

Anti-immigrant Sentiment and the Problem of Reproduction/Maintenance in Mexican Immigration to the United States

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Abstract ■ This article explores the links between 1) the growing militarization of the US–Mexico border; 2) state legislation such as California’s Proposition 187 designed to deny undocumented workers and their non-citizen wives and children state-funded medical, educational, and other social services; 3) the call by some sectors of the population to deny US citizenship to children born in the US to undocumented immigrants, but in most cases also to legally permanent residents who have not yet acquired citizenship; and 5) threats of deportation of undocumented workers, cases highly publicized in both the US and Mexico. It is argued that these phenomena are related to the desire to re-separate the processes of production and reproduction among the now more permanent Mexican labor force working in the US. With the fall of the USSR no other nation has taken upon itself the *moral* task of criticizing human rights abuses in the US, providing a more permissive environment for the abuses perpetrated against Mexican workers and their families.

Keywords ■ Mexican immigration to the United States ■ migration networks ■ militarization of the US border ■ production/reproduction ■ undocumented immigration

In this article I will attempt to answer the following question: What is the link between (1) the growing militarization of the US–Mexico border designed, with its planes, helicopters, guns, cast iron fences, infra-red telescopes, body sensors and other military technology and tactics, to regulate the entry of undocumented workers to the United States and leading to the deaths of many (Dunn, 1996: 2; see also Eschbach et al., 1999; Heyman, 1998; Huspek et al., 1998), but not to stop their flow entirely; (2) state legislation such as California’s Proposition 187 and its subsequent clones in other states, designed to deny undocumented workers and their non-citizen wives and children state-funded medical, educational and other social services; (3) movements to deny US citizenship to children born in the United States to undocumented mothers (Roberts, 1997) which necessitates

changes in the US Constitution; (4) recent reforms in federal welfare and immigration laws, embodied in the 1996 Personal Responsibilities and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Individual Responsibility Act of 1996, which deny federal, state and local benefits not only to undocumented immigrants, but, in most cases, also to legally permanent residents who have not yet acquired citizenship (Aleinikoff, 1997; Fragomen, 1997; Gimpel and Edwards, 1999; Huber, 1997; McCarthy and Vernez, 1997: 277); (5) the highly publicized threats of deportation of undocumented workers telegraphed by all media of communication from 1997 to 1999? An important ideological-cultural context for these phenomena relates to the fall of the Soviet Union and the subsequent resurgence of nativism/restrictionism.

The five phenomena are linked, I will argue, through their function in re-creating a separation between the processes of generational and daily reproduction of the labor force, including its maintenance during times of unemployment, illness and retirement (processes which represent a cost to any society) and of productive activity (a process which represents a gain to any society). The avoidance of the costs of reproduction and maintenance and the accessing of the benefits of productive activity is most easily achieved if the low-skilled and semi-skilled labor force is born and raised elsewhere, and presents itself ready to work in a state of health and adequate maturity. It is also, thus, most easily achieved if male workers migrate from the country of maintenance and reproduction (the source country) *without female dependents and children*, presenting themselves for surplus labor extraction at the site of productivity activity (the destination country) without encumbrances. The fall of the USSR has altered the international moral climate with its accompanying ideological pressures in such a way that the resurgence of a deep-rooted American nativism has been unleashed.

Between the 1930s, with its massive deportations of entire Mexican families, some of whose members were US citizens (Hoffman, 1979), until the mid-1960s, Mexican workers, undocumented or documented, have provided this ideal labor force. Most Mexican wage labor migrants, whether entering the United States without documents or under short-term labor contracts, were either recurrent migrants, arriving to work each year for short periods of time, or 'target earners' (Chavez, 1992; Massey et al., 1994; Piore, 1979) who crossed the border to earn a predetermined sum of money in order to invest in small businesses, farmland, farm machinery or housing in Mexico. They were involved in what Roberts et al. (1999: 242-3) have described as a temporary migration system as opposed to a more recent permanent migration system.¹

Beginning in the 1960s, several economic, social and legal innovations began to reverberate upon potential and actual migration streams from Mexico to the United States, leading to greater migration of wives and offspring, as well as unmarried sisters, joining their pioneering husbands,

fathers and brothers in the United States. These included, first, the widespread adoption of Green Revolution technologies, introduced into Mexico under the auspices of the Rockefeller Foundation in the early 1940s. The adoption of these technologies propelled a differentiation of the peasantry into larger and smaller landholders; created, along with demographic pressures, an ever larger landless rural class; and accelerated the change from intermittent or permanent semi-proletarianization to full proletarianization of male family members, including the male head of household (Hewitt de Alcantara, 1976). Pressures on women to engage in productive economic activities or to labor for a wage were also increased among marginal families. Second, the official termination of the Bracero Program in 1964, after 22 years of existence, both ensured that recurrent wage labor migration to the United States was no longer officially facilitated on such a massive scale² and led some employers to aid their previous *braceros* in arranging legal permanent residence. A year after the termination of the Program, changes in US immigration laws gave preference to family members of various categories for entry into and legal residence in the United States, permitting those *braceros* who had obtained legal residence formally to sponsor the immigration of relatives. Third, the almost concomitant maturation of many migration networks and the reestablishment or expansion of numerous 'daughter communities' (Chavez, 1988; Massey et al., 1987), linking specific Mexican communities to sites of destination within the United States, occurred on a scale unknown since prior to the Great Depression of the 1930s.

I will summarize each of these changes in turn, then argue that subsequent to or concomitantly with them, the previously separated processes of reproduction/maintenance and production tended to converge among undocumented immigrants, leading to their greater concentration in the United States. On a society-wide level, benefits offered by undocumented workers were no longer exceptionally high, and costs associated with their reproduction and maintenance increased and became more obvious. Meanwhile, after the fall of the Soviet Union, there was no great power which exerted ideological pressure against the super-exploitation of Mexican immigrant labor or against human and civil rights abuses on the border.

The Green Revolution, the differentiation of the peasantry and women's work

In *Modernizing Mexican Agriculture* Hewitt de Alcantara (1976) analyses how the Green Revolution, initiated immediately after the Second World War, quickly led to an accelerated differentiation of the peasantry in the Mexican countryside. The hybrid corn-herbicide-pesticide-chemical fertilizer package, with its technical base in monocropping and the use of farm

machinery, represented an expensive alternative to traditional intercropping with indigenous corn varieties which, while yielding less tonnage per hectare, were better adapted to survival in a given micro-environment without costly inputs. Better-off peasants, who could afford the new seeds and inputs, were able to take advantage of Green Revolution technology and become capitalist farmers, producing for the market and hiring in laborers during peak agricultural seasons. Poorer peasants were eventually forced to sell all or part of their land, becoming landless wage-laborers or subsistence and sub-subsistence farmers. As Lenin (1984) observed in the case of the Russian peasantry, the middle peasantry was threatened with landlessness or near landlessness with every crop failure.

Many of the poorest eventually migrated to the burgeoning Mexican cities; others remained anchored to the *rancho* (rural population center), taking seasonal work on plantations or for the better-off farmers in their own or nearby *ranchos*, or toiling as artisans, masons, construction workers, brickmakers or vendors, locally or far afield. Some became involved in the Bracero Program, and later entered transnational migration networks that led to some of them settling in the United States. It was, however, the young unmarried males and male household heads with some capital to risk who pioneered the subsequent migration streams to the United States (Massey et al., 1987, 1994; Mines and Massey, 1985), often with the short-term goal of retaining or capitalizing the family farm, combatting losses from crop failures or falls in prices for their produce, or diversifying their economic portfolio to include a small business. Many young, unmarried men entered to work in the United States in order to finance the building of a house back home, prior to marriage. The family plot, no matter how modest, remained the site of the reproduction and maintenance of the family left behind and of the worker when he returned.

Two aspects of this system of transnationally migrant semi-proletarianization are notable: first, the importance of semi-proletarianization in the source region to the profit-making of the capitalist firms in the destination region; second, the gendered character of the articulation between the household economy at the point of origin and the capitalist economy at the destination.

Meillassoux (1981), focusing on African migrations, provides a most elaborate theoretical consideration of the subsidy to capitalism provided by the semi-proletarianized peasantry. He argues that the value of labor power is composed of three elements: 'sustenance of the workers during periods of employment (i.e. *reconstitution* of immediate labor power; *maintenance* during periods of unemployment (due to stoppages, ill-health, etc.), *replacement* by breeding of offspring' (Meillassoux, 1981: 100, italics in original). For workers fully integrated into the capitalist economy in advanced capitalist countries (or capitalist sectors of developing economies), maintenance and replacement of workers takes place within the capitalist sphere of production through the provision of indirect wages or fringe benefits.

When workers are paid only a direct wage for hours worked, as are recurrent migrants (or, in Meillassoux's terminology, 'rotating migrants'), for example, their maintenance and reproduction takes place outside the capitalist sphere of production, and within the domestic subsistence mode (Meillassoux, 1981: 102-3; see also Wilson, 1992: 17-23, 1993).³ Although resting his analysis on migrants of rural origin, the crucial point is that there is a subsidy to the workers' maintenance and reproduction at the home site. Income-generating activities by family members left behind could take place in either rural or urban centers. In the case of Mexican recurrent migrants, maintenance and reproduction take place in Mexico, whereas their labor is accessed in the United States.

Burowoy (1975) has compared the system of migrant labor in South Africa with Mexican migration to the United States. He found that in both cases capitalist employers benefit from immigrant labor because part of the costs of the maintenance of the labor force is borne by the subsistence economy in regions where standards of living are lower (see also Kearney, 1997; Portes, 1978; Portes and Walton, 1981; Sassen-Koob, 1978). Writing of Mexican migration to the United States, Cornelius (1989a: 2) points out 'the source communities function mainly as nurseries, rest-and-recreation centers for migrants temporarily worn out by their labors in the United States, and nursing homes for "retired" migrant workers and their spouses who did not opt to settle permanently in the United States'. It is in the source community that functions as a 'nursery' that the new generation of wage laborers destined for the fields and factories in the United States has been raised.

The gendered nature of the subsidy provided by the subsistence economy, whether involving agricultural production or livestock raising, has been well documented for Latin America (e.g. Deere, 1976; Hecht, 1985). It is wives as well as children left behind who contribute to the maintenance of the family plot or farm, assuring day-to-day reproduction of themselves and immature dependents, and of their recurrently migrant husbands and sons when they return. Although male migrants send remittances, they may be neither adequate for family maintenance, nor reliable. Wives and daughters of landless men who migrate may seek wage work in their husbands' or fathers' absence (Arias, 1994; Mummert, 1994). Wives and older daughters of transnational immigrants, landless, near-landless, and landed, provided (and are providing) a subsidy to the household economy through a variety of income-producing activities apart from maintaining the family farm or engaging in agricultural wage labor. These income-producing activities include artisanry such as weaving or embroidery (Arias, 1994; Stephen, 1993), employment in local garment workshops and other decentralized industries (Wilson, 1991), and working in strawberry- and other food-packaging plants (Arizpe and Aranda, 1986; Mummert, 1994). This is far from an exhaustive listing of women's waged and informal work.

In villages where transnational migrants are overwhelmingly male (which has been the case initially almost everywhere in Mexico), women's farmwork

and wage-earning has provided a subsidy to the household economy and has aided in reproducing and maintaining a base to which transnationally migrant males could return in times of sickness, unemployment or retirement. As the peasantry increasingly became differentiated into successful capitalist farmers and landless and near landless peasants, more men were pushed to look for a source of income across the border⁴ and women's (as well as children's and old folks') subsidy to the maintenance and reproduction of family members left behind became more widespread. Because of women's and children's work at the home site, then, immigrant workers could present themselves for surplus labor extraction without accompanying dependents and without demands on a 'safety net' in the country in which they performed labor. Immersion in activities such as outwork and factory labor gave women skills which they could eventually use across the border, once they joined their menfolk there (Arias, 1994; Mummert, 1994).

Notably, the differentiation of the peasantry in Mexico still continues and will be intensified once again due to changes in Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution promulgated by President Salinas de Gortari (1988–94). Under Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, *ejido* lands were distributed to men over 18 years of age. As per the definition of *ejido*, these lands could not be legally bought, sold, mortgaged or rented out, although they could be inherited. In practice, however, with the commercialization of agriculture, accelerating after the Second World War with the Green Revolution innovations, poorer farmers rented, sold and sharecropped land to better-off or more capitalized farmers. Notably the introduction of irrigation works and credit packages from government-owned banks accelerated the differentiation of the peasantry. After the changes initiated by Salinas de Gortari, these lands can now legally be alienated: sold, rented, lent or mortgaged. In a crisis of crop failure, such as has been occurring in the period from 1997 through 1999, due to excessive dryness followed by floods, the propensity to sell out will be heightened. As will be seen in the section on network maturation, the landless too begin to migrate transnationally once migration networks have matured, but, having little to return to, they also tend to settle in the United States. Women, who have experience earning income or who know it is possible for women to do so, often follow or accompany them.

The subsidy to capitalism in the United States, via the provision of a cheap labor force, born, raised and nursed elsewhere, has rested to a great extent on women's economic contributions to the household in the source community.

The Bracero Program, illegal immigration and women's entry into the migration stream

The full economic and social consequences of the differentiation of the peasantry occurring subsequent to the adoption of Green Revolution

technologies were partially deflected from 1942 to 1964 by the existence of the Bracero Program, as well as by an undocumented immigration which accompanied it and was facilitated by it. The Bracero Program, formalized in 1942 by the United States and Mexican governments, was designed to recruit Mexican labourers into industries suffering labor shortages due to the Second World War, mainly, but not exclusively, agricultural field work. The Bracero Program, with its short-term contracts, gave legal underpinning to recurrent wage labor migration and offered opportunities to villages with no previous massive migration history to incorporate recurrent migration into their collective economic portfolio. Its existence led to widespread, public knowledge about employment opportunities across the border.

Running alongside official recruitment of Mexican laborers were illegal immigration streams. Since, during the first years of the Bracero Program, men who had worked as *braceros* (Spanish: arms; English: 'hands') were not given preference for new contracts, nor was there initially any system for recontracting a 'good worker' by his previous employer, many *braceros* returned to the United States as undocumented workers, often as employees of the original grower to whom they had been contracted (Calavita, 1992). Throughout the Program, numerous *braceros* also 'skipped' their contracts and sought employers who paid them more or offered them better or more steady working conditions, becoming 'illegal aliens' in the process. Other potential *braceros*, due to irregularities in recruitment on the Mexican side, including requests for bribes in order to assure selection (Calavita, 1992: 91), avoided bureaucratic entanglements and crossed the border clandestinely from the start.

Whether as official *braceros* or as undocumented workers, a pattern of recurrent wage labor migration, with the separation of the processes of reproduction/maintenance (at origin) and productive work (at destination), was reinforced. Some men 'skipped' *bracero* labor entirely, and began seeking work in urban centers. Women, as mentioned above, continued to subsidize the household economy during the Bracero Program. Stephen (1993), for example, reports how Zapotec women in Oaxaca intensified their weaving to sell during the Bracero Program when men left for the United States in droves, but remittances were intermittent or uncertain. In the 1960s, when male migration became widespread in the Zamora region of Michoacan, wives left behind began working in the strawberry-packaging plants to make ends meet, despite intense opposition by their absent menfolk and aspersions cast on their morality by members of the community (Mummert, 1994). Today, daughters' work in the packaging plants 'has become a rite of passage for girls, much as going north is for young males' (Mummert, 1994: 201).

As will be explored below, young, single women, now accustomed to the idea of working for a wage, some with prior work experience and some without, increasingly crossed the border as well.⁵ Wives also joined their

husbands in the United States. Many, faced by spouses' lack of encouragement for their crossing, employed the help of siblings or female friends and relatives (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992, 1994; Massey and Espinosa, 1997; Mummert, 1994). Women also crossed the border alone, some to seek work, some to escape physical abuse from parents or spouses (Argüelles and Rivero, 1993). Many of the young, single women who crossed the border became potential mates for the young men who had entered the United States to seek work previously.

Initially, most married and single women entered the United States illegally. At the close of the Bracero Program, however, some employers arranged legal permanent residence for previous employees. One year later, in 1965, changes in US immigration law gave priority to family reunification. Legal residents and Mexican Americans who had married Mexican citizens took advantage of these provisions favoring their spouses and close relatives: once their residence was established, they too could then arrange papers for their parents and siblings, leading to a great expansion of eligible legal immigrants. If paperwork were too difficult, the presence of friends and relatives in the United States assured potential immigrants aid in the form of housing, information and often job placement, once they arrived. The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, with its legalization of many undocumented immigrants and its re-affirmation of the principle of family reunification, had the same effect, this time for formerly illegal residents.

Network maturation and the process of settlement

Numerous articles and books co-authored or authored by sociologist Douglas S. Massey have underscored the importance of the maturation of migration networks in the processes of increasing and sustaining migration flows and leading to permanent settlement of Mexican undocumented (or documented)⁶ immigrants in the United States (for example, Durand and Massey, 1992; Massey, 1987, 1990; Massey and Espinosa, 1997; Massey and García España, 1987; Massey et al., 1987, 1994; Mines and Massey, 1985). I will briefly outline their analysis here.

Pushed by motives of economic betterment or family risk diversification, pioneering immigrants tend to be neither so poor that they cannot risk the costs of the trip, nor so well-off that migration is viewed as unnecessary or undesirable (Mines and Massey, 1985: 105). Once these pioneering immigrants become acquainted with the host society and its employment opportunities, reciprocal obligations they share with non-migrant kin and friends lead to extending aid in the form of housing, loans for the trip across the border, and information about job openings. Because of these types of aid, the costs and risks associated with transnational migration are lowered. Over time, due to multiple relations of reciprocity, migration is facilitated even

for the poorest in the community (Durand and Massey, 1992; Massey et al., 1997).

As Massey et al. (1994: 1499–1500) explain:

Every new migrant . . . reduces the costs and risks and increases the attractiveness and feasibility of migration for a set of friends and relatives. With these lowered costs and risks, additional people are induced to migrate for the first time, which further expands the set of people with ties abroad. This additional migration reduces costs and risks for a new set of people, causing some of them to migrate, and so on. Once the number of network connections reaches a critical threshold, migration becomes self-perpetuating because each act of movement creates the social structure necessary to sustain it. . . . (see also Massey, 1990; Durand and Massey, 1992)

Connections to migrants working in the United States are thus a form of ‘social capital’ which can be utilized by friends and relatives in the source region (Massey and Espinosa, 1997; Massey et al., 1994). Social capital also consists of the information leading to employment opportunities which the immigrants bear. Much of this social capital began to be amassed during the Bracero Program.

Although most immigrants from any given source community begin as target earners and possibly become recurrent migrants over the course of their lifetimes, some eventually settle in the United States, forming ‘daughter communities’ (Massey, 1987; Massey et al., 1987). A number of researchers (e.g. Browning and Rodríguez, 1985; Chavez, 1988, 1992; Massey and Espinosa, 1997; Massey et al., 1994) trace the settlement process to family formation in the United States: single male immigrants may marry females from their community of origin, from other Mexican communities, or US citizens of Mexican or other descent – any of whom they may meet in the United States. Married men may bring their wives and children, or, as mentioned above, wives may cross against husbands’ wishes to reunite the family (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992, 1994; Massey and Espinosa, 1997; Mines and Massey, 1985).

Surveying transnational migration patterns from 19 Mexican communities, Massey et al. (1994) show that with the development of migration networks, just as migration becomes less selective in terms of class, so too does it become less selective in terms of gender. Once more than 20 percent of a community’s male members have crossed the border to work in the United States, women begin entering the migration stream at an accelerating pace (Massey et al., 1994: 1512–23). Notably, many nodal points for migratory networks were initially established during the Bracero Program, although labor markets later diversified to urban areas (Cornelius, 1989a, 1989b; Massey et al., 1987). On a macro-social level, it has been found that women and children represented a higher proportion of immigrants from Mexico after the 1970s (Tienda, 1989: 117–18), illustrating the effects of network maturation. Economic crises in Mexico in the 1980s and 1990s, which dried up employment and investment opportunities, have also

fostered a more permanent migration system, and converted sojourners into settlers (Roberts et al., 1999: 241–3).

Immigration streams broadened in the 1980s and 1990s. The Mexican economic crisis of 1982–3 did not immediately provoke increases in undocumented immigration (Martin, 1999: 130). Lack of employment opportunities was not initially a problem: the fall of the value of the peso, inflation and the lowering of the real wage led many previously unemployed women, youth and children to enter the labor force in order to make up the deficit in the household economy (González de la Rocha, 1991: 118). Eventually, many men and women crossed into the United States seeking work. Notable about these immigrants is that many came from communities that had no strong tradition of immigration to the United States, but whose economies were so disrupted that overwhelming 'push' factors came into play (Cornelius, 1991: 161). Joining the urban and rural poor were members of the middle class: skilled workers and professionals (Gledhill, 1998: 280).

The 1986 Immigration Control and Reform Act also initiated migration of women and children, as family reunifications of existing immigration legislation permitted the amnestied to bring in wives and offspring. Notably, their spouses could then facilitate (largely undocumented) immigration of members of *their* ego-centric social and kinship networks. The peso crisis of 1994–5 has had a more immediate effect on immigration, as unemployment immediately accompanied devaluation to a greater extent than in the early 1980s: both urban-based workers and poor farmers were crossing, or attempting to cross, the border in greater numbers to seek employment in the United States (Martin, 1999: 131).

Negative reactions to undocumented immigration have coalesced around the use by women and children of public resources and institutions. Chock (1996: 2–5) analyses the rhetoric surrounding the passage of the 1986 Immigration Control and Reform Act and shows how women's use of public hospitals to bear US citizens eligible for welfare benefits was considered problematic. The sites of production and reproduction were no longer separated. In this connection, Hondagneu-Sotelo (1995: 177) contends that California's Proposition 187 (an intellectual precursor to the Immigration Reform and the Welfare Acts of 1996) and the rhetoric surrounding it reflect:

a profound historical moment and a muted acknowledgement that there has been a transformation from a predominantly sojourner or temporary pattern of Mexican undocumented migration to a pattern that is reflected in the widespread establishment of Mexican immigrant families and permanent settler communities throughout California.

The reaction against Mexican immigrants and their use of public facilities is part of a widespread trend in what one anonymous reviewer of this article called a general 'mean-spiritedness' in the United States, reflected in the cut-backs in welfare aid for marginalized citizens of the United States as well.

Empirical evidence provided by the works cited above shows that over time there is a settlement process in the United States which involves the increasing presence of women and children, whether the children are born in Mexico or in the United States. With settlement, reproduction/maintenance and productive activity converge within the United States. The country of origin, and womenfolk left behind, no longer provide a subsidy to the capitalist system at destination to the same extent. They come to be viewed as a burden in the country of settlement.

The Welfare Reform Act and the Immigration Act of 1996

Both the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act and the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Individual Responsibility Act are notable in exempting immigrants, illegal and legal, from federally funded welfare benefits. Legal permanent residents were made ineligible for supplement security income (SSI) or food stamps⁷ until they had secured US citizenship or worked in the United States for 10 years (40 qualifying quarters) while paying social security taxes; other federally funded benefits were restricted to those with a five-year period of residence (Fragomen, 1997: 448). Illegal immigrants are excluded from welfare benefits except for emergency medical aid, short-term in-kind disaster relief, in-kind community services and public health immunizations and treatment of communicable disease (Fragomen, 1997: 450).

The Immigration and Welfare Reform Acts deflected responsibility for the welfare of new legal immigrants from the government, whether state or federal, to sponsors of the immigrant. A potential immigrant's sponsor, whether relative – as in most cases – or employer, has to sign an affidavit of support showing that he/she earns 125 percent of the poverty line. If the immigrant applies for any federally funded benefit, the sponsor's income and resources are 'deemed' to belong to the immigrant to cover his/her needs (Fragomen, 1997: 450; Gimpel and Edwards, 1999: 79–80, 214). States were authorized to bring their legislation into line with both acts. The costs of reproduction and maintenance, including hospitalization for childbirth or illness and sustenance during periods of unemployment or underemployment, are thus passed on *de jure* to the relatives of the legal immigrant as well as *de facto* to the undocumented immigrant. Although the national capitalist system as a whole can benefit from immigrant productivity, the costs immigrants might incur are again externalized from the system, not to the source community as in the case of undocumented immigrants, but to the legal immigrant's relatives.

As with any piece of legislation there are political and moral actors and administrative institutions pressing for their visions of right and wrong. There are also numerous political, institutional and moral actors whose positions must be taken into account concerning immigration legislation,

ranging in ideological bent from nativists/restrictionists to those who would endorse open borders (Calavita, 1992; Castro, 1999; Wilson, 1999). Immigration legislation is partially a compromise or amalgam of these often contradictory pressures, although some voices, given the cultural-ideological climate of the times, may be silenced.

The media reign of terror

Widely publicized threats and news coverage of deportations serve to germinate a climate of fear among undocumented immigrants and their legal immigrant relatives. This fear makes the undocumented super-exploitable as they feel they have no recourse in the case of crimes committed against them or in the case of mistreatment (including breaches of contract, lack of safety precautions, under-payment or non-payment) by employers. Along with the fortification of the border, reinforced in the 1996 Immigration Act, this publicity makes it less likely that undocumented male immigrants will send for wives and children, thus assuring that reproduction and maintenance processes remain externalized to the source community.

Various organizations concerned with human and civil rights have documented verbal, physical, psychological and sexual abuses committed by the Border Patrol and other law enforcement agencies (e.g. US Customs, San Diego Police Department, Riverside Sheriff's Department, US National Guard, INS, etc.) against undocumented (and sometimes documented) workers crossing the US–Mexico border region (American Friends Service Committee, 1998; Americas Watch, 1992; see also Eschbach et al., 1999; Huspek et al., 1998). These reports are read by academics and activists both in Mexico and the United States.

Information about abuse reaches popular audiences as well. As Castro (1999: 48) points out:

The Latin American public and media are keenly aware of restrictionist/nativist tendencies in U.S. society. Univisión and Telemundo, Spanish language networks based in the United States that are widely viewed in Latin America, give extensive coverage to the issue. Especially in Mexico, incidents such as the 1996 taped beating of two undocumented immigrants by California policemen are given wide exposure and are deeply resented.

The Mexican national television chains Televisa and TV Azteca also air news stories about mistreatment of undocumented (and documented) workers and about deaths of Mexicans in crossing the border. Both national newspapers published in Mexico City and distributed throughout the country, such as *El Nacional*, *La Jornada* and *El Financiero*, and local newspapers such as the *Diario Penninsular* (La Paz, BCS) and *La Voz de la Frontera* (Mexicali, BC) also report on the mistreatment and fatalities of immigrants. These reports can only serve to heighten the terror of the border for those who hope to cross, or whose loved ones are planning to do so, or who have done so.

The fall of the USSR and the resurgence of nativism

Nativism – necessarily viewed as part of the national, if contested, culture – has deep roots in the United States. It begins with the mistreatment (even genocide) of various groups of Native Americans and the enslavement of Africans, through laws designed to halt Chinese and Japanese immigration beginning in the 1880s, to limiting immigration from Southern and Eastern European countries in the 1920s and, periodically, to deporting those Mexicans who were not filling their role as flexible and temporary labor (Feagin, 1997). Visible racial, ethnic, cultural and/or religious differences fuel nativist reactions against immigrants in general (Johnson, 1997; Muller, 1997; Roberts, 1997) and Mexicans in particular.⁸

There have been ebbs and flows of nativism/restrictionism throughout the history of the United States. The newest wave of anti-immigrant sentiment, rising to a crescendo in the years after the passage of the 1986 Immigration and Reform Control Act bestowing amnesty on undocumented immigrants with a minimum period of residence or work in agriculture, and continuing to the present, has been associated with the fall of the USSR (Chavez, 1997; Delgado, 1997; Perea, 1997). Once the Soviet Union collapsed there was no great power with an ideological interest in criticizing the human and civil rights abuses perpetuated by the United States against undocumented, and sometimes documented, Mexicans. As Delgado (1997) points out concerning the current wave of nativism:

The conditions that produced the civil rights decade of the sixties are missing. Unlike then, we are not competing with the Soviet Union for the loyalties of the uncommitted Third World, most of which is black, brown, or yellow. Then, racism, lynching, and mean-spirited treatment of domestic minorities and foreign visitors were embarrassments which our competitors seized on as evidence of their system's superiority. Now there is less need to demonstrate that our system is better than godless communism.

Drawing on Derrick Bell's 'interest-convergence' theory (Bell, 1980), some researchers (e.g. Delgado, 1997; Perea, 1997) explain the fall of the USSR as alleviating pressures on white elites to extend decent treatment to 'others'. Bell's interest-convergence theory was developed with regard to desegregation efforts during the Cold War as exemplified by the 1954 *Brown v. The Board of Education* decision to desegregate schools: due to the international climate of opinion the white ruling elite found it in its best interests to extend at least some civil rights to Afro-Americans (see also Dudziak, 1988).

Applied to Cuban immigration, it is notable that after *perestroika* and then the breakdown of the Soviet Union, Cuban refugees were no longer given special status as they had been when the ideological conflict between the USSR and the US made massive Cuban immigration to the capitalist US seem a protest against communism, providing the US with symbolic capital in both national and international arenas (Grosfoguel, 1999; Pérez, 1999).

With Soviet support for Cuba effectively withdrawn, Cuban immigrants must now follow the procedures which any prospective immigrant must follow, rather than being extended permanent residence as soon as touching US soil.

Applied to the treatment of Mexican immigrants (including, for example, the militarization of the border) two points have been made. First, that in the absence of a common external enemy in the form of a superpower, the immigrant other becomes scapegoated as the common enemy responsible for all manner of social and economic ills: 'Immigrants become the new threat to national security and identity, filling the void left by the loss of old enemies after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War' (Chavez, 1997: 67; on scapegoating of immigrants see also Mazón, 1975). Second, that there now exists no contesting external power interested in gaining symbolic capital among the unaligned, and especially unaligned Third World countries, by pointing out human and civil rights abuses by the United States against foreigners and minorities, and this permits the unrestrained resurgence of nativism (Delgado, 1997; Perea, 1997). This nativism has been directed especially against undocumented workers from Mexico, who, for capitalism, are not performing their expected function of flexible and *temporary* labor. This nativist sentiment provides legitimacy (in some circles) to the reign of terror institutionalized along the border.

Conclusions

What differentiation of the peasantry, the Bracera Program, and the maturation of migration networks propelled was an accelerated migration, spreading to all classes at the point of origin, and including both men and, eventually, women. It was the migration of women and dependent children that led to the convergence of the processes of reproduction/maintenance and productive activity, both now centered in the host society. Rather than being separated – reproduction and maintenance taking place in the source community in Mexico and being subsidized by the labor of women and children, male productive activity taking place in the destination community in the United States, at least intermittently – both now increasingly took place in the United States. The Mexican labor force thus began to cost more for US tax payers: undocumented children and children born to undocumented parents needed, at a minimum, educational and health services. Women needed hospital beds, mainly in public hospitals (McCarthy and Vernez, 1997), to give birth to their children. This made them more visible to authorities and a component of anti-immigrant/nativist rhetoric (Chock, 1996). Ill and unemployed men no longer went back to where they had come from. Services such as fire and police departments were utilized more often. Some aged and retired in the United States, and more undocumented

immigrants came to rely on more social service providers (McCarthy and Vernez, 1997). Despite the fact that many undocumented workers paid federal and sometimes state taxes, these were, and are, being absorbed by services extended to an aging Anglo population (Hayes-Bautista et al., 1990). More dependents on public services were certainly not welcomed. With the fall of the USSR nativism could be unleashed without fear of loss of international symbolic capital: there was no great power which would advertise to the Third World the mistreatment of the undocumented.

How do the arguments provided above relate to the questions posed in the introduction? That is, what is the link between (1) increasing militarization of the US border; (2) state legislation aimed at depriving undocumented workers of state-funded educational, medical and other social services; (3) movements to deny US citizenship to children born in the United States to undocumented workers; (4) reforms in the federal welfare laws denying benefits to all who are not US citizens (or designated refugee groups); (5) the widely publicized threat of deportations of undocumented workers? All are aimed at re-separating the process of production from the processes of reproduction and maintenance. I will address the questions in reverse order, showing how they do this.

Deportations and threats of deportation inject terror into the undocumented community, especially fears of family separation: husbands separated from wives, but especially mothers separated from their immature children (Chavez, 1992). A predictable outcome is that men will protect their undocumented wives and small children by returning them to Mexico, or by preventing them from crossing in the first place. Deported men can re-cross more cheaply if unaccompanied by dependents and once again, due to economic necessity, present themselves for productive work without burdening the society by a call for services for dependents. In the case of their unemployment or illness, they can be expected to rejoin their wives and children, now back in Mexico. The aim of massive deportations or threats of massive deportations is to scare women and children back to their country of origin or give pause to their plans to cross the border.

The changes in federal welfare and immigration laws are self-explanatory. Women and children, whether lawful permanent residents or undocumented immigrants, will not be eligible for certain welfare benefits. Thus no aid will be extended for their reproduction and maintenance. As for the movement to deny citizenship to children born in the United States to undocumented immigrants: since these children would not be citizens, they would be ineligible for federal welfare benefits as well. Similarly, state initiatives such as Proposition 187 deny state-funded educational and health services to the undocumented. Although the proposition's provisions were struck down by the courts due to their trespassing on federal government territory, many were incorporated in the Welfare Reform and the Immigration Acts of 1996. Since it is mainly children (as well as the aged in the case of medical services) who need these services, their 'costs' will no longer

be borne by the state or federal governments. The aim of all three of these innovations is to deny any governmental subsidy for reproduction or maintenance of the foreign-born workforce and their dependents, even if their reproduction and maintenance now is occurring in the United States. The point is to discourage these processes, and re-separate productive and reproductive activities. Those who wish to bring relatives to the US are deemed responsible for their welfare, thus transferring responsibility for well-being from state and federal governments to individuals.

Militarization of the US–Mexico border and augmentation in the numbers of border patrol personnel can be interpreted as also aimed at re-separating the processes of reproduction/maintenance and productive activity. As immigrants are pushed into more dangerous terrain on their crossings, deaths from hyperthermia, hypothermia and drownings are increasing (Eschbach et al., 1999; Heyman, 1998: 165; Huspek et al., 1998: 123). Although men will and do continue to cross the border to seek work, they will hesitate to subject wives, sisters and dependent children to the increased danger of border crossing. That, at least, is what both capitalist and nativist interests would hope.

It is not that Mexican undocumented immigrants are to be totally excluded from US soil. Their labor is needed. Rather, their presence will be tolerated only as long as they are almost costless, as compared to the native born. Notably, concerning the separation of processes of reproduction and production, holders of US permanent residence ‘green cards’ (recently changed to ‘pink cards’) are permitted to live on the Mexican side of the border and ‘commute’ to work on the US side (Calavita, 1992) where they work in the agricultural fields, traveling throughout various southwestern states during peak agricultural seasons, and are employed in the service sector along the border. The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) left room for the expansion of an H-2 program permitting the importation of temporary agricultural workers under short-term contract, similar, if less massive in scope, to the Bracero program. Growers in the United States have recently called for the implementation of what they also designate as a ‘bracero program’ to contract workers, on a temporary basis, to labor in the agricultural fields (Carlón S., 1998), and a bill to foster that temporary labor force was introduced in the Senate in July 1998 (*Migration World*, 1999: 42). Suffice it to say that many immigrants who enter as agricultural laborers eventually find their way to urban centers to take the low-waged work found there, whether as maids and gardeners, or in restaurants, factories, construction, supermarkets, hospitals and old folks’ homes (to give a brief list). Others, crossing illegally, are networked into urban areas from the start. One can only conclude that the Mexican worker’s primary identity, for employers in general and for US capitalism, as Vélez-Ibañez (1996) points out, is a ‘commodity identity’. S/he can find an opportunity to work, however hedged around with legalisms to promote a climate of fear, but s/he will discover no other rights. The nativists will provide a legitimacy

to actions taken against the undocumented, and thereby help maintain them as a super-exploitable population, working for wages that national minorities cannot accept if they wish to survive at a minimal level of comfort.

Notes

- 1 Europeans, whether from the north, south, west or east, tended to arrive in the US in family groups throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries (Cohen, 1995), as did many Mexicans prior to the deportations of the 1930s. But many more Mexican men came alone, as 'target earners' seeking to earn a certain sum before returning home. Notably, debates surrounding the passage of the 1924 National Origins and Quota Act, immigration legislation designed to limit the migration of southern and eastern Europeans, stressed the 'flexibility' of Mexican labor, i.e. the propensity of Mexican workers eventually to return home, and applauded this aspect of Mexican immigration (Calavita, 1992: 7, 1994: 58–9).
- 2 The need for recurrent, seasonal labor has been met in other ways, however. Holders of legal permanent residence documents are permitted to live in Mexico, and commute daily to work in the United States. An H-2 or temporary agricultural workers program was also initiated at the same time that the Bracero Program was terminated (see Calavita, 1992).
- 3 Whereas Meillassoux was addressing the separation of the processes of production and reproduction under colonialism in Africa, the separation of reproduction and production among Mexican immigrants, especially the undocumented, in the US, must be seen in the context of uneven capitalist development between adjoining nation-states and relations of economic dependency forged through the economic penetration of the subordinate economy by the dominant one (Portes and Walton, 1981; Sassen, 1988, 1999). Buroyoy (1975) was the first to compare the African and Mexican systems of immigration in terms of the subsidy to the receiving economy derived from separation of the processes of production and reproduction. Concerning Mexican migration, this theme was later developed by Portes (1978), Portes and Walton (1981) and others. See Wilson (1999) for a brief review of this literature.
- 4 Members of reasonably well-off landed families often migrate as part of a family decision to spread risk in face of the possibility of crop failures, or a drop in the market price of their produce, or as a means of acquiring capital for investment in the family farm (Massey et al., 1994; Wilson, 1992).
- 5 It has been notoriously difficult for census takers to count undocumented immigrants, thus sex ratio changes over time are subject to speculation as well. Ethnographic evidence shows, however, that there have been increasing numbers of women and children migrating, thus heralding the change from sojourner to settler. Viewed from the sending communities, Massey et al.'s (1994) study of 19 Mexican sending communities shows that with the peak maturation of migration networks up to 40 percent of adult women enter the migration stream to the United States. Viewed at destination, undocumented Latino immigrant streams in general come to be composed of ever greater numbers of women (for example, see Hagan [1994] on Guatemalans in Houston, Texas; Mahler [1995] on Salvadoreans on Long Island; and Hondagneu-Sotelo [1994, 1995] on Mexicans in the San Francisco Bay area).

- As noted above, Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) has even found that much female migration is often sponsored by female-centered rather than male-centered networks of aid.
- 6 Although I am mainly concerned with undocumented immigrants from Mexico in this article, the legal status of their families can become quite complex, with various combinations of members with permanent legal residence, US citizenry by birth or naturalization, and without documents.
 - 7 In April 1998 the Senate restored the right of legal immigrants dropped from the food stamp program by the provisions of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act to receive food stamps (*Migration World*, 1998: 9). In 1999 all remaining provisions of California's Proposition 187, limiting social, medical and educational services to the undocumented and their children, were struck down by California's Supreme Court – a news item swiftly broadcast on Mexican national television stations and appearing in Mexican newspapers.
 - 8 Although I see economic factors as having the primary explanatory power in the new nativism and the terrorization of potential and actual undocumented immigrants, the ethnic and cultural differences they represent can feed into the newest wave of nativism. As Muller (1997: 109) notes: 'the sight of veiled women in suburban supermarkets, the proliferation of mosques in large cities, the prevalent sound of Spanish in the streets, and the proliferation of small businesses with Korean, Indian, Arabic, and other ethnic advertising have aroused middle-class resentment in the 1990s similar to that observed nearly a century earlier'. Demographic changes in the form of larger numbers of visibly 'different' minority/foreign populations are seen as integral to the new nativism by Roberts (1997) and Johnson (1997) as well.

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