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Lunsford and Ouzgane’s anthology consciously evokes the title of Gloria Anzaldúa’s book of poetry and autobiographical writings, Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (1987). In the preface, Anzaldúa claims that “the Borderlands are physically present whenever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrink with intimacy.” Significantly, the second essay in the Lunsford/Ouzgane anthology, “Toward a Mestiza Rhetoric: Gloria Anzaldúa on Composition and Postcoloniality” by Andrea Lunsford, is an interview with Anzaldúa herself. In asking Anzaldúa to explain why her writings as a bi-cultural woman are meaningful to freshman writers in composition classrooms across the nation, Lunsford once again repeats the reasons given in the Introduction: that both she and first-year writing teachers are involved in bringing marginalized voices to the center. Scholars in composition and postcolonial studies need to engage in dialogue. The old accusation of postcolonial studies being too caught up in arcane discussions of high theory while those on the ground, the worker bee-like composition instructors, struggle with the nuts and bolts of pedagogy pops up periodically in the anthology. While it is not fair to reduce Lunsford’s argument to such a binary, one cannot help being struck by the reasons given in the Introduction (which get repeated in the interview with Anzaldúa) as to why it has taken so long for composition to acknowledge the insights of postcoloniality. After all, Mary Louis Pratt’s “Arts of the Contact Zone” (1991) was enthusiastically claimed by composition studies and various writing programs around the country. For fifteen years, scholars have designed curricula, textbooks and workshops in the teaching of writing upon Pratt’s theory.

In reading Crossing Borderlands, it is important to remember that composition studies is not the only discipline to find points of deep connection with the methods and vocabulary of postcolonial studies. Henry A. Giroux, in his path-breaking work in Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Educatio (1992) and followed by Between Borders: Pedagogy and the Politics of Cultural Studies (1994), edited by Giroux and McLaren), makes a similar argument to the one made by the editors of Crossing Borderlands: traditional disciplinary boundaries preclude any kind of sharing or dialogue to take place between individual scholarly fields. In the case of the two Giroux texts, it is important to note that terms like “writing Against the Empire” (230) and “decolonizing the body” (180) in Border Crossings, and a whole section on “Nationalism, Postcolonialism, and the Border Intellectual” in Between Borders, use postcolonial terminology
in radically different ways from postcolonial studies, thereby appropriating a postcolonial discourse for critical education. One is reminded of Chinese or Indian food as it is sold in restaurants in the U.S. The food has been re-constituted for the palates of mainstream Americans, and there is very little distinctive taste or identity, other than through the names “kung pao” or “tandoori” chicken. The packaged food has little resemblance to food cooked and consumed in Chinese and Indian homes. I am not saying that such a reconstruction (it goes way beyond mere repackaging) of food or discourse is necessarily a bad thing. And yet, if there is one thing that postcolonial studies for all its heterogeneity is known for, it is its concentration upon identifying the local, particular “subaltern” voices that have been kept out of official narratives. So it is in order to circumvent just such an accusation, I think, that *Borderlands* pads its middle section with marvelously luminous essays on bi-cultural identities and alternative literacy practices. Thus, the anthology intuitively balances the theoretical with the testimonial. (Aneil Rallin’s piece is particularly insightful in negotiating identities, subjectivities, and yes, genres).

What I found most interesting about *Crossing Borderlands* is the way this work ignores the traditional materials of postcolonial studies; instead, it makes an effort to study, in a series of brilliant essays by well-known writers in the field (writers who have always evinced an interest in the body of the Other—Gary Olsen, Deepika Bahri, Susan Jarratt, and Min Zan Lu, to name a few), the mode of address, so to speak, of postcolonial studies. For instance, Susan Jarratt’s “Beside Ourselves: Rhetoric and Representation in Postcolonial Feminist Writing” is an exhilarating rhetorical exercise in reading the self-positioning of three postcolonial theorists (both Spivak and Minh-ha are indisputably theorists); the third figure, Guatemalan testimonial writer Rigoberta Menchu, is more controversial. Two representative essays give the reader a sense of the rest of the collection. “Composing Postcolonial Studies,” by Min-Zhan Lu, consciously adopts the familiar reading pose of early postcolonial writers (Ngugi in *Decolonizing the Mind*, for instance), where the colonizer’s “gifts” of his language is thoroughly criticized. Lu adopts the same posture as the postcolonials who were writing back, Caliban-like, to their former colonizer in his own language. Lu’s attempt to redraw the lines of reception between the giver, the given, and the gift (the terminology of the “ungrateful recipient” taken from Trinh T. Minh-ha) is fascinating as she critiques the ways the dominant critical languages casually “swallow” the contours of composition knowledge. The perennially inferior position in which composition is relegated within the larger academy is particularly telling in the way Lu interrogates Lunsford’s interview with Anzaldúa.

Bahri’s “Terms of Engagement: Postcolonialism, Transnationalism, and Composition Studies” continues the familiar postcolonial/composition project of reading educational practices politically. In her elegant prose, Bahri does us the service of defining, summarizing, and explaining the condition of the postcolonial (as a text, as a body, and as a palimpsest of textual and political practices) in
academia. As a postcolonial herself, she keeps in the forefront the transnational self in the “academy in Anglo-America at the turn of the century” (67). Her essay seeks to sound a warning (thus is very similar in many ways to the reservations expressed by Lu) of recklessly adopting the postcolonial within the field of composition and rhetoric. That postcolonialism has been embraced so thoroughly by the Western academy ought to give us pause, Bahri argues. She shows how the postcolonial as an Other from a far-off nation comes to stand in the stead of other minority cultures closer to home. This “displacing and proxy condition of Postcolonialism within Anglo-American politics” (79) is what concerns Bahri the most. If her insight is applied to the essays chosen for inclusion in Crossing Borderlands, one thing becomes glaringly clear: except for the very last essay in the anthology, a study of the Ebonics controversies by C. Jan Swearingen, there is no significant essay by or about the African American and/as the postcolonial (for instance, the black body as a diasporic figure is a concept integral to Black studies in general).

Speaking of geography, it is necessary to note that composition studies has always been conscious, in a geographical sense, of understanding the sites from which it speaks. (Phrases like “Contact Zones,” “mapping” errors, and “marginalia” are part of its vocabulary). It is also important to point out that the need the editors of Crossing Borderlands speak of is not new. Class Issues: Pedagogy, Cultural Studies, and the Public Sphere, edited by Amitava Kumar (1997) describes a similar disjunction between the public and the academic spheres that many of the essays in Crossing Borderlands addresses. And yet, what makes Crossing Borderlands different and in a class of its own is its constant prioritizing of composition studies. The subtitle needs to be read in a linear fashion, for the essays definitely place composition over postcolonial studies. Though many of the contributors assume a basic familiarity with major names and arguments on the part of the reader; nevertheless, it is possible to read the text without much awareness of the historiography of postcolonial studies (read the Gaurav Desai and Supriya Nair edited anthology Postcolonialisms for a nice introduction to the field). But if you are looking for a text that re-iterates the radical interlocutions of critical education, and of the place composition studies occupies in this developing conversation, this is the book for you.

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Works Cited


The film Writing Across Borders comes at an opportune time. The current debates about U.S. language policy, along with the increasing linguistic diversity of our classrooms, call for increased attention to second (or third!) language writing. Both in our writing center and graduate colloquium series at UW-Madison, we have used this film to reflect on our conferencing with multilingual writers and to rethink our responsibilities to students in an age of increased globalization. The film and accompanying website, written and directed by Wayne Robertson and produced by the Oregon State University Writing Intensive Curriculum and Center for Writing and Learning, draw from interviews with international students and ESL faculty conducted over a three-year period. Robertson articulates the goal as to “address some of the most significant challenges international students face when writing for American colleges and universities.” In addressing these challenges, the film and website do the important work of raising consciousness about second-language writing and writers. The film’s straightforward presentation, inclusion of student voices, practical suggestions, and multimodal format make it accessible to a wide audience. The website complements the film with discussion questions and potential answers, film clips, and a full transcript, which could be used for tutor training, faculty development, or discussions “across borders.” In our colloquium meeting, for instance, those who work in the ESL program joined those of us in composition and rhetoric to share experiences and questions. Because of the interactive and visual format, and the film’s short running time at thirty minutes, Writing Across Borders lends itself to such engagement—from professional development to interdepartmental discussions.

In the introduction, Robertson reports that there are now over 600,000 international students (1 in 20) on college and university campuses. Many experience frustration not only from writing in a non-native language but also from different cultural and educational expectations. Despite the certainty that instructors will work with international students, Robertson worries, “very little is done to prepare teachers.” He asks how culture shapes our rhetorical expectations,