

US-Mexico Border Militarization and Violence: Dispossession of Undocumented Laboring Classes from Puebla, Mexico

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ABSTRACT

Interviews with return migrants in Puebla, Mexico before and after the massive border build-up of the mid-2000s reveal how increased border enforcement entailed greater risks of arrest and potentiated the violence migrants experienced at the hands of smugglers and criminals, reducing circular migration. Disposessed of physical security and psychological well-being, *illegal* mobile bodies create value for multiple accumulation processes: at the point of production as vulnerable workers, as well as commodities for trafficking organizations and private detention centers. The violence inflicted on undocumented border crossers disciplines them for the more exploitative labor relations of temporary worker programs.

Keywords: 1. violence, 2. illegality, 3. human smuggling, 4. United States, 5. Mexico.

La militarización y violencia en la frontera de Estados Unidos y México: Despojo de las clases trabajadoras de indocumentados de Puebla, México

RESUMEN

Entrevistas con migrantes retornados en Puebla, México, antes y después del endurecimiento de la frontera de mediados de la década de 2000, revelan un mayor riesgo de detención y violencia contra los migrantes por parte de los coyotes y criminales en la frontera, reduciendo la migración circular. Los cuerpos *ilegales* están desposeídos de seguridad física y bienestar psicológico para crear valor en múltiples procesos de acumulación: dentro del proceso de producción como mano de obra vulnerable, así como mercancías para los coyotes y los centros privados de detención. La violencia disciplina a los migrantes para las relaciones laborales más explotadoras de los programas de trabajadores temporales.

Palabras clave: 1. violencia, 2. ilegalidad, 3. coyotaje, 4. Estados Unidos, 5. México.

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*Introduction*¹

During recent fieldwork to determine the effects of the Great Recession on international migration flows and return migration in Puebla, Mexico, stories of difficult and violent clandestine border crossings surfaced frequently. While border crossings had always entailed some physical and financial risks for undocumented migrants, many agreed that it was becoming virtually impossible to cross in the early 2010s. When return migrants were asked whether or not they would go back to the United States, the following responses were typical: “I wanted to go last month, but right now, no. Everyone says that crossing is more difficult, because many people from here are returning [from the border] because they can’t cross” (Emilio, personal communication, June 16, 2011²). “I haven’t tried to go back because I don’t want to take the risk. I have crossed the [Sonoran] desert many times, I know the way. But now that it is infected with those people [bandits], for that reason I haven’t wanted to take the risk and try to cross” (Matías, personal communication, March 27, 2011).

These comments signaled an important change in migrants’ attitudes toward border-crossing. Once a rite of passage and prerequisite to gaining status in one’s home community (Kandel & Massey, 2002), border crossings became firmly associated with extreme danger and an unprecedented possibility of failure.

This article examines migrants’ changing experiences with clandestine crossings to explore how the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border, the criminalization of migration and new smuggling arrangements shaped by these processes have subjected migrants to increased violence at the border. Violence, both institutionalized and *legal* (Menjívar & Abrego, 2012) and that associated with human trafficking (Simmons, Menjívar, & Tellez, 2015; Slack & Whiteford, 2011; Slack, 2015) has contributed significantly to the change in the pattern of circular migration between migrant-sending communities

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² Migrants’ names have been changed to protect their identities.

in Puebla and the United States established during the 1980s and 1990s as a fundamental aspect of social reproduction to ameliorate the devastating effects of neoliberal policies (Binford, 2004). I draw on ethnographic research in a rural town and a peri-urban community in the state of Puebla to situate the experience of return migrants with the multiple forms of border violence within the intersections of the expanded reach of criminal organizations working in the United States and Mexico and increased border enforcement.

This article builds on a growing literature of scholars analyzing the violence migrants experience in transit across the U.S.-Mexico-Central America region. Central American migrants face horrendous abuses at the hands of gangs, criminal organizations, and Mexican security forces during their transit through Mexico (Izcara Palacios, 2016; Vogt, 2013). Central American and Mexican migrants face mistreatment by smugglers and bandits during U.S.-Mexico border crossings (O'Leary, 2009; Slack & Whiteford, 2011). Scholars have documented abuses of migrants in smugglers' drop houses (Simmons, Menjivar, & Tellez, 2015), at the hands of border patrol agents, and in detention centers after the migrants have crossed into the United States (Martínez, Slack, & Heyman, 2013; Slack, Martínez, Lee, & Whiteford, 2016). Migrants deported from the United States to Mexican border cities—often without the cash, official identification or other personal belongings taken from them while in U.S. custody—are targeted by kidnappers or recruited into gangs and cartels (Slack, 2015; Slack & Whiteford, 2011).

The violence is made possible through the construction of migrants as *illegal*, a category whose material and ideological power is constituted through U.S. immigration enforcement policy. *Illegality* and its immanent consequence, *deportability*, have been used as productive concepts to examine the roots of the creation of a docile and disposable workforce for U.S. capitalism (De Genova, 2005; Heyman, 2014). Its effects, however, extend beyond the workplace and the policing of the physical border to the creation of multiple vulnerabilities for migrants in transit to the United States to work or reunite with their families. *Illegality* dehumanizes individuals, criminalizing their movement outside of the authorized channels established by

U.S. immigration policy and subjects them to physical and psychological violence.

In the contemporary *global historical conjuncture* the mobility of undocumented migrants creates substantial value in multiple processes of extraction. Glick-Schiller has used the term “global historical conjuncture” (2015) to delineate “an approach to history that places transformations in political and social formations within an analysis of dominant forms of the accumulation and concentration of wealth and power.” (Glick-Schiller, 2015, p. 278). In our contemporary global order, *illegal* mobile bodies are at the center of accumulation processes at the point of production as docile, vulnerable, and disposable workers, as well as commodities for trafficking organizations and private detention centers.

By bringing these different extraction processes into a common analytical frame, the objective is to view them as forms of “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey, 2003) to highlight how dispossessing migrants of their physical and psychological security is central to accumulation processes (Glick-Schiller, 2015). Harvey (2003) describes how capital claims labor and resources previously outside of its realm in order to overcome crisis and fuel new rounds of accumulation. Dispossession not only describes the devastating effects of neoliberal policies for rural livelihoods that create the undocumented surplus labor force for the United States, but also the transformation of humans into commodities for smuggling organizations and the *criminalized* bodies that are fed to the private prison industry through border enforcement.

After defining the research methodology, I will discuss: 1) the emergence of circular migration as a result of neoliberal policies and currency devaluation in the 1980s and 1990s; 2) the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border in the context of the war on terror; 3) the effects of militarization on *coyotaje*, smuggling arrangements, and increasing levels of violence during clandestine crossings; and 4) the criminalization of immigration law and particularly the effects of Operation Streamline on migrants’ detention and deportation experiences. In the conclusion, I will address how these issues have sharply reduced circular migration between Puebla and the United States

and how the border situation may discipline workers for the expansion of temporary worker programs.

Ethnographic and Survey Research in Puebla

This article draws on data collected during two different ethnographic research projects in two migrant communities in the Mexican state of Puebla—Zapotitlán Salinas and Santo Tomás Chautla. The first, from 2002 to 2004, attempted to understand the emergence and acceleration of international migration from the region (Binford, 2004). The second, from 2010 to 2014, examined the effects of the Great Recession on migration patterns, migrant families, and communities. A modified version of the Mexican Migration Project's Ethnosurvey was applied to a 25 percent sample of households in Zapotitlán and 20 percent sample in Chautla³. From this survey and participant observation, 29 migrants in Zapotitlán and 28 in Chautla who returned between 2007 and 2009 were identified and interviewed about experiences related to border crossings, work and migration history, economic and social insertion in the United States, the decision to return, and reinsertion in the home community. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed with NVIVO 9.2. Although there were multiple ethnographic examples of the violence described below, only a few examples were chosen due to limits on space⁴.

The Evolution of Circular Migration in Rural and Peri-urban Puebla

We don't go to the United States because it is a pretty place. We go to improve our lives (Matías, personal communication, March 27, 2011).

Unlike the traditional sending regions in Western Mexico where international migration began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this phenomenon emerged in Puebla in the 1980s and 1990s and then quickly massified. Binford (2003a) named this pattern “accelerated

³ More information about the Mexican Migration Project Ethnosurvey can be found at <http://mmp.opr.princeton.edu/research/questionnaire-en.aspx>

⁴ The author conducted all interviews with Zapotitlán's return migrants. Desireé Otero conducted all the interviews in Santo Tomás Chautla with the author accompanying her during several of them.

migration” to emphasize how, in only two decades, this region was reoriented, economically and socially, to include international migration as a major livelihood strategy following currency devaluation in 1994 and the dismantling of small and medium-scale agriculture and petty commodity production through the implementation of neoliberal policies (Binford & Churchill, 2007; Binford, 2004; D’Aubeterre Buznego & Rivermar Pérez, 2014; Lee, 2008). Given the post-IRCA timing of the massification of this particular migration flow, the vast majority of migrants were undocumented in their first migration (92 % of Zapotitecos and 94 % of Chautecos).

Zapotitlán Salinas, located in the rural Mixtec region of Puebla, is a town of 2 700 people. Before the 1960s, Zapotitecos produced salt, herded goats, and tended to a few rain-fed agricultural plots. Beginning in the 1960s, a local onyx industry developed involving both the extraction of rock from local quarries and the processing of stone into material for luxury flooring and souvenirs sold in Mexican tourist centers. Eventually, several factors increased the cost of production of the local workshops, including neoliberal cuts to electricity subsidies and the overexploitation of the local quarries, which forced owners to purchase more expensive, non-local rock. This was mixed with the rise in international migration from the town, and the fall in middle-class purchasing power due to economic crisis in the 1980s and 1990s to create a steady fall in the market for onyx products. Most workshops went out of business in the 1990s and more and more people migrated (Lee, 2008). Men and women from Zapotitlán were inserted primarily in restaurants and other service jobs in and around New York City⁵.

Santo Tomás Chautla, a town of 6 500 people located on the southeast periphery of the state’s capital city (population 2.5 million), developed a diversified economy after World War II. The town’s economy depended heavily on the regional and national construction industry for employment. It was a source of marble for flooring and facades and unskilled and semi-skilled labor for construction. In addition, local marble quarries employed Chautecos, others lived from

⁵ Transnational migrant networks established in the 1950s extending from southern Puebla to New York City shaped recent migrants’ settlement in that city.

subsistence agriculture, and, for many girls and women, domestic work in the capital city was a major source of employment.

The number of people engaged in subsistence agriculture dropped precipitously starting in the 1980s as the result of the implementation of neoliberal policies and a local environmental crisis occasioned by deforestation. Moreover, the devaluation of the peso in 1994-95 detonated international migration due to the loss of hundreds of thousands of construction jobs. As a result, scores of men migrated to Los Angeles or New York where they were employed principally in construction (Binford & Churchill, 2007).

In both towns, a circular pattern of migration developed whereby many individuals went to the United States for a few years and sent remittances back to provide their families with the means to build a house, feed and educate their children, and pay for health care. A typical pattern of circular migration developed where migrants returned to their families and communities for short periods (six months to a year) before starting the cycle again. Migration transformed consumption patterns and local notions of a dignified life. Social mobility in Mexico was linked to becoming a superexploited immigrant (Heyman, 1998) who worked 12-14 hours per day, spending money on only the most necessary goods and services in the United States in order to maximize transfers to families in Puebla (Cordero Díaz, 2007). Migrants who adhered to these practices gained status in their communities, which often stimulated more migrants who wanted to *salir adelante* [progress] (Lee, 2008), a process which indicated growing dependency on migration (Binford, 2003b).

Circular Migration and the Voluntary-departure Complex (1980s–mid 2000s)

The circular migration pattern described above was made possible by the relatively porous border in the 1980s and early 1990s. For many decades, migrants who managed to cross but were apprehended by the border patrol were encouraged to choose *voluntary deportation*: They waived their rights to a deportation hearing and were returned to Mexico without a trial, their situations considered violations of administrative codes. The vast majority of migrants made additional

attempts until they successfully crossed and reached their destination in the U.S. interior (Espenshade, 1994). In this process, which Heyman termed “the voluntary-departure complex,” (1995) the United States appeared to be making an impressive number of arrests, protecting the country from illegal *aliens* while continuing to import Mexican labor on a large scale (Heyman, 1995).

Up until the mid-1990s, many migrants from Zapotitlán and Chautla crossed from Tijuana, Mexico, into San Diego, California by jumping the fence (or crawling under it) and running until they got past the Border Patrol and made it to a pickup point or a place in the urban area where they would be virtually indistinguishable from the Mexican-descent population.

Operation Hold the Line in El Paso, Texas, (implemented in 1993) and Operation Gatekeeper in San Diego, (implemented in 1994) aimed to deter would-be migrants in high-traffic urban areas by installing more Border Patrol personnel, border walls, and night-vision and electronic surveillance equipment. These efforts were part of a *prevention through deterrence* strategy that involved the militarization of the border defined by Dunn (1996, p. 3) as “the use of military rhetoric and ideology, as well as military tactics, strategy, technology, equipment and forces” to combat undocumented migration and drug trafficking (Andreas, 2000; Massey, Durand, & Malone, 2002; Nevins, 2010)⁶. The immediate consequence for migrants was being pushed to cross in the deserts and mountains—far from urban areas—where they would be more easily identified, detained, and deported (Cornelius, 2001). Based on my research, by the mid-1990s, the majority of migrants from Zapotitlán took greater risks by crossing through remote areas of the Sonoran Desert in Arizona where there were fewer Border Patrol officers and less surveillance. Some Chatecos continued to cross through the Tijuana-San Diego area, but most crossed through the mountains east of San Diego near Tecate or through the Sonoran Desert. Virtually all used the services of a coyote.

⁶ Dunn (1996) discusses the implementation of drug and immigration enforcement policies at the border from the 1970s to the 1990s, arguing that they assumed the character of *low-intensity conflict*, a Pentagon strategy infused with human-rights abuses, developed in Central America and elsewhere to gain control over civilian populations.

Zapotitecos and Chautecos used a form of coyotaje that David Spener termed *commercial transport* for the South Texas-Northeast Mexico border (Spener, 2009, pp. 141-49). Zapotitecos contracted one of the three coyotes in town to accompany them across the border and to a *drop house* in Douglas or Tucson, Arizona. Chautecos used coyotes with ties to Izucar de Matamoros, a small city in the Mixtec region of Puebla. A few Chautecos contracted coyotes in Tijuana when they reached the border. The crossings varied from jumping the fence from one urban zone to another to walking through the desert for a few hours—or, in some cases, as much as an entire night—until reaching a certain pickup point on the highway. During fieldwork in the early 2000s, there were never any reports of abuse of the mutual trust between coyotes and migrants from Zapotitlán. Neither did Chautecos complain about problems with coyotes from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s. It was common that migrants might be caught several times and detained for a few hours before being voluntarily deported to Nogales or Agua Prieta, border cities in the Mexican state of Sonora.

Despite the increased surveillance during this period, the vast majority of migrants deported back to Mexico made it across successfully on a future attempt, indicating that the voluntary-departure complex still applied up until the mid-2000s. A few migrants explained that they were even encouraged by Border Patrol agents to continue trying until they were able to cross. On his second migration to New York in 2005, Cristóbal explained how the Border Patrol official motivated his group to keep trying to cross after he and his brother had been caught and deported four times.

He told us: 'I am going to give you some advice. Keep trying, keep trying and you'll see that you'll be able to cross. Of 1 000 people who cross, we only get 200 or 300, the rest of them pass right through. You've had some bad luck, but if you try tomorrow, you'll be able to cross' (Cristóbal, personal communication, June 24, 2011).

Upon arrival at the drop house, migrants made phone calls to their family members or friends who wired money to pay the coyote in full. Within a few days, migrants met up with their family members

in California or they boarded flights to New York from the Phoenix, Los Angeles, or Las Vegas airports. During this period, Zapotitecos felt relatively safe because their coyote was part of their dense social network in the transnational community, and had a strong interest in their safety. Most Chautecos used the services of coyotes who had been recommended by family members and friends who had crossed successfully.

The *door-to-door* trip took from four to eight days on average. The trip from the border area to the final destination—New York in the case of Zapotitlán—was considered to be low-risk and it was reasonable to believe that one would eventually arrive. No one had lost their life or suffered major injuries in the border area from the two towns, nor did migrants sense that the border was a deadly place. Death, principally from exposure, was certainly part of the experience for hundreds of border crossers who perished in the desert during this time period (Cornelius, 2001; Rubio-Goldsmith, McCormick, Martínez, & Duarte, 2006). However, death and violence were not yet salient aspects of the crossing experience for Chautecos and Zapotitecos. Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that, in general, the number of deaths was low compared with the number of those attempting to cross (see next section), and migrants used the services of smugglers who were well known in their communities and had an interest in their safety.

*The Militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border:
Border Buildup and the War on Terror (Mid-2000s-Present)*

Starting in 2006 in Chautla and 2007 in Zapotitlán, there was a significant decline in the number of migrants who left for the first time to the United States and a marked increase in the number of migrants who returned, with one anomalous year in the trend for each town (Chautla in 2007 and Zapotitlán in 2008, as seen in Table 1). While the decreased demand for labor during the economic crisis accounts for a significant part of these changes (Massey, Durand, & Pren, 2014; Ramírez García & Meza González, 2012), migrants' comments, such as those in the introduction, indicate that increased border enforcement accounted for fewer migrations to the United

States from Puebla. These results reflect the general pattern of fewer entries into the United States and greater returns for Mexican migrants (Passel, Cohn, & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2012) during the Great Recession, leading scholars to conclude that the great wave of Mexican migration to the United States had come to an end. Migration flows between the two countries reached a “net zero” equilibrium from 2005 to 2010 (Passel et al., 2012) and a “below net zero” flow from 2009-2014 (Gonzalez-Barrera, 2015).

Table 1. First Migration to U.S. and Return Migration to Puebla 2002-2010

<i>Year</i>	<i>Chautla</i>		<i>Zapotitlán Salinas</i>	
	<i>Migrants, First Migration</i>	<i>Return Migrants</i>	<i>Migrants, First Migration</i>	<i>Return Migrants</i>
2002	10	13	12	5
2003	15	9	12	14
2004	20	8	16	10
2005	17	14	11	5
2006	5	16	12	6
2007	18	13	5	11
2008	2	26	10	8
2009	2	25	4	18
2010	2	12	2	16

Source: Compiled by author based on Mexican Migration Project, Modified Ethnosurvey applied to 20 % household sample in Chautla and 25 % household sample in Zapotitlán (MMP, 1982-2018).

In the interval between the two periods of fieldwork (2002-2004 and 2010-2014), Congress authorized unprecedented increases in funding for additional Border Patrol personnel, border infrastructure, and other enforcement programs⁷. Funding for the Secure Border Initiative increased from 38 million dollars in 2005 to 800 million in 2010 (Government Accountability Office, 2010). The budget for Customs and Border Patrol (CBP), which manages enforcement between official

⁷ A full accounting of the unprecedented growth of the government agencies responsible for border enforcement is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is interesting to note that here was a nearly 15-fold increase in funding from 1986 to 2012 for immigration enforcement programs (Meissner, Kerwin, Chishti, & Bergeron, 2013).

Ports of Entry where most migrants from Puebla cross, rose from 6.3 billion to 11.7 billion dollars between fiscal years 2005 and 2012. CBP increased the number of agents from 11 264 in 2005, to 20 558 in 2010, with almost 90 percent deployed to the southern U.S. border. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which is charged with interior enforcement, detention and removal, also experienced a budget increase between the 2005-2012 fiscal years, from 3.1 billion to 5.9 billion dollars⁸. The detention bed count rose from 20 800 to 34 000 beds between 2006 and 2012 (Meissner et al., 2013).

This border militarization also included the expansion of border walls and an increase in the number and diversity of technologies used to detect clandestine border crossers, including drones and sophisticated video surveillance systems (Department of Homeland Security, 2008). Moreover, it included removal programs that aimed to disrupt the contacts migrants had with smugglers to prevent future crossings. Finally, it increased the criminalization and incarceration of immigration offenders (Martínez & Slack, 2013). These elements of enforcement were brought together into a *whole-of-government* approach under the *Consequence Delivery System* in 2011⁹. In the context of the *War on Terror*, the regulatory policies associated with enforcement conflate migrants with terrorists, drug smugglers, and human traffickers, providing the political and social “justifications” for increased enforcement (Golash-Boza, 2012; Nevins, 2010). According to government sources, the strategy appeared to be working. CBP reported that the number of apprehensions decreased nearly 50 percent from 2008 (724 000) to 2012 (365 000), indicating that increased border

⁸ Coleman (2007) explains that the immigration laws passed in the 1990s eliminated the term deportation. “The concept of ‘removal’ was introduced in its place to do away with the procedural distinctions between ‘exclusion’ (i.e., denial of entrance at the border) and ‘deportation’ (i.e. removal from the interior). The goal was to purge court protections offered under the latter” (p. 71, note 5).

⁹ The Consequence Delivery System includes Operation Streamline, a mass trial for immigration offenders whose constitutionality has been called into question by scholars and activists (Lydgate, 2010); the Mexican Interior Repatriation Program (MIRP), which returns migrants to the interior of Mexico instead of deporting them to the border, increasing the costs of future migration; the Alien Transfer and Exit Program (ATEP), which departs migrants to a different location on the border than the one in which they crossed in hopes of interrupting their interaction with the coyote and other people in their support networks who are crucial for border crossing (Martínez & Slack, 2013; Meissner et al., 2013).

enforcement was an effective deterrence (Department of Homeland Security, 2013, p. 111).

The intensified policing of the border made the crossing more costly, violent and deadly for clandestine migrants (Alonso, 2012; Slack, Martínez, Whiteford, & Peiffer, 2013). Since the mid-2000s the number of deaths of migrants in the Tucson sector increased despite the fact that there have been fewer crossings and apprehensions. Researchers attribute the increasing death rate to enforcement which requires migrants to walk for many more days through the desert to avoid check-points and patrols (Martínez et al., 2013). This has led scholars to conclude that pain, trauma and death are not unintended consequences of enforcement, but actually central to enforcement efforts (Slack et al., 2016).

*Effects of Illegality in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands:
Militarization and Coyotaje*

Illegality conditions the experiences of clandestine border crossers in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands not only as they confront U.S. immigration enforcement tactics and policies, but also as their experience with coyotaje becomes more precarious and violent as human smuggling is more closely associated with other illegal commodity flows (Simmons, Menjivar, & Tellez, 2015; Slack & Whiteford, 2011). Interviews with return migrants suggest that border militarization fueled the reorganization of coyotaje, leading to the displacement of local coyotes by larger criminal organizations (Izcara Palacios, 2015). With more resources and technology to avoid the sophistication of the Border Patrol's buildup, smugglers took control of certain routes, forcing *local* coyotes to turn over migrants or *pagar piso*, pay criminal organizations to be able to operate in territory they controlled.

Militarization of the border and its effect on coyotaje had various implications for migrants from Puebla. First, the number of days migrants trekked through the desert increased as smugglers led them around the Southern Arizona checkpoints and patrol areas. Interviewees reported four- to seven-day journeys before they were picked up, taken to a drop house, or arrested. Migrants reported injuries from walking long distances, running out of food and water, or being attacked by

bajadores, bandits who robbed and raped migrants in the desert. Second, the coyote's fee increased. In 2003-04, walking through the desert accompanied by the coyote cost, on average, 1 800 dollars. From 2005 to 2011, this amount increased to 3 700 dollars. During this same period, some migrants paid up to 4 500 dollars to avoid the desert entirely and cross at points of entry with false papers, an option that lowered the physical risks of exposure in the desert but represented greater financial and legal risks by potentially subjecting migrants to fraud charges.

Third, the local coyotes who crossed with migrants into Arizona and sometimes accompanied them all the way to their destination stopped working. Detained many times, they feared harsher punishment for trafficking after 2005, when immigration enforcement escalated. After a man from a town adjacent to Zapotitlán took over the job as coyote, he limited his trips to the border, where he turned migrants over to other smugglers. Beatriz explains: "You leave town with the idea that the coyote is going to cross with you. But he sold us [*nos vendió*] to another [coyote] in Agua Prieta" (Beatriz, personal communication, June 2, 2011) Based on migrants' accounts, these other smugglers were members of larger organizations also involved in drug and weapons trafficking, with the resources to evade border patrols in the Tucson Sector. Alternatively, smugglers had to *pagar piso* (pay rights). Joaquin explains: "The worst part is in Sonora. There is a lot of drug smuggling there and the smugglers have to pay so that they can pass through with *mojados* (illegal migrants)" (Joaquín, personal communication, July 3, 2011). Martín described the situation like a chain of *mafiosos* [criminal bosses]: "I go with you [the smuggler], you turn me over to another and those guys to another ... that's how they move us through [the border]" (Martín, personal communication, March 20, 2011).

Migrants' situations turned more precarious in the desert. Several commented on how smugglers gave drugs to migrants so they could endure [*aguantar*] the trek. When migrants could not continue, coyotes simply abandoned them in the desert. Jorge explained: "The coyote told [the three female migrants], 'If you don't keep going, you're not going to make it.' He gave them drugs to help them keep walking all day. And well, they didn't make it. The coyote left them in the desert" (Jorge, personal communication, June 10, 2011). Injured migrants were also

abandoned: Leo had trouble sleeping for months after meeting a man in an Arizona *drop house* who cried inconsolably because coyotes left his snake-bitten nephew in the desert. “The guides would not return the man to the area” (Leo, personal communication, June 6, 2011).

Frequently, migrants explained how they ran out of water and food on the lengthy journeys through the desert. These problems were complicated if migrants were surprised by *la migra* or *bajadores*. Andrés was *sold* by the local coyote from Zapotitlán to an organization with operations near Nogales, Sonora. Over the next six weeks, his coyotes used him as *bait*, [*carnada*] that is, as a means to distract the Border Patrol while the organization crossed drugs and Asian migrants at a different location (Andrés, personal communication, Zapotitlán Salinas, June 19, 2011)¹⁰. When drug-smuggling and human-trafficking operations are linked, the more valuable commodity—drugs—is more likely to be carefully crossed while undocumented migrants can be left behind or even killed if migrants do not keep moving (Slack & Whiteford, 2011, p. 17). Migrant *illegality* equates to disposability within the operation of another, more lucrative, clandestine enterprise.

Alonso reported *bajadores* (bandits) attacked his group three times. They beat the men, groped the women, and stole the migrants’ money and clothing when they crossed in the Sonoran Desert during four days and three nights in 2007. He suspected that there was collusion between the coyote and the bandits because they backed off from further physical violence on a migrant when the smuggler reminded them he was worth money. “The coyote said, ‘Hey! Relax! That’s a lot of money! That guy is worth a lot!’ So they let him go. If they obeyed the smuggler, it’s because they know him” (Alonso, personal communication, June 2, 2011).

Not all of the dangers migrants face occur at the border. Once surveillance was stepped up at airports in Arizona, Southern California, and Nevada after the mid-2000s, smugglers opted more frequently to drive migrants across the United States. During these treacherous trips, drivers took drugs to keep themselves awake for days at a time,

¹⁰ Asian migrants are charged higher fees by smugglers, a fact Andrés was aware of: “*Un chino* [person of Asian descent] is worth triple what we [Mexicans] are worth!”

and stopped only long enough to get gas. Migrants seldom were able to eat or go to the bathroom.

They [the smugglers] drive those vans as fast as they can! You think, ‘Wherever we flip over, that’s where I will die.’ There are moments when you experience these things, you feel fear, and you think ‘This is where I will die’ (Paz, personal communication, May 23, 2011).

*The Criminalization of Immigration Law:
from the Voluntary-departure
Complex to the Immigration-industrial Complex*

Since the mid-2000s, growing numbers of border crossers were subject to policies that increased the consequences for unauthorized entries. One such policy, Operation Streamline, subjected migrants with no previous criminal record to arrest, detention, and formal removal with time bars to reentry. Attempted re-entry during the time bar is considered a felony crime, punishable by two years in prison or up to 20 years if the person has a criminal record (Lydgate, 2010).

Before when the Border Patrol arrested you, it didn’t mean you were going to jail. Now the third time they arrest you, you go to jail. You go for a year, six months, whatever the judge says. Because now it is a crime that you are committing to enter into that country. Now there is so much racism and new [immigration] laws (Ignacia, personal communication, April 20, 2011).

The possibility of being subject to long prison sentences is especially terrifying. Migrants witnessed verbal and physical abuse of other migrants by prison workers, were mixed with people who were charged with violent crimes, and were unable to communicate with the consulate or family members¹¹.

In 2009, Adán attempted to return to his convenience store job in Brooklyn after marrying his girlfriend and spending time in Zapotitlán. He was sold to a smuggling organization by the local coyote and attempted to cross into the United States through the Nogales

¹¹ See Slack et al. (2016) and Martínez et al. (2013) for a fuller treatment of this topic.

port of entry using false documents for which he paid the smuggling organization 3 800 dollars. However, he was detained and spent two months in prison. During these months, he was taken to different prisons without being told where he was going or why. He was jailed alongside convicted murderers and drug traffickers. “It traumatizes you. I was in a cell with a psychopath who killed his whole family” (Adán, personal communication, June 21, 2011). Adán met a drug trafficker who offered him work in Mexico upon his release, but he thought the risks were too great for his family.

These experiences clearly indicate how the incarceration of undocumented border crossers with convicted criminals heightens migrants’ sense of vulnerability and how “policies generate a more criminal and dangerous situation for migrants and the border in general” (Slack & Whiteford, 2011, p. 18). After two months of detention, Adán was deported back to Nogales without money or identification, where Grupo Beta gave him a place to stay and a stranger allowed him to deposit money to his name in Telecom/Telégrafos to pay for the half-price bus ticket home. He was lucky to have this assistance. Scholars have pointed out the problems of deporting people back to dangerous border cities where they have no contacts, money, or identification, making them easy recruits or targets for criminal organizations (Slack & Whiteford, 2011; Slack, 2015).

These punitive measures at the border combine with the expansion of interior immigration enforcement devolving to local police who became key personnel in the enforcement-first immigration regime (Gomberg-Munoz & Nussbaum-Barberena, 2011; Varsanyi, 2010)¹². Increasing numbers of civil offenses were reclassified as aggravated felonies: crimes committed by non-citizens that constituted grounds for deportation. These intensified enforcement efforts at the border and in the interior erode the legal protections that once covered non-citizens while being largely exempt from judicial review (Alarcón & Becerra, 2012; Coleman, 2007; Lydgate, 2010; Stumpf, 2006). As a result of these policies, hundreds of thousands of individuals were removed in recent years and there were numerous reports of maltreatment and human rights abuses of people in areas heavily monitored

¹² A fuller ethnographic treatment of migrants’ experiences with removals is beyond the scope of this paper.

by the Border Patrol and in detention centers (Martínez et al., 2013; Sabo et al., 2014; Slack et al., 2013)¹³.

Border enforcement has not, of course, *solved* the undocumented *problem*. Instead, some observers have suggested that anti-immigrant legislation and the enforcement procedures that it authorizes lead to a convergence of public and private sector interests in the criminalization of unauthorized immigration, resulting in the immigration industrial complex (Golash-Boza, 2009). Not only does the complex include the grotesque budget of the Department of Homeland Security, but also the private companies that receive millions of dollars to install and maintain the technologies associated with enforcement and manage the private prisons full of migrants (Kroll, 2013; Martínez & Slack, 2013)¹⁴.

Conclusions

This longitudinal ethnographic study before and after the massive border buildup of the mid-2000s reveals a historical conjuncture whereby increased border enforcement not only presented increased risks for capture and detention, but also potentiated the violence migrants experienced at the hands of smugglers and border criminals. In addition to bodily harm at the border, the human consequences of militarization also include the increasingly long-term separation of families divided by the border and the failure of migrants to successfully reintegrate back into sending communities in Puebla. The economic conditions that led migrants from Puebla to leave their communities of origin devastated by neoliberal policies have not changed significantly, despite social assistance programs deployed to combat extreme poverty. Tensions and conflicts strain relations between family members when life projects unravel under the current restricted

¹³ From 1995 through 1999, yearly removals averaged 119 000 per year; from 2000 through 2004, the average increased to 199 000 per year, and from 2005 through 2011 it surged to 340 000 per year. Removals are accompanied by an order of removal and administrative or criminal consequences associated with subsequent reentry (Department of Homeland Security [DHS], 2013).

¹⁴ Corrections Corporation of America, the largest company that manages private prisons and whose clients include hundreds of thousands of migrants from Mexico and Central America, secured an *occupancy requirement* of 100 % in its contract in three of the six prisons the company operates in Arizona (Kroll, 2013).

international mobility regime. The overwhelming evidence for the pain, trauma, and violence suffered by migrants in the region speaks to the need for dismantling immigration policies that inflict grave harm. In this sense, this paper adds to the mounting call to create an immigration system that embraces the profound economic and social integration between the two countries (Slack et al., 2013).

In a different frame, beyond the effects of these harmful policies on migrants' and their families' psychological and physical well-being, my point here has been to show that increasingly punitive border enforcement policies serve various interests, without suggesting that the border serves a direct, functionalist purpose for controlling labor under capitalism (Heyman, 2012). Institutionalized violence and violence suffered at the hands of non-official actors on the border create the vulnerabilities that are preconditions of the multiple forms of dispossession migrants from Puebla suffer. The important point about border policy is not that it fails to keep "unwanted" people out (Hicken, Fishbein, & Lisle, 2011); instead, it creates an entire reality of social inequality" (Heyman, 2012, p. 265) that is central to accumulation. *Illegal*, mobile bodies are at the center of accumulation processes at the point of production as docile, vulnerable, and disposable workers, as well as commodities for trafficking organizations and private detention centers.

The anti-immigrant policies enacted through executive orders by Donald Trump in his first few days in the White House—stoked by the xenophobic and racist chants of *Build the wall!*—work to shore up the construction of *illegality* reinforcing class divisions that are central for exploitation.

Fear of and loathing toward undocumented Mexican migrants are necessary to subordinate their labor to the demands of the dominant classes. The border and anti-immigrant politics are never meant to keep workers permanently out, but rather, like apartheid in South Africa, they include labor while culturally and socially the persons who embody the labor power (Heyman, 2012, p. 272).

I speculate that this historical conjuncture that creates extreme vulnerability for clandestine border migrants makes policies that were unacceptable in the 1960s due to their discriminatory nature now appear as *humane* and politically feasible alternatives. Previously

condemned for their discriminatory and exploitative policies, temporary worker programs are once again on the rise globally, including in Canada and the United States (Griffith, 2014). Although they relieve migrants of the need to risk their security during clandestine crossings, they have been highly criticized for their exploitative and abusive conditions (Binford, 2013; Hennebry & Preibisch, 2012). For global capital, however, they represent the “perfect immigrant” (Hahamovich, 2003): Migrants work for a stipulated period of time and then are expected to return to their countries of origin. They bring no dependents, their mobility in the labor market is extremely limited, and they have no rights to enjoy any of the benefits of the services and infrastructural projects that they help create. They are included economically, but excluded socially and culturally. Binford’s critical analysis of Canada’s Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program describes the employer’s view of the ideal worker as “a partial person who is expected to keep physical powers in peak working order while placing emotional feelings and needs on hold for the duration of the contract.” (Binford, 2013, p. 112) Glick-Schiller (2010) suggests that temporary workers meet “the needs of localized neo-liberal restructuring more efficiently than the previous, and still current, situation of family reunion, asylum, and the use of undocumented workers as a form of flexible and politically silenced labor” (p. 43).

The border wall and anti-immigrant politics do not exclude *illegal* laboring classes from production. Rather, they serve to remake them into the laborers willing to accept the more restrictive forms of social reproduction dominant under the expanding exploitative laboring regimes of temporal work programs, such as those proposed in U.S. Senate legislation in 2013. I suggest that the pain, trauma and violence inflicted on clandestine, undocumented border crossers that is integral to border enforcement represents a central force in this process of change.

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