USING ETHNOGRAPHIC VIDEO TO CAST LIGHT IN THE SHADOWS OF CHECKPOINTS

By William L. Alexander with Anthony Guevara and Mary K. Brannock

When we talk about the unmerciful “attrition strategy” designed to make daily life so difficult and dangerous for the undocumented that—it is erroneously claimed—they will “self-deport,” do we adequately consider its specific and widespread effects across vulnerable populations? Two years ago, the Anthropology Department at University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW) set up an internship with the Pender County Health Department Farmworker Outreach Program. Bi-lingual anthropology majors provide assistance at the clinic and during field visits, home outreach, and education workshops. The first intern was Anthony Guevara, a talented young filmmaker and double major in Film Studies. Building upon my ongoing research into the effects of immigrant policing on farmworker health in the state (Alexander and Fernandez 2014), he and I developed a project to collaborate on a documentary video that features the clinic and the particular challenges faced by providers and clients, some who reside locally and others who are in the east coast migrant stream. Along with research assistant Mary Brannock, a recent graduate of our program, our team has filmed more than thirty interviews so far. In addition to testimonies and insights from clinic clients, we have recorded the perspectives of health providers, advocates, immigration attorneys, adult education instructors, lawmakers, police, and students from farmworker families.

Transportation issues and the inability to drive legally is a continual source of uncertainty, anxiety, and risk. Prior to 2006, proof of legal status was not required to get a driver’s license in North Carolina. In the past two years, there have been two attempts by the General Assembly to re-extend driving privileges through immigration enforcement legislation—2013’s “Reclaim North Carolina” and this year’s “Highway Safety/Citizen’s Protection” acts. The first generated much controversy and resulted in a study bill after its extreme proposals for immigrant policing alienated its more moderate supporters. The second attempt appeared to have enough support to pass but is currently buried in the stalemate of a state budget standoff. In both of these, immigration reform is framed in the public discourse from the point of view of the state and its citizens in varying terms and degrees of criminality, security, and efficiency. The focus is on criminal background checks, identity and document fraud, cost/benefit analyses regarding insurance savings, and highway safety. Gomberg-Muñoz and Nussbaum-Barbarena (2014:4) in their introduction to the recent City and Society special issue on “Everyday Enforcement” call immigrant policing today a set of actions that “penetrate from the public to the personal, from the economic to the intimate,” concluding that “while most unauthorized people in the US have low objective probability of deportation, they nevertheless experience enforcement in a thousand less visible ways.” One of our goals is to reveal some of the dilemmas farmworkers face during the course of daily life, double binds of risk they can neither easily resolve nor from which they can opt out.

In our film, we hear how a woman who has been in the migrant stream since 2002 and who was in North Carolina for her usual three-month stay struggles to maintain continuity of care for her diabetes. A native Mixteco speaker, her expressed desire to take English classes is juxtaposed with frustrations voiced by an ESL/GED instructor and a teacher’s aide who work at a rural community college branch where night courses serve migrants. They describe a disturbing sequence of events: student attendance at classes fell by more than half as licenses became unavailable, a free bus service that operated for many years was canceled without explanation, and license checkpoints were set up by police on the road leading to and from the campus. Yet, we also hear about students’ determination to attend and their creation of alternative arrangements for transportation while keeping themselves informed about checkpoints using social media. This recalls Stuesse and Coleman’s (2014) concept of “altermobility”—strategies engendered by and used to overcome enforcement practices that constrain immigrants’ ability to work, pursue education, participate in local economies, and contribute to their communities.

Our hope is that the film can offer a platform that engages the wider community by highlighting the wide net cast by the effects of immobilization. We have the testimony of a UNCW student who is a citizen, who spent time in the fields as a child, and whose parents have legal status. She describes the panic that set in during her recent racial profiling experience involving a missed turn on her way home, a mistaken name registration entry at the DMV, and the officer’s unfamiliarity with the Spanish naming custom of dual surnames.

One farmworker who identifies the checkpoints as profiling Latino neighborhoods has been living and working in the United States for twelve years but has only recently seen a doctor and dentist through the outreach program. Another, a young father and native Mam speaker from Guatemala who has only been in the United States for eleven months recounts the difficulties of meeting everyday needs and the problems of depending upon the favors of friends for transportation. Still optimistic, he admits that working conditions are worse than he expected and that he has since warned his cousins of the heat, the long
days, and the lack of sleep. All of this is compounded by the added stressors of driving without a license, potential deportation at the worst, or a costly citation at the least. While we, as practicing anthropologists, attempt to keep current with the moving target of “big picture” immigration issues (changes regarding “enforcement priorities,” “prosecutorial discretion,” and the potential relief of the currently obstructed Executive Order), delayed reform is experienced by migrants as a web of immobility that continues to produce uneven access to health care while acting as a cumulative stressor. The correlation between unauthorized status and increased “allostatic load”—the accumulated bodily insults and health risks associated with chronic stress—is of critical importance for farmworkers (Holmes 2013:101).

The Farmworker Outreach Coordinator is interested in using the video for staff training and client awareness. We will present our work to them and discuss implications of issues we are bringing to light. One of the immigration attorneys will provide a copy of the film to her clients. We plan to make it available for classroom use with segments organized around particular issues that are often eye-opening to students unaware of the cruel predicaments experienced by people living so nearby but largely out of sight. The racial profiling of their peers in the campus community is especially effective for grasping the broader social consequences of aggressive citizenship enforcement. We aim to engage personal testimonies in a constructive dialogue between policymakers, advocates, public health agents, and state residents and to contribute clarity to a public discourse that is too often marked by antagonistic rhetoric, fear mongering, and misinformation.

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By Xóchitl Bada and Andreas Feldmann

Patterns of international migration in the Western Hemisphere including those between Mexico and the United States have suffered important changes in the last decade. The link between migration, security, economic cycles, and development is proving exceedingly fluid. Scholars and experts grappling with this new reality are facing several challenges. Unfortunately, the academic analysis of this complex scenario is still dominated by contrasting visions that are often too dependent on disciplinary preferences and contrasting methodologies. Precious little work relying on mixed methods (i.e., the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods), arguably the best suited to study this topic, is being developed (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al. 2014). Similarly, discrepancies persist between scholars in sending and receiving communities as their contexts permeate the way in which they engage with the topic. For scholars in receiving nations, the discussion centers on migration policy and challenges for immigrant integration; for those in sending countries, migration represents an opportunity to leverage social and economic development processes either via knowledge and technology transfers or by investing their family remittances in productive projects back home (Canales 2015).

Against this backdrop, it seems pertinent for the research community to reinforce their efforts in the creation of multidisciplinary teams in sending, receiving, and transit countries who hopefully will work based on an epistemologically and methodologically ecumenical mode. These teams could concentrate in some pivotal topics/elements of this phenomenon. The careful investigation of them should guide the way forward and hopefully inform public policy.

In the concrete case of Mexico-United States migration, there needs to be a concerted effort to push for a research agenda capable of systematically examining the changes that migration has displayed as of late. In this regard, it seems critical to re-examine the way migration studies have reacted to changes on the ground and to question the conventional wisdom (e.g., that Mexican migration to the United States is strictly economic and unidirectional). As Durand (2013) reminds us, the propensity of Mexicans to migrate to the United States has changed markedly. Mexican migration to the United States reached its peak in 2007 with 12 million migrants, approximately half of those without authorization. Today, migration to the United States is in an all-time low. Figures estimate a drop from an average 525,000 exits a year to fewer than 100,000 (Rios Contreras 2014).

This decline of international migration at the national level is correlated to multiple well-identified factors: changes in the demographic profile including lower fertility rates, decreased circularity, higher levels of education, dramatic increases in the costs of crossing, higher unemployment paired with slower demographic growth in the border region, the long United States economic recession of 2007, and decreased family remittances to finance new migrations (Durand 2013). The expectations that Mexican migration post-NAFTA would cause a significant depopulation of Mexico’s countryside proved to be unfounded. Yet, the vast majority of Mexicans who decide to cross to the United States in search of better job opportunities are fleeing the consequences of economic liberalization in the rural countryside.

Perhaps one of the most salient changes in migration patterns concerns the increase in forced migration derived from generalized conditions of violence in Mexico and Central America. Mexico is enduring an unprecedented wave of violence that has internally displaced circa 1.3 million people, mostly in rural areas. This number represents almost 1 percent of the population. In a context in which general migration to the United States has come to a halt, this represents a huge number. The uprooting is largely attributed to the rural and urban forced displacements created by organized crime groups. It is not a coincidence therefore that Mexicans became the largest group of asylum-seekers in the United States in 2014. Similarly, the northern American corridor has witnessed an upsurge in the migration of Central American people who move escaping from a vicious combination of poverty and violence (Cantor 2014).

On the other hand, new favorable legislation has allowed the introduction of large-scale megaprojects including fracking mining. These foreign investments backed by multinational corporations are producing new capitalist accumulation by dispossession, a process threatening the livelihoods and their right not to migrate in rural peasant communities of states such as Puebla, San Luis Potosí, and Nayarit, among others. Experts estimate that there are approximately fifteen million annual development uprooted people across the world due to violations to land rights and involuntary resettlement (Mcdowell 2014). According to the Mexican NGO Proyecto de Derechos Económicos, Sociales y Culturales (PRODESC), 30 percent of Mexico’s national territory is already in concession to transnational corporations. In the case of the transnational mining sector, Canadian multinational corporations have been overexploiting the natural resources of northern agrarian communities and violating small landowner rights unaware of their legitimate land rights, causing involuntary internal displacements and international migration. Unfortunately, development displaced are not usually included in the internally displaced population calculations because infrastructure development is an activity in which states have largely failed to adopt binding international agreements overseen by fully accountable international institutions.
In short, migration patterns in the Western Hemisphere and the North American corridor in particular are changing rapidly. The understanding of how security, economic sustainability, and development interact and shape migration patterns is proving exceedingly complex. We are confronting a different scenario than the classic northward movement by Mexicans from its rural hinterland. This new reality forces scholars and policymakers to think anew and creatively in order to adjust their knowledge to rapidly changing conditions on the ground. A particularly important step is to boost the dialogue and cross-fertilization of traditional migration scholars with researchers investigating forced migration and those in the development field. This dialogue seems fundamental to advance the state of the art in migration studies broadly conceived and has the potential to render a much more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of this complex topic.

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IMPACTS OF DEPORTATION: PERSPECTIVES FROM LATIN AMERICA AND THE UNITED STATES

By Beth F. Baker

In Latin American communities with high rates of emigration, there are multiple, sometimes conflicting images of the emigrant. Sometimes they are seen as brave entrepreneurs and sources of value in the form of remittances, but sometimes these same emigrants may be a source of anxiety about the perceived de-nationalization or cultural contamination of local communities. Similarly, in the United States, immigrants are often framed as sources of cultural contamination, and non-European immigrants are commonly portrayed as perennially unassimilable. In this, discourses of migration and national identity may not be so different in these two regions. However, portraits of the immigrant in the United States are more monolithically negative - they are not usually seen as a source of value. Despite the existence of clear data that demonstrate the importance of immigrants to the U.S. economy and society, current debates revolve around the perceived costs of immigration. Immigrants in the United States, particularly from Latin America and the Caribbean, are depicted as criminals and a drain on economic and environmental resources in the country. These perceptions, though illusory, have justified historically unprecedented rates of deportation, leading to the forced return migration of hundreds of thousands of people to Latin America and the Caribbean.

While perceptions of emigrants/immigrants differ in Latin American sending locales and the United States, fear of deportees unfortunately does not. Throughout the Americas, deportees are reviled as criminals, so much so that they are relegated to the margins of society...
wherever they go, denied full citizenship at “home” and abroad, and refused the basic rights that citizenship promises. Many people in Latin America fear deportees and treat them as serious criminals, though this is usually not the case. Most governments offer little or no support for their citizens who are deported, and sometimes they compound their victimization. In addition to social and economic marginalization, deportees are subject to high rates of violence in their home countries.

Most people deported from the United States are men from Latin America and the Caribbean. The Department of Homeland Security claims that these deportees are serious criminals and that their deportation is a priority for public safety. However, data collected in the United States and Mexico suggest otherwise. Immigrants’ rights organizations in the United States have long suspected that most “criminal” deportees were convicted of only minor, non-violent crimes such as traffic violations or drug possession. A survey of families of the deported that I am conducting with my colleague, Alejandra Marchevsky, confirms these suspicions—most of the deportees in this random sample were deported for simply being in the country without documentation or for minor, non-violent criminal convictions. Furthermore, had these deportees had adequate legal representation, some would have found that their criminal records alone did not warrant deportation. Rafael Alarçon Acosta (2012), a research professor at the Colegio de la Frontera Norte in Mexico, surveyed deportees in Tijuana and came to the same conclusion—most of the “criminal” offenses for which individuals were deported were minor traffic or drug violations.

Marchevsky and I argue that people who become deportees in the United States are victims of racial and gendered profiling that construes immigrant men of color as inherently criminal, despite the fact that immigrants are much less likely to commit a crime than are United States citizens (Marchevsky and Baker 2014). The deportation of men of color is an easy way for politicians and law enforcement to convince the uneducated public that they are protecting national interests. By the same token, governments in Latin America take advantage of deportees by blaming them for crime and by using public overtures to contain them as evidence of government authority and control. In both cases, public fears of criminality and foreign contamination legitimize the scapegoating, marginalization, disenfranchisement, and dehumanization of hundreds of thousands of people.

Instead of seeing deportation as a public good in the United States, our research indicates the high economic and social costs of deportation. Most deportees we studied resided in the United States for ten years or more before being deported. Most leave behind family members who were legal immigrants or U.S. citizens. These individuals were important nodes in extensive social and economic networks, and their removal from society means acute emotional and economic losses for their families and wider communities—loss of caretakers for children, the elderly, and infirm; loss of income for the family; loss of educational opportunities for children who must now work instead of pursue their studies; loss of property such as a house or vehicle; loss of income spent in the local economy; a decrease in local and federal tax income; and the loss of educated and trained workers. A surprising number of the deportees in our study were in white collar and management positions and had acquired education and training that benefitted their employers and the economy.

Immigrant detention and deportation in the U.S. have been fueled by the growing private prison industry, where annual profits from incarceration are in the billions. Corporations like the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) and The GEO Group, INC. GEO group spends millions of dollars lobbying politicians to support increased funding for private prisons and detention centers. Politicians like Marco Rubio rake in tens of thousands of dollars in return for supporting federal funding and contracting of privately run prisons, where prisoners and immigration detainees alike “work” for pennies and are victimized by extreme forms of abuse and torture. Similarly, federal spending on the militarization of the border and of local law enforcement agencies has skyrocketed. In sum, deportation constitutes a set of unacceptable costs for society—loss of social actors who play important roles in their families and communities, the loss of revenue, a brain drain as we eject educated and trained workers, and an increasingly large public expenditure that only benefits private corporations and politicians who sell themselves as law-and-order defenders of the public interest.

More research needs to be done in the United States on the steep social and economic costs of deportation. By the same token, more research and public education is needed in Latin America. Deportees there could be seen as valuable resources for their local communities—educated and trained workers who usually speak English, receivers of remittances, sources of income for the local economy, and valued members of families and social networks—instead of as criminal outsiders. When it comes to deportees, politicians and the media in the United States and Latin America are more in agreement than not, and it will take a concerted effort by scholars across the hemisphere to produce new forms of knowledge and to educate the public in order to change these attitudes.

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Marchevsky, Alejandra, and Beth Baker

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By Deborah A. Boehm

Scholarship about migration between Mexico and the United States has typically focused on Mexico as nation of origin and the United States as destination, understandably so given that this particular migration flow is among the most significant in the world, both historically and in contemporary context. At the same time, events and circumstances in the early twenty-first century—including record high deportations of Mexican nationals from the United States, unprecedented numbers of Mexican migrants living in the United States without formal membership or rights, and the ongoing transnational movement of people and tourist, drug, and trade economies—mean that movement between Mexico and the United States is ever more unpredictable and unexpected. The political landscape calls for new anthropological approaches and foci, especially given the potential for ethnographic research to shape policy and government programs in both nations.

One topic that deserves particular scholarly attention in the current milieu is “return” to Mexico and its ripple effects in both countries. It is and will continue to be important to follow the forced return of deportation but also the new migrations from north to south and the multiple transnational dis/connections that deportation creates. Of course, as historians of Mexican migration remind us, return is not necessarily or entirely “new.” The history of the region has always been characterized by movement north and south, circular migration, return, and deportation.

Still, what is arguably novel in contemporary times are the legal systems and emergent formations of state regimes that structure such movement and serve as its context. Different state-migrant encounters within this framework of unprecedented “illegality” and “deportability” are imperative to study. Against the backdrop of newly constructed disciplinary forms on the part of governments and increasingly violent immigration controls at the U.S.-Mexico border (and increasingly Mexico’s southern border), it is crucial that we continue and expand academic collaborations across borders, transnational ethnographic research, and conversations among scholars within both countries to understand ongoing transnationalism and its new forms.

First, scholars could productively focus their work on deportation and its aftermath. Despite the presumed finality of the U.S. government’s “removal” of foreign nationals, deportation is never an end to transnationality, as lives fall apart and/or are rebuilt in and across Mexico and the United States after forced return. How are those who are deported experiencing return? In the case of those who migrated at a young age, what happens when they “return” to their formal country of origin, a place that may be, in fact, unknown to them? What are the barriers to and possibilities for work and educational opportunities for deportees throughout Mexico?

In addition, there are new migrations that accompany or result from deportation, including Mexican migrants who return with loved ones and U.S. citizens who go to Mexico for the first time and make up what Daniel Kanstroom (2012) calls the “new American diaspora.” Joining U.S. expat communities in Mexico are millions who are not likely to fit the stereotype of white retirees with resources. As U.S. citizen partners and children of deportees move to urban centers and rural communities throughout Mexico, which regions of Mexico are most impacted by these new migrations? How are communities responding to record deportations, returns, and emergent migration flows? Also, when deportees and their family members “return” to the United States after moving to Mexico post-deportation, what are the implications for future trajectories and legal statuses?

Finally, how might we most effectively study the immobility of “deportability,” deportation, and return to consider the experiences of those who cannot (or cannot easily) move across international borders? Among those who are trapped in either country are family members who are unable to move north or south without profound risk and high costs; undocumented migrants to the United States who fear going back to Mexico because of drug violence; those who hope to migrate north to reunite with family or fleeing violent home communities but are unable to cross an increasingly policed international border; those in the United States without authorization who are unlikely to leave because a future return could become impossible; and so forth.

Others who are caught by state policies (or their absence) include the more than 11 million undocumented migrants currently living in the United States who continue to wait for comprehensive immigration reform; undocumented migrants from Central America who are in or moving through Mexico; “Dreamers” or undocumented migrant youth in the United States who cannot easily travel despite Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA); the “other Dreamers,” youth who were deported or returned to Mexico before the implementation of DACA; and those for whom Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) has not transpired. Although it might seem contradictory, the study of blocked movement is also crucial to our understanding of future migrations north and south.

Such mobilities and immobilities result in newly forged forms of membership but also exclusion and social injustice. Citizenship is increasingly “transnational,” “binational,” or “dual,” even in cases when de facto national membership is not formally recognized. But importantly, citizenship is eroded in new ways as people describe being
“from neither here nor there” and/or not being recognized as full members of nations to which they indeed belong. The scholarly, political, and social questions at the intersection of immobility and membership are among the most pressing we face in the current moment. As researchers, we have a responsibility to follow these different trajectories, and—most significantly—to use our findings to bring about policy change. Emergent migrations and returns are creating a new global order, one that deserves the attention of public scholars in both Mexico and the United States in the years to come.

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COMPETING NARRATIVES ABOUT IMMIGRATION IN THE UNITED STATES

By Guillermo Cantor

As one of the principal catalysts of social change in contemporary societies, immigration constitutes a uniquely fertile area of social science inquiry. Analytic interest in immigration is especially salient in the United States, given the country’s long history and origin as a destination for newcomers and the important role that immigrants currently play in U.S. society. Today, over 13 percent of U.S. residents (41.3 million) were born outside of the country. Of this immigrant population, over 60 percent entered into the United States before 2000, and approximately 27 percent are undocumented. Faced with this reality, immigration analysts (not simply academics, but also those whose interpretations are voiced in the public sphere) navigate various tensions when trying to understand the migration process itself and the presence of immigrants in the receiving country. Those tensions include (1) the role of individual choice versus social context in international migration; (2) ideas of legality versus illegality; (3) notions of deserving versus undeserving immigrants; and (4) conceptions of economic prosperity versus philosophies of control. The ways in which analysts position themselves and resolve those tensions lead to a plurality of discourses, which in turn inform distinct policy choices.

Individual Choice versus Social Context

Are individuals decision-making units who choose to migrate based on their own (mostly economic) analyses? Even though rational choice approaches have been extensively criticized within the social science literature, the idea that individuals decide to migrate based on their own cost-benefit analyses remains fairly prevalent both in public discourse and in contemporary analyses of migration. For example, in political and policy discussions about immigration reform, many characterize undocumented immigrants as intentional law-breakers who come to the United States solely for personal gain. However, those interpretations neglect to acknowledge the fact that migration occurs within social contexts, which are defined by multiple structural factors, including, for example, the structures of opportunities and labor demand in countries of origin and receiving countries, previous migration trajectories by family and community members, conditions of violence in sending countries, widespread cultural understandings of individual or family progress, and so forth. The reality is that migrants, as well as other individual actors, both shape and are shaped by the social worlds in which they live. Consequently, understanding migration as a social process requires an examination of individuals’ choices and the social context that enables or constrains them.

Legality versus Illegality

Immigrants in the United States are commonly placed into one of two groups: those who entered and remain in the country using available (albeit limited) legal immigration channels and those who entered the country illegally or overstayed a visa. In the first category, the prevailing narrative tends to associate them with nostalgic, idealized views of immigrants from the past, that is, those who came to the country to work hard, share their talents, and make a better life for their families; in this view, these immigrants made the United States a more productive place for everyone. The second group, according to this binary interpretation, is composed of individuals who in one way or another broke the law and, therefore, are depicted as opportunists. This binary categorization, however, ignores some key realities. First, the current immigration system is not aligned with the country’s labor needs. Namely, although the country creates jobs that are not filled by the local labor supply, the legal system does not offer meaningful opportunities for those who are willing to migrate legally to do those jobs. In the absence of realistic legal avenues for employers to hire immigrant workers, unauthorized immigration continues to fill the gap when demand is high. Second, there are categories of individuals who
Deserving versus Undeserving Immigrants

Another tension that informs common characterizations of immigrants is the division of migrants into two groups—those who deserve to be in the country and those who do not. This dichotomy partly overlaps with the notions of legality discussed above. However, gradations of deservingness apply to all types of migrants. For example, supporters of restrictive immigration policies tend to underscore the need to prioritize admitting “high skilled” migrants over those considered “less skilled” and the entry of economic migrants over those who seek to be reunited with their family members in the United States. This hierarchy also applies to family-based migrants, wherein those with certain types of family ties are favored over others. Notions of deservingness usually go hand in hand with an “economic appraisal” of the migrant’s value. Proposals for a “point system” to assign value to individuals’ attributes and rank aspiring migrants accordingly reflect these notions. Many times, the criteria upon which these “rankings” of migrants are based are indeed questionable. For example, is a computer engineer more deserving than a construction worker? Is someone who comes to the United States based on family ties less deserving that someone who is coming on an investor visa? From a policy perspective, how we approach these questions has clear implications for the ways in which we define our immigration laws. From a sociological perspective, it reflects the values and norms that structure our “imagined community.”

Conceptions of Economic Prosperity versus Philosophies of Control

Some characterizations depict immigrants as allies in the achievement of shared economic prosperity and societal enrichment. There are hosts of public leaders throughout the country who not only have embraced this view but also crystalized it in “welcoming” initiatives. The underlying notion is that better integrated communities, of which immigrants are a key part, are a key prerequisite for economic prosperity. On the other end of the spectrum, however, is an opposing view that conceives immigrants as a multiple threat—for example, economically, politically, and racially. In other words, immigrants (and undocumented immigrants, in particular) are depicted as a risk to a desired status quo. While the first perspective has been translated into actions that promote immigrant integration, the second one informs demands for greater enforcement against immigrants without legal status (not only at the border but also in the interior of the United States). These competing views are anything but new, but in the post-9/11 context, they became more conspicuous and have, in the past several years, informed the direction of the immigration debate at the national, state, and local levels.

As the analysis above illustrates, migration and immigrants are not only shaped by social structures but also subjected to categorizations that too often oversimplify and mask the complexity and diversity of the migratory phenomenon and the migrant population. Because these categorizations have the capacity to inform policy, paying attention to them is, at the very least, a necessary and productive exercise.

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SHIFTING DISCOURSES AND SOCIAL RELATIONS: THE PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE ON MIGRATION

By Heide Castañeda

Thank you for your invitation to this dialogue about how national context has shaped two different perspectives on the same issue, namely, the topic of immigration in anthropological research. With ongoing research on both sides of the border, the issue of how national context shapes our research questions has been a topic of ongoing reflection for me in recent years. One project focuses on the experiences of mixed-status immigrant families along the United States/Mexico border (specifically, the Rio Grande Valley of Texas). Another, conducted in conjunction...
with colleagues from the University of Oregon and the Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa, examines transit migration along Mexico’s Ruta Pacifica.

The study of immigration in Mexico, as Durand suggests, often takes a broader focus on transit migration and regional issues, as well as migrants’ continued influence in their homeland through remittances and reincorporation in communities. In my experience, all of this has required and resulted in a real concerted effort at interdisciplinary work. As applied medical anthropologists, we are currently collaborating with historians, economists, and regional development specialists to examine the impacts of transit migration. The impact of the Migration Law of 2011 has been profound in shifting discourses, as it included new rights for migrants, such as access to education, health care, and—arguably most importantly—the right to due process. Based on ongoing ethnographic fieldwork in two field sites in the state of Sinaloa, Mexico (one governmental office and one non-governmental organization), we are exploring how interactions between local community members, internal migrants, and external migrants are shaping new forms of social relations as well as new discourses about migration, citizenship, and deservingness. The analysis of such encounters reveals the ways contemporary migration complicates simple binaries of sending and receiving countries—or of origin and destination—and considers the impact of these flows for the relation between state and civil society in Mexico.

The suggestion that the analytical perspectives of transnationalism have lost strength also resonates. From work on the United States side, we are seeing a renewed focus on incorporation experiences, especially as migration from Mexico has declined significantly in recent years. This is most evident in the experiences of the “1.5 generation,” namely, the more than 2.1 million undocumented young people who have been living in the United States since childhood and whose trajectories into adulthood are powerfully impacted by immigration policy. In “learning to be illegal,” they undergo a transformation that involves the almost complete retooling of daily routines, survival skills, aspirations, and social patterns as they enter into adult roles that require legal status as the basis for participation (Gonzales 2011). Beginning in 2012, many became eligible for the two-year amnesty under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. In the first two years following DACA, beneficiaries have experienced a profound increase in economic and educational opportunities. Nonetheless, the constant vacillation between hope and fear is engendered by the possibility of immigration reform acts as a major disciplinary practice informing undocumented subjectivity (Chavez 2014; Gonzales and Chavez 2012). These youth challenge traditional assumptions about the incorporation patterns of the children of immigrants and draw attention to the powerful role of policy in transitions to adulthood and social mobility.

Another example comes from children living in mixed-status families. Currently, there are some 2.3 million mixed-status families in the United States which contain varied constellations of citizens, permanent legal residents, undocumented immigrants, and individuals in legal limbo such as recipients of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) or DACA. For many children and youth, experiences of growing up are framed not by their own but other family members’ legal status. Immigration and social policies, we have argued, neglect the far-reaching ripple effects on United States citizens living in immigrant households (Castañeda and Melo 2014).

Importantly, these experiences are not uniform, since the cultural, political, and economic features of particular regions or states—both in the United States and in Mexico—significantly impact sociocultural patterns related to migration. Transborder studies, as Freidenberg suggests, have a role to play in teasing out the specificities by focusing on regions of interconnection in addition to the borders that separate nation-states. A renewed conceptualization of the borderlands is also emerging, as they are not just as parametrical limit points but also as spaces of residence and everyday social interaction. In many ways, the border is and remains exceptionally locationally robust (Stuesse and Coleman 2014) and strongly shapes collective experiences. In our work in South Texas, local configurations of laws, practices, resources, and attitudes provide distinct advantages and disadvantages to different groups in specific geographic settings.

There is no doubt that the production of knowledge on migration in the United States and Mexico replicates the politics and policies of the nation-state. For example, as I have noted here, in the United States this is reflected in a focus on incorporation experiences of the next generation(s), while in Mexico, a strong regional component is evident in the focus on transit migration, along with a renewed contemplation of migrant rights and the role of the state. More dialogue—and certainly more research collaboration—between scholars on both sides will be beneficial in moving forward theoretical and practical insights on migration.

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The growth of United States bound migration came at a pace that few of us studying the phenomenon could easily explain. Typically, we turned to economic models to interpret the growth of cross-border movement. We defined movers as rational actors seeking opportunities abroad who were responding to the pull of the United States labor market and wages that were unimaginable at home. Our analyses, though sometimes limited in their discussions of culture and the outcomes of migration for indigenous movers, rang true in particular in our discussion of young unskilled and semi-skilled workers who were entering the national job market at a time when the Mexican economy was reeling from a series of crises.

The shifts brought by migration in Mexico, and in rural parts of the nation were palpable—villages emptied, milpas (small fields) were abandoned, and indigenous systems of organization were under pressure and at risk from globalizing market systems and neoliberal reforms. Nevertheless, as quickly as migration had increased, it dropped to a statistically insignificant rate by 2012. Here we were, little more than a decade removed from the explosive growth of rural migration to the United States, and it transformed yet again. And while rural and indigenous communities were more resilient than originally imagined (see the description of indigenous migration in Oaxaca in my 2004 book, The Culture of Migration in Southern Mexico), milpas remained unplanted, rural villages were not repopulated, and there was a tension between indigenous village life and increasingly globalizing sociopolitical systems.

Parodies of Mexican migration, caricatures of Mexican migrants as well as perspectives that focus solely on the migrant and not the system that drives mobility challenge any effort to explain the rapid growth of cross-border migration, understand the motivations that drive individual movers and define why in recent years migration has rapidly declined.

Parodies of Mexican migration characterize cross-border movement as something akin to an invasion that must be stopped. Caricatures of Mexican migrants portray them as nameless, faceless movers at best and criminals at worst who seek to take jobs from hard working North Americans and undermine the sociocultural glue that defines the United States as a nation. These distortions and their repetition in the media and by politicians render a dialogue over the realities of migration nearly impossible, yet we must push toward the discussion of migration to meet the concerns Judith Friedenberg and Jorge Durand share as they ask, what do we talk about when we talk about immigration on both sides of the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo?

Mexican migration to the United States is not a new process. It has developed as movers and the world they are a part of change; as the motivations for migration have shifted; and as the large, globally defined socioeconomic systems and neoliberal political reforms effect the landscape of mobility in both positive and negative ways. The Braceros of the mid-twentieth century who were in the United States legally (though not without abuse) are not the undocumented movers of the last twenty years; and it is clear that contemporary movers including many young children from places like Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, follow a path quite different from Mexicans of the 1990s.

There are unique qualities that define the rapid rise (the later decline and now...
shift) in United States bound migration, and it is incumbent upon us to recognize and explain the complex processes that define local decision making for movers and their families and recognize how culture, ecology, and more influence outcomes. There are features that render movement from urban Mexico quite different from indigenous migrants and Central Americans. Our job is, in part, to explain and define the features that make a difference and advance the dialogue from the representation of all migrants as faceless, nameless criminals to one that captures the changing reality of mobility.

Regardless of our geographic and intellectual relationship to and with migration and the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo, we can reclaim migration for the migrants and reject the parodies that render them nameless threats. Our work describes the history of movement, defines particularly moments in time (the rural-urban shift in Mexico, for example) as they influence outcomes and decision makers. We are also able to locate migrants in their worlds and as members of families and communities as they negotiate their futures, hopes, and dreams against the realities of their lives and the costs and benefits of moving. Finally, in our work, we explore larger regional, national, and global processes that influence outcomes in both positive and negative ways and that range from the ecological to the economic, the cultural to the technological. The challenge is to take this research and package it for the public and policymakers in a way that captures their attention and doesn’t belittle or betray the realities that migrants face. Approaching migration as a simple decision made by an individual with little regard for her or his world or family ignores the complexities of mobility. It also misses the broader patterns of cultural, environmental, and social change that confront migrants and that implicate the role global forces play in decision making. The public and policymakers on both sides of the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo are ready to listen; it is time to join the conversation.

By Walter A. Ewing

In the sound-bite driven realm of United States political discourse, the tremendous complexity of immigration is often boiled down to a single issue: security. More precisely, the national fears stoked by 9/11 are fueling a never-ending debate over whether or not immigrants—particularly unauthorized immigrants—constitute a “threat” to the nation and its people. The concern is that either terrorists or violent criminals are making their way into the country, undetected amid the hundreds of thousands of other migrants, travelers, and tourists who cross the United States border each year. It is telling that the primary locus of worry is the United States-Mexico border—not the much longer and less-fortified United States-Canada border.

Nativists like Representative Ted Cruz (R-TX) and GOP presidential candidate Donald Trump exploit this anxiety over security to promote negative stereotypes of immigrants—especially unauthorized immigrants from Mexico—as a potentially dangerous group which should be kept out of the United States with border walls and all manner of military technology. The underlying logic of this position is either that all of “them” are “bad,” or that if we don’t keep all of “them” out, a “bad” one might get in. Neither of these positions is supported by the available evidence. Immigrants, even if unauthorized, are not an inherently dangerous group of people, and trying to catch bad guys by keeping out everyone is an impossible task that wastes law-enforcement resources.

When it comes to the subject of immigrants and criminality, the evidence has been clear for more than a century: immigrants are less likely to commit serious crimes or be behind bars than the native-born. This holds true even for the young, less-educated Mexican, Salvadoran, and Guatemalan men who make up the bulk of the unauthorized population. Beyond incarceration rates, a variety of different studies have found that immigrants are less likely than the native-born to engage in either violent or nonviolent “antisocial” behaviors; that immigrants are less likely than the native-born to be repeat offenders among “high risk” adolescents; and that immigrant youth who were students in United States middle and high schools in the mid-1990s and are now young adults have among the lowest delinquency rates of all young people.

Note

1See, for example, the article “Net Migration from Mexico Falls to Zero—and Perhaps Less” URL:<http://www.pewresearch.org/daily-number/net-migration-from-mexico-falls-to-zero-and-perhaps-less> (August 15, 2015).

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As for the goal of “sealing the border” to prevent anyone dangerous from getting in, this is a fantasy. It is simply not possible to completely seal any border. Perhaps more to the point, striving to get as close to a 100 percent sealed border as humanly possible would turn the United States into a much different country than it is today. In a 2013 report, the Council on Foreign Relations concluded that the former East Germany’s border would be the closest historical parallel to the scenario of a United States border under 100 percent “operational control.” Yet even 1970s East Germany, with a highly militarized border where officers were ordered to “shoot and kill,” was only able to achieve a 95 percent apprehension rate. Furthermore, in the United States, none of this would have any impact on visa overstays. If one also keeps in mind that Mexico is the third largest trading partner of the United States, turning our shared border into a modern-day equivalent of the Berlin Wall makes no sense.

Furthermore, given that the vast majority of unauthorized immigrants entering the United States from Mexico are not security threats, security is not automatically enhanced by keeping more of them out. For instance, Josiah Heyman, Director of the Center for Interamerican and Border Studies at the University of Texas, El Paso, calls for “an intelligence-driven approach to homeland security, rather than a mass migration enforcement approach.” Heyman reminds us that “the 9/11 terrorists came through airports with visas…. They did not cross the United States-Mexico border.” The lesson to be learned from this is that “fortified borders cannot protect us from all security threats or sources of harm.”

Rather, the movement of unauthorized immigrants across the United States-Mexico border is symptomatic of the power wielded by the transnational criminal cartels that dominate the people-smuggling business. As former Arizona Attorney General Terry Goddard argues, the cartels are far more of a security threat than than the migrants they exploit. According to Goddard, were the United States and Mexico to attack the money laundering which is the life blood of the cartels and make the bi-national criminal investigation and prosecution of cartel bosses a priority, the border would be made significantly more secure. In the process, the violence in Mexico and the smuggling of drugs and people into the United States (and the smuggling of guns and money out of the United States) would be greatly reduced.

Not to be forgotten in all of this is the added security that would come with immigration reform which makes the United States immigration system responsive to the economic and social forces which drive migration in the first place—namely, the search for work and the desire to reunify with United States-based family members. As General Barry R. McCaffrey (Ret.), former Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, has pointed out, border security cannot be achieved only by further beefing up the Border Patrol. It also requires a “sensible immigration policy” which recognizes that mass deportation is not a realistic or desirable option for “solving” the problem of unauthorized immigration.

The United States needs to take labor migration and family reunification out of the southern border-security equation through the creation of a legalization program for unauthorized immigrants already living in the United States and flexible legal limits on future immigration to this country. Otherwise, the cartelists will have more people to exploit for profit, and real criminals and terrorists looking to cross the border without being noticed will have more elaborate smuggling operations at their disposal, as well as a larger flow of unauthorized immigrants in which to hide.

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BORDER BROKERS: SECOND-GENERATION MEXICANS
NAVIGATING THE U.S. STATE

By Christina Getrich

For the past decade, I have worked with a group of second-generation Mexicans who grew up principally in San Diego and engage in transborder life in Tijuana and points beyond in Mexico. During this time, journalists and scholars have started to describe the impact of restrictive immigration policies on young adults like them who live in mixed-status families, an important development in the immigration “debate.”

When I first got to know them as teenaged high schoolers, I was struck by the negative forces that circumscripted their lives—the damaging media portrayals of them and their family members that characterize them as a threat (Chavez 2013); the border enforcement policies and practices that infiltrate their neighborhoods, putting them under constant surveillance while
they engage in innocuous activities like playing freeze tag, walking to church, and attending school (Getrich 2013); and the exclusionary policies that literally fracture their families into those who “officially” belong in the United States and those who do not, those who can cross the nearby border into Mexico and those who cannot. In fact, these young adults do bear the scars of these anti-immigrant sentiments and public policies that swirled around them as they grew up in this milieu.

Yet, that is not the only frame through which I have observed their lives as they matured from teenagers making sense of these forces into twenty-something young adults who are increasingly comfortable and competent in navigating them. Indeed, now they reflect back on the affirmative aspects of their upbringings and the resilience they have cultivated: as now-twenty-seven-year-old Casandra noted, “Growing up in an immigrant family makes you be creative and be a problem solver. You learn not to take no for an answer and find another way. I’m confident in taking up challenges.”

These second-generation youth put their problem-solving skills to use as teenagers when they took on increasing household responsibilities, interpreted for their parents, helped family members apply for jobs, and drove around their undocumented family members. Indeed, they have actively supported and sustained their families in school, social service, and health care settings. They grew up serving as brokers (Katz 2014) between their families and broader social institutions—including the state immigration apparatus.

Their role as immigration brokers crystallized during spring 2006, when as teenagers they actively orchestrated and participated in immigrants’ rights protests. As Bloemraad and Trost (2008:520) noted, their background as translators “naturally spill[ed] over into political translation.” The teens participated in protests to voice their disapproval of laws that would adversely affect them, their family members, and friends and to challenge publicly widespread images of immigrants that did not resonate with their own life experiences (Getrich 2008). Their language skills, social knowledge, and secure legal statuses situated them well to broker messages of inclusion (Bloemraad and Trost 2008). The immigrants’ rights protests were a formative period in the teenagers’ lives, ultimately teaching them that they could take action to fight against the social inequality directed at their families.

At the time, scholars wondered what the legacy of teenagers’ participation in the protests would be; in fact, as the momentum of the immigrants’ rights movement has shifted to DREAMer activism, youth have continued to play a prominent role. Some of the individuals I first knew as teenagers have stepped up their efforts as professional immigrant advocates—young adults such as Casandra and Paulina, who graduated from college and now work in activist organizations. Casandra takes pride in the fact that her non-profit can “tap into [her] resources,” while Paulina focuses not only on immigrant rights but passionately organizes youth against other injustices, such as the school-to-prison pipeline.

Esperanza completed law school and fashions herself a “quieter” activist, saying, “My approach is definitely not out there in the streets protesting…. I worry that if you do something to piss someone off, that’s your cut, and you never get the chance to make the changes you want. My tactic is to make subtle changes that will have a long-term positive effect for my community.” Others serve as everyday brokers for their communities as firefighters, early-childhood educators, and social and health care workers.

Even those in my group who are not advocates by profession are nevertheless actively brokering their families’ belonging in the United States. Many contribute to their families’ household expenses and parents’ occupational development, even if they no longer live at home. After they turned twenty-one and saved up enough money to pay legal and immigration fees, both Isabel and Beto petitioned for their parents’ permanent residence. Isabel—whose parents are from nearby Tijuana but were unable to go home for twenty-two years—reflected, “I was like eight or nine when I knew they didn’t have papers. It felt really good doing that for my parents. We’re just calmer now… we don’t have that fear of what’s going to happen.” Now that they finally have their papers, Isabel is teaching her parents competencies such as negotiating the international border crossing that she developed in her youth during her frequent trips to visit her extended family in Tijuana.

Beto’s undocumented mother and other relatives cannot visit his older brother, who was deported and now lives across the border. Once he secured papers for his father, Beto accompanied him for a visit after a five-year period of separation. Beto took a cell phone video of the encounter to share with his family back in San Diego—the only way they could experience the bittersweet reunion. Beto is literally the “border broker” between his family members; he has the desire, local knowledge, and transborder competencies to carry out this role but still wishes that his family could all just sit down at the dinner table together.

Second-generation Mexicans like Beto continue to face significant barricades in their brokering efforts for their families and communities. As anthropologists, we need to continue to document, critique, and fight against the reverberations of these exclusionary state immigration policies on mixed-status families such as those of Casandra, Paulina, Esperanza, Isabel, and Beto.

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WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT MIGRATION

By David Griffith

Readers familiar with Raymond Carver’s fiction will recognize the origin of my title, which replaces “love” with “migration.” I chose the title because the evolution of Carver’s story—from full sunlight to darkness and from sobriety to drunkenness—reflects the evolution of national debates over migration, whether we are talking about immigration in the United States or emigration in Mexico. I chose the word migration instead of immigration or emigration to convey the idea of coming and going, of interconnections or interpenetration, and of transnationalism without the conceptual baggage of nationalism, citizenship, or other suggestions that migrants don’t regularly resist the formations and confines of states.

My experience with immigration comes from the United States South and Midwest, and my experience with emigration from Sinaloa and Veracruz in Mexico, as well as Honduras and Guatemala. As with many things, one’s experience with migration is always a bit local, despite that migration is global; yet however global migration is, migrants, like most of us, are local.

During the decade following the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, when immigrants from Mexico and Central America began trickling into the United States Midwest and South, they were generally welcomed for their hard work and for their tendency to keep to themselves, adopting what local observers called a “military model” of occupation: primarily single males living in group quarters and, with the exception of playing soccer on Sundays, moving between work, limited shopping, and home. In both regions, however, after six or seven years, gradually more and more of these single males began sending for their wives, children, and other family members, settling out of dormitory- or barracks-like housing in country trailer parks or houses in small towns, attending and founding churches, enrolling children in school, accessing health care more, establishing businesses, and deepening the cultural, linguistic, and ethnic inventory of community.

With increasing immigrant family formation emerged what the anthropologist Mark Grey, in a talk on immigrants in Iowa, aptly called knuckleheads—those narrow-minded, ethnocentric, nationalist, and racist natives who viewed and characterized migrants not as an asset but as a threat, not as hardworking but freeloading, and not as solution but problem. Becoming more vocal, writing letters to the editor and speaking up at city council meetings and other public venues, the knuckleheads muddied debates about migration by pairing immigrants with terrorists, asserting linguistic and cultural hegemony, inflating nationalism, and initiating or backing English-only laws, limits on the education of immigrant youth, and other anti-immigrant policies and practice while pushing for increased state surveillance, monitoring, and harassment of immigrants and ethnic others resembling them. It was a move, essentially, from light to darkness and from sobriety to drunkenness, leaving us with the ambivalence of needing immigrants yet behaving as if we don’t.

Attitudes toward migration have evolved, although differently, in the sending communities. From initially viewing migration as a short-term, positive, if difficult solution to some economic or ecological crisis—the erosion of crop prices, for example, or a hurricane—over time, community members increasingly viewed migration as a source of rising greed and laziness among recipients of remittances, particularly youth who dropped out of local labor markets. Especially when returning migrants engaged in conspicuous consumption, generally through improvements to housing, they were blamed for the community’s problems, even when those problems were due primarily to the withdrawal of state support for local livelihoods following the end of the Cold War and neoliberal policies. How migrants can be held responsible for falling coffee prices, for example, is beyond me, although anthropologists like Daniel Reichman have found just that. Perhaps it is that migrants, like William Roseberry’s yuppies, are more interested in becoming coffee drinkers than coffee growers.
One of the underlying issues these developments raise is about the value of reproductive labor. Immigrants in the United States seem highly valued when they are, like guestworkers, completely divorced from reproductive labor responsibilities. As long as they keep to themselves, live in group housing, move from their dorms or barracks to work and back—remain, more or less, invisible—community members tend not to complain. Even anti-immigrant legislators support the expansion of guestworker programs. Once immigrants begin forming families, however—one, that is, they incorporate into their experiences reproductive labor’s responsibilities, benefits, costs, and links to community institutions like schools and health care systems—community members seem to begin viewing them as threats to the dominance of English, to national security, to community chests, and to ways of life.

In the sending communities, the opposite occurs: as reproductive labor becomes devalued with the separation of migrating parents from children, the rise of surrogate parenting, the disobedience of youth, and so on, community members suspect migration as the root cause of social problems. Such myths have become the stuff of fiction.

In a recent film entitled Lágrimas del Corazón (Tears of the Heart) produced by a North Carolina Latino businessman, the protagonist leaves his wife and daughter in Mexico to seek a better life for them first in the tobacco fields of North Carolina and then in a local, immigrant-owned construction firm. While he is gone, his wife grows ill and dies and his daughter crosses the border to find her father. Once in the United States, he becomes a valued employee of a man who helps him commit marriage fraud to secure work authorization, and in the process he falls in love with his new, Carolina-born, Latina, quite voluptuous wife. One family disintegrates. Another family forms.

And the daughter? She makes it, with a stop along the way at McDonalds, to her father’s new home. In the final scene, before the father knows the daughter has joined them, the new wife asks him, “Do you believe in miracles?” How would you, as an anthropologist of migration, predict he responds?

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SHIFTING THEORETICAL FRAMES AND CHANGING (IM)MIGRATION CONTEXTS

By Lourdes Gutiérrez Nájera

As I entered graduate school in the 1990s, “transnationalism” was emerging as a dominant paradigm for conceptualizing the movement of people across space within a globalizing world. Transnationalism was particularly effective for describing a pattern of Mexican migration in which people maintained active engagement in multiple localities across national boundaries: a process facilitated by improvements in transportation, communication, and technologies which eased the flow of people, goods, ideas, and services. Anthropologists engaged in vibrant debates over the term, but eventually its usage became commonplace, and studies expanded beyond such theoretical debates. Today, anthropologists continue to build on transnational approaches to (im)migration between the United States and Mexico (and beyond) through multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in both sending and receiving countries.

This last decade has seen the expansion of transnational approaches to incorporate aspects of gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity more fully. Today, we have a much more complex image of (im)migrants and (im)migration than we did twenty or thirty years ago. My own research, focusing on Zapotec migration between Oaxaca and Los Angeles, challenges us to think about the impacts of migration on notions of membership and belonging at home and abroad. It forms part of an expanding scholarship on indigenous migration between Mexico and the United States. Indigenous migration has been happening since the last century. Today, there are so many indigenous Mexicans from Oaxaca that the state has been referred to as “Oaxacalifornia,” and the United States Census Bureau claims that Mexican indigenous people amount to the fourth largest indigenous tribe in the United States. Consequently, there is a wide diversity among Mexican (im)migrants. Thus, an emphasis on an indigenous movement
of people broadens discussions of Mexican (im)migration in significant ways through analyses of ethnicity and race in both Mexico and the United States. Other ways of talking about migration focus more on political processes in the United States. For instance, the political climate in the United States has produced an “immigration crisis,” drawing on negative images of undocumented migration. Academics like Leo Chavez (2007), Nicholas De Genova (2005), and Mae Ngai (2004) have challenged the images and rhetoric of “illegal” immigration by showing how these categories are discursively constructed. Ultimately, discourses of illegality and accompanying images stigmatize certain immigrants at different historical junctions. Today, public discussions of “illegality” in the United States assume Mexican migrants as perpetrators, despite the fact that undocumented migrants from all over the world inhabit the country. Beyond pointing towards the rhetorical strategies used by political pundits and the media to villainize certain groups of migrants, academics and activists alike point to the dehumanizing effects of this category and call for alternative ways of describing this lack of status with alternatives such as unauthorized or undocumented. This political engagement partakes in a larger trend activist or engaged anthropological research that is more local or regional in scope, in response to a mounting anti-immigrant climate in the United States.

The influx of unaccompanied immigrant youth in the last decade, and which became the topic of political debate surrounding immigration and border control during the summer of 2014, has also fertile ground for anthropological inquiry. The plight of Central American youth, as young as five years of age, who make their way through numerous borders and often fall prey to gang and state violence on their journey, has also hastened us towards engaged or activist research on immigration focused on human rights, especially those surrounding children and youth. This wave of immigrant youth has become the subject of anthropological inquiry in the United States as well as Mexico, documenting youth experiences of abuse that beg us to reconsider the political categories “refugee” and “asylum” as we debate the rights of these youth.

A persistent and escalating presence of migrant youth has also contributed to anthropological studies that shed light on experiences of what Alejandro Portes and Ruben Rumbaut (2006) called the 1.5 generation; a generation who like their parents were born outside of the United States and immigrated to this country but were raised in the United States. Anthropologists such as Haley Seif (2010) have provided valuable insight on youth activism and demands for social justice. This research highlights the plight of undocumented youth in their struggles to attain higher education. This research focused on attempts to pass the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, guaranteeing undocumented youth the right to attend public universities. However, the terrain has shifted both legislatively and culturally since the DREAM Act was first introduced and unsuccessful passed by the United States Senate in 2007. More recently, the implementation of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, which provides temporary documentation for youth enrolled in colleges and universities, has offered hope for change. But its current injunction signals the continuance of a vigorous struggle for undocumented youth. Indeed, my most current research focuses on the ways in which a contingency of undocumented youth at elite institutions have used activism to regain control of their self-representation, in the face of a hostile climate of nativism that has drawn on damaging, if not negative, discourse surrounding undocumented immigration.

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PUBLIC POLICY STRUGGLES: A VIEW FROM THE UNITED STATES-MEXICO BORDER

By Josiah Heyman

Mexico-United States issues are often reduced symbolically, and then in heavy-handed practices, to fear of the United States-Mexico border itself. This is more pronounced in the United States than Mexico, but it affects both countries. For example, anti-Mexican emotions recently stirred up by Donald Trump include an extension of the United States border wall, a physically enormous and practically punitive symbol. Certainly, there are other manifestations of anti-Mexican racism, such as imaginary gigantic plans for and widespread practices of mass deportations, or the mooted removal of the 14th Amendment guarantee of birthright citizenship, that go beyond the border. But the border is a key symbol in current immigration debates. At the same time, the border region is home to millions of people in both countries and complex crossing processes that go beyond stereotypes of both left and right. Applied anthropology in and by borderlanders responds to this situation.

Substantial numbers of refugees from violence, interwoven with family reunification aspirants and economic migrants, are moving from northern Central America, across Mexico's southern border, through Mexico (a passage of tremendous risk and exploitation, addressed by Mexican advocates and social scientists), and arriving at the United States border. Less well known, but also important, are Mexican refugees from violence, coming from distant (Michoacan, Guerrero) and border states (Chihuahua, Coahuila, and Tamaulipas). United States authorities receive refugee requests, arresting the applicant, processing them, and putting some into detention prison camps and releasing others with immigration court dates.

One network of morally-motivated advocates has worked at the prison camps, which are within a hundred miles of, but not at, the border. Their work centers on legal representation, and applied social scientists have been a resource for expert witness on issues such as mental health effects of imprisonment on family groups. Other refugees, who are released, are dropped off with few resources and little knowledge in United States border communities.

These releases have brought forth a new wave of moral discourse and action, such as an estimated 5,000 people in El Paso assisting transiting refugees, and even more in south Texas. I organized a student research team to document this impressive wave of moral action in the border United States (quite opposite from reactions in politics, the media, and some interior sites). The goal is to document it for posterity—a modest contribution, but one requested by the direct participants.

Mexican refugees have received less publicity, and the numbers are smaller, but this flow is important both in human terms and as a social base for transborder human rights politics extending back into Mexico. Notable has been the El Paso-based group Mexicanos en Exilio, based in the law office of Carlos Spector, with which the Mexican anthropology doctoral student (at CIESAS) May-ek Querales has done service ethnography. The program I direct, Latin American and Border Studies, at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), has hosted a special course on Asylum from Mexico, taught by Spector and assisted by Querales, that drew students into research on asylum-specific conditions in Mexico. Mexicanos en Exilio and Spector...
have had important interventions in the media, as well as legal processes, in both countries.

An ideologically (racially) driven view of the recent arrival of Central American refugees at the border is as threats to public safety. Worthy of note is that the principal response in United States border communities themselves is empathy, comfort in personal contact, and pride in giving assistance, while the principal response from outside has been fear of imaginary violence and criminality. In Texas, for example, the state immediately rushed National Guard infantry units to the south Texas and authorized $811 million over the next two years to deploy hundreds of new state police officers to the border region. United States border communities, which are ethnically overwhelmingly of Mexican origin, are distinctly safer than other comparable United States communities, and there is widespread disagreement between and resentment of these policies of militarization and police escalation: indeed, a justifiable sense of racialized targeting. UTEP sociologists Theodore Curry and Cristina Morales conducted a systematic community survey exploring just how and why El Paso is the safest large city in the United States. Texas state representative Cesar Blanco, with a background in criminal justice data analysis, penetratingly analyzed information to show that Texas deployments have resulted in heavy-handed surveillance of border communities, while public safety in the rest of the state has been neglected.

Yet it is, indeed, true that parts of Mexico’s northern border suffer from tremendous criminality, violence, and governmental human rights violations—currently, particularly in Tamaulipas state and the Valle de Juárez. Mexican social scientists (e.g., Luis Cervera, Julia Monárriz, and many others) have extensively documented these issues in collaboration with civil society groups. Importantly, the science and narrative that applied social scientists in the United State borderlands need to tell in order to resist repressive mass policing and militarization—that the United States border region is safe and secure—is somewhat different from the science and narrative that Mexican social scientists and advocates tell. They also resist ineffective mass policing and militarization but emphasize the situation of public insecurity, which Mexican regional elites minimize. This two-sided complexity is clearly recognized and understood in the advocacy of regional human rights organizations, such as the Border Network for Human Rights.

The two sides of the border are linked by mobility paths involving insecurity and bodily risk at all stages, but particular political and social settings require specific analyses and advocacy agendas unique to one side of the border or the other. A key challenge to the transborder, or more widely the transnational conceptualization, then, is that there are both tightly linked processes and paths and also important national or regional conditions and political frames that are divided by borders. The realities of insecurity and violence in Mexico can conflict with discourse on safety on the U.S. side. The political needs of each side can, at times conflict, while at other times allowing for one unifying transborder approach to challenges for people on both sides of the border. Transborder concepts must be applied in a flexible and subtle way, consistent with political movements on the ground.

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The Challenge of Framing Migration for the Public

By Brent Metz

The issue of “how we talk about immigration” is timely and critical, as the chasm between media and academic representations of migration remains wide. Both the mainstream and right-wing media simplify migration, particularly undocumented, and talk past each other. Due to the dire situations of recent arrivals and detainees, mainstream media tend to frame undocumented migration in terms of victimhood and human rights and reduce the motivations for migration to decontextualized poverty, gangs, and traffickers. The right-wing cares only about their own human rights and paints Latino migrants, in particular, whether documented or not, as terrorists, criminals, economic parasites, epidemic disease-carriers, cultural invaders, and illegal voters. Academics must refute all such depictions with a different discourse and more historical context.

Academic research reveals right-wing depictions of immigrants to
be intentional fabrications and see a more complex world of migration. Free trade agreements and structural adjustment programs have displaced labor that fuels migration, and the corporate designers of NAFTA took economic advantage of Mexican workers cheapened by the difficulty of movement across the United States border, thereby maintaining Mexico’s “comparative advantage” in cheap labor for transnational corporations. Corporate elites foresaw that imports of United States agroindustrial corn and the rescinding of Mexican support for peasant agriculture would lead to massive displacements, including to northern Mexico where United States agroindustry has long been expanding, but apparently assumed labor would not cross the border. Of course, they cared little about the displacements leading to broken families or psychological distress of leaving home (Delgado Wise and Cypher 2007; Fernández-Kelly and Massey 2007). Such anticipated displacements are rarely covered in the media. Thus, when the United States responded with military “operations” (Gatekeeper, Hold the Line, Intercept) to halt a wave of immigration just two years after NAFTA came into effect, migration was treated as a spreading virus rather than as a partial result of NAFTA. Both the language and response to increased migration are in military terms, rather than as a problem of development in Mexico or the rights of people to stay home. Unlike the European Union, which preempted displacements from its southern countries via compensatory investments, North American elites did nothing to invest in Mexico but kept the borders closed to Mexican labor (Wilcox Young 1995). Under our free trade, businesses and commodities can move more freely but workers cannot, whereas under European free markets workers can move freely as well. Rarely if ever does the media discuss this design of “unfree” markets. Instead, they sometimes obfuscate the phenomenon not as elites versus workers, but Mexico versus the United States. The Mexican and United States economies have been inextricable since the 19th century, and obstacles to labor movement on the United States border have not surprisingly been ineffective but not so from the perspective of many United States businesses. As long as the border is open enough for a large pool of vulnerable-by-design and therefore cheap, adventurous, hardworking Mesoamericans to enter, then economic conservatives have no reason to negotiate an immigration agreement.

Negative stereotypes of Mesoamerican immigrants emanate from social conservatives, although environmentalists and labor unions have contributed in the past. Given that they are unfounded, they smack of racism, not of the average woman or man on the street, but by the fear-mongering pundits that they are so willing to believe. I hold out hope that popularization of academic research can change some minds. It not only must be effectively communicated that Mesoamericans have been made vulnerable and cheap by design, but also transnational elites have facilitated a tradition of migration. It must be repeated that tougher border enforcement has only served to transform circular migrants into permanent immigrants. The public should know that undocumented immigrants commit less crime than the general population, and no known terrorist has illegally crossed the southern border (Pew Research Center). Various studies point out what businesses and local governments already know—that when welcomed, immigrants contribute more to economies and vibrant communities than they take in government services, contrary to the skewed accounting of ardent White nationalist Kris Kobach, who uses only government spending and taxes for his calculations. When conservatives call for building walls and expelling all 11 million undocumented migrants in the U.S., it is clear that cost is not the issue for them. Social conservatives, including Kobach’s academic advisor, Samuel Huntington, sound the alarm that Mexicans with their culturally contaminating ways are taking over large swaths of the country, but Hispanics learn English and contribute to United States culture and society at the same rates as other ethnic groups. Only 8 percent of second-generation Hispanics are not fluent in English. While social conservatives emphasize undocumented Mexicans as the problem, only about half of the undocumented are Mexican, and Hispanics constitute only half of the total foreign-born population in the United States. You would never know this by reading popular media. One would also be oblivious to the fact that from one third to one half of undocumented immigrants overstay their tourist visas, not sneak across the border (Pew Research Center 2015).

Fighting White nationalist stereotypes cannot be done only by accentuating the human rights and the refugee conditions of immigrants. The historical, political, and economic forces behind migration must be repeatedly highlighted. No longer should the phrase “no fault of their own” be applied only to the child migrants, as if their parents were to blame for the structural conditions promoting transnational migration (Bacon 2015). Language referring to migrants’ immigration status should be avoided. The unreflective use of terms like illegal aliens, criminals, and unauthorized or undocumented immigrants effectively reduces attention to the act of crossing the border in the same way that “wetback” does, rather than to complexities behind migration. Replacing these with more historically precise terms like displaced workers or economic refugees does not completely resolve the problem either because as the preface of this discussion adeptly points out, the reasons for migrating to the United States are not solely economic. Youth migrate for adventure and social capital, others migrate to escape local strongmen, gangs, mafias, or abusive husbands and parents, others move to unite families, some seek
specialized medical treatment, and others migrate to support the children’s education on either side of the border. Perhaps the best labels still are migrants for circular movers and immigrants for those intending to stay in their new host country.

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UNDOCUMENTED. UNAFRAID. UNAPOLOGETIC.

By Ruth Gomberg-Muñoz

On a cold, drizzly afternoon in March 2013, some two hundred people gathered in Chicago’s Federal Plaza. This was an immigrant rights rally, but it was very different from the “mega marches” for immigrant rights that I had attended in Chicago in 2006 and 2007. There were no politicians here today: no congresspeople, no mayor, no high profile representatives from the NAACP or National Council of La Raza. Members of Chicago’s Immigrant Youth Justice League (IYJL) had organized the rally, which was attended by students representing various high schools and colleges, as well as several workers’ groups, a few religious organizations, and a visible presence of LGTBQ activists. The rally organizers even looked different. Rather than college graduation caps and gowns often donned by immigrant youth activists, the organizers of this rally wore T-shirts that read, “Out of the Shadows, Into the Streets” on the front and “Undocumented. Unafraid. Unapologetic,” on the back.

The messaging at this rally was different, too. No one described “America” as a “nation of immigrants,” and not once were we exhorted to vote. Instead, speakers took the microphone to declare their refusal to live in fear and shame. They talked about United States foreign policies that had disrupted life in their homelands, compelling their family members to make difficult decisions to relocate. Youth applauded their parents for sacrificing to bring them to the United States, and they critiqued the recent immigration program, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), that provides benefits for them but leaves their parents behind. One young speaker, Stephanie, concluded her speech by telling the crowd, “I am here fighting for my family’s right and all our families across racial lines to be included in immigration reform. I am here because I refuse to let the current immigration hierarchy divide us! Walang papeles, walang takot! [‘No papers, no fear!’]. My name is Stephanie. We stand undocumented, unafraid, and undivided.”

IYJL was formed in 2009 by a group of undergraduate students at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) following a mobilization to halt the deportation of a UIC student. In March of 2010, IYJL led its first “Coming Out of the Shadows” march and rally. Youth had prepared signs and banners for the march that read “Undocumented and Unafraid,” and they planned to march through Chicago’s downtown and hold a rally in Federal Plaza, where students would speak publicly about their immigration status. As we gathered in Union Park, the stepping-off point for the march, an older woman representing a well-established immigration rights organization took an “Undocumented and Unafraid” sign away from the young woman standing next to me. “That’s too dangerous for you to carry,” the older woman admonished her. She turned to me, “Are you a U.S. citizen?” she asked. I nodded. “Here,” she said, thrusting the sign into my hands.

When Stephanie took the stage at Federal Plaza three years later, her words were intended to carry a message, not...
only to those who would deny undocumented people rights in the United States, but also to mainstream advocates of immigrant rights as well. In particular, Stephanie was responding to organizers who, like the woman in the park, were complicit in silencing undocumented people in paternalistic attempts to “protect” them. Following the 2010 march, IYJL organizers vowed not let mainstream organizations overtake their messaging or challenge their leadership again. One statement that a youth posted on Facebook shortly after the march sticks with me: “If you want to stand with me, stand beside me, but not in front of me.”

When youth like Stephanie declare themselves to be “undocumented and unafraid,” they reiterate their autonomy from mainstream immigrant rights organizations that were initially reluctant to allow undocumented youth a space at the table in national conversations on immigration reform.

The word “unapologetic” was added to IYJL’s messaging in 2011 after the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act failed in congress. Campaigns in support of the DREAM Act had often featured undocumented youth dressed in college graduation caps and gowns, emphasizing their educational achievement, assimilation, and future economic contributions to United States society. DREAM Act campaigns also highlighted the innocence of undocumented youth who were brought to the United States as children and, thus, were absolved of guilt in having violated United States immigration laws. Many IYJL organizers felt compromised by such messages, which work to divide the undocumented community into more and less “worthy” immigrants, reinforcing the “immigration hierarchy” that Stephanie spoke against. In particular, narratives that underscore the “innocence” of undocumented youth distance youth from their parents, who bear the blame for having violated United States law. “Unapologetic” is, in part, a refusal of youth to censure their parents’ migration decisions, in defiance of mainstream DREAM Act messaging. Instead, youth like Stephanie thanked their parents for their sacrifices. On Father’s Day that year, a meme that circulated on social media depicted a male figure gazing across a desert landscape holding only a backpack and a jug of water. “My father would do anything for me,” it read. “He would cross 1,000 borders.”

Following the DREAM Act’s failure, many IYJL leaders doubled down on their organizing efforts, participating in civil disobedience actions to demand a moratorium on deportations and an end to the Secure Communities program. They began advocating for cases that were considered “problematic,” such as deportations of people with criminal records, to challenge tropes that portray “criminals” as deserving of deportation. Then, when the DACA program was implemented in 2012, “unapologetic” took on renewed significance, as “DACAmented” youth were granted some protection from deportation, a work permit, and a driver’s license, while undocumented adults were not. Immediately, another meme began to circulate: “Work permit and driver’s license? Thanks. Now I can get to my Stop Deportations rally easier.” Youth leaders reiterated their commitment to advocating on behalf of a broader immigrant community.

Most of IYJL’s founding leaders have gone on to join statewide or national immigrant advocacy organizations, bringing their skills to those groups. Here in Chicago, IYJL has profoundly, perhaps permanently, changed the tone of immigrant rights organizing, pushing campaigns to be more reflective, more inclusive, and far more critical in their messaging and demands.

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**URGENT NEED TO ADDRESS PUNITIVE IMMIGRATION POLICIES**

**By De Ann Pendry**

I believe that much of the research on immigration generated in the United States has focused on the undocumented and the poor and the vulnerable because of the urgent need to respond (in and outside of the academy) to the dehumanizing discourse about so-called “illegals,” and to the increasingly “criminalizing” legislation being proposed, passed, and/or implemented, not only at the federal level, but at the state and local levels. The punitive policies generally have not been directed at entrepreneurs and “skilled” labor. Past policies as well as current proposals for immigration reform have favored them over working class immigrants.

Within anthropology and the other social sciences, when choosing a topic, many researchers consider: who will benefit from the...
research being conducted? I believe the answer to this question has led many researchers (including me) to prioritize elevating the voices and concerns of the “oppressed” and putting research about other kinds of migrants on the back burner. After all, even an academic who moves from Texas to Tennessee for work is an economic migrant. Nevertheless, in the social science literature on migration, researchers have been conducting studies about entrepreneurial and professional migrants for some time. From the perspective of human rights for all, comparative approaches can highlight how policies favor some migrants over others, as Aihwa Ong (1996) did when she compared Hong Kong businessmen with Cambodian refugees in California.

In addition, if one heeds the calls in anthropology to “study up,” this should include more ethnographic studies of the migration policymakers. As an activist, I would like to see more work (along the lines of Gonzales 2014) tracing how right-wing activists, such as Kris Kobach, managed to convince state legislators to introduce statutes intended to “make the lives of illegals so miserable that they would choose to self-deport.”

In Tennessee, for example, a group of young immigrants managed to convince one legislator to withdraw the bill she was sponsoring; she had not even read it. As an anthropologist/activist, I know that I prefer to spend my time supporting the efforts of undocumented and documented working class Latino immigrants who are active in the social movements calling for change. Thus, we have many rich ethnographic accounts of the lives of migrants. However, when we place their lives in the larger context of power relations, we tend to draw on media accounts and the public record to deconstruct the discourse and policies.

Because many scholars and activists based in the United States feel compelled to critique the most egregious discourse generated by Huntington, the Minute Men, and the Center for Immigration Studies, we have tended to address immigration policy debates in ways that mirror the press, who will interview representatives of anti- and pro-immigrant groups. Although scholars may conduct or refer to public opinion polls, there is less ethnographic research on the large group of non-immigrants who may or may not be politically active and who may or may not be influenced by the rhetoric of well-funded, ultra-right wing, White supremacy groups. This includes people who have chosen to be allies, as well as those who interact with immigrants at work, at school, in church, and in loving relationships. Ethnographies that focus on workplaces or the everyday lives of immigrants (such as Zololniski 2006 or Smith 2009) provide some evidence of this, but more could be done to highlight alternative discourses and practices. For example, I was struck when I participated in a national phone call in which a facilitator led activists from around the country in an exercise about messaging: it was much easier for us to list the negative views than it was for us to articulate discourse that affirmed human rights for all.

To situate myself briefly, I am of European descent, born and raised in Hawai’i but also lived in Honduras as a child, so I speak Spanish fluently. I earned a master’s in Latin American Studies and a Ph.D. in cultural anthropology from the University of Texas at Austin. There, I was influenced most by the approaches that address social inequalities and power relations. In 2004, I obtained a position as a lecturer at the University of Tennessee. The first year I was swamped with preparing new classes and applying for tenure-track jobs. The following year, I continued applying for tenure-track jobs, but decided not to postpone getting involved in the local community. I wanted to formulate a new research project in collaboration with local Latino immigrants but did not start with a well-formulated plan.

In 2005, I attended a meeting organized by the Tennessee Immigration and Refugee Rights Coalition, and ever since then, I have attended countless meetings, helped organize public events, participated in marches, and lobbied federal, state, and local officials. The activism has far outweighed my ability to generate academic publications about this work. However, I felt a pressing need to participate along with members of the affected communities and other allies in attempts to influence the political system, to change the discourse, to prevent punitive legislation from passing at the federal and state levels, to prevent the implementation of 287(g) in our county (which was successful), and most recently, to support a bill that would enable undocumented students to pay in-state tuition at public colleges and universities in Tennessee (which was one vote short in 2015 and will be reintroduced). Another factor that drew me in the direction of activism is that Tennessee is a “new destination.” As Lourdes Gouveia (2006) and others have pointed out, I arrived just as service and advocacy groups were beginning to form. Thus, I became part of a small group of people who were overwhelmed with the political tasks at hand. In addition, as a Spanish speaker, I often serve as a liaison between immigrants and their other allies. I suspect my dilemma is not unusual, which leads to another question about what counts as knowledge production about migration.

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WHAT DOES A MEXICAN MIGRANT LIFE STORY TELL US ABOUT MIGRATION?

By Marcia Barreto

Bebianno Simoes

Karina’s Story

I lived in Mexico for more than twenty years. During this time, I finished my career in anthropology, got married, and raised my children while working full-time. Karina was part of my life for most of these years. She started working at the house as a nanny when my older child was about to turn two and twelve years later moved to the United States and continued to work with my family.

Through many hours of formal and informal interviews, I have documented Karina’s views on migration and how she experienced it. I am hoping to convey here her perspectives and give voice to her through this short narrative.

Like many other migrants in Mexico, Karina first migrated from her small rural community in Guerrero to Mexico City.

“I first left my home when I was thirteen years old. I had finished elementary school and wanted to attend middle school, but my father would not let me. I was a girl and had no business going to the nearby town to attend school—he wanted me to help in the fields, which I really hated, help my mother, and eventually get married.”

Guerrero is one of the poorest States in Mexico. More than 42 percent of its population live in a town with less than 2,500 inhabitants and depend on temporal agriculture (peasant economy). Since the 1980s, the outmigration to the capital and to the United States started increasing, and currently, the state holds the lowest net migration rates, which reached -1.8 percent (INEGI 2011).

Karina’s village was no exception. When she left her village, many had already settled in the city and in the United States, where a relatively large community of migrants from her region have settled in North Carolina.

“I finally managed to convince him to let me go to Mexico City, to live with my aunt and uncle who had migrated to the city a few years back, and eventually find a job. I had to threaten my father I would run away if he would not allow me to go to the city….”

Karina had never left her village before—it was surrounded by a river, and at that time forty years ago, had no electricity or running water. She often refers to these first years in Mexico City—she was so scared, but at the same time it was the way out of the community life she was destined to have as a girl.

Landing in Mexico City, learning her way around, and working were very hard. Karina recalls: “In the beginning, it was very difficult, because…oh God, such a big city, and I felt so lonely…. I worked for my aunt for a year with no pay, and then she found a job for me as a domestic worker. I had to take a bus and the metro…. I was so scared…. I thought cars would run me over…. I cried a lot.”

Two years later, Karina started working with my family. During the twelve years she worked for me in Mexico, she met her husband, got married, and had three children. Five years into her marriage, her husband left her with three very small children. Though he came back a few months later and convinced her they should move back to her village, it did not last. This time, he left the village with a woman with which he was having an affair. Karina felt humiliated, and to this day, she still feels ashamed when she goes back to the community.

Bebianno Simoes


Zolniiski, Christian

Karina was devastated, morally and economically. The village was not an option, and she had to return to the city to work to feed the children, trying to make ends meet. She left the baby with her parents, the oldest girl with her aunt, and brought the middle girl to live with us. Her life became work from Monday to Sunday, no rest. When she left the job, she had to tend to the children and help her aunt who took care of one of the girls, and she never managed to cover all the expenses.

When the opportunity came to migrate to the United States, she seized it immediately, despite having to leave her children behind. The trade off for her was straightforward. She explains: “What’s my future and that of my girls if I stay here? I cannot work more than I do, so I either keep struggling and accept that their lives won’t be any different than mine, or I try to make a better living for them, but leave them behind…."

Sixteen years have gone by. Karina has established herself in the United States, both economically and socially. She has put her children through school, and one of them is in college. Furthermore, she sends money to her father to help pay for agricultural expenses, contributing to improve their lives as well.

**Comments**

From my perspective, these are some of the relevant issues in Karina’s story in regards to her perceptions on migration.

First is the rural to urban migration. For many young girls in rural areas, moving to the City to perform domestic work is the only option to leave the community. Thus, migrating from rural to urban areas is the first step to international migration.

Second, a culture of emigration is prevalent in Karina’s social world and enables migration as an option. Lack of opportunities, unemployment, and poverty are not enough to make people move; it must be an option available for them in the social practices of their national cultures, as it was for Karina (Cohen and Sirkeci 2011).

Finally, Karina was motivated to come to the United States by the expectation of a better income that would allow her to raise her children and offer them an education. When migration becomes an option available to the women as a common social practice in their context, it nourishes expectations of economic opportunities.

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**ANTHROPOLOGY AND IMMIGRATION: LEVEL OF ANALYSIS, MUSEUMS, AND THE INTERNET**

**By Maria Sprehn-Malagón**

The production of knowledge and dialogue about immigration in the United States and Mexico from an anthropological perspective includes varying levels of analysis and paths of communication. Levels of analysis in anthropological research and conversation about immigration reflect the untidy ethnic and racial cultural constructions within, across, and between the Anglo and Latin Americas. With regard to how we talk about immigration, important paths of communication linking scholars, governments, non-profits, and the general public are museums and the Internet. As an anthropologist working and living in the Washington, DC, area, I will focus my comments on the nation’s capital area which includes the city and surrounding counties in Maryland and Virginia.

Recent years have seen a marked increase in research on Latinos/Hispanics in the DC metropolitan area by anthropologists and other scholars. In contrast to other United States cities, DC’s Latino/Hispanic community lacks a majority in representation from one country of origin and has the highest percentage of foreign-born in the United States. The United States Census estimates that approximately 15 percent of Latinos/Hispanics in the nation’s capital area identify as Mexican, the second largest group to Salvadorans. In part, due to this diverse demographic, the dialogue among contemporary researchers and their research has primarily focused on a panethnic level of analysis which subsumes people from all countries...
of origin in Latin America, the Spanish speaking Caribbean, and Spain. Researchers do, however, recognize and address the diversity in country of origin, socioeconomic status, age, language, and immigration status within the Latino/Hispanic population. While most studies have had a panethnic lens, some studies have specifically addressed Salvadoran immigration. The point here is that the racial and ethnic cultural constructions of the United States as a nation-state do impact levels of analysis as well as how people in the Latino/Hispanic community identify themselves. Immigrants do not become Latino/Hispanic until they enter the United States, and in a metropolitan area with a hyper-diverse representation of Latino/Hispanic cultures, this category has become one with which many people identify. In contrast, in other parts of the United States and on the southern side of the Rio Grande, categories and levels of analysis of people reflect different demographics and the cultural constructions of Mexico as a nation-state. Other levels of analysis address transnational and undocumented peoples.

Recently, the need for anthropologists to engage in issues related to immigration, particularly anti-immigrant sentiments, has heightened. Museums provide a place, both physical and virtual, for a more inclusive dialogue about immigration through time and across space. The breadth of information available in museum collections and ongoing projects in addition to their mission to disseminate knowledge to the general public and scholars alike are key factors in balancing the dialogue about immigration as the general public is overwhelmingly presented with the negative impacts of the south to north migration. Anthropologists focused on immigration in the DC area have included Mexican but often within the broader Latino/Hispanic category. In addition to the academic conferences and peer-reviewed publications including journals and books, DC area anthropologists and scholars have produced and disseminated knowledge through local museums including the Smithsonian. The Smithsonian Latino Center, created in 1997 to promote Latino presence in the institution, has produced numerous exhibits and projects that reach back in history and cross international borders. In general, museums are capable of generating exhibits that highlight historical and contemporary narratives about immigration as well as exhibits that underscore the positive contributions of immigration in American culture.

Museums, as generators of knowledge based on collections of objects, photographs, and documents, have access to information that reach far back in time and across many topics. For example, the National Museum of American History (NMAH) exhibit “America on the Move” includes a theme on immigration and migration. Within a section of Latino Stories in the on-line exhibit, the early 20th century immigrant experience of Mexican Juana Gallegos is told through photographs and documents originating on both sides of the border. Another section of the exhibit highlights the Bracero program, also using photographs of life on both sides of the border.

While institutions such as museums can provide access to information with deep historical and wide spatial boundaries, the Internet supports the need to disseminate information quickly—imperative in engaging anthropologists outside the academic realm and as advocates. The role of the Internet in the dialogue about immigration among anthropologists and within the general public should be included in the “how” we talk about immigration. The Internet provides another way to distribute knowledge and engage others beyond the peer-reviewed articles, academic books, and professional conferences. Information, opinions, and tweets are funneled through social media, blogs, and websites. These communication tools allow the conversation and distribution of knowledge to move at a much faster pace than through anthropology’s traditional means of publication and annual meetings. Drawing the attention of the scholarly community as well as the wider public to the often swiftly changing situations related to immigration becomes more rapid and possibly more effective by using the Internet and other communication tools. The Internet also bridges the border between the United States and Mexico but only if the flow of information is “followed” and collaboration on the dissemination of knowledge occurs. Often the paths of information about immigration proceed on parallel paths as individuals subscribe to portals of information (e.g., websites, blogs, on-line news sources) that are tailored to their own interests and language preferences.

Perhaps as anthropologists on both sides of the Rio Bravo/Rio Grande who conduct research and fulfill obligations to disseminate knowledge about immigration, we should give more thought to engaging not only with one another but with our governments and general public as well. Paying closer attention to how our scales of analysis translate across the border and how we can use museums and communication technology to engage more broadly, we can bring about greater understanding and appreciation of emigrant, immigrant, and transnational peoples.

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POPULAR VS. ACADEMIC NOTIONS ON GLOBALIZATION AND IM/MIGRATION

By Alayne Unterberger

When I entered graduate school in 1998, I was hopeful that my anthropological training and acquired skills would contribute to public engagement and discourse on im/migration, im/migrants, identity, and public policy. I was hopeful when the term “globalization” featured on the cover of Time in 2001; my hopefulness turned into a more concrete engagement on how others were experiencing “globalization.” Often, in those years, discussions about globalization became concerns about global trade and NAFTA, then CAFTA; however, the dynamic nature of globalization and its far-reaching effects often did not become part of a larger dialogue that I had hoped would emerge. In this essay, I am reflecting upon my own and others’ research on im/migration and the disconnect(s) between research and popular views on migrants, immigrants, migration, and immigration. After twenty years of studying migration and im/migrants, a more nuanced, enlightened, and engaged public with an awareness on these topics still seems to be a goal, not a reality. This essay might raise more questions than anything else, but the questions seem important in this analysis.

Currently, there are approximately forty-two million immigrants in the United States, according to the DHS’ Office of Immigration Statistics (OIS 2015). The Migration Policy Institute (Zong and Batalova 2015) and DHS agree that there are approximately 11.4 million unauthorized immigrants in the United States, a figure that has not changed since about 2011. With 42 million as a denominator, the math works out that about 26 percent of all immigrants are undocumented or unauthorized, with four states accounting for 55 percent of the 11 million: California (28%), Texas (13%), New York (8%), and Florida (6%). Unauthorized im/migrants obtain fraudulent Social Security numbers, usually at high rates through the black market in order to work in the United States. Paid labor is then tracked using this fraudulent Social Security number. As a result, authorized or unauthorized im/migrants pay taxes on the wages earned just like everyone else. However, the fraudulent numbers are flagged in the IRS system, and there is little to no way for im/migrants to receive any benefits they have paid into FICA (Social Security, Disability, unemployment). By not having to pay out benefits to millions of workers, our government and economy benefit from both authorized and, especially, unauthorized immigrants.

Polls have shown that Americans object to the idea that immigrants receive public benefits for themselves and United States-born children and consider this an expensive “drain on the economy.” The public seems unaware that state and local laws ban immigrants from receiving said benefits. They are also largely unaware that immigrants, especially undocumented families, pay the same taxes they do. These taxes fund public services such as food stamps, Medicaid, Medicare, or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which exclude undocumented families. If the public is not aware of this reality, which has been federal law since 1996’s welfare reform, “The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996” (PROWA), and was state law in California by 1994, then the question is, why?
Are the media our friends or foes in creating a more balanced public conversation? Or, is the better question one of how anthropologists should engage media to promote a more critical set of frames to discuss policy?

A further disconnect between academics and the public lies in linguistics. In the public sphere, it seems that the lines between immigrant and migrant are blurred to the extent that there is little question that “migrant” means Mexican, undocumented, and “wetback” (as observed by many others). Similarly, migration as a separate activity from immigration is not a concept most Americans understand in the same way that scholars use these terms. Teaching undergraduates, many of whom are themselves immigrants, has taught me that they struggle with these concepts and tend to lump “immigration” together as a sort of “movement to the United States from a home country” as if it is a unidirectional, somewhat static, historical occurrence. We, as immigration scholars, know this is far from the case and, as this issue’s editors point out, anthropologists tend to focus on the dynamic transnational nature of immigration (Kearney 1995). Why, then, is there such a divide between how the public perceives these issues, even immigrant youth and children of immigrants, and how we as scholars document them?

When I cover globalization, transnational movements, and binational migration flows between the United States and Mexico in class, usually students speak knowledgeably about visiting their family’s hometown in the Dominican Republic, Cuba, or Nicaragua. At the same time, most cannot fathom their family’s return in a real or permanent way, even though they recognize that their parents desire and often spend months in their homeland, own family homes, and remit money on a regular basis. For some reason, the transnational nature of their family is not clear to them. Often, these class discussions are the first and possibly the only time a student is challenged to examine their bicultural and/or transcultural identity and/or views. So, it is my observation that even binationalists and transnationals have difficulty embracing this kind of identity in contemporary United States culture. At the same time, that does not stop academics from talking about it. Maybe part of the disconnect is that academics talk to each other about these phenomena but these discussions do not happen on a public level.

Global citizenship versus globalization is the difference between free flows of products and commerce versus the freedom of people to cross borders. In popular and media discourse, issues of economics tend to predominate discussions of globalization processes, while discussions of immigration become bogged down in discussions of “illegality,” borders, and/or rights, which is where these discussions tend to stalemate and linger with no conclusion. As Paul Stoller (2015) recently pointed out in the Huffington Post, fear fuels anti-immigrant sentiment, and it is especially prevalent during presidential elections every four years. This political rhetoric plays a role in creating more distance between research and public perception. This plays out in different—unexpected—ways. One such example lies in the dilution of the power of the Latino vote in light of such vehement anti-immigration discourse during the last two elections. Both of Obama’s successful bids were helped by Latino voters, but immigration, which was their policy priority, did not get traction until his second term, meaning that even those who feel most passionately about this issue recognize its lack of priority on a large scale (Renwick and Lee 2015).

What the research shows, however, is that debates and coverage on immigration tend to set agendas less frequently than previously thought (Renwick and Lee 2015; Whibey 2015). The key finding after looking at multiple cycles is that “increased voter knowledge on issues, too, does not necessarily equal persuasion, and studies confirm the idea that the debates reinforce partisan positions” (Whibey 2012:para.8). So if debates and media tend to only reinforce partisan and preconceived views, couldn’t this also mean that we, as social scientists, might have an opportunity to promote our research in a way that challenges preconceived notions? And, if there is this opportunity, how, when, and where should we focus our efforts? Maybe it is not only through the media. Maybe we should find a way to work within the K-12 classrooms.

**References Cited**


Stoller, Paul 2015 Trumping Fears of the Other: Media and the Politics of Contagion, Huffington Post Blog, August 2015.


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