

# THE MEXICAN-US BORDER: The Making of an Anthropology of Borderlands

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## ABSTRACT

This review traces the development of an anthropology of borderlands. The ideas of early ethnography and applied anthropology about border regions are considered along with contemporary perspectives on reterritorialized communities and practices illustrated specifically by Mexican migration and transborder processes. The argument is made that the conceptual parameters of borderlands, borders, and their crossings, stemming from work done on the Mexican-US border, in particular, illustrate the contradiction, paradox, difference, and conflict of power and domination in contemporary global capitalism and the nation-state, especially as manifested in local-level practices. Furthermore, the borderlands genre is a basis upon which to redraw our conceptual frameworks of community and culture area.

## INTRODUCTION

There has been much discussion lately of borderlands, borders, and their crossings. The concept of the border is now widely used in a variety of

contexts throughout the social sciences, the humanities, and departments of education. Yet we have barely studied the discourse on borders or determined the direction it should take. Conflict, contradiction, and the paradox of literal geopolitical and conceptual boundaries waylay us. How does the study of borders add to our knowledge and understanding of cultural practices and the locales in which people find themselves? How is this knowledge absorbed into our analyses? More important, what do our findings suggest about the epistemological concerns of the discipline of anthropology? In this chapter I review the grounds for an anthropology of borderlands based on work along the Mexican-US border and attempt to illustrate what the findings of this genre suggest for the anthropological canon more generally.

When social scientists speak of the borderlands they conjure up in many of us an image of the so-called Spanish Borderlands (20, 26), the region in the southern United States from the Pacific coast to Florida. The image is one of a frontier occupied first by the Spanish, then the Mexicans, then American intruders, and epochs of war and conquest. Thus our postcolonial legacy is a 2000-mile boundary dividing two nation-states. The boundary separates social forms, peoples, and regions. In this review I designate the "borderlands" as a region and set of practices defined and determined by this border that are characterized by conflict and contradiction, material and ideational.

Reviews of the history and literature on these borderlands are available in a variety of bibliographic volumes and articles (32, 67, 136, 137, 191, 193, 194, 196). The current and emerging anthropological work on the Mexican-US border that I address is based both on the early work on this border(land) and on a newfound awareness of the multiple conceptual boundaries involved—the borderlands of social practices and cultural beliefs in a contemporary global context. Such metaphorical extensions of borders and borderlands captivate our imagination (see 102). Yet the terms we use to talk about them are blurred in popular usage. Gómez-Peña illustrates how the borders metaphor can be elusive, undefinable, tautological, and even mystifying. For Gómez-Peña, the border and the borderlands have no history (98). His experience is ambiguous and characterized by multiple identities, which, like the metaphor of the border itself, is difficult to precisely define.

I attempt to analyze some aspects of this ambiguity by tracing the anthropological endeavor on the geopolitical borderlands, as well as the "boundary conditions" of those concepts that are metaphorically and metonymically related to borders and borderlands, concepts that constitute the core of canonical anthropological theory and that are currently being subjected to the same radical critique and interrogation as are the geopolitical borderlands.

## THE MEXICAN-US BORDER AND ITS CONCEPTUAL EXTENSIONS

Borders are traditionally defined as international boundaries between nation-states (31, 64, 71, 101, 104, 120, 121, 135, 195, 196). Indeed, the definition of the Mexican-US border has received unrelenting focus, such that it has been elevated to the status of the paradigmatic case (5, 31, 51, 212). Borderlands are both geographic regions and zones of political influence along lines drawn—in the case of North America—during a colonial era (16, 65, 121). Although there are hundreds of political borders in the world, the idea of borderlands as an area of study stems primarily from the work done by social scientists along the Mexican-US political boundary (29, 104, 138, 196). I argue here that this border has become the icon and model for research into other borders (16, 17) as well as for the elaboration and refinement of the boundaries of several salient concepts and their referents. Foremost among these are culture, community, and identity (2, 11, 23, 84, 102, 172, 177, 204).

Along with other defining concepts in anthropology that of the borderlands has lately come to represent a juncture between the literal and conceptual. Whereas at one time we conceptualized culture as territorially contained units and communities as likewise bounded entities (11, 102, 120, 172), we now attempt to reconceptualize these notions from the perspective of a deterritorialized world (37, 102, 120, 178, 180), a world in which cultural and ethnic identities have in their turn become deterritorialized and yet, stronger (9, 10, 11, 68, 201, see also 60). National and individual identities are continually contested, shifted, and accommodated. In particular, borders and borderlands graphically illustrate the conflicts and contradiction in a hierarchically organized world. For it is here that cultures, ideologies, and individuals clash and challenge our disciplinary perspectives on social harmony and equilibrium.

Some scholars feel that to take a metaphorical approach to borderlands distracts us from social and economic problems on the borders between the nation-states and shifts attention away from the communities and people who are the subject of our inquiry (116a). These "literalists" (if we can call them that) have focused on the actual problems of the border, including migration (8, 29, 36, 38, 42, 43, 45, 47, 53, 111, 118, 119, 120, 138, 140, 143, 144, 181, 214, 215, 217), policy (211, 212), settlement (8, 44, 45, 52, 53, 89, 178, 207), environment (107, 150, 183, 211), identity (105, 145, 155, 158, 168), labor (28–30, 42, 74, 75, 89, 110, 111, 116, 119, 159, 198, 208, 209), and health (43, 56, 131, 149, 169, 180, 200, 214). The "a-literalists," on the other hand, focus on social boundaries on the geopolitical border and also on all behavior in general that involves contradictions, conflict, and the shifting of identity (11, 25, 37, 120, 126, 127, 172, 174, 175, 177). Regardless, the two have dialectically influenced each other.

### *Borderlands and Boundaries of the Canon*

Anthropologists are faced with increasing disruptions to "their" cultural areas as exemplified by the blurring of ethnic boundaries by the people who cross and renegotiate cultural and political identity. The cultural borders we once drew are outdated in a world marked by shifting political boundaries, contested identities of gender and the interrogation of patriarchy, and the continual encroachment of global capitalism (14, 68, 174). The third world continues to extend itself into the first, and the nation-states encroach into territories beyond their borders (172). Yet, we continue to teach the traditional area courses that in part limit our discourse and maintain our inherent colonial past (65, 172, 174). Specialized topics such as Indians of Mesoamerica, Indians of the Southwest, peoples of Mexico, peasant society, and even theoretical subjects such as kinship and social organization bear the imprint of disciplinary prejudices and presumptions founded upon a parochial, patriarchal (171), and often idealized view of the world and its peoples (see 58). The anthropology of borders and borderlands challenges us to reconceptualize our terrain by breaking out of these constructions. The new perspective raises a question of epistemological concern. Rosaldo suggests that social analysts study border intersections to discern the processes of conflict and change (172, 173). The crossing of borders and the myriad dimensions of shifting human accommodation in this context illustrate some of the most important elements in the anthropological canon—community, culture, gender, identity, power, and domination.

One difficult challenge to anthropologists in the borderlands genre is to define a border culture, a seemingly homogeneous construct based on political demarcation and shared elements of history, multiethnic identity (Indian, Spanish, Mexican, Anglo), and binational economics and politics (66, 152). As with notions of culture writ large, the notion of a border culture either glosses over or essentializes traits and behavior, often obliterating the actual problems and conditions in the variation of human behavior. As illustrated by Bustamante, past and current attempts at defining the border have been tireless activities that have met with no conclusion (32a). While colorful, the definition of border culture as a hybrid of Spanish, English, and even Nahuatl was socially misleading. It was a "membrane," a Ninth Nation, Mex-America, and a trait list that often included tamales, Texas chile, and Kentucky Fried Chicken (24, 85, 88, 97, 99, 145, 158). The actual social-cultural processes of communities and the variation of border peoples were obscured by a drive to define and pigeonhole this geographic region into a Wisslerian culture area type. Despite these common elements of both shared antecedents and conflicting social relations, history, and current problems, a pervasive paradox is

evident in the borderlands genre: As the literal border defines and controls, so too do our disciplinary boundaries.

## THE MEXICAN-US BORDER AS ICON

The Mexican-US border is the model of border studies and borderlands genre throughout the world. The inaugural lecture of AI Asiwaju at the Berlin West African Conference, University of Lagos, is a dramatic example of the nature of this iconization (16). In his address marking the beginning of the modern state system in Africa, Asiwaju refers to himself as an African or, specifically, Nigerian *fronterizo*, a marginal person. The term applies to one who lives on a border, i.e. the Mexican-US border, to one who is marginal yet specifically defined and identified. Far outside North America, the Mexican-US *frontera*/border image is not lost. Asiwaju speaks of imposed and artificial boundaries that, like the Mexican and the US border, separate, marginalize, and create conflict. These boundaries split and maintain territorial imperatives through nation-state politics but at the same time regulate, constrict, and allow a natural movement of people in a historically precedented process across borders. The work by Asiwaju and his colleagues illuminates the conceptual in the literal borderlands of Nigeria and West Africa (15–17).

### *The Contextual Paradox: Where First World Meets Third World*

The defining characteristic of border conflict and paradox is the abutment of the US, *the* world's dominant economic-political nation-state, with Mexico, which has a "third-world" economy. No other border in the world exhibits the inequality of power, economics, and the human condition as does this one (28, 29, 71, 72, 74, 106, 120, 135, 142, 147, 159). The complexity and problems inherent in such a paradox go beyond everyday nation-state negotiations. This paradox reaches into the most local of contexts and affects the everyday life of border folk (9, 11, 42, 48, 50, 74, 75, 89, 110, 115, 120, 137, 139, 154, 182, 212). The massive exchange of commodities, both human and material, dramatically affects life and behavior (3, 9, 11, 25, 29, 113, 114), as does the continuous shifting and reconfiguration of people, ethnicity, sexual orientation and identity, and economic hierarchy and subordination (11, 25, 31, 40, 50, 74, 96, 115, 120, 130, 134, 135, 139, 154, 174, 175, 212).

Given the differing political economies and a history of conquest and domination, the Mexican-US border is the best example of how nation-states negotiate, marginalize, and influence people's ever-shifting local behavior. Indians, *fronterizos*, *norteños*, Chicanos, Chicanas, Mexican Americans, Mexican(o)s, Anglos, Tejanos, *gringos* and *agringados*, Texans, green carders, *pachucos*, *cholos*, commuters, and others represent distinct historical backgrounds and cultural behaviors. Current views of the Mexican-US border-

lands describe a complexity in the histories of a cadre of people who make the borderlands home (7, 34, 50, 90, 105, 119, 123, 125, 137, 148, 190). However, so-called border people are constantly shifting and renegotiating identities with maneuvers of power and submission, and often they adopt multiple identities (e.g. 13, 14, 84, 102, 116, 174, 175).

### *The Emergence of a Conceptual Borderlands Framework*

More than other world boundaries, the Mexican-US border is the subject of a rich academic dialogue and intense social-science research (32, 67, 136, 137, 191, 193, 194). How did this intense focus on the Mexican-US border evolve? The early work of anthropologists on the Mexican-US border followed a tradition of involvement by historians and social scientists (39, 90, 95, 133, 143, 191, 199). Three primary developments form the basis of an anthropology of borderlands. First, anthropologists developed an early interest in process, particularly that of Mexican immigration to the United States. Second, anthropologists drew attention to the importance of folkloric genres in understanding local notions of identity, inequality, and cultural conflict (22, 123–125, 127, 128, 157, 158). Finally, native anthropologists raised epistemological challenges to anthropological notions of subject/object and insider/outsider. Each of these developments is indeed bound to the Mexican-US border, yet each contributes to a conceptual borderlands influence on anthropological theory. These developments paralleled trends in the theoretical foundations of transnationalism (see the review by Kearney in this volume), the globalization of culture (68), capital, and “cosmopolitanism” (3, 103). To fully understand the implications of these developments a brief review of the scholarship and history of anthropology on the border is necessary.

## THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL GAZE IN THE MEXICAN-US BORDER(LANDS)

Before World War II, US and Mexican scholars held little interest in the border. Work by the Mexican anthropologist Manuel Gamio (92, 93) and American sociologist Paul Taylor (198) on Mexican migration were exceptions. After the war, social scientists focused on the peoples of the border region, both retrospectively and in current contexts. The pre-Columbian Southwest and northern Mexico were studied as separate regions related through similar patterns of life and trade (see 59).

The connections were important but the borderlands were viewed as a vast wilderness and frontier between the important great cultures in the Southwest and Mesoamerica. It is significant to note that the political boundary on some archaeological maps often defined culture areas. In the most extreme cases, the culture areas stopped at the border (see 4, 59).

This early anthropological perspective on the border held that the literal border separated cultures and defined boundaries. When ethnographers discovered the borderlands in the 1950s and 1960s, they portrayed the region as inhabited by peoples in cultural isolation and in bounded communities (56, 132, 179, 186, 187). The border, per se, did not enter as a variable. Kin, ritual, and social connections between people on both sides of the *linea*, the political line, were absent. Although the actual border seemed at least inadvertently to frame the culture areas, it was neither a factor in analysis nor a variable in social interpretation (193, 194). In the anthropological tradition of the period, the ethnography of a people was defined by geographical boundaries, frozen in time and often cast in images of cultures of the "other." In this context the influence of so-called Mexican folk curing (*curanderos*) and other folk remedies continued to be suitable topics of study for US anthropologists (and cross-cultural orientation to services). The role of Mexican culture as a negative barrier to US health-care delivery became a topic of concern for US anthropologists and an example of the need for education and change (56, 132, 179, 180).

The issue of the border's influence, especially in how the United States and Mexico regulated and affected the borderlands region was not yet a concern. Even the classic work, *Cycles of Conquest*, which in 1962 reviewed Spanish, Mexican, and American political influence on Indians of the Southwest, does not consider the political border as a meaningful variable (188).

In Spicer & Thompson's *Plural Society of the Southwest* (190), Southwest peoples on both sides of the border were given important recognition and insightful evaluation. Yet in this book the influence of the border as such remained undocumented. At the time, articles by Mexican and American anthropologists described and defined the types of people that lived in the region. *Norteños* (122), Mormons (156), Hopi, Navajo, and Mexicans (91) were included. Mexicans and Native Americans in the Southwest were regarded as natural components of the region. Ethnicity and ethnic boundaries were considered. Yet there was no dialogue concerning the multiple negotiation either of gender or identities, nor questioning of the role of the nation-state as a system of control and agent of marginalization.

At the time, from the anthropologist's perspective, the perceived border was a real and natural boundary. The early anthropological gaze defined the region as a historically and geographically continuous frontier separating the large culture areas of Mesoamerica and the Southwest. This view of the natural boundary encouraged and reinforced later images of bounded communities belonging to either the Mexican or US side of the border. The people of Mexican descent residing in the United States were interpreted by US anthropologists as living in Mexican communities that were vestiges of, and in some ways carryovers from, the natural frontier that had become officially separated

by the political boundary. Indians were isolated in reservations, nations of their own.

Anthropologists joined other social scientists and interpreted people's engagement in a side not their own as somehow unnatural, a sort of cultural trespassing. It was a violation of the natural and became part of a significant ideology of social, racial, and gendered domination over the people who were marginalized, unwelcome and did not belong. The influence of the so-called natural frontier was reinforced by the actual 2000-mile expanse of the border and the region's scarce population.

### *The Border as Artifact*

Over time, anthropologists developed new research interests on the Mexican-US border. As border towns and cities grew and populations became more concentrated in the borderlands, social scientists began focusing on the *actual* border. The borderlands became a perfect laboratory in which to view the coming together of, clashing of, and interface between cultures (135, 193, 195). Although voiced and expressed in literature, those conflicts and differences inherent in the borderlands sociology and anthropology have only recently been examined by anthropologists (27, 34, 96, 105, 106, 120). At the time anthropologists began to focus on the border, they were still caught up in looking for the social equilibrium and harmony in community life and culture that the canon demanded.

Problems along the border and between peoples in this terrain were often defined as "cross-cultural" misunderstandings. Because of the social problems inherent in an unequal economic and political context, early work in anthropology focused on border-dwelling Mexicans' aversions to receiving health care (56, 132, 179, 180). Important themes such as acculturation were contextualized in the cross-cultural misunderstandings of both Americans and Mexicans. Anthropologists who studied these issues were denounced in the 1970s and later as racist and colonial (see 170), but this field of study was part and parcel of the greater anthropology of the time. Anthropologists such as Rubel were clearly interested in the well-being of the Mexicano and in border life.

### *Applied Anthropology on the Border*

The interest in and concern for understanding and changing the plight of border folk formed an important foundation for the development of applied anthropology along the Mexican-US border. Anthropologists today who study both literal and conceptual aspects of the border must continue to document and challenge the popular notions of race, patriarchy, and equality. They must expose the actual conditions that structure and engage individuals in the social problems of contemporary US and Mexican society (43, 114, 174, 206, 209,



212, 217). Mexican anthropologists have been especially adept at focusing on the structural contradictions of policy and human interaction in the borderlands (28, 29, 63, 86, 89, 106, 147, 155) and in Native-American communities (86, 105, 155). With few exceptions, US anthropologists have continued to deal with theoretical and regional problems defined by the canon rather than by actual social conditions.

Currently, much of the anthropological effort is geared toward the study of policy formation along the border (43, 54, 60, 61, 212). Anthropologists have become advocates and engaged in research aimed at understanding and addressing the human issues in labor, migration, and the impact of new populations in the borderlands (28–30, 42, 74, 75, 89, 110, 111, 116, 119, 159, 200, 209). One area of study is the *Maquiladora* labor market (30, 74, 130). Patricia Fernandez-Kelly (74) is a pioneer both in addressing the plight of women in border labor and in illustrating the structural conditions of the *Maquila* labor force in Juárez.

Much applied work has led to cross-border and interdisciplinary collaboration with Mexican anthropologists and sociologists, as well as with policy-makers. In classic cross-cultural approaches, anthropologists worked on understanding Mexican and US cultures of the border region in problems of social impact on border communities and the problems of environmental contamination and control (150, 183). Anthropologists joined colleagues in interdisciplinary team efforts (54, 150) under a variety of Mexican-US and border institutes such as the Mexican-US Studies Center at the University of California, San Diego; The University of Texas, El Paso; El Colégio de la Frontera Norte in Tijuana; and the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Baja California in Mexicali. These efforts spurred a vast interest in border studies resulting in a cadre of important interdisciplinary journals and publications. Elwynn Stoddard's pioneering efforts produced the *Journal of Borderland Studies*. The Mexican periodicals *Frontera Norte* and *Estudios Fronterizos* are important. Indeed, the bulk of this social science, outside of the anthropological endeavor, has been aimed at practical application.

The Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology, formerly the Bureau of Ethnic Research, is a rare example of teamwork devoted to study of the border. Initially, under the direction of Thomas Weaver, the Bureau focused on the housing conditions and social problems of Douglas, an Arizona border town (214). The Bureau also produced a pioneering study of Mexican migration (215). The work of the Bureau continued under the direction of Carlos Vélez-Ibañez. Studies of the Tucson Mexican community and its ties across the border in Sonora have been conducted for over a decade now. The notions of a border ecological theory (211), human rights and social policy (212), work on US-Mexican households (205), funds of knowledge (curricula based on home culture) (206), and the persistence and documentation of the Mexican contri-

bution to Tucson and the Southwest are products of the Bureau. The complexity of border studies, as illustrated by the Bureau, warrants the long-term focus on specific borderlands regions. Unfortunately, although there are other strong interdisciplinary border institutes, none are of this type.

Mexican scholars working out of the border-state branches of the national universities have been particularly important in documenting history and life along the border (4, 33, 81, 89, 94, 105, 148, 161). In particular, Mexican scholarship has been much more thorough in relating the specific state-border dialogues on the Mexican side than have US scholars with the American (e.g. 81, 161). In contrast to our own disciplinary structure, Mexicans have worked in interdisciplinary teams as a rule rather than as an exception. The work of the *Colégio de la Frontera Norte* and UNAM in Mexicali are exemplary.

Owing to the rapid urbanization of the border zone, social scientists have focused on cities of the Mexican-US border (35, 95, 133, 164, 165, 172). Border towns grew into urban conglomerates almost overnight with resulting problems of both local and national import, yet few anthropologists have actually worked on the border cities. John Price's ethnographic efforts in Tijuana and Tecate in Baja California are the exception (164, 165).

### *Mexican Migrants and the Anthropological Pursuit*

The increased attention to the border by a cadre of social scientists studying Mexican immigration evoked anthropological interest. Pioneering efforts in the study of migration by Weaver and Downing and, later, Van Kemper and Camara, were among the first anthropological studies of the Mexican-US border (35, 36, 181, 215). Few anthropologists had actually done research on the border or actually focused on the problems to which other disciplines were drawn at the time. Yet as migration became more salient, anthropologists literally followed people to and across the political boundary in their studies.

Findings from the anthropological study of migration along the border challenged existing views of border life, particularly the notion of separated cultures. Awareness of Mexican immigration and of the undocumented (those who cross borders without official permission) is illustrated in the important volumes focusing on immigration beginning in the 1970s (e.g. 61, 162, 163, see also 118). Anthropologists studied migration from the perspective of the actor and began to describe important social and cultural behavior in local situations (8, 50, 111, 151, 178). Signaling a change from earlier anthropology, which had failed to problematize the geopolitical border, this new focus designated the border as an important variable in the study of the patterns of life in the borderlands.

Linda Whiteford's watershed work on the extended community (216) was a significant departure from the perspective of bounded, in situ communities

along the border. Whiteford proposed a cross-border and transnational (see Kearney, this volume) perspective that questioned our definition of the border as simply an impermeable divide and boundary. Research into the extended community revealed the political-economic reality and connections that spanned both sides of the boundary. It now became the task of anthropologists to clarify how people arranged and located themselves in these binational and extended communities.

The notion of the binational community and household stems in part from the initial work on "sending community" and "settling community." Earlier economic and demographic descriptions of immigration had focused on the severance of home ties and inclusion of migrants into labor markets in the United States. Migration studies have since illustrated the continuing connections between home and settler communities wherein social, cultural, and economic networks pervaded (8, 25, 61, 111, 118, 119, 138, 143, 144, 177, 178, 192, 217).

The recognition that local and regional historical relations connected the American side with the Mexican through personal, familial, and economic networks became an important focus of the anthropology of borderlands (8, 111, 204). At the present time migration is considered a circuitous social process with historical antecedents (8, 111, 118, 119, 177). The border was indeed a social system (5), and anthropologists continue to elucidate this cross-border phenomenon.

In addition to studying people on the border, some anthropologists focused first on communities in Mexico and then followed migrants to and across the border. Michael Kearney's work (see this volume) on Mixtecos (119) strongly influenced migration and settlement studies in the United States (101, 207, 217). Similarly, Richard Mines's (143) classic study illustrated the continuing connections of Mexican immigrants to home communities in Mexico, and the long cross-generational persistence of such immigration. Vélez-Ibañez's work (204) on the Arizona border and my work on the California border (8) illustrate the historical significance of family patterns in immigration, as does the work of Heyman in Arizona (111). These studies defined the actual migration process and provided an impetus for the focus on the extended and reterritorialized community (177).

Results of the focus on process in migration studies challenge the parochial interpretation of the territorialized community. A variety of work has illustrated the social parameters of migrant behavior that extend beyond geographically contained territorial units. The resulting social-cultural interpretation of community is limited only by the parameters of individuals' meaningful behavior (25, 120, 177). These are communities in which social-cultural patterns of behavior define groups' territory rather than nationalized geopolitical geographic locales. People create and re-create the boundaries of their social

communities, often over great distances. This occurs, for example, between Oaxaca, Mexico, and Los Angeles; Central Mexico and Chicago; Haiti and New York. This "hyperspace" lends new meanings to geographical interpretations of social behavior and has sparked transnational research (25, 177).

Of particular importance to this new study of migration are the differing perspectives of Mexican and US scholars (101). Whereas US anthropologists focused on the impact of Mexican immigrants upon US society and the assimilation of these immigrants by labor markets, Mexicans first interpreted migration as a result of structural labor needs in the United States (29). Mexican scholars looked at the plight of Mexicans both along the border and in the United States. More recently, US and Mexican views combine analytic elements from both of these perspectives (37).

### *The Current Discourse on Immigration*

In recent years immigration and undocumented migration into the United States have been studied extensively (28, 49, 50, 52-54, 62, 100, 111, 118, 138, 146, 207, 217). Much of this research is contextualized in transnationalism (see Kearney, this volume). Networks of extended social ties are characteristically, as argued by Wilson (218, see also 21, 203, 209), the dominant theme in these studies.

Within the broader spectrum of immigration and migration studies along the border, anthropologists have focused on local behavior and the lives of individuals (8, 96, 111, 112, 148) against the backdrop of a globalized economy. Specific studies on the household and family illustrate the cultural processes in the migration and accommodation of Mexicans and later Chicano/as to the border region and to the United States (8, 47, 205). Research on the role of women and feminine authority in this process is rare but increasing (100, 140, 182). However, the main focus is on the migration of individuals.

The global political-economic context has been a necessary complement to the study of local-level behavior. Migrants are engaged in a global capitalism that at one level obliterates the border distinction but that, at another level, is a mechanism of border control through the hegemonic state apparatus. Migrants, as labor, are enticed by and allowed into the US labor markets, yet are regulated and controlled as commodities (29) without a legitimate bilateral accommodation in the market (120). The work of both Chavez (46, 50) on undocumented migrants and Heyman (110, 116) supports this analysis. Migration and process must be examined in conjunction with the larger structure controlling the ebb and flow of commodity (labor) distribution between Mexico and the United States.

As the border became an entity in the social construction of lives, it also became a point of view from which to assess interpretation in social science. Ross's *Views Across the Border* (177) illustrates the initial incorporation of a

contrasting Mexican and American interpretation toward themes and problems germane to the Mexican-US border. This volume outlines conceptual and literal problems explored and engaged today: culture, identity, politics, economics, migration, health, and ecological issues. In addition to the identification of major categories of practical concern, crucial conceptual problems concerning identity, class, racism, and migrant labor were also raised. At the time, however, gender, the role of women, and the shifting identities of a border folk were not yet recognized themes.

## THE NEW FOLKLORE AND THE NATIVE VOICE

A crucial contributor to the anthropology of borderlands came from within the womb of the borderland itself. Much of the early research on the border concerning Mexicans and, later, Mexican-Americans was done by Euro-Americans—a trend in the interpretation of the “other” (128, 157, 158). A particular cadre of scholars enchanted by the lore and culture of the West and Southwest focused on the history and popular culture of the border. However, a single Chicano anthropologist in the late 1950s raised issues neglected by earlier folklorists (157). Americo Paredes, focusing on Mexican ballads and *corridos*, reinterpreted the way people of the border regions identify with Mexico. Paredes exposed *Los Rinches* (the Texas Rangers), the Anglo symbol of law, order, and Texan pride, as the Tejano (Texas-Mexican) symbol of racism, inequality, and injustice (157). Herein a major contradiction and conflict was brought to light and a tradition was also born: the study and interpretation of popular culture from the perspective of the Mexican in the United States. The focus of study was the new “Mexicano-Tejano” folklore and its expression of class and economic inequality along the border.

Paredes's work became a foundation for the research of other Chicanos and Chicanas contributing to a broader critique of anthropology and the social sciences (172). The production of historical texts by Chicano and other scholars and the reinterpretation of that history and process brought new consciousness and broadened the study area (1, 22, 34, 79, 108, 124, 125, 126, 129, 130, 161). Perhaps no other area in anthropology has induced the participation of the “indigenous scholar” as has the border. This insider view has been crucial in our quest for ethnographic truth (23, 124, 127, 129, 153, 172, 201). A quick review of “border” anthropologists and their topics of focus reveals this native involvement (e.g. 8, 34, 39, 41, 50, 69, 76, 90, 95, 99, 101, 107, 129, 138, 141, 160, 169, 170, 182, 205, 213).

In this context the voice of the women of the border is of crucial importance. Paredes's interpretations are ironically, as Rosaldo illustrates, paradoxical because a paternalism pervades them (171, 173). In the tradition of Mexican folklore, Paredes illustrates how patriarch becomes hero and legend but in

so doing also evades issues of subordination of women. In contrast, Gloria Anzaldúa contests the marked boundaries and subordination of the US nation-state, traditional patriarchy, and definitions of the natural (13). Her image of the borderlands is the crux and foundation for the description of a paradoxical and conflicting nature of life for women on the border(lands) and is in contrast to Paredes's work. Caught between Mexican tradition and Chicana existence, Spanish and English, sexual domination and choice, the United States and Mexico, Anzaldúa remakes the border and the conceptual understanding of the boundaries of life.

The new folklore—a form of cultural poetics—has been part and parcel of the literature and anthropology of the border. Unlike the work of the early folklorists, research into the new folklore aims at explicating the social-political conditions of class, gender, and inequality in border society through both the documentation and interpretation of cultural performances (34, 77–80, 108, 127, 128, 130, 173). A major focus of this work has been the Mexican ballad, the *corrido*, because it conveys the themes of history, romance, injustice, perseverance, unemployment, and discrimination (69, 70, 76, 107, 108, 127). Other forms of musical performance have provided important contexts for the interpretation of social and economic conditions. Manuel Peña's *The Mexican Conjunto* (160) is a classic border case study illustrating the importance of musical genre in the interpretation of class and labor formation.

Researchers of the new "folkloric tradition" continue to document cultural performance in both customary events such as the Fiestas Patrias (141), yet they also interpret ordinary events and life as political and cultural drama on the border (127, 129). Indeed, this is some of the best ethnography that has been carried out along the border. It is often rich with detail and feeling not often found in anthropological research. Limón's ethnographic work is exemplary. Writing from the perspective of a native son, he puts the reader in his (Limón's) position as both anthropologist and south-border Texan. Limón's description of dance halls, people, and talk makes the quality of social life come alive (127, 129). In addition to this rich ethnography, the new folklorists are excellent recorders of the cultural poetics of class and racial dominance. Although Limón's interpretation has been criticized, the ethnography is clearly contextualized in history and is an honest auto-ethnographic portrayal of life.

The 1960s and later decades of the US Civil Rights Movement were instrumental years in the reinterpretation of and challenge to the status quo; and for the social sciences this period of rebellion produced a new type of critique of the canons and epistemological concerns of our discipline. Following the previous decades where lone voices such as that of Paredes sang out, a new chorus began to make itself heard. Among Mexicans and Mexican Americans

began the rumblings of a major avalanche of work that soon became part of the landscape of the borderlands genre: Chicano and Chicana borderland literature and poetry. The novels of Tomas Rivera (167) and Rudy Anaya (12), for example, illustrate the contradictions of life on the border. Anaya's *Bless Me Ultima* shows the strong contradictions in everyday actions and beliefs of Mexicans living along the border, contradictions in religion, schooling, and the challenges of the US nation-state and their effects on the family. This literary tradition continues in the work of Villaseñor (210), who connects Southern California with revolutionary and rural Mexico, in a novel of life history based on his extended family.

Of additional importance are works by women writers (117). The recent writings of Sandra Cisneros (55) and Gloria Anzaldua (13) ring out with the timbre of challenge and new perceptions about being Chicana, Chicano, Mexicana, Mexicano—about being human in a context of conflict and oppression where the meaning of life itself is expressed in the paradoxes of daily social behavior. The authors detail the duality and often the multiplexicity of divergent strands of sexual, ethnic, national, and cultural identity. This is important work that disrupted border ideology and exposed various forms of subordination and gender and racial inequality.

This literature by natives of the border region mimics our disciplinary critique of so-called writing culture and illustrates an authority that the writers on culture (read ethnography) were in search of. In addition, like much of the post-postmodern, this reinterpretation of and critique of the writing of culture has attracted anthropologists who use literary analysis to understand behavior. Paredes, like Cisneros and Anzaldua, has been interpreted by a variety of analysts—Limónian, Rosaldian—and their findings are echoed in current ethnographic parlance (23, 154, 201). The voices of Paredes, Anzaldua, and others broke down the boundaries of the geopolitical border and illustrated the multidimensional character of life on the borderlands; nurtured in a history of conflict through the Spanish, Mexican, American, and, throughout, native stages. Through bilingual, bicultural, and binational voices, Chicanos and Chicanas illustrated the crossing of the conceptual lines of gender, race, class, nation and ethnicity. Borders took on a new meaning.

The coming together and recognition of the voices from the border region sparked a reevaluation of the anthropological canon and spurred a creative debate focusing on local behavior, lives, and situations in the global context. The role of capital and its attendant ideologies and hegemonies are no longer contested as major factors in the social construction of the border region. Our continuing object of study is to identify the particular expressions and accommodations of the human in these borderlands.

## BORDERLANDS IN THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL DISCOURSE: CONCLUDING REMARKS

The borders and borderlands of anthropological focus have important implications for anthropological discourse and theory.

The specific focus on the paradoxical, on the contradictory, and on the conflicts of cultural practices and identity has yielded the unique social patterns, interpretations, and expressions of people in contemporary life (173). Rather than maintain a focus on the geographically and territorially bounded community and culture, the concepts inherent in the borders genre are alert to the shifting of behavior and identity and the reconfiguration of social patterns at the dynamic interstices of cultural practices. When we looked for similarity and harmony we found adaptive patterns framed in functional formats of social equilibrium. The identification of paradox and contradiction specifies the importance of understanding differences, disequilibria, and the conflicting social patterns of human behavior on both the local and global scale.

In addition to reevaluating the disciplinary concepts of community, culture, and social equilibrium, we need to examine paradox, conflict, contradiction, and contrasts. These concepts identify the multiplex and constantly hybridized behavior of people in the global political economy. These terms are analytically significant. Unlike old terms that conjure up a unitary pattern of human existence, these force us to look for the common irregularity expressed in daily life, the changes and differences of human existence and the hierarchical tendencies in daily power struggles. They force us to examine the contradictions of a hierarchical order based on capitalism and an increasingly divided and defined nation-state. Our own ideologies are now contested; Rousseauian Native and the ideologized peasant have broken free of the anthropological mold.

In the past, anthropologists have been on the margins of border studies, but now we are at the forefront of a new borderlands genre. Although a cadre of excellent social histories and ethnographies has contextualized the borderlands (e.g. 3, 18, 19, 82, 83, 185, 189), we need more ethnographic work that specifically focuses on the role of the border in order to tease out the ways in which the myriad types of people negotiate life.

An irony of the new borderlands genre is the tendency on the part of anthropologists to neglect the social and historical continuity of border life. Much of our work has been ahistorical. History is more than context, yet we have not incorporated historical interpretation into our border studies. In our quest to expose and illustrate the importance of difference and contrasts, the role of the border in people's creation of bonds and social networks over time has been neglected. The specific permanence and longevity of border peoples in forming lasting social bonds and in political economic struggle is crucial (6,



8). My own work illustrates how, in certain instances, the actual crossing by family members of the Mexican-US border created stronger family networks over time, and a continuity in their lives of which the border is part (8). Indeed, this illustrates a multigenerational domain in the history of the US-Mexican borderlands region. Similarly, Carlos Velez-Ibañez directs our attention to his family's experience in the regional history of the Sonora-Arizona borderlands encompassing pre-Columbian trade routes (204). The connections to a border political ideology, family life, art, and expression are intricately woven into Velez-Ibañez's ethnography. For both Velez-Ibañez and myself, the border is a modern artifact, imposed on a social field with a history dating to early human involvement in the area.

Intense and career-long work that focuses on the border is rare. A number of scholars, however, have focused on the border region more recently. Leo Chavez and Josiah McC. Heyman are two good examples among a cadre of border scholars. Heyman (110–116) has focused specifically on the border with long-term research and in unique interpretations of policy that have exposed major contradictions in a broader anthropology. Of special importance is his research on the anthropology of bureaucracy (115), commodities (113, 114), and labor (110, 111). Heyman focuses on the border patrol and the US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), an institution that needs investigation. Heyman's work is significant not only in the realm of policy, but also for the borderlands genre: He illustrates a literal *and* conceptually sophisticated analysis. Heyman, working in the context of an anthropology of bureaucracy and power, shows how the actions of INS officers and immigrants responding to the needs of the US labor market sustain a contradictory policy. Even though arrests are made, undocumented labor migration is perpetuated. Through intensive study of the undocumented Mexican immigrant in the United States, Chavez brings forth a rich yet disturbing understanding of the contradictions of life in this border zone (49, 50, 52). His films "Under the Shadow of the Law" and "Uneasy Neighbors" are especially significant for viewing life on both the literal and conceptual borders.

Except for a few exceptions, anthropologists have done little work comparing international borders (15, 16, 38, 57, 73, 109, 166). In striving to focus on the local and immediate concerns of the Mexican-US border, we have failed to engage a primary anthropological tenet: comparison. In a recent collaboration, George Collier and I compared market experiences of Maya and *norteño* truckers on the southern and northern Mexican borders (11). This work brought forth a number of important issues that highlight and expose the differences of ethnic social organization and the engagement of entrepreneurs in burgeoning capital markets. Important work on Mexico's southern border illuminates the workings and definition of the Mexican nation-state (63–65) and raises questions about policy and its implementation on different borders.

Work by Wilson & Donnan promises to offer a unique contribution that compares border cultures internationally (218, see also 197).

In short, with the birth of an anthropology of borderlands, we are taking steps toward challenging and reorienting the canon. We hear the recent calls to address the ethnographic endeavor, the writing of culture, and the authority of the anthropologist. The conceptual and literal borderlands genre challenges us in similar ways. Let us redraw the borders of our cultural areas and look to the boundaries and connections of behavior. We need to join the people we study by engaging the contemporary world. This may, however, be the most difficult of borders for the anthropologist to cross.

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