Surviving the Borderlands: Living *Sin Fronteras*, Being a Crossroads

The Deperipheralization of the Chicano/a Cultural/Literary Space

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SURVIVING THE BORDERLANDS: LIVING *SIN FRONTERAS*, BEING A CROSSROADS
THE DEPERIPHERALIZATION OF THE CHICANO/A CULTURAL/LITERARY SPACE
The following study deals with the evolution of the centre-periphery dynamics in Chicano/a cultural and literary space of the Mexican American borderland region. With a brief overview of the socio-historical and geopolitical context in the background the article offers insight into the gradual formation of the cultural/literary capital of the Mexican American and later Chicano/a community, and inquiries into its possible emergence out of the formerly peripheral position in relation to the literary centres of Spain, Mexico or United States.

KEYWORDS:
Centre — periphery — the Borderlands — frontier — Mexico — United States — Mexican American literature and culture — Chicano/a literature and culture — Chicano Movement — Chicano/a Renaissance — mestizaje/miscegenation — postcolonial perspective — Pascale Casanova

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The title of this study is inspired by the words of the Chicana[1] writer Gloria Anzaldúa.[2] It expresses the struggle of a cultural space and its literature to survive, live and, finally, thrive in what Pascale Casanova envisioned as the "world republic of letters".[3] The main reason for this complexity stems from the fact that the culture and literature Anzaldúa stands for springs from what she has termed the Borderlands, a hybrid space that can be understood geographically as the zone surrounding the Mexican American border and the area of the US Southwest. More importantly, it has to be viewed as a spiritual space that represents a crossroads of cultural legacies and influences resulting from a peripheral situation with changing centres to depend upon. In the second half of the twentieth century, after a long and strenuous struggle, the Borderlands achieve a position where they can talk back to their former double (or even triple) metropolis: Anglo American Northeast, Mexico and Spain. And, indeed, if we take into account Casanova's concept of the world literary space as a network woven among literary centres and peripheries where peripheral writers often debate their artistic existence between universality and yearning to enhance the cultural visibility of their own place of origin, the evolution of literary Borderlands presents an intriguing dynamic. It is a relationship of centre and periphery squared (or even cubed) if we come to think that Mexican American and, especially, Chicano/a literature developed in an area of a rich Native American mythological foundation that was layered over by the great heritage of Spanish letters five centuries ago. Mexican (or, more broadly, Hispanic American)[4] and Anglo American literature that influenced literary Borderlands in the twentieth century had, in fact, only recently emerged from their own peripheral condition, overcoming their dependence on the French literary centrality.[5]

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[1] Terminological note. In our article we use the expression Mexican American to refer to literature and authors with Mexican ancestry living in the US (and especially the Southwest) up to the Chicano cultural revival. Starting with 1960s Chicano Movement and the following 1970s Chicano Renaissance, we opt for the term Chicano, Chicana or Chicano/a. (The gender-nonspecific terms ChicanX or LatinX that have gained popularity in the past decade are too recent for our needs. Also the pan-ethnic terms Hispanic and Latino/a do not comply with our focus on US writers with Mexican roots.)

[2] "To survive the Borderlands / you must live *sin fronteras* / be a crossroads." Anzaldúa 2012, p. 217.

[3] Casanova 2004.

Let us then project the evolution and emancipation of the Chicano/a cultural and literary space along three main lines of thought inspired by Anzaldúa's quote. First, "surviving the Borderlands" which is directed towards the delimitation of the subject of deperipheralization. Second, "living *sin fronteras*" dedicated to the Chicano/a cultural revival and the self-conscious formation of its own literary space and canon. And third, "being a crossroads" that illuminates the post Chicano Movement development leading to a shift in perspective.

SURVIVING THE BORDERLANDS

This land was Mexican once
was Indian always
and is.
And will be again.[6]

Bearing in mind that the actual Mexican American Borderlands culture has indigenous, Hispanic, Anglo and, foremost, Mexican or mestizo roots, it is important to

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[4] Terminological note. In relation to literature, we opt for the generally used term *American* to denominate the US literature in spite of its polemic synecdochic value. We use the term *Hispanic American* to refer to literature written in Hispanic American countries (this means not Brazil or Haiti, etc.) south of the Mexican American border, in spite of the fact that the term Latin American literature is commonly used in the US.

[5] In this context, we can point to the pivotal importance of William Faulkner in Anglo American literature or the so called Boom authors, such as Gabriel García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes or Julio Cortázar in Hispanic American literature.

[6] Anzaldúa 2012, p. 113.

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acknowledge that its formation followed a strong centre-periphery dynamic. A brief overview is essential to understand the imagery of Chicano/a literature.

The very first cultural level is represented by American Indians whose ancient claim to the area of the actual US Southwest was heavily emphasized during the Chicano cultural revival in the 1960s along with Mesoamerican mythology. In contemporary Chicano/a thinking, the mythical place of origin of the Aztec people, Aztlán, or "the Land of white herons", corresponds precisely with the area of the Mexican American Borderlands we are interested in.[7] As will be shown later, Aztlán along with the Aztec religious pantheon of gods such as Tláloc, Coatlicue, Coatlalopeuh or the posterior historical figures such as Cuauhtémoc or Malinche were often alluded to in the emerging Chicano/a literature.

The Spanish conquest of the Aztec empire in 1521 brings about the first important cultural shift: Tenochtitlán, a city central to Mesoamérica in the beginning of the sixteenth century, becomes peripheral when it changes to la Ciudad de México with the metropolis residing in Madrid, Spain. Being itself peripheral, however, Mexico City still represents the centre of the colonial society of the Viceroyalty of New Spain that expands in the sixteenth century in all directions. The expeditions of Francisco Vázquez de Coronado (1540) and Juan de Oñate (1598) mark the beginning of the Hispanic presence in the US Southwest bringing along also the Spanish literary tradition which formed the basis for Mexican American vernacular literary expression: religious theatre, octosyllabic poetry (*redondillas*, *décimas*, *coplas*, *romances* evolving in the later folk ballads called *corridos*), fiction genres (*cuadros de costumbres* and *novelas de caballería*).

The year 1821 brought the end to the Spanish colonial rule in a major part of the American continent and logically modified the peripheral existence of the Borderlands. The centre changed from Spain to Mexico, be it (for a short period) an imperium or (afterwards) a federal republic. Unfortunately, the political instability that accompanied the formation of the independent Mexican state accentuated the precarious hold that Mexico had on its northern territory. In addition, the Mexican authorities (unlike the Spanish) began inviting colonists to the North regardless of their origin and thus the Mexican population in Tejas soon found itself outnumbered by Anglo settlers. In fifteen years, the situation resulted in the independence of Texas (1836) soon to be followed by its annexation by the US. The next decade saw a gradual succumbing of Mexican territory to Anglo pressure from the east accompanied by a fierce imperialist US rhetoric expressed, among other things, in the concept of Manifest Destiny. This tension culminated in the Mexican-American war (1846–48) and ended with the signing of the Guadalupe Hidalgo treaty in 1848, wherein Mexico lost approximately half of its territory. The Gadsden purchase in 1853 added another portion of Mexican territory to the US.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the Borderlands materialized in the area that now forms the federal US states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Nevada, Utah, part of Colorado and parts of Wyoming, Oklahoma and Kansas. As the popular saying goes: "in 1848 Mexican people did not cross the border, the border crossed them" and made them US citizens under conditions that supposedly secured their land and civil rights but, in reality, were never kept. Those who remained soon became second class people whose peripheral condition was yet again oriented to a different centre, the US Anglo mainstream culture. The Borderlands people, however, never really gave up their Spanish/Mexican/mestizo culture perpetuated by the Catholic religion, vernacular poetry, popular theatre, local newspapers and, later, the radio. The cultural production from Mexico continued to stream over the borders thanks to the subsequent waves of Mexican immigration to the region.[8]

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[7] For more, see: Anaya — Lomelí 1991.

Since its annexation to the US, the Borderlands and its literature/culture went through different periods of mutual relations to the mainstream Anglo culture. The second half of the nineteenth and the first decade of the twentieth century witnessed strong racial discrimination and land grab practised by the Anglos toward the original inhabitants provoking a virulent reaction on their part in the form of ferocious social movements. The famous 1901 Texas Rangers's manhunt of Gregorio Cortez Lira, who was accused of killing a sheriff in self-defense, gave birth to the "Corrido de Gregorio Cortez", which would turn out to be one of the border ballads of key importance for the posterior Mexican American literary self-awareness whose vernacular roots are explored in Américo Paredes's academic work *With His Pistol in His Hand* (1958).[9]

The beginning of the twentieth century is characterised by a strong influx of Mexican immigration in the US caused by the violence of the Mexican Revolution, only to be followed by the repatriation of many illegal residents back to Mexico because of the economic crisis in the 1930s. The need, however, for a labour force during the Second World War led Mexicans to the US once again through the bracero program which invited agricultural workers from 1942 on. These migration waves brought about a repetitive blending of the fresh Mexican influence with the already specific Mexican American Borderlands culture.

The clash resulting from the assimilationist expectations of the leading Anglo elites of the time (striving for a *melting pot* of a nation that is culturally homogeneous and stable) and the diversity and cultural resistance of different minorities, exacerbated the racial stereotypes also toward the people with Mexican roots in the Southwest.[10] Their further marginalization was enabled by the unequal legal and educational system, segregated public space, rejection of the Spanish language in public institutions, the availability of easily exploited migrant labourers in the country and the growing urban population of the Mexican barrios especially in large cities of the Borderlands. One of the most notorious examples of the cultural conflict, brought about by racial segregation, were the Zoot Suit riots and the ensuing trials in Los Angeles in 1943.

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[8] For more, see: Ceballos Ramírez 2001.

[9] Américo Paredes. "The Legend of Gregorio Cortez". In Ortego 1973, pp. 53–77. Américo Paredes reconstructed the literary form of the legend of Gregorio Cortez on the basis of numerous tape-recorded versions of the corrido told by people living along the Mexico-Texas border. For more on Paredes, see: Stavans 2001, pp. 170–179.

[10] We are fully aware that racial bias was not limited only to the axis Northeast/Southwest that interests us. It influenced the lives of different ethnic groups all over the American territory: the original Native Americans, African Americans, former Mexican citizens overtaken by the US in 1848 or posterior immigrants, be they Irish, Italian, Mexican, Asian or from Central and Eastern Europe. An eloquent illustration of how mistrust could be attached to any kind of otherness is given by Kateřina Březinová in the introduction to her study *Latinos: Jiná menšina? Američtí Hispánci mezi Kennedym a Trumpem.* The author cites Benjamin Franklin's opinions of German immigrants in 1751 which are strikingly similar to the Anglo evaluations of the capacity of Mexican immigrants to integrate into the US mainstream two centuries later. See Březinová 2020, p. 9.

The unique Borderlands amalgamation of the local, Mexican and Anglo culture resulting from cultural pride but also from the necessity to survive was equally scorned by the US mainstream culture and in Mexico itself. The expressions *pocho*, *pachuco*, *chicano* provide evidence of Mexican accusations of the profanation of Mexican Spanish and the traditional way of life by the Borderlands people,[11] while the Anglo expressions *greaser* or *spik* indicate the racist attitude of the white US population that deemed Mexicans inferior. Despite racial discrimination, certain part of the Borderlands population accepted assimilation and participated in the gradual formation of the Mexican American middle class that would soon fight for its political rights. The participation of many Mexican American men in World War II and their experience of equal treatment in the battlefield eventually made them demand the same treatment on their return home. Indeed, the upcoming decades of the 1950s and 1960s saw the outbreak of the Civil Rights Movement in general with important US federal legislation banning racial segregation and securing voting rights for all.

The Borderlands literary periphery finds itself in between two centralities by the middle of the twentieth century. One of these is the famous upswing in white American literature (namely William Faulkner), yet waiting to be reflected upon by a posterior generation of Chicano/a writers. The second, and more important, centre of inspiration is Mexican literature, whose narrative still evinces its pre-boom dominance of realism. The Mexican American preference for "cuadros de costumbres" and regionalist fiction is evident, for example, in short stories or literary chronicles by Jorge Ulica or Mario Suárez, or later in José Antonio Villarreal's novel *Pocho* that embodies the cultural dilemma of many Hispanic people in the US of the 1930s and 1940s.[12] The soon-to-come star moment of the Hispanic American literature boom in the 1960s, when it positions itself right on the Greenwich Meridian of world literature, to use the expression of Casanova, will definitely influence a number of Chicano/a writers as well.

Although the Borderlands had had by that time a century long history of oppositional activities ranging from radical labour protests to more reformist-minded efforts,[13] it was the Chicano Movement in the 1960s that fundamentally changed Mexican American self-perception on the political, economic and cultural level and enabled Chicano/a literature to emerge in search of its own independence and self-confidence. Spanish as the major literary language of Mexican Americans gradually gives way to the co-existence of English as the vehicle of literary expression. The complementary use of both languages (i.e. English intertwined with words or phrases in Mexican Spanish, or Mexican Spanish sprinkled with English words,

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[11] See Villanueva 1994, pp. 42–46.

[12] For more on Mexican American literature prior to the Chicano Renaissance, see: Calderón 2004, pp. 1–27.

[13] See Alba Cutler 2015, p. 7.

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or the direct use of Spanglish and Caló[14]) demonstrates the signs of empowerment that will progressively lead to the deperipheralization of the Chicano/a literary creation.

LIVING *SIN FRONTERAS*

I refuse to be absorbed.
I am Joaquín
The odds are great
but my spirit is strong
My faith unbreakable
My blood is pure […][15]

The Chicano Movement represents immense energy on different fronts (political, economic, social, cultural, educational) to change the peripheral situation of people with Mexican roots in the Southwest. This was to a great extent caused by racially based *fronteras* or limits created by US sociology that had been justifying educational, residential, judicial and labour discrimination of Mexican Americans by their lack of assimilation to the American melting pot.[16] Nevertheless, many of them successfully integrated into the mainstream US society on the basis of the shared values of citizenship.[17]

On its many levels, the Chicano Movement fights back these *fronteras* in a way very different from integration. The empowering usage of the initially racially derogative denomination 'Chicano' in its title indicates that the cultural and literary renaissance is built upon ethnic roots hallmarking the Aztec and Mexican heritage and opposing assimilation to the mainstream Anglo culture. One can point to the titles of pioneering Chicano scholarly journals of the time: *El Grito* published by UC Berkeley alluding to the Mexican fight for independence[18] or *Aztlán* published by UC Los Angeles referring to Aztec mythology. The iconic strike of grape pickers led by César Chavez and Dolores Huerta in Delano, California in September 1965, that initiated the Chicano Movement, drew attention to the economic inequity of people of Mexican descent and anchored Chicano cultural emancipation in a profoundly political dimension.

The Chicano Renaissance was confirmed in the proclamation of El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán by "Alurista", the poet Alberto Baltazar Urista, during the Denver Chicano Conference in 1969.[19] Its nationalist and political orientation is condensed in the message “Por La Raza todo. Fuera de La Raza nada.”[20] The fifties and sixties also saw different factors of Mexican American emancipation: the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Higher Education Act led more minority and low-income students to universities amplifying thus the future Mexican American readership base. The expansion of postcolonial and cultural studies and multiculturalism was also significant. The publication of literary and academic works (Villarreal’s *Pocho* in 1959[21] and Paredes’s *With His Pistol in His Hand* in 1958) and the posterior storm-in of radical poetry and theatre (Gonzáles’s *I Am Joaquín/Yo soy Joaquín* in 1967 and Valdés’s Teatro Campesino founded in 1965) caused a wide Chicano/a nationalist self-awareness that launched the creation of the Chicano/a literary canon and educational centres.

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[14] Caló (also called Pachuco) is an argot of Mexican American Spanish that originated from the zoot-suit pachuco culture of the 1930s and 1940s in the cities of the US Southwest.

[15] Rodolfo Gonzales. "I am Joaquín". In Hernández-Gutiérrez — Foster 1997, p. 222.

[16] See Villanueva 1994, pp. 112–114. For more on Chicano Movement see also Březinová 2004, pp. 52–57, and Březinová 2020, pp. 120–126.

[17] See Březinová 2004, p. 93.

[18] The discourse entitled "El Grito de Dolores" was pronounced by the priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla on 16 September 1810.

[19] For more on the term Aztlán and Chicano activism, see: Contreras 2008, pp. 30–33.

Plan de Santa Bárbara (1969)[22] subsequently pronounced the need and will of adaptation of the curricula to the cultural needs of pupils and students with Mexican American roots and their more proportionate participation in higher education. This manifesto openly indicated the deficiencies of the US educational system (education in English only, exclusion of Hispanic or Mexican related cultural content, Anglo American staff, punishments for speaking in Spanish, etc.) that limited the Mexican Americans to basic education and low-paid jobs.[23] The plan (openly alluding to the Mexican tradition when stating: “At this moment we do not come to work for the university, but to demand that the university work for our people.”)[24] eventually found itself materialized in the establishment of Departments of Chicano/a Studies in universities across the US Southwest that pragmatically sought academic institutional incorporation to actively change the unfavourable social and cultural image of the Mexican American community and form a new, unprejudiced, corpus of Chicano secondary literature.[25]

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[20] Alberto Baltazar Urista. “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán”. In Castañeda Shular — Ybarra-Frausto — Sommers 1972, pp. 83–84. Addressing US citizens with Mexican roots as “La Raza”, it pays homage to the concept of *mestizaje* or miscegenetion coined by the Mexican intellectual José Vasconcelos and also clearly echoes Fidel Castro’s celebrated discourse dedicated to Cuban intellectuals in 1961 known as “Palabras a los intelectuales” saying “Dentro de la Revolución, todo; contra la Revolución, nada.”

[21] In his study, Alba Cutler traces the interesting evolution of the general acceptance of Villareal’s novel. See Alba Cutler 2015, pp. 26–35, 50–56.

[22] “El Plan de Santa Bárbara”. In Shular — Ybarra Frausto — Sommers 1972, pp. 85–86.

[23] For more, see Maciel — Iriart de Padilla — Padilla 1994, pp. 115–119.

[24] The words paraphrase a passage from José Vasconcelos’s inaugural speech when he became the rector of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México: “Yo no vengo a trabajar por la Universidad, sino a pedir a la Universidad que trabaje por el pueblo.”

[25] See Maciel– Iriart de Padilla — Padilla 1994, pp. 104–119. Nevertheless, the historic gains by emancipation movements may also yield to political shifts. This is, for instance, the case of the House Bill 2281 signed in 2010 by Arizona Governor Jan Brewer into law that banned Mexican American Studies from its public schools. The law was ruled unconstitutional in 2017 by U.S. District Judge A. Wallace Tashima. Norma Elia Cantú and Aída Hurtado point out in their introduction to the 25th anniversary edition of *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* that Anzaldúa’s book was among the texts banned by the Tucson Unified School System in Arizona. See Anzaldúa 2012, p. 3.

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A great deal of work was carried out by Chicano scholarly and literary journals and publishing houses. The first of the iconic journals, *El Grito: A Journal of Contemporary Mexican American Thought*, was established in 1967 at UC Berkeley by Octavio I. Romano, Nick C. Vaca and Andrés Ybarra along with the first fully independent Chicano publishing house Quinto Sol Publications, both existing up to 1974. The second, *Aztlán: Chicano Journal of the Social Sciences and the Arts*, was founded by Juan Gómez-Quiñones (among others) in 1970 at UCLA and is still being published. We cannot omit the Arte Público Press, the largest existing publisher of Latino authors in the US, part of the University of Houston, Texas, which was founded in 1979 by Nicolás Kanellos, the founder and editor of the *Revista Chicano-Riqueña* (1973–1999) at Indiana University.[26] Mango Publications (founded by Lorna Dee Cervantes in 1976) and Third Woman Press (founded by Norma Alarcón in 1979) prove the importance of women role in the building of Chicano/a cultural self-confidence.

The Chicano Renaissance played a decisive role in the creation of Chicano cultural capital and the case of Quinto Sol Publications is exemplary.[27] It published the first modern Chicano literature anthology *El espejo/The Mirror* in 1969 and launched as of 1970 the nationally promoted annual literary award Premio Quinto Sol for the best literary work written by an author with Mexican roots, all intensely advertised by *El Grito* journal. The finalists (the Quinto Sol Generation), Tomás Rivera with his novel *... y no se lo tragó la tierra* for the year 1971, Rudolfo Anaya and the novel *Bless Me, Ultima* for 1972, Rolando Hinojosa[28] with the prose work *Estampas del Valle* for 1973 and Estela Portillo Trambley with her collection of short stories *Rain of Scorpions and Other Works* for the year 1975 were strongly promoted by *El Grito* journal. Thanks to the canonizing power of the Premio Quinto Sol, they became part of higher education studying programs. In his analysis of the Quinto Sol publishing house, John Alba Cutler demonstrates how the Premio entered the literary "economy of prestige" underlining the academic background of the celebrated authors and the jury and its aggressive marketing to educators.[29] Some of the critics of the award (Juan Bruce-Novoa or Dennis López) pointed to its literary nationalism that gave priority to Chicano community cohesion while sacrificing its heterogeneity. As Alba Cutler argues, however, the Premio set out to prove "Chicanos' capacity to *produce* culture" and broadened "the boundaries of what constituted literature giving entrance to folklore, testimonio, jokes and other vernacular forms."[30]

Up to the nineties the canonizing power of the Premio Quinto Sol was recognized only regionally: in 1972, for example, Castaneda Shular adverts to the absence of Mexican American or Chicano/a authors in mainstream North American literature.[31]

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[26] There were also other publishers: Pajarito Publications, the Bilingual Press, Justa Publications, Tonatiuh Publications to mention just a few.

[27] For more, see: Alba Cutler 2015, pp. 56–65.

[28] In 1976, Rolando Hinojosa became the first Chicano writer to win the prestigious Cuban literary prize Premio Casa de las Américas for his *Klail City y sus alrededores*.

[29] See Alba Cutler 2015, pp. 57–58.

[30] Idem, pp. 60, 84–85.

[31] See Shular — Ybarra-Frausto — Sommers 1972, pp. xxv–xxviii. For more on anthologies published in the 1970s and 1980s, see "Preface. Three Decades of Contemporary Chicana/o Literature". In Hernández-Gutiérrez — Foster 1997, pp. xx–xxiii.

This is why the gradual creation of the Chicano/a academic and intellectual basis manifested itself also in the publication of literary anthologies edited by scholars of Mexican American origin. Apart from the already mentioned *El Espejo/The Mirror* anthology there appeared, among others, *Aztlan: An Anthology of Mexican American literature* (eds. Luis Valdez and Stan Steiner, Random House, 1972), *Mexican-American Authors* (eds. Américo Paredes and Raymund Paredes, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972), *Chicano Literature, Text and Context* (eds. Antonia Castaneda Shular, Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, Joseph Sommers, Prentice Hall, 1972), *We Are Chicanos* (ed. Phillip D. Ortego, Washington Square Press, 1973), *Chicanos* (ed. Tino Villanueva, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1985), *Literatura Chicana 1965–1995. An Anthology in Spanish, English and Caló* (eds. Manuel de Jesús Hernández-Gutiérrez, David William Foster, Garland Publishing Inc, 1997).[32]

Chicano/a literature comes out of the Chicano Renaissance as a culturally self-conscious project based on the experience of life within two cultures that partly continues the old Spanish and Mexican themes and forms (vernacular poetry, legends, cuadros de costumbres, satire, picaresque novel, political essays) but also, and primarily, creates new themes (dislocation, migration, social exploitation by the Anglo, life in the barrio, self-definition), new forms and especially new language that experiments with the deliberate blending of Spanish, English and the use of Caló.

Apart from the literary creation and the growing number of Chicano/a readers and libraries, the newly established editorial, academic and critical autonomy brings a decisive turning point in its peripheral condition as it provides instruments for deperipheralization. The main current of Chicano/a literature of this time, as Alba Cutler claims, is characterized by its effort to fight assimilation by prioritizing ethnic content and affirming an idealized image of the Chicano imagined community. There are also authors, however, whose critique of assimilation depends crucially on their literariness as they refuse the either-or choice between becoming 'American' or remaining 'Chicano/a' and focus rather on aesthetic aspects of the literary work.[33] The more universal tone is also inspired by the literary influence irradiated by the boom in Hispanic American literature with its vanguard use of language, literary structure and myth. Traces of Juan Rulfo or Gabriel García Márquez's writing can be found in Tomás Rivera or Rudolfo Anaya's fiction. At the same time, the impact of the US Beat generation of the 1950s can be seen in Oscar Zeta Acosta's *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*. The outer influence, however, is always transformed to speak of the Mexican American or Chicano/a experience.

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[32] Apart from the anthologies of Mexican American or Chicano/a literature, there are also the Pan-Hispanic anthologies such as *Latinos in English: A Selected Bibliography of Latino Fiction Writers of the United States* (Harold Augenbraum, ed., Mercantile Library, 1992) *Masterpieces of Latino Literature* (Frank Northen Magill, ed., HarperCollins, 1994). However, the mainstream anthologies such as *The Norton Anthology of Latino/a Literature* or *The Routledge Companion to Latino/a Literature* were released only in 2010 and 2013, respectively.

[33] See Alba Cutler 2015, p. 11.

BEING A CROSSROADS

We were a woman family:
Grandma, our innocent Queen;
Mama, the Swift Knight, Fearless Warrior.
Mama wanted to be Princess instead.
I know that. Even now she dreams of taffeta
and foot-high tiaras.
Myself: I could never decide.
So I turned to books, those staunch, upright men.
I became Scribe: Translator of Foreign Mail [...][34]

In the post-Movement decades of the eighties and nineties, the Chicano cultural capital is already visible. University programmes,[35] independent publishing houses, literary awards, all this allowed for the possibility to ponder Chicano Movement gains from the previous decade and shift to other themes. In spite of the fact that Chicanas were widely present and active during the Movement — as we have tried to show in the previous section exemplifying social activism (Dolores Huerta) or cultural/literary work (Estela Portillo Trambley, Lorna Dee Cervantes or Norma Alarcón), it is the eighties when the mostly undercurrent Chicana criticism of masculine nationalist rhetoric typical of the Chicano Movement begins to be voiced out loud. Together with LGBT writers they venture a fierce critique of the exaltation of the Mexican hero who never succumbs under the Anglo American pressure to assimilate. Chicanas underline their own role and readily use the powerful women's rights movement generalized in the Anglo space to launch a strong critique of the subaltern role assigned to women in the Mexican, and generally Hispanic, culture. Nevertheless, they also draw on Mexican feminism which, if less audible, is represented by Rosario Castellanos, Josefina Vicens, Elena Garro or Elena Poniatowska.

Chicana authors use distinctive female figures from Mexican mythology (La Malinche, La Llorona, Coatlicue, Coyolchauqui) to empower themselves against the 'Joaquín' of the 1960s. As Rebolledo and Rivero claim, they "consciously designed and re-designed myths and archetypes not to their liking".[36] This struggle for emancipation and gender identification becomes clearly visible in works such as Lorna Dee Cervantes's *Emplumada* (1981), Cherríe Moraga's *Loving in the War Years* (1983), Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* (1983), Arturo Islas's *The Rain God* (1984), Ana Castillo's The *Mixquiahuala Letters* (1985), culminating with Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). Starting in the 1980s, according to Alba Cutler, "Chicano/a literature centres representations of cultural change on dramas of familial power, sex, desire and the threat of masculine domination."[37]

The literary works often experiment with genres and language that mixes English with expressions or entire phrases in Spanish or Spanglish. This gives them a universal reach while permitting to stay deeply rooted in the cultural space of the Borderlands. Sandra Cisneros's personal experience is illustrative: the writer starts emulating Anglo American poets only to find her own voice coming from the *barrio*, mixing Chicano Spanish with English to express her own strife. Gloria Anzaldúa's literary expression is consciously built on hybridity of language (intertwining English, colloquial English, Texas Spanish, Caló, Chicano Spanish), of genre (essay combined with poetry and personal testimony or autobiography) and of theme (verbalizing the experience of life on the geographical, cultural, racial, social and gender border). Tereza Kynčlová views this hybridity of Chicana writing as essential in evading categorization and achieve the clear political goal of subverting hierarchies and reflecting the specific position of women of colour.[38]

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[34] Lorna Dee Cervantes. "Beneath the Shadow of the Freeway". In Heide 2002, p. 510.

[35] For more, see: Vázquez 1997, pp. 22–23.

[36] Rebolledo — Rivero 1993, p. 24.

[37] Alba Cutler 2015, p. 12.

Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* is emblematic of her own personal situation and, at the same time, speaks of a multitude of non-white women (not only) in the US. The outburst of the Chicana voice accompanied by the growth in the personal essay is, as Héctor Calderón points out, also the result of solidarity with Latina and generally Third World women and the tradition of storytelling and testimonio, especially during the civil wars in Central America in the 1970s and 1980s.[39] The tension between Chicana feminism or feminism of colour and white feminism makes itself clear in the anthology *This Bridge Called My Back* edited by Anzaldúa y Moraga in 1981 (Persephone Books). The distinctive voice of Chicana writers and of Chicana feminist theory is based on the intersection of race, class and gender. According to Kynčlová, Chicana literature reflects the combination of original theoretical thinking and eclectic work with feminist, postcolonial and indigenous theories inspired by structuralism, poststructuralism, postmodern techniques and psychoanalysis.[40] It finds its own space in independent Chicana publishing houses: the aforementioned Mango Publications and Third Woman Press are accompanied by Aunt Lute Books (founded by Barb Wieser and Joan Pinkvoss in 1982).

It is precisely Chicana writing that transcends the borders and becomes a 'crossroads'. It overcomes the Borderlands periphery to create a breakthrough space for other authors of Mexican American or Chicano/a literature.[41] The success of Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* (1983, Arte Público Press), which was published later in a mainstream Vintage Contemporaries edition, translated into over 20 languages, integrated into the school curriculum and in the 1998 fifth edition of *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, in many ways triggered the interest of readers with no Mexican American or Latino/a roots. In a different way, the metaphorical power of Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* and its conceptualization of the border/*frontera* and miscegenation/*mestizaje* gives this multi-genre text a universal quality that soon goes beyond the Mexican American (or rather Texan) border. María-Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba recognizes this dimension of Anzaldúan thinking: "It is in part due to her influence that the idea of 'the border' turned out to be very prominent in a number of academic disciplines since the mid-1980s, especially in the United

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[38] For more on Chicana writing, see: Kynčlová 2011, pp. 130–149.

[39] See Calderón 2013, p. 402.

[40] See Kynčlová 2011, p. 137.

[41] For more, see: Stavans 2001, p. 232.

States, where this image has served as a popular locus of discussion on monolithic structures."[42] It is widely read and interpreted.

A SHIFT IN PERSPECTIVE

> *… we are on both shores at once, and, at once see through serpent and eagle eyes.*[43]

Over the past half-century, the position of Chicano/a literature has gone through a considerable change in terms of the centre-periphery dynamics, a change that is still undergoing. After a long period of disinterest in Mexican American and Chicano/a culture outside the community with Mexican roots, the formation of the Chicano/a academy and cultural capital attracted the attention of the US, Mexican and Spanish scholars (and, subsequently, the general public) to the Mexican American Borderlands culture. The posterior boom of Chicana writing in the 1980s supported the growing interest. In the following paragraphs, this gradual change is briefly illustrated using the example of the changes to the literary canon within the US and the reflection of Chicano/a literature in Mexico and Spain, i.e. in areas that have traditionally acted as a metropolis to the Borderlands periphery.

The modifications to the US literary canon came after a decade of so-called "Canon Wars" in the 1980s and show a certain incorporation of Chicano/a literature into the mainstream. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, specifically its section of literature after 1945, exemplifies this process. If the first two editions of *The Norton Anthology* (published in 1979 and 1985) included no writers of Mexican American origin whatsoever, the third 1989 edition included the novelist Denise Chávez and the poets Alberto Ríos and Lorna Dee Cervantes. The fifth 1998 edition added the novelist Sandra Cisneros.[44] The eighth 2012 edition includes Rudolfo Anaya, Gloria Anzaldúa, Alberto Ríos, Lorna Dee Cervantes and Sandra Cisneros, and the last, ninth edition from 2017 reduces the number of included Chicano/a writers to Rudolfo Anaya, Gloria Anzaldúa and Sandra Cisneros. However, already in 1990, *The Heath Anthology of American Literature* edited by Paul Lauter offered a very different, inclusive approach, to minority literatures.[45] Over the following decades, there also appear pan-ethnic anthologies: *The Norton Anthology of Latino Literature* published in 2010 whose general editor, Ilan Stavans, includes writers from Chicano, Cuban-, Puerto Rican-, and Dominican-American traditions, as well as writing from other Spanish-speaking countries.[46] Three years later, *The Routledge Companion to Latino/a Literature* came out.

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[42] Tabuenca Córdoba 2013, p. 454.

[43] Anzaldúa 2012, pp. 100–101.

[44] For more on the US Canon and Chicano/a literature up to 2007, see: Dalleo –Machado Sáez 2013, pp. 385–395.

[45] Just for comparison, the 2006 edition of *The Heath Anthology of American Literature* includes, among others, a wide list of authors of Spanish/Novohispanic origin (the Colonial period comprising Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, Francisco Palou and Lorenzo Zavala), of Mexican or Mexican American descent (Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, Pío Pico, María Amparo Ruiz de Burton) and belonging already to the Chicano/a literary renaissance and posterior periods (the literature after 1945 represented by Rolando Hinojosa, Tomás Rivera, Rudolfo A. Anaya, Gloria Anzaldúa, Pat Mora, Gary Soto, Lorna Dee Cervantes, Helena María Viramontes and Sandra Cisneros).

Up to the 1970s, Mexico's attitude to Mexican American culture was characterised by suspicion and rejection. As Tino Villanueva argues, the Chicano Movement took Mexican heritage as a shield while the majority of Mexican intellectuals viewed Mexican Americans as disloyal descendants that were giving up Mexican culture and language for the adoption of the US mainstream (the derrogative denominations *pocho* and *chicano* illustrate the situation).[47] It was the 1990s that brought an important change in the reception of Chicano/a literature in Mexico. The decisive moment came in 1994 with the publication of Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* translated by the well-known Mexican writer Elena Poniatowska. Taking a brief look at the Mexican academy, Marisa Belausteguigoitia Rius and María del Socorro Gutiérrez claim that Chicano/a literature and studies in Mexico are now more recognized but only in "specific and focalized ways". They point out the investigation centres and publication and conference activities in the universities of UNAM, Universidad de Colima, Universidad de Guadalajara, El Colegio de México, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM) and Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia.[48]

As for the Spanish case, its indifference to Chicano/a literature (with the exception of the magazine Triunfo) began to change in the 1980s as Villanueva points out.[49] It was the 1990s, again, when conference activities organised by different Spanish universities (Castilla-La Mancha, León, Huelva) brought the attention of the academy to Latino/a culture. According to the German academic Frauke Gewecke, the major work of dissemination in this area was carried out by the biannual conferences on Chicano/a literature organised periodically by the cooperation of Instituto Franklin (University of Alcalá de Henares) with other Spanish universities from 1998 to the present.[50] The Chicano scholar Francisco Lomelí considers the director of the Instituto Franklin, José Antonio Gurpegui, the decisive figure who led to the fact that Spain "has become the principal center of Chicano literary and cultural studies outside the United States" exceeding the accomplishments of Germany, France and even the Mexican UNAM.[51] In her study "Latino/a literature in Western Europe" Gewecke offers an overview of Spanish, French, German, British and Belgian scholars who dedicate themselves to investigation in this area.[52] It may be of interest here to also

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[46] Stavans also reflects on the status of 'Latino' and 'Hispanic' identity in his work *The Hispanic Condition* (Stavans 2001, pp. 181–204).

[47] Villanueva 1994, pp. 45–46.

[48] For more, see Belausteguigoitia Rius — Gutiérrez 2013, pp. 101–103.

[49] Villanueva 1994, p. 46.

[50] See Gewecke 2013, p. 109. For more on Chicano/a studies in Spain in the 1990s, see Gurpegui, 2003, pp. 11–13.

[51] See Lomelí 2017, p. xii. José Antonio Gurpegui is also the author of *Narrativa chicana: Nuevas propuestas analíticas* (Madrid: Universidad de Alcalá, 2003). For more on the biannual conferences organised by the Instituto Franklin, see: Cañero 2017, pp. 109–125.

[52] For more on the Western European scholarship, see Gewecke 2013, p. 109–111.

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mention other European contributions, such as the academic work of the translator of *Borderlands* into Italian, Paola Zaccaria, or the Czech scholars Kateřina Březinová and Tereza Kynčlová.

As concerns translation and editorial activities, Gewecke affirms that the 1990s meant "a kind of mini boom in Latino literature"[53] in Europe and underlines the enthusiastic reception of the Chicana writer Sandra Cisneros. Neverthless, she draws attention to the tendency of the European book market to exoticize these works viewing them as an extension of magical realism. The German scholar thus resumes that the common European reader approaches Latino/a (including Chicano/a) fiction as the possibility to imagine foreign worlds rather than considering it a part of "the (Western) canon of a traditionally conceived Weltliteratur".[54]

Finally, two circumstances illustrate the significant change and the simultaneous constant negotiation of the position of Chicano/a writing in relation to the literary periphery. The first circumstance is US oriented. In 1992, Francisco H. Vázquez warned in his article "Chicanology: a Postmodern Analysis of Meshicano Discourse" against the mainstream academic appropriation of Chicano/a studies. In his opinion, the originally oppositional discourse characteristic of the Chicano/a struggle against the US mainstream (and identified by Vázquez as "Meshicano") ran the risk of being adopted and transformed into a neutralized hegemonic discourse that would actualize Anglo domination in a similar way Edward Said had described in *Orientalism.* This new discourse, stripped of its original power, was called by Vázquez as "Chicanology".[55] Two decades later, John Alba Cutler observes a similar situation but evaluates it in a different way. He admits that the political and ideological accent of the Chicano/a studies towards ethnic identity that was fundamental in the seventies and part of eighties may have diminished in the following decades. Far from interpreting it as a threat, however, he claims that this process enables Chicano/a studies to shift from its former task of intentional cultural capital building to a greater liberty of aesthetic and critical expression.[56]

The second circumstance is directed toward the Mexican side. It represents the considerations of María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba about the imbalance in the reception of the literatures written on either side of the Mexican American border, i.e. of Chicano/a literature in the US and of "la literatura de la frontera" in northern Mexico. Tabuenca Córdoba acknowledges the theoretical importance of the border metaphor that received great academic attention precisely after the publication of Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* and was later developed by Walter Mignolo into "border gnosis".[57] Simultaneously, she calls attention to the differences between the two cultural projects. On the one hand, there is the Chicano/a border theory that deals more with a textual-theoretical border as a metaphor used to

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[53] Idem, p. 113.

[54] Idem, p. 114.

[55] Vázquez 1997, pp. 22–23. A certain parallel between Said's idea of orientalism and the situation of the Americans with Hispanic roots is developed also by Ilan Stavans (Stavans 2001, p. 207).

[56] Alba Cutler 2015, p. 220–221.

[57] Tabuenca Córdoba 2013, pp. 454–461.

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"create a multicultural space in the United States" and to bring about the "imaginative return to a metaphorically conceived Mexican/Latin American cultural tradition which serves as a source of empowerment".[58] On the other hand, the regional Mexican "literatura de la frontera" focuses on the real geopolitical border and reflects US immigration policies, migrant deaths and the wall along US-Mexico border line.[59] The difference is also evident when we compare the publishing and translation possibilities of the authors in northern Mexico to the relatively better situation of the Chicano/a authors within the US due to five decades of goal-directed cultural and literary work since the Chicano Renaissance. Tabuenca Córdoba then continues to argue that in the Mexican American border area "US border literature occupies the dominant space, and Mexican border literature falls into a subordinate one."[60]

Taking all this into account, we are witnessing here a double emergence of the Chicano/a literature out of a peripheral condition. First, there is the universal impact of Anzaldúa's writing on border theory and, second, the actual Chicano/a literature gaining centrality in the area of the Mexican American Borderlands with the Mexican border literature becoming peripheral to it. This is a situation that is, nevertheless, always dynamic and prone to change as we have been trying to show on these pages.

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[58] Idem, p. 455.

[59] For more on "literatura de la frontera", see: Tabuenca Córdoba 2013, p. 455–459.

[60] Idem, p. 460.

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