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# Transnational Transgressions: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Global Mexican Cultural Productions

Rosana Blanco Cano

Trinity University, rblancoc@trinity.edu

Rita Urquijo-Ruiz

Trinity University, rurquijo@trinity.edu

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# Introduction

## Transnational Transgressions: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Global Mexican<sup>1</sup> Cultural Productions

*Rosana Blanco-Cano and Rita E. Urquijo-Ruiz*

The city of San Antonio, Texas, historically has maintained close artistic, political, social, and economic relations with Mexico. Because it embodies the complexity of transcultural and transnational exchanges in everyday life, in 2008 it became the site of a series of academic and artistic exchanges, out of which this text on global Mexican cultural productions emerges. A variety of artistic and theoretical perspectives were conceptualized to reflect the multiple transcultural dynamics of San Antonio and also other transnational Mexican areas physically and metaphorically located on both sides of the border.

In order to create such dialogues, we considered it crucial to include scholars, artists, and academically advanced undergraduate students who, through their complex subjectivities and innovative analytical approaches, enriched the understanding of cultural productions and negotiations within transnational Mexican communities. Using various academic standpoints such as cultural studies, anthropology, folklore, and performance studies, insightful discussions ensued, in which the intersections of class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, and national origin, among other factors, were considered in the production of *nuevos saberes*/new understandings. We wanted to open spaces for the historically marginalized Chicana/o and Mexican voices in the field of cultural interpretation. In addition, we expanded on the traditional academic canon by conceiving transdisciplinary dialogues from which students, artists, activists, and scholars could reflect on the discourses permeating exclusion and strategies of cultural resistance. As the

exchange of ideas occurred, it became clear that in order to do justice to these emergent cultural and critical reflections from all participants, the publication of a coedited volume with articles, interviews, and cultural interventions is imperative.

The discussions on the topic are framed under the following parts: (I) *And What are Transnational Mexican Border Cultures?* (II) *Voices and Literatures in Las Fronteras [the Borderlands]*; (III) *Performing Borders: De aquí y de allá [from Here and from There]*; and (IV) *De imágenes y sueños [Of Images and Dreams]: Transnational Border Visual Cultures*. Furthermore, such topics became an integral part of the academic curriculum in two classes (one in English/one in Spanish). Later, we selected the work of two students whose voices reflected the rich exchanges among a diverse group of critics, scholars, activists, and artists devoted to these themes. Although such students are the incipient critical voices in these discussions, we considered it significant to incorporate their perspectives among established scholars in the field.

This volume aims to enrich and expand the fields of cultural, trans-cultural/transnational, Chicana/o, gender/sexuality, and Latina/o studies by incorporating a multidisciplinary approach that examines cultural productions through a variety of analytical perspectives. Transnational identities in the Américas have been examined, for several decades, in the fields mentioned above as well as in traditional fields such as history, sociology, and anthropology.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, we propose a new multilayered reading of contemporary transnational cultural manifestations in which it is possible to recognize challenges and cultural strategies that transnational Mexican communities conceive in order to claim cultural, political, and social agency. In this respect the chapters included here elaborate on the creation of new forms of citizenship that reshape the long history of exclusion that has marked the experiences of these particular groups not just in the United States and Mexico.

In her work included in this volume, Norma Iglesias-Prieto provides very clear definitions of “transborder” and “transnational” dynamics. She defines the former as symbolic and material exchanges that occur in spaces situated on the Mexico-U.S. border. Additionally, she argues that “transnational” refers to similar exchanges, except that these could be situated anywhere within the two countries. Both processes are crucial in order to understand the characteristics and tendencies related to globalization and neoliberalism. On the other hand, Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez’s chapter serves to further complicate these terms by conflating them at times. He states: “When I use the word[s] ‘transnational’ and ‘transborder’ at one level, I include activities, events, behaviors, transactions, networks, and relationships in which persons on both sides of the border participate

in mutual fields and arenas in Southwest North America and beyond. These may be symmetrical or asymmetrical, open or close ended, and certainly political, economic, and social." Although these "material and symbolic exchanges" have historically existed between the two countries, it is indispensable to examine the unequal relations of power in these cultural, economic, and social practices.

### Transnational Mexican Historical Context

In spite of the fact that the history of these two neighboring countries has been interrelated for over a century and a half, little has changed in terms of their relations of power at the economic, political, and social levels. As such, their histories continue to demonstrate a subordination of one country's people and resources to the other, resulting in persistent exploitation and exclusion that, in turn, create an array of contesting cultural productions. Although such historical interventions have called into question these marginalized voices, they have not, however, incorporated a gender and sexuality framework that in turn perpetuates the traditional/patriarchal critical model. Our attempt is to incorporate and privilege the previously silenced voices.

According to Gilbert Paul Carrasco (1998), since 1848 and throughout its history, the United States has requested and utilized cheap labor from its neighbor to the south during times of economic growth and has rejected it during economic recessions. The first wave of Mexican immigrant workers into this country occurred during the Gold Rush era, adding to a population of Californios who had settled in the region with the expansion of the Spanish colonial frontier (Castañeda 1993). Anglo miners benefited significantly from the skills, tools, and techniques of Mexican immigrants, other longtime settlers, and Chinese miners.

But there was no gratitude shown toward any of these workers, instead, given the racism of the time, such miners became victims of discrimination, threats, violence, and restrictive legislation. Throughout the nineteenth century, Mexican labor continued to be exploited, especially in the areas of ranching, agriculture, and building railroads. At times they were held captive and at other times they were left to fend for themselves after finishing a labor season. Similar to the treatment suffered by the miners, other Mexican workers, seen as "foreigners" and an economic threat, also continued to be victims of violence and terror even when their labor was much needed (Carrasco 1998; Acuña 1972).

The U.S. invasion of Mexico in 1846, which in turn challenged the formation of the Mexican nation, was an opportunity for Mexican

indigenous groups to reclaim the communal lands taken away from them.<sup>3</sup> Alongside, they were also reclaiming their political autonomy, which continues to be one of their major struggles in the twenty-first century. However, such community land and communal living were considered a threat to the nation and its notion of private property. As the Mexico-U.S. border became geopolitically redefined throughout the nineteenth century, such as after the Gadsden Purchase following the Mexican-American War, people of all ethnicities living in the borderlands experienced violent, contradictory, and complex redefinitions of the limits of their cultural and social experiences. Chapter 2 by Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez narrates these occurrences and reflects on his childhood experiences in relation to Irish and Jewish families who migrated from the East Coast and became “mexicanized,” given that they lived most of their lives in his Tucson neighborhood.

In the process of nation building, major economic advances were implemented in Mexico, and none of them was more violent and imposing than Porfirio Díaz’s national development plans. The process of Mexico’s modernization was accelerated with his coup in 1876. His dictatorship lasted until the beginning of the Mexican Revolution and was responsible for displacing the country’s peasants and the poor who, in turn, migrated to industrialized cities and as far north as the United States (Acuña 148). Thanks to foreign capital from England, France, and the United States, Mexico invested heavily in the agriculture, mining, and railroad industries. According to Acuña, such investment produced a “reserve labor pool of unskilled labor” (12) for the industrialized cities in Mexico and for its neighbor to the north. Adolfo Gilly states that Mexico has thus become a servile colony for the United States, as it provides the United States with an inexhaustible reserve of cheap labor, which began with the Porfiriato (Gilly et. al. 29).

A primary reason for the United States needing cheap labor, in particular from Mexico, during the end of the nineteenth century was that it passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which prohibited further migration from China. Racist and nativist sentiments against the Chinese (many of whom later migrated to northwestern Mexico) led to increasing Mexican migration of unskilled laborers. But regardless of the racism of the time, the agricultural industry (as well as others) had one concern: “... [i]f you drive the Chinese out now, who is going to gather the fruit and the harvests next summer and fall?” (Saxton 209). The answer was simple: invite more Mexican workers to continue to develop the U.S. industries that needed them. Acuña indicates that by 1917 the United States had also limited migration from Europe (especially from eastern Europe), and that most immigrants had to clear reading, writing, and medical exams and



had to pay an eight-dollar fee. Mexican workers were exempt from these requirements until 1921 (Acuña 142; Sánchez 55, 57). However, once the law changed against them, historical records confirm the increased racism regarding the treatment of Mexican immigrants at the border, given that they were considered “dirty” because of their high rate of poverty and illiteracy. A demeaning example of this racism was that immigrant Mexican workers had to bathe at the border and their clothes were washed and fumigated before they entered the United States (Sánchez, 56).

As if such humiliation were not enough, some of their own compatriots of Mexican descent born in the United States also humiliated and disdained the new arrivals. David Gutiérrez indicates that the feelings of mistrust were mutual and that one group considered the other unworthy of whatever cultural values they held in high esteem. This created a rivalry between the “recién llegados/recent arrivals” and the “pochos/culturally deprived” (Gutiérrez 57, 63). Nevertheless, the opposite also occurred among some parts of these communities: “...the increasing flow of immigrants into the Southwest was welcomed by some Mexican Americans because the immigrants helped to rejuvenate Mexican culture, customs, and the use of Spanish in their communities...” (40). But it is important to recognize that such responses, whether positive or negative, were not merely due to cultural nationalism; they were fueled, instead, by economic and material conditions. By the mid 1920s the immigrant Mexican population had surpassed its U.S.-born counterpart. It is estimated that as many as 1.5 million Mexican immigrants entered the country between 1890 and 1929. Such high numbers of immigrants threatened some Mexican Americans, who felt they had to compete with the immigrants for the same or similar jobs in a racist economic system that constantly offered them very few job opportunities (Gutiérrez 40, 60).

Although initially the majority of Mexican immigrants into the United States were male, in the 1920s, according to Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, Mexican women and children joined the workforce and were used by employers as a stabilizing and exploitative tool, given that “...when accompanied by their families, men more willingly endured harsh working conditions” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, 21). However, by the time of the Great Depression in the 1930s, hundreds of thousands of women, men, and children, even those who were U.S. citizens, were deported/expatriated (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1997, 117; Ruiz 1998, 29–32; Acuña 1972). By 1942, amid the economic prosperity brought on by World War II, another big wave of Mexican laborers was sponsored under the Bracero Program (Calavita, Gutiérrez, Acuña), which was intended to last a few years but was expanded until 1964. Although this program offered work permits to 5 million men, another 5 million were in the country without

documentation (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, 23; Sánchez 1993; Gutiérrez 1995). During the 1950s, after the Korean War, yet another economic recession prompted labor unions' complaints that called for the control of undocumented immigration. This "control" measure was better known as "Operation Wetback," because it entailed the human rights violation of over 1 million people of Mexican ancestry who were deported within a few months in 1954 (Acuña 1972; Gutiérrez 1995).

But as soon as the recession ended, the United States, true to its pattern, requested a reinstatement of the Bracero Program to bring back cheap Mexican labor (González 2000, 203). In 1965 the United States initiated the Border Industrialization Program (BIP), also known as the Maquiladora Program, which was designed to reduce undocumented immigration by taking the factories and jobs to Mexico and locating them along the border region (González 2000, 233–45). However, this program has had the opposite effect.

According to Michael Huspek (1998), the United States contributes to the large-scale migration of Mexican undocumented workers by establishing commercial agricultural firms in Mexico that eventually drive peasants and indigenous families to the cities and across the border where they in turn obtain exploitative jobs at Maquiladora plants. The U.S. employers who hire such undocumented workers are rarely punished (*San Diego Union Tribune*, November 5, 1998). Such programs became even stronger after the 1982 near collapse of the Mexican economy, which was dependant primarily on the U.S. market for import and export of raw materials (such as oil) as well as human capital, such as the immigrants (documented or not) who send billions of dollars to their native country while working in the United States.

The culmination of the Maquiladora Program was the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, which has failed to stop undocumented migration and instead continues to facilitate the exploitation of Mexican workers on both sides of the border (In Motion Magazine 1997; González 2000). As Luis Méndez discusses, NAFTA was pursued and implemented by the Mexican ruling class who was looking to solidify the economic, neoliberal system from which the consolidation of the Mexican political right could be possible. The result is that the Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party) gained control of the country's political system at the national and state levels in 2000.<sup>4</sup> NAFTA is also the result of transnational unequal economic and political dynamics between the Mexican and U.S. elites. It is no coincidence that the agreement was ultimately signed in the city of San Antonio, which has historically been a point of transnational and transborder relations. Given the current nativist and racist attitudes across the United States

after the election of Barack Obama, the first African American president, these sentiments still exist. Immigrants, as well as people of color in general, often receive the blame for the economic crisis, which causes them to live in a state-produced terror.

When NAFTA went into effect on January 1, 1994, it was no surprise to the critics of this agreement that the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional/Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) took up arms against the Mexican government in Chiapas, one of the poorest states, to denounce five centuries of annihilation as well as the economic and cultural exploitation of indigenous peoples in Mexico. One of the main goals of EZLN was to challenge NAFTA's notion of aggressive development and implementation of global agribusinesses that in turn eliminated governmental subsidies for indigenous and peasant communities. As June Nash indicates: "The integration of Mexico into [the] global economy is correlated with the shrinking of national controls affecting the redistribution of wealth and the direction of development" (78). However, even a grass-roots movement, like the EZLN's, has been criticized for marginalizing indigenous women within it and negating equal rights to them because of their gender while demanding their rights as men from the Mexican government. It is well known that the BIP and NAFTA have targeted young women as the main employees in the Maquiladoras and other gendered industrialized sectors. Since NAFTA's implementation, the human rights violations and murders, especially of young women in the Ciudad Juárez/El Paso border region, have increased dramatically. As shown, the twentieth century was marked by an opening and closing of the southwestern border to Mexican labor, a trend explained since the 1970s by the "push-pull factor" of immigration, as previously discussed by Acuña and Gilly, among other authors.

Gerald López's analysis has complicated this earlier proposal even further by stating that as long as the United States continues to be more economically advantaged, migration north from Mexico will persist given that immigrants will continue to believe that this country will provide them with better-paying jobs than those available or unavailable at home (López 1988, 93). However, migration north is often that of undocumented immigrants, a source of contention between the two countries: although they fulfill the demand for cheap labor, they are also readily blamed for the United States' economic problems during times of recession. Unfortunately, racist sentiments disseminated by the press and public figures have resulted in hundreds of immigrants being physically brutalized (*In Motion Magazine* 1997, 2-4; Avilés 1999). Therefore it should come as no surprise that the border between the United States and Mexico has been a site of continued human rights violations against



immigrants in general and women in particular. The most recent example of these xenophobic attacks is Arizona's State Bill 1070, which criminalizes the immigrant and produces terror for all people who do not fit into the U.S. white model/imaginary of citizenship. Furthermore, the Texas Board of Education, a leader in the development of textbook materials nationally, has decided to enact similar xenophobic and racist endeavors by eliminating marginalized voices from history textbooks. It is no coincidence that such erased voices are those of women of all ethnicities and people of color in particular. After the 2010 midterm elections where Republicans gained a majority in the House of Representatives, other state officials have proposed similar discriminatory legislation, moving the country as a whole into further conservatism.

#### Theoretical Framework on Global and Transnational Dynamics

There are countless critical interpretations of the various manifestations of transnational/transborder Mexican cultures not only because of the broad scope of theoretical approaches that critics have been using for several decades but also because of the many forms in which Mexican identities are experienced on both sides of the Río Bravo/Rio Grande. For decades the existence of various *Mexicos* has been considered by the national Mexican elite as a symbol of *entreguismo* or betrayal and, to some extent, a Pocho-incomplete Mexican identity. However, for the diverse populations that represent the many *Mexicos* and live throughout the United States (as well as in other countries), embodying a cultural difference, this has implied a dynamic of empowerment that contests exclusionary discourses derived from the negative connotations associated with Mexican cultural identity.

Following Ana Sampaio's reflections (51), the chapters included in this volume consider the urgent incorporation of complex theoretical approaches in which transnationality works as the common thread. Such chapters also expand this discussion by reflecting on the transnational and multisituated critical approaches from which critics discuss local and global dynamics that affect and transform cultural productions and every day lives of Latina/o, Mexican, and Chicana/o communities. As Raymond Rocco argues, due to the complexities that exist within Latina/o communities in the United States, adopting interdisciplinary theoretical approaches—such as poststructuralism, cultural studies, and Chicana-Latina feminisms, among others—serves to disentangle social practices and to foster agency related to “the historical disempowerment and exclusion of Latina/o communities” (91). It is vital, as Rocco also suggests (93), to use critical standpoints that underline the complexity and

specificity of the visible and invisible borders that, based on Eurocentric and patriarchal discourses, mark everyday life for Latinas/os, since their subjectivities break with dominant notions of ideal citizenship, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexuality, social class, and education.

Thus, this volume includes critical interventions that contribute to the theoretical corpus that examines visible and invisible borders from a historical perspective. Adopting a complex historical analysis reveals the many layers associated with colonial and postcolonial societies—both in the United States and the rest of the Americas—in which unequal relations are still articulated among the colonizers and the colonized, the oppressed, and the exploited. Examining hybrid spaces—borders, limits, margins—and dynamics produced in that in-between space enlightens not only the complexity of exclusionary discourses toward nonideal subjects but also the multiple forms of resistance and renegotiation they establish against the power structures. It is from these in-between spaces that new political, social, and economic agents emerge, transforming dynamics of exclusion in the local, national, transnational, and global arenas.

Borders/Fronteras, as determining categories of analysis in this volume, have been one of the most powerful tropes for the understanding of cultural and historical connections present in quotidian experiences in the transnational *Mexicos* through personal, collective, and institutional practices. Gloria E. Anzaldúa, as a radical queer feminist voice, argues that the political borders between Mexico and the United States affect both the social position and agency for Mexican transnational communities. Furthermore, she expands and incorporates a broader concept of the border—a psychological, metaphorical, and spiritual one—that refers to exchanges among groups that have experienced exclusion and oppression from the dominant discursive matrix that determines those borders:

The actual physical borderland that I'm dealing with [...] is the Texas-U.S. Southwest/Mexican border. The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands are not particular to the Southwest. In fact, the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, middle and upper class touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy. (Anzaldúa, preface)

In this regard, theoretical perspectives on transculturality are relevant because this critical approach reminds us of “the confrontation and entanglement that occur when different social groups relate to each other” (García Canclini, 15).<sup>5</sup> As Néstor García Canclini suggests, the multi-layered process of identity creation goes beyond a romantic and static notion of identity politics (2004, 21–22). Using transcultural theoretical

approaches helps, in turn, to elucidate social practices intervening—either in facilitating or obstructing—in the (re)construction of political identities. The chapters included in this volume establish a discussion on the social practices that prevail in the construction of identities as processes. Such identity formation takes into account differences—ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, and language, among others—social inequalities and a lack of access to cultural spheres and resources that facilitate or obstruct the development of a cultural, economic, and political agency for transnational Mexican communities.

Global, transcultural, and transborder exchanges prevalent in spaces marked by visible and invisible borders will be central in the critical reflection these chapters present. By focusing on these three types of exchanges, the voices included in this volume establish a dialogue with Mary Louise Pratt's "contact zones," defined as "space[s] of colonial encounters, the space[s] in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (6). Furthermore, the chapters also elaborate on Anzaldúa's concepts of borders, margins, and hybrid spaces, identifying practices of empowerment that help to reconfigure the oppressive connotations associated with the implementation of borders, claiming these *fronterizos* [border] spaces as third spaces that break with the narrow notion of national specificities, cultures, identities, and citizenships.

Dislocating binary constructs and social practices that base their exclusionary mechanisms on the imposition of one term over the other—male/female, heterosexual/queer, American/Mexican, documented/undocumented—can serve to reveal new spaces of power in which emergent identities transform social landscapes immersed in complex and somewhat contradictory global exchanges (Rocco, 101). As Anzaldúa discusses: "Living in *Nepantla*, the overlapping space between different perceptions and belief systems, you are aware of the changeability of racial, gender, sexual and other categories rendering the conventional labeling obsolete" (2002, 541).

The many shapes of (trans)border and (trans)national identities, as Ramón Saldívar suggests in his examination of the concept of transnationalism proposed by Américo Paredes, are constituted through symbols and social practices that emphasize "the language of citizenship in which claims of belonging, community, and rights are formulated and expressed as a discourse of citizenship" (62). This language of citizenship also embodies multiple forms that should be considered not only by projects of historical preservation of communities inscribed in hybrid spaces. At the same time, such language must be examined from a complex

theoretical framework that incorporates powerful manifestations of the language of citizenship that bridge the examination of social and institutional practices such as the notion of “lived identities”:

The “lived identities” and realities of these hybrid and third spaces, margins, borders, contact zones and spaces “in-between” are not random, epiphenomenal, or transient. They are institutional spaces, structures of cultural, economic, and political practice that determine conditions, strategies and options for social and political actions. And their quality as spaces of the hybrid, border, or margin is directly linked to a variety of changes in the nature of the relationship between territory, space, identity, and community that have resulted from the processes of transnationalization. (Rocco, 100)

If “lived identities” also refers to the need to reconfigure the use of public spaces and institutions to create new spaces of power, it can be said that transnational cultural dynamics also offer the possibility of “reterritorializations” (Varese/Escárcega, 16) that bring, in consequence, the reconfiguration of traditional concepts of nationality. As Yolanda Cruz explains in her interview, included in chapter 15, binational Oaxacan indigenous groups participate in processes of reterritorialization by creating new social, economic, and political spaces of power and identity both in Mexico and the United States. Despite the fact that identity has been traditionally associated with a specific territory for its constitution, transnational communities immersed in processes of reterritorialization make explicit a new form of identity that is not necessarily formed by its association with one space, but instead with multiple and transnational spaces. Hence, it is now possible to conceive multisituated subjectivities that establish affective relationships with more than one geographic space and, in many cases, with metaphorical spaces. As Anna Sampaio suggests, “immigrants continually build familial and social networks that bridge the boundaries of multiple nations which situates them in a transnational space between countries” (56).

The way in which transnational Mexican communities articulate new cultural, political, and economic citizenship is one of the main themes this volume presents through the chapters included. These new identities—still in formation and transformation during the first decades of the new millennium—have based their social and cultural strategies in the established manifestations of various social movements, institutions, and cultural texts. Chicana feminisms, student activisms, grassroots interventions, Chicana and Latina cultural productions, and binational indigenous organizations are examples of such entities that,



in many ways, have been creating discursive channels of expression for negotiating the historical marginalization that Latinas/os have experienced in the United States. In this regard, we are currently experiencing new forms of empowerment for citizens with more than one affective or political national affiliation. In José Manuel Valenzuela's words, we are facing "New ways of legislating citizenship" (Valenzuela Arce, 25)<sup>6</sup> that to some extent allow more fluidity and exchange within the multiple hybrid spaces in which transnational identities are constructed and lived.

### Contributors

This volume includes academic and artistic contributions from Latina/o scholars and artists as well as two visual artists' interviews. The first section includes a broad multidisciplinary perspective on the definition of transborder/transnational cultures and identities.

"Wet Minds, Bookleggers, and the Place of Borders and Diasporas in U.S. Academic Circles," by Durán, reframes the concept of *mojado*—wet back—in order to produce a critical examination of practices and discourses that mark the experience of both academicians and cultural producers of Mexican origin working on border and transnational spaces. In his "anti-paper," Durán examines rigorously not only the asymmetric cultural exchange that takes place in American universities in relation to Mexican, Chicana/o, and Latina/o Studies but also demonstrates that Mexican national perspectives of cultural identity insist on marginalizing the transborder subject—and the knowledge produced beyond the Eurocentric notions of culture.

Vélez-Ibáñez questions unilineal megascripts of assimilation and daily experiences, exchanges, and cultural transformations of *fronterizo* life in his chapter entitled "Fronterizo and Transborder Existences: Binding Megascripts in a Transnational World." This chapter presents a short biographical account on the Sonora-Arizona border as well as an analysis and criticism of the model of assimilation as related to border lives and border peoples, whether they belong to white or Latina/o communities. His rich narrative critically demonstrates the several layers that comprise the transborder experiences in relation to ethnicity, social class, gender, and nationality, among other factors.

In "Transnational Mexican Cultural Production: *El OtroLado*," Hernández reevaluates traditional definitions of transnational/transborder cultures by examining not only spatial, capitalist, and socioeconomic



relations but also the intersection of factors such as gender, sexuality, race, and cultural differences in the production of transborder/transnational subjects and discourses. Reading contemporary cultural media phenomena under the light of an Anzaldúan critical discourse, Hernández demonstrates how traditional concepts of transborder/transnational subjectivities break with rational and Eurocentric notions of the “rational subject.”

In the second section, scholars reconsider the meaning of *textos fronterizos*/border texts by means of analyzing cultural texts embedded in the everyday social practices that constitute border identities. In “*Dos Mundos: Two Celebrations in Laredo, Texas—Los Matachines de la Santa Cruz and The Pocahontas Pageant of the George Washington’s Birthday Celebration*,” Cantú examines the complexity of celebrations on the border cities of the “Two Laredos,” spaces that are marked by the confluence and, as the author states, “seemingly contradictory behaviors.” Reflecting on historic and sociocultural dynamics of resistance, Cantú highlights the cultural hybridity among border cultural productions such as the Laredo celebration of Washington’s birthday and the *Matachines de la Santa Cruz*, an indigenous celebration about the Day of the Cross. Cantú posits that “*textos fronterizos*/border texts” establish a new cultural relationship across the border of Laredo/Nuevo Laredo: a cultural relationship that enables the “performing of what has been suppressed” by colonial, nationalistic, and patriarchal discourses and practices along the Mexico-U.S. border.

“*Transnational Narratives, Cultural Production, and Representations: Blurred Subjects in Juárez, México*,” by Tabuenca Córdoba, examines narratives on the femicide in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, as a “fundamental expression of transnational economy.” She critically examines cultural circuits that in conjunction with Eurocentric and neocolonialist discourses mark nonideal subjects—people of color, women, and those with nontraditional sexualities, among others—as disposable/replaceable subjects with no access to economic, political, or cultural citizenship in the global machine that operates in border spaces like Ciudad Juárez. In her complex analysis she proposes that the murdered women have been represented as “blurred subjects” that both in life and death are unrecognized, stigmatized, and discriminated against.

The third section reflects on the rich scope of cultural manifestations that examine the performative nature of cultural identities and practices. In “*Performing Borders: De aquí y de allá (Preliminary Notes on Mexican and Chicana/o Transnational Performance Art)*,” Gutiérrez presents a nontraditional scholarly overview of performance art from a (trans)national Mexican perspective that includes questions regarding

the main artistic preoccupations of multisituated and transborder performance cultural producers. Using her own transnational, bicultural, bilingual, and performance-like academic standpoint, Gutiérrez proposes the concept of unsettling comfort as one of the key features in Mexico-U.S. transnational performance practices. Her rigorous overview opens academic innovative spaces that serve to understand not only the complexity of transborder cultures and subjectivities but also transborder critical standpoints from which she produces new definitions of academic knowledge.

Danielson's "Aqui y Allá: Distance and Difference in Mónica Palacios' Transfronteriza Chicana Performance" focuses on the work of Chicana lesbian artist Monica Palacios as representational of the "transfronteriza experience and performance" by utilizing Anzaldúa's and Laura Gutiérrez's transborder and transnational theories. Danielson highlights the Latina lesbian body on stage as representational of the "de aquí y allá" transfronteriza subjectivity. The author analyzes strategies of resistance by queer, gendered, and racialized subjects within the local and global perspectives.

Parédez's "Selena's 'Como la Flor': Laying the Sound-Track of *Latinidad*" focuses on Selena Quintanilla's performances of "Como la Flor" [Like a Flower] to examine how "selenidad" produces critical questions "about the tensions that disrupt and affiliations that enable *Latinidad*." Parédez reflects on how this song—rhythm, lyrics, and performance features—affords us the opportunity to understand the mechanisms that permeated the staging of racialized sexuality, charting the emotional and cultural codes of *Latinidad* through Selena's performances. Parédez's analysis considers the contradictory practices that permeate the spectrum of *Latinidad* in Selena's body: a space for Latina/o working class empowerment in the midst of legislations against Latina/o bodies in the United States.

Section four revises the complex and rich set of visual manifestations developed in transnational and transborder Mexican areas. In "De Imágenes y Sueños [Of Images and Dreams]: Transnational Mexican Visual Culture," Ybarra-Frausto analyzes the work of various visual and performance artists beginning from the 1920s to the present. The author contextualizes and situates such works on both sides of the border in order to exult the notions of transfronterizo/transborder art as ubiquitous throughout the United States and Mexico, not just in the border region. In addition, the author highlights the importance of examining what he defines as the Latino imagination, cultural and artistic dynamic that provides new and expanded narratives of the American experience.

In “Coming and Going: Transborder Visual Art in Tijuana,” Iglesias-Prieto discusses some of the most significant features that characterize contemporary visual arts in Tijuana, Mexico, conceiving art as a radical space from which Mexican and transborder artists reimagine practices and discourses that deny border subjects the power of critical enunciation. Iglesias highlights the multiple transborder dynamics—unequal exchanges in relation to money, power, services, labor, people, and ideas—as factors that contribute to the formation of a complex visual cultural production in places such as the Tijuana/San Diego border.

Section five consists of works written as a result of, or in response to, the discussions at the Lennox seminar; ethnic, gender, and linguistic identities by Mexican-American students are presented in this section. As editors, we firmly believe in democratizing academic spaces by recognizing and validating such vibrant and emerging approaches. This section opens with Sotelo’s poems, entitled “Petition” and “Self-Portrait,” in which she explores her identity as a young, Latina writer living in the Texas borderlands. In “Socialized into ‘Whiteness,’” Rojas examines her Illinois elementary school’s attempt at assimilating her into mainstream—read white, middle class—society in order to remove any trace of her Mexican cultural descent. Rojas details the linguistic and cultural assimilation traps laid by the educational system and her struggle to maintain and sustain her Mexican cultural pride. In Guerra’s “From My Street to Main Street,” he details his effort to survive racial, ethnic, and linguistic bigotry in a white-dominant university environment after previously spending his entire life in the predominantly Latina/o areas of the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas.

Section six details the work of Yolanda Cruz and Rosina Conde. Cruz is a Chatino indigenous film maker who presents critical reflections in relation to immigration, trans(national) indigenous cultures, and gender transformations within Oaxacan transnational communities. On the other hand, Rosina Conde is a writer, singer, and performance artist. In her interview, Conde reflects on the cultural politics that permeate the Mexico-U.S. border cultural production.

This critical volume thus presents an opportunity to encounter and examine, at one place, various aspects of contemporary transnational Mexican cultural productions from artists, filmmakers, academics, and scholars. It is our hope that the readers will encounter in this volume established and emerging voices on the topics presented from both sides of the Mexico-U.S. border and from across each country. Additionally, we hope that this text contributes to the enrichment of scholarship on Transnational/Transborder studies.

**Notes**

1. In this volume, the term “transnational Mexican” refers to Mexicans as well as Chicana/os.
2. See *Dark Sweat, White Gold* (1994); *Stages of Life* (2001); *Border Women* (2002); *Transnational Latina/o Communities* (2002); *Por las fronteras del norte* (2004); and *An Impossible Living* (2010).
3. Particularly in the Yucatán. See Florescano’s *Etnia, estado y nación*.
4. See Luis H. Méndez, “Neoliberalismo y derechización.”
5. Original in Spanish, translated by the editors.
6. Ibid.