



AFTERWORD

BORDER THEORY IN PRACTICE

NORTH OF THE US-MEXICAN BORDERLANDS— Further Perspectives on the Canada-US Border

PART 1: THE BORDERS OF BORDER THEORY

In one of my definitions of the US-Mexico border as a state-sanctioned international boundary, I stated the following: “The US-Mexico border is, in fact, to millions of people, more than a possibility; it is an incitement to an always unfulfilled locality and residentiality that at once reinforces nation and its privileged subjects” (Lugo, *Fragmented Lives* 123). “Consequently,” I also noted, “it also marks as peripherals those ‘other peoples,’ similar to those ‘Other Victorians’ in Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* (1978), who are believed to belong elsewhere, in some other place of residence: on the other side, *but definitely not in a nonplace*” (italics in original). It is in the context of such interrelated yet relatively peripheralized “others,” that we must locate the theoretically and empirically diverse volume, “The ‘Other’ Border,” which focuses on the North American nation-state boundary located 2239 miles/3604 kilometers north of the US-Mexico border: the Canada-US border.

This interdisciplinary volume, which decidedly transcends individual disciplinary borders, captures and documents the social heterogeneity that characterizes the cultural, economic, political, environmental, and historical borderlands at the transnational crossroads of the US-Canada and Canada-US international boundaries. The essays herein further demonstrate that whether one’s perspective is framed by a position at the US-Canada or the Canada-US border is of tremendous philosophical, theoretical, and political importance. Tracking the same group of political border radicals, for instance, either from the Canadian side of the border or from the US side of the border, as Hewitt’s essay demonstrates, had distinctive political implications

Alejandro Lugo
Department of Anthropology,
New Mexico State University, USA



<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2317-9077>

in the late 1960s and early 1970s, whether one followed the activities of the R.C.M.P (the Royal Canadian Mounted Police) or the F.B.I. (Federal Bureau of Investigation), respectively.

This complex border bundle of international, cultural, and historical relations and limits between the United States of America and the Dominion of Canada, which is Canada's formal title, can be constructively approached or approximated through what I call "the borders of border theory"—the parameters of a sociocultural theory that, in turn, can be further unpacked if we ask, like I did back in 1997, the following questions:

If we wanted to carry out an archaeology of border theory, how would we identify its sources and its targets? Where would we locate its multiple sites of production and consumption, formation and transformation? What are the multiple discourses producing images of borders... at least in the minds of academics? (Lugo, "Reflections on Border Theory" 44)

In my view, we can best answer these questions, as they relate to the "Other" Border—that is, *El Otro Norte* north of "El Norte, USA"—with an exploratory spirit rather than a definitive one. This is an inquisitive challenge similar to the one that informed how I framed my own approximation to border theory concerning the US-Mexico border almost three decades ago, but now with a tweak. The "Other" Border requires us to consider particular sites, sources, targets, and discourses, namely previously marginalized border intellectuals within the academic field of Border Studies (i.e., women and other minorities as well as Canada-US border scholars); the outer limits of the nation-state (i.e., the US-Mexico border region and the US-Canada borderlands); the frontiers of sociocultural and postcolonial theory (i.e., cultural borderlands vis-à-vis cultural patterns); the multiple fronts of struggle in cultural studies, broadly defined (i.e., through Gramsci's war of position); the cutting edge (at the forefront) of theories of difference (i.e., race, class, gender, and sexual orientation); and finally (at) the interdisciplinary crossroads of history, literature, anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies—among other disciplines. Spanning this interdisciplinary crossroads, the essays in this volume critically demonstrate, quite compellingly, that border theory's critiques of society, not unlike in the US-Mexico border case, require rigorous recognition and analysis of multiple discourses, situated knowledges, positioned subjects, and different arenas of contestation in everyday life in the context of a trans-border binational international boundary: the Canada-US border.

WHAT IS THE BORDER DIFFERENCE?

In the field of Border Studies, no matter the area of the world we are studying, none of the following terms is taken for granted: Border, Borderland, Boundary, Border Zones, Frontier, Limits, Parameters, Patterns, Crossroads, and Crossings. So, in the larger North American context of the “Other Border” that concerns us here, what would be the difference between “border” and “borderlands” and between “cultural borderlands” and “cultural patterns”? In 1987, Gloria Anzaldúa differentiated the term “border” from “borderlands” in the following way: “A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition” (Anzaldúa 3). As I noted in 2008, “if the borderland is vague and undetermined and always transitional, the US-Mexico border, on the other hand, has been constantly static for more than 150 years” (Lugo, *Fragmented Lives* 121–122). As Anzaldúa painfully stated, “*es una herida abierta* [it’s an open wound] where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds” (Anzaldúa 3).

The terms “border,” “borderlands,” “frontier,” and also “*frontera*” are not synonymous with each other. Even in Anzaldúa’s main title of her book, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, she used the plural in English for “Borderlands” and the singular in Spanish for “La Frontera,” precisely to mark and highlight, analytically, a conceptual difference in the multiple ways she approached her US-Mexico border homeland. With respect to the disciplinary use of the term “borderlands,” and from a relatively recent cultural anthropology perspective, Renato Rosaldo differentiated the more interdisciplinary phrase “cultural borderlands” from the classic anthropological phrase “cultural patterns”—a term associated with a particular anthropological understanding of the concept of “culture” during the twentieth-century anthropology historical period that covered at least five decades, from the 1920s to the 1960s. In fact, Rosaldo was very precise about the limits and limitations of what he called the “classic vision of unique cultural patterns,” which, he explained: “emphasizes shared patterns at the expense of processes of change and internal inconsistencies, conflicts, and contradictions.” Rosaldo continues, “By defining culture as a set of cultural meanings, *classic norms of analysis make it difficult to study zones of difference within and between cultures. From the classic perspective, cultural borderlands appear to be annoying exceptions rather than central areas for inquiry*” (Rosaldo 27–28; emphasis added). Rosaldo further clarifies the difference between “cultural patterns” and “cultural

borderlands” in the following passage from the last chapter of his book, *Culture and Truth*, where he underscores the analysis of borderlands vis-à-vis the necessary analysis of particular “border zones”:

The fiction of the uniformly shared culture increasingly seems more tenuous than useful. Although most metropolitan typifications continue to suppress border zones, human cultures are neither necessarily coherent nor always homogeneous. More often than we usually care to think, our everyday lives are crisscrossed by *border zones*, pockets and eruptions of all kinds. Social borders frequently become salient around such lines as sexual orientation, gender, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, age, politics, dress, food, or taste. Along with ‘our’ supposedly transparent cultural selves, such *borderlands* should be regarded not as analytically empty transitional zones but as sites of creative cultural production that require investigation. (Rosaldo 207–208; emphasis added)

Given this volume’s robust analysis and interdisciplinary documentation of the multiple border zones of the US-Canada border and the Canada-US border, this collection of essays is more associated with Rosaldo’s concept of “cultural borderlands” than with the colonialist anthropological notion of “cultural patterns.” In other words, “The Other Border” exemplifies the opposite, say, of Ruth Benedict’s classic *Patterns of Culture*, without denying the historical importance of Boasian cultural analysis. One of the major contributions of this volume to sociocultural border analysis and Border Studies in general is that it produces complex heterogeneous understandings of American culture, Canadian culture, and the Canada-US cultural borderlands—and beyond.

For instance, just as Rowland Robinson’s critique of the Canadian settler state unpredictably overlaps with Paul Bowles’ and Astrid Fellner’s own respective assessments of the colonialist imposition of the Forty-ninth Parallel on Indigenous populations native to the US-Canada border region, as well as with Philip Awashish and Jasmin Habib’s political engagement and persistent critique of the Migratory Birds Convention of 1916, the historical and social influence of Caribbean migration and culture makes itself present on the Canadian cultural borderlands, whether regarding Bermuda, Haiti, or Jamaica, specifically in the essays by Robinson, Adina Balint, and Karen Flynn, respectively. The environmental borderlands (in Jane Desmond’s and Philip Awashish and Jasmin Habib’s essays), the explicit flow of organized politics, including “unlikely alliances” across the Canadian borderlands (in Paul Bowles’ essay), as well as the theoretical and philosophical borderlands (in Adina Balint’s and Astrid Fellner’s essays), provide additional foundational analytical layers to the thickness and complexity

of the Canada-US borderlands. This incredibly rich methodological and interdisciplinary body of work is well complemented by Jane Desmond's own elegant border analysis of human-animal relations, particularly the sale of hunting rights and the sale of the right to kill polar bears in the context not just of Inuit culture and hunting traditions but also in the broader contexts of the transnational global economy and of the impact of climate change on bears and the Inuit community. Along similar human-animal relations lines, Philip Awashish and Jasmin Habib's essay about the political engagement involved in defending the hunting, harvesting, and trapping rights of the Crees of Eeyou Istchee, remind readers of the transcendental contributions a particular border intellectual, such as Mr. Awashish, can make for a more humane transnational borderscape of the Canada-US Indigenous borderlands. Lastly, Jasmin Habib's border analysis of the cultural misrepresentations of Canada in American television simultaneously reminds us of the specific ways Canada can be perceived to be both a threat to US national security after the September 11 attacks (with the harmonization of border practices having a particularly negative effect on racialized bodies, for example) and represented as a site of sanctuary or, in keeping with the imaginary, of escape. The moving and elastic visual borders in Habib's essay resemble the analysis of nomadic subjects and imagery in Adina Balint's creative essay on "mobile borders."

Through the highly elaborate presentation of theoretical, historical, and sociocultural materials, both within each essay and across the collection, "The Other Border" provides an excellent example of Rosaldo's key observations that "human cultures are neither necessarily coherent nor always homogeneous" and that cultural borderlands, by being crisscrossed by border zones of all kinds, are not "analytically empty transitional zones but [...] sites of creative cultural production that require investigation" (Rosaldo 207–208).

BORDER INSPECTIONS: THE BORDER AND ITS LIMITS

According to Alejandro Morales, "We live in a time and space in which borders, both literal and figurative, exist everywhere [...] A border maps limits; it keeps people in and out of an area; it marks the ending of a safe zone and the beginning of an unsafe zone" (Morales 23; emphasis added). If a border maps and imposes limits, border theory reminds academics that our understanding of knowledge production and consumption also has its own limits. As I noted elsewhere ("Reflections on Border Theory"), border theory helps us: 1) to better recognize

“the political and epistemological limits under which we teach, write, do research and theorize” and 2) to more effectively “contribute to the exploration of these limits, as long as this exploration is recognized to be[...] a product of the codification” (Lugo 1997, 46) of what Foucault aptly phrased the “multiplicity of force relations [...] which by virtue of their inequalities, constantly engender states of power” (93). It is due to the inescapable inequalities inherent in social life’s “multiplicity of force relations” that we cannot ignore the border inspections that ultimately give *raison d’être* to border crossings either across intra-national borders or across international boundaries: past, present, and future--whether they are locally, regionally, or globally constituted.

In my 2008 chapter, “Border Inspections: Inspecting the Working-Class Life of Maquiladora Workers on the US-Mexico Border,” I specifically called for “a new analytical tool, ‘border inspections,’ that must be added to the current metaphor of border crossings,” (Lugo, *Fragmented Lives* 117), while noting that “most border crossings are more often than not accompanied by ‘inspection stations’ that inspect, monitor, and surveil what goes in and out in the name of class, gender, race, and nation” (*Fragmented Lives* 115). In the same chapter, I noted an additional distinction between the notion of “border crossings” and the notion of “border inspections”: “the main difference between the analytical phrases ‘border crossings’ and ‘border inspections’ is that the latter leads to the analysis of the depth and breadth of the many ‘inspection stations’ deployed throughout the social, political, economic, and cultural borders and borderlands characterizing human social life at the turn of the twenty-first century” (148). Ultimately, I argued, “border crossings [...] cannot be properly understood without an analysis of the border inspections that constitute them” (150).

Throughout this volume’s essays, though to different degrees in each essay, the border inspections constituting border crossings manifest themselves as a profound mark in the lives of the people inhabiting the Canada-US borderlands. At the international level of nation-state inspections, the essays by Jasmin Habib and by Philip Awashish and Jasmin Habib empirically document the many ways Canada as a nation-state is itself inspected, criticized, romanticized, and directly challenged by its American counterpart (indeed, it was not until 1999 that a 1979 amended protocol to the 1916 Migratory Birds Convention Act went into force after two decades of US resistance to the Canadian-initiated changes). Although Canada is often represented in the American mass media as “La Terre Paternal,” “The Promise Land,” “The Escape Country,” and the “Magical Land of the North” (Habib’s essay,) Canada (not unlike Mexico) is also often perceived

as dangerous to American national security. On the other hand, Canada, especially in the late 1960s and early 1970s at the height of the Civil Rights Movement period, similarly perceived the United States as a security threat to Canada. Most recently, Canada felt the US was an ideological and political threat to its political well-being during the 2022 “Freedom Convoy” movement of Canadian truckers—many of whom managed to block the Detroit-Windsor border crossing into Canada and some of whom were influenced by the white supremacy, xenophobia, and anti-vaccine ideology of American Trumpian politics (see brief photo essay, below).¹

Border inspections are also manifested in ethnographic and historically specific settings in several other essays. The essay by Karen Flynn on Jamaican domestic workers in Canada powerfully documents the multiple ways minoritized individuals are surveilled by different kinds of border inspectors—whether by the city police, middle and upper-class bosses, supervisors, immigration officers, or other border officials. Even in the changing contexts of Diaspora (Robinson), Mobile Borders (Balint), Bordertextures (Fellner), and Border Flows (Bowles), the Forty-ninth Parallel, the Medicine Line, and the Oil Pipeline, as well as the socio-political lines on both sides of the “Other Border,” most of the border crossings at the crossroads within and across modern societies are densely (even if not always physically visible) populated by multiple border inspectors as well as by the multiplicity of inequalities they represent and enforce.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERDISCIPLINARITY IN BORDER STUDIES AND BEYOND

The interdisciplinary literature on the US-Mexico border (or the Mexican-US border) and the interdisciplinary literature on the Canada-US border (or the US-Canada border), as this volume has shown, have demonstrated that a sociocultural theory of borderlands, which is itself a border theory of culture and society (see Lugo, “Of Borders, Bridges, Walls, and Other Relations”), challenges and invites academics to recognize the vitally important crossroads of interdisciplinarity, where ambassadors officially representing different disciplines (and there-

¹ During the Spring of 2025, when this essay was being finalized, President Trump, immediately upon his re-election, continuously threatened Canada by arguing that the United States of America should annex Canada as its 51st state. On May 27, 2025, King Charles visited Ottawa to honor Canada’s sovereignty and to reassure Canadians and the Trump administration that Canada is a free and independent nation-state.

fore serving as border academic inspectors) will be no longer needed and through which walls and barbed wires between and across disciplines and across world regions are persistently critiqued.

Once this challenge and invitation are accepted, border theory itself, as well as its practice—through its critique of knowledge production, consumption, and distribution—can help us to simultaneously transcend and effectively situate and unpack the privileges of culture, capitalism, the nation-state, and the academy at the critical crossroads of our search for social justice for the new generations, but only if it is imagined historically and in the larger and dispersed contexts of the nation-state, history, nature, community sustainability, and of power.

PART 2: FREEDOM CONVOY TO THE PROMISED LAND: A BRIEF PHOTO ESSAY OF TRUCKERS' RESISTANCE ON THE US-CANADA BORDER

With the transgressive spirit of practicing interdisciplinary border crossings, I would like to end this Afterword with a brief photo essay of the Canadian truckers' protest, "Freedom Convoy," which caught the world's attention because it temporarily occupied the streets surrounding the main buildings of Canada's federal government in Ottawa, the country's capital, and because it paralyzed, for a few weeks, a number of the international border crossings between the United States and Canada from January to February of 2022.

These photographs are part of a much larger ongoing series titled "T.V. Portraits/T.V. Landscapes." I have taken these photographs from the intimacy of my own home television room while working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic—from 2020 to the present.²

*THE "OTHER" BORDER:
On Canada/US Culture,
Power, and Politics*

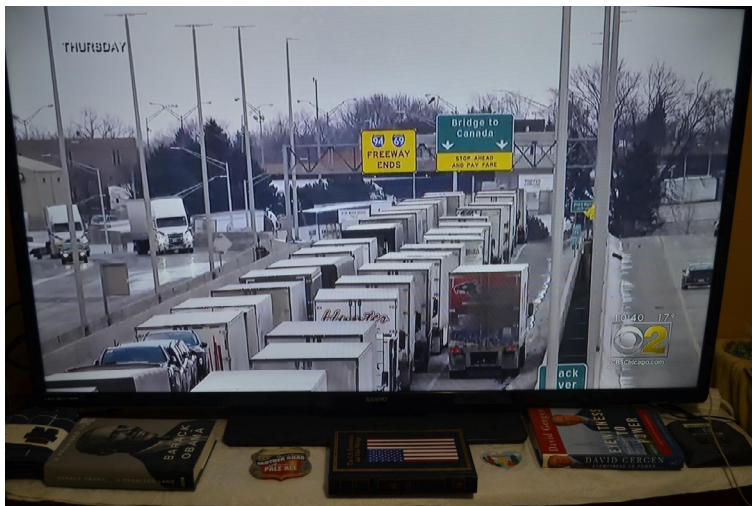
RIAS—Vol. 18, Spring–Summer, № 1/2025

2 I began taking this "T.V. photography" when I found myself quarantining in Beijing in 2009 when the H1N1 virus hit while I was attending a conference in China. At that time, all international participants were forced by the Chinese government to quarantine for a few days in our hotel rooms! Since I had my personal camera with me, I could only take photos of Chinese television in my hotel room until we were allowed to go out. Let us "fast forward" to early 2020, when COVID-19 arrived. When the COVID-19 pandemic forced us to stay home more than ten years later, I started emphasizing TV photographs again, as I did back in Beijing.

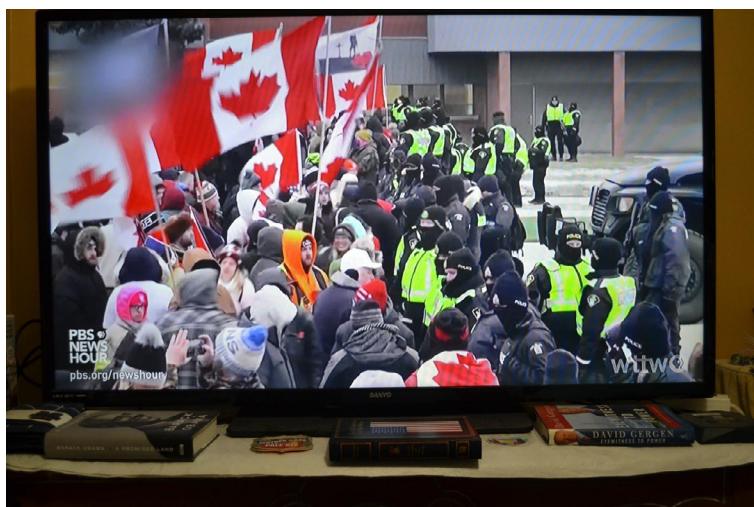
**"FREEDOM CONVOY" PHOTO ESSAY FROM LUGO'S TELEVISION ROOM:
OTHER BORDER I, OTHER BORDER II, OTHER BORDER III, AND OTHER BORDER
IV (COPYRIGHT 2022 ALEJANDRO LUGO):**



Other Border I: Resisting Prime Minister Trudeau's Vaccine Mandates, Canadian Truckers Occupy Ottawa's Government District (*The Last Word*, MSNBC)



Other Border II: As a result of Canadian Truckers Border Blockades, the International Border Crossing to Canada Becomes Paralyzed and Congested on the US Side (CBS Mornings Plus)



Other Border III: Canadian Police are Ordered to Contain Canadian Truckers and Their Allies in Windsor, Ontario (PBS Newshour)



Other Border IV: Trudeau's Administration Orders Clearing of Truckers Blockades and Occupations (PBS Newshour).

The photographs in the “Freedom Convoy” subseries manifest a particular analytical border zone where both my private gaze inside my house and the public media representation of the world beyond home unevenly come together to capture a temporary, though highly consequential, working-class conservative movement against the Cana-

THE “OTHER” BORDER:
On Canada/US Culture,
Power, and Politics

RIAS—Vol. 18, Spring—Summer, No 1/2025

dian state. The visual transnational border zone—mapped out through this photo essay—is a specific product of the resistance of commercial truck drivers against the imposition of additional *border inspections* for truckers entering Canada from the United States; specifically, the requirement on the part of the Trudeau administration that truck drivers show proof of vaccination against COVID-19 before entering Canadian territory. In the context of today's Trumpian politics, the "Freedom Convoy" was one of those unexpected historical moments when the Canadian government perceived, though somewhat silently and diplomatically, that the United States might pose a security threat to Canada.

Lastly, and of profound relevance to the possible sides one can take as we engage the "Other" Border, are the American side and the US-Canadian angle of the photo essay. After all, all the photographs have in common that all television networks reporting on the "Freedom Convoy"—through my television cable services—are US-based: PBS, MSNBC, CNN, CBS, and ABC. Additionally, all of the photographs visibly show, on my home television table, Barack Obama's memoir of his first years in the White House, *A Promised Land*, which is a title that provides a borderland bridge between the mutual mythical aspirations of both the Dominion of Canada and the United States of America.

Abstract: This Afterword underscores the collective interdisciplinarity of Canada-US Border Studies as evidenced in the preceding essays, particularly as they decidedly transcend the borders of individual disciplines. In the process, the essay maps out how the empirical and theoretical richness of such collective interdisciplinarity in the study of the US-Canada border effectively captures and documents the social heterogeneity characterizing the cultural, economic, political, environmental, and historical borderlands found at the transnational crossroads of the US-Canada and Canada-US international boundaries. The theoretical and empirical analysis of this productive interdisciplinarity in the field of border studies more broadly is presented from the theoretical perspective of border theory as it emerged via the US-Mexico border and through a brief photo essay of the Freedom Convoy of 2022.

Keywords: border theory and practice, border inspections, cultural borderlands, interdisciplinarity, Canada-US Border, US-Canada Border, Freedom Convoy, Canadian Truckers

Bio: Alejandro Lugo (Stanford PhD, Wisconsin MA, NMSU BA) is a cultural anthropologist who was born in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico, and was raised on both sides of the Juárez-El Paso (Texas)-Las Cruces (New Mexico) border region. Lugo is the 2024 recipient of the American Anthropological Association's "Anthropology in Media Award" for his opinion letters in the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, the *Washington Post*,

and the *Los Angeles Times*. Lugo is the author of multiple scholarly articles and book chapters on border theory and border culture and co-editor (with Bill Maurer) of the feminist anthropology volume *Gender Matters: Rereading Michelle Rosaldo* (University of Michigan Press) as well as author of the award-winning book, *Fragmented Lives, Assembled Parts: Culture, Capitalism, and Conquest at the US-Mexico Border* (University of Texas Press), which won the Southwest Book Award and the ALLA Book Award. His ethnographic and artistic photographs have been published as photo essays in the *South Atlantic Quarterly* (2006), *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* (2015), and the *Review of International American Studies* (2018). He has taught anthropology at Bryn Mawr College, the University of Texas at El Paso, and Arizona State University, where he served as Director of the School of Transborder Studies, as well as at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he taught for 20 years. Currently, Lugo holds a Faculty Affiliate position back at his undergraduate alma mater, New Mexico State University, where he was awarded the College of Arts and Sciences "2019 Star of Arts and Sciences."

WORKS CITED

- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987.
- CBS *Mornings Plus*. CBS, WBBM, Chicago, February 10-14, 2022.
- Foucault, Michel. *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*. New York: Pantheon, 1978.
- Lugo, Alejandro. *Fragmented Lives, Assembled Parts: Culture, Capitalism, and Conquest at the U.S.-Mexico Border*. University of Texas Press, 2008.
- . "Of Borders, Bridges, Walls, and Other Relations, Historical and Contemporary: A Commentary." *The U.S.-Mexico Transborder Region: Cultural Dynamics and Historical Interactions*, edited by Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez and Josiah Heyman, The University of Arizona Press, 2017, pp. 81-87.
- . "Reflections on Border Theory, Culture, and the Nation." *Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics*, edited by Scott Michaelsen and David E. Johnson, University of Minnesota Press, 1997, pp. 43-67.
- . "Theorizing Border Inspections." *Cultural Dynamics*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2000, pp. 353-73.
- Morales, Alejandro. "Dynamic Identities in Heterotopia." *Bilingual Review/ La Revista Bilingüe*, vol. 20 no. 3, 1995, pp. 14-27.
- . "Dynamic Identities in Heterotopia." *Alejandro Morales: Fiction Past, Present, Future Perfect*, edited by Jose Antonio Gurpegui, Bilingual Review Press, 1996, pp. 14-27.
- MSNBC, New York, 10-14 Feb. 2022.

Obama, Barack. *A Promised Land*. Crown—an imprint of Random House, 2020.

PBS Newshour. PBS, WTTW, Chicago, 10–14 Feb. 2022.

Rosaldo, Renato. *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Beacon Press, 1993. *The Last Word*.

Alejandro Lugo
Department of Anthropology,
New Mexico State University, USA

