



La Frontera de COVID-19

By Anthony R. Ramirez

Fronteras or borders have always been a part of my life in some way or form. I lived in the border city of El Paso, Texas for most of my life. The home where my family lives is five minutes away from the Mexico border next to El Paso's sister city, Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. Currently, we are living in a very border defined world as a global pandemic has caused us to quarantine ourselves from one another. According to Gloria Anzaldua, "A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and underdetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. it is in a constant state of transition (2012, p. 3-4). Due to this pandemic, the term border surrounds us in a variety of ways that we have never experienced prior to our current situation. COVID-19 is the dividing line and the borderland we are now facing as we have created various borders between ourselves and a deadly disease.

Josue David Cisneros (2011) mentions, "Obsession over the literal and symbolic border between American and foreigner, between us and them, is motivated in part by fear of the dilution and dissolution of US citizenship." In the current situation the world is in right now, the most important citizenship is not that of U.S. citizenship or any regional citizenship, but an Earthbound citizenship as communities around the world want to live free from this disease. It is not the thoughts and fears of migrating across

into new lands with Border Patrol and/or in some cases Minute Men that has become haunting, but a looming threat of an invisible disease that attacks everyone in an indiscriminately manner. Additionally, Cisneros discusses how, “Migrants and racial and ethnic minorities, among other minority groups, have served as “Others” through which US identity is constituted in part.” The term minorities changes dramatically as minorities are not found through race or ethnic background, but centered around this disease by contracting it and becoming minoritized in the process.

Again, I reflect back to my hometown of El Paso, Texas as many people are feeling this social *frontera*. El Paso has had a difficult set of years with such tragedies including a shooting at a local Walmart leading to 23 deaths and multiple wounded and now the COVID-19 pandemic. As of May 3, El Paso has had 998 COVID-19 confirmed cases and 22 deaths as a result of this disease (City of El Paso, 2020). Additionally, the state of Texas is about to slowly implement phases of re-opening businesses, therefore leading to debordering of the state. Local officials and business owners are creating a border between themselves and state officials by obeying or disregarding certain regulations. El Paso Mayor Dee Margo created a border amongst the city and state as he disagrees with the state government as he stated that the city has yet to reach its peak of COVID-19 cases (Parker, 2020). Even many small business owners are rejecting the debordering process including musician and small business owner Jim Ward, who says, “I will not open my dining room or patio. I will not put my employees’ health at risk. I will not put my customers at risk. The idea that we will open up 25 percent capacity for a couple of weeks and see how it goes is not just absurd but

dangerous” (Ward, 2020). By creating 25 percent capacity within restaurants, stores, and other venues this creates a border and “Othering” between those who can and cannot enter.

Like others around the country, El Pasoans do not want to get close to each other out of fear from an invisible disease. Again, minorities are now those who have contracted the disease and in addition they have become “Othered” in the process. Moreover, not only are those who contracted the disease “Othered,” but additional borders between one another are created in the process between those who have not contracted this disease. In the few cases people need to venture out for various needs, people distance themselves from one another creating borders and seclusion for their health and safety. We create social distancing borderlands between one another in order to follow the rules and regulations that have been set upon us. In order to protect ourselves, people who take the disease seriously cover their mouths and hands in order remain free from this borderless disease. Wearing masks creates a sense of “Otherness” as people look at one another as minorities with an internal anxiety caused by the pandemic. If people are seen or heard coughing and/or sneezing instantaneously they become “Othered” due to the fear this disease has caused many to feel. The Mexican community are people who appreciate hugs, handshakes, and other gestures which feature close proximities, but due to the border created by COVID-19, people are no longer able to salute one another as they would like. Stores are creating borders by allowing people only with masks inside the store and control the number of people within the stores. Additionally, stores also have created further boundaries between

customers by limiting the products and the number of the items we can purchase. Within the city, the numbers only seem to be increasing as a minority of El Pasoans have been decided to deborder themselves in a stubborn manner, as many have not been taking the disease seriously. This minority believes that the rules and regulations brought upon us due to COVID-19 disease has led to further borders around us. This social border has led this minority to exude stubbornness and machismo. During the Easter weekend, the city urged the public not to hold any gatherings, yet many around the city still were holding Easter celebrations thus increasing the number of COVID-19 cases (KTSM Report, 2020). Local officials and many around the city fear that upcoming holidays like Cinco de Mayo and Mother's Day will have an effect on the number of COVID-19 cases. We are facing many *fronteras* due to this borderless disease, as it has created physical, psychological, emotional, and social borders changing the way we live our lives not only in El Paso, but around the world.



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