

Britta Anderson
Research Statement

I study contemporary Mexican and Latinx cultural production through the lens of gender, visual culture, performance, and border studies. I address questions of social justice and citizenship through readings of literature and public art that respond to policing in border spaces throughout the United States and Mexico.

In my doctoral research, which I am currently developing into a book titled *Borders beyond Borders: Vital Mobilities in Greater Mexico's Public Art and Literature*, I identify the cultural workings of four systems that restrict women's mobility on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. These systems are highways, prisons, factories, and the border wall infrastructure. In these spaces, I examine the ways in which the militarized logic of the border has replicated throughout both countries, concentrating on the racialized, gendered policing of belonging and movement. I analyze contemporary texts and images produced about, in, and on the surfaces of freeways, prisons, assembly plants, and border walls. In these spaces, cultural production operates as a means of challenging the criminalization of Chicana and Mexican women. The strategies of mobility enacted by border subjects in these visual and literary works assert fluid new forms of movement and discourses of belonging. Reading, for example, Judy Lucero's poetry written from prison alongside women's murals from Santa Marta Acatitla Prison, or the graffiti of Ciudad Juárez alongside its fiction, I examine how literature and public art speak to each other.

My first chapter examines responses to the displacement of Chicana communities by the construction of freeways in California in Helena María Viramontes' novel *Their Dogs Came with Them* and in the murals painted onto highway pylons in San Diego's Chicano Park. Spirituality operates in these visual and literary texts as a challenge to the limitations imposed on border subjects' movement and representation. Chapter Two analyzes women's prisons in Mexico and the United States as gendered border spaces, positioning the work of incarcerated Chicana poets Judy Lucero and Lorri Martinez and of muralists in a women's prison in Mexico as parts of the same aesthetic project. The poets and artists restructure their experience of time while incarcerated by producing horizons where there are none, imagining temporalities outside of authoritarian prison time tables. Chapter Three examines the role of border assembly factories, or *maquiladoras*, in shaping the landscape and cultural production of Ciudad Juárez, focusing on local poetry, short stories, and graffiti murals to study the performance of gesture in supervisors' bodily control of workers, and in the artistic responses that assert women's right to move freely in the public sphere. My final chapter focuses on the surveillance and physical barrier of the border wall itself, examining the trope of walking women in murals applied directly to the wall and in fiction by Yuri Herrera and Luis Humberto Crosthwaite.

My doctoral research, which simultaneously addresses the border aesthetically and politically, questions the distinction between Mexican and Latinx studies, framing Mexican studies as an inquiry into the cultural flows of Greater Mexico. This has led me to distinguish systems of regulation and networks of resistance that operate across national boundaries. My project places Mexican literature in dialogue with Latinx, gender, and visual culture studies. I foster interdisciplinary and transnational exchange by examining visual and literary works from the United States and Mexico as complementary texts. While international work about the border often overshadows local responses to the region's violence and militarization, I prioritize border residents' work in order to bring critical attention to the artistic voices that are most directly able to respond to their surrounding circumstances. I ground my readings in site-specific spatial analysis, and center local cultural

production as politically engaged artistic practice. My study of border zones centers aesthetic work as a powerful tool of social change.

Through my publications, I have situated myself within an expansive understanding of border studies that includes institutional spaces beyond the border wall region, and that prioritizes questions of gender, affect, policing, and embodied acts of protest. In my article on the borders created through highway construction in California, “Movilidad fronteriza en *Their Dogs Came with Them* de Helena María Viramontes” (*Revista Iberoamericana*), I introduce the concept of cementation to link rigid institutional representations of border subjects to the physical hardening of border spaces through built environments and gendered policing practices. In “Public Grief and Collective Joy: Femicide, Solidarity, and Feminist Hip Hop in Ciudad Juárez, I examine how the members of the all-female hip-hop collective *Battallones Femeninos* utilize rap to critique neoliberal flows of labor and to perform a politics of solidarity with assembly workers and victims of femicide. In my latest article, under review with the *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies*, I assess the U.S.-Mexico border wall as a site of discursive, affective, and bodily crisis, and examine the role of vulnerability and care-taking in enacting solidarity in recent binational performance art. I am currently working on two additional articles that address gender in border spaces. In the first, which I will submit to *Hispanofila* by October, I examine spatial and sexual fluidity and the ways in which bureaucrats operates as border agents in Cristina Rivera Garza’s *The Iliac Crest*. The other, which examines constructions of masculinity in incarcerated Chicano men's poetry and tattooing practices, will be submitted to *Aztlán*. These articles and my engagement with colleagues at the University of Maryland have shaped my research by pushing me to approach transnationalism as the discarding of the national as a productive analytical framework and to understand interdisciplinarity not only as the inclusion of diverse objects of study, but also as crossing fields through collaboration with experts grounded in distinct disciplinary methods.

My current work has led me to conclude that the role of Mexico in criminalizing Central American migrants and the role of gender identity in shaping immigration experiences require renewed critical attention. My next book project centers on the experiences and representations of transgender Central Americans in Mexico and the United States. Through interviews and readings of film, photography, performance art, acts of protest, and texts from a trans writing workshop, I examine the use of cultural production in the formation of trans migrant community networks. Revisiting the border systems identified in my first book through the lens of trans studies, I focus on the obstacles that trans migrants encounter in spaces of labor, demonstrating the gendered, transnational complicity between corporations and immigration policy in Mexico and the U.S.

Today’s political rhetoric demonstrates the urgency of understanding borders. The focus, in the field and in media, is increasingly on the impacts of the border wall. While this is a crucial line of inquiry, it also serves as a distraction from the ways in which border security’s militarized logic proliferates discursively and materially beyond the geopolitical boundary. Whole landscapes of social and official checkpoints traverse the U.S. and Mexico, presenting obstacles to mobility and safety that disproportionately impact criminalized populations. My research probes sites of transnational crisis through these borderlands: the urban geography, prisons, factories, and walls where Mexican and U.S. government and corporate actors enact policies of fatal indifference and control that limit women’s mobility. My work centers aesthetic production as action that impacts border communities and restores empathy to create communities of solidarity. I create space for cultural exchange and transnational dialogue between scholars, activists, and artists. This carries over into my undergraduate classrooms, where I help students discover how artistic practice can challenge institutional violence and normative constructions of border subjectivity.