



OUR LOST BORDER

Essays on Life amid the Narco-Violence

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What has been lost is not a political boundary line between the United States and Mexico, but a 60-mile-wide cultural area above and below that the line; the issues raised by the voices here reflect how and why that border has become a zone of fear, violence and bloody murder.

Cortez (*Walking Home: Growing Up Hispanic in Houston*, 2010, etc.) and Troncoso (*Crossing Borders: Personal Essays*, 2011, etc.) are writers and academics now living in Houston and New York City respectively, but both are deeply familiar with the border. They have divided their anthology into a journalistic portion titled “The Tortured Landscape,” in which four reports appear once in their original Spanish and then in an English translation, and a subjective section titled “The Personal Stories,” which includes eight essays, two by the editors describing the losses suffered by them, their friends and their families. The judgments of Mexico are harsh, with one writer asserting that “what we see now is a ‘result of a society that has been rotting for many years.’ ” The words “corruption,” “bribery” and “greed” occur over and over again, and both the government and the populace are described as passive and even complicit in the monstrous narcotics trade. Turf wars between drug cartels are unbelievably brutal, with torture, beheading and disemboweling seemingly everyday occurrences, leaving desolate such cities as Juarez and Tijuana. Nightly shootings, kidnappings, robberies and the discovery of mass graves—all these and more have put an end to a once-thriving tourist industry and a rich cultural exchange between those living on either side of the boundary. Where there were once bridges, there are now high walls. Some mention is made of the United States as the consumer of the drugs and the supplier of arms to the warring drug cartels, but this is primarily Mexico’s story, and it is a bitter one.

A tough but eye-opening read.