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Romana Radlwimmer (ed.)







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**TRANSBORDER MATTERS:  
CIRCULACIONES LITERARIAS, TRANSFORMACIONES  
CULTURALES MEXICANAS Y CHICANAS**

Romana Radlwimmer (ed.)

Transborder Matters: circulaciones literarias, transformaciones culturales mexicanas y chicanas

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IMEX XVII

# EDITORIAL

## Editorial

### Transborder Matters. A Conceptual Approach

**Romana Radlwimmer**

(Universität Tübingen)

Borders stimulate acts of crossing, processes of transcending, and intents of trespassing. Representing supervised endings and beginnings, regulation, and state observation, borders are inevitably linked to the often highly politicized notions of closure and hindering, but also of protection and safety. Even though they suggest detained flows, they also ambiguously motivate the crossings they seek to control or stop. The significance of borders depends crucially on the movements along and through them. Crossings dissolve fixed ideas of *us* and *them* and propagate, as Julia Kristeva put it, that we *are* the other, and that if we flee it, we fight against own subconscious selves.<sup>1</sup> The passages through borders, and the blockages that they cause, reveal them once more as sites of power struggle. At times, borders impose a sheer insurmountable barrier. Then again, currents can become strong enough to completely cover division lines and make them unrecognizable. The "liquid" ideas of "flows" or "currents" can be useful, as intended here, to appreciate the movements connected to borders. However, they are far from being innocent concepts. The emotionally charged image of "waves", for example, has been regularly used by politics and media to refer to people entering the United States from Mexico, with the effect of dehumanizing the experience of border crossing, and of criminalizing it.

In recent years, border studies have increasingly highlighted the quality of crossing. The use of an adjectivization of the term *border* with the prefix *trans-* can be observed, resulting in the neologism *transborder*, or in Spanish, *transfronterizo*, as a concept which has entered academic, artistic and political discourse. The *Transborder Immigrant Tool*, for instance, was developed in 2007 by researchers and performance artists of the *Electronic Disturbance Theater 2.0 / B.A.N.G. Lab* (linked to universities such as the UC San Diego). Through easily usable, low-cost cellphone devices, the *Transborder Immigrant Tool* was meant to improve border crossers' chances of survival in hostile territory between Mexico and the United States, giving them access to water supplies, orientation, and information about border patrols. The tool also

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<sup>1</sup> See Kristeva (1990: 208-209).



supplied them with experimental poetry to help them endure the hardships of crossing. On their cellphone devices, migrants could read poems. The *Transborder Immigrant Tool* provided a Global Positioning System, but first and foremost envisioned as Geo Poetic System. Unsurprisingly, it was enthusiastically embraced and broadcast through activist and digital arts media, but also covered by the same mainstream journalism who supported US governmental security investigations on the creators of the Tool.<sup>2</sup>

Across the border, the Tijuana-based collective *Torolab* had been working on improving living conditions for people of the, as they state, transborder region since 1995. With their label *Torovestimenta*, Torolab designed clothing especially for border crossers. Their product "Pantalones transfronterizos" ("Transborder Trousers") were meant as a survival suit for Mexican as well as US citizens while crossing the border. While both were made with solid denim, wide legs and multiple pockets, the one for Mexicans had a pocket for their passport and credit cards, and the one for US citizens, who might not even need a passport when crossing, pockets for credit cards, money and pharmaceuticals purchased at Mexican discount stores.<sup>3</sup> In their project *La región de los pantalones transfronterizos (The Region of Transborder Trousers)* (2004-2005), *Torolab* provided five people with a GPS system in order to track their movements in the transborder region. A cartographic video installation presented the results of the tracked movements, affirming the constant crossings through a territory marked by a heavily guarded national border.

The focus on passing through, which both border-based performance projects – one in Tijuana, one in San Diego – propose, responds to the social reality of the border and to the immediate needs of its people. It reflects the contemporary situation in the Mexican-US region. Both projects illustrate how borders function: how imposed dividing lines are material facts as much as artificial constructions, how they block traditional, current and future paths through border topographies, and how they generate acts of crossing, touching people and places that can be close by or far away from the border in question.

*Transborder Matters: Circulaciones literarias, transformaciones culturales mexicanas y chicanas* takes up the perspective on borders with regards to their malleable characteristics, sounding it out and further expanding it. While a vast number of publications on borders and the Mexican-US Border already exists, this volume accentuates one specific aspect, expanding border thinking to transborder thinking. *Transborder Matters* combines eleven contributions by

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<sup>2</sup> See Aguirre (2015: 53f.).

<sup>3</sup> For more information, see Torolab (1995-2009) and EDT 2.0 / B.A.N.G. Lab (2007).

international scholars, researchers, theorists and artists who each explore and define the concept of *transborder / transfronterizx* through theoretical approaches and applied case studies.

Transborder phenomena can be understood as extending and moving between two or more separated entities. These can be physical, such as countries, regions, topographies, bodies, textures, texts, images, products; or they can be non-material in the form of laws, beliefs, thoughts, common senses, emotions, identities, disciplines, or processes. Transborder phenomena are shaped by borders that cross or divide them, and by concomitant struggles and negotiations. They seem to define division lines as one, but not as the only part of existence. They transcend borders, relating them to other phenomena such as language, space, identity, or history. In these new combinations and by changing themselves, transborder phenomena change supposedly stable confines. Transborder matters materialize in people and their actions, affecting them, modeling their being, thinking, and expression.

Mexican and Chicana/x cultures and literatures, for instance, are intrinsically a transborder field that has been shaped by constant flows between two cultural poles which were often defined through, and as, two nation states: the United States and Mexico.<sup>4</sup> Hence, a transborder perspective arises organically out of – and can be applied to – Mexican and Chicana/x Literatures and Cultures, establishing a rich tradition of transborder philosophy and an important transcultural archive. Mexican and Chicana/x literary circulations and cultural transformations have revised, dissolved or displaced borders from the cultural memory of resistance of a specific geopolitical space. They have informed us about borders' binary functioning that not always operates the same way: it matters who wants to cross them and from which position. "I did not cross the border, the border crossed me", Latino voices have stated, affirming their ongoing presence in the United States after the annexation of Mexican territory in the mid-19th century and their consciousness about the relativity of representation. Moreover, they have made existing and emerging safe and unsafe interstitial spaces visible, destabilizing ideas of nation-states and essentialist categories while proposing transborder ontologies and epistemologies.

*Transborder Matters* is centrally informed by a regional understanding which explores Mexican and Chicana/x border concepts, stories, narratives, discourses, markets, materials, images. Yet, this specific Mexican/Chicana/x literary and cultural topography is shown as interconnected with other transborder contexts, expanding its visions throughout the Americas and around the globe. The investigations circle around Chicana/x and Mexican notions, leave

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<sup>4</sup> I use the today widely accepted term "Chicana/x" instead of "Chicana/o" to highlight the border crossings this specific form performs between genders. This decision reflects the terminological use of several articles of this volume, but not of all. Some contributors wish to address specifically one gender or the other.

them behind, return to them. Following the paths of transborder phenomena, *Transborder Matters* is interested in the separating logics of borders, but concentrates centrally on the transformations envisioned beyond borders, and on the flows of human, artistic and geographic areas affected by dividing lines. The different contributions of the volume articulate transborder matters and ask in which ways transborder issues matter. Which are the borders to be crossed and which borders cannot be crossed? Which borders cross us? Which transborder cultural and literary fields deserve to be mentioned and studied? Which languages do transborder and transcultural spaces speak, which images do they show? What repercussions do they have? How do cultural and literary notions of the Americas inform historic and contemporary transborder phenomena? Which dialogues can be established between literatures, cultures and theories of the Americas and those of other spaces and geographies?

Epistemologically, transborder matters reflect a "re-member-ing", pondering on processes that wish to unify loose pieces, to harmonize contradictory experiences and to heal affected bodies, minds and souls.<sup>5</sup> *Borderlands / La Frontera* (1987), the seminal book by Chicana theorist and writer Gloria Anzaldúa (1942-2004), originally introduced the epistemological shift that would later shape current transborder reflections. It considered the self-conscious vision of those who have learned to live with borders, suggested approaches of how to move strategically with and around them; and told stories of those who have suffered yet managed to cope with the consequences of divisions. This understanding positions border crossers as powerful, active agents. Anzaldúa underlines the importance of "*La encrucijada*", where "*La mestiza*" becomes a "priestess of crossroads", thus aligning the notion of border crossing with a conceptualization of decolonial spaces-in-between (Anzaldúa 2007: 102).

'Transition, song of my cells' (2009), an experimental poem by Amy Sara Carroll written for the above mentioned *Transborder Immigrant Tool*, is one of the most frequently cited poems of the Geo Poetic System. It explicitly quotes *Borderlands / La Frontera* and Anzaldúa's and Moraga's *This Bridge Called My Back*.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Audrey Lorde uses the term 're-member' in *An Open Letter to May Daly*, Lorde's contribution to Anzaldúa's and Moraga's *This Bridge Called My Back* (Lorde 1983: 96). Gloria Anzaldúa uses the idea when developing the *Coyolxauhqui imperative*: "Remember that while Coyolxauhqui in her dismembered state (depicted as a disk with topsy-turvy body parts) embodies fragmentation, she also symbolizes reconstruction in a new order. Her round disk (circle) represents the self's striving for wholeness and cohesiveness" (Anzaldúa 2015: 89). The use of *re-member-ing* suggested here (with colons) refers to decolonial embodiment as well as memory work which the term encompasses, see Anzaldúa (2015).

<sup>6</sup> See Anzaldúa (2007: 33).

Gloria Anzaldúa writes, 'We have a tradition of migration, a tradition of long walks. Today we are witnessing la migración de los pueblos mexicanos, the return odyssey to the historical/mythological Aztlán'. The historical? The mythological? Aztlán? It's difficult to follow the soundings of that song. Today's borders and circuits speak at 'lower frequencies' [...]. This Bridge Called my Back, my heart, my head, my cock, my cunt, my tunnel. Vision: You. Are. Crossing. Into. Me. (Banglab 00:04-00:28; 01:31-01-41.).

Even though life and ideas about it may have changed, Carroll's poem sees the necessity to continue to think in Anzaldúan terms and to tune them with changing circumstances and points of view. In 'Transition, song of my cells', this means connecting them with a strong – acoustic, bodily – emphasis on crossings, that is, a transborder way of conceiving division lines.<sup>7</sup>

Anzaldúa herself expanded her ideas on borders and their transcendence significantly throughout her life. In the posthumously published *Light in the Dark / Luz en lo oscuro* (2015), she defined *nepantla*, an indigenous concept, as multidimensional interstices. The people who live in them are *nepantleras* who are able to cross between different dimensions and connect them. They recognize the damaging effect of borders, but have found passageways through them, and thus, they build bridges between different kinds of knowledge and encourage us to perceive the web of connections between all phenomena.<sup>8</sup> *Nepantla* allows us to think of borders not just as physical or psychological, emotional or political, textual, imaginary or discursive realities, but to combine all and constantly cross between all of them.

To various contributions of this volume, *Nepantla* and other Anzaldúan concepts are highly relevant to conceive processes of passing through and building bridges. MARISA BELAUSTEGUIGOITIA's article centers around Anzaldúa's thinking and applies it creatively to Mexican academia. Based on Anzaldúa's concepts, Belausteguigoitia defines *tilting pedagogies* to explain acts of crossings between academia and social realities, theory and body, different languages, and from northern to southern epistemologies and vice versa. Her theoretic approach targets ways to set up educational situations as critical space for "inclined", embodied thought and action. Belausteguigoitia proposes a valid reformulation of deeply theory-based, applied pedagogies to interrupt hierarchic classroom structures and social systems of inequality. By bringing together Chicana and Mexican concepts and realities, she also eases the pathway

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<sup>7</sup> I would like to thank my colleagues from the MLA executive forum *Literatures of the United States in Languages Other Than English* (LOTE), Uriel Quesada, Karen Bishop, Bill Johnson González, and Néfer Muñoz Solano, to point my attention to Amy Sara Carroll's work. Amy Sara Carroll was a Keynote Speaker at the forum's organized panel *Without Papers* at the MLA convention 2020, and forms part of the forum starting in 2020. The LOTE forum introduces a multi-literary perspective and seeks to uncover the often neglected multilingual character of US literatures, concentrating not only on literatures written in Spanish, or Portuguese and French, but also on native and minority literatures. Such a focus intrinsically stimulates the quality of crossing, as it was reflected in the panel *Without Papers* which asked about mechanisms of un/de/authorization for writing and literatures.

<sup>8</sup> See Anzaldúa (2015: 81-84).

between social classes, questions of gender and sexuality, and geopolitical coordinates, demonstrating the connections and fusions of diverse knowledge systems in a globally linked world.

Other contributions, such as the ones from Anja Bandau, INVASORIX, Verena Melgarejo et.al. or Romana Radlwimmer, refer to Anzaldúa's ideas of borders and crossings, or mention them as part of their methodologies. ANJA BANDAUI intersects the Northern and Southern sides of the border by concentrating on what she defines as the current, threefold approach to it: firstly, a Chicana point of view, secondly a transnational Mexican perspective which destabilizes centralism, and thirdly, a non-national one that sees the zone as larger transborder territory. Bandau then goes on to capture the depiction of transfronterizo cultures in contemporary narrative texts, weaving her reflections into an analysis of three Mexican border novels by Luis Humberto Crosthwaite, Heriberto Yépez, and Yuri Herrera. To all three novels, a Mexican-US border crossing is central. Bandau reads Crosthwaite's *La luna siempre será un amor difícil* as a narration of migration, crossing and transnational identity construction and as a response from south of the border to Anzaldúa's *Borderlands / La Frontera*. The personified transborder space leads to Florinda's, the indigenous main protagonist, emancipation. Bandau further emphasizes that Yépez' *A.B.U.R.T.O.* challenges views of individualized criminality and replaces them through a critical vision of Tijuana as decentralized center. Herrera's *Señales que precederán al fin del mundo* is a tale of Mexican migration from South to North; yet, as Bandau states, it could take place at any border as it prominently discusses liminality and permeability.

The reguetón *Me duele la cara de ser tan güerx* presented by collective INVASORIX from Mexico City builds its theoretic foundation on a fusion of native Mexican and Chicana theories, activisms and feminisms. Inspired in Cherríe Moraga's *La güera*, and rewriting the 1980s Spanish pop song *Me duele la cara de ser tan guapo*, INVASORIX analyzes intersectional privilege of skin color, gender, class, race, language, and translation. It recalls the different repercussions of the power of speaking Spanish on either side of the Mexican-US border, and the perpetuation of varying processes of exclusion and inclusion.

The art work of VERENA MELGAREJO WEINANDT ET AL. is an Anzaldúan exploration of Latinx and migrant subjectivities in a central European context. The presented photographs are the results of a workshop held by Melgarejo Weinandt in the framework of *A(r)mando Voices*, a project which circled around Gloria Anzaldúa's crossings between image and word, theory and practice, calling on the Chicana theorist's notion of images as bridges between evoked emotion and conscious knowing. In a text preceding the art work, Melgarejo Weinandt explains the objectives and structures of the workshop. The photographs by workshop participants

Marisel Bongola, Isabel Mendoza, Romina Palacios, and Sophie Utikal depict multiplying entrances, a shyly growing aloe vera plant on the window-sill in a northern night, details of stones and plants, oscillating and concrete images of skin, dresses, people, and shadows. Through the images, the poetic vision of those who have crossed and built bridges becomes visible.

While the contributions of Anja Bandau, Marisa Belausteguigoitia, and INVASORIX open up a Mexican space that communicates and connects with Chicana thought, Daniel Schreiner, Maria Wiehe, Laura Varela, and Heidi Denzel de Tirado put the accent on Chicana literatures, popular cultures, and film, and on the inherent crossings to Mexican heritages that define a Chicana perspective.

DANIEL SCHREINER presents his thoughts following the interviews of two Chicano authors who share their last name, Rodríguez. While Richard Rodríguez, known for his polished style and controversial conservative political points of view, received a formal education in a catholic school and different US and UK universities, Luis Rodríguez grew up in a barrio where he experienced gang violence, prison and, finally, writing as a tool of empowerment. Their differences let both Luis and Richard Rodríguez appear as distant from one another; however, Schreiner proposes a reading that shows how, through years of development, both authors' positions have started to oscillate and coincide in an accentuated awareness of loss and pain which modified and approached their writing regarding unresolved questions of belonging. In this sense, Schreiner constructs a transborder perspective that combines apparently opposed sides.

Echoing Schreiner's article on Catholic-raised Richard Rodríguez, who was often seen as a counter-figure to the traditional grassroots' Chicana movement, MARIA WIEHE demonstrates the traces of Protestantism in Chicano literature, which she understands as a transborder and transdenominational way to narrate identities. Wiehe's reading of two Chicano literary worlds, José Antonio Villarreal's unfinished tetralogy and Rudolfo A. Anaya's *New Mexico Trilogy*, detects their religious and denominational references. Through thorough literary analysis and biblical knowledge, Wiehe argues how in Chicano texts the narrative crossings between denominations and religious borders function. Villarreal's characters shift between different narrative structures concerning denomination and religiousness, and Anaya's protagonist Tortuga is revealed as denominational border crosser par excellence, in a setting resembling mythical Aztlán.

LAURA VARELA'S photo essay neatly fits into the same line of research. The Chicana photo and video artist from El Paso allows us to take a glimpse into her short documentary *Segundo*

*de Febrero in San Antonio, Texas*. The images from the film document a religious event taking place every year in a Catholic parish church in the Mexican American barrio of San Antonio. The celebration of the Segundo de Febrero blends the political event of the anniversary of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo into an ongoing popular, religious tradition of the parish. "The border fence that divides the Mexican people was born on February 2, 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo", as Gloria Anzaldúa wrote critically about the mythically elevated historical date (Anzaldúa 2007: 7). In the barrio, however, the date is perceived as a blending of traditions, of crossings of cultures, and is celebrated as such. The ritual is co-shared by a catholic priest, indigenous spiritual traditions, and activist consciousness to keep alive the spirit of crossing, blending, mixing of all elements which could otherwise appear contradictory, yet are embraced as one in this context.

The transborder media network Pantelion Films, founded 2010 in California, and two bilingual migration comedies it produced, are at the core of HEIDI DENZEL DE TIRADO's article. To approach the media network and its productions, Denzel de Tirado expands the concept of "borderscapes" which focuses mainly on mental restrictions, to cinematic "transborderscapes". She defines "transborderscapes", constructed through images and media, as landscapes of crossing of geographical and linguistic boundaries, opening multifaceted perspectives, world views and memories from both sides of the border. Denzel de Tirado demonstrates her theoretic framework in the analysis of the films *No se aceptan devoluciones / Instructions not Included* (Eugenio Derbez 2013) and *Pulling Strings / Amor a Primer Visa* (Pitipol Ybarra 2013). Both films cover Mexican and US realities, and conclude with happy endings on the southern side of the border.

Wolfgang Müller-Funk's and Romana Radlwimmer's articles approach transborder matters from a poetical and phenomenological side. As Denzel de Tirado, WOLFGANG MÜLLER-FUNK places a cinematographic analysis at the center of his reflections. He reads Iñárritu's *Babel* (2006) not as a great narrative of globalization, but stresses the film's vision of the global world as an obscurely intertwined network of small narratives. However, he also shows the film as paradigmatic example of a poetry of the space-in-between which he elaborates in the process. Müller Funk starts out by critically questioning whether a world structured as rhizome, without centres or limits, could be reality. He asks where (disappeared) borders become contact zones, or spaces-in-between, and defines the threshold, the bridge, the door, the wall, the fence, the barrier, and the membrane as different modes of (transcended) limitations. He argues in which ways these phenomena are different in character and how they cause different consequences for crossing and trespassing. According to Müller Funk's analysis, the limitations and spaces-in-

between multiply in *Babel* through objects such as the tourist bus or television, which allow realities to be separated yet permeable.

ROMANA RADLWIMMER detects a shift of perception towards transborder matters which has happened throughout the last decades and which she seeks to capture through different theories, media, art, literary and cinematographic works. She sketches a draft to a phenomenology of crossing, contemplating the diverse semantics and uses of ways through and beyond barriers and limitations. Concentrating on the Mexican-US border from both sides, Radlwimmer concludes that through acts of crossing, the border becomes an ambiguous regional and superregional site of unity and separation, violence and healing.

The present political situation of the Mexican-US border is one moment that motivates MARÍA SOCORRO TABUENCA CÓRDOBA's critical intervention. As a scholar from the border region Ciudad Juárez-El Paso, she observes the new limitations to crossing and its consequences as imposed through the Trump administration, reactions from the Mexican side, and the discursive changes going along with these developments. Tracing and expanding the term *transfronterizo* and its development since the 1990s, she points out how it touches concrete experiences of the border, and how it offers the possibility to choose between different strategies of thinking and being along lines of division. She also stresses the need to rethink the concept's meanings and its cultural and material foundations, asking in which ways the contact zones and movements it designates may also entail intellectual colonialism. Tabuenca Córdoba argues that once a *transfronterizo* shifting across borders and between sides, meanings, and options, is occupied by singular projects (may they be Mexican, Chicana, or other), they lose their political effectiveness and openness and fall into a hegemonic trap. She further explains that, while the Mexican-US border may have been at the center of discussions, voices from the North of Mexico or the Mexican Northern Border have been often overseen or neglected, and that transborder academics, who intrinsically live between worlds, have often not been seen as such, but ascribed to just one side or the other. With her intervention, Tabuenca Córdoba reminds of the fact that transborder realities frequently continue to be either simplified or silenced, and calls for a change of perspective.

The epistemological and political relevance of a transborder focus becomes clear throughout the different artistic and scientific contributions. Historically informed and within the framework of the latest regional, national and global events and understandings, the volume sounds out overlapping territories and mindsets, migratory or poetical flow, and extensions across borders or bodies. The case studies and theoretic explorations explain and navigate



through transborder phenomena as specific materiality and narrations, enhancing the literacy about the world we live in as an interconnected place: transborder phenomena appear through time and space. The different contributions question life and art from the perspective of crossing, transcending and trespassing through established orders and borders, and show the impact of shifting, moving and transforming them. They look at transborder practices as acts of moving and relocating (any type of) borders. The contributors develop and call for a transborder approach to today's political cultures and aesthetic paradigms. By doing so, *Transborder Matters* aims to enrich future conversations on border poetics, border politics and adjacent phenomena such as migrations, translations and experiences of the self and the other.

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IMEX XVII

**ARTÍCULOS**

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**ARTICLES**

## **Borderlands revisited:**

### ***La frontera norte* in contemporary Mexican fiction**

**Anja Bandau**

**(Leibniz Universität Hannover)**

#### **Introductory remarks: Some hypotheses on Mexican *transfronterizo* culture**

More than ten years have passed since I dealt with this topic for the first time<sup>1</sup> and the situation both in the literary field as well as in the sociopolitical context in Mexico and the US has changed dramatically. In Mexico, the violence in relation to narcoculture, the imbrication of state institutions and organized crime emerging all over the country cannot anymore be limited to Mexico's border region at its supposed northern periphery. The recent political development in the US reinforced a policy and a discourse of the border as neat line. This dramatically changes the picture. It makes us painfully aware that borders and border territories are a dynamic and precarious construction – crucial in their national, transnational and transregional significance and negotiation.

[...] both hybridity/resistance to state boundaries and polarization/embracing of state boundaries are emergent features of deep sociohistorical processes. Both cultural differentiation and polarization are contingent outcomes that need to be explained, and are likely to co-occur at borders, rather than being ontological natures of border cultures as such, which would require an absolute debate over which characterization is correct. Because they are emergent states of being, this requires a historical structural approach to borders. Nor are these cultural stances the distinct possessions of well-defined social groups. Within the border setting, some populations are carriers of specific processes, but often the same people are affected by both tendencies and manifest both cultural styles at different times and in different relationships (Heyman 2012: 48f.).

The crucial understanding to take from the above quote is that in the formation of border culture, competing processes are at work that also frame the views on and *transfronterizo* literature itself.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> My first intense encounters with the region's literary and cultural production was during my doctoral thesis (completed 2002 on Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga) and on a field trip with students of Latin American Studies to the Mexico/US-border in Tijuana and San Diego in February 2006. This led to various master theses by my students on the cultural production coming out of Tijuana as well as on dynamics of migration, discursive practices and violence at the border region. Some of the results are documented in a publication, see Bandau et al. (2009). My encounters with various cultural agents and writers (Humberto Félix Berumen, Rafa Saavedra, Heriberto Yépez, Amaranta Caballero Prado) back then did shape my approach to Mexican border literature and the different views on the border region, north and south of it.

<sup>2</sup> See Heyman (2012) and Wilson / Donnan (2012).

Textual and visual representations in the 1980s and 1990s established the border as an epistemological category in Cultural Studies and other fields such as Anthropology, Sociology, Political Science; Anzaldúa's *Borderlands / La frontera* (1987) has been seminal in this process at least in Cultural Studies. During the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, repercussions with other border-cultures were explored and Border Studies on various European (as well as other regions) (re-)emerged – German-Polish border, German-French border, Spanish-African border, Mediterranean Sea as border space.

The notion of the border space has been reworked from *la línea* to a space that is not easily demarcated and affects, subverts and changes the national and cultural entities coming into contact with it. A complex concept of the border has been elaborated, linking material and symbolic dimensions and establishing the simultaneous existence of the border as a demarcating line, an extended but still defined border space as well as a transregional *borderscape* contravening defined territorial demarcation.<sup>3</sup> Anzaldúa's notion of the *borderlands* was crucial in the conceptualization of the latter. Notions of space – as the transareal – were refined and had repercussions not only in Border Studies. Mexico became an enlarged *transfronterizo* space between the American North and South, between the US and Latin America. Certain cultural strategies and techniques coming out of the transborder practice were adopted to other regional and national spaces.

In what follows, I want to ask what qualifies today's literature written in the border region on the border as subject matter and I will link this question to the depiction of *transfronterizo* culture and borderlands in three novels written by Mexican authors of two generations: *La luna siempre será un amor difícil* (1994), *A.B.U.R.T.O.* (2005) and *Señales que precederán al fin del mundo* (2009). I will refer to some aesthetic and conceptual repercussions with Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands / La frontera*.

### **Mexican visions of the borderlands / of *la frontera norte***

Mid-nineteenth century stereotypes refer to the US-Mexican border as a hostile, violent, immoral, lawless and anarchic place where antithetical national entities are demarcated and conflicts within society are negotiated.<sup>4</sup> Mexican authors and artists have appropriated these historical stereotypes and confronted them with their visions of the contemporary situation to present a more differentiated image of the border region. According to M. Rodríguez Lozano,

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<sup>3</sup> See Schimanski (2015).

<sup>4</sup> Vasconcelos' famous phrase: "En el norte donde termina la civilización y comienza la barbarie" is only one example of this view, see Berumen (2004; 2003).

Mexican border literature developed between "two fronts" ("entre [...] dos frentes"; Rodríguez Lozano 2004: 163): on one side the US-American Chicana@ literature, that has been dominating the discursive terrain – as well as Border Studies – from the 1990s, and on the other, the centralist Mexican literary production, that has been ignoring as well as marginalizing regional literature from the Mexican North.<sup>5</sup> The field of *transfronterizo* literature is defined by, at least, three points of view:

1. The Chicana/o or Mexican-American perspective.
2. The emerging transnational Mexican perspective that destabilizes Mexican centralism.
3. The view on the border from people neither dwelling in the borderlands nor in the respective nation states which it occupies. All three have different approaches and views on the border (territory).

During the 1980s/90s, Mexican authors, mainly from the region, published the first texts that provided a different picture of the border space to the older versions of it as an alienated, violent space. Some of these authors are Federico Campbell, Rosina Conde, Luis Humberto Crosthwaite, Rosario Sanmiguel.<sup>6</sup> Their texts speak of the actual life at the border region (*la frontera norte*), narrate experiences of migration under specific geographical conditions (desert) or of suburban life in cities such as Tijuana. They also approach subjects such as work in the maquiladoras, border crossings as a daily experience as well as the routes of illegal border crossings. The literary forms and genres that prevail are poetry, testimonio and chronicles, essays, literary columns in self-edited journals, as well as, from the younger generation, blogs. Writer and critic Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz from Baja California considers immediacy as the central characteristic of this literary tendency marking a sharp contrast to the – according to him – more universalist and cosmopolitan, highly metaphorical and mythical strand that Gloria Anzaldúa's text *Borderlands / La Frontera* represented.<sup>7</sup> He implicitly saw Anzaldúa's intervention as a claim to a territory and its representation that from his point of view, had to be contested. In general, critics of Anzaldúa's metaphorical vision of the borderlands tended to marginalize the very tangible, specific and physical aspects in her writing.

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<sup>5</sup> See Rodríguez Lozano (2004: 161ff.).

<sup>6</sup> The various regional literatures of the Mexican north are a universe on their own and come more and more into focus of literary criticism and establishment. Daniel Sada, Ricardo Elizondo, Hector Alvarado, David Toscana, and more recently, Julian Herbert and Carlos Velasquez are just some of the authors with public acclaim.

<sup>7</sup> See Rodríguez Lozano (2004) and Trujillo Muñoz (2005).

There has, however, been a feminist reception of Anzaldúa's work that valued the gendered perspective on Mexican culture and dealt with mutual recognition and shared grounds – as well as dissimilarities – in a more integrative way. An early publication on Mexican and Chicana literature in 1990 (published by the COLEF and COLMEX and edited by Aralia López González, Amalia Malagamba and Elena Urrutia under the presence of Norma Alarcón)<sup>8</sup> testifies to this in addition to María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba's *Mujeres y fronteras. Una perspectiva de género* (1998) of the Chihuahua Institute of Culture.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, Anzaldúa's text is a classic that serves as a reference for countless literary and theoretical interventions: the integration of a whole set of marginal subject positions, the incorporation of popular culture as well as adding a mythical dimension of the borderlands, the departure from a gendered and queered perspective have given Gloria Anzaldúa's text, written in 1987, its importance and visionary character and made it a point of reference ever since. Her concepts of *nepantla*, new mestiza, borderlands / frontera enable a multidimensional take on the notion of borderlands. The intent to open up Mexican, Chican@, border identities for / to marginal positions is crucial here. They negotiate geographic, territorial, physical, social, political and symbolic aspects of individual and collective self-representation and identity positions – so important in the context of minority movements and identity politics during the 1990s. The strength of Anzaldúa's text lies in her "theory in the flesh" (Anzaldúa / Moraga 1983: 23), the physical acting out of the conflicts and of transformation. Although the quasi alchemistic process of transformation and healing that is required to arrive at the new mestiza consciousness has holistic and mythical undertones, it speaks to the now very timely aspect of conviviality.<sup>10</sup> Anzaldúa's border thinking captured the dynamics at the border and of the border connected to the embodied, lived experience (history, indigenous presence, sexuality), the act of remembering / *recordar* / *rememorar* the manifold affiliations through the flesh.

During the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, an interest not only on an international, but also on a Mexican national scale grew, where especially Tijuana became an epitome of the postmodern.<sup>11</sup> The younger generation of writers at *la frontera norte* that includes authors such as Rafa Saavedra, Omar Pimentá and Heriberto Yépez continues to claim a space for literature and culture from the border. Yépez especially criticized the outside perspective of literary and

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<sup>8</sup> See López González / Malagamba / Urrutia (1990).

<sup>9</sup> See Tabuenca Córdoba (2003). I have written elsewhere on the dimension of third world feminism of Anzaldúa's text and Chicana literature, see Bandau (2004).

<sup>10</sup> See Gilroy (2004) and Ette (2012).

<sup>11</sup> See Palaversich (2012). Between 2000 and 2006, a discussion on the character and status of border literature evolved in main Mexican literary journals as *Letras libres* and *Generación*.

cultural critics as well as border theoreticians whose understanding of cultural hybridization and view of the border were dismissed as simplistic, often celebratory, missing the 'real' nature of encounter and collision of border identities. The author from Tijuana repeatedly launched harsh critiques against the Mexican literary establishment that he accused of silencing and marginalizing the literature coming out of the North.

In the discussion of the following, the intertextual dimension to Gloria Anzaldúa's text is not at the forefront of the analysis, but will be engaged to different degrees, as it resonates with all three novels through authorizing strategies that Anzaldúa used.<sup>12</sup> These strategies encompass the focus on subaltern subject positions that inhabit the borderlands, the re-negotiation of the indigenous element in mestizaje, Aztec myth, work on language, the text as art of network.

### **Three Contemporary Mexican Novels on the border**

I have selected three male writers – Luis Humberto Crosthwaite (born 1962), Heriberto Yépez (born 1974) and Yuri Herrera (born 1970) – to highlight themes emerging from Mexican literature on the border. All three authors present the US-Mexican borderlands 'as well as' border crossing as central to their texts. They also resonate with Anzaldúa's *Borderlands / La Frontera* and the vital aspects of her vision of the borderland.

#### **Luis Humberto Crosthwaite's *La luna siempre será un amor difícil* (1994)**

Tijuana born writer, columnist, editor and academic Luis Humberto Crosthwaite (\*1962) gained international attention with short stories and several novels on the border region. His publishing house Yoremito was founded in 1997 in Tijuana to publish and promote literature from the North of Mexico to counteract the centralist publishing politics of Mexico D.F.<sup>13</sup> As a columnist he worked for the San Diego Union Tribune.

I will discuss Crosthwaite's sixth novel *La luna siempre será un amor difícil* (1994; *The Moon will forever be a distant love* 1997) as a response from south of the border to Anzaldúa's *Borderlands / La Frontera*. Using pop cultural elements to create his vision of *la frontera*, his take on the journey across the border recounts the making of Mexico within the logics of capitalism as a narration of migration, (border) crossing and (transnational) identity formation through corrido, telenovela, modern fairy tale / romance and the principle of collage. The main protagonist is not a mestiza, but an indigenous woman who travels from the Central valley – where the Aztec capital Tenochtitlán was founded – to the border, fleeing from poverty,

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<sup>12</sup> See Bandau (2004).

<sup>13</sup> The first three texts came from authors from Baja California: Roberto Castillo Udiarte's *Gancho al corazón...*, Rafa Saavedra's *Buten Smileys*, Juan Antonio Di Bella's *Yízus the Man y los Kiosko Boys*.

alcoholism and the authority of the priesthood. The modern-day Malinche meets the modern-day conqueror Balboa in search for employment – alter ego of the historical conqueror and adventurer Vasco Núñez de Balboa, who from 1500 onwards participated in various expeditions and founded the first settlement on the American mainland. But this present-day Balboa stands also for other conquistadores and the transition from conquest to colonial bureaucracy in sync with capitalist rationalization. Crosthwaite's characters link different time frames as they belong to the times of conquest (1500s), the viceroyalty *Nueva España* (1540s) and the nation state Mexico at the same time. Their fictitious quest, a journey and story of migration and border crossing in search for happiness, takes place in a time frame that fuses the time right after the Spanish conquest (1500s) and the present of the 1990s marked by the introduction of NAFTA (free trade agreement resulting in the maquila industry). The encounter between Balboa and Florinda alias Xochitl is told in the style of romance, the fictitious world of the chivalrous romance is intertwined with the modern world and its rational logics of consumerism and the mode of telenovela. Balboa's conquest of the Northern Empire – that is, the US – and its stereotypical blond women fails and, according to the ratio of modernization, he returns home with empty hands. Florinda, who had been waiting in the borderlands to join him, on the other hand, finds not only work in a maquiladora, but also starts to emancipate and is, finally, able to live on her own.

The borderlands become, it turns out, the space that enables Florinda's emancipation. In Crosthwaite's novel, the border line as well as the border territory unfold according to the different subjects' trajectory (the indigenous woman, the conquistador) in multiple, changing ways.

La frontera adquiere significación dependiendo del particular sentido y razón que dentro del espacio social se le otorga a su particular geografía, política e historia. Así es como, desde distintas perspectivas y posiciones, los grupos sociales traman su lógica y sentido común en relación con ella; por tanto, la frontera es un sistema simbólico, pues participa en la interpretación de determinados aspectos de la realidad (Ábrego 2012: 10).

Crosthwaite's text personifies the border that becomes a protagonist itself:

The Border wakes up, stretches, takes a shower and opens its portals to admit the waves of people who pour through in buses and cars and cabs; all of them traveling, all crossing each other's paths and interconnecting, all commuting enormous distances because the day is starting and it will not wait. [...] The Border of New Spain spreads out, revealing contents of streets and people who wait. The Border is a long wait. [...] The Border is a long anticipation, but at the same time it's a longer desperation, one that comes when it's not invited—usually at lunch time (Crosthwaite 1997: 34f.).



The reality of the actual border region, characteristics of the local life of maquiladora workers, are part of this story as well as the national and transnational aspects of the border space.

The text playfully weaves vignettes, fragments of documents, apocryphal journal articles, letters, recipes, illustrations, poems, lyrics of pop songs in a postmodern intertextual and intermedial reference to various genres: the epic, the novel of the Siglo de Oro, chronicles of the Conquista, Columbus' journal, letters, codices, telenovela, melodrama/romance. Colloquial language and regionalisms mingle with the baroque language of New Spain. The reader has to piece together and interpret fragments and voices, numerous inter- and paratexts: a whole universe of Latin-American literary tradition from García Márquez, Vargas Llosa to Augusto Monterroso's micro-narrations (*microrrelato*); global rock music; Mexican and US-American tradition of melodrama. Crosthwaite's postmodern multimedia hybrid novel pays homage to Anzaldúa's multilayered – cross-genre – text. The resulting tone, though, is very different from Anzaldúa's painful and utopian portrayal of the borderlands. His narration is filled with humor and playful, tongue-in-cheek references to consumer culture, its mediation through the popular genres of telenovela and romance are made highly present throughout the novel. The text's predominantly optimistic take on the borderlands with ironic undertones is achieved through the technique of montage and collage: the eclectic lumping together of different contexts, styles, time frames and historical narratives – practicing the pastiche of classic and popular genres such as parody and persiflage – generates comical effects.

### **Heriberto Yépez' A.B.U.R.T.O. (2005)**

A writer from Tijuana who belongs to the next generation of writers is Heriberto Yépez (\*1974), a fierce critic of the literary and cultural processes in the border territory, he is a philosopher working at UABC (Universidad Autónoma de Baja California) and a writer of poetry, essays, novels, journalism, blog entries in Spanish and English. In his blogs, he positioned himself as one of the central figures in Tijuana's cultural scene, writing from an insider perspective (as other authors of his generation Rafa Saavedra, Omar Pimienta, Amaranta Caballero Prado have done). In 2015, he created his blog *borderdestroyer*<sup>14</sup> where he declared himself a post-Mexican, post-nationalist writer between two literatures; his writing aims to undermine nationalist thinking from both a US and the Mexican perspective. Ten years earlier, he published his novel *A.B.U.R.T.O.* in 1994, which in an apocalyptic context tries to tightly link

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<sup>14</sup> Please **abstain** from using the URL <http://borderdestroyer.com>! It seems to be compromised by a pop-up scam. In the bibliography we provide a link to screenshots of the blog via the *Internet Archive*: <https://web.archive.org/web/20181123060613/https://borderdestroyer.com/> [iMex Editorial Staff].

the border region to the wider Mexican society, a moment of deep crisis when after seventy years the power of the PRI cracked decisively, the Zapatistas (EZLN) launched their armed rebellion in Chiapas and the free trade agreement NAFTA came into existence. The novel narrates the assassination of the politician Luis Donaldo Colosio during his election campaign for the PRI in Tijuana. The unsolved case was officially presented as the act of a lonely assassin, Mario Aburto, but its link to Mexico's profound social, political and economic crisis was already explored prior to Yépez, by two other Mexican writers who used the genre of the detective story (*novela negra*): Jorge Volpi in *La paz de los sepulcros* (1995) and Élmér Mendoza, a writer from Sinaloa, in *El asesino solitario* (1999). *El asesino solitario* made the genre of *narconovela* popular in Mexican literature, a category being associated with the country's north and the border region. Whereas Mendoza's text saw political corruption and struggle for power at the highest level at work connected to Mafia structures,<sup>15</sup> Yépez concentrated on Mario Aburto's story and perspective on the events. In his version the sub-proletarian – the ultimate subaltern – takes vengeance against the political and intellectual establishment and the corrupted power and violence it established during the 1980s and 1990s under the PRI-presidents Salinas de Gortari and his predecessor Miguel de la Madrid.

Yépez' protagonist, too, undertakes the typical trajectory and quest – this time from the Mexican west – to the border region. He grows up in a village in Michoacán (La Rinconada) under the condition of violent gender and family relations and an abusive father. As an adolescent, he leaves his village to migrate via Mexico City to Tijuana to rejoin his father and brother. There he strives to not only make a living in a maquiladora, but to live up to his expectations "to be somebody" (Yépez 2005a: 32, 47, 175). The narration portrays the protagonist as someone with a split personality: between Mario who is lucid, develops his own political convictions and takes action on one side, and Aburto who is mentally disordered and abused, on the other. The connotation of his last name Aburto – pointing towards a competitive, aggressive and violent behavior associated with traditional masculinity in his home village – mutates into his Tijuana nickname meaning waste, trash and deficiency: "Alguien que fue abortado, en una expulsión [...]. Algo peor que un zombie. [...] Un verdadero desgraciado [...] un forastero. Un ser absurdo. Un aburto" (Yépez 2005a: 40).

Mario finds work as a maquila worker – becoming one with the machine he works at – and is a protagonist who strives for his own understanding of truth: *la neta*. He reads Marxist theory (*los maquilocos*) and reveals corruption of government officials and police officers in his letters

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<sup>15</sup> See Regalado-López (2012).

to the local newspaper. To set things right by means of self-justice becomes his goal and secret project that ends not only in the assassination of the politician 'but' culminates in a phantasmal vision of Mario taking ultimate control of the politics at the border by opening the border for the subaltern masses stranded in Tijuana. Mario "se había vuelto un guerrero autónomo. Mario era una maquinaria" (Yépez 2005a: 38f.) In sync with Deleuze's theory of the nomad as ultimate warrior, the machine empowers the protagonist to link and control the subaltern masses as well as to lead them across the border. Mario fantasizes ultimate control:

Mario y sus infinitos botones mentales lo administraban TODO. Absolutamente TODO estaba bajo su control. Mario era esa mañana, en el trono de su máquina, el presidente del complete devenir de la frontera (Yépez 2005a: 209).

In this reminiscence to a cyborg figure (Alejandro Morales' *Rag doll plagues* come to mind but also Donna Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto'), he opens *la frontera norte* to send all the victims of a capitalist and neoliberal abusive system and illegal border crossers to the other side.<sup>16</sup>

The key to understanding the chain of events and the action of the assassin Mario, but also to grasping the underlying issues of Mexican society, lies in the city of Tijuana.<sup>17</sup> In Yépez' novel, Tijuana becomes the decentralized center, the simulacrum of chaos, dysregulation and hyperbole.<sup>18</sup> Yépez introduces a whole range of stereotypes attached to Tijuana, the clichés of violence, abuse and exaggeration: "Tijuana juega a la baraja de estereotipos" (Yépez 2005a: 57). In his intent to disperse and disseminate these clichés, deregulation is re-read as chaos and chaos becomes the underlying principle in Tijuana and in his story. For his poetics he is indebted to the popular culture of Tijuana, "ciudad de reciclaje" (Yépez 2005a: 27), and its language of the border. The aggressive tone of North Mexican slang overtly present in the book attests to this.

His protagonist Aburto matches Tijuana: "Tijuana fue hecha para mí. Y yo fui hecho para Tijuana" (Yépez 2005a: 49). Tijuana is the hyperbole of violence, but the whole country is saturated with violence: starting with relations on the individual level (the chingada / chingón syndrom that Octavio Paz saw as constitutive for the Mexican nation) and going up to the political elite. Yépez' borderlands – represented by Tijuana – is inhabited by thousands of subaltern figures, "tropas de jodidos" (Yépez 2005a: 224), "millones de dobles" (Yépez 2005a: 223), "tus dobles, todos tus enmascarados" (Yépez 2005a: 224) – driven north by structural

<sup>16</sup> See Yépez (2005a: 207ff.)

<sup>17</sup> See Yépez for his view on Tijuana as maquiladora of myths ("mitote de los mitos") and stereotypes for national and international use (Yépez 2005b: 14).

<sup>18</sup> "[A]narquitectura comercial, autoconstrucción caótica, ciudad de reciclaje" (Yépez 2005a: 27), "Tijuanicémonos todos lo más pronto posible" (Yépez 2005a: 31), "Tijuana es una mentira" (Yépez 2005a: 119).

violence. He resonates Anzaldúa's famous description of the inhabitants of the *Borderlands / La frontera*:

The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal' (Anzaldúa 2007: 25).

In Yépez' 2006 novel, Tijuana and the trajectory of Mario become clues to decipher and rethink the whole of Mexico. In a paradoxical move, the eccentric, chaotic other – that is, the third country, the borderland – turns into the blueprint for the supposed center. It ultimately preconditions any understanding of the entire nation state entwined in global development.

The author makes it excessively clear: there is no concise story of the events possible. His novel starts a sparkling display of poststructuralist theory that contests the status of all narrations feeding the novel, doubting authorship and authenticity: be it the third person narrative of the narrator, one alter ego of the author, or the prison psychiatrist who writes down and comments on Mario's testimonial, or be it the different versions of Mario's testimony, that contradict each other on various occasions. The familiar genres of testimony or *crónica* that are expected to represent subaltern voices fail to unveil the truth.<sup>19</sup> But as the testimony fails to present a credible version of the events on the discursive level of the narration, Yépez' novel fails to represent the complex character Mario Aburto and his explanatory power for the complex political and socioeconomic situation in Mexico in a convincing manner. Yépez wants too many things at once (an explanatory pattern for the assassination, the political and economic crisis in Mexico, and the border region) and finds neither the convincing approach to his protagonist, at the same time "vulgar y demoníaca" (Ornelas 2009), nor the appropriate tone that does not tire his readers.<sup>20</sup>

The following passage in this context almost reads like an anticipated apology for this insufficiency:

Yo soy un escritor. Soy la persona que menos fe tiene en la verdad. No me culpen de las versiones que aquí anoto. Esas versiones no las inventé yo. Son las que cuenta todo un país y yo, acaso, acomodo unas con otras, les saco punta o caricaturizo. No me interesa relatar la verdad. Solamente me interesa dejar claro que yo también pertenezco, como todos ustedes, al narcorrealismo.  
Bienvenido, baby.

<sup>19</sup> See Yépez (2005a: 215).

<sup>20</sup> Several critics see in Yépez' text the failed intent to overcome stereotypical presentations of the border region, Tijuana and violence. The playing with fragments of discourse as well as the abundance of interpretations and rhetoric excess lack a convincing vision. The poet Ornelas regards *A.B.U.R.T.O.* as "fracaso": "No le fue posible generar la potencia artística requerida para el drama interior de una mente a la vez vulgar y demoníaca, como la del supuesto tirador solitario" (Ornelas 2009).

Y de la manera en que les estoy contando esta historia, no culpen a la literatura. Francamente, de esa pobre tipa nunca he sabido mucho. A mi no me enseñaron a narrar los libros. Mis maestras fueron drogas más a la mano. Fue Tijuana, brothers. Fue Tijuana. Lo que Tiyei significa. Fueron los corridos de Los Tigres del Norte, las telenovelas de Verónica Castro, Alarma, La Carabina de Ambrosio y los Tijuana Bibles (Yépez 2005a: 137).

Very different from Yépez' angry novel full of philosophical concepts and allusions to low and high culture, the third writer, Yuri Herrera, undertakes his rewriting of the story of migration with the help of a reduced number of protagonists that is typical for the literary genre of the fable.

### **Yuri Herrera's *Señales que precederán al fin del mundo* (2009)**

Yuri Herrera (\*1970) was born not in the actual border region, but in Actopán (Hidalgo). He studied political science and creative writing and holds a PhD in literature from UC Berkeley. Throughout his career he has been teaching at several US universities. He is considered one of the most promising voices in Mexican literature and was awarded the Anna-Seghers-Preis in 2016. His short novel *Señales que precederán al fin del mundo* (2009), part of a trilogy, has been translated into several languages.<sup>21</sup> In various interviews Herrera points out his interest to mediate the urgent topics of Mexican society through artistic elaboration, that is, literature's possibility to create a different understanding of events.

Herrera's novel establishes a multi-faceted dialogue with a multitude of literary and non-literary texts and is situated in several discussions around issues such as migration, border crossing, and also narco-literature. He avoids, though, the overdetermined notions of 'narcotráfico' or 'migración' and creates a highly poetic approach that opens various roads of understanding. Herrera's short novel evokes various intertexts such as Dante's *Divine comedy* or Homer's *Ulysses* as well as the myth of Orpheus, but, more importantly, Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* and the myth of Mictlán.

Herrera reconstitutes parts from the basic structure of a well-known Mexica myth: the mythical passage to the Aztec kingdom of death – Mictlán – where the individual arrives through nine between-world / stages. The author superposes this symbolic structure with the story of migration that the protagonist – Makina – undertakes, retold in nine steps and chapters – from "La tierra", the center of Mexico, via D.F. ("El Gran Chilango") to *la frontera* (probably Tijuana) and finally the US (San Diego). Makina's journey to the other side – in search for her brother – links the territories south and north of the border and succeeds in creating real and

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<sup>21</sup> See e.g. Herrera (2014) and Herrera (2015).

symbolic places like the cantinas, Mexican villages and regional centers with their hierarchical structure of capos and caciques. The reader is not provided with the well-known topographies of specific locations – Hidalgo, D.F., Tijuana – but gets hints of possible specific geographies: the river as a demarcation of the border, San Diego's important military base, the stadium – "el cerro de obsidiana" – in the fourth chapter. Nevertheless, we follow Makina on the typical route of migration: arriving at the border, crossing with the help of los coyotes / polleros, the encounter with border patrol and self-organized paramilitary home guards on the US side, as well as the transnational network of migration once on the other side. Herrera's narration of Makina's quest intentionally leaves the reader undecided whether Makina is part of the world of the living or dead: We deal with "a plot that can be read in several keys, from realism to allegory" (Volpi 2013).<sup>22</sup> The journey that Juan Preciado (in Rulfo's *Pedro Paramo*) undertakes to the world of the dead to find his father is clearly a parallel.

The allegorical use of telling names, especially the protagonist's name – Makina / machine – alludes to the notion of the machine and in the Deleuzian sense to its systemic dimension: the alienating aspect of automated maquila work and mass production in the border region is present only as a subtext, but the protagonist's name is still a reference to the thousands of female maquiladora workers of indigenous origin that came into the border region and were exposed to this specific workspace, a dimension we already saw in Yépez' account of a border protagonist. In the system of narco-infiltrated provincial government structures that define regional politics, Makina is presented as messenger for these authorities, a kind of relay station for the village's communication.<sup>23</sup> She is able to speak three languages and serves as linguistic and cultural transmitter of information and as mediator in her work at *la centralita* (the telephone station), between the indigenous rural population and the transnational field of migration to the north (gabacho), the rural population and the narcobusiness infiltrated power structure.

[...] había demasiada gente esperándola. Alguien la cubriría en la centralita mientras viajaba, pero sólo ella hablaba las tres lenguas y sólo ella dominaba la cara de tabla de las noticias malas o el descuido con que tenía que anunciar ciertos nombres, ay, tan largamente esperados (Herrera 2009: 27 f.).

Herrera underlines the positive characteristics of his protagonist: she is part of a complex system and at the same time a unit of her own. This Deleuzian take on the machine presents

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<sup>22</sup> Santiago Navarro Pastor gives an interesting and very detailed analysis of the different levels of interpretations, the status of intertextual references as well as of Herrera's subtle work on language for the representation of timely topics such as violence and migration, see Navarro Pastor (2012).

<sup>23</sup> See Herrera (2009: 19f.)

Makina as one replaceable part of a system, but at the same time as central unit with a potential for resistance. Sharing a demonstrative toughness with various heroines from graphic novels (wonderwoman), Makina is strong and able to defend herself not only in the male world of Mexican provincial culture.<sup>24</sup> In this respect her utopian features resonate with Donna Haraway's cyborg concept and make her part of female resistance against gendered violence in central Mexico, both on her journey to the border and also against an assault by a racist (self-proclaimed) police man north of the border.<sup>25</sup> It is significant that the female migrant is to a certain extent in control and is the one who finds a way to legalize her status (after having found her brother). Her laconic vision of the manifold dangers she encounters might be a result of her in-between-status, the fusion between Greek, and Mexica mythology, the Cyborg fantasies and postmodern mass media take-offs. This liminal dimension of her existence has an interesting impact on the character of Makina and feeds into her ability to mediate and overcome several odds.

The significant title *Señales que precederán al fin del mundo / Signs that will precede the end of the world* has several implications: it refers here to Makina's migration to the other side that leads for her into a transformation of identity. At her final step – the ninth and last chapter that also symbolizes her arrival at Mictlán – Makina receives new papers and this means to her an altered identity. We are not sure what this final stage, the end of the world, means to Makina and her story: arrival at or point of departure from the world of the dead, a cultural and linguistic border territory.

Makina tomó el legajo y miró su contenido. Ahí estaba ella, con otro nombre y otra ciudad de nacimiento. Su foto, nuevos números, Nuevo oficio, Nuevo hogar. Me han desollado, musitó. [...] [M]as un segundo después – o muchos – dejó de sentir la pesadez de la incertidumbre y de la culpa: evocó a su gente como a los contornos de un paisaje amable que se difumina [...] y entendió que lo que sucedía no era un cataclismo; lo comprendió con todo el cuerpo y con toda su memoria, lo comprendió de verdad y finalmente se dijo Estoy lista cuando todas las cosas del mundo quedaron en silencio (Herrera 2009: 119).

It is the final step in a series of liminal situations: each one has been a new variation of the experience of liminality:

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<sup>24</sup> See Herrera (2009: 29, 32ff.).

<sup>25</sup> See Herrera (2009: 109f.)

Me interesaba el aspecto fronterizo del viaje de Makina. Aunque su viaje termina en algún lugar de los Estados Unidos cercano a la frontera, lo fronterizo para mí no se refiere únicamente a una situación geográfica, se refiere sobre todo a una condición en la cual uno está permanentemente entre dos cosas, o entre más de dos cosas. Además, si al cambiar de país se cambia también de lengua, uno debe encontrar nuevas maneras de decir el mundo, de decirse a sí mismo y también de estar en el mundo (Herrera / González Veiguela 2010: 42 in Navarro Pastor 2012: 121).

Herrera's creative approach embraces the constantly changing character of language as a living mechanism. The author is not mimicking the violent language to achieve an effect of authenticity, but invents a new and 'intermediate' language (Herrera 2009: 73).<sup>26</sup> To characterize, he does not use the highly sexualized language of swearing, typical for (North) Mexican slang, but rather captures the orality of Mexican everyday talk and the onomatopoeic quality of this orality ("hijuelachingada", "el tiiiiit"; Herrera 2009: 48f.). He invents words as "jarchar" (throughout the text; Herrera 2009: 15, 65, 69, 81) and explores the linguistic transfiguration between Spanish and English.<sup>27</sup>

Herrera's borderlands and its protagonists – first of all Makina – are situated in the realms of language. In the fifth chapter, center piece of the narration in nine chapters, the reader is confronted with the poetics of the author's—and the protagonist's—use of language:

Son paisanos y son gabachos y cada cosa con una intensidad rabiosa; con un fervor contenido pueden ser los ciudadanos más mansos y al tiempo los más quejumbrosos aunque a baja voz. Tienen gestos y gustos que revelan una memoria antiquísima y asombros de gente nueva. Y de repente hablan. Hablan una lengua intermedia con la que Makina simpatiza de inmediato porque es como ella: maleable, deleble, permeable, un gozne entre dos semejantes distantes y luego entre otros dos, y luego entre otros dos, nunca exactamente los mismos, un algo que sirve para poner en relación.

Más que un punto medio entre lo paisano y lo gabacho su lengua es una franja difusa entre lo que desaparece y lo que no ha nacido. Pero no una hecatombe. Makina no percibe en su lengua ninguna ausencia súbita sino una metamorfosis sagaz, una mudanza en defensa propia (Herrera 2009: 73f.).

This description refers not only to a language but also to its speakers and the liminal situation, in which this intermediate language is processed and practiced: clever metamorphosis, change out of self-defense resonates with the flux and flow, and Herrera's vision is neither celebratory nor pathetic. Makina's new mestiza consciousness qualities become visible in her angry response to the self-authorized police man in the eighth chapter ("La serpiente que aguarda"):

<sup>26</sup> See Herrera (2009: 73).

<sup>27</sup> See Navarro Pastor for a thorough linguistic analysis of the meanings of the neologism *jarchar* (Navarro Pastor 2012: 120f.).



Nosotros somos los culpables de esta destrucción, los que no hablamos su lengua ni sabemos estar en silencio. Los que no llegamos en barco [...]. Los que venimos a quitarles el trabajo, los que aspiramos a limpiar su mierda, los que anhelamos trabajar a deshoras. Los que llenamos de olor a comida sus calles tan limpias, los que les trajimos violencia que no conocían, los que transportamos sus remedios [...] Nosotros los oscuros, los chaparros, los grasientos, los mustios, los obesos, los anémicos. Nosotros, los bárbaros (Herrera 2009: 109f.).

Makina's speech sounds as a timely response to contemporary politics in the US where the US-Mexican border has become a battlefield on which national politics is negotiated. President Trump produced a crisis at the border that serves him to justify his project of a wall between the US and Mexico. As was the case with the two preceding texts, Herrera's echoes, too, with Anzaldúa's famous statement on those who live in the borderlands at the beginning of *Borderlands*.<sup>28</sup>

Whereas Crosthwaite and Yépez can be read in the context of regional literature, Herrera goes beyond this clear regionalization. All three texts share their main protagonists and subject – the journey of the indigenous subaltern to the border. Yépez' *A.B.U.R.T.O.* establishes a synecdochic relationship between the border region and wider Mexican society: the marginalized region of the border space projects the stereotypes ascribed to it back onto the Mexican center. Already in Crosthwaite's narrative, the focal point of his historical take on Mexico shifts to the border and a transnational perspective. Herrera takes the narration of migration and border crossing one step further and at the same time resonates some of the aspects of his predecessors. Here it is not the actual, physical borderlands that are highlighted. We can read the specific border region into this story as well as the myriad testimonials on migrating North. However, this is not the crucial point of Herrera's novel. The border travels with Makina from the Northern Central Valley via D.F. to the borderlands and back and the notion of Schimanski's *borderscape*<sup>29</sup> comes again to mind as it is embodied in Makina's trajectory: "[A] flexible entity that goes beyond the space of the border and the borderland" and can be understood as "border, disseminated or diffused across space" and as "landscape of resistance" (Schimanski 2015: 35f.). In this sense, the tale about Makina could be situated at any border, and the status of liminality is explored in a way that speaks to the whole of Mexico, as well as to the US and beyond.

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<sup>28</sup> See Anzaldúa (2007: 25).

<sup>29</sup> See Schimanski / Wolfe (2007).

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## Action as deferment: Anzaldua's *conocimiento* as critical thinking<sup>1</sup>

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Tilt: incline, displace from the axis, slant, give an oblique direction. Generate an inclination, a slope.

In this article, I focus on a pedagogical notion inspired by Anzaldua's critical thinking, which I call *tilting pedagogies*.<sup>2</sup> *Tilting pedagogies* are *left hand*<sup>3</sup> maneuvers – connecting operations developed by Anzaldua – that cross over to meet social urgencies as a way to incarnate theoretical thought.<sup>4</sup> *Tilting pedagogies* represent those notions, actions and maneuvers that allow us to 'incline' – or tilt. They allow us to move from academia to social urgencies, from Spanish to English and viceversa and from northern to southern epistemologies. Here I use *tilting* in its double meaning: as a tendency, a preference, rather an incitation and as an act of bending and leaning. In short: inclination as an incitation to tilt. This is what Anzaldua's *conocimiento*<sup>5</sup> produces: incitations to tilt and bend over.

*Tilting pedagogies* could be understood as a pedagogical operation which favors frictions that revolve learning and position it at the border with the body. Several questions arise: What is the kind of knowledge intended to be produced by tilting? Which body is involved, invented, recreated? What 'appears' in the classroom when it is inclined? What kind of practices imply the inclination towards suspended bodies, or better, bodies and texts in suspense, that is, in transit to be *other*?

These pedagogies are inscribed in the fields of gender, visual and border knowledge and were generated at the Gender Studies Program (2004-2013)<sup>6</sup> at the UNAM in México City. As

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<sup>1</sup> I thank Romana Radlwimmer for the careful, productive and extremely generous critique, information and revising she offered to this article.

<sup>2</sup> For the foundation of *tilting pedagogies*, see Belausteguigoitia / Lozano (2013) and Belausteguigoitia / Gutiérrez Magallanes (2013).

<sup>3</sup> See Anzaldua (1990: xxvi-xxvii).

<sup>4</sup> Throughout this article, I will explain both terms, *tilting pedagogies* – a term I created –, which resonates with *left hand maneuvers*, Anzaldua's understanding for actions that incline to touch and connect with the other, the different. *Tilting* develops from the inclinations offered by perspectives on gender, critical pedagogy and visual discourse.

<sup>5</sup> See Anzaldua (2002).

<sup>6</sup> My work with Anzaldua began with my graduate dissertation at University of California at Berkeley, with Norma Alarcón as advisor (1996-2001). Later in México at the UNAM, I elaborated on this work to create a new graduate curricular option on Cultural Critique and Gender Studies in the fields of Education, Latin-American, Visual and Cultural Studies at the Humanities, and coordinated the translation of Anzaldua's and Sandoval's texts. What I refer to in this paper is the first development of this curricular initiative – called OIP-EGCC (Orientación

a collective of professors, students, activists and artists gathered initially around the Gender Studies Program, Programa de Estudios de Género (PUEG / UNAM; 2004-2013), and later as a collective interested in Anzaldúa's critical thinking, we have been doing significant work related to Chicana Latino Studies and particularly with Anzaldúa's notions.<sup>7</sup>

Two of the most outstanding texts which fosters these types of cross-over-mechanisms are Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* and Chela Sandoval's *Methodologies of the Oppressed*. As part of a tilt towards Chicana epistemologies, we translated Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands: La Frontera* and Chela Sandoval's *Methodologies of the Oppressed* into Spanish. With regards to the history of this program, fifteen years ago we created a curricular innovation inspired in Anzaldúa, highlighting Gender Studies, Critical Culture, Pedagogy and Visual Discourse.<sup>8</sup> Under a reorganized curriculum, every year we teach three graduate seminars and two undergraduate ones. The core of inspiration for these seminars is Anzaldúa's narrative and theory. In this article, I expand on the notion of *tilting pedagogies* as a set of maneuvers inclined towards action, from academia to the activation of knowledge. I see interruption and deferment as two actions that are necessary to read theory not only under a local frame, but to inter-connect it with other active forms of knowledge.

In his article 'Traveling Theory' (1983), Said announces the importance of the act of interruption. What he calls "resistance to theory" represents the refusal of reading texts that are not interrupted by local concerns, context, urgencies, tensions and place based questions.

Indeed I would go as far as saying that it is a critic's job to provide resistance to theory, to open it up to historical reality, toward society, toward human needs and interests, to point up those concrete instances drawn from every day reality that lie outside or just beyond the interpretative area necessarily designated to advance and thereafter circumscribed by every theory (Said 1983: 242).

It is Donna Haraway who refers also to a form of interruption by calling to objectivity only through a partial perspective: "The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision" (Haraway 2003: 394).

This interruption of theory – to be properly transformed into knowledge – as needed concepts but also as urgent actions, is called *conocimiento* by Anzaldúa. *Conocimiento* means connection; for Anzaldúa, *conocimiento's* most important function is to connect "apparently

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Interdisciplinaria de Estudios de Género y Crítica Cultural/Interdisciplinary Emphasis of Gender Studies and Cultural Critique) running from 2007 to 2013 on a first stage (as Chair of Gender Studies) and later from 2014 until today.

<sup>7</sup> The collective is organized around the programs and fields of pedagogy, education, human rights, aesthetics (artistic practices and activism) and visual discourse. Rian Lozano, Patricia Piñones, Nina Hoecht, Coco Gutiérrez Magallanes are some of their most important activists and professors. The collective is conformed also by graduate and undergraduate students, artists and activists like Gelen Geleton.

<sup>8</sup> See Anzaldúa (2015a) and Sandoval (2015).

disparate events, people, experiences and realities. These connections lead to action" (Keating 2015: xxvii).

I focus on two notions to understand the way Anzaldúa intervenes in the concept of 'knowledge' and transforms it into *conocimiento*. In her latest work *Light in the Dark / Luz en lo oscuro*, Anzaldúa locates *conocimiento* as an unending transformation process, as some sort of fugitive and errant term (traveling, as Said underlines),<sup>9</sup> which represents a deviation from a final definition, calling for action of disparate people, in unexpected places and through unanticipated events. These three registers (disparate, unexpected and unanticipated) foster open forms of signification, which better serve this relevant form of connection. It appears when places, people and events are not previously defined, but open to endless signification. It is as if the last impulse, the last accent for signification, developing into action, was deference: a type of detour to connect disparate places, people and events. AnaLouise Keating explains Anzaldúa's understanding of *conocimiento*:

Anzaldúa redefines the term [*knowledge*], incorporating imaginal, spiritual-activist, and ontological dimensions. [...] Anzaldúa's *conocimiento* is profoundly relational and enables those who enact it to make connections among apparently disparate events, people, experiences, and realities. These connections [...] lead to action (Keating 2015: xxvii).

Intrusion and deferment are operations used by Anzaldúa as maneuvers and processes to signal the detour to produce *conocimiento*, as a set of ideas, notions, concepts, narratives that may open to signification in infinite ways. For example, Spanish language and the visual register represent alternative codes to academia in the US, these codes interrupt and deviate from both, the English as hegemonic language and the written format as privileged form of academic thinking. To speak in Spanish, to switch from writing to visual discourse, constitute two displacements which move away from both hegemonic languages – Spanish and writing – to open new frames of reading. They function – as Anzaldúa would state – as an activation of forms of communication connecting and producing *conocimiento*.

In Anzaldúa's critical proposal action is central, it has to do with knowledge as a precise way of acting upon it. A central deferment involves the *left hand*, favoring the detours which enable that sort of creativity entailed by the unseen and the forgotten, the squid. To act upon what we know – but is complicated to be represented, like Spanish or visual language – requires a detour, a sort of interruption of the way knowledge is envisioned and represented systematically. In this contribution, I concentrate on the kind of detour and interruption through *atravesamientos* as inter(re)ferences, to achieve activation and appropriation of knowledge, an example of this

<sup>9</sup> See Said (1983).

could be the use Spanish, or Chicano Spanish and the use of images to read or foster theoretical notions.<sup>10</sup>

We find this emphasis in Anzaldúa's visual and linguistic work in a collection of documents at the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas (UT). As part of this collective of activists, students, artists, and academics interested in Anzaldúa's critical thinking, Rian Lozano, Nina Hoecht and Coco Magallanes, coordinated in 2016 an exhibit of Anzaldúa's drawings. A selection was brought to the UNAM and later to different museums and cultural centers (*casas de la cultura*), in México City. The exhibition was called *Entre palabra e imagen. Galería de pensamiento de Gloria Anzaldúa*. This was the first time these drawings were exposed at the south of the Rio Bravo. These images were also used in our graduate and undergraduate seminars at the UNAM, confronting us with several questions: How do we read and re-appropriate the visual, activist, academic work of Anzaldúa? How does her vision and critical thinking relate to action? In which way do these images interrupt linguistic hegemonies and communicate tensions related with sexuality, dispossession and disappearance? How do these operations of communication get translated when used in other contexts such as the Mexican academic scenario?

The first image of the exhibition *Entre imagen y palabra* is Anzaldúa's open hand, one that represents doing, by knowing and communicating in between asymmetrical situations and people.<sup>11</sup> I quote:

Con los ojos y la lengua como pluma en la mano izquierda

Staying alive [...] requires strategies [...] of survival and resistance. One strategy brings together three different abilities – communicating, knowing, and doing, which I represent in my hieroglyph of a left hand on whose palm are pictured a pair of eyes, a mouth with a tongue hanging out and the writing tip of a pen at the tip of the tongue. Los ojos represent seeing and knowing which can lead to understanding or conocimiento. It means getting to know each other and, as mestizas form many cultures, seeing from multiple points of view [...]. La lengua is a symbol for speech, for breaking silence by talking, communicating and writing. The split forked tongue of a serpent is my signal for communicating bilingually (Anzaldúa 2009: 211f.).

Anzaldúa elaborates on the importance of the hand by stretching the Spanish translation of 'mano' into *maneuvers: left hand maneuvers*, as the 'need to act upon what we know', but also

<sup>10</sup> Anzaldúa specifies in *Borderlands: La Frontera*, that Chicano Spanish, Chicano-Texas-Spanish, Spanglish are deviated, improper and at the same time living languages for minorities in the US. She protests in *Borderlands* that until she is free to "write bilingually and to switch codes without always having to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish, when I rather would speak Spanglish, and as long I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate" (Anzaldúa 2007: 59).

<sup>11</sup> The image depicting the hand comes from the exhibit *Entre palabra e imagen. Galería de pensamiento de Gloria Anzaldúa*. Anzaldúa's image was published, and can be seen, in Sharpe (2017). For more information on the exhibit, see also Höchtel (2016), Gutiérrez Magallanes (2018: 132).

that appears in opposition of what we know, by highlighting the actions and representation of the odd, the unexpected and the strange. *Left hand maneuvers* are inclined paradoxically to both familiar and unexpected actions and practices. Anzaldúa refers to them as a capacity to act at the border of the expected and the unexpected, the familiar and the uncanny, theory and practice, word and image, female and other, Spanish and English.<sup>12</sup>

Early in her work we find the notion of 'left' through el *Mundo Zurdo*, referring to the *left* as the odd, the unexpected, linked also with the ones that sleep with hunger, the disappeared, the forgotten ones.<sup>13</sup> The hand, the left hand reminds us to act upon what we know, but closely attached to the sinister and the strange, to that which escapes and remains invisible. "To activate *conocimiento*" means to interrupt:

To activate the *conocimiento* and communication we need the hand. The hand is an agent of action. It is not enough to speak and write and talk and communicate. It is not enough to see and recognize and know. We need to act upon what we know, to do something about it. The left hand has always been seen as sinister and strange, associated with the female gender and creativity. But in unison with the right, the left hand can perform great things (Anzaldúa 2009: 212).

### **Interruption and appropriation: the deferred classroom**

Anzaldúa's writing, visual and theoretical work –what is understood as her production of *conocimiento* – is a process guided by constant intersections and interruptions: neutral writing is interrupted by autobiography, word by image, English by Spanish, and Spanish by Chicano-Spanish, the tongue of the "deslenguadas" (Anzaldúa 1987: 58). In Anzaldúa's proposal of *conocimiento*, there is no hegemonic system that remains uninvolved, uninterrupted. Anzaldúa states the rebellion of her tongue as "*Deslenguadas. Somos las del español deficiente*. We are your linguistic nightmare, your linguistic aberration [...]. Because we speak with tongues of fire we are culturally crucified" (Anzaldúa 2007: 80). Herein lies the importance of critical thought. Thus, we face a textuality which is product of crossings and intersections, a writing of a paradox (urgency and interruption) and an oxymoron (an urgent postponement). Writing from suspense and postponement means doing theory, but incarnate (located) theory, from the South, from the body, from the *pocho* (*deslenguada*) tongue.

<sup>12</sup> In Spanish the expression "mano izquierda" means to be able to act properly in extremely difficult and unexpected circumstances. It means to have an invisible and special capacity to deal with unexpected events.

<sup>13</sup> The notion of *Mundo Zurdo* appears at the closing section of Anzaldúa's essay 'La Prieta', in *This Bridge called by Back*: "We are the queer groups, the people that don't belong anywhere, not in the dominant world nor completely within our own respective cultures. Combined we cover so many oppressions. But the overwhelming oppression is the collective fact that we do not fit [...]. In El Mundo Zurdo I with my own affinities and my people with theirs can live together and transform the planet" (Anzaldúa 1983: 209).



Inside a deferred classroom, and within these detours, students may be capable of thinking by interrupting what they read; authorized to cross through theoretical paradigms in different languages (including Chicano Spanish), which otherwise could be read without interruption, away from a sort of criticism emanating from linguistic accents and far from inscribing borders into their reading practices. What does it mean to train students to be capable of throwing their bodies and their tongues in (*atravesarlos*), of getting them in the way of what they read? What does it take to put the body along the text, the image beyond the word? What does it mean to stand in the way or cross (*atravesar*) of theoretical texts?

The act of interrupting theoretical texts helps students to appropriate and use them, and not the other way around. This way, Anzaldúa's *pensamiento atravesado* – critical knowledge – becomes a model for pedagogies of interruption, that tilt towards social urgencies. It encourages not only to cross borders, but to 'stick the tongue out', interrupting the theoretical texts that may be difficult to appropriate and – if not interrupted – block questions that come from within the students about their own social concerns, doubts, personal and current fears and anxieties.

Anzaldúa refers to her rebellious tongue, strong and stubborn, a tongue that 'keeps pushing'. In that same chapter "How to tame a wild tongue", she addresses the importance of Spanish "a language with which we could communicate with ourselves" (Anzaldúa 2007: 77) and a distorted English called "pochismos" (Anzaldúa 2007: 78). One has to stop when reading texts interrupted by Chicano Spanish.

The first byproduct of our students' approach to complex theoretical texts is suspense, deferring the last word, interrupting. From this operation and these mechanics, drawn from an Anzaldúan pedagogy, emerges the practice of theorizing as an act of interrupting, and suspending the signification process.

### **La teoría como interrupción: lo que se atraviesa**

In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa depicts *los atravesados* (the queer, migrants, Mexicans), as the bodies that obstruct modernity. *Los atravesados* represent the border and its crossing, this constant state of transition: "The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over or go through the confines of the 'normal'" (Anzaldúa 2007: 25).

Anzaldúa's theoretical texts are preceded by strategic ambivalence and suspension of meaning, as routes deligned by the postponement of an imminent final signification, a displacement named by Lacan as the errantry of the signifier – as so of signification – and made

into a pedagogy by Gloria Anzaldúa: deferment as pedagogy.<sup>14</sup> This delay/detour in the process of signification may be read as a theoretical maneuver. In a contradictory manner, ambulance, delay and suspension are the routes to achieve an urgent knowledge –open and diverse to be used by the many deviant and dispossessed– be it pedagogical, historic or sexual. The kind of knowledge students need is not usually at the tip of the tongue, it needs to wonder and wander to their own tongue, to its tip, to be significant. This wonder and wander on language signals the process of finding and using a language which corresponds to a way of living "[u]n lenguaje que corresponde a un modo de vivir" (Anzaldúa 2007: 77); a language which is not Español nor inglés, but both.

This ambulance, errance, as detour, which confronts racial signification, through hegemonic language deferment gives way to what we call decolonial pedagogies, or maniobras which – along with Sandoval, Cusicanqui, Lugones, Fanon – reminds us that critical thought is only possible if it is based on the activation of knowledge, which encompasses necessary detours for the interruption of academic or hegemonic theories, languages and thinking. Decolonial pedagogies or maneuvers inscribe the urgent and displaced possibility for theory (as critical thought), only within the process of interruption as a movement of ambulance: going from a dispossessed body to one with the disposition for the appropriation of knowledge, wandering from one geocultural or disciplinary border to another by crossing from inside academia to the outside and the other way around.<sup>15</sup> Wondering and wandering, suspending final signification, amounts to the postponement of the arrival of a destined, or prefigured knowledge.

Anzaldúa's work responds to a strategic "resistance to theory" (Said 1983: 242) , and at the same time to the need of theorizing from the body, of 'embodying' portions of theoretical thinking (experiences, emotions and transactions), that are necessary to understand each other and build bridges between different subjects, fields and strategies of resistance and survival. The classroom is a space where this kind of delays, suspensions, deviations and detours are most effective. It is in the creation of an interval inside the classroom, where the process of activation of *conocimiento* may be generated. I am proposing the classroom as deviated and suspended device, and so as a place for theoretical production. By which maneuvers may the classroom develop as a theoretical, ambulant interval, as a *Nepantla* site?<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See Lacan (1971).

<sup>15</sup> In *Light in the Dark*, Anzaldúa uses the term *decolonization* frequently. In 2013, two years before this last book of Anzaldúa would be published posthumously, Norma Alarcón foresaw this trend in Anzaldúan thought. Alarcón referred to the so far-published Anzaldúan texts, stating that even if Anzaldúa herself did not mention the term *decolonization* for "her life-long project to heal the inner wounds and the sociopolitical and economic wounds of colonization", her "project's *telos* was a quest for personal and political decolonization" (Alarcón 2013: 189).

<sup>16</sup> To Anzaldúa, *Nepantla* is "el lugar de la frontera" and the "perspective from the cracks" (Anzaldúa 2015b: 47; 81).

### **Suspended bodies inside the *tilted* classroom**

It is a known fact that, as students move forward in academia and leave behind grammar school, junior high, and high school, and undergraduate studies, they also leave behind the body. Students in academia need to gradually give up those corporeal signs which could compromise the veracity, verisimilitude and legitimacy of their knowledge: decorporatizing the body is considered a sign of academic investiture.

Anzaldúa's teaching is interested in the exact opposite: an inclination towards the body, an invitation to 'make it appear', to cross/dress it, to invest in it; that means to 'produce' it at the borders of academia. With the body appearing at the limits of the academic scene, we underline teaching inventiveness under a set of practices that transform notions of discipline, time, space, canon and academic writing, and favor academia to incline towards radically different experiences, bodies, extended outsides, at the borders of its fields and disciplines.

In Anzaldúa's work such intermittent return to the body (visible-invisible, textual-carnal, deferred-present, yours-mine, ours-theirs) is key to the incarnation of criticism. In this sense a return to the body – inside the classroom – could represent a critical *movida* inside a space where the body is severely blocked. I understand *movidas* as Chela Sandoval addressed them in her chapter "Love as Hermeneutics of Social Change, A Decolonizing Movidita" in the book *Methodology of the Oppressed* as "operations that situate and legitimate subaltern knowledge and articulate methodologies in the process of building by assembling texts from both sides of the border" (Sandoval 2000: 109). Chela Sandoval's "border" is not only geographical, it refers also to the border between activism and academia, institutional theorization and embodied one, individual and collective, disciplinary and transdisciplinary thinking, hegemonic and 'subaltern' canon.

Anzaldúa's pedagogical maneuvers move also inside the classroom; they represent an investment in the absent body (the one missing, the one not there) and intermittent return of the postponed/deferred ones. The deferred body (the body to come) may occupy different subjective positions, may better incline when opposing restricted views. The deferred body 'tilts' or shifts, to occupy liminal positions inside academic scenarios. 'The body to come' is the one which is constructed under a specific inclination to negotiate identity and subjectivity in contact with other views and political, academic or subjective perspectives.

In her later work, Anzaldúa goes from el *Mundo Zurdo* to the notion of *new tribalism*, though she never abandons el *Mundo Zurdo* as the category which includes the strange, the alien, those who do not belong. *Mundo Zurdo* is the place for those who represent a threat "*somos una amenaza*" (Anzaldúa 1988: 168).

Anzaldúa in her later work, uses the notion of new tribalism to continue to build the notion of "transcend[ing] the 'us' versus 'them' mentality" (Anzaldúa 2015: 85) through narration and story-telling, as we perceive in the following quote: "The new tribalism is about being part of but never subsumed by a group, never losing individuality to the group nor losing the group to individuality. The new tribalism is about working [...] diverse futures. It's about rethinking our narratives of history, ancestry, and even of reality itself" (Anzaldúa 2015: 85).

*Tilting pedagogies* explores the inclinations towards the body, postponed signification and the errant classroom, to make an embodied artistic, pedagogic, epistemological practice move along realities. Final meanings and writing (which go unrevised under these inclinations), closed and defined and definitive identities tend to hinder interconnectedness, interdisciplinary perspectives, which can overflow rigid borders of academia. 'Straight' (not tilted) sexualities and other signs of identity are put into question – are postponed – through the understanding of theory and academic discourse as some sort of activation of knowledge and critical thinking and transformation. *Tilting pedagogies* leans in favor of practices that incline towards the non-regulated, the new, the unexpected. There is always a way of inventing a body, somebody, a way of rearranging their pleasures and desires, and escaping the many and reductive identities and labels placed upon us.

### ***Tilting pedagogies: The production of an inclined classroom as site of apparition as critical thinking***

*Tilting pedagogies* resonate with Anzaldúa's aesthetics and *movidas*<sup>17</sup>, they constitute inclinations towards frictions that revolve academic learning and position it at the border of academia and disciplinary knowledge in favor of an activation of knowledge.

The mechanics, the process, and the necessary inclinations for transforming – turning – the classroom into an open, public space ('inclined' to the activation of knowledge) favors contact with excluded or liminal knowledge and the appearance of absent bodies and of collective practices that raise urgent issues.

Tilting operations imply an inclination towards an academia, opened to reconsider its public mission, its service not only to disembodied knowledge (useful for different disciplinary advances), but to an embodied one, located at the fringes of disciplines and practices and in the actual student's bodies (as in the formation of collectives of students). This marginal or liminal

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<sup>17</sup> Anzaldúa uses the term *movidas* to refer to processes of transformation: "Ours are individual and small group *movidas*, unpublicized *movimientos*" (Anzaldúa 1990: xxvii). Other Chicana theorists also use the term. Chela Sandoval points out that "[i]t is love that can access and guide our theoretical and political *movidas*—revolutionary maneuvers toward decolonized being" (Sandoval 2000: 141).

position refers also to the empowerment of disrupted and fragmented lives of many of our students, whose gender, class, sexual and racial affiliations jeopardize severely their academic future (a majority of them first generation students<sup>18</sup>).

With the figure of the tilted academia, I explore the tilting, displacement and redistribution of knowledge, the rearranging of its disposition, its management and its administration. An academia off-axis, inclined towards the administration of a 'body to come' (suspended, deferred body of knowledge, student body, collective body). Tilted and deferment as pedagogy, and critical thinking as content is possible through three avenues: contact with sexuality (as a *movida* to make the suspended body appear), activism (as intervention of academia when inclined to its outside and to its outsiders), and artistic and pedagogical practices as new archives and action which contextualizes experience and incarnates knowledge.

*Tilted pedagogies* refer to acts aimed for open classrooms, inclined towards collective thinking. The tilting figure derives from some childhood memories in amusement parks, particularly a ride called 'tilt-a-whirl', which spins at such speed that the body is clinched, so that its weight and gravity are felt. The 'tilt-a-whirl' consists of freely-spinning cars that hold three or four riders each, which are attached at fixed pivot points on a rotating platform. As the platform rotates, parts of the platform are raised and lowered, with the resulting centrifugal and gravitational forces on the cars causing them to spin in different directions and at variable speeds. The weight of passengers in these cars (as well as the weight distribution) may intensify or dampen the spinning motion of the cars, adding to the unpredictable nature of the motion.

They are numerous references of this kind of theorizing and thinking in Anzaldúa's work, especially in the one developed later in her life in the texts reedited by Ana Lous Keating in *Light in the Dark*, but not only.

Using a multidisciplinary approach and a 'storytelling' format, I theorize my own and others' struggles for representation, identity, self-inscription, and creative expression. When I 'speak' myself in creative and theoretical writings, I constantly shift position – which means taking into account ideological remolinos (whirlwinds), cultural dissonance, and the convergence of competing worlds (Anzaldúa 2015b: 3).

"El remolino", the whirl or the vortex as Anzaldúa describes "el remolino", derives from "un arrebatamiento con la fuerza de un hacha" (Anzaldúa 2015b: 16). This whirl "cracks [...] our perceptions of the world, how do we relate to it, how do we engage with it" (Anzaldúa 2015b: 16). It can be read also as a radical shift. The shift gives space to *Nepantla*, "a psychological, liminal space between the way things had been and an unknown future" (Anzaldúa 2015b: 17). Here we may appreciate both the shift, the hard-wearing displacement in and the unknown as

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<sup>18</sup> That is, students who are the first in their family to go to college.

deferred future, a wide open one. It is in *Nepantla* as site for critique, where whirling and deferment appear with strategic potentialities, as we can see in the way Anzaldúa defines this site:

In nepantla we realize that realities clash, authority figures of the various groups demand contradictory commitments, and we and others have failed living up to idealized goals. We're caught in remolinos (vortexes), each with different, often contradictory forms of cognition, perspectives, worldviews, belief systems – all occupying the transitional Nepantla space (Anzaldúa 2015b: 17).

*Tilting pedagogies* act in consonance with Anzaldúa's maneuvers which interrupt academic and disciplinary construction of meaning by the activation of other knowledges, of indigenous knowledges, and through the production of what remains unaccountable and unaccounted.

One of the events that remains unaccountable is –without a doubt– the disappearance of the 43 students of Ayotzinapa, Guerrero.<sup>19</sup> This atrocity represented an incommensurable event that could not be assimilated neither by academics, activists, citizenship, nor by intellectuals, workers or students. It caused profuse production of demonstrations, protesting, articles, books, performances and most importantly the production of an inclined classroom, tilted towards the production of *conocimiento* as a set of actions that can make the disappeared appear. 43 chairs were left empty inside a deserted classroom. The continuous demand of apparition of the 43 students does not mean their actual magical presence, but the apparition of pedagogies that can make academia twist and incline towards urgent actions.

Cristina Rivera Garza is an intellectual that resonates with Anzaldúa's pedagogical maneuvers as inclinations to understand knowledge as the capacity to act and to activate academic knowledge. Rivera Garza has developed a type of writing derived from this urgent need and an aesthetic and pedagogical urge to make the disappeared appear; in other words to make an absence present. With other intellectuals such as Elena Poniatowska, Mónica Ocampo, Paula Mónac, José Luis Tapia, Sara Uribe, Ileana Diéguez and many others, she developed a kind of writing very close to what Anzaldúa defines as *conocimiento*, called *narrativa desaproporcionista* (desappropriated narratives), which exercises a kind of written representation of an incommensurable event – the tragic disappearance of 43 rural students – that may interrupt both the appropriation of the voices of the victims and of the disappeared, and the institutional way of simulating justice. To make the absence of the 43 students present there

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<sup>19</sup> On September 26th in 2014, 43 rural students of the Rural School *Normal Isidro Burgos* in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero disappeared after they took three buses to travel from Guerrero to Mexico City, to participate in the demonstration organized to remember the 1968 massacre of students (Matanza de Tlatelolco). It is not clear what happened, but significant evidence points out to the intervention of organized crime in confabulation with the military in their disappearance. During months one of the images that traveled internationally was one of a deserted classroom, with 43 empty chairs. See Ocampo / Tapia (2015).

is an urgent need to interconnect academia with activism, visual with written languages, theory with actions that can protest against violence and to foster languages that connect with the pain of others. In Rivera Garza's words resonating with Anzaldúa, the way to "heal" is to interconnect academic language with aesthetic, spiritual, poetic and political one:

Se trata, [...] de un libro sobre el dolor. Alrededor de él. En su centro. Se trata de palabras sueltas y palabras tomadas, de oraciones gramaticales, espirituales y estéticas, de párrafos concatenados que intentan, a su vez, concatenarse a otros fuera de la página, en la calle de nuestros días, en las voces que van a parar, tumultuosas, en los pabellones de nuestras orejas (Rivera Garza 2015: 19f.).

The strong call for appearance is especially meaningful in territories where violence is causing young students to disappear. The dramatic and forced disappearance of the 43 students from Ayotzinapa, Guerrero in Mexico in 2014, and the empty classroom they left, deepened a big national wound.

Classrooms could be the spaces that may guarantee appearance as a form of visibility that could prevent students from disappearing. Since the 43 students of Ayotzinapa, the absence and disappearance of students, the empty chairs inside the classroom, especially in dangerous territories, are consistently visibilized. The insistence in the errant, deferred and open classroom represents a strategy for constructing the necessary perspectives and inclination to make visible both what was impossible to see and perceive in a horizontal academia and the necessary crossings over and inclinations towards friction that revolves learning, generates connections of bodies, disciplines, archives and pedagogies an incarnation of knowledge as *conocimiento*: a way of being and knowing that is seeking another form of order, inhabiting various grounds of language and encompassing the convergence of competing worlds, which may establish hidden, unknown connections between lived experiences and theoretical languages.

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**Pantelion's 'Transborderscapes'.  
Borders, Gender and Genre in *No se aceptan devoluciones* and *Pulling  
Strings***

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**Introduction**

Since the very beginning of film history, the U.S.-Mexico border has continuously been staged in world cinema and has become an emblematic topography of geopolitics, national identity and human rights. As one of the most frequently screened landscapes, it has inspired filmmakers worldwide to take a stand on border and gender politics and to follow often highly predictable storylines, characters and patterns. Apart from a few exceptions like the popular 'Borscht Westerns' in Communist and Socialist countries, which reconditioned the genre in order to depict the immoralities and cruelties of capitalist expansionism, immigrants from the South were rarely depicted as positive characters, a phenomenon that is still prevalent in many neo-Westerns, as well as gangster and narco films of the 21<sup>st</sup> century like *Traffic* (2000), *No Country for Old Men* (2007) or *Sicario* (2015).<sup>1</sup>

In her analysis of American border media, Camilla Fojas distinguishes between the Hollywood border genre, which "reflects hegemonic colonial attitudes about the South" and critical Latino border media that "challenge the hegemony of the US model" (Fojas 2008: 2f.). Many of these latter critical 'bordersploitation films', in which Latinas/os are often the focal characters, "upending the immigrant phobic discourse of white victimization, and often complicating the polarized racial discourse at the border" (Fojas 2013: 37), belong to the global genre of new critical border films. In the midst of a global 'immigration crisis' and internationally resurgent forms of nationalism and xenophobia, many recent border films have directly reacted to the dominant discourse of white victimization and have started to focus on the 'hypervisibility' of migrants' pain, suffering, desperation and fear.<sup>2</sup> With empathizing emotional narratives, focusing on "politics of pity" (Chouliaraki 2006: 98), film makers have taken on the urgent challenge to educate their viewers on the constant infringement of human

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<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of so-called 'Easterns' or 'Red Westerns' produced in the German Democratic Republic, see Denzel de Tirado (2018). For the depiction of violence and crime on the US-Mexico border, see Tabuenca Córdoba (2010) and Schubert (2018).

<sup>2</sup> See Cava (2016: 596).

rights that is happening every day in refugee camps and detention centers in various border regions worldwide.

This essay concentrates on a third form of border films that transcend the aesthetics of 'hegemonic discourse' and narratives of 'pity'. I argue that the two comedies *No se aceptan devoluciones / Instructions not Included* (2013) and *Pulling Strings / Amor a Primer Visa* (2013) by the relatively new transborder network Pantalion Films have created new perspectives on transborder issues and aesthetics, based on bicultural and bilingual references to North and Latin American pop culture and film history. Pantalion Films was founded in 2011 in the midst of a rise of transnational US Latino/Latin American media companies and is backed by the American entertainment company Lionsgate and the Mexican multimedia company Televisa – "the largest and most powerful Spanish language media company in existence [...] serving the entertainment needs of Hispanic audiences around the world", according to the studio's website.<sup>3</sup> Thus, it is not only the first Latino studio in Hollywood but also reaffirms Mexico's persistent domination in the US Latino market. Known for its niche market movie productions, Pantalion has produced, acquired and distributed over 45 comedies, animated films and family dramas with top-rated Latino actors, directors and writers, mainly aiming at Latino audiences in the US and South of the border. Most of Pantalion's films gross quite high among viewers despite rather mediocre film critiques. The films are more or less bilingual and released in English and Spanish. As "Latinos don't see themselves reflected in Hollywood movies" (McNamara in Wollan 2011), the studio's declared goal is "to speak directly to acculturated and Spanish-dominant Hispanics alike", to feature Latino themes with a universal appeal to broad commercial audiences and to avoid negative stereotyped clichés of Latino representations in Hollywood films.<sup>4</sup> In order to fulfill these criteria, Pantalion films conform to familiar aesthetics, storylines, plots, characters, and spaces, and are highly intertextual. Titles like *Saving Private Pérez* (2011) or *Overboard* (2018) refer explicitly to American films, whereas other films like *Casa de mi padre* (2012) or *No manches Frida* (2016) are less obvious pastiches and parodies of classic film genres or adaptations of contemporary popular formats from other countries. The majority of Pantalion's films refer to border-crossings, either by representing the life of Latino immigrants in the US and the life at the border in Mexico, or by showing more or less explicit border-crossings and related experiences. Due to its reiterative and predictable plots, in which transborder issues are always solved in the end, Pantalion's films have become an active agent in 'borderscaping', imagining melodramatic and comic solutions

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.pantalionfilms.com/>.

<sup>4</sup> See Fritz (2013).

for common problems of Latino migrants and their children, such as poverty and stereotypes in *From Prada to Nada* (2011) or Latina girls who try to fit in and are ashamed of their cultural heritage in *Girl in Progress* (2012).

In order to examine Pantelion Films as a 'borderescaping' agent and to explore how *No se aceptan devoluciones* and *Pulling Strings* play with the construction and deconstruction of mental, physical and aesthetic borders, I define the concept of cinematic 'transborderscapes' and 'transbordering' aesthetics, politics and narratives. The concept of 'borderscapes'<sup>5</sup>, which has become more and more popular in international border studies since the conference *Spaces in Conflicts: Symbolic Places: Networks of Peace* (2006)<sup>6</sup>, is very inspiring for the analysis of border films, as borderscapes are less concerned with the shaping of borders on the ground, but more with the borders in people's minds. The portmanteau term 'borderscape' combines the fluid ambiguities of the two separate notions of 'landscape' and 'border' and is formed through representations of all kinds, which rely on narratives, images and imaginations and are constantly reestablished, negotiated and represented by discourse, practices, relationships and bodies in motions. Thus, 'borderscapes' provide "alternative perspectives" (Brambilla 2015: 19). Borders are in motion, they "happen at a distance, as well as at the borderline itself" and it is not only relevant "what happens on the border or in the immediate borderlands, but also of what happens at any spatial distance from it, at any scale, on any level, in any dimension" (Schimanski 2015: 36). In this context, borders are seen as 'shifting spaces', as they define new socio-spatial identities and geographies in order to discover alternative epistemologies and topologies to the traditional binary oppositions of center and periphery and inside and outside. For film makers and critics 'borderescaping' entails that film is seen as an aesthetic and political medium, as directors construct and deconstruct borders in their audience's imagination, allowing them to gain an understanding of transitional spaces in film. The majority of films about the 'westward movement' have created one-sided views of the US-Mexican borderscape from an American point of view. In early Westerns, the 'border' was not clearly distinguishable and moved West with the pilgrims. Thus, Native Americans or Mexicans did not appear as guardians of their territory, but as trespassers and threat to the peaceful migrants. In more recent borderscape representations like Tony Richardson's *The Border* (1982) or Julia Montejó's and Jesús Nebot's *No Turning Back* (2001), the frontier between Mexico and the US is clearly

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<sup>5</sup> See Dell'Agnese / Amilath Szary (2015)

<sup>6</sup> The conference was organized by Elena Dell'Agnese at the Università degli Studi di Trento, located in the autonomous Italian border region Trentino-Alto Adige (South Tyrol), which was part of Austria-Hungary until 1919 and has German and Italian as official languages. For the conference program, see Università di Trento (2006).

noticeable and represented in the form of a barbed wire fence, a border fortification or the Rio Grande. Here, the camera always remains on 'American' ground and migrants from the South are perceived as intruders of American territory. This static aesthetics changed with Gregory Nava's groundbreaking transborder migration film *El Norte* (1983), which adopted more mobile camera perspectives and became one of the first examples of the filmic and narrative aesthetics that create what I call 'transborderscapes'. In contrast to the partial perspectives in borderscape-films, transborderscape-films allow the viewers to cross the border with the migrants. Here the camera does not remain on one side of the border, but often takes the point of view of the focal characters. In addition, the viewers empathize with the migrants and undergo feelings of claustrophobia and the fear to get discovered through rapid montages of series of close-ups on faces of migrants hiding in cars and trucks and faces of border officials, checking diligently for illegal immigrants and products. Through aerial and extreme long shots of large, open spaces of the borderlands the viewers experience the vastness of the wilderness that the protagonists have to cross. Thus, nature and men – criminals, 'coyotes' and border officials – seem to make it "nearly impossible to illegally enter the United States" (Denzel de Tirado 2015: 289). Films like *Sin nombre*, *La misma luna*, *Sangre de mi sangre*, *The Girl* and many others do raise empathy for their likeable protagonists, but they also nourish the discourse of fear that border controls are not strict enough and that uncountable masses of clandestine migrants are constantly crossing the border from the South. In contrast to these transborder-films, which construct the border as a dangerous place, 'transborderscapes' writers, directors, producers and distributors of Pantelion Films create new, more relatable 'transborderscapes', as they aim to generate alternative marketable aesthetics and formulas to reach their audiences on both sides of the border.

### **The Two Sides of the Border and the Polymorphous Palimpsests in *No se aceptan devoluciones / Instructions not Included* (2013)**

Eugenio Derbez's *No se aceptan devoluciones / Instructions not Included* (2013) is certainly the unsurpassed exemplar of Pantelion's strategy to invest in familiar themes and story patterns put into a transborder context as it became the "top-grossing Spanish-language film of all time at the North American box office" (McClintock 2013). *No se aceptan devoluciones* follows the typical premise of cross-border family reunifications in recent border films. Like in so many other films, the main protagonist Valentín, a single parent, illegally crosses the border to the

United States with his child.<sup>7</sup> But the film also offers various twists to this well-known family reunification theme. First, the mother who lives in the United States is not a hard-working immigrant Latina who is sending remittances to the family in Mexico. Instead, Julie is a blond American woman who had met Valentín (played by Derbez himself), a notorious playboy in Acapulco, only twice in her life: the first time, when she got pregnant during her romantic vacation fling, and the second time, when she returned with their daughter Maggie. It was during this second meeting that she then just disappeared to the airport, leaving Valentín alone with the baby. Here, the familiar *Three Men and a Baby* premise is intensified by the notorious reputation of Latino men as shallow lovers and absent fathers, which Ramírez Berg has identified as typical character descriptors for Latino men in American film.<sup>8</sup> Not surprisingly, the Latin lover, who does not know how to handle babies, decides to hitchhike across Mexico to Los Angeles to leave the baby with her mother, which leads to an interesting mix of familiar immigration themes with popular family comedy tropes.

*No se aceptan devoluciones* follows the aesthetics of many border films by depicting Mexico as a transit borderscape for immigrants, deploying typical road movie frames. Several sequences represent Valentín walking on endless roads, but with his punkish hair-cut, blondish highlights, converse shoes and bright blue backpack, which he uses as a baby carrier, this familiar road movie framing gets a comic twist as Valentín does not conform to the typical exemplifications of immigrants on their journey to the North. Besides, the characteristic visual components of immigration films are contrasted with Valentín's shallow monologue, in which he is trying to convince the baby why they have to cross the border and why she "will be better off there". While he mentions the classic 'disadvantages' in Mexico – "corruption", "drug dealers", "politicians" –, he also adds more unconventional reasons like "demonstrations", "the national soccer team", or "if you grow up there, you'll be probably blond, blue-eyed, tall" (Derbez 2013: 15':32"-16':27"). When Valentín runs to a truck that stopped for them and the dangerously looking truck driver holds a gun in his face, we think of the many examples in international cinema when migrants become victims of local gangs. Here, like in many other instances in the film, the casting adds a humorous dimension for Mexican audiences that an American audience might miss. While Mexican audiences will recognize the truck driver Agustín Bernal, "el célebre villano del cine mexicano" (Candedo 2018), an actor who appeared in more than 150 films, American audiences might be just surprised by the phrase of the scary-

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<sup>7</sup> Women with their babies are stock characters among secondary migrant protagonists. For an analysis of films focusing on child migrant characters, see Denzel de Tirado (2015).

<sup>8</sup> See Ramírez Berg (2002: 121).

looking driver: "Get in, my name is Lupe" (Derbez 2013: 17':23"). Lupe is very friendly, despite his ugly looks. The familiar panoramic shots of sunrises and sunsets of transit borderscape representations are comically underscored by the constant crying of the baby and Valentín's and Lupe's arguments about diapers and babies: "Tu sabes cambiar pañales?", "Ya cámbialo, no?", "No seas payaso, cámbialo! Ahorita!" (Derbez 2013: 18':30"-18':34").

Instead of constructing the border as an insurmountable obstacle, where illegal immigrants try to storm the border, and the representation of the guardians of American ground who are diligently defending their territory against illegal intruders, *No se aceptan devoluciones* then presents a quite rare borderscape in immigration films: the tedious and boring phenomenon of very long waiting lines, bumper to bumper, the profane and unexciting border experience for all travelers who want to enter the United States from Mexico by car. At the checkpoint, it turns out that Valentín does not have a visa and the baby does not have a passport. But unlike in other transborder films, this does not result in stress and fear. The next sequence shows Valentín and Maggie in a dark room with other passengers and it turns out that Lupe had been hiding several people in a hidden compartment in his truck all along. Yet, the typical transborderscape aesthetics that are usually associated with danger and anguish of passengers hidden in a truck – e.g., in films like *Trade*, *The Girl*, *Sangre de mi sangre*, *Desierto*, *Guten Tag Ramón*, etc. – are left out. Instead of showing the protagonists crammed into confined spaces with the characteristic rapid montage of series of close-ups and extreme shots in order "to create feelings of claustrophobia and fear of suffocation" among the viewers (Denzel de Tirado 2015: 283), the next cut just shows Lupe removing the second wall in his truck, greeting his undocumented passengers by name and sending greetings to their friends and relatives. The emblematic transborderscape scenes with close-ups on the faces of highly professional border officials, their dogs and their flashlights are missing and the comedy plays instead with other 'borders' and restrictions.<sup>9</sup> For instance, in Los Angeles, Valentín is not allowed to enter the hotel where Julie used to work because she has a baby with him, while dogs are easily admitted to his dismay. But Valentín and Maggie manage to sneak into the hotel with the cleaning personnel, where he

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<sup>9</sup> Here it is interesting to mention the French remake of the film, *Demain tout commence* (Gelin 2016) starring Omar Sy, one of the most popular actors of foreign descent in France. In contrast to the long border-crossing sequences in *No se aceptan devoluciones*, which are full of references to border-crossings in other border films, the French film avoids any hints of legal complications to travel abroad with a baby without a passport. Here, the French version of Valentín, Sam, just boards a plane to London in order to return his daughter to her mother. This is possible because the French gigolo happens to meet a flight attendant whom he knows very well, who helps him to get onboard. While the French film cuts out any complications of travelling without a passport and just cuts from the sequence at the French airport to the sequence at the English airport, the remake keeps the theme of the baby's digestion problems and we see the pilots of the plane changing diapers, as well as the passengers of the London underground suffering from the infant's gas and flatulence. Despite mediocre critiques, *Demain tout commence* was a big box office hit in France, certainly due to Omar Sy's popularity in France.

hides his sleeping baby among the freshly washed towels for the swimming pool. After his heroic dive from the presidential suite into the pool to save Maggie from drowning, a film director offers him a well-paid job as a stuntman. At first Valentín is not interested to stay in the US as a "mojado", a 'wetback', a Mexican in the US without an official working permit (Derbez 2013: 25':46"-25':48"). The film director chooses to misunderstand him, immediately asks for towels for his soaking wet hero and convinces him to take his offer, suggesting that Valentín might be separated from Maggie at the border to Mexico. Valentín – who is continuously constructed as a coward since the beginning of the film – absolutely hates his perilous profession but never gives in to his fears throughout the film. I suggest that this perseverance for Maggie's sake could be interpreted as a metonymy for the determination of many undocumented parents who endure dreadful and unsafe working conditions in order to provide a better life for their children.

From frame to frame, *No se aceptan devoluciones* then creates multiple metacinematic exposures to narrative, aesthetical and self-referential allusions, constantly evoking tropes, images and paratexts from American, European and Mexican pop culture. Here, Valentín's employment as a stuntman in the Hollywood film *Aztecman* is an especially thought-provoking multi-layered example of a cinematic palimpsest, as it does not only refer to American pop culture but also to several transborder issues. While Valentín's unacknowledged role as a stuntman refers to the many 'invisible' contributions of Latinos who often work unnamed and unrewarded for the American film industry on the intradiegetic level, the stunt scene also implies various prevailing fervent debates about Latino employment and recognition in Hollywood on the extradiegetic level. Viewers who are familiar with *The Pirates of the Caribbean* immediately recognize an obvious allusion to Johnny Depp as Jack Sparrow in the scene of the *Aztecman*, as the film restages an iconic scene from Depp's popular Disney film. But the *Aztecman* is not about a pirate but about Cuauhtémoc, 'The Descending Eagle', the last Aztec leader. This becomes clear in the short dialogue between Aztecman and the Spanish soldier. In an evidently exaggerated and markedly artificial Spanish accent, the evil Spaniard asks the Aztecman where the gold of his people is hidden. Jonny, the actor impersonating Aztecman, replies in an even more overstressed American accent: "Over my burning feet!" (Derbez 2013: 30':41"-30':50"). With the direct reference to Johnny Depp, the film satirizes contemporary fervent debates about Hollywood policies to cast white actors for Latino characters – e.g., Ben Affleck as Tony Mendez in *Argo* (2012) – as well as Disney's strategy to endow their main protagonists with American accents, whereas the 'enemies' are bestowed with



foreign accents.<sup>10</sup> Here it is interesting that the actor 'Jonny' in the Pantelion film is played by Daniel Lopez, a Latino actor who physically resembles Depp but is still failing to fool the audience to be the 'real' American actor due to his Latino heritage. This 'failure' can be read as a reference to Depp's refusal to play the lead role in Emir Kusturica's film *The Seven Friends of Pancho Villa and the Woman With Seven Fingers*, as he argued that a Latino actor should play that role.<sup>11</sup> Besides, I propose that the Aztecman's costume as an eagle and the film's title are a direct reference to Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Birdman* and the complaint that the Oscar-winning director preferred an all-white cast, just like his Oscar-winning friend Alfonso Cuarón did for *Gravity*.<sup>12</sup>

When Maggie's mother comes back and wants full custody, Valentín gives up his risky job as a stuntman and takes on typical jobs of immigrants. But it turns out that walking dogs, fixing electric problems and cars are far more dangerous than expected and he gets hurt several times.

Despite all expectations, the American judge grants Valentín full custody under the condition that he "must learn to speak English with full command of the language" (Derbez 2013: 1:38':55"), whereas his illegal residence status is not mentioned at all. When it turns out that Valentín is not Maggie's biological father, he decides to escape with the child. While Julie is accusing Valentín of "kidnapping an American child" and tries to convince the police to go after him, they inform her that they "cannot just break into Mexico like that" and that they can only "alert airports and borders so they can keep an eye on him" (Derbez 2013: 1:46':00"-1:46':12"). Despite these alerts, Valentín and Maggie easily hitchhike across the border to Mexico again. This seems to be a typical ending according to genre conventions of the border film: in American film, Latino men are usually not allowed to stay in the United States and are deported.<sup>13</sup> But throughout the film, viewers saw Maggie and Valentín go to the doctor's

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<sup>10</sup> The National Hispanic Media Coalition (NHMC) and other media monitoring organizations have been pointing out for many years that Latinx have been mis- and underrepresented in the United States. While the exclusion of Latinx on national television has been the target of NHMC for many years, they recently demonstrated during the 2018 Oscar Awards to ask for more representation in Hollywood films. For more information on Latino Media Activism, the "blatant omission" and the "proactive and decisive stand against the Spanish language" in Hollywood, see Ross (2017) and Denzel de Tirado (2013: 3). On mock Spanish, linguistic racism and linguicism in the movies, see Bleichenbacher (2008: 13-35).

<sup>11</sup> See Lyttelton (2011).

<sup>12</sup> Later in *No se aceptan devoluciones*, Derbez gives another explanation for the lack of Latino actors in *Gravity*: Jesús Ochoa, one of Hollywood's most famous Latino actors, plays himself as participating in the wrong audition, trying to impersonate an embryo because he falsely believes that he is in one of the casting sessions for Alfonso Cuarón's *Gravity*. Also this scene could be read as an allegory for the invisibility and silence of Latin actors and actresses who only were cast for 3% of speaking film character roles during the last ten years, see Smith (2017).

<sup>13</sup> For an analysis of the deportations of Diego in *Sangre de mi sangre*, Jaime in *Amexicano*, Enrique in *La misma luna*, Carlos in *A Better Life* and many others, see Denzel de Tirado (2015: 289f.). Here, I also examine the fact that women and children are normally allowed to stay. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's observation of hegemonic texts depicting "white men saving brown women from brown men" is especially obvious in *Trade*, *Sin nombre* and *The Gatekeeper* (Denzel de Tirado 2015: 293-295).

because of a severe illness that will soon be fatal. Despite a lot of clues that Maggie could be the one affected by the disease, the viewers automatically follow the indications that it is Valentín who is fatally ill. This is certainly due to the fact that at the first scene at the doctor's, Valentín gets an injection and Maggie just gets her 'vitamins'. The expectation that Valentín will have to die is also nourished by the many plots of border films in which the male immigrants meet their death at the end of the film.<sup>14</sup> When Julie finds out that Maggie has only a few weeks to live because of a complicated heart disorder, she agrees to live with Valentín and give Maggie a 'happy family life' in Acapulco for the last two weeks of her life. Here it is important to note that *No se aceptan devoluciones* constructs a paradisiac Acapulco from the beginning of the film without contrasting it to a grey and depressing portrait of the United States, a phenomenon that has recently become more prevalent in border films.<sup>15</sup> Like Acapulco, Los Angeles is constructed as a colorful beach city and the aesthetics of the sequences on the beach in Mexico and the United States are nearly identical, which creates a neutral space without national, geographical or cultural distinctive markers and thus a transient transborderscape.

The second film of this analysis, *Pulling Strings / Amor a primer visa*, was released only a month after *No se aceptan devoluciones* and critics claimed it was "riding the wave of Derbez's success [...] making it the second consecutive bilingual hit by Pantelion Films" (Suarez Sang 2013). The comedy is intriguing for this analysis as it represents one of the very few films that stage a Mexican-American love relationship in Mexico and one of the rare cases in international cinema that dislocate the border from its actual geographic topography and redraw it on a bureaucratic level in an embassy.

### ***Pulling Strings / Amor a Primer Visa (2013) and the Dislocation of the Border***

In this border film, the common theme of family reunifications also builds the premise of the plot as single father Alejandro feels that his daughter is not safe in Mexico after her mother's death and should rather live with her aunt in the United States. What is new in this romantic comedy is the fact that the US-Mexican border is generated in an embassy and that the main protagonist tries to legally relocate with the adequate papers. However, the young successful American consular officer Rachel rejects his visa application, because Alejandro, a professional mariachi, cannot provide any supporting documents for current proof of income, property or

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<sup>14</sup> For a detailed analysis of the death of male migrant protagonist in *Amexicano, No Turning Back, Sangre de mi sangre* and many others, see Denzel de Tirado (2015: 290f.).

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed analysis of this phenomenon in *The Girl and Trade*, see Denzel de Tirado (2015: 293).

business ownership, or any other assets that are relevant for the authorization of a visa to the US. At the embassy, the border is depicted according to early approaches from political geography as a "mute, solid, objectifiable object with foremost geopolitical and economic implications" (Vanhaelemeesch 2018: 67). Far away from the actual geographical US-Mexican border, the individuals remain anonymous and lonely at the embassy – a space of transience, "a nonplace", according to Marc Augé – social references are ignored and boundaries remain static (Augé 1995: 121).

But later the same day, Alejandro sees the 'gatekeeper' Rachel again in another space that unites people from different economic and national backgrounds: a restaurant. Alejandro plays in a mariachi band during a farewell party for Rachel, who just got a promotion to work in London. While he immediately recognizes the woman who destroyed his hopes for a better life on the other side of the border, she does not pay any attention to him. Even when Alejandro brings the drunk American woman to his apartment because she forgot her own address after she fell asleep at a bus station, she does not remember him. Now, at Alejandro's home – an "anthropological place", a space where people can meet and share social references, empowering their identity (Augé 1995: 123) –, the anonymous bureaucratic border gets more subjective and personal. Until the breakfast that Alejandro carefully prepares for Rachel, he is constructed as an honest and likable person without any intentions to take advantage of the vulnerable situation of the woman who destroyed his dreams. Only when she panics because she thinks that she lost her laptop with highly confidential information on it, and Alejandro pretends that the laptop is 'not' in his home, the power dynamics are reversed. Now Rachel seems to depend on Alejandro, as the 'lost' laptop represents Rachel's 'visa' for a better job in London. On their 'mission' to find the laptop, Alejandro takes Rachel to beautiful cantinas and restaurants in Mexico City in order to stage his apparent fame, wealth and influence, hoping to change her mind about his visa application. Here, the film plays with the potential of the verb border-'scaping' which holds the potential of 'being' as well as 'doing', according to the social geographer Anke Strüver.<sup>16</sup> Space is now transformed through individual actions and perceptions. In the line of other borderscaping practices, the acts of 'seeing' and 'doing' morph the city-scape in this Pantelion film into a "liveable organic, identitarian, relational and historic places" as identified by phenomenological philosophers Martin Heidegger and Maurice Jean Jacque Merleau-Ponty (Vanhaelemeesch 2018: 67). The film reproduces the already described particular aesthetics of recent transborder films, which contrast the beautiful colorful Mexico

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<sup>16</sup> See Strüver (2005: 170).

with the ugly and grey United States. The contrast between the professional, grey, anonymous, non-anthropological space of the American embassy to which the ambitious Rachel had confined herself to during her stay in Mexico and her discovery of the colorful beauty and liveliness of Mexican culture, food and lifestyle represents a new real-life transborder-involvement for Rachel, who had never experienced Mexico despite the fact that she had been working there for several years. Rachel's character as workaholic, who had missed out on life, is emphasized by Rachel's mother, supervisor and best friend, who constantly tries to convince her to work less and to enjoy life. While Alejandro's neighborhood in Mexico City was depicted as dangerous, the places that Alejandro shows Rachel on their search for her laptop are magical. Here, the staging of the city and Mexican culture goes beyond the common contrasting of colors. Similar to the strategy of *No se aceptan devoluciones*, *Pulling Strings* offers several layers of references to internationally known products, professions and stars of Mexican culture. The fact that Alejandro is a mariachi is crucial as the figure of the mariachi is a national icon, myth and symbol deeply embedded in Mexican consciousness, representing a particular type of machismo and mestizaje, which has "long penetrated the production of 'an authentic national type'", producing an image of "'false Mexicanism'" in Mexico and abroad (Mullholland 2007: 249).

The mariachi also happens to be one of the most prominent border masculinity types in American film due to John Landis' cult classic *Three Amigos* (1982) and Robert Rodriguez's successful *Mexico Trilogy*. While the first film of this series, *El Mariachi* (1992), was selected for preservation in the United States Library of Congress's National Film Registry of culturally, historically, and aesthetically significant films, the other two films, *Desperado* (1994) and *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* (2003), became extremely popular due to the cast of the famous Latino icons Antonio Banderas, Salma Hayek, Cheech Marin and Danny Trejo, as well as Quentin Tarantino, Johnny Depp and Willem Dafoe. In contrast to Rodriguez's hypermasculine resilient mariachi character, *Pulling Strings* constructs a softer version of the iconic mariachi figure and endows Alejandro (played by Jaime Camil) with charming and romantic qualities. With the full name of the mariachi character, Alejandro Fernández, screenwriter Gabriel Ripstein adds another dimension of iconic Mexican familiarity for American audiences, as this happens to be the name of a famous Mexican singer, also known as 'El Potrillo' ('The Colt'), who received two Latin Grammy Awards and a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame for his particular blend of mariachi, ranchera and pop music. The resemblance between Jaime Camil and the famous singer is so obvious that Camil and Fernández were casted as brothers in Alfonso Arau's film *Zapata*. Just when Rachel has fallen in love with Alejandro and his beautiful culture of tequila,

cantinas and music, she finds out that he has been misleading her the whole time and decides to choose her career over her feelings for Alejandro. Despite the advice of her mother and her American supervisor to reconsider this move and to follow her heart in order to find happiness – "If you find something that makes you feel part of life, go for it" (Ybarra 2013: 1:30':33"-1:30':59") – she decides to go to London, describing herself and all the expats as 'gypsies' and 'vagabonds' who do not have any roots and will never be able to settle down (Ybarra 2013: 1:26:23-1:26':26"). Alejandro's rush to the airport – where he is able to pass all the barriers separating him from Rachel by buying a ticket and taking off his mariachi-pants in order to go through the metal detector – and his moving speech at the finale of the film are not enough to convince Rachel to stay in Mexico and she flies away. One month later Alejandro and his daughter have moved and are happy. Unlike many other Mexican male protagonists who risked their life to cross the border to make their American dream come true, Alejandro just moved to a better neighborhood with a safer school and seems to have come to peace with their life in Mexico. Thus, *Pulling Strings* is not a typical transborder film as the camera never leaves Mexican territory. But if one considers the American embassy and the international airport as sovereign territories, it is interesting that the film does not show the typical high-security checks of American embassies. At the embassy, Rachel is the only metonymy for the frontier. At the international airport in Mexico City, security checks play an important role in the film but are also easy to pass. Despite the fact that the camera never leaves Mexico, the film insinuates a transborderscape as Rachel left to London but then returned, giving up her job in Europe. Her return to Mexico represents a new cinematic 'transborderscape', as it suggests that a happy life could be lived on the Southern side of the border as well. While Rachel makes clear that she returned for Alejandro and not for the 'tostadas' (Ybarra 2013: 1:42':43"), she does embrace his culture when she asks him for forgiveness with a mariachi serenade, sung by a female mariachi. Alejandro's two main motivations for migration –the lack of safety and a female caretaker for his daughter– are now filled and there is no need for them to emigrate to the US anymore. Rachel did not officially immigrate to Mexico and we cannot know if this bicultural couple will last, I interpret Rachel as one of the very few cinematic representatives of the nearly two million Americans who have chosen to live in Mexico – the home of the largest community of US citizens living outside the United States – a fact that very rarely appears in fiction feature films from both sides of the border.

### **The Reproduction of Conventional Gender and Ethnicity Stereotype Limitations**

Despite being a dynamic genre, which constantly undergoes transformations, the border cinema still has to meet capitalist industrial demands. Genres are "symptoms of culture" and often reveal and explore "prevailing sociopolitical issues and preoccupations" of society (Fojas 2013: 36). While the Pantelion comedies present new alternative spatio-temporal story lines, settings and 'transborderscapes', they also remain truthful to familiar depictions of ethnicity, gender and power politics in films about immigrants and the Southern border. Valentín represents the notorious Latino stereotype of the buffoon, "second-banana comic relief" and goofy sidekick that has haunted Hollywood cinema since the silent film era (Ramírez Berg 2002: 71). While this representation always sells – Sofia Vergara in *Modern Family* is another example of popular Latin buffoonery –, it does not necessarily entail that Pantelion comedies are 'racist'. The buffoon and comic sidekick has a long history in world literature, theater and film and has been extremely popular in Hispanic culture since Sancho Panza in *Don Quijote*. Indeed, Derbez – who is frequently described as the 'Latin Jim Carrey' (Kaufman 2013) – has long embodied the buffoon in Mexican media very successfully. When cultural, ethnic and linguistic identities and alterities become essential plot elements, however, characters are perceived as representations of their particular group. In this way Derbez is also often called the "Tyler Perry of the Latinos" (Rivas 2013) as he serves an underserved ethnic audience and brings them to the theaters. Just like Perry, he feeds his viewers "the same images of ourselves over and over and over because they sell", while Hispanics like "black people need new stories and new storytellers" (Lemieux 2009). Pantelion films and Derbez want to "conquer another market, another audience" and "do something different" (Batista / Derbez in Rivas 2013: 00':48"-00':55"), but they are still far from it. Julie and Rachel repeat recent television and film stereotypes of modern, emancipated, professional, self-centered American women who represent "superficiality, pretentiousness, untrustworthiness and artificiality" and are often contrasted with reliable, modest, affectionate, motherly and virtuous Latina nannies in American media standing for "moral forthrightness, emotional empathy, intuitive honesty and authenticity" (Denzel de Tirado 2013: 25). Julie looks like a barbie and is an egocentric, unempathetic, bisexual former drug-addict, who cold-bloodedly left her baby behind, became a successful lawyer and always just takes what she feels she is entitled to. After his evolution "from Latino 'macho' to Latino 'mandilón' (a man who takes over feminine chores and responsibilities)" – a character development which connects him to several recent counterstereotypes of Latino father figures on American television, as he shares their characteristic "strong American work ethic, their ambition and their dedication to the family"

(Denzel de Tirado 2013: 10) –, Valentín is constructed as Julie's contrasting figure. Rachel is not pleasure-seeking, but she is confident and adventurous and decided against any form of human relations. She has always put her career first and is not even talking to her mother who is visiting. Like the Puritan heroines in traditional Western films, Rachel gets herself in a position of vulnerability and has to be rescued by a 'noble savage'. She does not faint like the customary damsels in distress in traditional Western films, but she does fall asleep after too many shots of tequila, which fulfils familiar recognizable narrative implications. Like in traditional 'captivity tales', the 'white captive' falls in love with her passionate alluring and exotic saviour, as it is through him and her trials in the 'wilderness' in Mexico City that she develops a different kind of power, independent of her social status as a (Puritan) woman.<sup>17</sup> Not surprisingly, the mariachi, who also resembles the popular figure of the irresistible 'singing cowboy' in Mexican and American film, finally gets the girl because she just cannot live without him anymore. Despite these narrative clichés, the two analyzed films from the year 2013 created original 'transborderscapes'. Both films showed interethnic love relations, crossed borders and showed that immigration is not a one-way movement to the United States, a fact that is still underrepresented in American film. And while the shallow, predictable and superficial Pantelion comedies do represent an important third subgenre of the border film between the alarming 'cinema of criminality' and the worrying 'cinema of pity', they still do not exploit their 'transborderscapes' potential and tend to fall back on old stereotypes. If we look at recent Pantelion productions like *How to Be a Latin Lover* (2017), in which Eugenio Derbez plays a lazy gold digger and gigolo who is constantly looking for American elderly ladies that he can exploit, I could not agree more with Lemieux, that we need 'new stories'. While the transborder venture of Pantelion Films does create employment and audiences in Mexico and the United States and thus produces an affective dynamic of distancing and approaching across the US-Mexican border, generating new alternative production circumstances, it rarely translates these intriguing circumstances into new plots and perspectives. As Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado has pointed out, most of Pantelion's more recent plots do not articulate political standpoints anymore and rather reconcile political concerns that reflect neoliberal ideologies of racial hierarchy, middle-class respectability and meritocracy.<sup>18</sup> Also 'transborderscapes' and bilingualism have become less prominent in recent Pantelion productions. Here it is important to mention that Catalina Aguilar Mastretta's "bilingual delight" (Lewis 2017) *Everybody Loves*

<sup>17</sup> For more details about 'captivity tales', the figure of the 'white captive', the 'noble savage' and their presence in modern media, see Bird (2001: 66-75).

<sup>18</sup> See Sánchez Prado (2018).

*Somebody* (2017) – one of the very rare examples of recent Pantelion films that play with transborder experiences – was a tremendous success among critics as it "manages to take the formula, shake it up a bit, and come up with something that feels fresh and inventive" (Cordova 2017). After Carmen Marron's *Go For It!* (2011) and Patricia Riggen's *Girl in Progress* (2012) *Everybody Loves Somebody* is only the third Pantelion film by a female director and one of the few Pantelion films of the last years that focuses on a Latina lead character. For Aguilar Mastretta's focal character Clara, border crossings are routine experiences as she lives and works in LA but often returns home to Ensenada to see her parents. The film moves several times between Mexico and the US, but only sporadically features the border. The first time, the border crossing goes fast and Clara assures her Australian travel companion that he will not need his passport to cross the border to Mexico – "only on the way back [...] they can sense that you are a harmless soul" (Aguilar Mastretta 2017: 09':59"-10':09") – while she is changing into her maid of honor dress and fumbling around with her silicone bra inserts in front of the border officials, showing that she is not afraid at all of border controls. The second time Aguilar Mastretta delivers a shot of the long waiting lines at the Southern side of the border, but most of the time she films Clara in her car or just cuts from scenes in Mexico to the US and vice versa. Not only her geographical but also her linguistic 'transborderscape' is represented in ordinary routines, as all the characters –including Clara's Australian boyfriend Asher– switch easily between Spanish and English and ethnicity, culture and geography function as mere decor in this film. It is in this kind of transborder narratives and aesthetics that Pantelion exploits its true bilingual and transcultural potential.

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## Poetry of the Space In Between

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The new world different from the old with new jewels to be consumed,  
new frontiers to be won, and much more love to be given.  
(Burdon 1967)

### Introduction

This article discusses visible and invisible borders and liminal phenomena in an anthropological and philosophical context. Following Bernhard Waldenfels, it makes a comment upon on the asymmetric relation between the space of one's own and the space beyond. We are used to understanding this asymmetry primarily in a post-colonial sense as a political, social and economic inequality, but it is embedded in a principal difference between inside and outside, on this side and beyond, here and there. We can never be on both sides, we look from one side to the other, which is the precondition for all forms of alterity and strangeness insofar as one can say that liminal phenomena are central to understanding culture as an entity that is structured by visible and invisible borders. This text seeks to modify our contemporary understanding of liminal phenomena as exclusively spatial. It points out that all kind of borders entail a temporal aspect or in other words: the Border is a *chronotopos* in the Bakhtinian sense.<sup>1</sup> Opening and closing are the two components that determine the process of drawing borders.

Alejandro González Iñárritu's film *Babel* (González Iñárritu 2006) is an excellent example for this argument. It is a film that demonstrates the functioning of borders in a global world and at the same time, the temporal and dynamic aspects come into play through the topic of travel that makes the act of crossing borders an unintentional adventure on both sides. *Babel* is interesting with regard to its narrative matrix and because of two aspects.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, the film unfolds a butterfly effect narrative matrix. An action in one part of the planet leads to another unintended, unexpected, unpredictable consequence in another place. On the other hand, the membrane, a transparent liminal phenomenon, plays an important role in the film. The membrane discussed here regards an installation by the Austrian artist Sabine Müller-Funk

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<sup>1</sup> Chronotopos is seen as a specific time space relation, as a space in time. See Bakhtin (1981).

<sup>2</sup> See Vossen (2008); Olivier (2009).

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(Müller-Funk 2011), combines the two moments of borders – its opening and its closing – in the chronotope of defending and transgressing.

Iñárritu's masterpiece, part of a trilogy, is seen not only as an illustration of liminal theory or an example, but as medium for developing cultural analysis. As with all works of art, *Babel* does not explain or give arguments. It 'shows' the dynamic of borders and the process of bordering in a global world. It delivers illustrative material that is a challenge for theory and reflection.

### **Liminality and Space**

There is a certain and central discourse about borders, frontiers and all sorts of liminal phenomena, including transbordering or border-crossing which is older than the current one on globalization and post-colonialism.<sup>3</sup> As far as I can see, it dates back to the very beginnings of classical modernism and suggests the idea or, rather, the promise to overcome all sorts of limitations and restrictions. As is the case in Friedrich Schlegel's famous 116<sup>th</sup> Athenaeum fragment, there is a narrative behind modernism and avant-garde movements: the utopia of delimitation and unification of the heterogeneous.<sup>4</sup> In these cultural and philosophical contexts, freedom and delimitation become synonyms. It may be seen as the core of the eroticism of modern aesthetics.

The postmodern virtual space constructed by the new digital media seems to be the material fulfilment of this desire. The promise of ubiquity, of living in a space as infinite and boundless as the ocean is attractive. It goes hand-in-hand with the fantasy of an unlimited subjectivity. This dream is based on the phantasm of being able to be everywhere – like God. The heroes of the old myths, but also those in modern movies can be characterised by the fact that they overcome borders, disregarding barriers and ignoring the rules of division.

At first glance, borders, barriers and limitations are suspicious, especially from a liberal political perspective. However, how could a world exist in which the territorial, social or symbolic space is, to borrow from Deleuze and Guattari, uncut and plain.<sup>5</sup> Is it possible to have a world which is only a rhizome, a netting without any centerings, intersections, limits and margins and in which all and nothing is a limit?

Borders are room dividers, dividing rules and frames in at least three dimensions; space, time and symbolism. A house is an artefact that not only protects you from weather conditions, but

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<sup>3</sup> See Burdon (1967).

<sup>4</sup> See Schlegel (1972: 36).

<sup>5</sup> See Deleuze / Guattari (1993).

also gives you a feeling of security, moreover a certain kind of identity. If it has no openings as in the German *Schildbuenger* book, it becomes, from an internal perspective, a prison and from outside a space we cannot enter. The quality of living and dwelling in the house is real, as in its metaphorical sense it is always connected with limitation and accessibility. As the Italian philosopher Massimo Cacciari has pointed out, borders are never only *limes*, borders, fences, or walls, but at the same time they are also spaces between contact zones.<sup>6</sup> This brings me to the following observation: that the disappearance of borders makes contact impossible. Furthermore, the dream of boundlessness proves to be ultimately totalitarian.

Human space is always constructed by limitation, which has a strong, double and irreducible function. It means separation and connection at once. What is important is to bring these two functions into an artful balance. If border is only *limes*, habitability is destroyed and abolished, because we are either imprisoned or locked out. If there are no borders, we also lose habitability, because there is no sense of security and no contact in an emphatic way.

People living at territorial, linguistic and cultural borders always perform a balancing act. They are importers and exporters from one space to the other. Because of their mobility, they achieve, at least internally, what other human beings are not able to achieve: to be inside and outside at the same time. Since they are located in a space in between, their own and the strange is connected in a remarkable way. Metaphorically speaking, there are many crossers of borders in our times: migrants, diplomats, translators, importers of the strange and exporters of the own. If there is any utopian figure in our contemporary cultural life, then it is surely the 'hybrid'. It is the man or woman who seems to ignore frontiers, especially symbolically, like Peter Handke's protagonist Kobal in the novel *Repetition (Die Wiederholung)*, who walks with one leg in one space and the other in another.<sup>7</sup> He is neither in the first nor in the second space; he is, to quote a verse from a song by Mick Jagger and Keith Richard, "sittin' on a fence" (Rolling Stones 1967). Whether or not this is really a third space is an interesting question. There are some kinds of spaces in between, nowhere lands and stairwells, but they seem to be, to make use of Marc Augé's terminology, "non-lieux", non-places.<sup>8</sup> The third space has a strong temporal aspect. In other words, "hybridity" is unstable. Hybridity and the idea of a third space are quite often

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<sup>6</sup> See Cacciari (2002: 73-84).

<sup>7</sup> When crossing the border between Austria and Yugoslavia, the border patrol asks protagonist Kobal about his Slavic name which means 'a person who straddles his legs', or 'designates the room between straddled legs'. See Handke (1986: 7).

<sup>8</sup> See Augé (1995: 75-115).

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related to the hidden utopian desire to convert non-places into places for living – dwelling – in a space in between.<sup>9</sup>

In my view, the idea that globalization – which is mainly an effect of economy – new media and migration will wipe out all borders and limitations is problematic. In addition, the strange, which incidentally is also the result of cultural construction, does not disappear. It is not very probable that, for example, the European countries will lose their specific profiles and differences. It is very often the surface that becomes homogenous – this a lot, but not everything. If it is true that we need borders to cross in order to create human space, also in a temporal and semiotic sense, then we have to expect new construction of borders.

The adventure of modern times is not that our world becomes borderless, but that borders have become more mobile and invisible like the wall in Marlen Haushofer's novel *Die Wand* ("The wall").<sup>10</sup> Many limitations are not to be seen as objective, evident and irrefutable. We begin to understand that we are the creators of all those spaces, because we draw borders and barriers. From this perspective, we can define culture as a human capability and necessity of erecting borders and developing techniques and concepts to make use of them. It could be true that Musil's *Möglichkeitssinn*, which is more a sense for the impossible than for the possible, converts into *Realitätssinn*, the sense for the real.<sup>11</sup> Transgressing, moving and changing borders may sometimes be dangerous, but at the same time, as the text of the Eric Burdon LP *Winds of Change* of 1967 suggests, it can be stimulating. In contrast to fashionable fantasies of dissolving, it might be necessary to rehabilitate physical and non-physical phenomena as limits, thresholds and borders. We also can raise the question as to which configuration limits can have.<sup>12</sup>

There is strong support from two sides, firstly from philosophy, especially from phenomenology, and secondly, from Freud's psychoanalysis. In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud argues against Roman Rolland's idea of an oceanic feeling (which is close to Friedrich Schleiermacher's). The author sees this kind of oceanic feeling as a form of infantile borderless existence. Freud's scepticism goes hand-in-hand with the argument that there is a need for human beings to develop certain forms of internal barriers to create an individual identity separate from mother and father.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of hybridity and third space see Bhabha (2012).

<sup>10</sup> See Haushofer (1968).

<sup>11</sup> See Musil (1978: 16-19).

<sup>12</sup> See Waldenfels (1990: 28-40).

<sup>13</sup> See Freud (2016: 51f.).

### Poetry of the space beyond

Modifying the famous title of a famous book, Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*,<sup>14</sup> I will outline a poetry of a space in between, of different modes of limitations, such as the threshold, the bridge, the door, the wall, the fence, and the barrier. It seems obvious that they differ in their functional logic, but they also contrast in the temporal, that is, in the dialectical relation between opening and closing. Quite clearly, a bridge has a strong accent on connecting separated spaces on all levels, but bridges are used for controlling access to the 'other' space beyond. A threshold is an 'in between' that is associated with danger. Therefore, it is a metaphor for a central aspect of liminality, that is, for all rites of initiation.

Briefly speaking, and starting from the 'real' spatial aspect, we can roughly differentiate between three kinds of in-between situations. The 'inside-outside' contrast can be related to the phenomenon of entering and initiation, the 'here' (on this side) and the 'there' on the other side ('beyond') may refer to transgression, and 'up' and 'down' fits the idea of overcoming on the vertical plane. It is a ladder that takes Jacob up into another, divine world.

The door, the bridge and the staircase are the classical representative elements of these three types. With regard to Waldenfels, we can say that they have something in common: the asymmetrical situation, since as human beings we are always only on one side (bridge, door), mainly outside (door), here on this side (bridge, door) or downstairs (staircase). Waldenfels has namely called our attention to an interesting asymmetry, which is decisive for thresholds, but also for all kinds of space marking. We can never be inside and outside at the same time. With regard to the famous scene between Oedipus and the Sphinx, this is very important. He is the man standing outside and she is the female monster that is positioned at the threshold, which separates inside from outside, man from woman. The Sphinx is also the imaginary product of the male eye. The female space behind the threshold is dark and invisible. This story can hardly be inverted. From the perspective of the Sphinx, she herself would disappear, including the uncanny that is part of her monstrosity. The Sphinx is the threshold of the man, Oedipus. Like all threshold keepers, be they male or female, human or animal, the Sphinx is dumb, and she gives no answer. In the standard story, she poses only one single riddle. Drawing on Waldenfels, but also on psychoanalysis, I would like to discuss this famous figure as a monstrous being in a space in between, a figure on the threshold as a gatekeeper, which controls and polices the access to another space. From the male perspective, this other space has a double code. It is the space of the other sex, the female one, but it is also the space of another state, of the

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<sup>14</sup> See Bachelard (1964).



unconscious. Thus, the Sphinx sits on a sexual border, in between the male and the female, between the conscious and the unconscious. It is this kind of principal limit – *eros* and *thanatos* – that creates metaphors and symbols.<sup>15</sup> I also want to mention the idea of understanding female genitalia as a body space for the sexual other: it has aspects of a threshold and, from the perspective of the man, is a strange place. By the way, heterosexual coitus is a good example of Waldenfels' idea of the inside-outside asymmetry that is so central for all spatial phenomena.<sup>16</sup> We can argue that the Greek version of the story has substituted the original Egyptian version, in which the Sphinx is male, protecting a space of power that is guaranteed and legitimated by religion.

On the one hand, limits are made and established by human beings and are part of human existence, but on the other hand, there is an irreducible moment in all these limitary phenomena. Philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty and Waldenfels, who are highly interested in body phenomena, have focused their thinking on those paradoxes. Their cautious approach to limits, borders and thresholds stands in a certain contrast to the basic figure of deconstruction, which suggests a transgression of binary oppositions that are the result of clear limits. Overcoming this binary structure not only in thinking, but also in cultural reality, has become a Sisyphean task. Dissolving frontiers has become an influential slogan in postmodern cultural life. The contemporary debate about limits, borders, and frontiers are to be characterized by this dichotomy: either to acknowledge or to overcome limitations and limits. We can see the threshold as that element which is in the impossible middle.

Limits seem to be timeless. In contrast to all these fixations, thresholds entail a temporal dynamic from the very beginning. Standing in front of the controlled entrance, we have the choice: we may cross over the dangerous threshold, but we can also move back because of fear. Or – and that might be the worst case scenario – we are fixed, we are not able to move, as is the case in Kafka's famous parable about the door keeper and the poor chap from the countryside, who spends all his time waiting in front of the door.<sup>17</sup> This implies an absolute standstill. Maybe there is still a fourth possibility: the human being in front of a threshold can also move in a circle around the barrier. Maybe he or she becomes a writer.

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<sup>15</sup> See Macho (1987: 172-194); Müller-Funk (2014).

<sup>16</sup> See Müller-Funk (2016: 253-265).

<sup>17</sup> See Kafka (1996).

### The membrane: Sabine Müller-Funk

Let's have a very short glance at a further fascinating liminal phenomenon which has a strong organic connotation. It is a singular *limen-limes*, because the membrane is absolutely permeable, but it need not be symmetric. Skin has similar qualities, too. The membrane is the limitation in which *limes* equals *limen*. Here, the border is an obstacle and transition at the same time. I would like to continue this article with a quotation from the artist Sabine Müller-Funk. With regard to her installation *Teheran-Membranes* 2011, she writes about her stay as an artist in Iran: "Through the membrane of your words I am looking at you – through the membrane of my view, I am walking into the world" (Müller-Funk 2011).



Img. 1: Installation "Teheran-Membranen" by Sabine Müller-Funk (Müller-Funk 2011)<sup>18</sup>

The artist makes metaphorical use of the term 'membrane' which is connected with the phenomenon of the skin.<sup>19</sup> Skin is a phenomenon that protects our body from the external world,

<sup>18</sup> "Installation, 4 membranes (each 220 x 90 cm, with text made of garden soil) and video projections: moving mouth talking the written words and moving eye looking" (Müller-Funk 2011).

<sup>19</sup> See Nancy (2008); Anzieu (1991).

but at the same time it is a medium that is permeable. So the skin represents our statue in natural surroundings. At the same time, it entails a moment of closure and opening that is central for our existence. The membrane is in permanent contact with the external world – that is also true for the membranes of our cells.

Skin is something that is visible without which the beauty of human body would not exist. But as a membrane it is connected with other senses, especially with tactility or with breathing. Skin is a membrane that is not visible. Sabine Müller-Funk writes on an installation of wired meshes and projects digital images onto it. The artist understands her installations as membranes because of an analogy. The mesh or the glass, another material in her oeuvre,<sup>20</sup> is seen as a visible membrane. As all walls it separates, but because it is made from a transparent material, it connects us with the other. So for example the face of the other in the space beyond becomes visible. Here, the mesh works like a window and has the quality of a medium. This corresponds with the words in her commentary "I look at you". The membrane in this metaphorical sense generates the possibility of a (transcultural) communication, in which communication can take place in a state of recognition of the other. At the same time, the position of another who gets respect from the glance beyond the membrane can be recognized. In this situation, asymmetry has not disappeared, but is converted in a productive, maybe utopian way. The asymmetry between the own (space) and the other (from the space beyond) survives in and because of the relation that is illustrated by the figure of the membrane. Such an understanding of liminality might be key to understanding a film like *Babel*.

### **Globalization and New Borders**

Before *Babel* (2006), Mexican director González Iñárritu already dealt with the subject of (border) narratives in two of his previous films (*Amores Perros* 2000, and *21 Grams* 2003) by multiplying a story in several variants. Thus he directs our attention to the narrative construction of 'reality'. In his third film *Babel*, Iñárritu projected this process on a global space represented by events in Japan, Mexico and Morocco. The multicultural group of actors – Brad Pitt, Cate Blanchett, Said Tarchani, Gael García Bernal, Adriana Barraza, and Rinko Kikuchi – corresponds to the director's ambition to symbolize the entanglement of people from different local and cultural traditions into a global context.

But Iñárritu's film is also one about various liminal dimensions. Borders appear in the three different geographical places: Mexico and the US, a mountain region in Morocco and the urban

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<sup>20</sup> See Höller / Holter / Müller-Funk (2018).

space of Tokyo. At the same time, the film connects these spaces by a globalizing plot which transcends the traditional system of liminality. I will try to sum up the phenomena of borders in the film:

1. The visible border between the United States and Mexico.
2. The visible and invisible border between the world of the nomadic people in Morocco and the Western tourists.
3. The border between the young people and the adults in the Japanese narrative.

The action begins with the purchase of a much-admired Winchester rifle, a wonder from another world, a violent instrument, which connects the stories. We then walk with the rifle and the two brothers through the Moroccan mountains, the first symbolic space. The two shoot with the gun until a bus on a street becomes visible. When the shot hits the bus, the invisible camera changes. Moreover, we enter the second symbolic space, into the world of the American tourist couple embodied by Cate Blanchett and Brad Pitt. The bus is a strange place; to a certain extent, it contains the chronotope itself. It forms a mobile space *sui generis*; it is a dynamic and temporary Western diaspora in another, non-European culture. The bus is not only a means of transport, but also a social and symbolic shelter. It contains a clear liminal aspect, but also two openings, real (doors) and visual (windows), which are rather risky with regard to safety. The purpose of a tourist trip is not primarily to make contact with another symbolic world, but to remain separate from it, not to encounter people from the other side. However, the actual telos of the couple's trip has nothing whatever to do with the foreign symbolic space, since it is about overcoming a marriage crisis and the family's leave, more precisely of the children, who are supposed to be sheltered at home. The woman's annoyance indicates how superfluous she finds this excursion, not only because she is more eccentric than the man is, but also because she is thoroughly distrustful of the strategy of a long-distance journey as a means of re-establishing a relationship. She shows how much she finds the hardships of this long-haul trip frustrating.

The tourist is a cultural voyeur who, through the glass pane, looks at the strange landscape and briefly descends to take a so-called sightseeing tour. The bus as a divider of space and time is a separate symbolic cosmos, a safety device that prevents the encounter of cultures, and does not, at least at the beginning of the story, create a third space. Thus, the technically hypermodern bus, a kind of chronotope, a space-time approach to a modern, possibly futile journey, establishes a border that is as relevant to globalization as the fortified boundaries of prosperity in the south of the United States and in the east and south of the European semi-continent.

The shot from a western gun (imported from Japan) in the hands of an innocent Arab boy immediately sets the terrorist narrative in motion, but proves to be a statistically unlikely coincidence which transforms the trivial holiday into the adventure of a cultural encounter, a third space of negotiation. As a result, the husband takes over the leading role, he has to negotiate with the bus driver as well as with the village doctor who turns out to be a veterinarian. The husband also has to deal with the unwilling fellow travellers who feel the interruption of the journey as threatening for their safety and wellbeing and want to keep up with the logic of tourist apartheid. It is an accident that, in an involuntary and tragic-ironic way, overrides the separation of cultures and overrides the logic of symbolic separation on which modern tourism is based. By the way, the husband reaches the end, the goal, which the usual and planned package trip would never have had: the reconciliation with his wife, to whom he would never have been able to prove his love in the planned package holiday.

The involuntary adventure, the violation of the borders, provokes the power of evidence. For not only is the life-threatening injury a cathartic act in the sense of the Aristotelian narrative theory. Through his courageous commitment, the risk of dialogue with the other culture as well as the confrontation with the other fellow travellers, the man proves that he is the right husband for his wife, a man who is helping and lovingly present.

The 'utopian' side of the film shows the encounter between the American husband and the doctor, and their helplessly touching attempt to get in contact with each other. They cross all cultural barriers, as well as the silent exchange of views between the injured wife and an old, monstrous looking village-dweller, who plays the role of the pre-modern miracle hero and exotic witch. At first, the American gaze falls horrified at the ugly countenance of the woman who stands for the monstrosity of the stranger in the sense of Kristeva.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the possibility of seeing through the distortions of the stranger, the face of the other, and recognizing the stranger as an alter ego, gives a sudden perception that the intention is help and not threat. The film, however, is neither illusory nor idyllic. It leaves no room for doubt about the post-colonial dilemma of the two symbolic spaces. The imperious manners of the husband who commands and threatens the native man corresponds with the circumstance that the life of an American woman is much more worthy than that of the natives, who are oppressed and humiliated by a statehood which is submissive to the culture the temporary migrants come from. Meanwhile, an audience watches an American television report in the symbolic space of Japan. Telephones, televisions, helicopters and buses are just like the media that connect the

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<sup>21</sup> See Kristeva (1988: 202f.).

heterogeneous cultures of the globe in a surprising, but uneven way. With regard to liminality, they all seemingly transcend traditional borders, yet confirm them in a second step.

The second line of action also contains a split symbolic space. Firstly, it is the home of Susan and Richard, which the couple has left temporarily to find again their marital love in romanticism. However, this space contains a foreign element in the form of the Mexican nanny, illegally working in the US. Symbolically, she lives in an ethnoscape in the sense of Appadurai.<sup>22</sup> When a relative appears to take her to a wedding in Mexico, she agrees after some hesitation and takes the children of the American couple with her. Unlike the long-distance travel of the American tourists, this trip has a clear telos: home, territorial homecoming on time. In contrast to the Western tourists, however, there is no air-conditioned bus that protects the travellers from the dangers of the other culture. On the contrary, the two American children come into touch with the relatively unknown world of Mexican culture; disturbing experiences with disturbing violence (cockfights), and sexual and ecstatic moments take place, aspects of life the well-ordered American middle-class world has so far withheld from the children – this is the very borderline in the film.

The strongly stereotyped symbolic space of Mexico forms a postcolonial counter-world to the West. Exuberance, ecstasy, physicality, and direct corporeal contact with each other to form the elements that mark the boundaries which, from the child's eye, at least seem to be ambivalent, if not attractive. In a reversal of the first narrative, the accident (in this case a traffic accident), only occurs at the end of the partial narrative. It has to do with the inequality of the same limit. It is easy to pass the boundaries from north to south, from the US to Mexico; it can be a huge obstacle to pass the border in the other direction, especially if you do not have the right papers and two 'white' American children in the car. For Amelia, the housekeeper, there is no successful conclusion in the film; the American border police ultimately deport her from the privileged symbolic space of the Jones' family home. In this narrative segment, the film undermines its self-image of a global world without borders. In view of a culturally multi-fragmented world, the visible and invisible boundaries the symbolic pavilions, and the exclusions and inclusions, the self-image of globalization as a cheerful, colourful mixture in the sense of a Benetton advertising turns out to be a false romance that hides the power asymmetries and the structural violence of this global world.

The third narrative, in turn, is assigned to a specific symbolic space, the urban space of modern Japan. Interiors like a sports hall correspond with the megalomaniac architecture and

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<sup>22</sup> See Appadurai (1996).

the street noise of Tokyo. The fact that the main character, Chieko, is deaf can be understood as a secondary metaphorical meaning, a "thick description" (Geertz 1973). Chieko's inability to hear can be read as a criticism of a society that lives from the contradiction of being more Western and global than the Western world, and at the same time carrying the structures of a traditional Japanese social order. The father who makes his daughter 'deaf' in a paternal act of protecting and controlling represents this world; the daughter is superficially on her first sexual adventure, but in reality, she seeks love and security that she does not find. The third segment of action reports the disturbances of such globalization in an outwardly perfectly modern epicentre, one that is much more perfect than the Western 'original'. The confinement of this sequence of action results from the focalization, which is mostly that of the deaf-mute girl, from whose disturbed perspective the cold glittering world of modern Japan becomes visible. Here, we can criticize the stereotyping, too, but the film leaves no doubt that it is transporting images of globalization and is not a film about real globalization. It is rather a picture of Japan in a global panorama, which, in contrast to Morocco and Mexico, acquires its visual power first. The technique of montage takes the relations between the symbolic contrasts to a further semiotic level.

Only very late in the narrative does it become evident that the rich father, a global tycoon, is the original owner of the rifle which reaches the hands of the two Moroccan shepherds (at the level of the narrated time, this happens later, but at the level of the narrative discourse, it occurs earlier). He gave it to their father during a big-game hunt. The death of Japanese tycoon's wife, a suicide, is clearly the cause for the life crisis of the adolescent girl. At this point, another globalizing medium reveals the context of crossing over. In Japanese television, the dramatic event in Morocco is a topic in the news, and the fact that the weapon is Japanese comes into play.

Iñárritu's film does not expose a great narrative of globalization; it introduces the global world as an obscurely intertwined network of small narratives. It is in its ambivalence that the film is postmodern. It does not contain any analysis of globalization by cinematic means; the political dimension of the global world becomes visible as a framework, and the economy manifests in the metropolis of Tokyo as well as, in its own way, in the global periphery of Mexico and Morocco. The film provides picture material of the hypermodern world whose heterogeneous fragmentation contrasts with homogenizing tendencies of a space interconnected through various media. In addition, it lends a voice to those who are otherwise silent, as in the case of the girl Chieko.

By the way, it is not at all easy to say who the implicit audience is and where the symbolic space of its narrative community is located. The film is a virtual alternative of a Bakhtinian chronotope to that of the motorized vehicle, to the seemingly safe tourist bus. We can understand the journey which the film undertakes by cinematic means as a counterpart to the conventional long-distance journey of the Western tourist. However, the stereotypes presented by the film can be attributed to those images from catalogues of package travels which tourists take to be able to feel good and whole again in the strange land. The film introduces these images without supporting them particularly, because it contains precisely what I have described as a second reflection, a post-Kantian form of self-reference which goes hand-in-hand with advanced, modern and postmodern aesthetics.

Perhaps the thesis that the film does not contain a great narrative of globalization has to be revised at the end; at least, it has to be limited. The title, *Babel*, comes with a mythical narrative from the Old Testament which is effective as a matrix of today's globalization. It is a narrative about the creation of dimension and difference, heterogeneity and confusion, which plays a decisive role in today's discourse on translation, from Jorge Luis Borges over George Steiner to Jacques Derrida. The people of the city of Babel wanted to build a tower up to heaven. As God disliked this megalomania, he dispelled them by creating many languages instead of one. This story is the biblical explanation of why there are so many different languages in our world. The title, a *peritext* (Genette), brings this meaning into play as a suggestion for self-interpretation, subverting the original story as a revisionary act.

The film establishes a new level of sense, generated by the implicit relationships of the different spaces: a transition and an in-between, which sometimes opens up, but is often closed. At the same time, the film forms a virtual space, a 'globe' – in contrast to the closed space of the tourist bus, which is a symbolic enclave on foreign territory, enclosed by glass and air-conditioning.

The only God who is at work in the film is a cinematic narrator, an arranger, who, thanks to the most modern media techniques and semiotic mixtures, creates a global world that is and will remain Babylonian from the very beginning. The connections between them remain hidden from the individual actors in contrast to the spectator of the film.

Coming back to the differentiation between *limen* and *limes*, we could say that this double aspect of liminality is based on hypermodern globalization in an unbalanced way. Whereas media – understood as all phenomena mediating between different entities – suggests a possibility to overcome borders at least virtually ('window'), there is, on the contrary, a renaissance of the building of borders. The idea behind means a permanent, and not a temporary



closure ('door').<sup>23</sup> In this regard, the membrane represents a positive, maybe utopian model of another globalization in which reciprocal acknowledgement is inscribed.

Globalization means, to vary Eric Burdon's statement from 1967, not the disappearing, but the rising of new borders. Whether this is a win or a loss is the prominent question. The membrane is not a plea for a borderless world, but for a world with another use of borders.

## Conclusions

*Babel* shows liminality in action and the border as a chronotope. It is a film on crossing borders. It presents a globalised world with new boundaries and borders. At the very beginning, the Western people in the bus are totally divided from the native and semi-nomadic people in the North-African Mountains. In the film, the bus is the central medium of traffic in the space beyond. Quite obviously, the passengers do not need to leave the bus with the large windows which works as a membrane with a minimal standard. They can have a look into the fascinating and strange landscape without physically leaving the safe moving space of the chronotopian bus. The unintentional attack on one American tourist changes the situation completely. Because they need help, the rich Western tourists, especially the US-American couple, come into contact with the native people, with the local doctor and the elderly woman in the village.

But strangeness in the film is not only a transcultural issue, as it is the case with the American and Western tourists in Morocco or with the experiences of the US-American youngsters at a Mexican fiesta beyond the familiar space. The Japanese girl Chieko is a stranger in her own world. Her muteness symbolizes the lack of communication and shows that strangeness is never only a transcultural phenomenon. Moreso it is a social relation. Being a stranger means living beyond a communication which is concrete, for example in the figure of a membrane. There is nobody who really looks at her.

In *Babel*, the real 'membrane' is sometimes substituted by an invisible one. The difference between the cultures survives just as the asymmetric situation in which the postcolonial aspect overlaps a general one. There are situations in the transcultural dialogues, especially in the scenes in Morocco where it seems to be possible that each one 'looks' at the other. There are moments where borders come into e/motion, but at the end the global order that needs means of transportation– as the bus – is reinstalled again. Maybe there will remain some dark reminding. Or in other words: *Babel* is a sceptical film, eventually a membrane itself, a transparent liminal phenomenon.

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<sup>23</sup> See Simmel (2001: 55).

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## **Hacia una fenomenología del cruce. Propuestas literarias, cinematográficas y artísticas desde la frontera norte/sur**

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### **Cruzar y no cruzar**

La frontera mexicana-estadounidense es una zona emblemática para el fenómeno del cruce. La frontera atraviesa territorios y, en un nivel simbólico, a personas, cuerpos, eventos, culturas. En la frontera se desea, se facilita, se niega o se inhibe cruzar; la frontera se desplaza, se expande o se disminuye; la frontera atrae y expulsa. Esta compleja red semántica de cruzar y no-cruzar se caracteriza por una dinámica a veces imprevisible entre movimientos y momentos estáticos. Las direcciones del cruce indican las implicaciones políticas y el desarrollo histórico de la enorme línea de división entre dos países. La pregunta de atravesar o no se modifica según la mirada hacia la frontera como frontera norte o *Southern Border*. Desde su imposición en el 1848, la frontera se construye como diferencia, con una vida política, económica y cultural distinta en sus dos lados. A la vez, "los habitantes de esta región" transfronteriza "tienen más en común que con el resto de sus respectivos países" (Del Rosario Moreno 2015: xii; mi traducción). La similitud entre ambos lados y sus íntimas relaciones presuponen la travesía como característica de la frontera, y cada inhibición de cruzar se convierte en acto violento. Al mismo tiempo, el cruce adquiere un significado violento en vista del "tráfico de identidades, o sea, paisanos que se arrojan al abismo en busca de una vida mejor", del "crimen organizado binacional", y de las "familias separadas por [...] [el] muro metálico y que pronto será, si se le cumplen sus sueños guajiros a Trump, un muro solar" (Gómez Peña en Rompeviento TV 2017: 8':37"-9':18").<sup>1</sup> El arte y los estudios sobre la frontera mexicana-estadounidense reconocen la calidad ambigua de la travesía en una zona donde la división parece ser un primer factor dominador en común. Guillermo Gómez Peña, nacido en México D.F. y residente de California, vivió durante varios años en la frontera Tijuana/San Diego. Se autodenomina "doblemente pos-nacional" y define su identidad desde la travesía: "La frontera la crucé no solamente a pie, la crucé en *Greyhound*, en avión, en carro, en mis sueños en la cama, en la comida... La llegué a

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<sup>1</sup> En junio de 2017, Donald Trump propone que el nuevo muro que imagina se construya con paneles solares (véase De Llano 2017).

conocer muy bien. Desde que yo crucé la frontera la primera vez, la [...] traigo dentro de mi psique" (Gómez Peña en Rompeviento TV 2017: 7':59"-8':29"; 11':40"-11':42").

La frontera es el momento de travesía bloqueada que Gloria Anzaldúa describió como "herida abierta en donde el tercer mundo raspa contra el primero y sangra" (Anzaldúa 2015a: 61). La famosa cita hace hincapié en que las diferencias entre norte y sur de la frontera se han construido como desigualdades; precisamente por eso urge señalar las condiciones políticas y repercusiones artísticas y conceptuales diversas en los dos respectivos lados nacionales del norte y del sur.<sup>2</sup> En su libro *Border Women*, Debra Castillo y María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba formulan una excelente crítica sobre la construcción de la diferencia en la frontera desde sus respectivas dinámicas nacionales. Las dos autoras analizan la asimetría de representación entre las literaturas transfronterizas estadounidenses y mexicanas. Si la literatura fronteriza chicana es, en el contexto de los Estados Unidos, una literatura minoritaria, no lo es con respecto a la literatura fronteriza mexicana: "Desde la perspectiva de un proyecto literario transfronterizo, se evidencia la disparidad. Quién y qué cruza la frontera, y quién y qué no, se aplica a textos literarios tanto como a personas"<sup>3</sup> (Castillo / Tabuenca Córdoba 2002: 6; mi traducción). Los continuos movimientos y las prohibiciones de moverse entre norte y sur pertenecen a la frontera como su condición (no-paradójica) de representar diferencia y similitud a la vez.<sup>4</sup>

Un factor desencadenante para el boom conceptual sobre la frontera mexicana-estadounidense fue el influyente libro *Borderlands / La Frontera* (1987) de Gloria Anzaldúa.<sup>5</sup> Es redundante repetir hoy que la frontera mexicana-estadounidense como signo de separaciones

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<sup>2</sup> En las universidades y comunidades estadounidenses, los debates sobre la frontera sur se han vinculado al movimiento chicano, y el arte y los estudios fronterizos han ganado cada vez más visibilidad céntrica, posicionándose en dinámicas fascinantes de pensamiento periférico que ha cruzado los confines establecidos. La frontera ha servido para atacar la lógica de identidad coherente de ambos proyectos nacionales, el mexicano y el estadounidense. Desde una perspectiva mexicana centralista, una cierta precaución nacional sobre la frontera norte y las posibles aproximaciones a las culturas estadounidenses se han ido aflojando cada vez más: Castillo y Tabuenca Córdoba recapitulan cómo antes la frontera norte fue rechazada como "no-existente u oximorónica", pero que a partir del nuevo milenio las culturas de la frontera fueron gradualmente más reconocidas como económicamente y artísticamente relevantes (Castillo / Tabuenca Córdoba 2002: 60).

<sup>3</sup> "[W]hen put into the perspective of a transborder literary project, the disparity is clear. What and who crosses the border and what does not applies to literary texts as well as to persons" (Castillo / Tabuenca Córdoba 2002: 6).

<sup>4</sup> Las definiciones de la frontera no son ni estables ni fijamente establecidas, sino flexibles, permeables; como si las fronteras y las miradas sobre ellas se definieran por su permeabilidad, por el acto constante de traspasar. Este traspasar se deja pensar rizomáticamente, y no como una mera celebración de una vida sin fronteras; incluye la opción de erigir nuevas fronteras o de regularlas.

<sup>5</sup> Tabuenca-Córdoba describe su investigación sobre la frontera en 1992 y recuerda que no importaba qué base de datos estuviera utilizando, el resultado siempre era el mismo: Gloria Anzaldúa (véase Tabuenca-Córdoba 2009: 11). Walter Mignolo afirma que la teoría de Gloria Anzaldúa motivó su concepto de *Border Thinking*: "The idea of border thinking came to me from Chicana writer and thinker Gloria Anzaldúa. [...] For millions of people around the world who dwell in the border, Anzaldúa provided a way of thinking that incorporates experiences not previously reflected (except, perhaps, partially and indirectly) in even the most superb and magnificent expressions of European thoughts" (Mignolo 2012: xx).

y posibilidades ha sido leída tanto concretamente como simbólicamente,<sup>6</sup> ha servido para explicar los fenómenos de hibridización<sup>7</sup> o de colonialización y decolonialización.<sup>8</sup> La frontera es localidad específica, pero también se expande. A partir de la frontera se introducen cruces conceptuales, territoriales y metafóricos que desplazan la frontera. En muchas ocasiones no se conceptualiza 'desde la frontera', sino desde otros lugares.<sup>9</sup> En la novela *Canícula. Imágenes de una niñez fronteriza*, de Norma Cantú, la frontera se mueve y el cruce se perpetúa con los viajes de la familia desde Laredo y Nuevo Laredo hasta Monterrey o San Antonio, pero sin dejarla completamente atrás.<sup>10</sup> Metafóricamente, la frontera se expande a las zonas fronterizas psicológicas, sexuales y espirituales que no son particulares de la frontera norte/sur.<sup>11</sup>

En el pensamiento literario y cultural, la noción de la "frontera" se ha ido modificando en este nuevo milenio. Generalmente, se deja observar un énfasis conceptual que se centra en los modos de "transar, transbordar, transcribir, transferir, transfigurar, transflorar, transfundir, transigir, transitar, transmitir, transmudar, transpirar, transponer, transportar, traducir" las fronteras (Radlwimmer 2018: 65). Este cambio teórico se deja comprender como un movimiento hacia lo transfronterizo, hacia la pregunta de cómo se cruzan o se desplazan las fronteras.<sup>12</sup> "Los estadounidenses cruzan la frontera sur en busca de identidad e historia. Los mexicanos cruzan la frontera norte como si se fueran al futuro. [...] Cruzamos la frontera para reinventarnos..." (en Gómez Peña 2000: 65; mi traducción).<sup>13</sup> Lo transfronterizo no es nuevo, sino implícito en los conceptos conocidos sobre la frontera mexicana-estadounidense.<sup>14</sup> Los

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<sup>6</sup> Véase Anzaldúa (2007).

<sup>7</sup> Véase García Canclini (1989).

<sup>8</sup> Véase Mignolo (2012).

<sup>9</sup> Castillo y Tabuenca Córdoba critican la distancia de la frontera: "[T]he Argentine critic [Néstor García Canclini] located in Mexico City comes to Tijuana through the French thinker [Jean Baudrillard] and ends up, discursively at least, in Paris (or Berlin or Berkeley) in May 1968" (Castillo / Tabuenca Córdoba 2002: 196).

<sup>10</sup> *Canícula* cuenta de una familia de Laredo, Tejas, E.E.U.U. / Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, México: "[L]a mayoría nos hemos quedado cerca de la frontera entre San Antonio y Monterrey" (Cantú 2000: 147). La novela se publica en inglés en 1995 y en castellano en 2000, y se reedita con nuevos capítulos en 2015. Uso la versión inglesa de 2015 cuando se trata de los capítulos nuevos que no existen en la versión en castellano de 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Véase Anzaldúa (2007).

<sup>12</sup> En *Canícula*, se cruza "a pie el puente de un Laredo a otro" (Cantú 2000: 5), y el acto de traspasar adquiere diversos significados históricos en 1935 o en 1948, o más tarde de visita corta o larga, de vida diaria, pero también de expulsión. Cruzar la frontera "significa el regresar a casa, pero no del todo" (Cantú 2000: 6), ya que cada cruce es una pérdida y un nuevo comienzo.

<sup>13</sup> "Americans cross the border South in search of identity and history. Mexicans cross the border North as if coming into the future. [...] We cross the border to reinvent ourselves..." (en Gómez Peña 2000: 65).

<sup>14</sup> En el laboratorio posmoderno, la ciudad de Tijuana de Néstor Canclini, "[e]l simulacro pasa a ser una categoría central de la cultura", ya que "[d]onde las fronteras se mueven [...], todos los días se renueva y amplía la invención espectacular de la propia ciudad" (García Canclini 1989: 301). Este desplazamiento de fronteras se debe a que "la vida" en Tijuana "consiste en pasar constantemente fronteras" (García Canclini 1989: 293). El "pensamiento fronterizo" de Mignolo pretende dejar atrás las limitaciones de un solo territorio físico y epistemológico (véase Mignolo 2012: 67). Según Mignolo, a partir del nuevo milenio ya no se abordan tanto las fronteras, pero se elabora el "pensamiento fronterizo"; es decir, se ha producido un cambio epistemológico que, en vez de enfocar las limitaciones coloniales, explora las nuevas posibilidades decoloniales. El "pensamiento fronterizo" de Mignolo es

avances teóricos actuales sobre la frontera mexicana-estadounidense se inclinan hacia lo transfronterizo, ambiguamente dejando atrás las dualidades pero, al mismo tiempo, reconociendo las consecuencias de las construcciones binarias. En su libro *Luz en lo oscuro*, publicado póstumamente en 2015, Anzaldúa subraya la complejidad multidimensional de las fronteras y se distancia cada vez más de pensarlas como dos polos. Expande el concepto de la frontera que se convierte en "este punto en el planeta que contiene todos los demás lugares" y define "las zonas fronterizas [...] como el árbol de la vida que cruza todas las dimensiones" (Anzaldúa 2015b: 57). Lo transfronterizo, entonces, se deja definir como la exploración del fenómeno del cruce de fronteras.<sup>15</sup>

### Similitud y diferencia

Si pensar la diferencia de los dos lados de la frontera inhibe el cruce, pensar la similitud lo facilita y estimula. El proyecto de arte público *Puro Borde* se constituye entre El Paso y Ciudad Juárez.<sup>16</sup> El juarense David Flores, uno de los co-fundadores, habla de los "transborderistas" para referirse a las/os iniciadoras/es del proyecto (Flores en White / Devon 2017). El arte que *Puro Borde* defiende "se encuentra en constante mutación" y "está hecho a base del reciclaje, de desbaratar y reconstruir materiales, ideas e imágenes"; la frontera aparece como "un espacio de unión, armonía y vinculación cultural" en el cual se pretende "crear una misma narrativa y rescatar la memoria colectiva" de "una identidad única fronteriza" (*Puro Borde* 2018). *Puro Borde* destaca la "cercanía de ambas ciudades" que "va más allá de los límites geográficos", por "una interacción constante" y por "un flujo de capital gráfico y simbólico en ambos sentidos" (*Puro Borde* 2018). En esta definición transfronteriza, las poblaciones divididas se convierten en una sola unidad llena de cruces y contrastes. En "una ciudad fronteriza como Cd. Juárez //

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consciente de y conoce la colonialidad, pero propone pensamientos alternativos y cruza entre los dos. Lo transfronterizo se centra en el traspaso y el desplazamiento de fronteras, y por lo tanto, despierta las categorías binarias. Joan Pinkvoss, la editora de *Borderlands / La frontera* de Aunt Lute Books, afirma que Anzaldúa se movía teóricamente "entre el aquí y el allá" (los dos polos opuestos), pero "Gloria no decía: bueno, aquí tenemos estos dos opuestos y desde esta contradicción sale un nuevo camino, una tercera opción. No, no... Ella decía que estos opuestos tenían que ser pateados desde abajo –no eran la fundación, pero molestaban a la hora de crear lo que ella imaginaba" (Pinkvoss 2007: s.p.; mi traducción). En mi artículo 'Práctica y pensamiento transfronterizos' explico cómo la teoría de Anzaldúa contiene movimientos entre lo fronterizo y lo transfronterizo (véase Radlwimmer 2018: 66-69).

<sup>15</sup> Desde una perspectiva de género e inspirada en Gloria Anzaldúa y Cherríe Moraga, Jackie Cuevas denomina su libro *Post-Borderlandia* para definir las últimas tendencias culturales y literarias chicanas de transgresión fronteriza en cuanto a cuestiones de sexualidad. Uno de los títulos explícitos en este contexto es "Transing", y en el capítulo que sigue, Cuevas afirma que las fronteras de la sexualidad han traspasado al lugar de "genderqueerness" (Cuevas 2018: 78). En el análisis de Cuevas no me interesa tanto su hipótesis central sobre la conexión entre teoría queer y teoría fronteriza, sino su paso epistemológico hacia lo *transfronterizo*, que parece, hoy por hoy, una condición a priori para definir los procesos culturales que se tejan a lo largo de la frontera mexicana-estadounidense.

<sup>16</sup> El nombre *Puro Borde* remite a la frontera, a los márgenes, y a un habla coloquial.

El Paso [...] cada [...] expresión artística [...] es [...] un mosaico de texturas, colores y sentimientos, pintado por [...] toda la sociedad Fronteriza [sic]" (Puro Borde 2018). Varias iniciativas se agrupan dentro del colectivo *Puro Borde*, tal como "el ejercicio performativo transnacional" *Pollero cultural*, que "consiste en cruzar obra no declarada de artistas sin documentos migratorios en ambas direcciones a través de la frontera de EE. UU. y México" (Arte el Escarabajo México). La visión radicalmente abierta y conectada de ambos lados inventa sus propias reglas del cruce, ignorando las leyes oficiales y modificando el conocido lema humanitario en "¡Ninguna pieza es ilegal!" (White / Devon 2017). El contrabando se declara "abierto a [...] cualquier disciplina" (Arte el Escarabajo México) con el objetivo de facilitar el flujo artístico en la ciudad dividida El Paso / Ciudad Juárez. Según Kerry Doyle, la directora del Centro de Artes Visuales de la Universidad de El Paso, la mayoría de las y los artistas realmente están en casa entre las dos ciudades, no en una de las dos.<sup>17</sup>

En un lugar de la frontera más al oeste, en Tijuana, la cantante, compositora y autora Azzul Monraz piensa la noción de la travesía desde la similitud y la diferencia. Para ella, Tijuana y San Diego son una sola ciudad, pero esta unidad se estalla a veces contra los muros de la diferencia, como en las ocasiones de trato hostil en San Diego contra la gente mexicana.<sup>18</sup> Su propia percepción sobre la similitud de Tijuana/San Diego, y la percepción ajena de la diferencia es lo que constituye la ambigüedad del lugar: "Era la misma ciudad, pero a la vez, no lo era" (Monraz en Falke 2016; mi traducción). Monraz define el espacio transfronterizo Tijuana/San Diego desde la perspectiva del cruce que observaba ya en su infancia. De la casa de sus padres, situada al lado de una carretera en Tijuana y detrás de la frontera, veía cruzar a la gente como si correr en la autopista fuese normal; para Monraz, los recuerdos desagradables del cruce se transforman con su creciente entendimiento que Tijuana es un lugar de sueños en todo su país, y que eso se deja interpretar de manera positiva.<sup>19</sup> Con su banda musical *Madame Ur y sus hombres*, Monraz imagina ese sitio de ilusiones como la posibilidad infinita de traspasar fronteras: "Vámonos para otro lado / donde haya otra gente y otro carnaval. [...] Vámonos y contruyámonos / otra razón y otra necesidad. Porque en este lado / siento tempestad" (madame ur y sus hombres 2017). El cruce que evoca la canción *Vámonos* recurre a los tópicos de atravesar la frontera mexicana-estadounidense, pero reflejan, a la vez, un sueño más amplio. La ilusión de moverse a un espacio más ameno construye, necesariamente, la diferencia del otro lado como el motivo deseable del cruce. No queda claro, empero, en qué lado se encuentra la

<sup>17</sup> Véase Doyle en White / Devon (2017).

<sup>18</sup> Véase Falke (2016).

<sup>19</sup> Véase Falke (2016).



voz de *Vámonos*, ya que el otro lado también siempre supone otro lado. "Al regresar", dice Gómez Peña, "lo que descubro es que sigo estando del otro lado. O sea, la frontera es como una cinta de Moebius, y yo soy un Sisifo ranchero" (Gómez Peña en Rompeviento TV 2017: 16':06"-16':21"). Según Castillo y Tabuenca Córdoba, desde el lado sur, la frontera se concibe más desde la materialidad, mientras suele ser más simbólica en los posicionamientos desde el lado norte, lo que tiene que ver con la barrera geopolítica real en la que los sueños mexicanos se rompen y se defraudan.<sup>20</sup> *Vámonos* presenta la diferencia del otro lado desde la materialidad; al mismo tiempo celebra el cruce como sueño en un nivel altamente simbólico: la travesía ocurre en un espacio "real-e-imaginado" (Soja 2000: 11). La melodía tranquila y animada en la que predominan la voz de Azzul Monraz y un piano acompaña las letras. El vídeo de la canción es producido por el artista visual de Monterrey y radicado en Tijuana, Aldo Guerra<sup>21</sup>: una sola toma muestra a la cantante en primer plano, de espaldas, con una falda larga de color morado, una blusa blanca de mangas largas y una antigua radio en la mano derecha (Img. 1).



Img 1: *Vámonos* (madame ur y sus hombres 2017: 00':00").

La dominante línea horizontal que ondula en las colinas del trasfondo es el muro fronterizo mexicano-estadounidense, y la figura de mujer de espaldas mira hacia el otro lado de la frontera y hacia la fuente de luz prometedora de aurora que entra en la imagen desde la derecha y desde arriba. La toma parece una fotografía, pero un viento leve agita la falda y el pelo de la mujer. La mujer mueve sus brazos suavemente y con ella, se mueve su sombra. Se mueve también, de

<sup>20</sup> Véase Castillo / Tabuenca Córdoba (2002: 3s.).

<sup>21</sup> Véase madame ur y sus hombres (2017).

forma casi imperceptible, la cámara. Al final de la canción, la cámara se desliza hacia arriba, hasta mostrar únicamente la luz blanquecina del cielo. La composición de imagen de *Vámonos* es una referencia explícita a la foto *Mujer ángel, Desierto de Sonora* de Graciela Iturbide (Img. 2).



Img. 2: *Mujer ángel, Desierto de Sonora, México* (Iturbide 1979).

Tanto el vídeo como la foto muestran a una mujer con pelo largo y una radio en la mano, en camino en un paisaje montañoso. El traje de las figuras femeninas es casi igual; Monraz invierte los colores de la falda blanca y camisa oscura de la mujer ángel. Se trata de una vestidura tradicional asociada con lo indígena y se encuentra ya en los conjuntos mexicanos a mediados del siglo XIX; la foto es una de las más famosas de Iturbide, y una de sus pocas composiciones en movimiento.<sup>22</sup> La mujer ángel cruza la vastedad del desierto de Sonora, mientras Monraz, parada, contempla el muro como posibilidad (inhibida) de cruzar. El vídeo de Aldo Guerra visibiliza los elementos transfronterizos sutilmente presentes en la imagen de Iturbide. La reinterpretación pictográfica recuerda que el desierto de Sonora es territorio hostil de cruce, y convierte la travesía de la misteriosa mujer ángel en un topos de la migración hacia el norte. Las dos imágenes *Vámonos / Mujer ángel* se cruzan como la interpretación sonora / el desierto de Sonora, introduciendo una multiplicación de signos. En la superposición *Vámonos / Mujer*

<sup>22</sup> Véase Brandes (2008: 97).

ángel, el cruce recupera la memoria cultural, en un sentido inmaterial de honrar los conocimientos ancestrales, pero también en un sentido material del camino visible que plantea las preguntas transfronterizas 'de dónde se viene' y 'hacia dónde se va'. Se cruza hacia el otro lado sin dejar atrás el conocimiento de las referencias artísticas y culturales mexicanas. "O sea, México está en ambos lados de la frontera", afirma Guillermo Gómez Peña, reflexionando sobre las culturas flotantes que el cruce en la frontera norte/sur genera (Gómez Peña en Rompeviento TV 2017: 17':40"-17':45"). En estas propuestas transfronterizas, el cruce es el futuro: el cruce entre las localidades concretas Tijuana/San Diego o Ciudad Juárez/El Paso, y el cruce entre artes e ideas.<sup>23</sup>

### La experiencia vulnerable y su transformación

La frontera es un fenómeno arbitrario e invasivo que cruza territorios, culturas, cuerpos y que genera violencia.<sup>24</sup> La frontera también es un fenómeno de cambio constructivo.<sup>25</sup> De forma análoga, el cruce conlleva el potencial de transformación –la promesa de iniciar "otro carnaval" (madame ur y sus hombres 2017) y de convertir lo separado en unidad–;<sup>26</sup> pero también conlleva el peligro de transgresión violenta.<sup>27</sup> La violencia es atraída por las fronteras, las cruza fácilmente. "[N]uestra frontera", declara el colectivo artístico *Puro Borde*, "antes fue conocida por expresarse por medio de la violencia", pero "ahora El Paso // Cd [sic] Juárez se expresa por medio del arte" (Puro Borde 2018). El intento de reemplazar la violencia 'por' el arte coexiste con la representación de la violencia 'en' el arte. Las contribuciones artísticas no han podido sustituirla o pararla, mas han aportado a visibilizar la violencia a nivel internacional.

Las zonas de terror se modifican en el lado norte/sur de la frontera, y requieren acciones, reflexiones y soluciones distintas. Los femicidios de Ciudad Juárez en el lado mexicano y los traumas de la guerra de Vietnam en el lado estadounidense ilustran la diferencia entre frontera norte y frontera sur. A primera vista, ambos casos se relacionan sobre todo con los respectivos

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<sup>23</sup> Hace casi dos décadas, Castillo y Tabuenca Córdoba veían una gran diferencia teórica entre frontera norte y *Southern Border*: "When we turn to Mexican border literature, one of the most striking aspects of the sparse scholarship is the general lack of attention to [...] theoretical issues" (Castillo / Tabuenca Córdoba 2002: 6). Sin embargo, *Puro Borde* o *Azzul Monraz* con Aldo Guerra confirman la solidez teórica de un proyecto transfronterizo no solo motivado desde el norte, sino también desde el sur, conectando los dos lados como unidad, y estimulando reflexiones sobre la similitud y la diferencia entre los dos lados de la frontera.

<sup>24</sup> Véase Anzaldúa (2007: 24).

<sup>25</sup> Cruzar fronteras significa, para Anzaldúa, un nuevo comienzo: "I propose a new perspective on imagining and a new relationship to the imagination, to healing, and to shamanic spirituality" (Anzaldúa 2015b: 44).

<sup>26</sup> Véase *Puro Borde* (2018).

<sup>27</sup> En este contexto, la cantante *Azzul Monraz* habla de la doble transformación de Tijuana: por una parte, "el cambio" artístico y cultural que está "en nuestras manos", y por otra, el cambio "difícil a aceptar" (Monraz en Falke 2016; mi traducción). Con lo último, Monraz alude a las transgresiones destructivas. De manera similar, *Puro Borde* define la frontera como transformación activa, ya que eso, y no la violencia mediatizada, es realmente "una cara más representativa de nuestra región, una cara más verdadera" (*Puro Borde* 2018).

contextos nacionales y aparentemente no cruzan la frontera; no obstante, trascienden el ámbito regional. A pesar de ser adscritos a un solo lado, no se dejan pensar sino como fenómenos transfronterizos que han escandalizado internacionalmente. Las manifestaciones artísticas sobre los femicidios de Ciudad Juárez han aludido a su estrecha conexión con los flujos transfronterizos. El documental *Señorita extraviada*, de la cineasta chicana Lourdes Portillo, retrata la vida en la frontera norte y afirma que los cruces económicos y las transgresiones políticas contribuyen a producir el escenario criminal de los femicidios.<sup>28</sup> Las imágenes líricas del documental chocan con los rastreos por los cuerpos y los cementerios decorados y desolados que muestran. Portillo, oriunda de Chihuahua, vivió en la frontera como adolescente, antes de mudarse con su familia a Los Ángeles y San Francisco. Para el documental que se estrenó en 2001, Portillo regresó a la frontera, conviviendo con las familias de las víctimas. *Señorita extraviada* combina las entrevistas de los familiares de las desaparecidas con un comentario propio que denuncia el comercio transfronterizo de las maquiladoras donde muchas de las víctimas trabajan. La novela *Desert Blood. The Juárez murders*, de Alicia Gaspar de Alba, nacida en el Paso, cruza la frontera desde el norte para investigar los femicidios. La protagonista principal Ivon Villa regresa a El Paso, donde comienza a involucrarse cada vez más con la violencia del otro lado de la frontera.<sup>29</sup>



Img. 3: *Ensayo de la identidad* | "Diana Noraly Piaga Reyna, 16 años. Desapareció el 27 de febrero del 2009; trabajaba en una maquila en el turno de la mañana. Foto de la pared de su habitación." (Martell s.f.).

<sup>28</sup> Véase Portillo (2001).

<sup>29</sup> Véase Gaspar de Alba (2005).

Desde Ciudad Juárez, *Ensayo de la identidad*, de la fotógrafa Mayra Martell, presenta el mundo privado de las desaparecidas. La serie de fotos de los cuartos y las pertenencias personales archiva el silencio terrible de quienes se fueron sin aviso para no regresar jamás.<sup>30</sup> En las fotos, las ausentes afirman su presencia.<sup>31</sup> Una imagen muestra la textura de una pared en dos colores en la cual una de las jóvenes desaparecidas pegó tres figuras Disney. La sirenita Ariel y Blancanieves se convierten en signos de sueños transfronterizos fabricados en Hollywood (Img. 3).

En su función de revelar la violencia, las figuritas alegres irritan, y ni corresponden a la triste realidad juarense, ni al cruce económico que ocurre en toda la frontera norte/sur sin facilitar los castillos prometidos. Hay quienes "pasan diariamente a los Estados Unidos para trabajar, otros cruzan la frontera en los meses de la siembra y la cosecha"; los que se quedan en Tijuana "están vinculados a intercambios comerciales entre los dos países, a maquiladoras norteamericanas ubicadas en la frontera de México o a servicios turísticos para los 3 o 4 millones de estadounidenses que llegan por año a esta ciudad" (García Canclini 1989: 293s.). El caso de Juárez y la frontera tejana, sin embargo, es diferente "que Tijuana, con California como frontera", y según Mayra Martell, "eso se siente: a Ciudad Juárez llega mucha gente queriendo cruzar y a veces no sucede, lo que hace que la ciudad tenga siempre una población flotante" (Martell en Yaconic 2017).

Otra artista juarense, la directora de teatro y actriz Perla de la Rosa, reescribe el drama griego de Antígona desde la frontera. *Antígona. Voces que incendian el desierto* representa a Antígona en busca de su hermana Polinice entre otras mujeres desaparecidas, mientras las autoridades ordenan silencio. Los dirigentes no se preocupan por los asesinatos, sino por el peligro del comercio paralizado y "que todo este escándalo [...] haya rebasado las fronteras de Ciudad Tebas. La prensa internacional está incontenible" (De la Rosa 2004: s.p.). La pieza teatral explora cómo la violencia de Ciudad Tebas / Ciudad Juárez se extiende a través de fronteras: la materia griega eleva el drama a un nivel transferible y traducible.<sup>32</sup> El interés por traspasar a otros espacios se refleja también en la promoción de la obra, que desde su estreno en 2004 se

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<sup>30</sup> La juarense comenzó el proyecto de retratar la ausencia cuando regresó a la frontera después de sus estudios fotográficos en el D.F. Los carteles de las mujeres desaparecidas desviaron su interés inicial de la ciudad de su juventud a las mujeres. Véase Yaconic (2017).

<sup>31</sup> Véase Argüello Manresa (2018: 98).

<sup>32</sup> Moira Fradinger da un excelente análisis sobre la "universalidad" de la materia griega de Antígona en los contextos latinoamericanos marcados por el colonialismo, el occidentalismo y el pensamiento periférico moderno. Fradinger advierte de los peligros de mitificar la materia como "universal", y enseña cómo la práctica de contrastar suele llevar a reafirmar el "original" griego y a sus "copias" posteriores (Fradinger 2014: 225). En el contexto de mi artículo cabe destacar cómo la materia 'cruza fronteras' y cómo conecta los femicidios con tradiciones literarias discutidas a través de espacios y tiempos.

ha representado en diversos teatros de los EE. UU. y de Europa. En su conjunto, las obras artísticas sobre los femicidios muestran cómo las fronteras permeables del comercio transnacional barato de las maquiladoras y del tráfico ilegal contribuyen a crear la espiral de violencia de género. Las representaciones artísticas sobre Juárez denuncian las transgresiones crueles, y las traducen y transportan al arte.

En la frontera sur, la violencia invade también el espacio regional. La escritora Norma Cantú, de Laredo, y la cineasta Laura Varela, de El Paso, testimonian los efectos terribles de la Guerra de Vietnam desde un punto de vista transfronterizo. El documental *As Long As I Remember: American Veterans* (Varela 2009) y la novela *Canícula* (Cantú 2000 / Cantú 2015) dibujan el camino de la guerra hasta los últimos rincones del imperio donde interrumpe la vida con su impacto mortal. En *Canícula*, la protagonista Nina, la joven de Laredo, recuerda la despedida de su hermano Tino.<sup>33</sup> Tino se va a Vietnam, cruza nuevas fronteras y no vuelve vivo a su propia frontera. Tras su muerte, la familia en Laredo recibe sus últimas pertenencias desde Vietnam. Como el trabajo de Mayra Martell sobre los femicidios, Cantú representa la ausencia del ser querido desde un mundo femenino y pictográfico. En la serie de fotos de Martell, las sobrecamas de las mujeres desaparecidas ocupan un lugar prominente en el retrato de la ausencia de Ciudad Juárez. En *Canícula*, se revisan las viejas fotos en una "sobrecama de lino blanco bordada [...] y bordes con encajes"; las fotos de Nena marcan un espacio transfronterizo "más allá del océano, más allá de [...] Los Estados Unidos, más allá de [...] México, más allá de la frontera [...] en el barrio de las Cruces en la Ciudad de Laredo" (Cantú 2000: xix-xx). Cada capítulo de *Canícula* se compone alrededor de una foto que plasma la vida en la frontera tejana-mexicana y los cruces entre ambos lados.

*As Long As I Remember* acompaña a tres veteranos de Vietnam en sus viajes íntimos a lo largo de la "herida abierta" (Anzaldúa 2015a: 61) de la guerra que afecta la vida de varias generaciones. Los tres son artistas chicanos, un pintor, un escritor y un actor/músico; han cruzado fronteras y han regresado con el equipaje del evento traumático de Vietnam. En Tejas, las huellas de la guerra se bifurcan silenciosamente en las familias y comunidades, mientras la memoria de matar y morir se niega en la sociedad estadounidense de la pos-guerra. El documental comienza con el número escandalosamente alto de mexicanos muertos en la Guerra de Vietnam, e introduce las diferentes fronteras territoriales y epistemológicas que los soldados atraviesan. Los tres veteranos reflexionan sobre el sistema educativo excluyente para los mexicanos en Tejas y sobre la falta de preparación en el Cuerpo de Marine, dos obstáculos

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<sup>33</sup> Véase Cantú (2015: 168s.). La versión en castellano no incluye este capítulo.

fundamentales para comprender lo que hacían cuando fueran a Vietnam. La guerra transforma a los tres, ya que el ejército estadounidense los trata como soldados de segunda clase por sus orígenes mexicanos. Además, comienzan a identificarse con la gente de Vietnam, en la que reconocen sus propias tradiciones y sus aspectos físicos. La guerra facilita este cruce epistemológico, pero sobre todo es limitación insuperable. Tras la guerra, ya no es posible regresar al estado de antes, y la memoria de Vietnam se inserta en la memoria cultural transfronteriza. Las imágenes filmadas en el sur de Tejas giran alrededor de la guerra, y el debate de los traumas colectivos se asocia con las costumbres mexicanas y chicanas. La secuencia fílmica sobre el Día de Muertos, con las calaveras y la omnipresente Virgen de Guadalupe, conecta México con Tejas y ambos con Vietnam. "Qué viva la muerte!", grita uno de los artistas en el desfile del primero de noviembre, en una doble semántica de la celebración de la tradición mexicana y la conmemoración de Vietnam.

En la novela de Cantú, Vietnam es un hilo narrativo entre varios otros que retratan las culturas populares y folclóricas transfronterizas. En un tono poético se describen los vestidos de china poblana, los bailes de los matachines y las piñatas de cumpleaños que cruzan la frontera entre Laredo y Nuevo Laredo. Recordar la violencia y activar la memoria cultural popular mexicana son dos elementos que se solapan en el proceso de transformación que Cantú y Varela retratan y proponen. El acto de conmemorar es imprescindible en ambas obras, tal como lo es en las representaciones artísticas sobre la violencia de Ciudad Juárez. *Canícula* dedica varios capítulos al hermano asesinado en la guerra, recordando la juventud de Tino y la noticia de su muerte lejana recibida en el entorno familiar. Las figuras de las "comadres" (Cantú 2000: 61-64; Cantú 2015: 47s.) contribuyen a transformar la experiencia vulnerable de Vietnam. La amistad sólida entre las vecinas de Laredo convierte, con el tiempo, las heridas en recuerdos queridos, sin poder mitigar el dolor. En *As Long As I Remember*, el arte aparece como posible medio de sanación. El escritor que sufre de trastornos psicológicos define la escritura como acto liberador de conmemorar. Los cuadros y las performances de los otros dos aparecen como un vehículo de articular el sufrimiento y de lidiar con la cadena de cruces perpetuos entre los diferentes lados de diferentes fronteras, entre lo ajeno y lo propio.

Como solución política, la propuesta de transformar lo inhumano a través del arte y de la vida comunal pareciera meramente romántica; como modelo estético, se conecta con la noción del desplazamiento: desplazamientos de imágenes y palabras; desplazamientos de las construcciones de normalidad; desplazamientos de la memoria. El desplazamiento se dificulta en el caso de Ciudad Juárez, donde la experiencia vulnerable y su transformación coexisten en un solo espacio simbólico de violencia interminable. Cuando la fotógrafa Martell comenzó "a

trabajar el tema, la situación era la misma que la de ahora. Es algo que no para, quizá se diversifica" (Martell en Yaconic 2017). Las representaciones artísticas de los femicidios se producen en ambos lados de la frontera, situando la violencia entre fronteras. Los trabajos de Martell, de la Rosa, Portillo o Gáspar de Alba transforman la ausencia de las desaparecidas en presencias visibles, convirtiendo la experiencia vulnerable del silencio en discurso accesible.

### **Hacia una fenomenología del cruce**

En los últimos años, la literatura, el cine y el arte desde y sobre la frontera mexicana-estadounidense describen e investigan el fenómeno del cruce. Una revisión conceptual evidencia que las teorías culturales sobre la frontera preparan esta tendencia contemporánea. Anzaldúa, Canclini o Mignolo construyen sus respectivos proyectos feministas, deconstructivos o decoloniales desde los movimientos territoriales, simbólicos y epistemológicos entre las líneas de división impuestas. Basándose en estas nociones, el cruce se deja pensar desde la diferencia y desde la similitud. La travesía es unión o es separación; en la línea vertical, no es lo mismo atravesar la frontera norte desde el sur o la frontera sur desde el norte; en la línea horizontal, la frontera sur y la frontera norte no son uniformes, sino variables. El movimiento de Tijuana a Nogales, a Ciudad Juárez, a Laredo pasa por topografías marítimas, desérticas, urbanas, rurales y por diferentes condiciones políticas y culturales. En ambos lados se fabrica el deseo de cruzar, en el imaginario estereotípico mexicano del "sueño americano", tanto como en el intento chicano de regresar, de revitalizar y reinventar sus tradiciones mexicanas. Desde ambos lados, se cruza con una memoria cultural mexicana; desde ambos, existe una precaución sobre las transgresiones criminales y peligrosas de la frontera. En este contexto, la inhibición de atravesar puede ser violenta o una medida para evitar la violencia. La idea de la travesía es ambigua y compleja; por un lado, inventa un mundo en el que se desplazan las fronteras y se desplaza libremente entre fronteras. En esta visión, las fronteras geográficas y metafóricas ya no cruzan los territorios, las culturas, los cuerpos y las psiques, y se reemplazan con procesos de transformación. Por otro lado, el cruce aparece como práctica de transgresión violenta donde se trata del tráfico lucrativo de drogas, armas o personas, donde se invaden y destruyen las zonas pacíficas, o donde los proyectos nacionales imponen sus fronteras rígidas en contextos regionales. Las representaciones artísticas de los femicidios de Ciudad Juárez y de los traumas de Vietnam demuestran tanto la semejanza como la desemejanza entre los dos escenarios de violencia transfronteriza. En y desde la frontera norte/sur, pasar de la experiencia vulnerable a un estado de transformación pacífica es, metafóricamente, el cruce de fronteras que no siempre es asequible.



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## **Rodriguez & Rodriguez: Between Chicano Marxist and Catholic Thought**

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My mestizo boast: As a queer Catholic Indian Spaniard at home in a temperate Chinese city in a fading blond state in a post-Protestant nation, I live up to my sixteenth-century birth. The future is brown, is my thesis; is as brown as the tarnished past (Rodriguez 1982: 162).

We seem to be in a general state of depression – a cultural malaise of isolation and meaninglessness. We are feeling more rootless and hopeless than ever before, despite the unprecedented prosperity permeating our society – where consumer products strain warehouses and retail outlets; technology and rapid service is at our fingertips; TV, video games, books, music, and movies bombard us at every turn; and access to every imaginable drug, drink, and sexual release is commonplace (Rodriguez 2001: 13).

Living and working abroad several times in my life, I became interested in borderlands as spaces of vivid creation and enrichment of culture. After teaching assignments in Azerbaijan and Pakistan, I moved to Tijuana, Mexico and experienced how the border separated people from each other. Due to my research and interest in Turkish-German literature, I was curious from the beginning to see how social conditions in the US.-American and Mexican borderland had an impact on the citizens who considered themselves being part of both sides. Often waiting in *la línea*<sup>1</sup> in order to travel to San Diego, I was able to witness a transborder country something beyond the myths of belonging created by nationhood. Having been held in secondary inspection for hours and been hassled (but still protected by my German passport) by young, most likely first generation US-American border officers at the San Ysidro crossing, the concept, or to be more precise, 'the ontological force' of transborder crossings appeared to me as a natural human response to the artificiality of the threshold created by men.

Being a scholar in the field of Comparative Literature, I am always tempted to think about texts outside a nation's canon. Taking a distant point of view on my home country and exploring Mexican-American literature and the authors' quest for participation finally gave me a new perspective to understand Turkish-German literature as a search and statement of belonging. Due to the fact that my first encounter with the Mexican-American academic community was during the *Mundo Zurdo Conference* on the works of Gloria Anzaldúa in Austin 2015, I want to try follow her technique and include my own persona in the following essay on Richard

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<sup>1</sup> Spanish speaking people sometimes call the border "the line", "la línea".

Rodriguez and Luis J. Rodriguez, who each individually represent transborder approaches of belonging. Since the work of Gloria Anzaldúa is not only about establishing an independent *teoría* of emancipation but also about creating community, the sharing of personal insights are from my point of view essential for entering into the spirit of Gloria Anzaldúa. In this regard I remember Norma Cantú once saying: "The battleground is us!".

In fall 2016, I was visiting the US for my PhD project, in which I compare Turkish-German and Mexican-American Literature. In my dissertation, I was focusing on various authors' writings on matters of participation, marginalization, exploitation, belonging and racism in countries of immigration. Contemporary politics in the US and Germany was in midst of the rise of racist and nationalistic movements, with, Donald Trump's witch hunt for undocumented Americans on the one side, the assassinations of Turkish-German citizens by the Neo-Nazi terror organisation NSU<sup>2</sup> on the other. Furthermore the Turkish president Tayyip Erdoğan's attempt to influence German-Turks has had a strong impact on the condition of living and inner peace in both societies.

For my PhD thesis, I was able to interview several writers to discuss their views on politics and their literary responses to racism and marginalization.<sup>3</sup> After reaching out for over a year and with the help of other writers and colleagues in the field of Chicano studies, I finally got in contact with Richard Rodriguez in San Francisco and Luis J. Rodriguez in Sylmar and arranged meetings for interviews with both writers<sup>4</sup> who, upon first impression, seemed to have nothing in common except their Mexican-American heritage. Richard Rodriguez was raised in Sacramento, went to a Catholic school and attended universities in the US and UK. Instead of becoming a scholar, he became a journalist and is well known for his first memoir *Hunger for Memory* in the early 1980s.<sup>5</sup> American conservatives referred to him regularly in order to justify their idea of how integration should be. In the following years, Richard Rodriguez published three more memoirs discussing his own life intermingled with American history.<sup>6</sup>

Luis Rodriguez, on the other hand, was born in El Paso and grew up in a *barrio* in Los Angeles. He was a high school drop out, joined street gangs and became a heroin addict. It took him years to become sober. His engagement with Marxism and the Chicano movement, as well as his activities in the spiritual men movement made him community worker. He is most known

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<sup>2</sup> See Kies (2016).

<sup>3</sup> See Schreiner (2019).

<sup>4</sup> See Schreiner (2017: 483-501).

<sup>5</sup> See Rodriguez (1982).

<sup>6</sup> See Rodriguez (2013; 2002; 1992).

for his first memoir *Always Running: La Vida Loca* published in the early 1990s, which sold 500,000 copies.<sup>7</sup>

During the pre-election debates between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump in 2016, I arrived in San Francisco and found my way to Richard Rodriguez. I had read all his books and had stumbled over and over again on essays and articles on his works. At the Modern Language Association conference in Austin January 2016, I even attended a whole panel debating his role in Mexican-American thought. Ever since the 1970s, his opinions had been very different from other writers within the Chicano movement and feminist Mexican-American authors. His conservative advocacy against programs of affirmative action<sup>8</sup> and his sole support for *English Only*<sup>9</sup> had made him an outcast in the Mexican-American writing community. Being labeled as a "coconut" (a phrase pointing out the 'brown' ethnicity and the 'white' behaviour of an individual) and a "sellout" by the Chicano community for being a strong individualist, Richard Rodriguez stayed away from *La Causa*. He did not long for exchange with others and lived and wrote in his own borderland.<sup>10</sup> Aureliano DeSoto sums up Richard Rodriguez' reputation from the perspective of Chicano community as follows:

Rodriguez was for many years, and continues to be for more than a handful of Chicana/o critics, the antithesis of the preferred variations of the Chicana/o subject. For Rodriguez, this initially assumed his self-identified role as a Caliban-like figure. A more compelling and lasting character analogy would be the Madwoman in the Attic. Given the sustained intensity of the focus on Rodriguez's four autobiographical works, Rodriguez effectively functions as a Chicana/o Bertha Mason/Antoinette Cosway, a literary character who lends himself to multiple parallel readings always already central and inescapable to the Chicana/o literary subject (DeSoto 2016: n. p.).

His outcast status made me even more curious to meet this excellent stylist and writer who later in his career publicly came out, leaving politics behind and started exploring matters of religion and interfaith. Being myself raised in a small Catholic village and interested in Judaism and Islam, I could connect with Richard Rodriguez' latest turn in his writings. On the other hand, I also was looking forward to meeting Luis Javier Rodriguez in person. I loved reading his memoirs and poems and, furthermore, due to my background as a social worker, I was

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<sup>7</sup> See Rodriguez (1993).

<sup>8</sup> The term "affirmative action" summarizes policies of promoting the education and employment of citizens who are discriminated due to their ethnicity or gender.

<sup>9</sup> The *English Only* movement promotes and demands English as the only official language of the US.

<sup>10</sup> Interesting works on Richard Rodriguez are: Nieto Garcia (2014) and Guajardo (2002). Guajardo emphasizes the fact that Rodriguez in a way was standing outside the discourse and community: "The best approach to Acosta and Rodriguez is one that acknowledges their individuality as writers rather than as politicians. Both writers have been aptly viewed as contributors to particular ideologies, but no less central is their position as word-crafters, writers concerned with aesthetics. Very few critics have taken this latter approach. [...] As individuals, Acosta and Rodriguez both have been doubly marginalized: from the dominant culture and from the Mexican-American culture as well" (Guajardo 2002: 115).

fascinated by his political activism, his engagement with prison inmates and his poetry in the tradition of Raul Salinas<sup>11</sup> and Jimmy Bacca.<sup>12</sup>

Just after I had read the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa at the UT in Austin, I had become a member of a men group and could explore the power of storytelling and spirituality for myself. Especially Anzaldúa's text 'now let us shift...the path of conocimiento...inner work, public acts'<sup>13</sup> had made a deep impact on me. About the same time, I also found out that Luis J Rodriguez himself was a spiritual advocate for healthy manhood. Luis Javier Rodriguez had been a drug addict, a gangster and a prison inmate, and was thus looking at the Mexican-American experience from the opposite direction than Richard Rodriguez.

I was quite sure that meeting both men in person would help me to understand their work and the variety and intellectual range of Mexican-American thought. In the Bay Area I would meet the Catholic queer, a true *homme de lettres*, a classically trained university intellectual, and in LA I would face a former gangmember, a self-taught Marxist activist and spiritual street poet. Considering my own working class background and first generation graduate – I am someone still struggling with style, grammar, orthography, a certain theoretic terminology, and with the concepts of a bourgeoisie literary canon and of 'high culture' as the opposite to popular culture – I have sympathies for both writers and their different approaches to find a place within the dominant Anglo culture of the US. While Richard tried to master English in order to find acceptance, Luis wrote literally for his life straight out of the *pinta*<sup>14</sup>.

In all honesty I thought that I would meet two totally different men. In some ways this was true. While my interview with Richard Rodriguez had already been published and the interview with Luis Rodriguez is hopefully going to be in the future,<sup>15</sup> I want to present some thoughts on the similarities and differences between the two writers. I do understand this undertaking as an intellectual exercise to break through political oppositions which seem monolithic and undebatable in a time which is strongly affected by the a mistrust in science, the rise of populism, of a constant critique of the media, and the general unwillingness for discussion on both sides of the Atlantic.

Colleagues of mine and other writers had warned me about Richard Rodriguez. He had a reputation for being complicated. But then the same was said about Luis Rodriguez by some

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<sup>11</sup> See Salinas (1999).

<sup>12</sup> See Bacca (2009; 1992; 1982).

<sup>13</sup> See Anzaldúa / Keating (2002: 540-576).

<sup>14</sup> Chicano word for 'prison'.

<sup>15</sup> The interview with Richard Rodriguez was published in the journal *American Studies* (see Schreiner 2018) and the video-interview with Luis J. Rodriguez has not been transcribed yet.

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scholars I had met. I had written several emails to Richard Rodriguez and sent him one of my papers to win his trust – and indeed he welcomed me in his office.

In the very beginning of our interview, Richard Rodriguez said something very important that helped me to understand his latest writings. When I asked him how he would describe his own turns during his career, he explained that his own experiences of aging, illness and loss have made him a different writer. He said that taking care of dying people during the outbreak of the AIDS crisis, and now of his neighbor, and the fading of his own body had taken away his eagerness to prove his position in political discussions. Like Luis Rodriguez and Gloria Anzaldúa, Richard Rodriguez had experienced his share of human loss and pain. It seems to be a matter of aging when authors seem to lose some of their harshness and turn to a deeper spirituality. As with Anzaldúa in her late text *Let us shift*, in Richard Rodriguez's *Darling* (2013), the author looks for what humans have in common instead for what divides them. In a sense Rodriguez's transnational Catholic understanding of human brotherhood shows similarities with a transborder concept of belonging beyond national identity politics.

Nevertheless, he is aware that a lot of people are afraid of changes that naturally occur within a supra-local transborder reality and the fading of the illusion of a White Anglo America. When I asked him about the rise of nationalism and populism in the EU and the US he argued, albeit despite his admiration for Angela Merkel, that people in Germany (and the US) are afraid of immigrants and of losing their culture. Richard Rodriguez understands that 'white' people in Arizona or Germany are afraid of the 'browning' of their societies. Focusing on Europe, the Catholic Richard Rodriguez discussed that European societies were losing their religion and that Islam would fill the gap. In a way, Rodriguez talked about *Critical Whiteness* without being a theorist of this sort. Richard Rodriguez avoided words like 'racism' since, from his point of view, terminologies would hide the nightmarish reality behind them. He understood that Trump demonized migrants and played on the fear of his voters to win his campaign. Although he had sympathies for the positions of people who are afraid to lose the world they are used to, he forgot to mention that 'Mexicanos' in 'Tejas' or California suffered far greater injustices with the US American takeover of their lands in the 19<sup>th</sup> century than the Anglo-Americans in Arizona who see migrants coming in today.

In contradiction to that, Richard Rodriguez addressed issues of economic injustices and stated that "The war on drugs"<sup>16</sup> and the US-American demands for drugs would create migration in the first place. Rodriguez showed himself convinced that Americans were not

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<sup>16</sup> See Hari (2015).

really able to talk about their true desires. Instead, he said, they focused on their fears. Religion was another factor he mentioned as an explanation for the conditions in the US today. As a Catholic, he explained how Protestant and Puritan theology had its impact on the US-American understanding of poverty. While from the Catholic Mexican perspective the 'poor' were seen as 'true' to the human experience, in the US poverty would rather be seen more as a failure.

Just like Luis Rodriguez, Richard Rodriguez was aware that there was a lack of belonging in the world. Islamism and terror armies like the *Islamic State* remind him of the crusades: he said that the war between *Shia* and *Sunna*, between radical Islamism and Liberalism, offered young men a cause. In the absence of a stringent and promising socialist movement, religious groups attracted people who were looking for a change of system. The longing for purity, the extended fear of cosmopolitanism in times of globalization shows that Islamist thought is in some sense similar to the wish of people voting for populists in Western societies. They too claim that they will recreate a better "once upon time". The political projects of going back to the greatness of America or to the early days of the prophet Mohammed arise from the same fears or wishes for purity, which are illusional.

While Luis Rodriguez is a socialist at heart who believes in the power of grass roots movements, Richard Rodriguez rather hopes for a messianic figure who can establish a positive promise of belonging without using hate and fear to form society. By recalling his meeting with Mother Theresa, with whom he visited the San Quentin Death Row, Richard Rodriguez argued that humans longed for heroes and the 'great narration' as a way to keep them going. Here, one can perceive Richard's own wish for Christian thought and act. His ideal world would be one of certainties. There would be a certain set of values. Purity and engagement matter to him; but he knows that it stays an illusion. Maybe this is the great tragedy of Richard Rodriguez: He wants a society and world which he knows will never be real.

Richard Rodriguez is aware that the lack of belonging creates violence, yet, he awkwardly avoids to answer questions on participation. Nowadays, he resists to give his idea on how Mexican-American participation should look: Richard Rodriguez's quest was to master English. To become a brilliant stylist was his way of finding participation in society. While his personal story reminds me partly of Edward Said's private struggles of belonging and identity,<sup>17</sup> I cannot understand how Richard Rodriguez is sensitive for matters of belonging, but blind for the marginalized position of Mexican-Americans. Maybe this is a psychological necessity: if Richard Rodriguez would focus on existing structural injustices for Mexican-Americans, he

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<sup>17</sup> See Said (1999).



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might come to realize that even mastering English does not give him the belonging and standing he wishes for. I am not at all saying that Richard Rodriguez is a narcissist or an egoistic character. He was and is too much engaged in helping others. Yet, compared to Luis J. Rodriguez, who is a community driven tribal member of his people, Richard Rodriguez was right from the beginning a more individualistic person who had to find his own way. Their upbringing and family connections pushed both men in very different directions. While Luis J. Rodriguez found a failed substitution for home first in gangs influenced by toxic masculinity, then within the Chicano movement and spiritual mangroups, the young homosexual Richard had to face the homophobic reproach of his church while he was, at the same time, struggling for the acceptance within the Anglo world.

Narrations and story do matter for Richard Rodriguez when he talks about history. He stated that the older he gets, the more he is interested in the density of places. For Richard Rodriguez, the layers of memories in a person or a place are gateways to understand personal history on a meta level. Opposed to Luis Rodriguez, who wants to understand how history creates injustice for people, Richard Rodriguez focuses on history as a kind of transcentral DNA which creates the single individual. While Luis Rodriguez wants to understand himself and history to change society, Richard Rodriguez aims to examines history in order to understand himself. Asked what literature can do or shall do, Richard Rodriguez said that literature should confuse and raise questions.

In my interview with him, Luis Rodriguez, on the other hand, saw literature and poetry as tools of social work which bring individuals in contact with their inner shadows and true character; a tool which helps to understand how the environment creates someone's life. But literature has to happen within a community. Luis Rodriguez, as an elder and such as a mentor, shares his stories so that the younger ones start telling their own life stories and rewrite them for the better by aiming for enhancement in the future. Luis follows the Marxist insight that the social being determines their consciousness. Hence, Luis Rodriguez implies that the people in the *barrio* need education to understand the conditions of the society that holds them down. Storytelling is a cultural tool for Luis, which helps to deconstruct race and class and to heal the individual:

There are already many programs dealing with young people. Far too many of them, however, are organized inadequacies. They don't seem to go deep enough; they don't get to the heart of the matter. They don't address the essence of the transformation process for individuals and society. What we need is a fundamentally different system of relationships that, as a whole, sets the conditions in which anything that can happen will happen. [...] Everyone is a "story" – a storehouse of experiences, thoughts, memories, sentiments, traits – with links to other stories. Not story as history, but as Michael Meade says, story as "symbolic liveliness". Remember, if you don't know your gifts, you can't see the gifts in others (Rodriguez 2001: 67).

Culture matters mainly to strengthen the group's identity and self-consciousness. Hence, to find one's native roots is an emancipatory act that challenges the power structures of the dominant society. After all, the dominant society creates race and cultural differences to rule.

As I could gather in the interviews, the two authors' approach to communication with society is quite distinct. While Richard Rodriguez gives talks at universities, Luis Rodriguez goes into prisons and teaches inmates to write. He also helps the Mexican-American community in and around Sylmar with his *Tia Chucha's Centro Cultural*<sup>18</sup> which provides education, counseling and books. Due to their different personal conditions, Richard and Luis Rodriguez operate in contrasting environments. It takes a former *vato* and gangmember to have enough credibility to reach people struggling in prison.<sup>19</sup> Luis Rodriguez's analysis on toxic masculinity is helpful to understand the social conditions which lead to male violence:

We know that many young people express their rage with violent fury. Almost anything can set them off. Mostly this happens when they feel wrongfully challenged, disrespected, or misunderstood. Many of the young people I've worked with were highly sensitive to a variety of dangers around them. They confront a steady stream of abuse at home, in school, and on the street, which heightens their levels of fear, resulting in an acute state of awareness. Chemical changes occur in the brain as a defense mechanism against habitual threats. These kids sometimes react like frightened animals. The oldest known responses to these situations are called the three Fs: "fight, flee, or freeze" (Rodriguez 2001: 98f.).

Luis Rodriguez is, as mentioned before, until today a community driven activist. Like Trump's racism or the tribes fighting at Standing Rock: he is aware of the social, cultural and political battlegrounds and is connected with activists throughout the US. The native element of his existence is very important for him. While Richard Rodriguez finds comfort in the church, which had been implemented by the Spanish colonizer, Luis Rodriguez connects with the native spirituality of the Tatomajas, the Hopi, Showshone, Pueblos and with the old Mexican religions – the same spiritualities that also had an impact on Gloria Anzaldúa.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See [www.tiachucha.org/](http://www.tiachucha.org/) [30.12.2019].

<sup>19</sup> Luis J. Rodriguez's engagement as a community worker is also reflected in his books. See Rodríguez / Martínez / Rodríguez (1998); Rodríguez / Parson-Nesbitt / Warr (1999); Rodríguez (1999).

<sup>20</sup> Luis J. Rodriguez is influenced by the works of Michael Meade. See Meade (1996; 1994).

Here again we see the main difference between the two men: while Richard Rodriguez looks for unity in the church, Luis Rodriguez finds unity in diversity and community. Luis Rodriguez is a political activist and a man of statistics and data. While Richard Rodriguez talks about symbolism and theological concepts, Luis Rodriguez looks for the sociological facts which explain the problems his people have to deal with. He is able to point out how many 'Black American' or Mexican American are killed by police, and that 'white' people mostly get killed by 'white' people etc. Here is a political mind at work, and it is not surprising that Luis Rodriguez was running for Governor in the state of California with the Green party in 2014.

From my point of view it can be said that Luis Rodriguez owes his life to *La Causa*. Instead of dying of heroin addiction or gang violence, he became a part of the change and will be a veteran in the struggles to come. His writings and poetry teach us about the past but also show how Donald Trump's anti-migrant policies can be confronted. In this sense, also Richard Rodriguez does his part: his actions and writings represent a Christian compassionate conservatism that can serve as an ally for other social movements. The rapid change and enrichment of culture in the US and Europe has created transborder societies. Hence culture, identity and belonging are now the most important factors of economic and political struggles of distribution.

Further work on the common grounds of compassion, central to Gloria Anzaldúa, Luis Rodriguez and Richard Rodriguez's work can help to build and sustain the desired alliances which, in early 2019, are on the rise in both the US congress and foremost at grassroots level to challenge nationalistic and racist policies.

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## ***Wet minds* y colonialismo intelectual: saberes de aquí y allá<sup>1</sup>**

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El espacio fronterizo es el campo en el que se está produciendo [una] confluencia; no sólo es línea divisoria, sino que es un lugar de numerosas relaciones de complementariedad y contradicción, de conflicto y resistencia. Es un espacio en movimiento con toda la riqueza y variedad de las interlocuciones culturales no cristalizadas (Zúñiga 1998b: 226).

Hablar desde el punto de vista teórico de la cultura de la frontera es siempre combatir un estigma; el estigma de que la dispersión es impensable. ¿Cómo pensar desde una noción de cultura circunscrita, que es una ficción la dispersión simbólica de la frontera, que no es una ficción? (Alarcón en Zúñiga 1998b: 9).

### **I.**

En la actualidad hay una gran variedad de fronteras geográficas, políticas, económicas y culturales que se han puesto de manifiesto gracias a los medios de comunicación. Las migraciones masivas de los países de Medio Oriente y África hacia Europa, y aquellas de México y Centro América rumbo a la frontera sur de los Estados Unidos en el último lustro han dado fe de una crisis humanitaria por "el hambre y la muerte"<sup>2</sup>. A estas crisis los gobiernos y la ciudadanía han respondido solidarizándose con los migrantes a través de organizaciones gubernamentales, no gubernamentales y apoyos individuales,<sup>3</sup> o creando muros simbólicos y concretos a través de discursos discriminatorios e intervenciones gubernamentales, no gubernamentales e individuales.<sup>4</sup> Una de las voces más agresivas y, desafortunadamente, más

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<sup>1</sup> Agradezco a Romana Radlwimmer por su apoyo en la escritura de este trabajo y a Rocío Irene Mejía sus atinados comentarios y sugerencias.

<sup>2</sup> "El hambre y la muerte" las tomo del migrante Rubén Figueroa, quien a su vez las recoge de la voz de una mujer de entre la multitud que llegó a México, cuando explicaba los orígenes de la caravana migrante centroamericana que salió de San Pedro Sula, Honduras el 13 de octubre de 2018. Para más información sobre la caravana se puede encontrar artículos y vídeos en la página web de CESPAD (véase p.e. CESPAD 2018). Pienso también en "la muerte y el hambre" que generaron las migraciones provocadas por las guerras y la desesperanza económica en países como Siria, Afganistán, Irak, Congo, Somalia, Sudán y otros expulsores de migrantes económicos.

<sup>3</sup> Como es sabido, gobiernos como el de Alemania, Turquía, Jordania, España, Grecia, Italia y Portugal, entre otros, crearon diferentes programas de asilo temporal o permanente, apoyos en campos de refugiados, etc., y organizaciones internacionales y locales han provisto a los migrantes con ayudas en efectivo y especie dentro de los que se incluyen alimentos, medicinas, apoyo legal y otros. Las ayudas individuales han llegado también de formas diversas, ya sea por medio de las organizaciones, el voluntariado o la promoción a través de las redes sociales.

<sup>4</sup> El gobierno de Estados Unidos ha tenido un abierto discurso antiinmigrante y una política agresiva en contra de las/os indocumentadas/os, e incluso contra las/os llamadas/os *dreamers*. Lo anterior lo podemos atestiguar gracias al actuar de la Casa Blanca y sus seguidores. Otros países que no han tenido una apertura ante los migrantes han sido Polonia, Hungría, Austria, la república Checa e Italia. Asimismo, sabemos por las noticias internacionales de ataques xenofóbicos contra comunidades de migrantes regulares e irregulares.

insistentes y con más peso político ha sido la de Donald Trump. Desde que en su discurso de aceptación a la candidatura por el partido republicano lanzara las frases:

When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you [...] They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems to us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people! But I speak to border guards and they tell us what we're getting [...] I will build a great, great wall on our southern border and I will have Mexico pay for that wall. Mark my words (Trump en Washington Post Staff 2015).<sup>5</sup>

Su tono y el contenido de su discurso no han bajado. La insistencia en levantar "a big and beautiful wall" para impedir la entrada de personas sin los documentos requeridos ha sido tal que en algunas partes de la frontera entre México y Estados Unidos ya han comenzado los trabajos de construcción, a pesar de la oposición de sus adversarios políticos y de una gran parte de la ciudadanía. Además, las políticas que se han implementado durante su régimen<sup>6</sup> han dado pie a que a una cantidad considerable de menores se les haya separado de sus padres, se les haya fichado como criminales y hayan tenido que comparecer ante jueces de inmigración siendo infantes sin siquiera entender su presencia en el tribunal.<sup>7</sup> Las amenazas de Trump sobre cortar los apoyos financieros a los gobiernos de Honduras, El Salvador y Guatemala han funcionado. Asimismo se ha estado forzando a México a tomar medidas severas para detener a las personas antes de que lleguen a la frontera norte del país, y se ha enviado a 5000 efectivos militares para frenarlos a su llegada. El presidente de los EE.UU. también ha advertido que ordenará se les dispare "si agreden a los soldados con piedras", que suspenderá la ciudadanía por nacimiento de aquellos/as hijos/as de indocumentados/as, que cerrará la frontera entre México y Estados Unidos para estos migrantes, que suspenderá las peticiones de asilo que se hagan a partir del momento en que firme una orden ejecutiva para ello, lo cual contraviene las leyes migratorias del país.<sup>8</sup> Además, ha amenazado con cerrar los puertos fronterizos oficiales si no se aprueban los fondos solicitados para 'su' muro.

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<sup>5</sup> Para consultar el discurso completo, véase Washington Post Staff (2015).

<sup>6</sup> Recordemos que apenas tomar posesión, el 27 de enero de 2017, implementó la Orden Ejecutiva 13769, intitulada "Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States" e informalmente conocida como "Muslim Ban" (prohibición/exclusión musulmana), con la cual empezó a tomar acciones directas contra los migrantes que atraviesan México para llegar a la frontera estadounidense, y que le han servido como chivos expiatorios desde el inicio de su campaña – tal como lo señala su discurso contra los mexicanos.

<sup>7</sup> Con respecto al tema de los infantes y jóvenes en los tribunales de inmigración estadounidenses en la época de Trump, véase Chen (2018), Egkolfopoulou (2018), Henley (2018), Jewett / Luthra (2018), Santos (2016). Para el período de Barack Obama, quien ha sido el presidente que más deportaciones llevó a cabo, puede leerse *Los niños perdidos* de Valeria Luiselli, en el cual da cuenta de la crisis con los niños inmigrantes en 2014. Véase Luiselli (2016).

<sup>8</sup> El *New York Times* y el *Washington Post*, así como las grandes cadenas de televisión estadounidense desde las más conservadoras a las más liberales y la prensa internacional han estado reportando el día a día de la caravana y el racismo del presidente. Además, en la cuenta de *Twitter* del mismo Trump podemos leer el ultimatum: "To those

Su discurso sólo ha variado para volverse más violento y más cínico. Sin embargo, lo que comenzó siendo una provocación y un llamado a votar por él y actuar en consecuencia, ha causado profundos daños, varios irreversibles: separación de familias, redadas continuas, ataques sistemáticos contra grupos específicos, declaraciones sin fundamento, detenciones criminalizantes, masivas y violentas, así como revisiones exhaustivas en los puntos de vigilancia y garitas internacionales.

Quizá para quienes habitan en distintas latitudes del planeta, sus palabras tengan un impacto ideológico o sólo sean parte de una noticia más sobre las crisis migratorias internacionales. Pero para quienes vivimos en la frontera entre México y Estados Unidos, y cruzamos cotidianamente, su discurso afecta nuestras relaciones transfronterizas. Los cruces hacia 'el otro lado' se vuelven intolerables; nos fastidia sobremanera cada minuto adicional que soportamos detenidas en las filas de entrada, cada pregunta que nos hace el/la agente, cada revisión de documentos, cada envío a inspección de rayos X del auto con la chofer, cada husmeada del perro oficial, cada golpe a las llantas o a la carrocería del coche, cada abierta de cajuela o de cofre, cada frase amable o agresiva del o de la representante de la ley; esto, si cruzamos en automóvil, ya que el cruce a pie puede ser más tedioso, sin contar con las inclemencias del clima. Allí se detiene el tiempo y nuestra vulnerabilidad se hace patente; damos paso a monólogos interiores que cuestionan nuestro estar en ese sitio, nuestros cruces constantes, nuestras relaciones locales, binacionales, transnacionales o transfronterizas y los procesos que éstas conllevan.<sup>9</sup> Es, en esos instantes, cuando reflexionar sobre estos temas e intentarlos plasmar en un "anti-ensayo" (*anti-paper*), como diría Durán (2011: 20), se torna sugerente. Por ello, aquí me propongo continuar algunas consideraciones que hemos planteado en diferentes espacios académicos y no académicos,<sup>10</sup> y extendiendo una invitación permanente a dichas discusiones.

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in the Caravan, turnaround, we are not letting people into the United States illegally. Go back to your Country and if you want, apply for citizenship like millions of others are doing!"(Trump en Donachie 2018).

<sup>9</sup> Dentro de los procesos que pueden prevenir o detener la transfronteridad se encuentran la violencia en las ciudades fronterizas mexicanas, la devaluación del peso, las tensiones que surgen entre los gobiernos federales, etc. Sin embargo, ninguno de los anteriores ha sido tan perverso en los últimos cincuenta años como el del muro de Trump, dado el discurso beligerante y las amenazas sostenidas con respecto a los cierres de la frontera sur.

<sup>10</sup> Antes y después del panel organizado por Juan Carlos Ramírez Pimienta y Javier Durán *Wet Minds, Bookleggers, Mexicanistas, and the Place of Borders and Transnationalisms in US Academic Circles* para el congreso de LASA 2006, ya habíamos iniciado diversas conversaciones con respecto a nuestros intereses de investigación sobre las literaturas y culturas del norte de México y el suroeste de los Estados Unidos (literaturas fronterizas o de fronteras), de nuestras identidades y las distintas identidades de esos conglomerados poblacionales, así como de las relaciones entre académicas/os de uno y otro país. En las diferentes conversaciones y distintas épocas a lo largo de este proceso nos encontramos Norma Cantú, Norma Klahn, Norma Alarcón, Debra Castillo, Ricardo Aguilar Melantón, Juan Bruce-Novoa, Rolando Romero, Javier Durán, Juan Carlos Ramírez Pimienta, Laura Gutiérrez, Ignacio Corona, Diana Palaversich, Willivaldo Delgadillo, Cristina Sisk, Rocío Irene Mejía, Maarten Van Delden, Norma Iglesias, Miguel López y Gabriela Baeza. Algunas/os hemos escrito específicamente sobre estos temas, otras/os los han sugerido en algunos textos y otras/os los han dejado sólo como charlas de sobremesa. En esta lista incluyo a aquellas/os con quienes recuerdo haber tenido este tipo específico de diálogos.

Aprovecho los modelos de Durán (2011) y Blanco (2012) para enmarcar mi narrativa desde la perspectiva auto-etno-biográfica y autobiográfica<sup>11</sup> a fin de "problematize a series of critical issues that I see emerging [from those conversations]" (Durán 2011: 20) y para "insistir en la pertinencia de utilizar diversas formas de generación de conocimientos y diferentes modalidades de presentación de resultados [...] [a fin de] impulsar la praxis de una verdadera interdisciplinariedad que respete y valore en igualdad de condiciones una gama de posibilidades epistemológicas y metodológicas" (Blanco 2012: 177).

Tomo como punto de partida la ilustración de Durán y acepto su invitación a charlar sobre el tema de los llamados *wet minds*<sup>12</sup> y nuestros intentos por establecer un diálogo con Carlos Monsiváis y con la academia mexicana y norteamericana.<sup>13</sup> Asimismo, repaso una propuesta del fenómeno transfronterizo o la 'transfronteridad' y reviso un par de ejemplos de bibliografía transfronteriza entre México y Estados Unidos. Finalmente, planteo varias reflexiones y preguntas que puedan dar pie a "conversaciones futuras sobre las poéticas y políticas fronterizas y sobre los fenómenos colindantes, [entre ellos] la migración, la traducción [etcétera] o las experiencias de lo propio y lo otro" (Radlwimmer 2020: 17; traducción de la misma). Mis reflexiones no son inocentes; están filtradas por mi lugar de enunciación, la frontera entre Ciudad Juárez y El Paso, por mis estudios sobre y desde las literaturas y las culturas del mismo, así como por el desarrollo de un *border gnosis / border thinking* definido por Walter Mignolo como "knowledge from a subaltern perspective [...] conceived from the exterior borders of the modern/colonial world system [...]" (Mignolo 2000: 11-14).

## II.

La primera vez que reparé en el término "transfronterizo" fue al leer *El ir y venir: la relación transfronteriza* de Olivia Ruiz (1996). Creo que ha sido la única ocasión que reaccioné positivamente a un término o categoría con el que podía identificarme. Había otros con los que había jugado antes, pero siempre estaban en falta. Éste me quedaba mejor; era como si hubiese ido a la modista y el vestido no necesitara ninguna alteración. En su argumentación, Ruiz apunta que "lo transfronterizo implica procesos que rebasan los límites del territorio nacional; se refiere a personas y acciones que son extranacionales. Así, el término alude, por ejemplo, a los

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Con ello no excluyo a una cantidad de estudiosas/os de estos temas cuyos nombres podrán aparecer o no en este trabajo y que se han dedicado a hacer investigación en el campo que nos ocupa.

<sup>11</sup> En este sentido apelo a discusiones más amplias, no sólo con las múltiples propuestas de narrativas autobiográficas practicadas en la antropología, sino con una de las corrientes literarias inspirada por Cantú (1995), seguida de Urquijo-Ruiz (2012), el mismo Durán (2011) y otras/os escritoras/es latinas/os y chicanas/os en los Estados Unidos.

<sup>12</sup> En la última sección desarrollaré al respecto.

<sup>13</sup> Para más información sobre el debate, véase Durán (2011).



*commuters*, o sea las personas que viven de un lado de la línea nacional y trabajan en el otro" (Ruiz 1996: 56). Lo transfronterizo tiene bases materiales y culturales. Dentro de las materiales, se encuentran las economías de ambos países y el acceso a mejores precios de una y otra parte de la línea. Asimismo, se cuenta con salarios diferenciados, precios, mercancías, servicios y bienes. Es decir, no es difícil ver a norteamericanos consumir medicinas, alimentos, bebidas, música, arte y artesanías en la parte mexicana, y acudir a los médicos, especialmente a los dentistas mexicanos, por la diferencia en el costo.<sup>14</sup> De igual forma resulta cotidiano cruzar del lado americano a comprar artículos de vestir, electrodomésticos y productos de limpieza o intentar buscar un trabajo de forma documentada o indocumentada.

En el plano cultural, "la interacción se construye a través de las semejanzas en patrones de conducta, valores e idioma [...] de los dos lados de la frontera" (Ruiz 1996: 57). Para la autora, el proceso se lleva a cabo a través de decisiones que van desde cuestiones insignificantes y de corto plazo, como el uso del tiempo libre (asistir al cine, museos, conciertos, restaurantes, conferencias, etc.), hasta decisiones fuertes que conllevan el largo plazo, como la educación, el trabajo y el matrimonio. Hay decisiones y actividades que involucran también el plano emocional y "relaciones humanas que sitúan, centran y anclan a la gente en su vida diaria y la hacen sentirse más o menos cómoda en un lugar" (Ruiz 1996: 58). De ahí que los transfronterizos utilicemos diversas estrategias para bregar en los dos sistemas; algunas son conscientes y otras inconscientes. Éstas responden, la mayoría del tiempo, a disfrutar de las ventajas que proveen los dos países sin necesariamente caer en las categorías de 'binacionales, bilingües o biculturales', pero sin descartarlo tampoco. Señalo estas diferencias, en virtud de que una persona binacional, bilingüe o bicultural puede o no ser transfronteriza. Las definiciones del *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española* describen a una persona bilingüe como alguien "[q]ue habla dos lenguas" (DRAE 2019: s.v. *bilingüe*<sub>1</sub>); a una binacional como "[d]e dos naciones" (DRAE 2019: s.v. *binacional*<sub>1</sub>) y, a una bicultural, como "[c]aracterizad[a] por la coexistencia de dos culturas" (DRAE 2019: s.v. *bicultural*<sub>1</sub>). Sin embargo, ninguna de ellas está ligada a un ir y venir entre dos naciones. O sea, se puede ser bilingüe, binacional o bicultural sin vivir en una región fronteriza o sin cruzar frontera alguna.

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<sup>14</sup> A partir de la violencia en las fronteras mexicanas, cada vez se les ve menos. Sin embargo, estas relaciones norte-sur continúan. La violencia incrementó considerablemente a partir de su declaración de guerra contra el narco de Felipe Calderón en 2006. Las ciudades de las fronteras principalmente se vieron invadidas de soldados, policías federales y municipales, lo cual provocó más violencia. Los años de más alta violencia fueron entre 2008 y 2011. Lo anterior se puede verificar en Alvarado (2011); Booth (2012), Rodríguez (2011), Univisión (2011), Valencia (2010); y otros tantos que aparecieron en la prensa local, nacional e internacional durante el periodo de 2008 a 2012. Entre otras fuentes se puede consultar *La Vanguardia*, *El Diario de Juárez*, *El Paso Times*, *ABC*, *El País*, *The New York Times*, etc.

Está claro que el fenómeno del bilingüismo es mucho más complicado que lo que define el *DRAE*, ya que la lingüística, la sociolingüística, la psicología, la antropología, entre otras, han dedicado una enorme cantidad de páginas a su estudio.<sup>15</sup> La situación de los sujetos binacionales o que cuentan con doble nacionalidad también es compleja debido a las implicaciones legales que éstas – en cada Estado-Nación – requieran para sus ciudadanos,<sup>16</sup> aunque en la práctica sea menos notable esa complejidad. Y en cuanto a las personas biculturales sucede prácticamente la misma situación que en las anteriores en virtud de que un individuo puede ser parcialmente bicultural "en la medida que es capaz de trasladarse de una sociedad a otra e incorporar elementos culturales de ella (lengua, leyes, costumbres), puesto que la condición humana permite llegar a adaptarse a su paradigma y desenvolverse funcionalmente con normalidad en él" (Gómez García 2011: 10). Es decir, en nuestras fronteras<sup>17</sup> podemos encontrar varias combinaciones: seres bilingües que no poseen la doble nacionalidad o no son biculturales; personas binacionales monolingües y monoculturales o con cierto dominio en la segunda lengua (inglés o español en el caso que nos ocupa) pero con desconocimiento en la otra cultura; individuos bilingües, binacionales, biculturales y transfronterizos. Sin embargo, cabe tener en cuenta que "más allá de la clasificación basada en nacionalidad, documentada en un pasaporte, por ejemplo, y dejando aparte los casos de doble nacionalidad, los empeños clasificatorios de tipo identitario están abocados al fracaso, porque hay tantos criterios posibles que cualquier elección resultará irremediabilmente arbitraria" (Gómez García 2011: 10).

A pesar de lo dicho por Gómez García, y en total acuerdo con él, resulta casi inevitable caer en la tentación de catalogar, dado el afán humano de encontrarle sentido a las cosas y explicar nuestro mundo o a nuestras vidas. Para el caso que nos ocupa, Óscar J. Martínez en *Border People* (1994) hace una tipificación<sup>18</sup> de lo que él considera "las tipologías de los principales grupos poblacionales de las fronteras: mexicanos, México-americanos y angloamericanos" (Martínez 1994: 59, mi traducción). Explica que la principal diferencia entre estos habitantes fronterizos y otras personas del interior de México y de los Estados Unidos es el ambiente internacional.

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<sup>15</sup> Véase Gómez García (2011), Grosjean (1989; 1982), Mackey (1970; 1962).

<sup>16</sup> Por ejemplo, en Estados Unidos la ley de la doble nacionalidad ha estado vigente desde 1967 pero la de México no lo fue sino hasta 1997. De hecho, en ambos casos, los procesos migratorios fueron definitivos para que las leyes cambiaran. Cabe aclarar que hablo de doble nacionalidad en el entendido que no es doble ciudadanía, ya que ésta trae consigo derechos ciudadanos (votar, ser votado, responsabilidades fiscales, etc.). Para más información sobre las leyes de doble nacionalidad en Estados Unidos y en México, véase Anav Yedidia (1998), Robles Farías (2014).

<sup>17</sup> Menciono aquí nuestras fronteras, la mexicana y la estadounidense, pero lo anterior se puede también aplicar a cualquier frontera o nación, o tal vez al mundo entero.

<sup>18</sup> Existe una cantidad considerable de estudios sobre las identidades entre las fronteras México-Estados Unidos desde diferentes disciplinas. Véase p. ej. Vila (1998; 2000; 2003), Valenzuela Arce (1992; 1998), Zúñiga (1998a; 1998b; 2008).

Powerful transnational forces pull large number of borderlands into the orbit of the neighboring country, with a resulting array of cross-boundary relationships and lifestyles. Transnational interaction in the contemporary borderlands includes, but it is not limited to such phenomena as migration, employment, business transactions, tourism, trade, consumerism, cultural interchange, and social relationships (Martínez 1994: 59).

Cada tipología incluye las subcategorías pertinentes que, en ocasiones, son las mismas con sus especificidades según el lado de donde se encuentren, por ejemplo, las de "commuters", "binational consumers", "biculturalists" y "binationalists" (Martínez 1994: 67). Además, incluye otras subcategorías que corresponden a un grupo en especial; entre ellas menciona a los "transient migrants", "uniculturalists", "settler migrants", "assimilationists", "newcomers" "disadvantaged/advantaged immigrants", y "winter residents" (Martínez 1994: 68-79, 93, 119), entre otras. De tal suerte que gracias al texto de Martínez nos podemos dar una idea general de la complejidad de seres que habitamos y cruzamos (o no) las fronteras oficiales entre México y Estados Unidos, y las diferentes identidades que podemos o no adjudicarnos cuando reflexionamos sobre ellas.<sup>19</sup> Entonces, toda vez que tuve claras varias de las tipologías sobre quienes habitamos las fronteras, asumí el concepto "transfronteriza" dado por Ruiz porque me hablaba directamente. Tocaba mis experiencias, mis cruces constantes, mis posibilidades de escoger varias tácticas. Se refería a mi libertad de vivir en dos o tres mundos a un tiempo sin conflicto; de hablar en dos idiomas con diferentes registros sin aprietos; de decidir ser y estar en un espacio compartido entendiendo las complejidades de las geografías, de las políticas, de las economías y de las culturas. Pero había una pieza clave que me interesa aclarar: si para Ruiz "la interacción se construye a través de las semejanzas en patrones de conducta, valores e idioma [...] de los dos lados de la frontera" (Ruiz 1996: 57), para mí la interacción también se desarrolla y edifica a través de las diferencias, aunque resulte complejo admitirlo. Es fácil construir con semejanzas, pero las relaciones humanas en contextos de culturas en contacto se dan más a través de las diferencias. Por ejemplo, en el cruce hacia Estados Unidos indiscutiblemente nos ponemos tensos, aunque sepamos que tenemos todos los documentos en orden, que el auto está en regla y que no llevamos nada prohibido. Sin embargo, sabemos que el/la agente tiene una predisposición a que "todos somos sospechosos" y ahí encontramos una diferencia en el patrón de conducta, de valores y tal vez de idioma. Lo mismo sucede si viajamos de norte a sur y nos toca pasar a revisión. Tal vez en esa situación la diferencia sea mayor porque no es cotidiano<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> En la introducción de 'Sketches of identities from the México-U.S. Border (or the other way around)' juego un poco con esta idea de las identidades cambiantes, de lo que pensamos de nosotros y lo que piensan sobre nosotros por cómo nos vemos, de dónde somos y cómo nos presentamos. Véase Tabuenca Córdoba (2005).

<sup>20</sup> Para entrar a las ciudades fronterizas mexicanas (al menos en el norte, desconozco el proceso en la frontera sur) no se necesitan documentos y las revisiones aduanales son aleatorias, a través de un 'semáforo fiscal'. Dicho semáforo se enciende aleatoriamente en verde o rojo cada vez que pasa un auto hacia el lado mexicano. Si se

y, aunque sepamos que no debemos tener problemas, de cualquier forma hay una sensación de incomodidad.

¿Con quién construimos la interacción o la relación si cada vez que pasamos podemos encontrar diferentes oficiales en las garitas? Con todos y con nadie, pero, sobre todo, con la situación en sí. Me explico, cada individuo va a escoger cómo reaccionar ante un/a agente estadounidense que detiene la fila y 'cumple con su deber' – aunque sea por el pase rápido o la 'Línea Express'.<sup>21</sup> Su actitud en la espera dependerá de cómo decida tomar las acciones de aquél o aquéllos que le permitirán o negarán el acceso al país vecino. La decisión que tome el/la oficial, además de los documentos que presente, dependerá de cómo se responde a las preguntas que le haga. Las personas que no tienen este entrenamiento pueden padecer mucho más el proceso que quienes tenemos un conocimiento previo y años de práctica.<sup>22</sup> Propongo este ejemplo extremo a fin de ilustrar que el espacio de cruce, las políticas que conlleva y nuestro conocimiento del trámite son esenciales para que lo transfronterizo sea posible. A menos cruces, menos *transfronteridad*, menos intercambios, porque no concibo una relación transfronteriza sin un intercambio constante. En mi entendimiento de lo transfronterizo, una persona que vive en la frontera (de cualquier lado), si no cruza o pasa pocas veces al año, no puede considerarse transfronteriza pues carece de la experiencia del tránsito constante, del "ser experimentado fronterizo" que mencionan Irasema Coronado y Héctor Padilla (2006: 11), tal como observaremos en breve. Carecerán de los saberes específicos para las situaciones particulares en ambos lados de la frontera independientemente de si se es binacional, bilingüe o bicultural.<sup>23</sup>

Mi percepción de lo transfronterizo está pensada alrededor de una región geográfica determinada y formas de vida diversas e idiomas distintos de acuerdo con el territorio en que nos encontremos. Concuera con aquella de Ruiz (discutida antes)<sup>24</sup> y aquella de Stephen, y de otros geógrafos de la cultura, planeadores urbanos y antropólogos que examiné. Sin embargo, no está ceñida a una garita o a cuántas veces al día o al año se cruce, pero sí considero que los

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enciende en rojo, hay que pasar a una revisión aduanal. Ésta puede llevar unos instantes en lo que el/la oficial abre la cajuela y hace la señal de pase, o puede pasarse el automóvil a revisión de rayos X de forma aleatoria también.

<sup>21</sup> Después del 11 de septiembre de 2001 se creó el programa *Secure Electronic Network for Travelers Rapid Inspection* (SENTRI). El programa tiene como objetivo permitir un acceso más ligero, por garitas exclusivas, a los viajeros que entran a Estados Unidos después de una exhaustiva revisión de antecedentes penales y una entrevista personal que decidirá si la persona es confiable o no para pertenecer al programa. Los individuos que tienen acceso a este programa también pueden participar en otros similares (NEXUS y Global Entry). Hay otras garitas dedicadas a las personas que sin contar con el beneficio del SENTRI se supone que acceden más rápido que aquellas que aún no han solicitado visas de turista B1 o B2.

<sup>22</sup> En este caso 'la práctica no hace al maestro' pues por mucho que conozcamos el ejercicio y entrenemos nuestra paciencia, después de treinta minutos de espera en una fila de cinco autos la situación puede llegar a ser insoportable.

<sup>23</sup> O se encuentre en uno de los subgrupos mencionados por Martínez.

<sup>24</sup> Véase Ruiz (1996: 56s.).

cruces y los intercambios son importantes. Además, soy consciente de que existen otras fronteras de etnia, raza, género, clase, edad, situación migratoria, etc., que dan pie a distintas "vidas transfronterizas" (Stephen 2007) y cuyas complejidades son dignas de considerarse y reflexionarse en una discusión posterior. Aquí entretrejeré las dinámicas estructurales y los discursos sistemáticos y sistémicos de violencia real y simbólica a los que nos enfrentamos día a día.

De momento dejo estas ideas sobre la mesa y, a fin de ilustrar una de las relaciones transfronterizas poco visitadas por las y los investigadores,<sup>25</sup> paso a revisar tres textos coordinados por investigadoras/es que habitan en la región de Ciudad Juárez / El Paso. Intentaré hacer un ejercicio similar al de Javier Durán, para observar las relaciones académicas transfronterizas que se tienen entre uno y otro lado de la línea divisoria a través del discurso implícito y explícito de los textos y sus participantes, y no con el contenido.

### III.

Con tales concepciones en mente y a sabiendas de que los estudios fronterizos o sobre fronteras tienen una larga historia y que "han experimentado importantes cambios desde la segunda mitad del siglo XX a la fecha [...] [y] se han vuelto cada vez más inter y transdisciplinarios" (Tapia Ladino 2017: 62), realicé la búsqueda bibliográfica sobre lo transfronterizo, las relaciones transfronterizas y la *transfronteridad* para el presente trabajo. Como tendencia general noté que quienes realizan más estudios sobre el tema o utilizan el concepto consecuentemente, se encuentran haciendo investigación antropológica, geográfica, urbana o regional. La mayoría se enfoca en análisis sobre regiones de la Unión Europea, la frontera entre Brasil, Uruguay y Argentina, y la frontera entre México y Estados Unidos. Al condensar los asuntos de mi interés particular, revisé varios estudios de caso sobre alumnado transfronterizo bajo diversas perspectivas disciplinarias. Para mi sorpresa, sólo encontré una discusión sobre lo transfronterizo en literatura<sup>26</sup> intitulado 'Un diálogo binacional en el desierto de Sonora: El arte transfronterizo de *A sol pleno* de Inés Martínez de Castro y Mónica Luna' (2012) de Andrew M. Gordus.

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<sup>25</sup> En la revisión bibliográfica encontré una cantidad considerable de ensayos y libros que estudian el fenómeno transfronterizo en los siguientes temas: educación, métodos pedagógicos, *curricula*, etc.; estudiantes (identidades, anécdotas, historias de vida); economía, instituciones de gobierno; gobernanza; desarrollo urbano y regional, entre otros; pero ninguno que estudiara las publicaciones académicas transfronterizas y las relaciones de poder.

<sup>26</sup> Mi búsqueda no implica que no haya más trabajos sobre literatura de la frontera México-Estados Unidos que versen sobre lo transfronterizo. Lo que indica es que el término *transfronterizo* en sus distintas variedades no se encontró en ningún otro título de mi búsqueda. Sin embargo, los conceptos "binacional" y "transnacional" se hallaron en un buen número de estudios al respecto.

Dentro de la bibliografía examinada el proyecto que me resultó esencial fue el artículo 'Las fronteras, la movilidad y lo transfronterizo: Reflexiones para un debate' de Marcela Tapia Ladino (2017). En él hace una revisión de las discusiones sobre lo trans- y lo fronterizo "para pensar un marco explicativo que permita comprender qué convierte a una región o espacio fronterizo en transfronterizo" (Tapia Ladino 2017: 61). Tapia no repara en darnos un repaso profundo, ya que utiliza una amplia gama de fuentes que no observé en otros trabajos revisados. Por ello, además de las definiciones de Olivia Ruiz, tomo las conclusiones del trabajo de Tapia dada su revisión exhaustiva de lo escrito sobre el tema. Tapia explica que lo que convierte a una región fronteriza en transfronteriza no es sólo la cercanía de las poblaciones o las ciudades:

Son los intercambios, los cruces frecuentes de personas en ambos sentidos, los factores explicativos de esta configuración. La continuidad transfronteriza o las similitudes pueden ser un factor por considerar, como es el caso de las eurorregiones, pero por el contrario, las diferencias y por sobre todo las asimetrías, son los factores explicativos más relevantes para explicar el aumento de los cruces, o los intentos por cruzarla. Los casos más emblemáticos son el caso de la frontera mexicano estadounidense y, de un tiempo a la fecha, el borde externo de la Unión Europea [...] El despliegue de distintas prácticas sociales fronterizas convierte a la frontera en un recurso más allá de su configuración como contención o resguardo (Tapia Ladino 2017: 75).

Lo que vemos en esta serie de definiciones es algo similar a lo expuesto por Ruiz y sugerido por Martínez. Su propuesta final es muy ambiciosa y atractiva, ya que invita a mantener investigaciones que de alguna manera midan los intercambios y observen de qué forma se constituye la interacción a fin de "verificar o validar lo transfronterizo en las regiones o espacios fronterizos" (Tapia Ladino 2017: 75); sin duda, una labor de titanes. En este caso, su proyecto es mucho más abarcador y aprehensivo que el resto de las publicaciones que consulté. Como dije, Tapia es la que incluye discusiones teóricas sobre fronteras territoriales y culturales en las ciencias sociales y la geografía, en las cuales discute a estudiosos de América Latina, Europa y Estados Unidos, así como a académicos que se encuentran en otras latitudes. Contrariamente a lo que observé en casi toda la bibliografía (libros y ensayos académicos) de las y los autores norteamericanos o europeos, o cuya investigación está publicada mayormente en inglés. Ellos rara vez incluyen en sus fuentes o en sus proyectos más amplios<sup>27</sup> a estudiosas/os latinoamericanas/os y, cuando lo hacen, las menciones son escasas. Ésta es una cuestión que he debatido en otros foros<sup>28</sup> y que al abordar este tema lo reencuentro. De ahí me surge la pregunta,

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<sup>27</sup> Me refiero a coordinaciones de libros o proyectos de investigación en conjunto y específicamente a aquéllas/os que estudian la frontera México-EE. UU.

<sup>28</sup> En diferentes artículos y conferencias he hablado sobre este tema de la asimetría o desigualdad entre las y los académicos de uno y otro lado de la frontera debido a las diferencias económicas propias de ambos países. También se da la inequidad en la distribución de obras o en el manejo de la lengua, por ejemplo. El más reciente artículo con fecha en el volumen de 2019 aunque el libro se publicó en 2018. Véase Tabuenca Córdoba (2019).

¿por qué una buena cantidad de académicos/as norteamericanos/as y europeas/os de estudios fronterizos no incluyen en sus investigaciones a investigadores/as de Latinoamérica? ¿Por qué en un sinnúmero de publicaciones se invisibiliza a esas subalternidades que producen un conocimiento (trans)fronterizo? ¿Será que la mayoría de las/los investigadoras/es latinoamericanas/os prefieren escribir en español (como hoy lo privilegio) y los y las académicas/os del primer mundo deciden no leer en español porque son inconscientes de ello, porque no lo comprenden bien o porque no consideran importante ese conocimiento local? Cualquier respuesta es posible. Y quizá parte de la respuesta de David Newman, quien desde el Néguv afirma: "Language remains the one great boundary which, for so many of us, remains difficult to cross, in the absence of a single, global, borderless form of communication" (Newman 2006: 147s.). La consideración ante las palabras de Newman sería: ¿por qué pensar en que la lengua del imperio debe ser la principal y única "global, borderless form of communication"? ¿Por qué no pensar en otras posibilidades como las de dejar la comodidad y saltar las fronteras lingüísticas o buscar grupos transfronterizos o transnacionales que apoyen con proyectos de traducción, como se ha hecho en distintas latitudes?

Esta ausencia sistemática de inclusión de las academias latinoamericanas (al menos en los Estados Unidos) en sus estudios sobre el caso que nos ocupa me remite a lo que Iris M. Young llama "imperialismo cultural" (Young 2009: 104)<sup>29</sup> y que yo he nombrado "colonialismo intelectual" (Tabuenca Córdoba 1997). Young amplía este concepto al describir las cinco caras de la opresión. Para ella, el imperialismo cultural se da cuando los productos culturales se normalizan o se vuelven universales porque pertenecen a la experiencia y cultura de un grupo dominante, así que son "aquéllos que están más ampliamente diseminados, son expresión de la experiencia, valores, objetivos y logros de dichos grupos" (Young 2009: 103). Es decir, si la experiencia más ampliamente diseminada es aquella promovida por los grupos hegemónicos (en inglés), se convierte en representación de la realidad fronteriza o transfronteriza; entonces las voces de los grupos 'imperializados' se ven desplazadas o silenciadas, ya que son voces escritas en el idioma colonizado. De tal suerte que, aunque en América Latina y desde la frontera mexicana existan suficientes expresiones que estudien los fenómenos regionales fronterizos y transfronterizos, o en palabras de Young, existan formas culturales alternas, la academia dominante "[...] impone a los grupos [académicos] oprimidos su experiencia e interpretación de la vida social" (Young 2009: 105) y nos resta agencia. Comparativamente

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<sup>29</sup> Sus ideas sobre las cinco caras de la opresión aparecieron por primera vez en *Justice and the politics of difference* de 1990. Sin embargo, para propósitos del presente trabajo, utilizo la versión en español de 2009, de ahí la diferencia en los años dentro del texto y en la sección bibliográfica.

hablando, al explicar las diferencias entre las literaturas de las fronteras, denominé "colonialismo intelectual" a las actitudes hegemónicas tanto en México como en Estados Unidos (y otras latitudes) que se empeñan en exaltar como fronterizo únicamente lo chicano, lo latino o lo mexicano del centro que habla de la frontera, sin tomar en cuenta las expresiones literarias y culturales que se dan en la frontera norte mexicana o en el norte de México. En este sentido me arriesgaría a decir que no sólo se nos silencia e invisibiliza, sino que se nos desterritorializa, ya que, en el caso de las y los (académicos) transfronterizos o las y los fronterólogos / *wet minds* se nos adscribe a un solo lado de la frontera, aunque nosotras/os pensemos – y en múltiples ocasiones estemos – en los dos. En 2007, después de algunos eventos claros de colonialismo intelectual y desterritorialización, definí la naturaleza del proyecto de *wet minds* en la presentación del avance de la publicación del *Diccionario de Estudios Culturales latinoamericanos* coordinado por Mónica Szurmuk y Robert MacGee Irwin en la Ciudad de México:

El grupo lo comprendemos un grupo de mexicanas y mexicanos de corazón quienes, a excepción de mi persona<sup>30</sup>, se encuentran trabajando en universidades de Estados Unidos de forma documentada, o gracias a la ventaja fronteriza de poseer la doble nacionalidad legal o ilegalmente.<sup>31</sup> Nos autonombramos 'fronterólogos' y nos consideramos una comunidad desprestigiada por nuestra posición geográfica y preferencia intelectual. Bautizados por Carlos Monsiváis como *WetMinds* nuestras reflexiones han girado en dos direcciones: (1) El papel que tenemos en la academia desde el llamado 'México de afuera' y (2), el rol que jugamos en la academia norteamericana como mexicanos, méxicoamericanos, chicanos o fronterizos (Tabuenca en Durán 2011: 24).

Aproveché mi posición de enunciación transfronteriza para dar a conocer nuestra postura académica y de agencia, en virtud de que en el *Diccionario* había una clara 'no descentralización de los centros', aunque se reforzaba la posición centralista, sin tomar en cuenta los saberes en entradas que podrían haber correspondido a fronterólogos que tenían muchos más años, publicaciones y experiencia en ciertos temas referentes a las fronteras que los que los coordinadores conocían.

Como testimonio de lo anterior y que sugieren otros retazos de respuestas a estos saberes de aquí y de allá, presento dos textos que considero representativos de esas relaciones académicas

<sup>30</sup> En ese momento trabajaba para El Colegio de la Frontera Norte en su sede en Ciudad Juárez.

<sup>31</sup> Una práctica común, antes de la ley de la doble nacionalidad para las y los mexicanos en las ciudades fronterizas, era que, si se nacía en Estados Unidos, los padres registraban a los hijos en México a fin de que también tuvieran la 'doble nacionalidad', aunque este registro no estuviera dentro de los parámetros de la ley. Una vez que se estableció la ley, si la persona era (o es) descubierta teniendo un acta mexicana, ambos países aplican una multa. De hecho, es sabido que algunos políticos fronterizos mexicanos han violado la ley estadounidense de no ser votados en otro país so pena de perder la nacionalidad, pero no ha pasado a mayores. El caso más sonado en Ciudad Juárez fue el del dos veces alcalde de la ciudad Héctor Murguía Lardizábal; sin embargo, no pasó nada pues se comenta que hay muchos políticos de otros partidos que están en la misma situación y no quieren que salga a la luz pública.



transfronterizas y las relaciones centro vs. periferia. Uno fue publicado en México y el otro en Estados Unidos. El primero, *Cities and citizenship at the U.S.-Mexico Border. The El Paso del Norte Metropolitan Region*, editado por Kathleen Staudt, Julia E. Monárrez Fragoso y César M. Fuentes (2010), se enfoca en estudiar principalmente el proceso de exportación de la industria global manufacturera dentro de una frontera internacional urbanizada.<sup>32</sup> El contenido de cada uno de los capítulos muestra las destrezas de cada investigador/a dentro de su especialidad (antropología, ciencias políticas, sociología, pedagogía y planeación urbana), y los ejemplos que se plasman en el volumen sirven para estudiar los espacios transnacionales y transfronterizos de la frontera entre México y Estados Unidos, así como otras fronteras. El punto de partida del volumen surge después de una estancia de investigación de Staudt en El Colegio de la Frontera Norte en su sede en Ciudad Juárez, de los constantes ires y venires de una ciudad a la otra por parte de varias/os de las/os autoras/es, y de sus intercambios intelectuales y vivenciales.<sup>33</sup> Así pues, el volumen integra estudios comparativos de académicas/os de ambos lados de la frontera y de la región dentro de los cuales se plantean "new empirical research, methodological challenges to existing ways of doing research, and theoretical advances to understand the region with vivid, accessible analyses of content" (Staudt / Monárrez Fragoso / Fuentes 2010: xv) realizados mayormente por investigadoras/es mexicanas/os. Y aquí el idioma no se experimentó como barrera ya que fue posible presentar el *border gnosis / border knowledge*<sup>34</sup> del subalterno con las estrategias y el lenguaje del amo.<sup>35</sup> En este caso se ve también una negociación entre las relaciones de poder en la academia marcadas por las relaciones transfronterizas: aunque el libro incluye más artículos de las y los investigadores de

<sup>32</sup> Véase Staudt / Monárrez Fragoso / Fuentes (2010: ix).

<sup>33</sup> Como dato adicional señalo que el periodo de la estancia de abril 2008 a mayo 2009 estuvo marcado por una intensa situación de violencia en Ciudad Juárez que alcanzó niveles nunca antes experimentados en ninguna región del país. Dado el índice de asesinatos (aproximadamente 4000 en los dos años completos), la ciudad llegó a ser nombrada 'la más violenta de México'. *Proceso, La Crónica, El Universal, CBSN, la BBC, CNN* y otros medios noticiosos dieron cuenta de lo que estaba pasando en la ciudad y el país. Para más información sobre este período se puede ver: EFE (2010), El Universal (2012), Emmott (2009), Redacción La Vanguardia (2010), NTX (2010), Petersen (2010), RTVE (2009), Vulliamy (2009).

<sup>34</sup> Como expliqué en el inicio, esta denominación de Walter Dignolo se refiere a la oportunidad de imaginar la posibilidad de "teorizar desde la frontera" pensando en ésta como "un umbral, como lo liminal, como dos lados conectados por un puente; la frontera como una locación geográfica y epistemológica" (Dignolo 2000: 309; mi traducción). Empero, para Dignolo es muy importante la frontera geográfica desde la cual las y los académicos no solo se dediquen a estudiar los fenómenos fronterizos o pretendan teorizar sobre ella; sino lo que requiere esta gnosis fronteriza es que se involucren en una desobediencia epistemológica disciplinaria y realmente lleven al primer plano la experiencia existencial de habitar la frontera. Para Dignolo, si no se toma ese riesgo, el pensamiento fronterizo no florecerá (véase Dignolo 2000: xvii). Este *border thinking / border gnosis* que propone Dignolo no viene sólo de vivir o experimentar las fronteras, sino de ser conscientes de ello y ejercitar la teoría y la práctica.

<sup>35</sup> Utilizo el entendimiento de Josefina Ludmer desarrollado a lo largo de "Tretas del débil": "[E]l gesto superior que consiste en dar la palabra al subalterno" (Ludmer 1984: 51).

Juárez<sup>36</sup>, Staudt aparece como primera coordinadora. Tal vez sea porque desde su proyecto de estancia ése fue uno de sus compromisos; quizá porque ella es la académica con más antigüedad, la que domina la lengua del imperio y quien posee la mayor concentración de conocimiento académico y editorial; o probablemente porque no nos podemos zafar de ciertas convenciones jerárquicas; aquí las del reconocimiento académico, idioma y acceso a las editoriales estadounidenses. En realidad, las razones no importan, ya que la publicación es un acierto pues abre el espacio a otros académicos transfronterizos a un mercado mayor<sup>37</sup> y muestra la voluntad de trabajar en conjunto a pesar de las fronteras lingüísticas, etarias, genéricas, étnicas, geográficas, etcétera.

*Juntos pero no revueltos. Estudios sobre la frontera Texas-Chihuahua*, coordinado por Irasema Coronado<sup>38</sup> y Héctor Padilla<sup>39</sup> (2006), aparece con el sello de la Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez y cuenta con una propuesta similar al anterior. En el prefacio los editores reconocen que el propósito principal del volumen es

estimar el acercamiento entre los residentes de ambos lados de la frontera y, en particular, entre las comunidades académicas de nuestras universidades. Esto es así porque creemos que la frontera representa un territorio de oportunidades en el que debemos aprender a trabajar como lo hacen los *habitantes fronterizos experimentados*, es decir, como lo hace la gente que cruza a diario y sabe qué comprar y en qué lado de la frontera para optimizar sus recursos (Coronado / Padilla 2006: 11).

Con este objetivo Coronado y Padilla subrayan que hay un distanciamiento entre ambas academias, a pesar de haber una cercanía geográfica. De hecho, ponen de manifiesto que los "habitantes fronterizos experimentados" tienen una capacidad mayor que los expertos de

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<sup>36</sup> Si contamos los artículos en coautoría como medio artículo y tomamos a Méndez y Payán como 'transfronterizos mexicanos', la ecuación sería seis a cuatro. César Fuentes y Sergio Peña viven en El Paso pero trabajan en Ciudad Juárez (son 'transfronterizos mexicanos'). Zulma Méndez creció en Juárez y para la fecha de publicación todavía vivía y trabajaba en El Paso, pero participaba activamente con organizaciones no gubernamentales en Juárez ('transfronteriza mexicana'). Kathy Staudt es 'transfronteriza americana' 'de corazón' pues una gran parte de su vida cotidiana transcurre en El Paso, aunque participa activamente con organizaciones en Ciudad Juárez. Cynthia Bejarano vive en Las Cruces, Nuevo México y sus traslados a Ciudad Juárez son eventuales. Además, es parte de una organización de apoyo a las familias de las víctimas de feminicidio en Ciudad Juárez. El resto, con la excepción de Martha Miker, quien está adscrita a la Dirección de Nogales, viven en Ciudad Juárez y rara vez cruzan a El Paso.

<sup>37</sup> No pretendo que se lea esta observación como una crítica personal a Kathleen Staudt por aparecer como primera autora. La considero una académica y activista de primera. Lo aclaro porque podría interpretarse de esa forma. Mi reflexión surgió en el momento en que analizaba el libro como objeto y su presentación. Lo mismo habría sucedido si el primer autor fuese alguien que posee más prestigio académico que los demás. Mi punto era señalar que no importa dónde ni cómo, hay convenciones y relaciones de poder que difícilmente podemos esquivar.

<sup>38</sup> Irasema Coronado es originalmente de Nogales, Arizona, de donde son sus antepasados. Trabajó durante algún tiempo en El Colegio de la Frontera Norte en Nogales durante los noventa. Ahora radica y trabaja en El Paso pero participa constantemente en proyectos con la UACJ y con organizaciones no gubernamentales en ambos lados de la frontera.

<sup>39</sup> Héctor Padilla, como muchos de los habitantes de la frontera norte mexicana, posee la doble nacionalidad, pero vive y trabaja en Ciudad Juárez, salvo cuando cruza para dar un par de clases de ciencias políticas en español a la Universidad de Texas en El Paso. Aunque es proficiente en inglés, prefiere comunicarse en español.

desarrollar un *border thinking* / *border gnosis* dada su disposición a experimentar, ya que en la introducción comentan que las y los académicos fronterizos sólo estudian "uno de los lados de la frontera sin buscar sus conexiones con el otro lado o sin abordar fenómenos comparativos. Lo *fronterizo* es una variable supuesta pero inexplorada [...], los académicos aparecen, entonces [...] *juntos pero no revueltos*" (Coronado / Padilla 2006: 11). Parecería que los coordinadores respondieran a las palabras de Mignolo cuando plantea que "studying the border doesn't lead necessarily to border thinking ... unless scholars engage in epistemological disciplinary disobedience and bring to the fore the existential experience of dwelling in the border" (Mignolo 2012: xvi). Es decir que el llamado de Padilla y Coronado a realizar estudios comparativos y proyectos de investigación transfronterizos abrirá la posibilidad del verdadero florecimiento de un *border gnosis* / *border thinking*.<sup>40</sup> Si bien estoy de acuerdo con esta propuesta, no coincido con que en el momento de la publicación no había estudios comparativos entre ambas fronteras, ni los investigadores trabajaban "juntos pero no revueltos". Tal vez haya una tendencia a que así sea; pero al menos en el ámbito de la literatura y la cultura fronterizas<sup>41</sup> hay una historia de trabajos conjuntos, especialmente en las fronteras de las Californias, Sonora, Arizona, Texas, Coahuila y Tamaulipas. En la edición se reconocen trabajos enfocados hacia las ciencias sociales, ciencias políticas, la lingüística y los estudios regionales; las y los autores integran el profesorado de la Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez o de la Universidad de Texas en El Paso, donde trabajan Padilla y Coronado. El volumen de Coronado y Padilla está publicado en español para difundirse a un público hispanohablante por lo que se hicieron las traducciones correspondientes. Al igual que en el libro *Cities and citizenship at the U.S.-Mexico Border*, me llaman la atención dos detalles. El primero, que el volumen publicado por una universidad mexicana incluya más artículos de las y los profesores estadounidenses (6 de 10); y que la académica estadounidense tome el primer puesto en los créditos, sobre todo porque en esta situación, quien tiene el contacto editorial es el investigador mexicano. Ahora bien, sería posible que se eligiera el orden por trayectoria y alfabeto como suele darse en la academia. De cualquier manera, señalo esta particularidad del volumen como un dato interesante de estas relaciones académicas-transfronterizas que parecieran no ser jerárquicas, pero finalmente se mantiene, en cierto grado, el colonialismo intelectual. A este respecto, existen dos libros más que se me

<sup>40</sup> Véase Coronado / Padilla (2006: 11). Aquí pienso en el *border thinking* de Mignolo y en la habilidad que tienen las personas de manejarse en su comunidad fronteriza. Lo *fronterizo* lo entiendo, además, dentro de sus límites nacionales, mientras lo *transfronterizo* trasciende estos límites nacionales y desarrolla una forma de vida capaz de manejarse en dos naciones a un tiempo sin necesariamente arrojarse a lo binacional, bilingüe o bicultural. Por ejemplo, hay muchas personas que tienen estas destrezas sin saber ambos idiomas.

<sup>41</sup> Véase Tabuenca Córdoba (2018; 2017; 1998; 1997), Castillo / Tabuenca Córdoba (2002).

quedaron en el tintero y que presentan las similitudes ya presentadas. Los textos son *Cultura e identidad en la frontera México-Estados Unidos*, coordinado por Héctor Padilla y Consuelo Pequeño (2009), un volumen que circunscribe tanto temas como investigadoras/es transfronterizos. Los compiladores logran un buen balance de autoras/es de uno y otro lado de la frontera. El otro es el volumen de Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez y Joshiah Heyman, *The U.S.-Mexico Transborder Region. Cultural Dynamics and Historical Interactions* (2017), en el cual no se incluye a nadie de la frontera norte mexicana (como si la dinámica histórica y cultural sólo se produjera del lado estadounidense de la línea). Salvo Amado Alarcón de nacionalidad y residencia española, que trabaja en la Universidad Rovira i Virgii en Cataluña, el resto labora en universidades de Estados Unidos y no hay ninguna indicación en sus biografías que hable de afiliaciones con universidades mexicanas. Llama la atención en este texto la ausencia de voces 'del otro lado' en un volumen así, pues los coordinadores han colaborado (y participan) con grupos de investigación fronterizos mexicanos y son reconocidos por su activismo académico y social.

Estos ejemplos que aparecieron en mi región sobre el tema nos permiten observar no sólo algunas políticas editoriales que funcionan en este andamiaje de lo transfronterizo y sus relaciones, sino las diferencias y la asimetría que aún existen entre la academia norteamericana y la mexicana, a pesar de que se percibe una aparente equidad. En este sentido, soy consciente de que hay mucha más producción académica en nuestra zona y en otros sitios de la frontera México-Estados Unidos. También tengo conocimiento de la labor que se ha hecho por establecer contactos entre otras fronteras, como la que llevó a cabo el proyecto Río Bravo / Mediterráneo<sup>42</sup> y aquéllas que han surgido a principios de este siglo, como son las trans-americanas, la chicano-palestina, la chilena-mexicana, la sudasiática-americana y otras que comparan diversos contextos fronterizos en países latinoamericanos y europeos.<sup>43</sup>

#### IV.

El colonialismo intelectual, el imperialismo cultural o el deseo de imponer una visión o acción dominante sobre una zona periférica han existido siempre. En nuestras discusiones académicas, se ha acrecentado desde finales del siglo pasado hasta nuestros días. Para nuestro tema vuelvo al anti-ensayo de Javier Durán 'Wet Minds, Bookleggers, and the Place of Borders and Diásporas in U.S. Academic Circles' a fin de ilustrar auto-etno-biográficamente lo complejo de habitar diferentes fronteras en México y Estados Unidos. En su artículo argumenta sobre el

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<sup>42</sup> Véase El Río Bravo / Mediterráneo (s.f.).

<sup>43</sup> Véase MacKee Irwin (2018).

desprecio que tienen los académicos mexicanos – principalmente del centro de la República – y algunos grupos de la academia norteamericana, hacia las y los profesores mexicanos que estudiamos en Estados Unidos, sobre todo a aquéllas/os de nosotros que estudiamos temas de frontera. Lo anterior debido al estigma que las ciudades fronterizas, su población y los mexicanos en Estados Unidos han tenido desde principios del siglo pasado en el discurso centralista nacional. Un punto que merece enfatizarse es que aún y cuando aquéllas/os académicas/os de fronteras hemos querido abrir la comunicación, quienes están en el centro oyen, pero no escuchan, como es el caso que discute Durán con Carlos Monsiváis.

Hace un detallado seguimiento desde que el escritor de *Amor Perdido* se refiere como *wet minds* a un grupo de estudiantes doctorales mexicanos que junto con él asistían a una conferencia. Lo que en un principio le pareció una ocurrencia, al comentarlo con un colega se convirtió en una reflexión sobre el nivel de subalternidad que el término denotaba. Lo anterior, dada la connotación negativa del vocablo *mojado / wetback* y por la actitud de superioridad del crítico (consciente o inconsciente) y el desprecio con el que hace algunos años se trataba a las y los profesores mexicanos y chicanos en los departamentos de español en los Estados Unidos. Básicamente, la expresión implicaba la percepción de que las y los académicos mexicanos que trabajan en los Estados Unidos no han alcanzado el nivel de reconocimiento y respeto en los círculos culturales mexicanos, además de que *wet back / wet mind* puede ser considerado como mano de obra académica barata.<sup>44</sup> Durán expone que, a fin de profundizar en el tema, se invitó a Carlos Monsiváis al congreso anual de LASA a celebrarse en Puerto Rico en 2006, para tener una conversación con un grupo de 'mentes mojadas' y saber cuáles eran sus comentarios sobre la existencia o no de las y los por él bautizadas/os *wet minds*, y la situación del centro vs. periferia. Para nuestra sorpresa, el crítico negó la autoría del término y se limitó a hacer generalizaciones sobre las culturas de las fronteras y el supuesto trabajo que debemos llevar a cabo en las comunidades, no sólo académicas, sino vecinales,<sup>45</sup> a pesar de que el contenido de las ponencias y comentarios de las y los académicos del panel giraban en torno a elementos clave para que el escritor respondiera directamente. Incluso fue tanto lo que se distanció del tema sobre el que intentábamos reflexionar, que en la sesión de preguntas y respuestas se suscitó una discusión con un par de asistentes que sintieron que estábamos faltándole al respeto al

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<sup>44</sup> Véase Durán (2011: 20).

<sup>45</sup> Considero que la sugerencia de Monsiváis es acertada pero que no sólo aplicaría a los *wet minds*, sino a todas y todos los que hemos logrado tener puestos en la academia y fuera de ella como un compromiso con nuestra sociedad. Aclaro, como Javier Durán, que no es mi intención crear una polémica con Monsiváis ahora que no puede responder. En ocasiones anteriores y antes de su fallecimiento ya yo lo había expresado por escrito sin que tal vez Monsiváis hubiera reparado en ello, véase Tabuenca Córdoba (1997; 1998; 2002),

maestro y a nuestra misma posición académica por utilizar el 'yo' al leer las ponencias o emitir nuestras opiniones. Uno de los comentarios post-panel y post-conferencia que hemos exteriorizado quienes participamos en el evento fue que es difícil abrir una discusión sobre estos temas con algunos círculos académicos mexicanos en México, Estados Unidos y ultramar debido a la visión negativa que se tiene de la frontera norte, lo transfronterizo o 'el otro México'.<sup>46</sup> En sus reflexiones finales Durán recobra y subvierte la categoría de *wet mind* y amplía mi propuesta sobre este proyecto y su naturaleza al denominarnos también contrabandistas del pensamiento, traficantes de "saberes y leeres", "fayuqueros" académicos (Durán 2011: 27). Deja también abierta la posibilidad de crear un nuevo paradigma entre las relaciones centro-periferia, nación-frontera, así como alta cultura y expresiones populares; pero su búsqueda explícita, al igual que la nuestra, continúa, como lo pudimos constatar en los ejemplos.

Al leer el artículo de Javier Durán me surgieron varias preguntas: ¿de haber estado entre académicos/as mexicanos/as y no entre *wet minds*, les habría Monsiváis solicitado que regresaran o siquiera habría intentado pedirles regresar a tener presencia e impacto en sus barrios y sus comunidades como lo hizo con nosotras/os? ¿Les habría dicho lo mismo a otras/os académicos en general discutiendo otros temas? ¿Habríamos tenido la misma respuesta si todas nuestras intervenciones hubiesen sido en inglés y él hubiera tenido que responder en ese idioma? ¿Habría podido desarticular ese enfoque basado en un imperialismo cultural que ha perdurado por más de cien años? Desafortunadamente ya no lo sabremos pues el autor de *Días de guardar* falleció en 2010 y nunca retomamos el asunto, aun cuando varios del grupo coincidimos con él en un par de congresos. Me pregunto si estos cuestionamientos son sólo actos de retórica cuyas respuestas son predecibles dados los discursos preexistentes. De ser así, estaría negando la posibilidad de tener estas y otras comunidades transfronterizas; estaría anulando las futuras conversaciones, reuniones y publicaciones sobre el tema, estaría desestimando toda la historia al respecto, estaría invisibilizando la propuesta de Durán y la mía,

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<sup>46</sup> Para tener una visión más completa respecto a las controversias de lo fronterizo, en especial a la literatura de la frontera norte o del norte de México, sus críticas/os y su (des)prestigio, consultar los artículos 'Otra mirada a la literatura del norte', de Diana Palaversich; 'La literatura fronteriza: Una vez más entre las muchas que hoy hablan por México', de Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz; y 'Nomos del norte: Nuevas tendencias de la recepción de la narcoliteratura mexicana entre medios, academia y gobierno', de Heriberto Yépez, en el volumen editado por Cota Torres y otros (2014), así como la polémica Lemus-Parra (2005) en *Letras Libres*. Aquí mismo aprovecho para señalar que no es sólo la academia mexicana, estadounidense y de ultramar, sino que es una percepción del sentido común que las ciudades del norte de México son ciudades de 'vicio y perdición', en donde sólo habitan sexoservidoras, contrabandistas, narcotraficantes, coyotes, sicarios, asesinos de mujeres y otros seres deleznable para la sociedad en general y 'las buenas conciencias' en particular. Todo lo anterior torna más compleja la discusión pues hay un discurso preconcebido difícil de penetrar y desarticular.

y estaría rechazando mis propios saberes y leeres fronterizos, y con ellos a mi comunidad de *wet minds*.<sup>47</sup>

Antes de concluir quisiera regresar a las palabras de Norma Alarcón en el epígrafe ya que, como hemos venido observando, es difícil combatir un estigma desde el punto de vista teórico. Sin embargo, es posible que Javier Durán intente combatir el estigma apropiándose del mismo lenguaje del agravio, consciente o inconscientemente. Posiciona el denuedo de ser un *wet mind*, un fayuquero o un contrabandista, y lo coloca en el campo de los saberes y leeres. Así, nos reterritorializa en nuestro sitio privilegiado de transfronterizos descolonizados. Entonces, ¿cómo entender la aceptación de los términos provenientes de la criminalidad y la discriminación? ¿Por qué prefiere utilizar los vocablos de procedencia ilegal y prejuiciosa que el de subcontratación? ¿Debemos asumirnos como 'terroristas' del conocimiento (trans)fronterizo porque nuestros argumentos son 'bombas' contrahegemónicas? ¿Es el lenguaje del odio o de la subversión del sistema político, el que disrumpe en la transfronteridad? Tal vez el crítico sonoreense considere que como habitantes y estudiosas/os de las fronteras, transfronterizas/os, desplazadas/os, invisibilizadas/os y sujetas/os al imperialismo cultural o al colonialismo intelectual de México, Estados Unidos y otras latitudes, nuestro conocimiento también es ilícito, censurable, como las actividades 'propias' de la región, por ello hay que introducirlo a la academia de contrabando. De ser así, es necesario comprometernos a continuar produciendo ese *border thinking / border gnosis* desde nuestras periferias de forma regular / legal para nosotras/os, tal vez irregular / ilegal para quienes nos esquivan; vamos a seguir enseñando e investigando en nuestras universidades; y vamos a proseguir con nuestra invitación abierta al diálogo. Para este caso, las palabras de Rolando Romero y Elena L. Delgado al hablar del proyecto de Walter Mignolo son adecuadas: "[La propuesta] nos obliga a pensar en la ética y la política de la enseñanza y la investigación, la producción institucional del conocimiento, y nuestra inversión (como académicos) en la perpetuación tanto de las diferencias coloniales como de las injusticias sociales" (Delgado / Romero 2000: 7; mi traducción). Son afirmaciones adecuadas pues, como observamos, nuestra presencia y producción son sólo un palimpsesto en las teorías y textos (trans)fronterizos. Finalmente, mientras los *wetminds*, *border thinkers*, fronterólogos, fayuqueros y terroristas del conocimiento discutimos sobre nuestro sitio en la academia, nuestra desterritorialización y coloniaje, las caravanas de migrantes avanzan; Trump

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<sup>47</sup> Incluyo en la mía a las y los participantes de nuestra mesa en el congreso de LASA 2006 y a algunas/os citadas/os en la nota 10. Con ello no quiero decir que no haya otras comunidades que puedan asumirse como tales una vez continuada esta discusión. Tal vez haya personas que, sin adscribirse exactamente a la definición del proyecto, se sientan políticamente identificadas con él y lo asuman como postura política, como se hizo con la identidad chicana en su momento (y todavía en este momento).

persiste en su cinismo y su odio; militares y civiles armados se despliegan en su frontera sur estadounidense; y miles de desplazados, desterritorializados, colonizados, prejuizados y visibilizados, mantienen la esperanza y permanecen caminando ... llegando al norte.

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## **Religious and Denominational References in Chicano Literature – a Transborder Way of Narrating Identity**

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### **Introduction: Religion and Border – a Dynamic Relationship**

This article understands the US-Mexican border not only as a border between nations, but as a border between religious denominations. In Chicano literary texts, such as work by Rudolfo Anaya and José Antonio Villarreal, Mexican Catholicism and US-Protestantism combine to form a third, unique religiousness. This new religiousness neither completely rejects old nor new but parallels both, establishing its own identity – a transborder and transdenominational identity. Various denominational and other religious references on different narrative levels serve the authors as literary means to transform the line that separates into a fruitful, identity-founding space.<sup>1</sup>

Border discourse and Chicano research are closely connected.<sup>2</sup> Here, the border can be looked upon as literal as well as figurative, that is, the real, physical, political border on the one hand, and the border as metaphor on the other.<sup>3</sup> While the latter has been gaining more and more scholarly attention, it is also important to keep the literal border in mind, especially in these times when political borders are becoming disturbingly robust.<sup>4</sup> However, this twofold notion of 'border' within the Chicano context is particularly productive regarding literature, culture, theory, and identity. 'Border' stands as a close relative to another, structurally equally twofold paradigm in Chicano literature: that of religion.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> While the term 'denomination' in this article refers to the Christian denominations Catholicism and Protestantism (without further differentiation of Protestant denominations), the term 'religion' is used to refer to Christianity without denominational distinction as well as religious concepts other than Christianity.

<sup>2</sup> As not to complicate my text further, I resign the gendered specification of 'Chicano' and 'Chicana' (Chicana/o, Chican@, ChicanX), apart from points where obviously only women are included. As I work with primary texts of male authors only, the term 'Chicano' is most times sufficiently correct anyway.

<sup>3</sup> See Goodman (2015: 155).

<sup>4</sup> Ever since the mid-1980s, the metaphorical border has been of academic interest. Tabuenca Córdoba sees this "tendency toward a metaphorical, rather than literally based appropriation of border experience") as highly problematic (Tabuenca Córdoba 2013: 456). She suspects an "intellectual colonialism" that affects mainly the population on the Mexican side of the border when the metaphorical border gains predominance over the geopolitical border (see Tabuenca Córdoba 2013: 454-459).

<sup>5</sup> In this article, I use the widest definition of religion possible, one that includes organized and officially established religions as well as the most individualistic personal religiousness and spirituality.

Religion in literature can, and of course does, mirror religiosity and therefore can be understood in its literal sense. Similar to the border, religion also becomes a metaphor and can, in its figurative sense, be read as a poetical expression for something else like cultural identity. This double meaning is valid for the combination of border and religion: in a literal sense, border and religion interact and determine one another. Apart from language, religion is one of the most significant cultural elements that constitute Latin America and North America as different cultural spaces. Such a distinction between a (mostly) Spanish speaking, Catholic world and a (mostly) English speaking, Protestant world has historically grown and does not precede the arrival of European conquerors and settlers.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the US-Mexican border in its literal sense is not a 'natural' one; it is the result of the European conquest and its subsequent settlement, with different motivations on each side. Different denominations are not only a consequence of colonization in the sense of specific cultural features imprinted on the forthcoming population (in the sense of 'we are Catholic/Protestant because we are here'), they are also crucial factors in building these differences in the first place (in the sense of 'we are here because we are Catholic/Protestant').

In a metaphoric sense, religion 'becomes' a notion of border. In literature, both border and religion can be used to narrate – and by narrating to some extent create – a new identity. Taking these circumstances into consideration, this article aims to add a new perspective to border discourse by approaching it through literary analysis of religious, and mostly denominational, references.

It is noteworthy at this point that religion in the Chicano context cannot be reduced to Christianity. As Theresa Delgadillo points out, "non-Western worldviews are many, and how fiction represents these perspectives and practices range from subtle allusion to structural principle to central themes and characters" (Delgadillo 2013: 248). In this quote, Delgadillo hints at the literal and figurative meanings of diverse religious references. Religious images, thought, and language do not stop at borders but cross them and intermingle freely; they explain faith and belief, culture and identity. When understanding the border as a denominational border, it becomes obvious that references to denominations in Chicano literature are a transborder phenomenon. They address many denominations and originate from both sides of the border. With this in mind, tracing references of solely Christian denominations becomes a much narrower field.

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<sup>6</sup> For negotiations on the influence of religion and especially Christian denominations on the different cultural self-concepts of the Americas. See Elizondo (1985: 9-14), Junker (2009: 22f.), Waechter (1996: 28f.), Noll (2000: 213), Krakau (2009: 51-57).

Christian denominations play a crucial role in the development of today's border between Mexico and the US: Protestant exceptionalism and manifest destiny caused the US to expand into Mexican territory. On either side of the border, denominational affiliation was a significant factor in the construction of nation and identity. Thus, it is not surprising that neither one of the denominations holds a home field advantage within the borderlands themselves. Both are present, both on shifting ground. In this context, denomination does not necessarily carry a theological or religious meaning anymore, but can also be understood as a cultural element which may over time have developed a secular significance. The literal becomes figurative.

Since Protestantism emerged through the rejection of Catholicism, both denominations – even though both Christian – must be seen as separate entities. Each stands for itself and influences the believer in potentially every aspect of life. Although most Chicanos may identify as Catholic, traces and references in Chicano literature show a profound usage of Protestant themes, motives and structures. Movements and extensions between the (at least) two denominations can be found in Chicano literature and therefore in the Chicano worldview. It is constitutive for Chicano identity to be neither fully Mexican nor American but a unique 'third' with a strong "tolerance for contradiction",<sup>7</sup> a tolerance also to be found regarding religious aspects. The space between nations that Chicanos find themselves in is mirrored in the literary transcendence of religious and denominational notions. In literature, religion shifts from literal to figurative realms.

Although (or maybe precisely because) Chicano literature rarely favors one denomination as the personal religiousness of its protagonists, it suggests a spirituality native to the borderlands. Carmen Cáliz-Montoro notes:

[T]he borderlands run beyond territorial restrictions. They involve the building of new myths through artistic creation, which is here to be taken to its ultimate goal, that is, transformation and self-creation. In literature, the creation of new forms of writing and myths represents the foundation of the movement of the New Mestiza, and of what living in the borderlands means (Cáliz-Montoro 2000: 14).

Even if Cáliz-Montoro explicitly refers to Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of the 'New Mestiza',<sup>8</sup> myths like these are often told with narrative structures that are profoundly coined by Christianity and even denominationally distinguished. As the analytical sections of this article will point out, religious notions within cultural products such as literary works have complex

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<sup>7</sup> This term is coined by Gloria Anzaldúa. She writes: "The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures." (Anzaldúa 2012: 101).

<sup>8</sup> See Anzaldúa (2012).

denominational influence on language, thought, worldview, story lines, and narrative structures, while at the same time new religious concepts are introduced. In the borderlands, otherwise separate denominations are in contact with one another.

The dynamic interaction between the diverse religious references and the notion of 'border' in Chicano literature has not yet been fully investigated, nor has it been extensively used for literary analysis. Of course, the one text that comes to mind concerning these two paradigms is Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Even if the situation is less dramatic than Alma Rosa Alvarez' fear of *Borderlands* being "rarely discussed in terms of spirituality" (Alvarez 2007: 51), the question of cultural identity, especially with the characteristics of border and gender, has attracted foregrounding discourses around Anzaldúa's work.<sup>9</sup> Amongst others, Delgadillo's 2011 *Spiritual Mestizaje* "turn[s] attention to the ways that Anzaldúa's perspective of the borderlands centers spiritual transformation as a possibility arising from the meeting of disparate cultures and as a necessary and more conscious element of the critical project of the borderlands" (Delgadillo 2011: 179). Delgadillo focuses on 'Chicana' literature only; furthermore, since she is exploring Anzaldúa's concept of "spiritual mestizaje", denominations do not play any role in her investigation. This is not surprising since Anzaldúa's text clearly leads away from these established forms of religiosity: "[t]he mestiza consciousness she advocates is predicated on ambiguity and contradiction, which allows for the vacillation between Catholicism and other beliefs. This postmodern uncertainty opens up a space for altered or new forms of spirituality/ies" (Alvarez 2007: 57). Yet, as Alvarez states, some of these may well stay in the realms of Christianity and even Catholicism. It is therefore worthwhile to keep looking for denominational references in literature.

While the scholarly interest in border discourse seems as popular as ever, the admittedly wide field of 'religion' in a Chicano context has not been exhaustively studied. The academic engagement with religion in Chicano contexts can, at this point, generally be divided into two categories. The first one deals with the notion of religion in literary texts, and the second one tries to fathom the dimensions of religion in Chicano lives. While the latter sees religion in Chicano culture (that is: 'reality'; a place 'outside' literary texts) as extremely diverse and multifaceted, a multidirectional analysis of religious notions in Chicano literature has not yet taken place, even though the importance of religion in Chicano texts has long been recognized. In 1975, Guadalupe Valdes Fallis even affirmed that Chicano literature can be called 'literature' precisely 'because' it engages with the universal question of the existence of God.<sup>10</sup> In the

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<sup>9</sup> Anzaldúa herself amplifies the discourse of spirituality in her 2015 volume *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*.

<sup>10</sup> At this historic moment, Valdes Fallis saw Chicano writing being attacked in its literary quality (and seen as



following years, some scholars engage with the notion from a point of view that accepted and constructed Chicano texts as sites of a homogeneous Christianity. In 1982, David Carrasco put forth that "[t]he Christian-centric orientation of most Chicano studies is a serious problem" (Carrasco 1982: 197).<sup>11</sup> Whether or not Carrasco's statement is correct, he fails to point out how negotiations of Chicano literature in this field often miss one crucial aspect: the heterogeneity of Christian religion. As noted above, Chicanos find themselves not only between Christianity and a wide range of other, indigenous religious traditions, but also between denominations. Espinosa's and García's 2008 volume *Mexican American Religions. Spirituality, Activism, and Culture* pays tribute to this extensive diversity of religiosity, including denominational differences. Unfortunately, literature is but a marginal object of investigation in this volume, and even less in Facio's and Lara's *Fleshing the Spirit. Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women's Lives* published in 2014. The notion that becomes visible in these volumes – that 'religion' in Chicano contexts is more than Christianity and is leaving the realm of mere 'religiosity', merging with culture and politics of ethnic identity – would also prove to be most relevant for literary studies.

In this article, I will enhance the discourse of border and religion, tracing denominational elements in two literary cycles, Villarreal's unfinished tetralogy and Anaya's *New Mexico Trilogy*. By mapping their narrative functions, I will show that these denominational references are used to transcend religiousness and play a vital role in the literary development of a transborder identity.<sup>12</sup> Prior to this, I will discuss why it is literature that attracts my focus of

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irrelevant outside of Chicano communities); hence, she explores what literature is: "[i]deas in great literature, it is held, must be universal" (Valdes Fallis 1975: 26f.). Investigating the works of Rivera, Anaya and Villarreal, Valdes Fallis detects such universality in Chicano literature's question of God. I quote this article in the framework of a historical exploration of the relevance of religion in Chicano literature. See Valdes Fallis (1975: 26f.).

<sup>11</sup> With his 'Perspective for a Study of Religious Dimensions in Chicano Experience', Carrasco presents a first alternative point of view by focusing on other than Christian religious manifestations in Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*, such as sacred landscape, hierophany, shamanism, and sacred knowledge. While his new and important study indeed turns away from a Christian-centric orientation, it could easily leave the impression of Christian religion having no influence at all on *Bless Me, Ultima*. A denial of Christian influence, Christian themes and structures seems as limited as the proposed problematic Christian focus. As with many aspects in the Chicano context, religion gives no clear 'either or'. *Bless Me, Ultima* features both: Christian and non-Christian religious references. While I agree with Carrasco criticizing Christianity as powerful norm against which other religious notions are measured, my contribution to this field is to even take the denominational heterogeneity of Christian religion into account – without renouncing other religious references. I thus ground my research on Carrasco's important study, but at the same time aim to amplify and surpass it.

<sup>12</sup> Given that the cycles to be analyzed in this study are strongly concerned with the conception of Chicano identity, and due to the ever-present mode of nearly all Chicano concerns to be somewhat in between, which hints at this proposed identity to be a 'trans'-identity, this article is not so much concerned with 'what' this identity looks like, but with 'how' it is told. This way, by deciphering religious and denominational references, a mode of telling and narrating identity will be foregrounded and not so much transborder identity itself (even though naturally the mixture, overlaying and recreation of religious references are part of - and reflect - also the mode of identity and not only the mode of telling this identity). Religion is part of identity. Therefore, when religion is used figuratively it is not always obvious that transborder aspects of identity are told.

research rather than other cultural manifestations of denominations and religion that have been the predominant choice of objects of investigation so far, as the current state of research indicates.

### **Chicano Literature as Cultural Product of Denominational Borderlands**

Literature carries the characteristic of being both mimetic and performative. Therefore it not only mirrors the culture it springs from, but also helps to 'create' it in the first place.<sup>13</sup> Being a border literature, Chicano prose mirrors the border and all issues that come with it, while it takes part in the making, and, in consequence, even in the unmaking – destabilizing, relocating, transcending – of borders.<sup>14</sup> Analyzing literature unfolds transborder processes.

"Borderland literature evokes a new dimension of reality which first involves - and then transcends - the geography and culture of the borderlands. It suggests a point of departure, a new state of mind similar to a crossroads where different paths converge" (Cáliz-Montoro 2000: 10f.). The Anzaldúa metaphor heard in this quote is also concerned with the performative function of literature. Anzaldúa states: "When I write it feels like I'm carving bone. It feels like I'm creating my own face, my own heart – a Nahuatl concept. My soul makes itself through the creative act" (Anzaldúa 2012: 95). In yet another quote, Anzaldúa again picks up the image of carving one's own body, above connected to writing, and links it with the creation of culture and religion:

So, don't give me your tenets and your laws. Don't give me your lukewarm gods. What I want is an accounting with all three cultures – white, Mexican, Indian. I want the freedom to carve and chisel my own face, to staunch the bleeding with ashes, to fashion my own gods out of my entrails. And if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture – *una cultura mestiza* – with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture (Anzaldúa 2012: 44).

The strong feminist discourse that is opened up at this point must be skipped as it is not primarily relevant for my study. However, a programmatic emphasis on the performative quality of writing emerges in this quote, forming body, culture and religion, and creating identity. Delgadillo notes that diverse religious traditions play an outstanding role in this performative act because they are "not merely anthropological markers of Latino/a cultures, but discourses available to Latino/a writers as they work [...] to create contemporary Latino/a identities" (Delgadillo 2013: 246).

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<sup>13</sup> This is also valid for all aspects of culture, be it language, identity founding myths, gender concepts, or religion.

<sup>14</sup> Not all Chicano literature must necessarily be border literature, neither is all border literature Chicano literature. For discussion of differentiation, see Tabuenca Córdoba (2013: 454-461). Since my analysis is strongly based on a proposed denominational 'border', I view Chicano literature as border literature.

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Religious images thus become a 'language' in Chicano literature that speaks in a way that is very similar to how language in its literal sense functions in Chicano context. Chicano language is neither (Mexican) Spanish nor (American) English, but a mixture of great variety of both. The mixture goes deeper than simply including words from both languages or switching sentence by sentence – no, it forms, to some extent, a new language with modified words and grammar, with new meanings, images, structures, and with a new dimension of rhyme, style and aesthetics. It is a new creation influenced by both (or more) languages and not fully comprehensible for those who know only one. It may be the case that a word of Spanish origin is used in an otherwise English structured sentence to express something that could not be expressed equally in an only Spanish or only English sentence. A 'more' emerges.

Religious references work in a similar way. An author may create a distinct Catholic setting and at the same time underlay it with Protestant themes and structures to tell something completely different and new, like the longing for a spiritual homeland found in Aztec Aztlán, as will be shown in my analysis of Anaya's *New Mexico Trilogy*.

The multifaceted ways religion circulates in Chicano literature lead to a destabilization of essentialist categories within the field of religion, and concerning the narrower focus on denomination, the multidirectional negotiations transform the denominational border into a transdenominational and therefore transborder space. Religious references as narrative elements define transborder identity; this goes along with the collapse of denomination and border as stable concepts. Transborder identity may thus be understood and appreciated through denominational references in Chicano literature in their multidirectional functions.

My objects of investigation are José Antonio Villarreal's *Pocho* (1959) and *The Fifth Horseman* (1974), which together form an unfinished tetralogy, and Rudolfo A. Anaya's *New Mexico Trilogy* consisting of *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972), *Heart of Aztlán* (1976), and *Tortuga* (1979). While this choice might irritate some readers for the authors might appear "too old", "too male", "too canonized", and the texts "too 1970's", and "too sexist" – a critique is certainly not completely unjustified – this article pleads not to dismiss them too early. These important precursors proved to be seminal for Chicano literature yet to come, with *Pocho* being written, published, and read before the *movimiento*, and the others emerging right at its summit. Concerning the representation of religion, Delgado classifies Chicano literature of the 1960s and 1970s as the first of four distinct periods which is "dominated by texts that overtly wrestle with religion ideologically and culturally" (Delgado 2013: 241).<sup>15</sup> These early texts establish

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<sup>15</sup> In the second period, "religion constitutes an aspect of traditional ethnic and racial identity under contestation" in earlier, newly discovered and republished literature (Delgado 2013: 241). The third period in the 1980s and

significant links between the negotiation of religion, the urge for social change, and the development of a distinct identity. Although they have not yet completely arrived there, they clear the way for a transborder identity in their use of religious and denominational references. Contemporary transborder developments could difficultly exist without building on them, and this historic dimension is one of the aspects why they deserve to be studied.

### **Denominational References in José Antonio Villarreal's Unfinished Tetralogy**

Although Villarreal's *Pocho* is very well known, mostly as a forerunner of Chicano literature and especially of the Chicano *Bildungsroman*, most research widely ignores its construction as one sequel in a planned cycle of four novels of which only *Pocho* and *The Fifth Horseman* have been realized.<sup>16</sup> The latter stands as the antecedent of *Pocho* and tells the story of Heraclio Inés who fights at Pancho Villa's side in the Mexican Revolution until he must leave his home country disenchanted. In *Pocho*, "Heraclio Inés becomes Juan Manuel Rubio", father of the protagonist Richard (Jiménez 1976: 67). In both works, references to Catholicism add to an authentic cultural background in which the protagonists are socialized. Protestantism does not exist in the setting of *The Fifth Horseman*; in *Pocho* it is used as a cultural attribute to mark off Anglos from those characters of Mexican origin. Protestant characters are not fashioned as antagonists, on the contrary: the Protestant girls Marla Jamison and Mary Madison become close friends of the protagonist. Nevertheless, the differences in denominations are not discussed within the plotline.<sup>17</sup> When he argues with Mary, Richard starts to reject both denominations: "The Father tells us the Protestants are all going to Hell, and it's wrong for us to even go into a Protestant church, and I bet your preacher tells you we're all wrong. They can't all be right" (Villarreal 1989: 71).

Despite the lack of further negotiations of denomination on the level of plotlines, denominationally distinguished references find their way into the logic of the narrative structures. Concerning the above mentioned female figures, for example, a strong contrast to Catholic females can be noticed. While *Pocho* has often been criticized for presenting a misogynist image of women, this is only true for Catholic women such as Richard's mother

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1990s is predominated by literature by women who see the "spiritual form a[s] key part in eliminating gender and sexual inequalities" (Delgado 2013: 241). In the fourth period in the new millennium, "new literary explorations of both non-Western worldviews and the historical formation of Western religiosities that often prominently feature female healers" are predominant (Delgado 2013: 241).

<sup>16</sup> See Jiménez (1976: 67) and Cantú (1985: 420-431).

<sup>17</sup> One exception is the denominationally based difference in the handling of the Bible that is noticed by Richard on several occasions. He positions himself slightly on the Protestant side when secretly reading the Bible as the Madison Family does on a daily basis although knowing that the Catholic priest will punish him for this. See Villarreal (1989: 74).

Consuelo or his childhood-friend Zelda. Protestant women are as strong characters as the male figures. This can be seen with Marla rightfully taking her place at her father's side in the orchard business,<sup>18</sup> and Mary staying Richard's dear platonic friend while his Catholic female friend Zelda is used only for sexual pleasure.<sup>19</sup> Consuelo, the Catholic wife and mother, tries to emancipate herself throughout the novel but remains in dialectical opposition to Protestant women. She is scorned by Richard and left by her husband for trying to be on par with men. Thus, the novel connects a misogynic image of women with Catholicism while linking emancipation of women with Protestantism. This structure serves as critique of Catholicism and therefore orientates itself slightly towards Protestantism.

This critique can also be seen in the attitude towards the clergy which *Pocho* portrays in an increasingly negative way. One priest "would not believe him [Richard] during confession, and twisted his words around so that in the end he made him admit he had done that which he had not" (Villarreal 1989: 114); the priest goes on gloating over Richard's sin of masturbation.<sup>20</sup> Richard soon thinks of priests as liars<sup>21</sup> and is reassured in this thought when he hears of a priest breaking his seal of the confessional for money<sup>22</sup> and sees another give false affidavits.<sup>23</sup> Not only is the clergy presented as corrupt, but also obstructive in administering religious education. Richard concludes "[o]ne should not, on penalty of going to Hell, discuss religion with the priests" (Villarreal 1989: 85). This extensive critique of Catholic clergy again tends to result in a Protestant orientation of the novel.

Another theme is structurally linked with Protestantism: education.<sup>24</sup> Education, learning, and reading play an important role in *Pocho* as Richard is nearly obsessed with it. This irritates Consuelo; as the Catholic key figure, she inevitably links education with blasphemy.<sup>25</sup> The most obvious split between Catholicism and education is introduced by the novel's attributed genre. It is widely received as *Bildungsroman* for which education (in German 'education' translates to *Bildung*) is a structural principle and crucial for the protagonist's development. After going

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<sup>18</sup> See Villarreal (1989: 52f.).

<sup>19</sup> See Villareal (1989: 141f.).

<sup>20</sup> See Villareal (1989: 114).

<sup>21</sup> See Villareal (1989: 69).

<sup>22</sup> See Villareal (1989: 100).

<sup>23</sup> See Villareal (1989: 174).

<sup>24</sup> The emergence of Protestantism and the education of the common people are closely connected. For Protestants, a personal relationship with God is most important and this is dependent on the understanding of the Bible. Protestant reformers thus for example put great effort in the alphabetization of the common people. The sermon as means of education about God gains a more important role in Protestant liturgy. The inner conviction of every individual becomes the most important aspect of belief. See Tietz (2009: 29). Yet another reason for putting much effort in education is the Protestant resignation of clerical hierarchies that results in the need of a higher educated common people. See Lauster (2015: 354f.).

<sup>25</sup> See Villarreal (1989: 64).

through different crises, at the end of a *Bildungsroman* the protagonists typically stand as powerful individual.<sup>26</sup> The novel's strong interest in education and the link to its critique of Catholicism are again signs for a structurally Protestant formation.

The prominent position of the individual supported by the novel's structural composition as *Bildungsroman* has a Protestant implication. According to Wolfgang Steck, individualism is one of three Protestant attributes, the other ones being liberalism and modernity.<sup>27</sup> All three, perfectly fitting *Pocho's* protagonist, present Richard in the realm of Protestantism. On the level of the plotline, the text introduces Richard as Catholic. Although he eventually rejects Catholicism, he never takes on Protestantism as his personal religious identity. Nevertheless, his character fits with the above mentioned Protestant thinking structures.

This general – and very literal – Protestant leaning of Richard also comes to light in his formation as a figure of overcoming. Luedtke and Raab acknowledge this trait of Richard, as does the genre of *Bildungsroman*.<sup>28</sup> Overcoming in terms of religious identity, however, positions Richard close to reformers on the one hand, and close to the most prominent Christian figure of overcoming on the other: Jesus Christ.

The transfiguration of Jesus Christ is "a fictional narrative in which the characters and the action, irrespective of meaning or theme, are prefigured to a noticeable extent by figures and events popularly associated with the life of Jesus as it is known from the Gospels" (Ziolkowski 1972: 6). This is also true for Richard, with parallels occurring even before his birth as his parents are on a journey when he is born. The birth-scene is followed by an epiphany of the father, Juan, which shows a godly connection to the child's birth.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, Juan's physical paternity is questioned, since Richard is born only two months after Consuelo finds Juan on his migration route. Then, still following the gospel's structure, Richard's early childhood is left out of the story. Paralleling Jesus' first apparition after his birth (Luke 2,41-2,52 where young Jesus discusses scriptures with the scribes), the reader next meets Richard in a preadolescent age, just having been awarded a prize for his outstanding knowledge of religious texts. Also paralleling the gospels, *Pocho* narratively neglects the protagonist's siblings and instead, another figure appears at the side of the protagonist in both the Bible and *Pocho*: Mary. Furthermore, Richard

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<sup>26</sup> The genre of the novel has been profoundly influenced and further developed by puritan Calvinists because of its stress on the development of the individual and its inner thoughts. See Lauster (2015: 435-443). The genre of the *Bildungsroman* also carries this Protestant implementation by accentuating precisely this individual development. Furthermore, it derives from the literary tradition of religious biography and is especially connected to humanistic education. See Heinz (2007: 89). Finally, also Protestant pietism influenced the development of the genre *Bildungsroman*. See Michel (2007: 586).

<sup>27</sup> See Steck (1991: 109).

<sup>28</sup> See Luedtke (1986: 75) and Raab (2005: 12).

<sup>29</sup> See Villarreal (1989: 31).

is looked upon as "martyr" (Villarreal 1989: 175) by his peers until he must literally protest: "I'm not Jesus Christ. Let 'my people' take care of themselves" (Villarreal 1989: 162). Paradoxically, this denial of his role functions at the same time as its confirmation, because otherwise it would not be necessary.

Whereas the transfiguration of Jesus Christ clearly shows 'Christian' influence on the text, standing for itself it does not yet imply a denominational direction. This fact changes with the second transfiguration that appears in *Pocho* and, which is further extended in *The Fifth Horseman*: Richard's father can be read as an Old Testament figure. Juan Rubio becomes Moses or Adam, while Heraclio Inés mirrors David or Joseph.<sup>30</sup> Theologically, all four Old Testament figures are read as types, with Jesus being the antitype whom they prophetically prefigure. This typology is very common in biblical exegesis, but in literature it also features a tradition which Ursula Brumm recognizes as distinctly Protestant. Her book, *American Thought and Religious Typology*, clarifies that one traditional use of typology is to relate one's "own destiny typologically to the Old Testament, which was then regarded as concrete, dramatic, universal history of providential significance" (Brumm 1979: 33). Thus, "the emigration to the American wilderness was an exodus of the children of Israel to a 'second Jerusalem'" (Brumm 1979: 33). This legitimizing concept was extensively used by Puritan Calvinists; it is also used by Villarreal to explain and justify the existence of a child of Mexican immigrants in the US. This way, Richard – the 'Pocho', the Chicano – is sanctified perfectly, and instead of being looked upon as in deficit, is advanced to a 'second Adam' that may, can, and even necessarily 'must' come. Here we have a perfect example of the connection between the promotion of Chicano identity and religious references. While *Pocho* is concerned with presenting a way of coping with being 'Pocho' and thus concerned with establishing a new identity, this identity is creatively told with the help of denominational references and evaluated positive by the positive meaning of these references - as well as by the positive traditions the use of these references stand in. At the same time, *Pocho* is not a story of religious conversion. This hints at the overtly *figurative* meaning of religious references in this text, even though religion in *Pocho* can surely also be read literally.

*The Fifth Horseman* expands the possibility to read *Pocho* typologically by providing

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<sup>30</sup> Determining factors for this interpretation are the entitling of the migration as 'exodus', which evokes the biblical exodus from Egypt (Moses) and the search for a fresh start outside the home country (outside paradise; Adam). For in-depth interpretation of Juan as Adamaic figure, see Sedore (2000: 246-249). The connection between Heraclio and David and Heraclio and the Old Testament Joseph will be made later on in this article on the basis of text analysis. Neither of the four Old Testament characters are transfigured completely, rather they are loosely hinted at. This way, they are not in conflict with another (for indeed, Moses, Adam, David, and Joseph are very diverse characters), but merely fulfill their function as different types to the antitype Jesus Christ.

alternative types to the Christ-figure, and also forms a more general panorama of the Old Testament. Several allusions to Old Testament stories transform the setting of the Mexican Revolution into a biblical landscape with the characters reenacting well-known narratives such as the above mentioned stories of Joseph and King David, as well as the Fall of Mankind, and the story of Cain and Abel. The protagonist Heraclio, who is introduced as the prototypical Mexican, always takes part in these stories – and always changes them slightly.<sup>31</sup>

Paralleling Joseph, Heraclio grows up in violent sibling rivalry until his older brothers abandon him far from the hacienda, without a horse, water or weapons (the biblical Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers). Like Joseph, Heraclio survives and fights his way out of his brothers' footsteps, arriving at a higher social position; nevertheless, he refrains from punishing his brothers for what they had done wrong. Unlike Joseph, however, Heraclio does not stay with the established ruler, but always goes against official hierarchies and joins revolutionary troops.

Like young King David, Heraclio starts his career as a shepherd and is slowly promoted to higher positions until he works directly for the hacienda's dynasty and even starts a relationship with the Don's daughter (David marries the King's daughter once he arrives at the royal court). Like David, he is later expelled and joins rebel groups. But unlike David, Heraclio never becomes the ruler himself. In the end of the novel, he leaves his home country rather than perpetuating established political structures.

Evoking the Fall of Mankind, Heraclio wanders through the hacienda's apple orchard, which in the strict sense is forbidden. As he finally picks an apple, he is startled by a boy who sits in the apple tree and threatens him with a knife. Out of this encounter, a close friendship emerges instead of the biblical hostility between Eve and the snake. Finally, mirroring the relationship of Cain and Abel, the relationship between Heraclio and his friend David evolves from brotherly love to rivalry, jealousy and hatred until one eventually kills the other. In Villarreal's version, however, it is never exactly clear who of both friends takes on which role, both are switching constantly, being both Cain as well as Abel.

Constructing *The Fifth Horseman* as the 'Old Testament' and *Pocho* as the 'New Testament' with Richard being the redeeming Christ figure, Villarreal repeats a well-known dynamic: he legitimizes a Chicano following the same pattern by which the Messiah is legitimized in the Bible. The slight modification of the Old Testament allusions serves as prevention of a too negative representation of the Mexican identity. Heraclio never becomes part of the oppressive political system; he is not clearly positioned as Cain – at least not without being Abel as well –,

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<sup>31</sup> See Villarreal (1974: n.p.). Also noting the prototypical fashioning of Heraclio, see Dimicelli (1976: 74).



and his 'sin' in the apple orchard does not lead to diremption. In this way, the Mexican can remain a positive source of identity and yet the Chicano can be seen as the necessary fulfillment of a prophetic destiny. This argumentation follows the very structure of typology and by being used to explain one's own existence, it stands as an explicitly protestant tradition. This way, religious references are used to tell an identity construction that has little to nothing to do with the religious content the references provide.

As the title already suggests, yet another biblical allusion is made in *The Fifth Horseman*: "Thoughts of the Apocalypse and the Day of Atonement come immediately to mind" (Cantú 1985: 427). Indeed, Villarreal configures his novel following the Revelation by staging the first part, with Heraclio growing up on the hacienda, as the present world, and the second part, which details the transgressions during the Mexican Revolution, as the End Time. Destruction, famine, pestilence, and death – the apocalyptic scourges of humanity – are all to be found in *The Fifth Horseman*. Instead of opening the end of the novel towards the eschatological New Jerusalem, Heraclio as the 'fifth' horseman of Revelation stays in the world of mortals as "mankind's hope and promise" (Cantú 1985: 428) and rides towards "the City of the Angels all refugees seemed to know" (Villarreal 1974: 398). Thus, Los Angeles – and the US in general – gain an eschatological meaning and the people that enter it – the Chicanos – become the 'chosen people'. This narrative structure is also well known as exceptionalism and it functions in the same way as typology. Exceptionalism as narrative device to legitimize identity has a strong Calvinist and Puritan tradition and therefore can be seen as Protestant structure.<sup>32</sup> But again, this does not mean that a Chicano transborder identity must have a Protestant implementation – it merely is told through Protestant structures, regardless of religious content. The structure simply provides the mode of 'how' it is told, not of 'what' is told.

As shown, Villarreal makes extensive use of Protestant structures, in small, single elements of his novels as well as in the comprehensive whole of their logic as a cycle. These are found beneath an explicitly non-Protestant plotline. Regarding contents, mainly Catholicism is addressed and finally overcome by Richard; yet, Protestantism is not a choice either. This indicates that Protestant structures such as typology and exceptionalism are used to provide the

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<sup>32</sup> Exceptionalism as the legitimizing thought to settle on the newly discovered continent traces back to the first Puritan and Calvinist settlers who were convinced of godly providence in their undertaking. See Waechter (1996: 28). In his famous sermon, John Winthrop established the metaphor of 'a city upon a hill' to ground his community on Puritan faith. This sermon follows the structure of typology by connecting the biblical Exodus to the own situation of building a new community and initiates a new narrative genre: the 'jeremiad'. See Bercovitch (1978: 1-8). Exceptionalism as promoted by the first Puritan settlers takes considerably part in nation building and in the self-conception of the US even until today. Here, Protestant exceptional thought over time replaces its religious implementation for a more political one. See Krakau (2009: 50-55) and Junker (2009: 22).

legitimizing background of a pursued – not yet accomplished – transborder identity. The personal 'religious' identity of the protagonists in the end is neither Catholic nor Protestant. This confirms the interreligious position Chicanos find themselves in and verifies the borderlands as a space between denominations. Richard has not found his personal religious identity (yet), but what he does 'not' believe in foreshadows a new transcended religious identity. A transborder religiousness is visible on the horizon.

### **Religious References in Rudolfo A. Anaya's *New Mexico Trilogy***

Anaya's trilogy handles references to denominations in a very similar way as Villarreal. The protagonists of both cycles overcome Catholicism, mother figures are fashioned as Catholic key figures, the main protagonist each has a Protestant friend, and the clergy is criticized. Anaya, though, is also concerned with remnants of indigenous religions and the creation of new and recreation of old myths. He thus expands the spectrum of religious references. As not to repeat results, in this chapter I will leave aside the negotiation of denominations – although they are certainly there – to focus on the interplay of Christianity with other religious concepts instead. In Anaya's trilogy, Christian religion functions as a culturally well-known pattern to transport other spiritual concepts. Christianity itself does not provide a satisfying spiritual concept – neither in its Protestant nor Catholic implementation. It merely provides the means to communicate the Chicano myth of Aztlán to the culturally Christian-coined reader. Successively, in Anaya's trilogy, the Christian religion crosses different levels. It appears as the protagonist's personal religion at the level of the plotline, and is also an instrument for the author to narrate transborder identity.

Research has extensively engaged with *Bless Me, Ultima*, Anaya's most famous novel. As with *Pocho*, it is less often understood in its context of a series. However, only by examining the whole cycle does the development of religious positions become visible. In *Bless Me, Ultima*, the child protagonist Antonio first discovers alternatives to Catholicism but does not stray too far from Christianity.<sup>33</sup> Clemente, father of the Chávez family in *Heart of Aztlán*, goes one step further by adopting the myth of Aztlán for spiritual support where the church fails to provide it. Finally, the teenage protagonist of *Tortuga* is physically and spiritually healed in a children's hospital in the desert, somewhere unmistakably fashioned after the legendary place

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<sup>33</sup> Although Antonio is introduced to the Legend of the Golden Carp as an alternative to Christianity, this legend is invented by Anaya and fashioned strikingly parallel to biblical stories. See Hebebrand (2004: 47). The legend says that in primordial times a people was sent to the valley by gods to live there in peace, being forbidden only one thing: to eat fish. Anyway, after a long period of hunger, they violated this law and as punishment were turned into fish themselves by the gods. One of the gods felt sorry for the people and turned himself into a great golden carp to be with them at all times. See Anaya (1994: 79-81).

of Aztec origin, Aztlán. He leaves this place as a new man on the path of the sun. While the development of Chicano religiosity in the *New Mexico Trilogy* clearly leads away from Catholicism, the structures of narrating this development stay profoundly grounded in Christianity. Here it is clearly visible that a distinction between the 'what' and the 'how' of the narration is to be made: 'what' is told is not Christian, but 'how' it is told is even more so. Antonio's mentor Ultima, for example, is really configured as a Christian figure, even though she introduces the boy to *curanderismo*, to the world of spirits and witches, and the holistic concept of pantheism, thus opposing Christianity on the surface. In the plotline, she stands in opposition to the Christian institution represented by the always negatively portrayed clergy, yet in the structural logic of the novel, she remains a part of Christianity. This is accomplished by creating her as part of a trinity with Ultima representing Jesus, her owl being the Holy Ghost and La Virgen de Guadalupe taking the place of God the Father.<sup>34</sup> Along with Ultima as the Christ figure, curing the sick, fighting evil, and being murdered in the end,<sup>35</sup> Antonio becomes her disciple and together they form a deeply kerygmatic constellation that mirrors the emergence of Christianity and thus evokes the genesis of a new religion – which Antonio literally asks for: "can a new religion be made?" (Anaya 1994: 247).

Ultima is not only Christian in structure but also in principle. Her ethics, morals, behavior, and actions are never in conflict with Christianity, rather her "*curanderismo* is a metaphor for something Christianity has lost" (Holton 1995: 26). This makes her a counterpart to Catholic clergy, not to Christianity in general. Her moving toward a more primordial religiousness, and Antonio's turning 'back' to her as the oldest spiritual agent available, parallel the Protestant paradigm *ad fontes* – back to the beginning. Catholicism is overcome following the pattern the Protestant Reformation provides, but not for the benefit of Protestantism as personal religiousness. The novel's direction of impact clearly is reformatory, but the goal of reformation remains ambiguous. Looking at Ultima as spiritual role model for Antonio, Anzaldúa's 'tolerance for contradiction'<sup>36</sup> becomes visible concerning different religious concepts that are united in the person of the old *curandera*. This way, she can be read as a 'trans'-figure, being transdenominational, transspiritual, and therefore representing a transborder identity. As shown, this transborder identity is narrated with the help of religious and denominational references, making it easier for the Christian-coined reader to understand the renewing and reformatory aspect of transborder identity by drawing on pictures of 'religious' renewal and reformation.

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<sup>34</sup> See Cantú (1990: 28).

<sup>35</sup> These and more hints of Ultima as a Christ figure are noted in Cantú (1990: 28f.).

<sup>36</sup> See Anzaldúa (2012: 101).

*Heart of Aztlán*, as the title already suggests, is concerned with the central Chicano myth that has been conceptualized as spiritual homeland during the *movimiento*. The legendary Aztlán is a self-created myth. It does have indigenous roots, but it was almost forgotten and did not contribute to any specific identity construction until it was literarily and politically recovered and functionalized for the founding of a Chicano group identity. It "emerged to provide Chicanos with an *authoritative* sacred narrative of ancestry, delineating a map for ritual and world production that could *ground* a claim to authenticity" (León 2004: 54). It resembles Old Testament stories that stabilize Jewish identity and provide a legitimizing origin to a homeless, wandering people in exile. Unlike the biblical stories, which are deeply rooted in the cultural memory of Christian populations, Aztlán – even though it is an ancient Aztec myth – needs to be actively created and reframed. Anaya conveys it in *Heart of Aztlán*, and to some extent also in *Tortuga*, interestingly narrating the renewed myth by following well-known biblical narrative structures.

Like the Legend of the Golden Carp in *Bless Me, Ultima*, the myth of Aztlán, told by the wise old man Crispín, shows striking parallels to biblical stories. The fictitious Golden Carp could thus be revealed as a 'test case' for Aztlán. Anaya himself notes the resemblance of Crispín's myth with the Expulsion from the Paradise<sup>37</sup> and the Exodus from Egypt.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, the Flood is alluded to, and in the feathered god (Quetzalcoatl), a charismatic leader like Moses or Jesus is evoked, one who even promises to return, which mirrors the Christian hope for Parousia. In this way, a Christian perspective contributes to understand the ancient pre-Columbian concept of Aztlán in its contemporary reconfigurations from a different angle.

In addition to fashioning the content of this myth according to the Bible, Anaya uses another biblical structure to *tell* the myth: the protagonist Clemente and the wise old man Crispín fulfill the constellation of prophet and messiah. Crispín resembles John the Baptist, thus functioning as precursor to Clemente who is even called 'messiah' by his people.<sup>39</sup> Like John the Baptist, Crispín comes from the desert. Both figures are the first ones to recognize the new leader, they baptize him, and make their followers turn over to the new messiah once he is established.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, Clemente resembles Jesus by becoming a leader, initiating a scene of The Last Supper where he passes a bottle of wine not "to get drunk, but to share in the communal spirit"

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<sup>37</sup> See Anaya (1993: 241).

<sup>38</sup> See Anaya (1993: 235).

<sup>39</sup> See Anaya (1988: 52).

<sup>40</sup> In *Heart of Aztlán*, the connection to baptism is made by Crispín himself when he rescues Clemente from a dangerous storm. See Anaya (1988: 123).

(Anaya 1988: 147). Furthermore, he creates a uniting bond that "is the holy sacrament of the new movement" and is denounced by his own people (Anaya 1988: 147). In the end he leads a peaceful revolution.

As shown, the lost and newly created meaning of Aztlán as the positive foundation of a community is told through doubly Christian structures. First, Aztlán as told by Crispín resembles Christian myths of community foundation, and second, Aztlán is conveyed by a constellation of figures that resembles the one of prophet and messiah. However, as similar as biblical stories and the myth of Aztlán may seem, Anaya does 'not' ground the hope of his people on Christianity.

[I]t is also clear that a spiritual vacuum has to be filled by something other than the traditional Catholic faith which promises the Kingdom of Heaven for the poor and the meek. Aztlán is the myth, the force, the psychic construct that can and, at least in the novel, indeed, fill [sic] the spiritual (i.e., psychological) void experienced by Clemente, his family, and the striking workers. This myth offers some relief on earth and it calls for social and political struggle as opposed to calling for penance, patience and blind faith for a better world in the afterlife (Alurista 1993: 223f.).

As can be seen in this quote, it is Aztlán that fulfills the spiritual need of the people and not Christianity. The compatibility of Aztlán with biblical structures, however, shows the logic in thought and narration that still derives from Christianity. In the narrations of Aztlán, Christianity is thus revealed as cultural element rather than occupying religious meaning. In this way, religion crosses borders, and Anaya functionalizes it as narrative device to create a new – or rather renewed – spiritual concept.

*Tortuga* is yet another attempt to reframe Aztlán and due to the continuous movement of the trilogy away from Christianity, it comes closest to Native American spirituality – measured by the somewhat Christianized version in *Heart of Aztlán* and the completely fictitious legend of the Golden Carp in *Bless Me, Ultima*. In *Tortuga*, the setting is not explicitly called "Aztlán", but the description of the primordial desert with the prominent mountain and its seven healing caves makes Aztlán recognizable once more. The young paralyzed protagonist Tortuga is brought to a children's hospital on this sacred site. He recovers throughout the novel and is able to leave the hospital in the end, at which point he receives Crispín's blue guitar that signals him as the new leader of his people. Through this, Anaya re-writes the indigenous myth of Aztlán in the experiences of the protagonist, and connects it to the well-being of the Chicano community.

When compared to the protagonists of the other two novels, Tortuga is the most disconnected character from the Christian religion. The novel starts with Tortuga's loss in faith. Later the boy

claims: "I knew I had to find something to hold on to, we all did, but I wasn't quite sure what it was" (Anaya 2004: 107). This spiritual journey away from Christianity towards a new, personal religiosity is once more told with the help of biblical narrative structures.

As Bruce-Novoa notes, the plot of *Tortuga* shows close parallels to the New Testament narrative of Christ in the desert.<sup>41</sup> This very general story line calls for "the retreat of a chosen one into a secluded place [...] where, through penance, mortification, meditation, and perhaps dialogues with peers and masters, or an apprenticeship to learn a specific skill, the person is transformed into a new, enlightened man" (Bruce-Novoa 1990: 184). This structure effectively helps to illuminate the symbolic meaning of Tortuga, a Chicano teenager who lives through perils and suffering and who leaves the "secluded place" only when he is physically and spiritually healed and ready to become a leader of his community.

Not only can Christ in the desert be read in *Tortuga*, one also finds the closely-related motif of 'Descensus Christi', the Harrowing of Hell. With striking frequency, a connection between the children's hospital and hell is made in the novel.<sup>42</sup> This turns Tortuga into Jesus Christ, descending to the dead after crucifixion, and rising again, leaving hell – leaving the hospital, leaving Aztlán – to "sing about it" (Anaya 2004: 134). Despite the Christian pattern he follows, Tortuga does not 'sing' about Christian religiosity. Instead he rises from hell on the "path of the sun" (Anaya 2004: 160), which is a distinct allusion to indigenous spirituality.

Tortuga is a crosser of borders. From city to desert, from paralyzed to moving, from victim to leader, from boy to man, from Catholic to the path of the sun, he overcomes and transcends dividing lines. His configuration as Christ additionally alludes to an abstract kind of border crossing: from the desert of temptation to unconditional devotion and from earth to hell to heaven. Thus, the motif of crossing borders is enhanced by Christian allusions, and religious references are used to narrate transborder phenomena.

### **Conclusion: Religion and Border – Transcended by Literary Means**

"There is no one Chicano language just as there is no one Chicano experience" (Anzaldúa 2012: 80). One may add there is no one Chicano religion and no one Chicano way of dealing with religion, either. "Indeed, the defining characteristic of spirituality in the borderlands is its flexibility" (Martín 2014: 3). While Villarreal's unfinished tetralogy carefully foreshadows the specific Chicano identity and spirituality that is yet to come, Anaya's trilogy is already ripe with a wide variety of religious concepts – and much more stable in its promoted idea of identity.

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<sup>41</sup> See Bruce-Novoa (1990: 184).

<sup>42</sup> See Anaya (2004: 28, 89, 118, 119, 134).

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With Tortuga, it finally presents a protagonist sure of himself, his spirituality, and his place in his community, whereas Richard, Villarreal's protagonist, only expresses a need for change by fleeing to the army. In both cases, the negotiations of identity start in a crucial in-between-state and are closely linked to notions of religion, literally as well as figuratively. Biblical narrative structures help both authors to deepen the symbolic meaning of their texts.

In almost all examined texts, the US-Mexican border is negotiated only in its metaphoric sense, with other essentialist categories (like 'race', language, food and other cultural customs, and in *Bless Me, Ultima* even male/female or allegorical categories like moon/sea) taking the place of nation states.<sup>43</sup> As my investigation has shown, the substitutional negotiations of 'border' take also place within the field of religion, so that even when the border is not discussed literally, transborder processes can be traced on a metaphorical level. Denominations, standing literally as well as figuratively for nation states, are carefully used by both authors to be transcended into a new 'third'. The texts themselves show an admirable tolerance for contradiction concerning religious notions. They include all kinds of different references, such as Catholic setting, Protestant structures, indigenous remnants, and newly fashioned myths, which exist next to each other, overlap one another and add different levels of understanding to the texts. Thus, the border is relocated to the realms of religious negotiations.

The references to different denominations and religious notions in Chicano literature are like an ointment in the dangerous zone of the border which they cross, provoking a healing and the emergence of something new. Just like other concepts, Aztlán serves also a religious function. It is told in Chicano literature through structures of, and references to, both Christian denominations that originate from south and north of the border. In a spatial sense, Aztlán transforms a line (border) into a space (borderlands); and in an ideological sense, a new space of (religious and cultural) understanding is created by referring to different religious and denominational structures and contents.

Literatures of the 1970s are crucial for appreciating today's transborder trends; expanding transdenominational research to contemporary Chicano literature by following the above practiced pattern promises to be extremely worthwhile. "Latino/a literature's engagement with spirituality has [...] always mirrored the uniquely transnational characteristics of this population, and this is even more true in the recent prose and poetry of new generations of Latino/a writers" (Delgadillo 2013: 250). Deciphering the ways religious references function in Chicano

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<sup>43</sup> The one exception is *The Fifth Horseman*, where the literal border is crossed in the end. But even this literal crossing is explained, foreshadowed and legitimized through biblical narrative structures and thus narrated religiously.

literature may illustrate the cultural identities emerging from transborder spaces. The results could easily be transferred to any other element affected by borders. The unique interplay of religion, border, culture, and literature, cannot be underestimated and gives invaluable insights into transborder dynamics.

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IMEX XVII

**IMPRESIONES**

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**IMPRESSIONS**

## Me duele la cara de ser tan güerx<sup>1</sup>

### INVASORIX

#### ♪ ¡INVASORIX! DESDE NEPANTLA

#### ♪ CON LXS AMIGXS REALES E IMAGINARIAS<sup>2</sup>

Así empieza nuestro reguetón, con nuestro posicionamiento desde nepantla<sup>3</sup>, desde donde trabajamos en grupo y en colaboración con lxs amigxs reales e imaginarias. Entre ellxs, lx amigx real Dayra Fyah, quien nos acompañó en el proceso de escribir la letra del reguetón y también cantó una de sus estrofas, y lxs amigxs imaginarias Comandanta Esther, Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks, Cherríe Moraga, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, Gayatri Spivak, cuyas prácticas nos acompañan, retan, hacen pensar y actuar. Para Anzaldúa nepantla es el lugar de la frontera, un espacio de resistencia, de ruptura, un estado de sobrevivencia desde donde se reconfiguran fragmentos y se crean nuevos ensamblajes. En palabras de Anzaldúa:

El arte y la frontera se intersectan en ese espacio liminal donde la gente fronteriza, especialmente lxs artistas, viven en un estado nepantla. Nepantla es la palabra en náhuatl para este estado 'in-between', este terreno incierto donde unx cruza cuando se mueve de un lugar a otro, cuando cambias de una clase, raza o posición sexual a otra, cuando viajas de una identidad presente a otra nueva [...] La frontera es un estado constante de nepantla [...] Es por esto que la línea fronteriza es una metáfora persistente en el arte de la frontera, un arte que trata los temas de identidad, fronteras, cruces e imaginaria híbrida. [...] El estado nepantla es un hábitat natural para lxs artistas, más para aquellxs artistas de frontera mestizxs que son parte de múltiples tradiciones y múltiples mundos. (Anzaldúa 2009a: 180-181; nuestra traducción).

Desde la Ciudad de México y en intercambio cibernético con otrxs INVASORIX<sup>4</sup> que cruzaron fronteras, ríos, el océano Atlántico, y que ahora se encuentran en otros horarios y en otros

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<sup>1</sup> En 1988, la banda de pop-rock gamberro *Los Inhumanos* de Valencia en España, constituida solo por varones, lanzó su número *Me duele la cara de ser tan guapo* (Los Inhumanos 1988).

<sup>2</sup> Para evitar suponer el género de las personas usamos la 'x' en el lugar de la 'a', la 'o' u otra letra que pudiera especificar un género, a no ser que tenga una fuente que afirme que alguien se identifica con cierto género. También usamos la 'x' para referirnos a personas en plural, para que la identificación de alguien no sea más importante que la de otrx. Aunque este uso de la 'x' se está volviendo un poco más común en ciertos espacios, sigue sin tanta difusión. Desde un enfoque lingüístico, Pablo Antonio Barrera Alvarado y Pedro Antonio Ortiz Ramírez analizan las distintas maneras de un lenguaje no sexista, y usar una 'x' en vez de una 'o' o una 'a' para terminar una palabra es una de estas estrategias. Véase Barrera Alvarado / Ortiz Ramírez (2014).

<sup>3</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa explica *nepantla* de la siguiente manera: "[E]l lugar entremedios, is the space between body and psyche where image and story-making takes place, where the spirits surface. When I sit and images come to me, I am in my body but I'm also in another place, the space between worlds (nepantla). Images connect the various worlds I inhabit or that inhabit me" (Anzaldúa 2009b: 291).

<sup>4</sup> En 2018, siete personas forman parte de INVASORIX: cuatro radican en la Ciudad de México, unx en Vancouver, unx en Viena, con viajes regulares a la Ciudad de México, y unx viaja constantemente de un lado a otro (de la Ciudad de México a San Diego o a Viena).

mundos de lenguas, nuestro reguetón se sitúa entre múltiples fronteras: entre límites reales, metafóricos y rítmicos que nos transitan; entre texto, música e imagen, pero también entre la frontera que separa el norte y el sur del Río Bravo; entre las fronteras que cruzan las perspectivas de raza, etnia, clase, sexualidad y género, edad, (dis)capacidad, religión y de estatus jurídico e (in)migratorio: entre las fronteras que delimitan las disciplinas artísticas y las que separan la pista de baile, la plaza pública o la contribución textual en una publicación.

### ♪ LO GÜERO TAN OMNIPRESENTE

### ♪ LO GÜERO INSTALADO EN TU MENTE

### ♪ LO GÜERO INTERNO Y FREGADO

### ♪ LO GÜERO SIN MÉRITO TAN PRIVILEGIADO

En 2001, la revista mexicana *Debate Feminista* publicó, bajo el título *La güera*, la traducción al español de la reflexión autobiográfica de la chicana Cherríe Moraga. En ella, Moraga explica: "[Y]o era 'la güera' –la de la piel clara. Nacida con las facciones de mi madre chicana, pero con la piel de mi padre anglo, la vida sería fácil para mí" (Moraga 2001: 120). En el contexto mexicano, al menos a la mitad de nuestro grupo se le lee y se le aborda como 'güerxs': la palabra puede referirse a las personas de cabello rubio y/o piel clara y/o ascendencia europea y/o supuesto estatus social y cultural 'superior'. Por lo tanto, se podría utilizar actos de 'güerear' como estrategia para sacar ventaja sobre quienes no lo son. En algunos contextos, 'güerear' es una acción en la que de forma paralela, se saca provecho de alguien por responder o representar el estatus de güerx. Moraga, quien escribió su reflexión en inglés en 1979, compartió además lo siguiente: "[S]igue siendo aterrador reconocer que he internalizado un racismo y un clasismo cuyo objeto de opresión no es alguien *fuera* de mi piel, sino alguien que está dentro de mi piel. De hecho, en gran medida, la batalla real contra esa opresión empieza para todas nosotras debajo de nuestra piel" (Moraga 2001: 123).

### ♪ ¿DE VERAS LES DUELE LA PIEL?

### ♪ MÉTALE LA MANO A SU PUESTO V.I.P

Este 'alguien dentro de la piel', del cual habla Moraga, se encuentra también dentro de nuestras pieles, en nuestro grupo. A sabiendas de que las dinámicas de poder nos preceden y exceden:

¿Cómo podemos abordarlas, tocarlas, lidiar con ellas e intervenir en su ruido blanco? Un ruido blanco que es como una potencia opaca, omnipresente y subaudible, y que organiza jerárquicamente los cuerpos, las tierras, los recursos, el acceso, entre otros. ¿Es posible intervenir en este ruido blanco con el fin de interrumpir su chillante zumbido, aparentemente tranquilizante, aunque adormecedor, estando fuera y dentro de nuestras pieles, escribiendo, cantando, compartiendo y bailando juntxs un reguetón?<sup>5</sup>

♪ **¿DE VERAS LES DUELE EL PELLEJO?**

♪ **LLEVEN SU PRIVILEGIO BIEN LEJOS**

♪ **QUE YA ESTABA AHÍ SIN NINGÚN ESFUERZO**

¿Cómo abordar en el reguetón mismo las dinámicas de poder, los puntos ciegos y dolorosos, así como los diferentes privilegios, raciales, de clase y de educación, los límites reales, metafóricos y rítmicos que nos transitan, y que persisten dentro de nuestro grupo? ¿Cómo es que estos límites afectan, transforman, desafían, obstaculizan y disminuyen las relaciones, los diálogos, el trabajo y los riesgos éticos, políticos y creativos que tomamos?<sup>6</sup>

Nuestro reguetón es una invitación a lo que Gayatri Spivak llama "hacer la tarea",<sup>7</sup> que consiste en identificar las coordenadas geopolíticas e institucionales de las relaciones de poder donde nuestras prácticas se sitúan. 'Hacer la tarea' implica una auto-reflexión sobre nuestras pre-concepciones epistemológicas y ontológicas que hemos naturalizado, con el fin de 'desaprender los privilegios' que permiten la continuidad del silencio sobre la violencia colonial del patriarcado blanco supremacista y capitalista.<sup>8</sup>

♪ **LEER DE RACISMO NO TE HACE SUDAR**

♪ **NUESTRA BLANCA ACADEMIA DISECA MELANINA**

♪ **EN NOMBRE DE LA TEORÍA NOS QUIEREN CIVILIZAR**

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<sup>5</sup> Estas preguntas planteamos en nuestra presentación del 11 de noviembre de 2016 en el marco de la conferencia *SOUND::GENDER::FEMINISM::ACTIVISM 2016 White Noise* en Londres.

<sup>6</sup> Estas preguntas planteamos en nuestra presentación del 11 de noviembre de 2016 en el marco de la conferencia *SOUND::GENDER::FEMINISM::ACTIVISM 2016 White Noise* en Londres.

<sup>7</sup> Véase Spivak (1990b: 62).

<sup>8</sup> Véase Spivak (1990a: 9s.).



Img. 1.

En lugar de centrarnos en profesionalizar nuestra capacidad de escribir e interpretar canciones, hacer videoclips e intervenciones en espacios mayormente educativos,<sup>9</sup> decidimos abrazar nuestras habilidades autónomas –por ejemplo, la capacidad de parodiar, cantar y bailar juntxs lo que estamos viviendo, de tomar decisiones y de escuchar a, de sentir y cuestionar lo que pasa fuera y dentro de nuestras pieles–, e ir así más allá de los medios aprendidos y asumidos de nuestras prácticas artísticas y/o educativas individuales (Img. 1).

Desde nuestros cuerpos, la potencialidad de la no-profesionalización se basa precisamente en aprender y desaprender en grupo, de explorar las diferentes maneras de ser, estar y de trabajar juntxs no-profesionalmente. En esta línea transfronteriza de la profesionalización, no-profesionalización y desprofesionalización, la parodia como "repetición con diferencia crítica" juega un papel importante.<sup>10</sup> Nos parodiamos a nosotrxs mismxs como profesionales, artistas y/o autoras y/o educadorxs y/o estudiantes y/o trabajadorxs precarias y/o güerxs, parodiamos además los roles y los compromisos de género, los roles de lxs artistas, reguetónerxs y soñadorxs de un mundo alternativo. Hacemos 'torsiones' en este espacio liminal entre la cooperación de y la distancia a lo que estamos citando, aludiendo y repitiendo. El placer de la ironía paródica, según la crítica literaria Linda Hutcheon, no surge del humor que ésta

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<sup>9</sup> En la Escuela Nacional de Pintura, Escultura y Grabado (ENPEG), también llamada 'La Esmeralda', la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), en la Universidad Autónoma de Tlaxcala (UAT), entre otras.

<sup>10</sup> Véase Hutcheon (1985: 7).

incorpora, sino del nivel de enfrascamiento en las 'torsiones' que forman el juego intertextual.<sup>11</sup> La parodia juega con las reglas y los códigos sociales, culturales, musicales y/o artísticos al mismo tiempo que se opone a ellos.

♪ **¿DE VERAS LES DUELE EL PELLEJO?**

♪ **LLEVEN SU PRIVILEGIO BIEN LEJOS**

♪ **QUE YA ESTABA AHÍ SIN NINGÚN ESFUERZO**

♪ **NO SE TRATA DE SORTILEGIO**

♪ **NI DE HACER CONEJO**

En el número de *Debate Feminista* mencionado antes se publicó también el discurso de la comandanta zapatista Esther, llevado a cabo en el Palacio de San Lázaro de la Ciudad de México el 28 de marzo del 2001 ante diputadx, senadorxs y el público televidente:

Así es el México que queremos los zapatistas. Uno donde los indígenas seamos indígenas y mexicanos, uno donde el respeto a la diferencia se balancee con el respeto a lo que nos hace iguales. Uno donde la diferencia no sea motivo de muerte, cárcel, persecución, burla, humillación, racismo. Uno donde siempre se tenga presente que, formada por diferencias, la nuestra es una nación soberana e independiente. Y no una colonia donde abunden los saqueos, las arbitrariedades y las vergüenzas. Uno donde, en los momentos definitorios de nuestra historia, todas y todos pongamos por encima de nuestras diferencias lo que tenemos en común, es decir, el ser mexicanos (Comandanta Esther 2001).

Dirigiéndose a la cámara, Esther habló en español, la lengua que aprendió a hablar y a escribir cuando ingresó al Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN). Para algunxs indígenas, el español es una lengua enseñada, mientras las lenguas indígenas no son generalmente aprendidas en México. Aunque se hablan cerca de setenta lenguas indígenas en México, el español goza de privilegios sociales y de acceso al sistema educativo, político y jurídico, entre otros.

Cinco años antes de la comunicación de Esther, en 1996, la comandanta Ramona había hablado en la UNAM, la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, en tzotzil, su primera lengua. Durante más de una hora, Ramona había puntualizado las condiciones del cerco militar, la situación de las mujeres indígenas, y las formas de resistencia que habían desarrollado. Sin embargo, la comunicación detallada de Ramona no llegó a cruzar los confines del lenguaje entre tzotzil y español. "Cuando la tradujeron, alguien más leyó un texto previamente escrito y a cambio de la hora en que se aludió a información específica sobre las mujeres [...] se leyó uno de los comunicados de Marcos" (Belausteguigoitia 2001: 244). Por lo tanto, en 2001 se decidió

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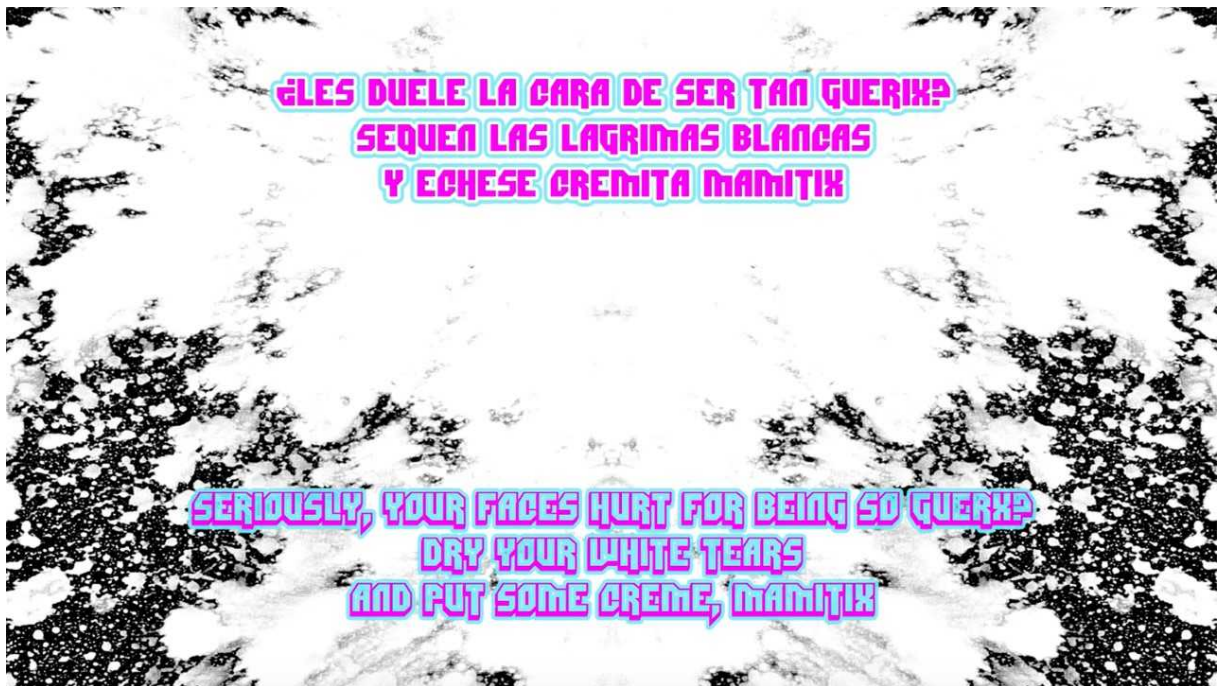
<sup>11</sup> Véase Hutcheon (1985: 32)



que Esther hablara en español, en su segunda lengua, durante su comunicación pública. Su discurso refleja la im/posibilidad de cruzar las fronteras del idioma, de costumbres y prácticas culturales que existen en México:

En este país fragmentado vivimos los indígenas condenados a la vergüenza de ser el color que somos, la lengua que hablamos, el vestido que nos cubre, la música y la danza que hablan nuestras tristezas y alegrías, nuestra historia (Comandanta Esther 2001: 341).

En el centro simbólico y jurídico de México, en el Palacio de San Lázaro de la Ciudad de México, Esther mostró en cuerpo y voz como los colores, las lenguas y los vestidos se construyen como diferencias que exponen a lxs indígenas a una cadena de discriminaciones durante toda su vida. El sistema colonial concatena su discurso "con los saqueos, las arbitrariedades y las vergüenzas" (Comandanta Esther 2001: 340) cuyo ruido blanco optimiza su continuidad. Esther articuló también el rol importante que juegan la música y la danza "que hablan nuestras tristezas y alegrías, nuestra historia". Nuestro reguetón se une con todo su ritmo a este potencial que tienen la música y la danza, y habla del ruido blanco en las estructuras, las instituciones y todas las áreas de nuestra sociedad. Todxs nacimos en un mundo de ruido blanco incrustado en nuestros patrones de pensamiento, nuestro lenguaje, nuestras imágenes, nuestras maneras de bailar. Todxs fuimos socializados racistas, sexistas, heteronormativos, entre muchas otras formas de discriminación y sus intersecciones (Img. 2).



Img. 2.

Quienes conformamos INVASORIX no nos identificamos como indígenas; para la mayoría de nosotrxs la lengua primera es el castellano. No hablamos ni entendemos ninguna lengua

indígena mesoamericana, como el tzeltal, la primera lengua de Esther. Sin embargo, siguiendo a Rivera Cusicanqui, lx indix que hay en nosotrxs nos interpela para bailar, caminar y asediar, buscando pasados que puedan ser futuros.<sup>12</sup>

La lengua española juega un papel diferente al sur y al norte de la frontera mexicana-estadounidense. En México, la relación entre el español y el tzotzil, el tzeltal, las lenguas de Ramona y Esther, introduce jerarquías distintas que la relación entre el español y el inglés en los EE.UU. En *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa discute la lengua española en el contexto de los EE.UU., refiriéndose específicamente al español chicano, tex-mex, español tejano chicano, entre otros:

*Deslenguadas. Somos los del español deficiente. Somos tu pesadilla lingüística, tu aberración lingüística, tu mestizaje lingüístico, el sujeto de tu burla. Por hablar con lenguas de fuego nos crucifican culturalmente. Racial, cultural y lingüísticamente somos huérfanos, hablamos una lengua huérfana.*

Las chicanas que crecimos con el español chicano hemos internalizado la creencia de que hablamos un español empobrecido. De que no es válido, de que es una lengua ilegítima. Y al internalizar cómo la cultura dominante utiliza nuestra propia lengua en contra de nosotras, usamos nuestras diferencias de lenguaje en contra de nosotras mismas. (Anzaldúa 2015: 118).

Tanto en México como en los EE.UU., se legitima por medio de políticas lo que se debe de hablar, cómo se debe de hablar, dónde se debe de hablar, pero también 'en qué idioma' se debe de hablar para ser parte de la cultura dominante. El español en México y el inglés en los EE.UU. se promueven como medios legítimos y superiores de comunicación. Sin embargo, la comandanta Ramona habló en tzotzil frente a miles de personas en la UNAM, y Anzaldúa mezcló el inglés, el español y el náhuatl en sus escrituras. Tanto en la UNAM, por el tiempo que le tomó a la comandanta Ramona pronunciar su discurso, como en las escrituras de Anzaldúa, por el tiempo que le tomó escribir y que nos toma ahora leer, se abre un espacio transfronterizo de lo traducible y lo no traducible, de lo comprensible y lo no comprensible, de lo decible y de lo indecible, de lo escuchado y de lo no escuchado.

Cantamos en español con acentos diferentes, usamos palabras y expresiones de otros lugares, que también nos cruzan en nuestro devenir colectivo: 'monita, güerita, rosadita'. 'Monitx' es una palabra que se usa en Colombia, y que podría ser un sinónimo de la palabra 'güerx'. Los diferentes términos señalan que el ruido blanco nos cruza y nos sigue colonizando de sur a norte en este territorio americano.

## ♪ ESTE REGUETÓN TE ESTÁ DESBARATANDO

<sup>12</sup> Véase Rivera Cusicanqui (2015: 54s.).

♪ ESTE REGUETÓN VENIMOS A PERREARLO

♪ PA' DARLE UN TATEQUIETO AL TAL RUIDO BLANCO

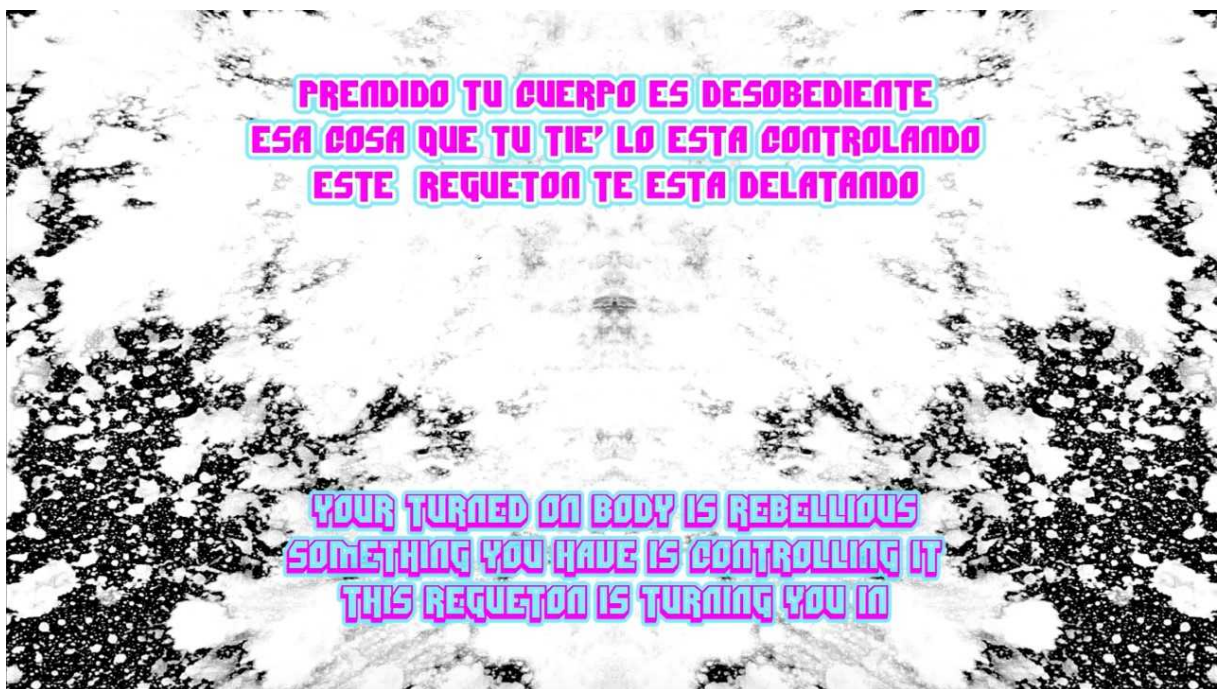
♪ NO PARES! HASTA QUE SEA SUFICIENTE

♪ PRENDIDO TU CUERPO ES DESOBEDIENTE

♪ ESA COSA QUE TÚ TIE' LO ESTÁ CONTROLANDO

♪ ESTE REGUETÓN TE ESTÁ DELATANDO

Somos conscientes de la apropiación cultural capitalista que convierte los ritmos y las manifestaciones culturales provenientes del sur global en consumo *light* blanqueado.<sup>13</sup> No obstante, entendemos nuestro reguetón como un espejo de obsidiana, un vidrio volcánico que muestra un espacio transfronterizo de lo reflejado y lo no reflejado, de lo presente y de lo ausente, de lo visible y de lo invisible, de lo que coloniza y de lo colonizado; lo entendemos como una metodología para ensayar otras formas de pensar y de decir, desde el goce y con nuestros cuerpos (Img. 3).



Img. 3.

Nuestro reguetón desafía el sesgo clasista y racista con el que el género musical es culturalmente asociado. Es un dispositivo para activar representaciones críticas desde nuestro quehacer cuir-

<sup>13</sup> El 14 de mayo de 2018, la revista *Negra cubana tenía que ser* denuncia la producción musical de la argentina Romina Bernardo con su proyecto de reguetón *Chocolate Remix* de apropiación cultural y racismo. Véase Ile-Iwe / La Escuela (2018).

feminista,<sup>14</sup> y una herramienta de contradicción y paradoja que intenta desbaratar los roles que tenemos disponibles, sacudirlos en el perreo, mientras que desde nuestras corporalidades entrenamos otras formas de estar, sentir y actuar. El 'tatequieto', o en otras palabras, el ponerle fin a la conducta de 'tal ruido blanco', es un momento de ruptura y de destrucción necesario para una transformación.

¡Con todos nuestros cuerpos evocamos a la amiga imaginaria bell hooks para que se escuche y baile!

## ♪ PERREAMOS EL PATRIARCADO BLANCO

## ♪ SUPREMACISTA CAPITALISTA PARA

## ♪ ROMPERLE LO COLONIALISTA Y MONOPOLISTA

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<sup>14</sup> Utilizamos el término *cuir* para referirnos a las prácticas latinoamericanas de resignificación del movimiento y la teoría *queer* anglosajona. En palabras de la Internacional cuir: "La variación queer/cuir registra la inflexión geopolítica hacia el Sur y desde la periferia, en contrapunto a la epistemología colonial y a la historiografía anglo-americana" (La Internacional cuir en Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía 2011).

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## **Nepantleras fotografiando. Exploring identities through the camera**

**Verena Melgarejo Weinandt**

(Berlin / Wien)

**and Marisel Bongola, Isabel Mendoza, Romina Palacios, Sophie Utikal**

(Wien)

### **The Knowledge of Images: Creating Bridges**

(by Verena Melgarejo Weinandt)

In 2016, I held the workshop "Nepantleras fotografiando", as part of *A(r)mando Vo(i)ces*, a project which revolved around Gloria Anzaldúa's crossings between image and word, theory and practice. *A(r)mando Vo(i)ces* called on Anzaldúa's notion of images as bridges between evoked emotion and conscious knowing.<sup>1</sup> After six months,<sup>2</sup> the project concluded with an exhibit in the Vienna Central Library, in which the results from events, workshops and research work done in the Library's collection were presented. In cooperation with the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin and the Austrian Association of Women Artists (VBKÖ), I was able to show a series of Gloria Anzaldúa's drawings, entitled *Between Word and Image. A Thought Gallery*.<sup>3</sup> This collection of archive material were drawings that Anzaldúa used during the lectures she called gigs.<sup>4</sup>

From a curatorial perspective, I had to consider how to design/shape/create a 'translation' of Gloria Anzaldúa's work. Here, I do not mean merely a linguistic translation, but rather the 'bridges' that I wanted to illustrate between Anzaldúa's work and its significance for the Viennese context. Otherwise, the exhibit would have run the risk of her work being shown 'in isolation' and thus might have been received on a purely theoretical level.

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<sup>1</sup> This theoretical basis and the documentation of the exhibition can be viewed online. See <https://armandovoices.wordpress.com/>.

<sup>2</sup> The whole project consisted of a workshop with children about the knowledge of dreams, organized in collaboration with the association *Großes Schiff*, a talk about decolonial feminism held by Yuderlys Espinosa Miñoso and research on questions of representation of indigenous identities and knowledge at the Vienna Central Library.

<sup>3</sup> The drawings were originally compiled by Julianne Gilland (former head of the Benson Latin American Foundation) and presented by Nina Hoechtl, Coco Gutiérrez-Magallanes and Rían Lozano at UNAM in Mexico.

<sup>4</sup> See Keating (2000: 211-233).

The idea for the photography workshop "Nepantleras fotografiando", which took place in cooperation with the association *Großes Schiff*,<sup>5</sup> originated from these considerations. I invited women\*<sup>6</sup> from the Latino community in Vienna to the workshop, which was offered at no charge. The group was heterogeneous, they were first and second generation migrants in Austria, had different class and educational backgrounds, different sexual orientations and varied in age, defined themselves as white or women\* of color. Being at all these intersections is what Gloria Anzaldúa describes as the *nepantlera*: a place where different knowledge(s) come together, a place "between the conscious and the unconscious, the place where transformations are enacted. Nepantla is a place where we can accept contradiction and paradox" (Anzaldúa 2015: 56).

Starting from that group composition, I used Anzaldúa's drawings to approach her theory. These drawings, realized on transparencies, express the important role images play for Anzaldúa's thinking, writing and teaching.<sup>7</sup> By presenting Anzaldúa's knowledge using her drawings rather than texts, it was possible to conceive an educational concept that does not only communicate on a linguistic and theoretical level. The participants were invited to examine the drawings on an associative level and in conversation with one another, thus approaching their content collectively. The goal was not to assess these interpretations in terms of 'right' and 'wrong' in accordance to Anzaldúa's definitions, but instead to use them as a basis for an exchange about topics such as identity, experience as knowledge, language and spirituality. In a second step, we read selected quotes from Anzaldúan texts, which we connected to the drawings.

On this basis, every participant created a photographic piece to establish her own connection to the work of Anzaldúa. Not only the image itself, but the creative process of imagination is at the center of Anzaldúa's research interest, providing a possibility to heal and transform.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, inviting the participants to create images of themselves opened up the possibility to change and create these images by questioning "frameworks and conceptual categories reinforced by language and consensual reality. To explore the 'cracks between the worlds' (rendijas, rents in the world), we must see through the holes in reality ('seeing' is another type of perception)" (Anzaldúa 2015: 45).

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<sup>5</sup> The Association *Großes Schiff* realizes different art and culture projects by and for the Latino community in Vienna, for example *Creativas*, a project that offered free creative workshops in Spanish for Latinos by Latinos, *A la Rueda Rueda*, a program for Spanish-speaking or bilingual children, *Migrativas*, a self-organized magazine project. See <https://www.grosses-schiff.org>.

<sup>6</sup> I used "women\*" as a description for the invitation to the workshop to invite also transwomen to the workshop.

<sup>7</sup> See Sharpe (2017).

<sup>8</sup> See Anzaldúa (2015: 35).

For this exploration and the realization of the pieces, I chose analogue compact cameras. The technical fact that the images could only be viewed after exposure meant that the participants could concentrate more on the presented subject and did not need to be equally concerned with aesthetic questions about presentation, detail, lighting conditions, focus, etc. Viewing the exposed images became a moment of reflection, memory and surprise for each photographer. Every participant was able to make a choice about which photographs would be presented to the entire group. The images related to the following questions: how can complex identities be expressed through photography? How is one's own identity reflected in nature? Which objects and other images are an expression and representation of one's own history and identity? How can one's own body be perceived through the camera? Which collective rituals or events form one's identity and what does it mean to document them? The search for visual representation and the examination of the results enabled a reflection on identity. The discussion and exchange about the photographs led to very intimate moments, in which insights into the participants' lives were shared through the images and conversations.

The selected photographs from this workshop were then also displayed in the library. Although I was the curator, I let the participants themselves decide which photographs they wanted to present how, and if and to what extent they wanted to contextualize them in writing or in another way. The participants of the workshop were: Anais Bongola, Marisel Bongola, Romina Palacios Espinoza, Karen Lazaro, Isabel Mendoza, Cecilia Tasso, Sophie Utikal. The following pieces are selected results of the workshop: photographs and written pieces by Sophie Utikal and by Marisel Bongola, and photographs by Romina Palacios and by Isabel Mendoza.

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**The Knowledge of Images: Expresando identidades**

(Marisel Bongola, Isabel Mendoza, Romina Palacios, Sophie Utikal)



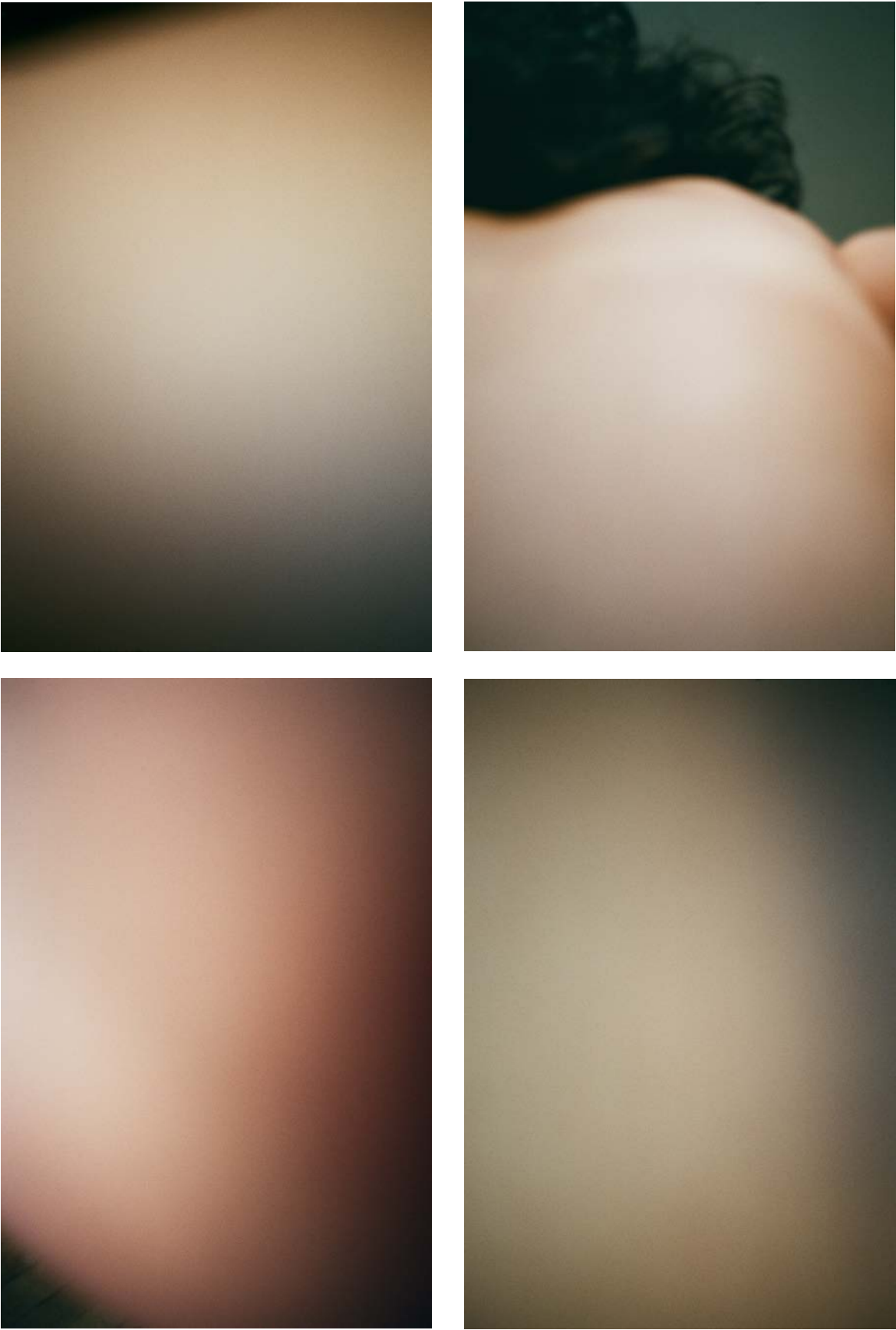
Img. 1: (Palacios Espinoza 2016).



Img. 2: (Palacios Espinoza 2016).



Img. 3: (Palacios Espinoza 2016).



Img. 4-7: (Sophie Utikal 2016).

**Taking a picture of myself / Tomando una imagen de mí misma****(Sophie Utikal)**

Taking a picture of myself. How to re.construct a re.presentation of my foreign body on a piece of paper within less than a second. If sometimes I feel so near, so close, so dense and so thick that not even I can see myself anymore. It all blurs and diffuses into a feeling, a color, a texture.

Imagining how my back looks like. I see a bent mountain, shielding off my chest from the eyes and words of the dominant others but I also see a warm and cloudy sea of memories it has navigated me through, passing across the contradictions and the tensions.

How to capture this on film? First I stretch out myself to what lies behind of me, reaching out into my unknown, into my shadows, while still holding on, pointing back to me, trying to stay still so that the image will be clear enough.

It is not easy, my arm becomes tense, my body is not used to travelling around itself, I need several approaches. My fingers press the release. Not sure if what I caught is my body or the wall. Am I still looking at my back or looking with my back?

.

Tomando una imagen de mí misma. Cómo puedo re.construir una re.presentación de mi cuerpo extranjero en un pedazo de papel en menos de un segundo. Si a veces me siento tan cerca, tan inmediata, tan densa y ancha que ni yo misma me puedo ver. Todo se esfuma y se disuelve en un sentimiento, un color, una textura.

Imaginando cómo se ve mi espalda. Veo una montaña protegiendo mi pecho de los ojos y las palabras de los otros que dominan, pero también veo un lago tibio y nublado de memorias donde he navegado, pasando las contradicciones y tensiones.

¿Cómo capturar esto en un rollo? Primero me estiro a lo que queda atrás de mí, me extendo a mi desconocido, a mis sombras, mientras que aguanto, apuntando otra vez a mí, tratando de mantenerme quieta para que la imagen salga clara.

No es nada fácil, mi brazo se pone tenso, mi cuerpo no está acostumbrado a viajar alrededor de sí mismo, necesito varios intentos. Mis dedos aprietan el disparador. No estoy segura de si cogí mi cuerpo o la pared. Estoy aún mirando a mi espalda o mirando con mi espalda?

.

Ein Bild von mir selber machen. Wie kann ich eine Re.präsentation re.konstruieren von meinem fremden Körper auf einem Blatt Papier in weniger als einer Sekunde. Wenn ich mir

---

manchmal so nah bin, so eng und so dicht, dass ich mich selbst nicht mehr sehe, es zerstreut und verschwimmt sich alles in ein Gefühl, eine Farbe, eine Textur.

Vorstellen wie mein Rücken aussieht. Ich sehe einen gekrümmten Berg, der meine Brust von den Augen und Worten der anderen die dominieren abschirmt, aber ich sehe auch einen warmen und bewölkten See von Erinnerungen durch den er mich navigiert hat, entlang an den Widersprüchen und Spannungen.

Wie kann das auf Film eingefangen werden? Erst breite ich mich aus, zu dem was hinter mir liegt, ich greife in das Unbekannte, in meine Schatten, während ich immer noch festhalte, auf mich zurück zeige, ich versuche still zu bleiben damit das Bild deutlich genug wird.

Es ist nicht leicht, mein Arm verspannt sich, mein Körper ist es nicht gewohnt um sich selbst zu reisen, ich brauche mehrere Anläufe. Meine Finger drücken auf den Auslöser. Nicht sicher, ob ich meinen Körper oder die Wand eingefangen habe. Sehe ich nun auf meinen Rücken oder mit meinem Rücken?



Img. 8: (Marisel Bongola 2016).



Img. 9: (Marisel Bongola 2016).



Img. 10: (Marisel Bongola 2016).



Img. 11: (Marisel Bongola 2016).



Img. 12: (Marisel Bongola 2016).



Img. 13: (Marisel Bongola 2016).





Img. 14-16: (Isabel Mendoza 2016).



Img. 17: (Isabel Mendoza 2016).



Img. 18: (Isabel Mendoza 2016).



Img. 19: (Isabel Mendoza 2016).

## **Segundo de Febrero in San Antonio, Texas**

**Laura Varela**

**(San Antonio, Texas)**

As a filmmaker and artist my work is shaped by the influences and awareness of growing up on the U.S./Mexico border. My work crosses cultural, linguistic and physical borders through the use of documentary film and contemporary art installations; challenging iconography and discourse of popular culture. I identify as a Xicana filmmaker whose work is in service to her community, striving for a deeper understanding of her history and culture.

My goal with everything I create is to connect it to a larger movement for social change and liberation within Xicana and indigenous communities. Through subject matter and my insider lens I feel that my work subverts the mainstream narrative. My projects provide a glimpse of those whose roots have been part of the Americas for hundreds if not thousands of years; nevertheless, our stories have been omitted from mainstream literature, films, and television. It is a digital resistance; where I get to re-write our histories back into the 'books' and psyche of those willing to bear witness. It allows us to heal, recover, and remember.

I experienced a recovery and remembering for myself while a student at the University of Texas at Austin (UT) in the early 1990s. At that time, I only knew one place, and that was the US/Mexican border of El Paso/Ciudad Juárez. When I arrived at UT, my invisibility was a source of pain when I came to the harsh realization that the history of my community had purposefully been omitted, or maligned from my public education. What added to that pain was the few Latinos at the University of Texas in the early 1990s; even fewer from El Paso. Now, through film, I have transmuted this pain into something beautiful, tangible, and permanent.

My film and art work aims to transcend borders and to heal the spiritual wounds of my invisibility as a Xicana in US mainstream, and the invisibility of countless others. Although the notion of Mexican-American culture permeates Texas, stories of families and women who resemble me, who 'are' me, are devoid from Texan popular culture. Our histories and contributions have been systematically obscured, unappreciated, and distorted. The stories that connect our humanity to the world around us are nearly impossible to find, as they have been deliberately hidden in the crevices of society where they are the barely noticeable. This lack of visibility serves as the impetus for my life's work and dedication to telling those stories that serve as the medicine of our generational and contemporary wounds – which are, with no doubt, rooted in colonization and patriarchy. It is up to me to heal myself; in doing so I heal the

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generational trauma from seven generations back and seven generations forward. Indigenous people from the north and south of the border see seven as a sacred number.

Growing up along the US-Mexican border, two languages, two countries, and two identities were one and the same. The union of this duality permeated every aspect of my youth. The border constantly crossed my world through language and culture. The food I ate every day reflected the constant crossing. It was (and is) essential to speak Spanish to navigate the life in a border city. However, just as other members of the Mexican American community, I was well aware of the fact that I needed English to succeed in the US, the country I lived in. I was also cognizant of the discrimination generations of Mexican Americans have faced since 1848.

My father, who grew up in segregated El Paso, Texas, and his maternal family from New Mexico insisted on teaching me English as soon as possible to prevent any discrimination as they were made to suffer speaking Spanish. They made sure I entered school with all the language skills they thought I needed to succeed. As the youngest of five children and an avid consumer of American TV, I picked English up rather quickly. My mother was born in Durango, Mexico, as well as both of her parents' families. However, Trinidad Breceda, my maternal grandmother, was born in the state of Wyoming – before her family returned to settle back in Durango. We could only surmise that it was the migrant stream or railroad that took her family up north. My Grandmother Trini left Durango with her husband, my grandfather Fermin Valdez, to Ciudad Juárez; after they split, she ended up in El Paso, TX. My mother was left behind in Durango at one year old when her parents moved up north to Ciudad Juárez; she was raised by her paternal grandmother. At sixteen years of age she insisted on returning to her mother and family when an aunt was going to Ciudad Juárez. Once there she was crossed by her aunt into the United States through the international bridge; she did it by wearing make-up and practicing the words 'American' which were all one needed to declare to cross the border in the early 1960s. Identification was rarely requested if one was a US citizen. She joined my grandmother, now remarried, and her siblings whom she had never met, in El Paso, TX. My grandmother quickly petitioned for her citizenship, because she was born an American citizen in Wyoming. Like many before me, my place in the United States of America was grounded and established in indigenous, Spanish colonial, Mexican, and American History.

When growing up in El Paso, racism, its privileges and exclusions were constant issues. Even though I was the 'lightest' of all my siblings, I suffered from bullying and threats of violence like many other young people; the darkest skinned children and those with heavy Spanish accents were even more affected. The well-established need in US society to differentiate, to be better, like American Exceptionalism, crept into the attitudes of our

community which, at the same time, was dealing with internalized racism and identity confusion. The elementary, middle and high schools I attended in El Paso were populated by 99% Mexican American students. Our neighborhood, elementary and middle school property fence lined the Border Highway, with the Rio Grande running parallel. Our excursions into Ciudad Juárez were usually on the weekends when we visited relatives and shopped; we were always grateful to return to the US side. We were kids. Even as children we knew we were the same, but somehow different. Our US citizenship was used as a weapon of differentiation against those that recently arrived in the school ground. Intergenerational trauma manifested in ways that I did not fully comprehend as a child. As an adult I have reflected on the violence in my community and neighborhood, and it all makes sense.

The realities of our home life contradicted all playground rules and attitudes of the 'other'. In the school yard the 'other' was usually someone who was physically different or had just settled in El Paso from Mexico. However, in our home in particular, we always had a family member from Mexico who was staying with us, getting, as they said, their life in order and preparing for life in the US. El Paso was the first step after they had crossed the border. Many times, my mother helped prepare them for their next journey; more than likely to California or Chicago. The constant back and forth through the *frontera*, throughout the generations, created a network of family on both sides of the US-Mexican border. Before it was militarized and before border enforcement grew to today's levels, the border was just a physical barrier which needed to be crossed, easily, to continue one's life's journey. For generations, my family members had been crossing north, to establish their own families and new generations of US citizens. Unfortunately, deep wounds prevented my mother from returning home regularly; despite my father's love of visiting Mexico, she rarely made the return trip, fourteen hours by car, to Durango, Mexico. She was (and is) happy to forget the poverty she grew up in; however, her *mexicanidad* is reflected in the way she communicates, nurtures and views the world. For this I am eternally grateful.

In the early 1990s, during my college years at the University of Texas at Austin, I took my first classes in Chicano History, Literature, and Meso-American Anthropology. I started to realize that our own history or our contributions to this land had not been taught in high school. This history was quickly forgotten, while the 'heroic defenders of the Alamo', the narrative describing Anglos as heroes and Mexican as villains, was imposed on the mainstream Texan narrative. My public school education completely ignored the Chicano Civil Rights movement and the cultural and scientific contributions of our indigenous and Mexican ancestors.

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My understanding of what was lost and now recovered has led me to work on projects that I consider medicine stories. Stories of communities preserving and/or recovering culture and traditions. The current political climate in the US has radicalized a whole new generation of LatinX about the need to return to indigeneity; it is important that everyone understands the need to protect the water and the environment, and to preserve sacred sites. Decolonization also includes defending the rights of nature. The survival of all living beings on Mother Earth depends on us.

### ***Segundo de Febrero: The documentary***

*Segundo de Febrero* is a short documentary I directed in San Antonio, TX.<sup>1</sup> It was filmed in 2017 at Christ the King Church, a historic Catholic parish deep in the West Side of San Antonio, a historic and predominantly Mexican American area of the city. The following photo essay presents some of the essential shots of the documentary, presenting part of the film's transcript together with the photos.

February second is a unique Mexican American celebration commemorating the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the U.S.-Mexican War. The date is also considered to be the 'birth' of the Mexican American. It merges the commemoration of the Treaty of Guadalupe with el *Día de la Candelaria* and with the day indigenous communities celebrate the Blessing of the Seeds. *Día de la Candelaria*, a holiday celebrated annually on February second, is also known as the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, which marks forty days after Jesus Christ was born, and the supposed day when Mary and Joseph presented Baby Jesus to the Temple.

The idea of capturing this communal celebration on film intrigued me because I had long wanted to shoot something that shows the complexity and beauty of Chicano spirituality. For me, Grupo Xinachtli represented a return to our indigenous identity and millennial traditions of *conocimiento*. They perform particular traditions from central Mexico. The group calls themselves a Grupo de Danza Mexica Azteca Xinachtli, and their ceremonies and tradition use the Concha, the armadillo shell guitar like instrument, drums, rattles and singing along with dance. They are a purely ceremonial group; they are also known as Concheros. The 2017 mass which I filmed was a commemoration of the first celebrations at the church thirty-five years ago and brought Grupo Xinachtli back to Christ the King.

February 2017 was also a time of awakening in the Mexican American community; many were reconnecting with their indigenous blood and supporting the movement in Standing Rock.

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<sup>1</sup> To view and learn more about the film please see Varela (2019).

Many different indigenous groups and Xicanx communities were sending resources and people; supporting the information campaign and boycotting companies like Wells Fargo that supported the Dakota Access Pipeline and its parent company Energy Transfer Partners. I felt the need to create work that was in support of the water protectors in Standing Rock.<sup>2</sup> During the time of production, I was part of an informal network supporting my nephew Victor Jiménez and other water protectors who traveled to North Dakota to be on the front lines of the protests at the Standing Rock reservation. Indigenous activists and allies were protecting the water from the Dakota Access Pipeline, which was eventually built under the Missouri River on tribal land and a Sacred Site. This all was in our consciousness at the time, and as a filmmaker I wanted to be of service to my community in every project that I created; making sure I was able to weave messages of solidarity. Everyone drinks water. Everyone is impacted. Even my family was forced to pull together networks and resources when my nephew felt compelled to go and be of service to this movement protecting the rights of nature and indigenous treaty rights. The ceremony on Segundo de Febrero mentioned the water as crucial element to our community.

The film was made possible by Carlos González, a dear friend who makes a short appearance on my feature documentary *As Long as I Remember: American Veterans* (2010).<sup>3</sup> Knowing it's cultural significance, Carlos asked me to film the mass. He forms part of the Segundo de Febrero Committee in San Antonio, TX, which is dedicated to keeping an archive of events in the cities of San Antonio, Denver and Tucson. Filming this ceremony and mass meant I could capture their lived interpretation of *mestizaje*.

Carlos González and Richard Jasso had both attended Our Lady of the Lake University and the Raza Unida State Conference in Lubbock, Texas, in 1977, where the Chicano/Mexican American Commemoration Day, also known as Segundo de Febrero, grew out of a resolution. Segundo was born towards the end of the Chicano Movement in an effort to keep the spirit of the *movimiento* alive. The name was born because many of the students and members of Raza Unida were educated in the United States, they did not even realize that the correct way to say the date in Spanish was 'el dos de febrero'.

The parish at Christ the King is a mixture of families who have been in San Antonio for several generations as well as new immigrants who have just crossed the border. Father Mike Horan has a mission in El Salvador, and hints of Liberation Theology are evident on the murals in the church entrance (Img. 1). Father Horan also hosts an *intercambio* with parish teens who join him on his yearly trips to El Salvador where his parish has built a school and a church.

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<sup>2</sup> To review the debates on 'Standing Rock', see for example Chief Arvol Looking Horse (2018).

<sup>3</sup> For more information, see Varela (2014).



The ceremony is special because the *tradición de conocimiento* that Grupo Xinatchli practices, which is featured in the film and in the photo essay, originated in Mexico before colonization and Catholicism. Danza Mexica Azteca was lost in the United States until *maestro* Andres Segura brought it to the United States and created three groups in the 1970s. The groups sprouted in Southern California, Albuquerque, New Mexico and Austin/San Antonio, Texas. For the film I interviewed the Capitán del Grupo, Jose Peregrino Flores, of Austin, TX. We also interviewed two other members of the Grupo, Joleen Garcia, a community organizer in San Antonio, along with Diana Abrego, one of the founders of Casa de Colores in the border town Del Rio, TX. Both women are very active in their respective communities. We also interviewed a parish member, Sylvia Garza, who is part of the Guadalupanas, a prayer group dedicated to the Virgen de Guadalupe, at Christ the King Church. Mrs. Garza recalled her life as a child in Michoacan, Mexico as a *danzante* during her childhood years. Our final interview is with Rogelio Smiley Rojas, who was one of the original members of Grupo Xinachtli that participated in the first Blessing of the Seeds ceremony at Christ the King thirty-five years ago.

The film premiered one year later, on February second, 2018, in the parish hall at Our Lady of the Lake University for their Segundo de Febrero programming. The following Sunday we presented the film at Christ the King Parish Hall. San Antonio celebrated its Tricentennial in 2018. This celebration more than ever shows the unique spiritual culture that is created when territories change governance and borders are created. Spirituality and cultural traditions continue to find a way. There is a unique *mezcla*, a mixture of cultures that emerges from populations that are resisting the mainstream narrative and returning or retaining traditional practices. The heart and soul of this city, of this region, derives from those who have crossed borders and who continue to cross them on a material and spiritual level. Mexican American culture has created a confluence of cultures that has shaped who we are to create something new.

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**Segundo de Febrero: A Photo Essay**

Img. 1: San Antonio, TX



Img. 2: Christ the King Church



Img. 3: José Flores: "Gracias a Dios y los espíritus guardianes de este lugar sagrado. Es un lugar sagrado porque la gente aquí viene a rezar. Todos vienen con la misma idea y voluntariamente a acercarse con el gran espíritu".



Img. 4: Conchas



Img. 5: Greeting each other in the morning



Img. 6: Preparing flower petals for the ceremony



Img. 7: Keli Rosa Cabunoc and Xelina Flores collecting flower petals



Img. 8: Smiley Riojas blessing his Concha with tobacco smoke



Img. 9: José Flores, Capitán Grupo Xinachtli: "El dos de febrero es el empezar de una nueva vida, aunque sella una nueva vida que crece plantita, o crece un maíz o te crece el espíritu, el entendimiento, y la conciencia. Todo eso significa, en una manera, este día aquí en esta iglesia.

Y también, no sé si por casualidad o una forma poética, el dos de febrero es cuando se firma el tratado de Guadalupe Hidalgo en 1848, y para nosotros también es una forma de nueva vida. Se siembra la identidad del Mexicano Americano. *The Mexican American*".



Img. 10: Father Mike Horan: "Este día vamos a reconocer nuestra historia y adorar nuestras tradiciones y lo bello de nuestras culturas. La Candelaria es la levantada de Jesús. Recordamos también es cuando se firma el tratado de Guadalupe Hidalgo hace 169 años. Con favor de dar la bienvenida al Grupo Azteca Xinachtli."



Img. 11: Diana Abrego: "Venimos a bendecir las semillas; pero lo importante es que la comunidad mexicana chicana indígena está, es un lugar sagrado para ellos. Entonces esta reunión para venir a la iglesia a volverse a conectar con sus raíces, y Xinachtli combina eso con la iglesia".

Jolleen Garcia: "We have to understand who we are and where we came from, and when we do that, we are a force that can't be stopped. We are so powerful, that's why I feel understanding your indigenous roots helps you remember the symbols, remember the balance, remember the wisdom that is taught throughout the ceremonies".



Img. 12: Jose Flores: "I think that everybody, como los indigenas, but also our young people, they need to have that spiritual identity, because the spiritual identity is what begins to nurture that which you think is good, and that which you think is bad. Maestro Seguro siempre nos decía que la danza es para definirte. Taking care of our resources and our water that are not only sacred but required to live".



Img. 13: Sra. Sylvia Garza: "Yo soy de una provincia en el Estado de Hidalgo, y yo en mi pueblo, yo empecé a bailar desde los seis años hasta la edad de catorce años".



Img. 14: Sra. Sylvia Garza: "Y el dos de febrero, allá en la parroquia, danzábamos también. Y yo, esa tradición la tengo desde mi niñez".





Img. 15: Father Mike: "Todos somos hijos y hijas de Dios. Muchas culturas indígenas conocían estos días un buen tiempo para bendecir sus semillas que iban a plantar. Hace treinta y cinco años, ese mismo grupo Xinachtli participó con nosotros en una misa para reconocer el Tratado de Guadalupe Hidalgo".



Img. 16.



Img. 17: Jose Flores: "Este es el día de la nueva vida, o sea, la nueva vida de los cuarenta días, que sale Jesucristo, hoy también empieza el año agrícola del plantar, febrero dos, el tratado de Guadalupe Hidalgo también plantó una semilla muy especial. La semilla que nosotros somos mexicanos americanos y somos orgullosos de nuestra tradición, que somos orgullosos de nuestra cultura. Siempre para en frente, no importa lo que dice el gobierno en estos días, seguimos enfrente en nuestra fe en nuestra cultura porque si no, se nos puede secar nuestro jardín".



Img. 18: Smiley Rojas: "In 1982 was the first time we had the ceremony here at Christ the King for the Blessing of the Seeds, and we came back five years ago to continue the ceremony. But the good thing is that here in the congregation we always find señoras that were *matachines* or *danzantes* in their earlier years".



Img. 19: Diane Abrego: "Los cantos para mí, yo los entiendo que son rezos, cada paso que damos es un rezo".



Img. 20: Joleen Garcia: "The female energy is present, it is also balanced by male energy in different forms; so you have the fire you have the water, you also have the earth and you have the sun".



Img. 21: Bendición Diana Abrego: "Las sahumadoras, la malinche que lleva el sahúmador, es la que va protegiendo el grupo sahúmando el camino; bendiciendo con los humos, y protegiendo y a la misma vez limpiando, es el vereda que lleva cuando empiezan las ceremonias. So we have a responsibility to human beings not only spiritually, but como madres y mujeres to educate our community, and if we could do it por medios como la ceremonia que reconoce lo más importante, algo tan importante como es las agua".



Img. 22: Drinking the water. Joleen Garcia: "The water is with us throughout the ceremony, it carries a glass of it throughout; and in that glass is a rock, it's an obsidian which carries the energy of our ceremony and at the end we create a circle and each one of us drinks from that water".



Img. 23: The Petals. Joleen Garcia: "The petals, with their different colors, represent different energies and the balance, and you see that we all come together at the center. It's part of the mestizaje that we talk about being indigenous people in this land."



Img. 24: Father Mike: "Dios, te pedimos que bendigas estas semillas que van a florecer, que van a crecer, que van a dar gloria tu nombre, que van a dar a todos a todo el mundo, que van a admirar los que van a ver a estas semillas, que pronto van a ser plantas; el poder de Dios para nosotros. Que nosotros también vamos a sembrar sus palabras en nuestros corazones. En el nombre."



Img. 25: Grupo Xinachtli: Song. Call: "Gracias al buen Señor que alabo su gran poder". Response: "Gracias al buen Señor que alabo su gran poder."



Img. 26.



Img. 27: Joleen Garcia: "We came together as families, now we are products of Spanish and indigenous peoples and our traditions also reflect we have always felt that we wanted to create a relationship that was respectful, and much closer so we can connect communities, and also to be able to say 'Don't forget your indigenous roots'".



Img. 28: Jose Flores: "Pedimos que la luz y la paz y el dador de la vida esta con nosotros siempre".

Congregation: "Ahora y siempre".

Jose Flores: "El es Dios".

END

IMEX XVII

**RESEÑAS**

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**REVIEWS**



**Christian Sperling**  
**(Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana)**

Oswaldo Estrada (ed.) (2015): *Senderos de la violencia: Latinoamérica y sus narrativas armadas*. Valencia: Albatros Ediciones, 367 páginas.

Oswaldo Estrada recopila en *Senderos de la violencia* tanto estudios académicos sobre un corpus abundante de "narrativas" como crónicas y ensayos en los cuales escritoras y escritores dan testimonio y reflexionan sobre la violencia en América Latina. El diálogo teórico, metodológico y axiológico que entabla esta veintena de textos resulta sumamente atractivo, pues entrelaza análisis hondos y precisos sobre la función de la literatura en escenarios de (pos-)conflicto. Además, este libro contiene experiencias de primera mano sobre qué implica escribir en contextos de a la violencia, cómo se pueden dismantelar sus lenguajes y cuáles son las estrategias para oponerse a la "desmemoria". El gran acierto de este esfuerzo colectivo consiste en esbozar un amplio panorama de expresiones artísticas y críticas sobre algunos casos sintomáticos de la opresión durante las guerras sucias, las dictaduras militares y la imposición del neoliberalismo y del neocolonialismo. Centrados en los conflictos de las últimas cuatro décadas, los análisis de las diversas formas de la violencia –objetiva, subjetiva, simbólica, latente y epistémica– parten de una concepción abarcadora de "narrativa" que incluye novelas, cuentos, películas, testimonios, lugares de memoria, fotografías, poemas, canciones, etc. Al partir de la idea de la narración como medio fundamental para sondear la dimensión subjetiva de la violencia, y con ella los ámbitos del trauma, la construcción de la memoria, las ideologías y lenguajes que legitiman la violencia o se posicionan de forma contestataria frente a ella, muchas de las agudas indagaciones adquieren una importante ejemplaridad teórico-metodológica para el estudio de las representaciones de la violencia en general. No solo son los enfoques en los discursos artísticos como testimonio o incluso legitimación de la violencia, o las innovadoras propuestas de modelos semióticos para su análisis que hacen de este libro colectivo una obra de consulta ineludible; también marcan pautas para futuras aproximaciones críticas los abordajes de la estetización del mal, la comercialización de la memoria y la espectacularización de la violencia que demanda el mercado de libros y la construcción de hegemonía en el contexto de las llamadas guerras contra el narcotráfico.

La primera de las cuatro secciones titulada "Fronteras de violencia y narcotráfico" abre con una crónica donde Juan Villoro explora las particulares formas de comunicación a través de la violencia espectacular que ejercen las bandas de narcotraficantes cuando arrojan cadáveres

descuartizados o colocan narcomantas en el espacio público; al mismo tiempo, Villoro examina la propaganda del Estado mexicano en el contexto de la construcción maniquea del "enemigo": la justificación de la militarización de ese país. En el mismo orden de ideas, Oswaldo Zavala profundiza en la construcción de hegemonía a través de la despolitización de la violencia y la exotización del narco en la llamada "narcoliteratura", porque ésta, según el crítico, genera un imaginario cómplice con la mitología del narcotráfico divulgada por el Estado mexicano, de modo que una buena parte de la producción novelística reciente reproduce las simplificaciones de la verdad oficial. El estudio de Alejandra Márquez, en cambio, busca sondear el potencial crítico en las representaciones de mujeres dentro de narcoficciones: una de sus aportaciones es señalar el funcionamiento de la abyección en los procesos de inserción de las protagonistas en un entorno caracterizado por la violencia y el machismo. Por otra parte, Rafael Acosta discute la producción simbólica –corridos y vallenatos– de grupos ilegales armados colombianos y mexicanos para ahondar en sus estrategias legitimadoras de la violencia. Esta primera sección finaliza con el texto de José Ramón Ortigas quien se basa en el concepto de la heterotopía para analizar relatos testimoniales y ficciones sobre la violencia que ejercen bandas criminales y el Estado mexicano en contra de los transmigrantes centroamericanos. En suma, el potencial literario de encubrir o revelar la función y los efectos de la violencia es uno de los ejes centrales de esta sección.

El siguiente apartado –"Archivos de violencia latente"– inicia con una crónica-testimonio elocuente de la construcción de la memoria frente al trauma colectivo, en la que el escritor guatemalteco Rodrigo Rey Rosa se entrevista con los habitantes de una comunidad rural quienes excavan en los alrededores de su aldea en busca de las fosas con víctimas de la desaparición forzada. A continuación, Alexandra Ortiz Wallner ofrece una interpretación de la novela *El material humano* del creador centroamericano mencionado, donde el archivo es el lugar donde se organiza la biopolítica genocida del Estado guatemalteco durante la guerra sucia, a la vez que el archivo es el lugar para construir la memoria en resistencia frente a la verdad oficial. Otros objetos simbólicos que dividen y separan –pasaportes, puertas, murallas– son la temática abordada por María del Carmen Caña Jiménez, cuyo ensayo teoriza sobre la violencia latente, evidenciada en las emociones vinculadas con ausencias y presencias, y así desarrolla una categoría útil para dar cuenta del terror y los peligros imaginarios con los que cotidianamente coexisten los integrantes de las sociedades centroamericanas. Este segundo apartado culmina con la interpretación de narrativas puertorriqueñas; John Waldron relaciona elementos ideológicos de las divisiones de clase, raza y género con procesos semióticos que ponen en evidencia y colapsan las dicotomías encargadas de crear inclusión y exclusión,

identidad y alteridad, pues exploran zonas intermedias entre lo representable y su contrario: así el crítico muestra el potencial de la literatura de transgredir y subvertir las normas de conducta y el imaginario hegemónicos. Cabe destacar la importancia de esta segunda sección, ya que brinda visibilidad a una literatura poco conocida, de una inmensa hondura crítica para identificar los mecanismos y estragos psicológicos y sociales de la violencia.

El tercer apartado, "Géneros de violencia", comienza con una reflexión del escritor peruano Diego Trelles Paz quien expone las razones que lo motivaron a usar un lenguaje violento en su novela *Bioy*: "si quería mostrarla y documentarla [la violencia] en toda su demencia y ferocidad, había que violentarlo todo: la forma, el lenguaje, las estructuras, el espacio, el tiempo narrativo" (181). Los dos artículos siguientes de Liliana Wendorff y Rocío Ferreira enfocan profusos corpus de novelas y películas peruanas sobre el conflicto entre grupos guerrilleros y Estado: al estudiar numerosos relatos ficcionales y testimoniales, en particular, de autoras que revelan la situación de las mujeres en contextos de violencia y represión, los análisis puntuales conducen además a periodizaciones nítidas. La contribución de Oswaldo Estrada al volumen colectivo discute la novela *Bioy*: en particular, profundiza en cómo la novela representa y desmantela la violencia legitimada por el lenguaje hegemónico que normalizó el horror en la cotidianidad durante la guerra contrainsurgente en el Perú; por otra parte, indaga en la representación de la memoria fragmentada, describe el *acting out* de la condición traumática manifiesta en actos de venganza por parte de víctimas y problematiza la comercialización de la representación de la violencia en la literatura latinoamericana. Estas reinterpretaciones de un copioso corpus aportan nuevas facetas a la discusión de la violenta historia reciente del Perú, particularmente, ponen en la mesa de debate cómo reconstruir social, psicológica y socialmente un país después de un conflicto que produjo 70000 víctimas.

El último apartado del libro, "Fracturas de la memoria", inicia con un ejercicio autobiográfico de la escritora chilena Lina Meruane, quien se cuestiona qué significan la niñez bajo la dictadura de Pinochet: ¿cómo permeó la naturalización de la violencia del régimen autoritario en la formación de personas amedrentadas y, por ende, dóciles? A continuación, Dianna C. Niebyski sondea el potencial del realismo grotesco frente a la violencia simbólica, en particular, la representación del cuerpo en dos novelas de Diamela Eltit: su propuesta de una interpretación alegórica relaciona de forma sugerente el cuerpo con la construcción de la nación, así como la dinámica de la abyección con procesos de marginación y expulsión económicamente motivados. El siguiente texto de Ksenija Bilbija analiza, a través del análisis de testimonios y películas, la figura de Luz Arce dentro de las coyunturas políticas de la historia chilena; dentro de la tendencia de la comercialización de la memoria, la biografía de la

prisionera izquierdista y luego colaboradora con la dictadura militar es emblemática de la flexibilidad que requiere el sujeto en el neoliberalismo. Al enfocar los actos de violencia bajo la dictadura argentina, Corinne Pubill interpreta la oposición entre el silencio de las víctimas y el lenguaje de la agresión en la novela *Madrugada negra* de Cristian Rodríguez; las preguntas rectoras de ¿cómo los perpetradores construyen a sus víctimas? y ¿cuál función cumple esta construcción en su imaginario?, es un enfoque productivo que también aparece en otros textos del volumen. Otro tema reiterado es la cadena de mando y la fragmentación de las tareas en la maquinaria represora, aunque ese, en particular, forma parte de la reflexión axiológica de Fernando Reati, quien complementa su experiencia propia con el análisis de dos novelas para problematizar, en la construcción de la memoria, el significado de la mayoría silenciosa y su aceptación tácita de la represión bajo la junta militar argentina: ¿qué responsabilidad individual implica la omisión de actos de resistencia y cuáles son las consecuencias para la identidad y la memoria en el escenario del posconflicto? Concluye esta sección con el ensayo de la escritora Sandra Lorenzano, quien propone una poética de la memoria a partir de la reflexión sobre el papel que juega la resignificación de espacios de violencia; en concreto, la transformación de la Escuela de la Mecánica de la Armada en lugar de memoria, que junto con las exposiciones artísticas y el trabajo de colectivos radicados en el anterior centro de detención y tortura clandestino, es emblema del terrorismo del Estado argentino. Uno de los ejes clave de esta sección es la construcción de una memoria contrahegemónica.

Además de la excepcional hondura crítica de los textos altamente relevantes contenidos en *Senderos de la violencia*, cabe destacar que este conjunto logra sistematizar debates y corpus de narrativas regionalmente muy dispersos, de difícil acceso, lo cual potencia los alcances críticos del volumen, pues muchas de las aportaciones tiene una ejemplaridad teórico-metodológica más allá de los casos específicos, y así deja constancia de que "Las narrativas armadas" de América Latina y su riguroso estudio son herramientas valiosas para repensar nuestras realidades, ya que nos permiten cobrar conciencia de los estragos y de las funciones de la violencia, así como para construir resistencias que exijan –aunque parezca improbable– la no repetición de la represión autoritaria.

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Françoise Perus (2012): *Juan Rulfo, el arte de narrar*. México: RM-UNAM, 247 páginas.

El libro de Françoise Perus, a pesar de haberse publicado hace ya nueve años, encuentra no sólo una relevancia capital en los estudios sobre la narrativa del autor jalisciense Juan Rulfo (1918-1986), sino además total pertinencia en los estudios sobre el "arte de narrar". El libro aparece introducido por un texto de José Pascual Buxó, el cual señala de manera general las discusiones teóricas que entabla la autora con la tradición crítica sobre *El llano en llamas* (1953) y *Pedro Páramo* (1955). De acuerdo con Buxó, el gran aporte que hace Perus a la discusión sobre el arte de narrar de Rulfo se encuentra en que no busca "datos objetivos" de una supuesta "realidad", y, por lo tanto, supera la concepción –propia de la crítica realista y positivista– de que la obra, para ser "verosímil", debe estar anclada en un contexto histórico. Dicha consideración, a la luz de los estudios culturales que han inundado los trabajos literarios, resulta en gran medida discutible. No obstante, el trabajo de la autora no tiene por finalidad insertarse en una discusión culturalista, sino que se centra en dilucidar las técnicas narrativas que dan trascendencia a la obra de Rulfo. La autora incluso menciona que su trabajo busca mostrar lo que entrañan las formas de relación que se establecen en el "acto de narrar", en la "poética narrativa", con el ámbito cultural nuestro, en el sentido amplio de la palabra (239).

En primera instancia, la autora realiza un exhaustivo y riguroso análisis de la crítica que a la fecha de la publicación de su libro se habría escrito sobre la obra de Rulfo. Analiza los enfoques sin desestimar ninguna de las propuestas, pero reconoce que el craso "error" de la mayoría de propuestas recae en un problema epistemológico: buscar en la obra del jalisciense el carácter histórico, tal como se presenta en la narrativa de la Revolución mexicana. Tal aspecto invita a pensar el texto no como un "objeto" que responde como "caja de resonancia" a una realidad (herencias del realismo, positivismo y estructuralismo). Para la autora, el problema radica en que se ha tratado de hallar lo "subyacente" al objeto textual: "el texto ha pasado a ser dispositivo o artefacto, sin recobrar por ello su calidad de práctica artística, activa y viva; vale decir, de modalidad específica de intervención en tradiciones narrativas y culturales claramente definidas" (22). Por lo tanto, este libro invita a reabrir el debate sobre la narrativa de Rulfo, volviendo a los textos, ubicándolos en "lo que pudiera haber sido su propia perspectiva y sus propias concepciones acerca del acto de narrar" (22). Este análisis que hace Perus es todo menos ingenuo; la revisión crítica tiene como objetivo la desarticulación de posibles falacias fundadas

en una mala interpretación de la propia perspectiva teórica realista, por lo que la autora dedica tiempo a revisar sus contextos de producción y aplicación, para comprender de qué forma pueden no revelar el "arte de narrar" de Rulfo. El realismo, por ejemplo, presupone un mundo natural y social que antecede a la representación artística.

Françoise Perus parte del análisis del entrevero de los tiempos en la narrativa de Rulfo, que clausura toda posibilidad de analizar la obra desde la perspectiva de la trama y, en efecto, desde la perspectiva de la referencialidad histórica. Tal aspecto, considera la autora, ha sido clausurado cuidadosa y deliberadamente por Rulfo, lo cual constituye la base de su arte narrativo, pues al plantear "preguntas equivocadas", se inaugura la posibilidad de poner la "narración en escena" y la modalidad de indagación, que respectivamente encierran la poética rulfiana y el humor y la ironía.

El narrador testigo, reminiscencia de la tradición oral, siembra la base de la poética narrativa de Rulfo, lo que obliga, a juicio de la autora, a replantear el papel del lector y, por lo tanto, del acto de lectura, pues dicha poética exige, al estar puesta en escena, un interlocutor activo, propio de la *narración oral y viva* (28). El narrador es una suerte de "personaje" que involucra a un "lector oyente" que, incluso, puede ser un personaje, como el caso de *Pedro Páramo*. El lector deja de ser una "imagen virtual" para convertirse en la *mise en œuvre* (29).

Por medio del análisis del narrador, Perus analiza los diferentes niveles de lectura. Dichos niveles articulan, de hecho, la estructura de su investigación y le permiten hacer una catalogación de las narraciones de acuerdo con la forma, es decir, observando cómo se establecen las funciones del narrador, el lector y los contextos narrativos convocados. Esto le permite mostrar cómo el acto narrativo de Rulfo pareciera vivo pues es un "acto en proceso", cuyo sujeto se busca a sí mismo "en su propio proceso narrativo" (27). En este punto, precisamente, Perus parte del supuesto de la existencia de una *poética* entendida en el sentido aristotélico de *técnica*, cuyo funcionamiento se produce por obra de varios tipos de narradores. Pues, lejos de haber un narrador monolítico, en la narrativa de Rulfo se desestabiliza incluso la categoría misma de narrador. Éste se descompone en muchas voces antes de llegar al narrador personaje.

De ahí que Perus dedique gran parte de su análisis a los cuentos de *El Llano en llamas*, en los que advierte una narración para sí, es decir, el "yo" y los "otros", un desajuste entre la "historia" y el desenlace del "relato", en la forma de enunciación narrativa, en los trasfondos religiosos del relato, en el espinoso asunto de la conciencia moral, en la extraposición del lector, en la forma compositiva insólita, en la persecución, en la poética del cuento, en el oído y la mirada, en el narrar rememorando, en las variaciones, en la atención del narrador, en las luces

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y sombras de la narración, en la trama y el acontecimiento, en el monodílogo del personaje, el interlocutor silencioso y el narrador testigo, en los derroteros de la imaginación y hasta en los murmullos que matan.

Para concluir, no sobra insistir en las consideraciones de orden propiamente historiográfico que Perus señala para investigaciones posteriores. Pues efectivamente no sólo hace falta contextualizar mejor a Rulfo a la luz de la Guerra cristera, en la que sus padres fueron asesinados, sino replantearse el manido presupuesto de que su narrativa sea exclusivamente "rural", ya que, de acuerdo con Rafael Gutiérrez Girardot, en su ensayo "La transformación de la literatura por la ciudad" (2006)<sup>1</sup>, y apoyado en las consideraciones Jacques Le Goff sobre el origen ciudadano del intelectual y de la escritura, toda literatura es urbana y no hay propiamente literatura campesina. Incluso la supuesta oralidad de la escritura rulfiana es algo ilusorio, pues ésta ha dejado de serlo en la medida en que está escrita y, en consecuencia, hace referencia a la literatura escrita culta. La recomendación final de Perus invita a estudiar más a fondo la materialidad biográfica de Rulfo, es decir, lo que le permitió escribir y publicar, durante su larga estancia en la Ciudad de México, sus dos obras maestras.

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<sup>1</sup> Gutiérrez Girardot, Rafael (2006): "La transformación de la literatura por la ciudad", en: *Pensamiento hispanoamericano*, UNAM, México, pp. 125–138.