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Borderlands: North and South – Introductions

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BORDERLANDS: NORTH AND SOUTH — INTRODUCTIONS

by Steven Riel and Kristin Sánchez Carter

Steven Riel:

The need for an issue on the theme of “Borderlands: North and South” seemed obvious to me. In January 2017, President Trump signed an Executive Order “that banned foreign nationals from seven predominantly Muslim countries from visiting the country for 90 days.”¹ Discrimination based on religion features prominently in the history of Franco-Americans, particularly in New England. In May 2018, the Trump Administration’s Department of Justice announced the implementation of a “zero tolerance” policy towards asylum seekers who crossed the US-Mexican border, which resulted in the removal from refugee parents of any children accompanying them.² During the same period, a steady pulse of acts of murderous police brutality against Black Americans caused many White Americans to consider, sometimes for the very first time, our own roles in perpetuating systemic racism. Patrick Lacroix³ and most especially Timothy St. Pierre⁴ have encouraged the Franco-American community to step outside old ways of viewing ourselves as we undertake this self-examination. In the words of St. Pierre, “...we can no longer look away from our past when we do not like what we see... we cannot build a sturdy future on a foundation we refuse to fully inspect.”⁵ He provides a litany of ways in which comparing the oppression experienced by Franco-American to that experienced by Native and Black Americans only results in excusing and perpetuating our White privilege.

Given that warning, why did it still feel so necessary to compile an issue of a literary journal that creates, at the very least through juxtaposition, *comparison* between the “borderlands”

experiences of two groups: Latinx (especially Chicanx) at the southern border, and Franco-Americans at the northern border? What did we hope to reveal? In Gloria Anzaldúa's groundbreaking book *Borderlands/La Frontera*, that Chicana author presents the following statement as one of several varied approaches towards defining her topic: "A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary."⁶ In Denis Ledoux's introduction to his memoir *Growing Up French* that we publish in this issue, he describes a similar, but different, residue: "This is a story of emotional and cultural displacement. I am not a refugee, but I am a person living in another country other than the one that ought to have been mine." Our goal is not to equate the experiences of two groups, but to bear witness to how creative writers address this physical, emotional, and psychic terrain in their work, and to learn from the dialogue that gets implicitly generated. It is instructive to note that Anzaldúa strove to reach across boundaries, not to be hemmed in by them; in her book's acknowledgements, she mentions not just those who share *similar* (i.e., not exactly the same) experiences, but also those who are ignorant of what she describes:

to you whom I never chanced to meet but who inhabit borderlands
similar to mine;

to you for whom the borderlands is unknown territory[.]⁷

This spirit aligns with our impulse to expand the conversation we offer about "borderlands" by including a poem by Sujash Purna, a Bangladeshi writer living in Missouri. And while not all of the pieces that comprise this issue contain content related to the theme, some of those without such overt relevance provide interesting echoes--for example, Québécois Jérôme Pilette's bicycle odyssey in Louisiana links the North and the South in yet another way. (To find all of the works

specifically related to our “borderlands” theme, search that term using the search box in the right-hand panel of our home page. They also are labeled with the term “Borderlands” in the table of contents.)

Our journal’s editorial board was very lucky to have benefited from the many contributions and insights offered by our theme-issue co-editor Kristin Sánchez Carter. Her efforts have played a significant role in shaping the contents and quality of what is included.

The literary and artistic works that comprise this issue shed light on many aspects of “borderlands.” Poet Rafael Jesús González describes a linguistic one, in that his creative process involves a complex interaction between a Spanish and an English muse: “Fond sisters, their cordial discussions determine my metaphors, tenses, syntax. The result is a single piece in two tongues.” Kevin Cyr’s remarkable sculptural works of vehicular and temporary dwellings convey a deep-seated acceptance and even celebration of rootlessness and liminality (Erica Vermette’s fine interview of Cyr asks all the right questions to plumb what informs his work). Jim Bishop’s evocative poems recreate fluid psychological states in which dream, memory, a people’s history, and the present are anything but walled off from each other. The intermingling of communities across a geopolitical border that Gabriella Brand’s poem “Curling, Before” depicts suggests the richness and largeness of vision such easy fraternization can engender. Luis Lopez-Maldonado brings a queer perspective to the mix, contrasting the violence going on along the US-Mexican border and against people of color within the US with a radical, borderless openness he likens to a man on his knees performing oral sex on another man. And Juan Perez helps us to see recent events at our nation’s southern border from a different angle by relocating those atrocities to another planet.

This issue contains too many echoes and too many delights to mention. It seems to me that it has proven to be a true example of our title: many resonances can be found here. We invite you to discover them.

Kristin Sánchez Carter:

When Steven asked me to assist him with the call for submissions for this issue of *Résonance*, I at first sensed that this was just the right moment--and then, just the wrong one. When I thought more about "Borderlands, North and South," I wondered if Steven's request was misplaced. I could talk about the border, but what did the border to the north have to do with what I knew, which was the border to the south? Nothing and everything, it turns out, and that nothing/everything, nowhere/everywhere dichotomy is what shaped the submissions we received for this special issue. As Steven and I read the submissions, we were invited to think about borders-- the generational, the temporal, the spatial, the geopolitical--in a way that required us to let go of a definition, and understand that the fraught histories of empire, privilege, race, and class in North America produce a subjectivity in which the liminal space between experience, and knowing how to render experience, is the borderland itself. This borderland, which is both discursive and material--through the text, and of the text--is a mobile, ephemeral space for artistic production and politicization. It is at once an archive of memory, of keeping both the ground, and the movement on the ground--and a marking of loss, forgetting, disappearance, dust.

The works here are products of a borderland culture, but they also mark a production and a making of a culture which we must recognize, even as we see its boundaries changing. Sujash

Purna, in “Mimicry,” writes about seeing culture made in a gallery of imagery and clouds, remembering the labored cultural productions of his own that are trashed and dismissed, and rearranging them together with an eruption of laughter, and of agency. Julie Cyr’s “The Year My Grandfather Didn’t Speak” speaks to the voices that still vibrate, are remembered across a space that is now marked only in a photo, and to them memory of a silent search in the ground for those voices, lost across time, buried in the ground. In “achievement,” Kate Pashby reminds us of the clash between generational and geopolitical borderlands, as the mark of more than one history moves them to stake an embodied claim of refusal. None of these poems come from an exact “place,” yet their salience and materiality grounds them firmly in a shared space. Our writers remind us that the borderlands are a place or a space that is perpetually carried, redrawn, replaced--and that this labor is never ending, even as it emerges from the static space of the written word. Our experience reviewing these works has been authentically resonant, vibrational, and fluid, and we hope that the movement of these works, when read together, will be as dislocating and grounding for you as it has been for us.

¹ ACLU Washington, Timeline of the Muslim Ban, viewed March 6, 2021, <https://www.aclu-wa.org/pages/timeline-muslim-ban>

² Southern Poverty Law Center, Family Separation under the Trump Administration: A Timeline, viewed March 6, 2021, <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2020/06/17/family-separation-under-trump-administration-timeline>

³ Patrick Lacroix, “Race, Privilege, and the Problem of the Subaltern Franco-American,” Society for Historians of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era Blog, January 29, 2019, viewed March 6, 2021, <https://www.shgape.org/race-privilege-and-the-problem-of-the-subaltern-franco-american/>

⁴⁴ Timothy St. Pierre, “Acknowledging and Confronting Racism in Franco Communities,” *Le Forum*, vol. 42, #3 (fall 2020), p. 10, etc.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 49.

⁶ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. 4th ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2012), p. 25.

⁷ *Ibid*, 3rd prelim. p.