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Book Review

Up Against the Wall. Re-imagining the U.S. Mexico Border, Edwards S. Casey and Mary Watkins (2014)

Austin: University of Texas Press, 288 pp.

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The visibility of the Mexican–US border has become a daily fixture in the press around the world. The Trump administration has continued to reshape US immigration policies following some of the President’s controversial pledges: extending the border wall, speeding the deportation of undocumented immigrants by increasing the number of immigration enforcement officers, boosting borders patrols force, and calling for stripping sanctuary cities of federal grant funding.¹ By addressing the historical

¹ Cities that have policies in place designed to limit cooperation with or involvement in federal immigration enforcement actions.

construction of the US wall at the Mexican border and its metaphorical projection, Casey and Watkins' book, *Up Against the Wall. Re-imagining the U.S. Mexico Border*, offers an analysis that contextualizes current US responses to migration.

The research of this book is built not only on scholarly inquiry by historians, philosophers and cultural critics (Rodolfo Acuña, Gloria Andalzúa, Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida, among others), but also on the *testimonio* of migrants and those who live and work at the borders (human-rights activists, *maquiladora* workers, artists and US Border Patrol officers). The authors recall their own immersion experiences that have allowed them to apprehend the realities of the wall in different communities. Their understanding of the forced migration crisis draws on the physical and metaphorical understanding of the border concept to contextualize the many 'forms of political, economic, and social exclusion, reinforced by racists projections, created daily "precarity" (Butler 2006), including the overhanging threats of detention and deportation' (2). The book also tries to fill gaps in the literature around the *Frontera* from the US perspective and, particularly, 'Anglo border psychology'.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part (Re-viewing La Frontera) is written by Ed Casey and focuses on the physical nature of the border and the effect on the near inhabitants and on the environment. Chapter 1 explores the changes in the historical relationship between the United States and Mexico, particularly by looking at the changes over three different time stages: from 1848 to the beginning of the construction in the mid-1990s after the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and post 9/11. It analyses key terms related to border (boundary, borderland, borders, walls and fences,

and borderline) that encompass different variables and meanings (from real to images) of *La Frontera*.

The wall built in the mid-1990s connects and divides Ambos Nogales into the two cities of Nogales, Arizona, and Nogales, Sonora. Chapter 2 places them in their historical–geographical context and discuss the creation and development of these ‘*bivalve and incongruous counterparts*’ (39). In addition, the chapter examines the border dynamics of this cityscape with the progressive militarization of the *Frontera* after 9/11.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to Tijuana, a city born from the border itself. The focus of this chapter is not only the history of the city, but particularly the environmental impact of the wall on the estuary that lies between Tijuana and the American side to the north. This case study illustrates the difference between border and boundary in the natural environment. The wall extension in Tijuana is increasing the ecological damage and threatens to destroy this *ecotone* space, an interval place ‘in which human and animals (and sometimes both together) are given space for cohabitation’ (79).

Chapter 4 is devoted to analysing the impacts of borders in the Lower Rio Grande Valle, a space where the river provides the basis of the border. It combines the historical description with the narratives of local citizens who are suffering from the militarization of the border. The surveillance cameras and the obtrusive presence of the wall is at the same time a physical reality and a symbolic image of separation and division.

Part 2 (Looking Both Ways at the Border), written by Mary Watkins, examines the metaphorical status of the wall and the psychological, interpersonal and intercommunity status of the border.

Chapter 6 examines the racism suffered by Mexicans in towns and cities through the Southwest since the redrawing of the border in 1848. US citizens of Mexican descent were reduced to second class citizens, segregated in public spaces and relegated to the lower labour scale. The criminalization and mass incarceration of Mexican migrants has created a substantiated stigmatization similar to the one suffered by African American. This chapter illustrates the relationship between institutionalized racism and education with the plight of young immigrants to pass the DREAM (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors) Act. Moreover, Watkins makes clear that the US government is not taking responsibility for the collateral damage (psychological and physical traumas) done to many immigrant children from Central America countries. These remarks resonate with recent media images of children separated from their parents because of the US 'zero tolerance' policy that presses criminal charges on adults crossing the border 'illegally'.

Chapter 7 provides an analysis of the US social and historical amnesia regarding the injustices committed on Mexican migrants. Watkins calls for collective shame and remorse as the first step towards the reconciliation of the communities.

The power of art can contribute to creating and empathic link between communities. Chapter 8 examines different forms of art used as a way to protest or mark a memorial. Alejandro Santiago's *2501 Migrantes; El Paseo de Humanidad (The Parade of Humanity)* by Guadalupe Serrano, Alberto Morackis and Alfred Quiroz; or *Border Dynamics* by Alberto Morackis and Guadalupe Serrano are some of the artistic creations discussed in this section.

Transborder ethics are discussed in Chapter 9 by examining the UN's International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, the DREAM Act, the building of border parks, and the roles of cities as sites of sanctuary.

The book closes with a Postlude to Part 2, that calls for the value of hospitality (Derrida 2000) and human desires for dignity (Hicks 2011), and an Epilogue that projects an imaginary future without borders and where people can live together sharing languages, culture and traditions.

It would be impossible to render justice to the myriad of multiple sources and testimonials collected to create a tapestry of voices that enrich the philosophical, cultural and historical analysis of this iconic border known as *La Frontera*. This book is particularly innovative in the use of 'liberation psychology' (Watkins and Shulman 2008) – based on the liberation theology and Paulo Freire's theories – that calls for the peaceful convivence of communities, and for giving preference to poor and oppressed majorities. To sum up, the reading of this review illuminates the importance of rethinking immigration not only as a global issue, but as an unavoidable ethical question.

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