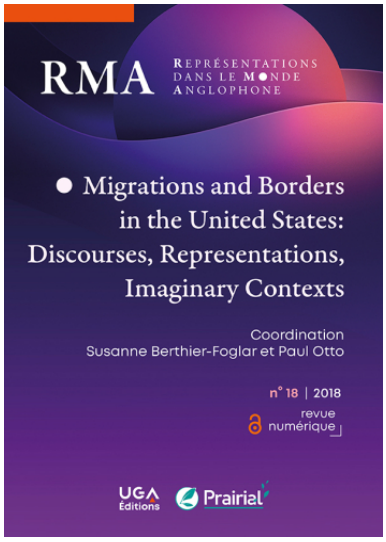


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# Migrations and Borders in the United States: Discourses, Representations, Imaginary Contexts

*Migrations et frontières aux États-Unis : discours, représentations, contextes imaginaires*

**Directeur de publication Susanne Berthier-Foglar et Paul Otto**

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# NOTES DE LA RÉDACTION

The history of the borders and migrations of the United States is a very recent chapter of world history. The present volume discusses an extensive typology of borders: nineteenth century international borders crossed by American citizens settling Mexican territory, or crossed by Europeans settling the United States and becoming American in the process. As a counterpoint, several papers deal with the more recent crossing of the Southern border of the United States with a view from the ground giving a voice to the coyotes enabling the passage into the United States, or with a view on the technology and discourse used to block access from the South. The unfiltered narrative of—and by—recent immigrants, both legal and illegal, trying to reconstruct their lives in the United States is discussed in the interview of filmmaker Yehuda Sharim who presents his own reasons for giving them a voice.

Not all borders are physical lines on the map; some are conceptual and are crossed when moving into another culture or into another space. They are linked to the notion of cultural mobility, evidenced when a group adopts cultural traits from another group. Hence, partial assimilation of migrants into the culture of the host country is also a situation of cultural mobility, and of micro-borders surrounding subcultures or ethnic enclaves. These non-international and often invisible borders will be analyzed in the context of Arab-American fiction, in the racialized context of African-Americans confronted with—and interacting with—white Arizonians, Mexicans and Indians on the Southern border of Arizona, and in a discussion of the theoretical framework of “decolonial” studies questioning how far the colonial blueprint affects the relations between mainstream America and its Latin American neighbors.

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# Introduction

**Susanne Berthier-Foglar et Paul Otto**

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## PLAN



## TEXTE

# From the unorganized advancing frontier to the management of a stable international border

1 The history of the borders and migrations of the United States is a very recent chapter of world history. Seen from the United States, the starting date of their border history is obviously 4 July 4 1776, and from the British—and legalistic—viewpoint it can be set at the end of the Revolutionary War, 3 September 1783, when Britain recognized the new country with the signature of the Treaty of Paris.

2 However, borders and migrations have preoccupied the American colonies from the beginning of colonization and the question reached a climax when the English mother country set a western limit to their expansion with the 1763 Royal Proclamation theoretically forbidding access to the trans-Appalachian west. The colonial regulation of the

Appalachian border, as well as immigration restrictions, were part of the grievances and the "long train of abuses" listed in the Declaration of Independence:

> [The King of England] has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose, obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migration hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands. (Declaration of Independence)

With the treaty that marked the end of their rebellion against the mother country, the United States acquired the trans-Appalachian west up to the Mississippi. From then on, the United States continued to push its borders west—and south—until the mid-nineteenth century (Stephanson.)

3 If we consider the geographic space that is now the United States, in the approximately 250 years of their territorial growth, their historic border typology exhibits a great diversity which in turn has generated diverse representations. Since the country has expanded rapidly over less than a century—up to the acquisition of Alaska in 1867—and in a fairly recent period, the human memory of migrations is still vivid in memory, popular representation and storytelling.

4 Following a pattern visible in all of the Americas, the borders of the United States have started as mobile and colonial frontiers, often unorganized territories where European immigrants butted against indigenous groups (Turner). Gradually, the frontiers narrowed down to a line and became the geographically stable international borders as we know them today.

5 These subsequently evolved from porous lines allowing relatively easy crossing, even for permanent settlement, to administratively more constrictive borders with heightened access control.

6 The history of the United States has always been one of immigration and consequently border control has always existed, at least to a certain extent. Colonial America, of course, saw wave upon wave of voluntary and forced migration—English, Scots-Irish, Germans, and Africans, to name the most prominent. And in the early republic, the

U.S. population swelled from German and Irish migration. Such patterns continued throughout United States history. Sometimes immigration was promoted, when settlers or workforce were needed, and discouraged, or outlawed, at other times, often selectively, when certain ethnicities or nations of origin were considered unwanted, starting with the Chinese after the completion of the transcontinental railroad and the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Since then, various policies have been implemented from country of origin quotas, to family reunification policies, to lottery schemes and selective acceptation.

7 By their nature, borders can be considered from various viewpoints and Patricia Nelson Limerick's famous "look both ways" advice to historians (Limerick 181) is especially useful in this context. The historian of the West had in mind the relentless invasion of the continent by European settlers displacing the Indigenous and she advocated for a more balanced view on conquest. When the border between the United States and Mexico is viewed through this lens, one cannot fail to notice that most of its current setting was determined by warfare and was thus positioned on the map under duress, contrary to the wishes of people on the losing side.

8 Some of the border issues in the present volume use the concept of "race" and since the present papers are published in a French journal, this requires some clarifications which will seem obvious to American readers (Carter 547–549, Sarich and Miele 14). In the United States, the term "race" is commonly used, by the administration and the general public, to define a reality combining ethnicity, culture and various—not necessarily very visible—nuances of skin color. Despite the fact that it is a social construct, "race" is a term used in U.S. administrative documents, some even requiring "racial self-identification" and—in the case of the census—permitting the indication of multiple "races". While racism exists, the mention of a person's "race" on an application or document is not necessarily to the detriment of non-white people but is generally used today for statistical purposes and for the implementation of policy measures to redress harmful situations.

9 As for policies, such as border control or immigration, which are often considered to have a racial bias, they can be deemed neutral, or

color-blind, from a legal point of view, while statistically affecting to a larger degree individuals from one specific group, or "race" according to the terms used in the United States. This is the case for example of border policies implemented on the southern border of the United States; while they do not officially target "brown" people, the practical result is that the vast majority of the border-crossers will be from Latin America, hence the criticism that the border wall is a measure to prevent access to the U.S. for poor, non-white Latinos, hence it can be called a racist policy. To conclude, the reader should be aware of the fact that the term "race" in the present volume is always to be understood in the American sense.

10 The present volume discusses an extensive typology of borders: nineteenth century international borders crossed by American citizens settling Mexican territory (Greg Cantrell), or crossed by Europeans settling the United States and becoming American in the process (Kathleen DeHaan, David Zwart). As a counterpoint, several papers deal with the more recent crossing of the Southern border of the United States with a view from the ground giving a voice to the coyotes enabling the passage into the United States (Óscar Gil-García), or with a view on the technology and discourse used to block access from the South (Saïd Ouaked, Hugo Rangel Torrijo). The unfiltered narrative of—and by—recent immigrants, both legal and illegal, trying to reconstruct their lives in the United States is discussed in the interview of filmmaker Yehuda Sharim who presents his own reasons for giving them a voice.

11 Not all borders are physical lines on the map; some are conceptual and are crossed when moving into another culture or into another space. They are linked to the notion of cultural mobility, evidenced when a group adopts cultural traits from another group. Hence, partial assimilation of migrants into the culture of the host country is also a situation of cultural mobility, and of micro-borders surrounding subcultures or ethnic enclaves. These non-international and often invisible borders will be analyzed in the context of Arab-American fiction (Sonia Farid), in the racialized context of African-Americans confronted with—and interacting with—white Arizonians, Mexicans and Indians on the Southern border of Arizona (Robert Jefferson), and in a discussion of the theoretical framework of "decolonial" studies questioning how far the colonial blueprint affects

the relations between mainstream America and its Latin American neighbors (Maria Teresia DePaoli).

# 1. Border history: borders as international affairs and foreign ancestors becoming Americans

12 The first chapter of the present volume ("Border History") deals with international matters and borders crossed. Greg Cantrell presents an important chapter in the history of the United States, the peopling of Texas organized by *empresario* Stephen Austin ("Imagination, Representation, and Reality in the Peopling of Anglo-American Texas: Stephen F. Austin as Visionary and Pragmatist"). The transformation of Texas, from an array of colonies accredited by Mexico, to the independent Lone Star Republic, later to be annexed by the United States, shows the need for historians in the discussion of public policies and ideologies. The invasion of Mexico by private American citizens, who then proceeded to annex the area they settled to the United States, puts the border management into perspective since this particular frontier intersects with "la frontera", i.e. the borderlands between the United States and Mexico (White 89–90).

13 Gregg Cantrell focuses on the importance of the migrants' imaginary visions in their settlement of a new country, their dreams of life on better land but also their yearning for the culture they left behind. Cantrell's analysis shows how the personal aspirations of Stephen Austin, traditionally called the Father of Texas, played a role in his endeavors. Starting with petty personal motivations of wealth, his vision soon evolved into a grand scheme of bringing "civilization"—as opposed to Indian, not yet called Native American, culture—to this underpopulated region of Northern Mexico (see also Cantrell 1999).

14 Drawing attention to a family group instead of an individual, Kathleen DeHaans' paper ("A *Pleasurable Exertion*: Navigating an Immigrant Identity") addresses the representation of the migratory experience. Her research is based on the letters sent home to England by the Watson family who had emigrated to America in the early 1800s, and

she focuses on the communication techniques used by the migrants who detail their American experience to make sense for themselves as well as convince their readers to join them.

15 The letters of the Watsons are thus centered around the main push factor that convinced them to board a ship to America: the inability of the working poor in Sussex to better their condition. The Watsons then proceeded to demonstrate the positive changes in their life in North America, focusing on the fact that their migration has rendered possible profiting from their work, producing a surplus to acquire land and animals, and moving within North America when they sensed better opportunities.

16 It is surprising how the rhetorical discourse of migrants writing home is unchanged since the nineteenth century. While, for the Watsons, the most common tool of communication was letter writing, social media are used today by migrants for the somewhat hyperbolic documentation and storytelling of their new life, with a focus on desirable social and cultural situations, to justify the hardships of the migration, a fact that is well-known by the authorities of African countries, like Ivory Coast, who actively try to debunk the stereotype of the easy life in the projected host country (Gokra).

17 When the migrants to America became settlers, they also became American. The question has already been worded in the 1780s by Hector St John de Crèvecoeur in *Letters from an American Farmer* when he asked rhetorically "And what then is the American, this new man?" St John de Crèvecoeur goes on detailing the multiple—northern European—origins of the settlers and their appreciation for the new social contract they are offered in America and made possible by an agricultural life conducive of equality and producing plenty (St John de Crèvecoeur 49–52).

18 Expanding beyond families to religio-ethnic groups, David Zwart ("Remembering Immigration: Ethnicity in the Rural Midwest after World War II") focuses on the history of rural Midwestern farmers and more specifically on how settler history was (re)written in the 1950s and 1960s. After World War II, with the United States as one of the victorious powers in a bipolar world, the U.S. reaffirmed the values of the mainstream. Minorities conformed or became invisible, and the descendants of Northern European settlers in the rural

Midwest (Iowa) told the story of their ancestors as hard-working builders of the country, as real Americans.

19 Zwart uses a corpus of church commemoration pamphlets produced for the fiftieth, seventy-fifths, and mostly the hundredth anniversaries of the churches' creation by immigrants from Germany or Scandinavia. They were presented as the good immigrants, the people with a strong faith who built America, who made the land productive, who set up the core institutions of the country, and who built the churches. Their selective stories are centered on developing the land while overlooking some aspects of conquest (taking the land from the Natives) and the Civil War. They also tended to forget that their acceptation of English, in replacement of the language of their country of origin, often took several generations and was motivated by the fact that at the onset of the First World War the American tolerance for German, or any other non-English language, was low.

20 Zwart's study demonstrates how representations of "good" immigration served people who lived in the heartland, especially the Protestants. The view is from the church members who see the church as the heart of their community's identity and social world. While they have established cultural micro-borders defining their communities, they also minimize the international borders their ancestors have crossed to migrate to the United States as the process of cultural migration and assimilation has transformed these ancestors into Americans (Greenblatt 2–6).

# 2. Moving across borders: border crossing today

21 The second chapter of the present volume ("Moving across Borders") deals with border crossing today. Demographic pressure, as well as the relative ease of transportation, and easier access to information, have increased the worldwide migratory flow (U.N. International Migration Report 2017, 1–6). To avoid destabilization, the overwhelming majority of countries have implemented policies to regulate immigration and those that do not are countries with the lowest pull factor, such as Syria during the recent war.

22 The present volume being focused on the United States, it is necessary to remind the French reader that citizenship in the U.S. derives "from the soil", as opposed to "from the blood". Thus, any person born on U.S soil obtains *de facto* immediate citizenship regardless of the mother's status, whether legally or illegally in the country. This is a powerful pull factor for parents, or mothers, who want to assure their offspring a future in the U.S. without the hassle of visas or illegality. Opposition to the policy of the "instant citizen" can be heard, especially, from right wing sources, but—in 2018—there is no consensus to modify the fourteenth (citizenship) Amendment (Delgado).

23 The U.S. citizenship policy reflects the history of the country, welcoming foreign nationals when the land was sparsely populated or when workforce was needed, or when the citizenship of freed slaves was discussed. It must be added that the U.S. is a country with almost no welfare entitlement—at least compared to most Western European countries—and that migrants to the U.S are expected to work for their upkeep upon arrival with no safety net or health insurance. As a corollary, working immigrants, whether legal or illegal, are often considered with benevolence as they represent a needed workforce for jobs with low qualifications and low pay. Past administrations have dealt with mass legalizations of immigrants enabling their status change, starting with the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, which did not include provisions to stop illegal immigration. Hence the criticism it faces today.

24 The current United States administration has chosen to enforce existing immigration laws and to pass more restrictive ones to prevent illegal entry into the United States. The general context is one of fear—of the possibly dangerous Other—and of uncertainties in the face of economic shifts and heavy industries moving abroad while the high-tech sector has no need for low-qualified workers. In addition to that, a general distrust of foreigners in the age of global terrorism, and a tightening of border controls, have made it more acceptable to stop or deport immigrants (Crowe).

25 The first paper in this chapter deals with the little-known situation—at least outside the United States—of individuals who return to their country of origin because they are compelled to do so against their

wishes. These so-called “unintended returnees” may be children, who may also be citizens of the U.S., or spouses of deported individuals.

26 Óscar Gil-García (“U.S. Immigration Enforcement and the Making of Unintended Returnees”) has followed a family of foreign nationals from Guatemala and analyzed the migratory trajectories that led them to the United States. When the husband was deported, his wife and U.S.-born child (thus a U.S. citizen) left the United States for Mexico. The husband subsequently became a “coyote”, and led occasional tours, guiding people illegally through the border to the United States. While it might be easy from a safe position far away from the locus of the situation to consider him a human trafficker, Gil-García presents a nuanced picture of survival on the border and guiding people seen as helping them, rather than committing an illegal action, while the real villains are the higher ups who manage the cross-border traffic and have unlimited power over the independent coyotes.

27 It seems that whatever devices or measures are put in place by the U.S. to stop illegal immigration, the pull factor of the U.S.—and the push factor of Latin American countries—is such that individuals are willing to incur high costs and high risks to cross the border and endure a situation where they will live as illegal immigrants in the host country. Moreover, in response to the demand, the illegal border crossing business has fostered an array of criminal activities where “customers” are not protected and “small business leaders” risk torture and death.

28 Seen from the American side, the relatively unprotected U.S.–Mexican border has gradually been strengthened since the 1980s (Levario 1–3) and even more so in the twenty-first century with an increase in global terrorism as well as an upswing of isolationist policies in the United States.

29 Isolationism has been reinforced by the perception that threat comes from the outside and that danger can be prevented through immigration control. For Saïd Ouaked (“Beyond Borders: Revisiting the Concept of ‘Frontier’ in the Age of Global Terrorism”) the “new frontier” has become a locus where the American security apparatus confronts incoming dangers. For Ouaked, the narrative on immigration now focuses on the unwanted characteristics of

immigrants who are seen as a threat to the economy—taking away jobs from American citizens—as well as potential criminals and terrorists. The recent anti-Muslim rhetoric also fosters the great Satan image of the U.S. in areas of the world where there is traditionally little sympathy for the country.

30 The most visible way to keep perceived dangers at bay is the construction of a massive wall on the southern border of the United States. For Hugo Rangel Torrijo ("The Conservative Discourse Behind the US–Mexico Border Wall vs. Co-operation for Cross-Border Regional Development") the wall exemplifies the impermeable border and is the direct offspring of the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which shifted a colonial border of the United States to the South and to the West.

31 In parallel to the construction of the wall, a negative image of the Latino is being created in the U.S. to foster distrust of immigrants from the South with an exaggerated discourse of fear (crime, terrorism, drugs) that does not match reality.

32 While the official discourse on immigration largely focuses on the risks posed by people crossing the southern border illegally, Yehuda Sharim provides us an insight of a different vision in his interview ("As Borders Are Crossed: Violence, Race, and Migrant Realities"). As filmmaker and academic, he uses the techniques of oral history to record the unfiltered voices of immigrants with hopes of a better life in America, hardships to be overcome, and a new culture to be mastered and integrated into past experiences. His Middle-Eastern, Latino, Asian, and African voices imbue immigrants with humanity transforming them into seekers of the American Dream instead of anonymous carriers of risks.

# 3. Cultural mobility: culture and ethnic borders

33 Crossing a cultural border is an enduring element of migrations. The third chapter of the present volume ("Cultural Mobility") deals with cultural borders that have been crossed and with conflict in progress.

34 Literature by minorities often speaks truths that cannot be said elsewhere. Set at the crossing between reality and fiction, minority literature gives voice to fictional characters who draw their inspiration from real life. While this can be said about any piece of literature, minorities need—more than any mainstream group—to present their take on subjects, and their life, within the host society through the protective filter of the literary text offering credibility through its position in high culture.

35 Sonia Farid ("Being Arab-American: Stereotyping and Representation in *Arabian Jazz*") presents a cultural and social vision of a novel set in the United States by Jordanian-American writer Diana Abu-Jaber.

36 Farid argues that the genre is fraught with difficulties as mainstream readers in the United States prefer rags-to-riches tales with an Arab version of the America Dream, while avoiding mentions of cultural and geopolitical conflict. The text Sonia Farid chooses to analyze shatters the model of the exotic ethnicity, serving as a veneer, and delves into controversial topics and stereotypes such as the dissension among Arabs of various backgrounds, the patriarchal society, the role of women, and honor killings. The migratory trajectory of the main female character does give a realistic view of geographic borders crossed and of internalized borders carried by migrants to their new host country.

37 The invisible borders surrounding cultures are the main theme of Robert Jefferson's text on African-American GIs stationed on the Southern Arizona border during WW2 ("Dark Passages: African American World War II GIs, Blackness, and Border Town Life and Cultures in 1940s Southern Arizona"). Several borders intersect in Jefferson's text: the international border with Mexico and the racial border delineating groups of non-white individuals, whether brown—Mexican, Indian—or black. Arizona, has a long history of race relations. After the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Mexicans remained on U.S. soil as second-class citizens while Indians were in limbo, not yet citizens, and had to be protected by the U.S. army against massacres by locals. This was the situation at the end of the nineteenth century, and at the eve of the Second World War Arizona

was still a stratified society when the black GIs arrived in the border towns of Arizona.

38 Jefferson argues that they felt—at first—more welcomed in the Mexican border towns they visited for entertainment, at least until their massive arrival led to the risk of racial strife. Jefferson's paper discusses how black bodies were viewed as threats against the established social order, how racial purity was enforced in areas where interracial relations were frowned upon, and how black and brown outsiders interacted on the margins of white society.

39 The notion of outsiders viewed as threats is the theme of Maria Teresia DePaoli's analysis of undocumented immigrants who have no voice to present their plight ("Can the Undocumented Immigrant Speak? Exploring Decolonial Thinking in Mexican and Latinx Literature and Cinema"). At the crossroad between cultural studies and politics, DePaoli also uses literary texts (in the broad sense, including film discourse) to present the trajectories of children brought to the U.S. with their parents and growing up undocumented as illegal aliens.

40 Her decolonial analysis starts with the term "alien" used by the U.S. administration services, and her criticism of its non-human, extra-terrestrial connotation. Decolonial thinking considers the economic purpose—as a cheap and uncomplaining workforce—of the illegal aliens. As racialized Others, they live on the margins of society, serving those who are protected by citizenship.

41 The question of borderland ("frontera") citizenship is ironic as it brings us back to the first chapter of the present volume and to the empresario Stephen Austin settling Americans on Mexican territory. A colonial border was then established and the same colonial border is being discussed, crossed, increasingly militarized in the twenty-first century, and, as Brunet-Jailly argues, increasingly used as an exclusionary device (Brunet-Jailly 639).

# Conclusion: the ongoing research on migration and borders at ILCEA4 – UGA

42 The present volume of *Représentations dans le monde anglophone* is part of an ongoing research program on migrations and borders at University Grenoble Alpes by ILCEA4, the Institute for Research on Languages and Cultures in Europe, the Americas, Asia, Australia, and Africa. We are also indebted to the researchers of PACTE (Laboratoire PACTE, UMR) and more particularly its director, geographer and border specialist, Professor Anne-Laure Amilhat-Szary and her research on the borders of the United States.

43 Grenoble is located in south-eastern France, in close proximity with Italy and Switzerland, and has witnessed border warfare and clashes over the centuries since the Roman occupation. Living close to international borders also means that many inhabitants have a personal experience of border crossing or family migration. The renewed interest in migrations and borders also stems from the last decade's world-wide instabilities also felt in this region of France, with civilians fleeing the war in Syria or danger zones in Afghanistan, and the demographic crisis in Africa sending a steady stream of African migrants across the Mediterranean. These reasons help explain why we are interested in other push factors, such as the dreary economic and social situations in the Americas south of the United States, especially south of Mexico, and the enduring pull factor of the stable and relatively safe countries of the north. As for international border management in the wider Grenoble region, we have experienced the growth of Europe with the gradual ease of trans-European border crossing into Italy—for European citizens—with the Schengen zone border control regulations. We have seen Switzerland accepting some European regulations, and rejecting others, creating situations where strict rules were enforced crossing one way or the other for citizens of Europe or those of Switzerland. More recently, we have seen migrants—mostly from Africa—crossing Alpine passes on foot to evade border controls.

44 Since borders control the flow of goods, capital, and people, the advent of mass terrorism in the early twenty first century added an element of threat to the management of individuals crossing international borders. Both mass migrations and international terrorism have thus led to more defensive borders, and to a discussion about wanted versus unwanted immigration. While this is not specific to the Grenoble area, it is part of a global experience.

45 The above elements help explain the reasons, and the need, for academic studies on borders and migrations, i.e. research disconnected from direct policy-making but offering a wider and more informed viewpoint on relevant issues. Many of the issues discussed here find an echo in the Grenoble region: territorial annexation and a displaced international border (neighboring Savoy was annexed by France in 1860), the integration of hard-working migrants in the industrial post-WWII days, the incoming flow of Syrians, and later Africans and the ongoing discussion on whether to block their arrival or favor their integration.

46 It is also our aim to discuss border and migration issues with students of every level, from the Bachelor, to the Masters, and to Doctoral studies. Our purpose is to provide information that will—or will not—be used by policy-makers, but will form a body of knowledge that can be drawn upon when necessary, knowledge that can also be discussed, disproved or amended. This is the role academia should play in public life.

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# AUTEURS

**Susanne Berthier-Foglar**
Susanne Berthier-Foglar is currently Professor of American studies and Native American studies at Université Grenoble Alpes (France). Her previous positions include Professor at University Savoie Mont Blanc (2007–2012), and Assistant Professor at Université Stendhal (1996-2007). She is the adjunct director of ILCEA4. She has published a monograph on Pueblo history (*Les Indiens Pueblo du Nouveau-Mexique*, Presses universitaires de Bordeaux, 2010) and edited books on the genetic identities of the indigenous (*Biomapping*, with S. Whittick, S. Tolazzi, Rodopi, 2012), on the French colonization of the America (*La France en Amérique*, Université de Savoie, 2009), on mountains, power and conflict (*La montagne, pouvoirs et conflits*, with F. Bertrandy, Université de Savoie, 2011), and on the resistance and survival of the Natives (*Sites of Resistance*, with B. Madhu and L. Richard, Manuscrit, 2006).
IDREF : https://www.idref.fr/111738709
ORCID : http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3769-7836
HAL : https://cv.archives-ouvertes.fr/susanne-berthier-foglar
ISNI : http://www.isni.org/0000000080076259
BNF : https://data.bnf.fr/fr/16103045

**Paul Otto**
Paul Otto is Professor of American History, William Penn Faculty Fellow, and Chair of the Department of History, Sociology, and Politics at George Fox University (USA). Formerly he was Associate Professor of History at Dordt College (1996–2002). He is author of *The Dutch-Munsee Encounter in America: The Struggle for Sovereignty in the Hudson Valley* (2006) and has published several articles including "'This is that which … they call *Wampum*': Europeans Coming to Terms with Native Shell Beads", *Early American Studies* (2017). He is the recipient of the Hendricks Award (1999) and has been a fellow at the Henry E. Huntington Library (California) and National Humanities Center (North Carolina).
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# Border History: Borders as International Affairs and Foreign Ancestors Becoming Americans

# Imagination, Representation, and Reality in the Peopling of Anglo-American Texas: Stephen F. Austin as Visionary and Pragmatist

*Imaginaire, représentation et réalité dans le peuplement anglo-américain du Texas : Stephen F. Austin, visionnaire et pragmatique*

**Gregg Cantrell**

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## TEXTE

1 The emigration of Anglo-Americans into Mexican Texas in the 1820s and 1830s set in motion one of the most significant episodes in the history of the southwestern borderlands. As a result of that emigration, Texas won its independence from Mexico in 1836. Within a decade Texas would be annexed by the United States, which in turn brought about the US-Mexican War and the reshaping of the continent with the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. Leading the Americanization of Texas was Stephen Fuller Austin, a young Missourian. In 1821 Austin became the first and by far the most successful Texas *empresario*, or colonization agent, and by the time he took command of the Texas revolutionary army in the fall of 1835, more than 30,000 Americans had followed him to Texas. After his death in 1836 at age forty-three, Austin became a legendary figure in the history and mythology of the Lone Star State, lionized as the "Father of Texas" by subsequent generations of Texans. [1]

2 The historiography of early Anglo Texas has followed general trends in American historiography, although the shelf-life of older interpretations has often proved stubbornly and unfortunately durable. Not surprisingly, nineteenth-century chroniclers, following the practice of the era, cast Austin in the great-man mold and the history of Anglo colonization in a heroic narrative of patriotic pioneers. By the time that professional scholars turned their

attention to Texas in the early twentieth century, the influence of Frederick Jackson Turner and his Frontier Thesis seemed like a natural fit, and Austin and his times found their historian in the person of Eugene C. Barker, who devoted his fifty-year career at the University of Texas to the study of Austin and the Texas Revolutionary era. Barker's understanding of his subject can be gleaned readily from the full title of his magnum opus, his 1925 biography of Austin: *The Life of Stephen F. Austin, Founder of Texas, 1793–1846: A Chapter in the Westward Movement of the American People*.

3 Barker's Turnerian interpretation held sway virtually unchallenged until social historians began chipping away at it in the 1970s. Still, while correcting many of the Turner School's errors and prejudices, the social historians largely failed in their efforts to craft a new master narrative of the Texas Revolutionary era. In the past few years that has changed. The new histories of capitalism, and particularly those exploring the rise of the world cotton economy, have breathed new interpretive life into the story of Texas and the US–Mexican borderlands. Borrowing outlooks from the French *Annales* school and world-systems theory, among others, Edward Baptist's *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* and Sven Beckert's *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* have refocused scholars' attention on the central role of cotton and slavery in American and world history. Most recently, Andrew Torget's *Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery, and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800–1850*, has brought that focus to the story of Texas and Mexico in the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s. At the hands of Torget, the Anglo-American colonization of Texas, the Texas Revolution, and the short-lived Republic of Texas become central chapters in the inexorable rise of the cotton economy, and the struggles over the institution crucial to that rise—racial slavery—become the driving force behind the familiar political and military events of the period. The founding of the Republic of Texas in 1836 as a slaveholders' republic, Torget provocatively argues, constituted a dress rehearsal for the later Confederate States of America, a rehearsal as unsuccessful in its own way as its more famous successor in the 1860s. [2]

4 Those like myself who study and teach Texas history owe a deep debt to Torget and his fellow revisionists for providing such a sophisticated and compelling new way of understanding this period of Texas and borderlands history. At the same time, their approach presents problems for those who believe in contingency, who think that individuals matter. In the more-or-less mechanistic story constructed by the revisionists, remove a Stephen F. Austin from the historical stage and you ultimately get more-or-less the same outcome. By their very natures, the *Annales*, world-systems, and history-of-capitalism approaches discount, if not ignore, the human element. If the profits to be made from cotton were the driving force behind American emigration into Texas, then those profits must have, in some way, motivated the individuals who spearheaded that emigration; those who might have stated otherwise were either dishonest or delusional. In such a historical treatment, there is little room for imagination, for dreams and human striving in fields far removed from the mundane business of business. This, I believe, is to be regretted.

5 A close look at Stephen F. Austin's life provides an opportunity to examine the role that imagination played in the history of the southwestern borderlands. Austin was born in Virginia in 1793, the son of an enterprising Connecticut Yankee, Moses Austin, and his Philadelphia-born wife Maria. The elder Austin was a hard-driving entrepreneur who had been in the lead-mining business in western Virginia before moving to Spanish Upper Louisiana, where he cajoled the colonial authorities into granting a tract of land containing the richest known lead deposits on the continent. In the early years of the nineteenth century Moses made a princely fortune, only to see it all come crashing down in the aftermath of the War of 1812 and the Panic of 1819. In 1820 a destitute Moses Austin traveled to Spanish Texas and convinced the last Spanish governor there to allow him to colonize three hundred American families into Texas. Believing that the Texas venture would quickly restore the lost family fortune, Moses immediately began urging his twenty-six-year-old son Stephen to join him in the enterprise, to which Stephen responded with a decided lack of enthusiasm. He saw Moses as an impractical dreamer whose recklessness had brought humiliation to the family, and he wanted no part of his father's scheme. [3]

6 Moses died before he could launch his colony. Only after learning of his father's death did Stephen begin to exhibit any enthusiasm for the project, for he now knew that if the Spanish authorities recognized him as his father's heir, he would be free to manage the project in his own way, which by his nature would be cautious and methodical. Austin arrived in Texas just as news of Mexican independence reached San Antonio, and he soon learned to his chagrin that he would need to seek approval of the new government in Mexico City. He ended up spending a full year in the capital before receiving that approval; in the meantime his first colonists were arriving in Texas. When Austin arrived back in Texas in the spring of 1823, he found that he faced an overwhelmingly difficult and challenging task in forging a functioning colony peopled by unruly frontiersmen in a largely uncharted wilderness contested by hostile Indians, all with new, untested, and highly unstable national and state governments.

7 Austin's earliest recorded thoughts about his Texas venture tended toward the mundane and personal. He had come to Texas to make money, to restore the lost family fortune. It soon became apparent, however, that Texas would offer no quick and easy path to riches. This realization alone would have defeated many men, but Austin's imagination allowed him to find refuge in a more circumscribed vision of domestic tranquility. Writing to the widow of his close friend and business partner Joseph H. Hawkins in April 1824, Austin relayed his expectation that several of his family members would soon join him in Texas. "[M]ight we not form a little circle a kind of isolated world of our own amidst these wilds and hope that happiness would become our presiding goddess?" he asked Mrs Joseph Ann Hawkins. Austin confessed that "perhaps it was a romantic dream" and that "peaceful quiet scenes" were likely to "be lost in vain regrets for past enjoyments in the gay and bustling world". He acknowledged that "The mind of man is of too unstable a texture to found even a theory of happiness upon" and that "the evil passions of the human heart [might] soon prove the fallacy of all such dreams". Despite his pessimism that such dreams could be realized, he nevertheless felt "disposed to try the experiment and shall endeavor to collect my scattered family to one point" (Stephen F. Austin to Mrs Joseph Anne Hawkins, 20 April 1824). A few months later he elaborated on that dream to his sister Emily Perry:

> I want to free my self from debt and then to sit quietly down on a farm in this Country for the balance of my life and hope to see Brother married and settled on one side of me, and if it could be Mr Perry and you on the other but all my plans have been broken in upon and I make no more calculations except to spend my life here; wheither [sic] rich or poor, here (that is in this colony) I expect to remain permanently. (Stephen F. Austin to Emily Perry, 17 December 1824)

8 Austin's imagination seemed limited to bucolic scenes of hearth and home, but a man of his talents and education surely could have realized those dreams in the relative safety and comfort of a genteel American city and a career in business or law. Instead, a new dream was beginning to fire his imagination. Rather than seeing Texas colonization simply as the means to an end (and a rather personal, private end at that), at some point in the mid-1820s he began to profess a new vision, a more elaborate justification for his errand into the wilderness. Americanizing Texas became an end in itself, an enterprise motivated by humanitarian purposes. As early as May 1824, a year after his return from Mexico City, he expressed that vision in a proclamation to his colonists, saying,

> […] the greatest consolation I ever expect to derive from My labors in the wilderness of this Province will arise from the conviction that I have benefited many of my fellow beings, and laid the foundation for the settlement of one of the finest countries in the world. (Stephen F. Austin to the Settlers, 1 May 1824)

Austin would return to this vision many times over the remaining twelve years of his life—so often, indeed, that it is hard to escape the conclusion that it became chief among the factors motivating him.

9 In that 1824 proclamation, Austin expressed two interrelated themes that would shape his conceptual thinking about Texas and his role in its settlement: first, that he was a philanthropist of sorts, that he was making it possible for thousands of people to prosper and provide security for their families; and secondly that he was a harbinger of civilization, that Texas was being "redeemed" from its wilderness state and becoming a place where commerce and culture would flourish. He expressed these themes both publicly and privately. One

public example came in the spring of 1827 on the occasion of the promulgation of the newly drafted constitution for the state of Coahuila and Texas. At a gathering of the colonists, Austin offered a toast, saying:

> We emigrated to this country when it was a wilderness, by our labors we have Settled and improved it—plenty now rewards our industry—the charms of refined society, like the budding rose, is beginning to shed their genial influence around us and the wild characteristics of nature are rapidly disappearing before the March of enterprise and civilization. (Copy of Toa[s]ts and remarks of Col. A at the publication of the State Constitution, 27 July [29 May] 1827, at S. F. de A.)

10 He frequently elaborated on his personal motivations in private correspondence. In an 1829 letter to William H. Wharton he wrote at length on those motivations:

> I have no ambition of a political military or avaricious character [he declared]. My ambition has been to succeed in redeeming Texas from its wilderness state by means of the plough alone, in spreading over it North American population enterprise and intelligence, in doing this I hoped to make the fortune of thousands and my own amongst the rest. My success so far has fully equalled my expectation, and I think that I derived more satisfaction from the view of flourishing farms springing up in this wilderness than military or political chieftains do from the retrospect of their victorious campains [sic]. My ambition is to build up, for the present as well as for future generations, to do it silently without ostentation or display. (Stephen F. Austin to William H. Wharton, 24 April 1829)

11 It is impossible to understand fully Austin's mindset without considering the role that honor played in his thoughts and actions. For elite white men like Austin in early nineteenth-century America, honor fundamentally shaped their values in ways that modern observers are apt to overlook. In that honor system, money was a means, not an end. Possession of a fortune would allow a leader to make decisions for the common good rather than for his own narrow financial interests (Wyatt-Brown). Writing in 1829, Austin explained, that "I may frankly confess that I would have abandoned the settlement, the settlers and the country, if no other motive than

pecuniary individual interest had influenced me" (Stephen F. Austin to J. L. Woodbury, 6 July 1829). On another occasion he told his cousin Mary Austin Holley, "I had never learned the value of money, at least that value which the world gives it: and the hope of amassing wealth was not the principal incentive that led me here". Austin admitted that when he first came to Texas, "Ambition" had "kindled its fires" in his breast, but he claimed that

> [...] the flame was a mild and gentle one, consisting more of the wish to build up the fortunes and happiness of others, and to realize my dreams of good will to my fellow men than of the overbearing spirit of military fame, or domineering power.

His "ambition", he repeated, "was to redeem this fine country—our glorious Texas—and convert it into a home for the unfortunate, a refuge from poverty, an asylum for the sufferers from selfish avarice" (Stephen F. Austin to Mary Austin Holley, 29 December 1831).

12 For an honorable leader, his reward might or might not bring public acclaim, for the masses were often shortsighted or ignorant, susceptible to being misled by false prophets or demagogues. Indeed, it was the lot of the true leader to be unappreciated. In the preceding letter to his cousin, Austin gently chided her for complaining that his efforts had gone unrewarded.

> You say the world knows nothing of me [Austin noted]. I have never sought for notoriety, nor extended fame, nor do I expect any thing of the kind. A successful military chieftain is hailed with admiration and applause, and monuments perpetuate his fame. But the bloodless pioneer of the wilderness, like the corn and cotton he causes to spring where it never grew before, attracts no notice. He is either cried down as a speculator, or his works are too unostentatious to be worthy of attention. No slaughtered thousands or smoking cities attest his devotion to the cause of human happiness, and he is regarded by the mass of the world as a humble instrument to pave the way for others. I feel thankful that my happiness does not depend upon the possession of fame. (Stephen F. Austin to Mary Austin Holley, 29 December 1831)

13 By 1829 Austin could take personal satisfaction in his success, acknowledging that "I had a little pride in wishing to succeed, for

I undertook this enterprise in opposition to the advice of my friends in the United States, who nearly all pronounced it visionary and impracticable" (Stephen F. Austin to J. L. Woodbury, 6 July 1829). But in the end, Austin found his reward where his code of honor would most require it, in recognition from other men of honor. Referring to his goal of Americanizing Texas, he simply noted that "I deemed the object laudable and honorable and worthy the attention of honorable men" (Stephen F. Austin to William H. Wharton, 24 April 1829).

14 Austin's honor-inspired vision of himself as philanthropist and bearer of civilization served him in new ways when relations between Anglo Texas and the Mexican central government deteriorated in the years after 1830. In 1834 Austin returned to Mexico City to lobby the government for reform, only to be arrested on his way back to Texas. From his prison cell in the capital he wrote a letter to Rafael Llano, brother of the governor of Nuevo León, in which he used a version of his vision tailored for Mexican ears.

> Texas [he explained] is depopulated; I wish to people it. The population that is there is backward; I wish it to be advanced and improved by the introduction of industrious agricultural settlers, liberal republicans. I want the savage Indians subdued; the frontier protected; the lands cultivated; roads and canals opened; river navigation developed and the rivers covered with boats and barges carrying the produce of the interior to the coast for export … I wish to take from my native land and from every other country the best that they contain and plant it in my adopted land—that is to say, their best inhabitants, their industry, and their enlightenment, so that the eastern frontier which is now without population and in its greater part almost without government, might present an example worthy of imitation. (Stephen F. Austin to Rafael Llanos, 14 January 1834)

Austin admitted to Llano that his plans were "magnificent, and as it now appears, visionary", but he asserted that any Mexican who did not share such a vision "does not love his country …" (ibid.).

15 Two years later the Texas war for independence was raging. As Santa Anna's army marched toward San Antonio and its small garrison of defenders at the Alamo, Stephen F. Austin arrived in New Orleans, having been dispatched by the Texan provisional government to seek support for the cause in the United States. Writing to his cousin Mary

Holley, he informed her that “A new republic is about to rear its independent banner over a country but lately a wilderness”, and he avowed that “There is magnificence in the idea—prosperity freedom and glory in the results”. He admitted being “rather enthusiastic in the view I take of it”, but he was out of paper and would have to write more another time. But as he closed the letter, he left no doubt where he stood on the subject of Texas independence. “My whole heart and soul”, he declared, “is devoted to it” (Stephen F. Austin to Mary Austin Holley, 7 January 1836).

16 In 1990, just as a new generation of revisionist scholars was mounting a frontal assault on many of the hoary myths of the American West, the great Texan novelist Larry McMurtry weighed in on this “New Western History”. McMurtry acknowledged that a more realistic depiction of the West was long overdue, but he also gently chided the revisionists for depicting “a West where people had only jobs, and crappy, environmentally destructive jobs at that”. McMurtry perceptively noted that

> [...] the winning of the West was an act based on a dream of empire dreamed by people with very different mentalities and ambitions from those historians or Westerners who may now direct a critical eye, quite fairly, at the legacy of that same dream and that same act. [Such historians], in their effort to have the truth finally told, often fail themselves because they so rarely do justice to the quality of imagination that constitutes part of the truth. They may be accurate about the experience, but they simplify or ignore the emotions and imaginings that impelled the Western settlers. Explorers and pioneers of all stamps needed imagination, much as athletes need carbohydrates. Fantasy provided part of the fiber that helped them survive the severity that the land put them to. (McMurtry).

17 Stephen F. Austin could be highly pragmatic, even Machiavellian, in his myriad dealings with settlers, Indians, or Mexican officials during his fifteen years as the leader of Texas colonization. He understood clearly what the most recent band of revisionist historians have discovered: that the future of Texas was inextricably bound up in the burgeoning world cotton economy, an economy dependent on enslaved labor. Austin made his peace with that cruel reality. But the unpleasant circumstances of his life and his calling paradoxically may

have made him even more reliant on his imagination. As McMurtry suggested, his utopian dreams of providing home and livelihood for his settlers and for presiding over the rise and development of a civilized, prosperous Texas enabled him to press forward, to endure the hardships and the frequent moral and ethical compromises that his position regularly forced upon him. As historians, when we overlook or dismiss the role that imagination plays in the lives of the people we study, we do so at the risk of telling only part of the story.

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- Stephen F. Austin to Mary Austin Holley, 7 January 1836, vol. 3, pp. 300–301.
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## NOTES

1 For an overview of Austin’s life, see Cantrell, *Stephen F. Austin: Empresario of Texas*.

2 For an overview of the historiography on early Texas emphasizing Barker’s influence, see Lack.

3 Unless otherwise noted, all biographical information on Stephen and Moses Austin is from Cantrell, *Stephen F. Austin*.

## RÉSUMÉ

**English**
In this essay, Gregg Cantrell examines the leader of one of the great migrations of American history: Stephen F. Austin, who spearheaded Anglo-American immigration into Mexican Texas in the 1820s and 1830s. Granted permission in 1821 to bring three hundred American families into the sparsely settled northern Mexican province, Austin made Texas colonization his life’s work. “My ambition”, he wrote, “has been to succeed in redeeming Texas from its wilderness state by means of the plough alone, in spreading over it North American population enterprise and intelligence. In doing this I hoped to make the fortune of thousands and my own amongst the rest”. His statement hints at mixed motives. On one hand, “redeeming Texas from its wilderness state” seems to carry an idealistic vision of civilization conquering barbarism, with the verb “redeeming” carrying quasi-religious

overtones. On the other hand, making his "fortune" clearly loomed large in Austin's calculations. Stephen F. Austin's case has much to teach us about the complex role that imagination and idealism played in the expansion of the United States into the Spanish/Mexican Southwest. Modern borderlands historians have tended to emphasize the sordid pecuniary motives of the Americans who conquered the West. A nuanced view, however, of "pioneers" like Austin reveals that both idealism and pragmatic concerns figured into the settlement of the American West. As the novelist Larry McMurtry aptly put it, "Explorers and pioneers of all stamps needed imagination, much as athletes need carbohydrates".

## INDEX

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## AUTEUR

**Gregg Cantrell**
Gregg Cantrell earned his PhD from Texas A&M University. Since 2003 he has held the Ralph and Erma Lowe Chair in Texas History at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas. His publications include *Stephen F. Austin: Empresario of Texas* (Yale University Press, 1999); and "'Our Very Pronounced Theory of Equal Rights to All': Race, Citizenship, and Populism in the South Texas Borderlands", *The Journal of American History* (vol. 100, no. 3, 2013). He has just completed a book-length manuscript titled *The People's Revolt: Texas Populists and the Roots of American Liberalism*. He is a former president of the Texas State Historical Association and a member of the Texas Institute of Letters.
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# A *Pleasurable Exertion*: Writing an Immigrant Identity

*Un « effort agréable » : l'écriture d'une identité d'immigré*

**Kathleen DeHaan**

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## PLAN



## TEXTE

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*This research is due in no small measure to a Balch Fellowship for which I was able to study at the Balch Center for Ethnic Studies and at the Library Company of Philadelphia. The Benjamin Smith publication from 1829 was one of many original documents available to me. I am deeply grateful for this experience.*

1 Migration—whether spiritual, psychological or physical, across oceans of space and time, or simply from one state to another—begins as a dramatic tension between resignation and restlessness, as a struggle between satisfaction with what one has and longing for something more, as a response to exigent circumstances such as political oppression, religious persecution or economic deprivation. The process of migration creates a need for someone to tell a story, to have his or her life heard, to make life sensible and significant. Immigrant letters record and give expression to such tensions and exigencies.

2 Millions of immigrants wrote letters as a way to grapple with the exigencies of migration, to hold fast to homeland connections, to

report on new lives lived, and to come to terms with a shifting sense of self. Letters were forums for immigrants to create, maintain, and change their identity. Indeed, these were powerful mediums for a diaspora deprived of most access to political and social outlets. The historically appointed "huddled masses", became more than lines on a ship's manifest. They were mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters—each with a former life remembered and a new life imagined. And whether "pushed" or "pulled", forced out or drawn to, every immigrant left something behind and anticipated what was yet to be. Many wrote about their transitions in journals, diaries, and letters. As a result, we have a record of the great migrations in very personal terms.

3 This essay is designed to suggest strategies for reading immigrant correspondence so we might be better able to understand these primary texts as they chart migrations across international, national, state, even conceptual borders. While it is compelling to read letters as historical artifacts or as personal curiosities, reading rhetorically offers another perspective and helps us to understand the dimensionality of immigrant lives and how these lives were constructed. The mistake we make when considering immigrant letters is in reading them only for what they can contribute to our understanding of history, sociology, and other related disciplines. While making important contributions to these fields, immigrant letters are far more than data mines. They are also highly contextual moments of rhetorical identity, and as such are strategic social practices offering commanding agency to often-muted diasporas. This essay offers an exploration of the evolution of immigrant identity through an analysis of a select set of one family's immigrant letters. I begin with a brief discussion of symbolic construction of identity amidst challenges of migration, then focus on four specific exigencies within the Watson correspondence written in the early 1800's (edited by Benjamin Smith and published in London in 1829).

# Naming and social order

4 In any transnational moment those on the move are challenged to resituate the self. In these moments, immigrants seek to make sense of all that is different and foreign from their perspective (dress,

worldview, religion, food, government, etc.), and in so doing new and tentative meanings and understandings are created (Handlin 6). During such transitory periods, immigrants select symbols to create and sustain different worldviews, which then allows them to act within the New World according to this edited script (Duncan 21–22). A well-chosen symbol provides immigrants with "confidence to act in a present because it resolves difference, doubt and ambiguity" (Duncan 112). Such symbolic action allows immigrants to label and thus separate good from bad, resulting in a new social understanding and order which remains contingent in space and time. Assigning a name or a label is an action relative to the past and dependent upon the future—where they have been vis-à-vis where they are going. The ability to name or rename has powerful consequences, since, in this naming, immigrants are constructing a new social order within which they choose to live. In the immigrant's transformation from emigrant to immigrant to citizen there is a constant process of differentiation occurring as is evidenced in the symbolic action of the letters analyzed in this study.

5 I argue that as enunciations of identity, immigrant letters made it possible for those who wrote to span literal and symbolic borderlands. Making the transition from Old World to New was not as simple as boarding a boat and crossing an ocean. Such breaks are never clean. Anzaldúa speaks of this tension when she writes, "Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and value systems", theirs was the "in-between consciousness" of the immigrant (Anzaldúa 78). Anzaldúa uses the terms "mestiza" and "borderlands" to express this inner struggle of borders in which the immigrant experiences a cultural collision and ends up on both shores. "A borderland", she writes, "is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition" (Anzaldúa 3). Bhabha labels it "a third space". Lavie and Swendenburg write of a "third time-space" (16) in which subjects "who are fragments of collectivities-that-were" return to a derived identity and cultural heritage (see also Trinh 14, 59).

6 Immigrant letters reflected and responded to exigencies experienced in the transition. Typically, these exigencies are reflected in recurrent themes ranging from finances to religion to birth to death, with this

exploring specific themes of interpreting new world customs and cultures, navigating increased mobility, understanding changing conceptions of work, and maintaining family connections.

7 Although there has been extensive research into immigrant letters, none of this research considers these texts as forums for the development of a transnational immigrant identity. My analysis seeks to complement and extend scholarly understanding of these letters and to appreciate them for the critical merit they deserve.

8 Letter writing is a social practice, fulfilling needs normally associated with face-to-face encounters such as intimacy, care, concern, affection, and emotional support. (Maybin). Barton and Hall argue that letter writing "[…] mediate[s] a huge range of human interactions; through letters one can narrate experiences, dispute points, describe situations, offer explanations, give instructions and so on" (1). Letters provide a site where immigrants construct, articulate and deliberate their knowledge of the world.

9 Langellier refers to this as a "boundary phenomenon" and explores the movement "[…] between literary and social discourse, between written and oral communication, between public and private spheres of interaction, between ritual performance and incidental conversation, between fact and fiction" (138).

10 Some scholars place personal letters in the oral tradition. Nevalainen places them in the "involved category closer to comedies and fiction than to such literate genres as official documents, sermons, religious treatises and academic prose" (183).

11 Immigrant letters are not isolated acts, but overlapping waves of responses to the Old World and New. They possess an interactive quality whereby they intervene "[…] between experience and story, the way that narrative mediates experience even when a factual account is promised" (Langellier 128). There is a literal and metaphorical ebb and flow, which is in response to or in anticipation of other voices (Maybin 170). This relationship between writer and audience and the mediation of response, is further evidenced in immigrant letters.

12 For this essay, I have chosen letters written by John and Mary Watson. The Watsons and their children left Sussex County, England

in late spring of 1819 arriving in New Brunswick, Canada, 16 June, ultimately settling in Aurora, Indiana, United States. Their collection of letters (1819–1828) is part of a larger volume, *Twenty-Four Letters from Labourers in America to Their Friends in England*. Published in 1829 from London, this book was intended to bring to print the letters of a community of emigrants from Sussex County. As the editor, Benjamin Smith, notes,

> No method of conveying the knowledge of these important facts to the working poor of England seems more effectual, than that of publishing a fair specimen of the letters, written by labourers in that country to their friends of the same class here. (III)

Not unlike millions of others, the Watsons chose to depart the homeland for economic reasons, leaving family, seeking work in Canada, then the United States, and hoping to create a better life for themselves and their children. Yet, even in this transition, with its focus on the future, there is loyalty to the past. This is the key tension. It is almost a perceptible stirring, a movement between forgetting and remembering, between holding fast to familial bonds, familial places and routines while embracing the exigencies of emigration and arguing that the decision to migrate was the right one.

13 John and Mary's letters portray immigrants who are responsible for much of what happens along their journey. This self-determination—one of the key themes appearing throughout these letters—reflects a much different attitude than other immigrant letter collections, where some reveal experiences in which immigrants portray themselves as having little power or control over their unfolding lives.

14 Immigrants are not *a priori* historical objects, nor are they reconstructions; they are instead a product of rhetorical discourse out of which an ambivalent, shifting and ever emergent identity is born. Within this context, immigrant letters are self-generative in that they help immigrants negotiate their liminal, borderland existence.

# Customs and cultures

15 The western ideal in the 18th and early 19th centuries was that of the cosmopolitan citizen, a citizen of the world, embracing various philosophies and ideologies. Vestiges of Franklin, Jefferson and Melville helped to define the cosmopolitan and intellectual landscape as a response to a colonial life of living on the margins. The great migrations however, were no longer viewed as "cosmopolitan", particularly by those who defined themselves as Americans. The strength of the Protestant expansion, the Know Nothing Party, Eugenics, and Darwinism seemed to begin to redraw the lines so that immigrants in the late 1800s and early 1900s struggled to establish an identity of belonging. This tension appears in letters as they seek to place themselves into this landscape.

16 Letters about a new lifestyle were part of that negotiation process whereby immigrants constructed a space in a new homeland as their correspondence helped to establish a right to belong, a right to home. Further, their letters affirmed an immigrant's ethnicity as well as bridged the chasm between the Old World and New. On these pages, they could situate their selves in their new country—as participants in an American life of celebrations, religion, and politics, as well as consumers of the mundane.

17 The Watson letters paint a nearly idyllic immigration picture of the New World. Correspondence was a vital rhetorical space for immigrants in that it allowed immigrants to situate themselves in the favorable environment of their own construction. Thus in bridging these worlds, Watson letters had to possess an optimism that was persuasive and compelling. In their first letters, Watson's commentary frames the New World as a land of abundance. John writes in October 1819,

> A man may catch as many fish in an hour as would do for him and his family for a day […]. There is plenty of land, but we want men to work it. You would really wonder to see so many thousands of acres of woody land idle, and good land.

And again in August 1820 his notes suggest success tied to a new consumerism:

> Butcher's meat of all kinds is exceedingly cheap; every farmer here has an orchard, in which the apples and peaches hang almost as thick as your hops. Clothing, is about the same here as in England; money is scarce at present, owing to there being no demand abroad for grain, but every thing else is in the utmost profusion; and I look forward with a confident and well-founded hope to the time, as not far distant, when I shall be a freeholder, and call no man by the degrading name of master. This you will possibly say is all idle rant; but no, I am acquainted with many here who came to this country poor and penniless, who now possess fine freeholds of from 100 to 300 acres, fine houses, barns, and orchards, thriving flocks of cattle, sheep, and etc. What others have done why may I not accomplish?

18 In writing about their new lives, the Watsons create symbolic capital, by which I mean the ability to recognize, to name and to value. They take great pains to differentiate and name; to distinguish themselves from less than desirable elements of the New World, to identify with the more favorable and to bridge the gap between Old and New. While it seems that they delight in describing all that they experience, their letters are not simply travel guides. Instead, these descriptions serve to shore up family connections by not only making sense of things American, perhaps more importantly they are justifications and demonstrations of success. The Watsons' descriptions of their experiences were also written in part to justify the dangers, expense, and inconvenience of the move.

19 In June 1822 John Watson's depictions of potential catastrophe are framed as merely the result of being a foreigner.

> Here I found myself a stranger, without friends, acquaintance, utensils of any kind, or money, having spent our last dollar a day or two before; added to which myself and all our family were caught by illness for 6 or 8 weeks, without the power of doing anything. But no sooner was our situation known, than we had plenty of provisions, brought to us, and as our strength recovered […].

Illustrating the kindness of strangers through gifts of provisions conveys images of a land brimming with goodness and prosperity. John and Mary take great care in constructing their epistolary identity.

20 By August 1823, these letters are full of commentary on American taxes and farm life. Yet again, this commentary is not simply a listing of successes. Their correspondence is a means to define themselves by what they are and what they are not. Mary writes:

> We would recommend all our acquaintances who are tired of paying tythes and taxes to come here, where tythes are unknown, and taxes hardly worth mentioning, compared to what they are with you. The only tax we have paid is 1 day's work on the road, and 50 cents for 1 yoke of oxen. You say England is in a very bad state, and farmers are got very low [sic]. We would say, let them come here: we were worth nothing when we landed at this place, and now we have 1 yoke of oxen, 1 cow, 9 hogs, and we intend having another cow […]. We have just taken 10 acres upon these terms, and John is busily engaged in ploughing for corn; he wishes his uncle Edward was with him to help.

21 Already, Watson has moved into the borderland separating their old lives from the new, reflecting upon an in-between status for themselves. In this moment, the Watson correspondence enables a separation and creates distance from the Old World. After differentiating and separating from the "old", they then evaluate and name the new, finally associating or identifying with it. It is important to note this association with the prosperity of the New World. Indeed, the Watsons might have written about failure or loss or hardship. Instead, they chose to write about the bounty around them, much of which was of their making as is evidenced in their letter of April 1823:

> Rabbits and pigeons, particularly the latter, are very abundant; and squirrels, which are very fine eating. There are also plenty of fish in the river, for those who take the trouble to catch them. Partridges are also very numerous, and wild turkeys. We bought 1 for 25 cents, which lasted us for 4 meals. Meat we buy for 2 cents per pound. John often talks of his grandmother, and says we could keep her without working. Whilst this letter is writing, my wife is eating preserved peaches and bread, and washing them down with good whiskey and water […].

22 Fresh meat, good whiskey and caring for loved ones. Such extravagances were certainly not part of the laboring class in 19th

century England. Yet it is now a reality in the Watsons' new home. In their letters, John and Mary Watson grappled with these changes and transitions as they sought to place themselves "within a communal context defined by the changing historical and cultural circumstances […]" (Aarons 5). They were dislocated in space and had to make sense of this New World, while at the same time holding fast to family back in the Old World.

23 This sense of belonging is important for both writer and audience. As such, the Watson correspondence is a demonstration of agency and control. By framing the North American experience as positive, immigrants ensure an ethos of success, as evidenced by this March 1825 letter. Note the great attention given to the evolution of their identities:

> We are still farming, have got this season about 10 acres of very promising wheat, 7 acres of oats, 13 acres of corn, 1 acre for flax, between 1 and 2 acres for potatoes and other garden stuff. We have got a horse, a yoke of oxen, a pair of young steers, a milk cow, and plenty of pigs and fowls. There are plenty of English people in and around our neighbourhood; we rent land of an English woman. We feel ourselves at home among the people; we have regular preaching by the Methodists and Baptists, but no parsons to tyths us. We make our own soap and candles; we have just got between 40 and 50 yards of linen from the loom, from our last year's flax.

Themes of prosperity, of finding home, of being able to build a new life evidence immigrants who use letters to construct an identity of their own devising amidst the North American landscape.

# Immigrants and movement

24 One of the most exceptional of these American encounters was the concept of movement. A great part of the immigrant psyche was about moving around. From the first steps out of the native home, the immigrant was constantly in motion—on boats, wagons, feet, bicycles, trains—either across town or across the ocean. In the early 1800s Alexis de Tocqueville noted this primarily American phenomenon:

> A man who has set his heart on nothing but the good things of this world is always in a hurry, for he has only a limited time in which to find them, get them, and enjoy them. Remembrance of the shortness of life continually goads him on [...]. This thought [of death] fills him with distress, fear, and regret and keeps his mind continually in agitation, so that he is always changing his plans and his abode. (de Tocqueville 536)

25 Throughout their letters, many immigrants acknowledge this restless exigence, while sometimes framing these choices as being of either divine intervention or as predestination. Winthrop Hudson writes in his book, *American Protestantism*, that Calvinism was well suited to the immigrant life, "to the needs of men struggling to tame a wilderness". The requirements were, "Sturdy virtues [...] stern imperatives and high destiny [...] restless energy, unfaltering confidence, and unblinking acceptance of the harsh facts of life" (Hudson 23). Hudson's "restless energy" is also manifested as "action and activity", core tenets of the Reformed theology. Calvin compared the Christian life to that of a journey or a movement toward a goal. "Our life is like a journey", Calvin asserted; yet "it is not God's will that we should march along casually as we please, but he sets the goal before us, and also directs us on the right way to it". These concepts were critical to the immigrant experience. By validating and sanctifying their migration as somehow providential, immigrants could assuage the guilt for having left.

26 Immigrant correspondence is filled with discussions of mobility—movement from one town to another, from a small plot of land to a larger farm, from the East coast to the Midwest, from Canada to the United States. Typically, land ownership was the motivating force for immigrant mobility.

27 [As an] "ancestral resource" formerly unobtainable for most, land in the New World

> [...] gave identity and status to a family and helped tie them to their past and their community. As a result, traditional practices of landed inheritance, part of the ethnic heritage of immigrants, guided their long-term economic goals and priorities to a remarkable extent. (Beltman 11)

Beltman also writes that land helped the immigrant to acquire a sense of place and to establish feelings of security in the wake of the constant migrant transitions (88). Mobility or the simple opportunity to uproot and start anew, while novel for most, seemed to be a significant part of the immigrant mentality. Obviously, letters were one of the few ways to notify family and friends of a changed address. However, and more importantly, letters about a new home, more land, a new farm, resonated with success. Research into immigrant mobility shows that movement resulted in improved income, more profits, greater wealth, and increased opportunity (Ferrie). Further, Ferrie documents a "duration effect", whereby immigrant wealth increased by 15% per year. Thus, as immigrants remained in the US and were consciously mobile, their wealth increased dramatically (188).

28 The contrasts making this phenomenon all the more noteworthy were obvious. Most native countries were small and developed compared to the wide open spaces of the United States. Throughout most of Europe, mobility was fairly limited, particularly for the middle and lower classes since travel was not a cultural norm, and at the same time was quite expensive. Further, barriers and borders were well established throughout European countries making intracontinental migration difficult. As such, narratives about immigrant mobility are compelling rhetorical forums. This was no less true for the Watson correspondence:

> October 15th, 1819, I arrived in Saint John the 16th day of June, after a disagreeable passage. We were struck with lightening in a storm, in which we lost one of our sailors. When I came into the above place I saw no prospect of doing any thing there, and proceeded to Frederictons, [sic] and had many proposals made me there, but did not accept them. I am now situated 120 miles up the river St. John; the gentleman in whose employ I am has built me a house in which I now live. I am to have it, and 10 or 12 acres of land, rent free, for three years. I expect to be able to maintain my family on this, until I get land from Government. Every married man is entitled to 200 acres, and every single man 100. As to saying positively what labourers get, I could not; but they are paid according to what they can do. I got five pounds the first months, and my diet. I must now tell you we are not pestered with Revenue officers. We are a free people, free from rates and taxes.

Here, Watson frames movement as a choice, as a symbolic and literal passage from Old World to New. For this family, the danger of a transatlantic journey yielded independence and freedom.

29 Mobility while foreign to those left behind, seemed part of the immigrant imperative, part of the immigration narrative. Their moves occurred from barn to apartment to house to larger house; from farm to city (or more often city to farm), or city to suburb; from state to state; from job to job. Final settlement choices were often determined by financial status, that is, immigrants stopped moving when they ran out of money, although, mobility often yielded increasing opportunity, greater income, mounting capital, and larger profits.

30 By March 1820, while having been in North America for less than a year, the Watson family decides to uproot again and venture to warmer climates. They document the journey in their correspondence of June 1822:

> You will recollect that I started with my wife and our children in the spring Wellington for St. John's, New Brunswick, where we arrived June 15th, 1819 [...]; there we remained till March 15th, 1820. Now in Brunswick the winter too severe to profit much by farming, I determined to leave it, at all hazards; I therefore with my wife got a hand-sleigh, in which I placed the children, and drew them on the ice up the St. John's river about 360 miles, Mary and myself walking, drawing the children after us. You must also recollect that 100 miles of this was not settled being all wood. We arrived at the head of St. John's river. We traveled on in the same manner across snow and ice to the great river St. Laurence, about 180 miles below Quebec there we found the country along the bank thickly settled. I then built myself a light wagon, and had all our family provisioned during the time of making the wagon [...]; the good people who were French Canadians wishing us very much to stay with them. In this wagon our children were drawn by myself for upwards of 400 miles to Kingston; at the mouth of the lake Ontario. There as every other place, we met with uncommon kindness; a gentleman quite a stranger not only sent us by the steamboat free of all expense to Fort George, but put 6 or 7 dollars in our pockets besides. From Fort George we crossed into the United States, and passed the summer at Geneva, Ontario County, New York State. Hearing a more favourable account of the State of Indiana, I once more started on a ramble, and traveling across the State of New York, I came to O'Lean Point on the Allegany

> river, which river, a very rapid one, I came down in a flat boat to Pittsburgh; here I staid two days, and passing on, after being detained by head winds, and the water being very low, landed at Aurora; situated at the mouth of Hogan Creek.

Not content with his circumstances, it seems that Watson was restless. Yet, there was a certain determination in his trajectory, a design. One would obviously take note that a journey such as this involved great challenge and hardship. Therefore, Watson had to justify risk, both to himself and to his readers. Destitution, cold, exhaustion, illness, all were juxtaposed against agency, promise, generosity, and goodwill.

31 In search for "the good things of this world", immigrants used their letters to demonstrate that they had indeed found their sought after desires. For John and Mary Watson, their success was earned literally step by step. And in this journey, their successes were acted out in stories of endurance, experience, wealth, and contentment as we see in this November 1828 letter:

> We embrace this opportunity of writing to you, to say that we are all enjoying good health at present […]. And we are glad to hear that some of you intend coming to America; and we greatly desire that you would all come to this rich fertile country; for we assure you that there is sufficient room for you all in this Palestine land; though we do not believe every part of America so good as where we live, and especially the part of America where brother Stephen lives; for we know by experience, that it is not half so good a country for a poor man to get a living as where we are, though they are well satisfied where they live, and we believe their country far better than Old England. Yet we know that their country is not half so good a part of America as where we live. But they know no better, for they have not traveled through America to see the difference. But it is not so with us; for we traveled 2,000 or 3,000 miles through America before we settled ourselves; therefore we are better judges than they can be […] [A]nd finally, we think it too tedious to mention all the good things in America, but invite you to come and see for yourselves. So no more at present from your affectionate son and daughter.

As they moved through this landscape negotiating new customs and cultures, letters frequently focused far more specifically on labor, employment, and occupations as a way to justify success or failure.

# Immigrants and work

32 Immigrants experienced tensions tied to their altered work status, and the changing nature of work from Old World to New. As labor economist John R. Commons (1978) notes, “Migration tears a man away from the traditions, the routine, the social props on which he has learned to rely […]. Partly fear, partly hope, make the fresh immigrant the hardest […] worker in our industries” (as cited in Rodgers 173). Watson reflects upon the nature of work in America, an exigency that dominates his correspondence. Through his letters he negotiates his liminal status by allowing himself to define and differentiate himself as being different from workers in the Old World.

> I arrived here about the middle of June, [John writes in August 1820] […] and have been for the principal part of the time since in the employ of a Mr. Watson [sic–a different Watson], an Englishman from Northumberland, of whom I bought a cow, for which I paid him in work, besides supporting my family. An honest industrious man can maintain his family better by 3 days work here, then he can in England by 6.

Although not self-employed, it was important for Watson to cast himself as the lead character in his immigration success story. “This is in truth the land of hope; labour is a pleasurable exertion, because all its profits go to enrich yourself, and not another”. Coming from an indentured past, most immigrants similar to Watson tried very hard to leave behind the pitiful existence 18th and 19th century England offered the working class.

33 Yans-McLaughlin writes that work in the Old World was not a means to an end. It was “hardly a rewarding, profitable, or hopeful activity” (265). Still, for many this new work provided a source of self-satisfaction and self-respect. Their work supplied them with a “corporate identity that established their exclusiveness and stability in a society undergoing traumatic change” (Cantor 10). Work in the

New World, however, was at once the "cornerstone of individualism", as Emerson suggested (Gilbert 4). "America", Gilbert writes, "is and always has been a nation defined by devotion to work", which served as a "sacred myth of mobility and individualism" (VII). Prior to industrialization, work was the means for immigrants to establish a sense of individuality often lost in transition. When all else seemed to be foreign (food, customs, architecture, clothing, language, etc.), work was easily translated. This "means to an end" philosophy appears in the letter of 15 June 1822:

> I obtained work at digging, etc. My wife took in sewing, and by degrees we have worked it to that. I have 2 cows, 2 calves, 9 pigs, and 1 calf expected in August. James is now at school, and I intend to send two in the winter. I have joined with a farmer in cropping: that is I received one-half of the produce […]. I now am working for an English gentleman named Harris, who is building in Aurora, and owns four-quarter sections up the creek. Much good land can be bought far distant for 1 dollar and ¼ per acre, and improved land for not much more: indeed, so good is that prospect for a man who must live by industry, that I wish all my friends and acquaintance were here with me. I can safely say, I would not, nor would my Mary, return to England on any account whatever.

In this statement, Watson is not simply establishing that he is better off, but he is also arguing that the decision to emigrate was economically sound. In this transactional space Watson defends the decision to himself and to his loved ones. Letter writing enabled John and Mary to devise and give expression to their evolution from cautious emigrants swept along by the tides of fortune, to self-assured entrepreneurs who chose to belong. In his letter of 26 April 1823, he adds a "PS":

> Mary has just made a bushel of soap, which cost me nothing but her attention and a little labour. Those animals called in your country "Excisemen", are not known in this country, so that we boil soap, make candles, gather hops, and many other things, without fear, which you must not do. We are under no fear about our children not having food: we have finer pork and fowls than you have, and plenty of them […].

34 Writing about work provided an opportunity for the Watsons to maintain familial connections, to justify their decision to emigrate and to negotiate their transnational identity. Mediating his work identity offers Watson the opportunity to reconstruct himself several times. This transition is made in such a way that implicit in Watson's message is an evaluative position: working hard is valued; working for oneself and one's family is better than being indentured; success comes to those who are industrious and diligent.

# Immigrants and family

35 Immigration necessitates that family members negotiate temporal and spatial separations; otherwise, migration can ultimately lead to the severing of familial connections. In the transnational moment, an immigrant changes in ways the family left behind cannot experience. And these changes, if not mitigated, can contribute to separation. The Watson letters offered support, advice, motivation, and affection. They were their only way "to express, to feel, to be", as well as "the only real relief the agonized soul can experience" (Lewis 225):

> June 15th, 1822. Recollecting my promise to you not to write till I was perfectly settled, you would not expect a letter so soon as you might otherwise have done. I now consider myself as so settled and thought I have some time ago written a letter to you, yet it may have miscarried, and I not only think it right that you should be acquainted with my situation, but I wish that you with all our family and friends could be with us. We have suffered many hardships, as the statement of our journey will show you; but they were occasioned by my being a stranger to the country.
> I now write with greater pleasure than I have ever yet done, as it is answer to yours, dated February the 2nd, the only one I have received; the others I suppose must have gone to Canada, where you might think I was settled [writes John Watson in April 1823]:
> It proved very gratifying to us to hear that you all enjoy such general good health, excepting father Vaughan and sister, who could not have been expected to remain long, having been ill so long. Though your letter was written by several persons, we cannot answer them separately, but must beg of you to read all to them. You should have mentioned who my brother James married; we suppose it must be Henry Freeland's sister.

36 Watson's letters were the means to exercise familial duties, to demonstrate their continued affection, and to maintain those ties so important to the preservation of family. Their letter from April 1823 while seemingly a simple list of children also serves to characterize the general health, well-being, and success of this newly immigrated family:

> You express a wish to know all our children: John, born April 22nd, 1809; James, October 18th, 1813; Naomi, February 7th, 1815; Henry, April 11th, 1818; Eliza Anne, born January 21st, 1821. Henry is very well, generally in mischief like all other children [...].

None of these letters mentions the loss of a child through miscarriage, disease or accident—a rarity particularly for immigrant families during this era.

37 Letter writing provides a medium through which John and Mary were able to maintain their roles of parents, children, and siblings. Here the letter functions as a deliberative forum in which questions are asked, conversations are carried on, and debates are engaged. Again this same letter invites the intended reader into familial dialogue:

> Our brother William, and sister Sarah, and our dear mother must not be hurt if we did not mention them in our last letter; it was not an intentional neglect, for our affections for them are as strong as ever, and very often do we wish they were here [...]. Mary begs you will be particular in mentioning her relations in your next letter which you must not be angry if we ask to be written closer, so as to contain more information; as the postage of letters is rather expensive; not that we grudge the money, but we think the sheet might be made to hold more.
> And now, our dear Father and Mother, as it is not very likely that we shall meet on this side the grave, may it be our fervent prayer, that in the life to come, where there shall be no alloy, no griefs or difficulties, we may all unite; and there may you with all the blessed, salute your ever dutiful and affectionate children.

There is an inherent tension reflected here. As Higham notes, "To exist and yet not to exist, to be needed and yet to be unimportant, to be different and yet to be the same, to be integrated and yet to be separate" (12). Like many immigrants then and now,

John and Mary Watson were caught in these tensions presented by the interstitial nature of the diaspora.

38 As expressions of his heartfelt familial bonds, letters are also Watson's long-distance means of preserving a presence, sustaining status and maintaining roles. Their struggle to maintain familial relationships is evident in their concerns for the welfare of the family back home as letters enabled them to provide guidance and approve or disapprove of choices and actions:

> March 9th, 1825: It is now two years since we heard from you, excepting in a letter from brother Stephen, saying you were all well. We are longing to hear what you are all doing, the particulars of all the family: when you sent the letter, you did not say anything about William and Sarah, neither who James and Ann were married to. I want to know what is become of William Blover, and whether he loves drink as well as he used to do; if he does, tell him there is plenty of whiskey here; if a man wants to kill himself, he need not be long about it, for he may get a gallon a day and his board; but I hope better things of him; I hope he has seen into the folly of it before this. We should be very glad to hear from all our friends: we think they would do a great deal better here than in England; we cannot think what makes so many of them go back, for we would not come back again.

39 The exigencies characteristic of any family life afford the Watsons numerous opportunities to maintain familial connections via letter writing. Clearly, the conversational quality of their letters ties readers to absent writers. These letters are written so that the extended family can sit and "hear" their now-distant relatives. Regardless of the topic, the Watson letters create a present writer, one who despite the distance still cares for the souls of those left behind:

> March 9th, 1825, PS: We should be very happy to see you; but as we do not expect to see you this side of Eternity, we beseech you to prepare for the awful day, when we must all give account of the deeds done in the body; it is the one thing needful; do not put it off till it is too late, but fly to the arms of a bleeding Redeemer, who is willing to save you.

# Conclusion: signing off

40 Letters have served as noteworthy rhetorical forums for generations of immigrants. At the very least letters are of great consequence for the socially marginalized, "huddled masses" who sought to enact new lives. Occurring at the intersection between writing and speech, and constituted identity, social knowledge and cultural practice (Pollack), letters are at once mirrors and lenses into social reality reflecting and focusing upon what individuals and groups perceived as "what matters". Pollack provides an apt metaphor of "textual travel [...] drawing one charged moment into another constituting knowledge in an ongoing process of transmission and transferal [...]" (91). This ability to constitute knowledge, to bridge disparate worlds of reality and experience, and to recalibrate difference accords immigrant letters enormous significance and cultural capital.

41 This analysis extends our understanding of migrations by demonstrating that these letters, while important historical artifacts, do far more than trace the travels of generations of immigrants. Through liminal spaces, immigrants are able to negotiate borders and then to stake a claim. Indeed, letters are voices of and for a liminal existence. Further, this research broadens the scope of migration studies to include the thousands and thousands of epistolary utterances which helped shape the imaginations of men, women, and children who sought a new life in a new world. We should seek letters in archives and attics and study them, looking for the language of a transitional moment in time.

42 The Watson correspondence illustrates how the immigrant self is rhetorically fashioned, staged, and articulated via the forum of letters. John and Mary faced tensions of change and loyalty, of holding on to the past, and embracing the new, while creating a present and future in which to place themselves and their family. Letters were their means to deal with these tensions while facilitating shifting identities. This agency was achieved as they grappled with the exigencies generated by the displacement of immigration. The Watsons deliberate, ask questions, and stress certain facts while strategically omitting or neglecting others in an interpretation of American material and social culture. Via letters, they constitute a

world, redefine identity, and then situate themselves in the context of this newly created world.

43 Immigration at any point in history by any ethnic group is typically marked by a potential loss of voice. This was certainly the case for many immigrants. For them, letters were a space where meaning could be constructed and legitimated. These were powerful moments of agency—to be able to decide what was recalled, recorded and transmitted; to be able to label experience as true, just, inferior or excessive; to be able to place oneself into the historical record; to be able to transform life into imagined reality. These were spaces for memory production where the immigrant could re-arrange, re-present, re-create, re-store, re-buke, re-fashion, re-enact, re-generate, re-act, re-birth, and re-vise the self and experience (Roach 43–61).

44 Immigrant letters served as a means of justifying the decision to migrate, as a method of negotiating changing identity, and as a way of maintaining familial connections. As social practice, immigrant letters lent importance to typically mundane things as work and food in order to emphasize the economic soundness of the decision, and to illustrate how they were claiming a changed identity for their new world. And in devaluing such dangers and difficulties as cold, hunger, and poverty these letters allow writers to reassure themselves and their families that life would indeed be better. These persuasive elements were intended not only for a distant audience, but also as reflexive moments. John and Mary in particular were constantly engaged in persuading self and family: “This was a good decision”. “We made the right choice”. “It is good that we are here”. In addition, letters were a means to maintain their place in the family, thousands of miles away. By way of correspondence, therefore the Watsons (re)presented as necessary, the role of naive strangers, industrious workers, devoted parents, loving children, experienced travelers, or a savvy entrepreneurs.

45 Letters are sites of identity construction and cultural negotiation for displaced people. As such, this essay draws on letters produced in the course of an emigration from England to Canada, and finally to the United States. Thus, it is significant to note that this research specifically represents an “English” immigration experience, which

differs in some respects from the experiences of other groups. The English were a highly literate population for whom letter writing was a "normal" form of discourse. Nevertheless, diasporic dislodgings are not limited to Europeans—Asian immigrants, Native Americans, African Americans, Latinos—all have had their own diasporas, and all have need to address many of the same exigencies of displacement faced by the Watsons: interpreting customs and cultures, framing mobility, finding work, maintaining family connections and negotiating a shifting identity.

46 The issue of how different ethnic experiences might affect similar research must be considered. Immigration is prompted for many reasons. Rhetorical strategies may differ. Displacement coping might differ. But some things will remain the same. Ritual moments of the journey will be remarkably similar. There will always be a passage from one shore to another—be it physical or psychological. Immigrants by and large will be compelled to create forums for preservation of family, religion, and community. More than anything else, they will be motivated to reconstruct an identity for themselves and a place in the world. And their letters will serve as instruments of control or expressions of uncertainties along the way.

47 Letter writing is the product of an age that was more in touch with traditional technologies of communication. While technologies of circulation and transportation did sustain a communication community unique to its times, the strategies of identifying a self-based upon physical disconnectedness, family separation, and little anticipated contact may have lent special constraints to the rhetorical situation. Today's immigrant populations may not have the same expectations, and electronic means of communication have eradicated some of these constraints. Given the ephemeral nature of contemporary communication technologies, it is doubtful that today's immigrants will leave as rich a record of their journeys. Indeed, this study invites further comparative research to explore the issues of the extent to which the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries diasporic rhetoric finds similar and different forms of expression in the late 20th and 21st centuries. Regardless of the epoch, however, people displaced in space and time still need to justify their migration decisions, to maintain familial connections, and to grapple with their identities.

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## RÉSUMÉ

**English**

By the middle of the 20th century, America needed a re-branding. The persistence of racial segregation combined with the tendency of some Europeans to view America as culturally inferior, gave the country an image problem at the beginning of its geopolitical struggle with the Soviet Union. As a result, during the 1950's, The Common Council for American Unity directed a well-coordinated program to create a new image of America. Recognizing the value of immigrant correspondence in this public relations battle, the CCAU launched the *Letters from America* campaign, appealing to the 35 million citizens of foreign birth or foreign parentage to correspond

with family overseas about life in the United States. The CCAU advised participants that they "just tell the truth". Letters represented a familiar forum within immigrant communities. Estimates suggest that in 1950 more than 178 million letters were mailed overseas, with 21 million heading into "Iron Curtain" countries. The US wanted to put that correspondence to use during the days of McCarthy and the Red Scare to prove allegiance and to be a "real American". The CCAU *Letters from America* campaign is a fascinating look into the intersection of state-sponsored activities and media/cultural production during the Cold War era. This essay will discuss the *Letters from America* campaign and argue that by leveraging the traditionally private sphere of personal correspondence, the CCAU created a larger public sphere with the pretense of a fully participative discursive arena. It will also raise the question of whether or not the ideological demands of the Cold War actually suppressed deliberative rhetoric within immigrant communities across the United States.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés**
diasporas, lettres de migrants, rhétorique épistolaire, ordre social, identité des migrants

**Keywords**
diasporas, migrant letters, rhetoric of letter writing, social order, migrant identity

## AUTEUR

**Kathleen DeHaan**
Kathleen DeHaan received her Ph.D. at Northwestern University, after earning a master's degree at Emerson College (where she was named Outstanding Graduate Instructor and also won two Outstanding Student Awards). Her B.A. is from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. Dr DeHaan's research interests include rhetoric and public address, immigrant rhetoric, organizational communication, political communication, and communication training. Her current research explores immigrant letters as forums for identity construction. She has received several research awards, most notably a Balch Fellowship. Students at College of Charleston recognized her as one of the top five professors by awarding her with a Golden Key Honorary membership. Other recognitions include selection to the prestigious Charleston "40 Under 40". In addition to her work in the Department of Communication, DeHaan serves as the Associate Dean for the School of Humanities and Social Sciences.
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# Remembering Immigration in the Rural Midwest after World War II

*Souvenirs de l'immigration dans le Midwest rural après la Seconde Guerre mondiale*

**David Zwart**

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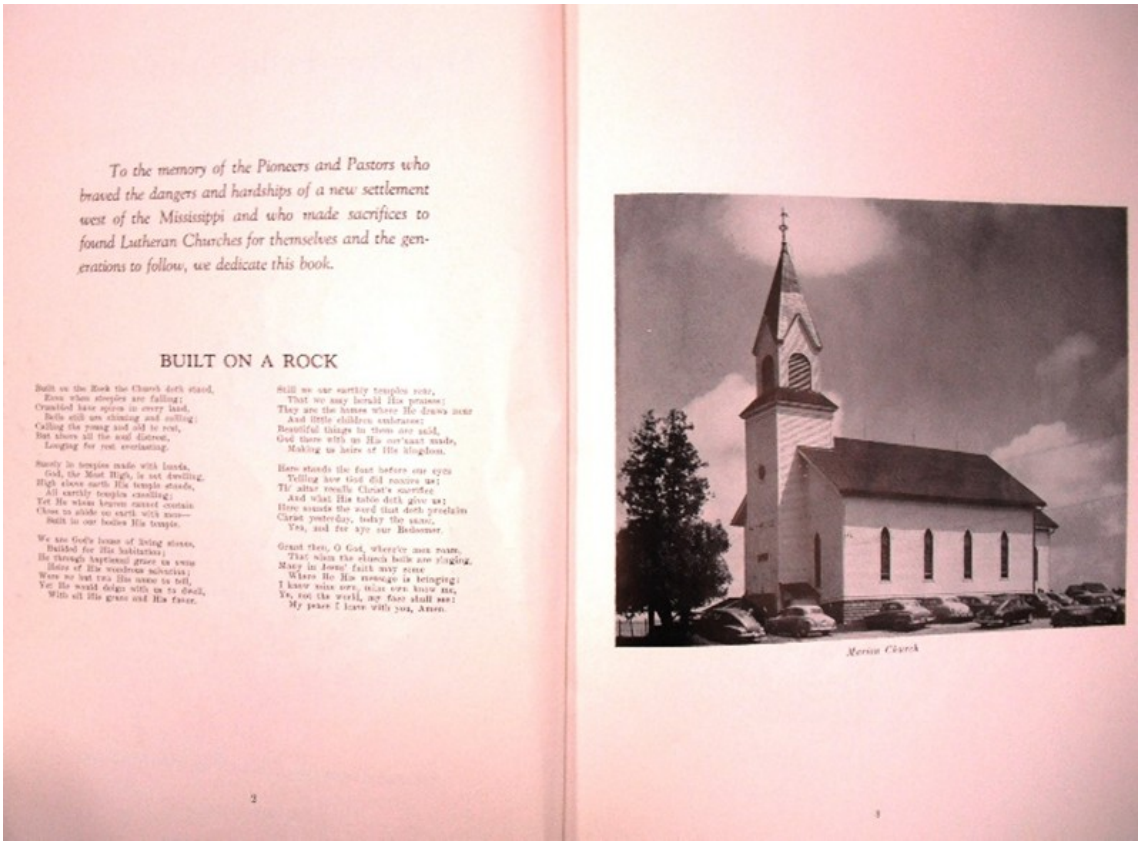
## PLAN



## TEXTE

1 The Norway and Marion Lutheran Congregations in Clayton County, Iowa commemorated their One-Hundredth Anniversary together in 1951. For this important occasion, they published a book dedicated "to the memory of the Pioneers and Pastors who braved the dangers and hardships of a new settlement west of the Mississippi and who made sacrifices to found Lutheran Churches for themselves and the generations to follow" (*One-Hundredth Anniversary, 1851–1951. Norway-Marion Lutheran Congregations, Clayton County, Iowa*). This book included photographs of church buildings, previous pastors, officers, and current organizations of the congregations. Its centerpiece was a narrative history by un-named authors who hoped it would "point to the part we have played in building America and the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America".[1] This rather typical history began by naming the first Norwegian "settlers" to the area as well as noting the reasons for the immigration itself. Next, the history noted when the settlers held their first religious services. It continued to chronicle the subsequent building projects and pastors.

**Figure 1. – Dedication page and first image in the commemoration anniversary book of the Norway-Marion Lutheran Churches.**




"One-Hundredth Anniversary, 1851–1951", Norway-Marion Lutheran Congregations, Clayton County, Iowa (1951).

2 Congregational commemorations at the time of a significant anniversary reveal much about how rural Midwesterners understood immigration, themselves, and their place in America after World War II. Congregations usually published a book with a narrative history and photographs. The selection of past events and people in these histories revealed what people found meaningful in the past and valued in the present. These sources allow the historian to listen-in as the people made sense of their past for the present (Schultz; Øverland; Pederson 128–133). The present generation was encouraged to overcome their own struggles by reading about immigrants who succeeded by overcoming hardships. These selective histories showed that rural Midwesterners saw themselves as good Americans who had descended from hard working, faithful immigrants.

3 These rural congregations stood at the heart of the social and cultural patterns in the nineteenth century as well as for those who remained members after World War II (Swierenga 1997; Barlow and Cantonwine; Madison; Neitz; Ammerman 1994; Ammerman 2005). One of the reasons for the importance of the congregations was the number of European immigrants who settled in the rural Midwest in the nineteenth century. They started churches very soon after arriving in a new location creating a "heavily churched landscape" (Ostergren 1981, 225). As the number of European immigrants flowed into the Midwest in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, they created a "cultural homeland" (Hoelscher and Ostergren 88). As historians have shown for the past forty years, migrants chose to move to particular communities and these immigrant communities were typically formed around congregations and denominations (Gjerde 1985; Gjerde 2002; Kamphoefner; Ostergren 1988; Coburn; Swieringa 2000).

4 Understanding how rural Midwesterners remembered their past provides insights into views of immigration and borders after World War II. They drew borders around who was a good American and who was a good immigrant. They repeated what Paul Spickard has called an "Ellis Island" paradigm. This paradigm stressed a story of assimilation for European immigrants but overlooks the effect on Native Americans or restrictions on immigration from other areas (Spickard 6–28). Spickard mainly focuses on political and intellectual leaders who articulated this paradigm. However, this paradigm was not only top down but also came from the bottom up. Many rural Midwesterners believed that their ancestors in the second half of the nineteenth century defined the paradigm for what made America great as they assimilated into America easily. Studying how these people on the ground thought about America and the place of immigration helps tell the story of this era and better explains the rural Midwest.

5 Since the people of the rural Midwest saw themselves as quintessential Americans, their definition of themselves shaped larger narratives. Rural Midwesterners have variously been labeled as either heartland people or flyover people. For rural Midwesterners, these have historically been connected and troubling. Being heartland people meant that they represented the very heart of the American

experience. On the other hand, if the Midwest was labeled flyover country, this meant the country was flying over its heart (Lauck; Higbie 81–90; Kiel). Seeing themselves as heartland people, including having immigrant roots, meant that the Ellis Island paradigm shaped how they saw immigration and who was a worthy American after World War II. Iowa examples are used in this study because it is an exemplar state in the Midwest (Schwieder; Madison).

6 Much historical scholarship about the era after World War II emphasizes that people with immigrant roots no longer had an immigrant or ethnic identity (Conzen et al.; Sollors; Gans). Historians have explained this fading ethnic identity after World War II for a variety of reasons. Immigration from Europe had slowed since the 1920s so fewer Europeans relied on ethnic institutions in their daily lives as they adjusted to life in the United States (Bukowczyk; Luconi). Other historians argue that ethnic loyalty decreased as racial identity increased. For much scholarship on white ethnicity, the 1950s and early 1960s represent a time when other identities took precedent over particular European ethnicities (Gerber; Jacobson 1998; Kolchin; Guglielmo; Roediger; Bayor). Finally, some look at the "generations" of the immigrants and note the changes to the second generation. This literature generally argues that European immigrant roots only mattered during the subsequent "roots" movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Jacobson 2006). At the same time, literature about the place of immigrants in the United States in the twentieth century often focuses just on political discourse about immigration (Ngai; Daniels; Pruitt). This literature focuses on the rhetoric of spokespeople and politicians as well as particular laws showing that immigrants did not always receive a warm welcome. The restrictions on immigration were mostly pushed by those who wanted the United States to be populated by whites, Anglo-Saxon Protestants (Higham; King). Many of the rural Midwesterners would fit this category but little is written examining their attitudes about their own immigration or the immigration of others. As efforts to reform immigration restrictions gathered strength, these people continued to remember their immigrant ancestors as excellent examples of successful immigrants. In many ways, they thought all immigrants could enjoy the same kind of success their ancestors had

and failed to notice the structural impediments for subsequent immigrants.

7 The people living in the rural Midwest after World War II constructed their ideas about themselves and their immigrant ancestors in a very specific context. They faced both real and perceived upheavals that transformed their world. Their churches seemed to experience the possibilities of increased resources but feared peril that might lurk around the corner. Demographics changed as rural areas lost political power to urban areas. Rural schools struggled to maintain their standing in communities as school consolidation swept the area. Agriculture changed to emphasize higher and higher production using chemicals and mechanical technology (Wuthnow 1988; Danbom; Anderson 2009; Wuthnow 2011; Anderson 2014). The context of the changes in the rural Midwest points to the desire to look for a stable and usable past. As the world changed around them, they actively constructed a story about their immigrant ancestors that focused on their ancestors' role in building America as they overcame hardship. Their immigrant ancestors had built institutions that had brought stability to rural life. Telling stories about immigrants who had been through the upheaval of immigration but had built stable lives gave comfort to those experiencing upheaval.

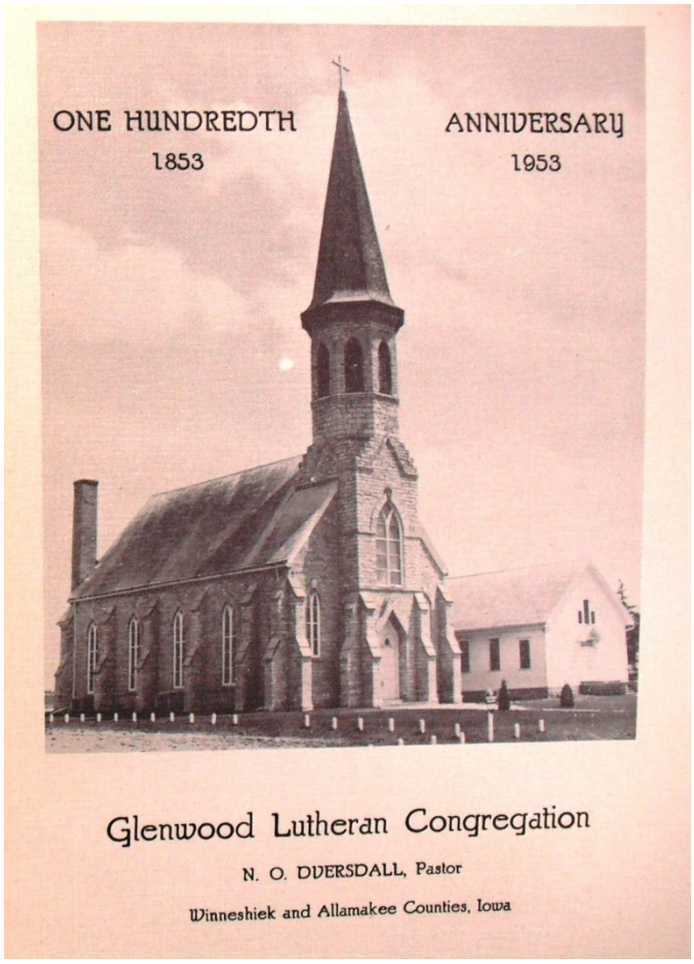
# True Americans

8 As rural Midwesterners with immigrant roots told stories about their past, they defined themselves and their ancestors as true Americans. They thought of themselves and their immigrant ancestors as those who had made the land productive through hard word. This notion that American history had been a history of taking the land and cultivating it could be traced back to the original colonists. While not explicitly connecting themselves to the Pilgrims or Puritans, the idea that it was natural for Europeans to control the land in North America framed the overall narrative of how rural Midwesterners thought about their pioneering ancestors. Of course, this construction meant that urban immigrants or non-Europeans did not fit the definition of being true Americans.

9 Writers of commemorative histories emphasized how these immigrants had started cultivating the land as farming pioneers. In

these narratives, the land required human intervention to be productive. Histories noted how good the land was and how early pioneers had found cheap and fertile land. The Norway-Marion Lutheran Church in Clayton County, Iowa remembered how the first settlers had chosen to start in the hills and woodlands before they realized "the value of the vast expanse now known as the 'Garnaville Prairie'" (*One-Hundredth Anniversary, 1851–1951. Norway-Marion Lutheran Congregations*). The Springfield, Iowa Lutheran Church's history noted that the pioneers "endured hardships as they cleared the land, broke the sod, carved out from the wilderness home for themselves" (*One Hundredth Anniversary: 1853–1953. Springfield Lutheran Church, Springfield, Iowa*). The writers of the Glenwood, Iowa Lutheran Church history also highlighted the "cheap and fertile land" the "brave men and women" found in Northeast Iowa (*One Hundredth Anniversary: 1853–1953, Glenwood Lutheran Congregation, Winneshiek and Allamakee Counties, Iowa*). One church history even went so far to point out that the first settlers were "sons and daughters of the soil. They wrestled with the sod that had laid untouched through the centuries of time" (*75th Anniversary: 1885–1960, First Reformed Church, Hull, Iowa*). The history of the Big Canoe Lutheran Church in 1953 noted that "the pioneers who settled here experienced the same struggles and hardships as other settlers who came from Norway in those days to carve out homes for themselves" (*One Hundredth Anniversary: 1853–1953, Big Canoe Lutheran Church, Big Canoe, Iowa*). The work of being pioneers portrayed these immigrants as true Americans.

**Figure 2. – Cover image of the commemorative anniversary book of Glenwood Lutheran Congregation.**




"One Hundredth Anniversary: 1853–1953", Glenwood Lutheran Congregation, Winneshiek and Allamakee Counties, Iowa (1953).

10 These histories emphasized the hardship and danger that greeted these immigrant pioneers. As the history of the St. John's Lutheran Church in Madrid, Iowa detailed "no one can realize the hardships endured and the sacrifices made by these early settlers. Wild Indians roamed about in search of plunder" (*100th Anniversary, St. John's Lutheran Church, Madrid, Iowa*). Another history pointed out the dangers of pioneer life including a list of dangerous animals and "sometimes the Indians added interest and excitement to the routine of the day" (*History: 1875–1950, St. John's Lutheran Church, Adair, Iowa*). The Native Americans were seen as a danger and nuisance and not as people who also had claim to the land. The dangers also included, according to Immanuel Lutheran Church in

Clarinda, Iowa's history "prairie fires and bitter cold on the windswept plain" (*100 Years: 1869–1969. Immanuel Lutheran Church, Clarinda, Iowa*). The danger of fire prompted the history writers of the Immanuel Lutheran Church in Spirit Lake to note that matches were necessary during travel in order to "start a back-fire in case of prairie fires, which were then not uncommon" (*Diamond Jubilee: 1878–1953, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Spirit Lake, Iowa*). These stories imagined the American heartland as a dangerous land that these immigrants had tamed as true Americans.

11 Histories that highlighted the hard work and dangers that came with making the land suitable for farming not only reflected what they understood to be the meaning of being a true American, but also the anxiety about the ways farming changed after World War II. This nostalgia for their immigrant ancestors as pioneers on the land suggested a desire for a pastoral, pre-industrial era of farming during a time of technological changes. Writing about their ancestors, the writer of the Immanuel Lutheran Church in Clarinda, Iowa's history noted that "farm technology, conservation techniques, marketing, education, medical services, transportation, and means of communication have changed drastically since the days of pioneers, but it is debatable whether or not people are happier now than they were in the pioneer days of our community" (*100 Years: 1869–1969. Immanuel Lutheran Church, Clarinda, Iowa*). This nostalgic view of earlier times shaped how rural Midwesterners framed the history. As the 1961 history of the Calamus, Iowa Our Savior's Evangelical Lutheran history put it "these early pioneers ventured with no small amount of bravery to a new land" (*One Hundredth Anniversary: 1861–1961, Our Savior's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Calamus, Iowa*). Another history writer noted that "Brave hearts and strong arms were their chief assets" (*100 Years: 1861–1961. Estherville Lutheran, Church. Estherville, Iowa*). They also came with a determination and a desire to succeed. The history of the East Clermont Lutheran Church of Clermont, Iowa in 1951 noted that early pioneers had "come from Norway with a determination to make this their adopted country and to build for themselves a home they could call their own […] Many were almost penniless when they arrived" (*Centennial Anniversary: 1851–1951, East Clermont Lutheran Church, Clermont, Iowa*). In a time of changes, the nostalgic

view of self-made immigrant farmers who, through hard work and bravery, contributed to America framed these histories.

12 America also was a place of freedom in these histories. In the way these congregations told their history, freedom and opportunity defined America. As the Swede Valley Lutheran Church of Ogden, Iowa, noted "pioneers […] saw their dreams take on reality" (*Because of Christ: 1868–1968. Swede Valley Lutheran Church, Ogden, Iowa*). Forest City, Iowa's Immanuel Lutheran explained how Scandinavian immigrants were "coming to a land of liberty and opportunity". One pastor even went so far as to acknowledge that success as a congregation at least partly came from the government granting freedom of worship and assembly (*50th Anniversary: 1908–1959, First Christian Reformed Church, Ireton, Iowa*). America was the place where immigrants came to build a life because of freedom and opportunity.

13 Freedom also meant being able to use their foreign language. Histories noted the long use of homeland languages even as all these congregations used English by the 1950s and 1960s. In telling their story about themselves, the transition to English usually seemed simple. The St. John's Lutheran Church in Alta, Iowa waited all the way until 1934 when "it was found necessary to conduct both German and English services every Sunday" (*Diamond Jubilee: 1880–1955, St. John's Lutheran Church, Alta, Iowa*). This passive explanation makes it seem that the transition was simple and easy even if over fifty years had passed since the founding of the congregation. The congregational histories usually retold how the congregation had voted to slowly change one or more services to English. In other histories, the first mention of using English was when the congregation began keeping records in English (*Celebrating Our 100th Anniversary: 1870–1970, St. Olaf Lutheran, Church Bode, Iowa*; *Seventy-Fifth Anniversary: 1877–1952, Deer Creek Evangelical Lutheran Church, Carpenter, Iowa*). None of the histories noted how it had been multiple generations before the language had changed to English. This slow transition in using English reflected how they saw non-English speaking as part of the American experience. These commemorators seemed to not have cared that their multiple languages spread across the heartland.

14 However, many churches recounted the negative sentiments towards foreign language use during World War I. The Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in Atlantic, Iowa noted that "public sentiment was against those who used the German language" during World War I (*75th Anniversary*, *Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church*, *Atlantic*, *Iowa*). In fact, the language issue during World War I prompted the Humboldt, Iowa Zion Lutheran congregation to petition the authorities to continue using German in services (*Eightieth Anniversary*: *1884–1964*, *Zion Lutheran Church*, *Humboldt*, *Iowa*). The Schleswig, Iowa Immanuel Lutheran Church in 1962 explained what happened during World War I as "people from other communities came here and insulted our people, spoke of their lack of patriotism, though we bought as many liberty bonds as anyone and our sons also marched away to war" (*1912–1962*, *Immanuel Lutheran*, *Church*, *Schleswig*, *Iowa*). Restrictions on using foreign language for services affected how rural Midwesterners thought about being immigrants. For instance, the Peoria, Iowa Christian Reformed Church, fifty years after the events, remember how "feeling ran high between those who had advanced more rapidly in the process of Americanization and our Holland people who were continually coming from the fatherland to settle in America" (*Seventy-Fifth Anniversary*: *1894–1969*, *Peoria Christian Reformed Church*, *Peoria*, *Iowa*). St. Olaf Lutheran Church of Belmond, Iowa called laws during World War I requiring English-only services as a "frenzy of misguided patriotism". Yet, this history went on to note that the "unusual edict undoubtedly hastened the change from Norwegian services to English as more and more were clamoring for services in the language their children and young people could understand" (*75th Anniversary*: *1888–1963*, *St. Olaf Lutheran Church*, *Belmond*, *Iowa*). World War I was an anomaly as they enjoyed the freedom to use a foreign language.

15 Commemorating immigrant ancestors, then, actually made these rural Midwesterners true Americans. Immigrants, whether from Norway, Sweden, Germany, or the Netherlands, had benefited from policies, social structures, and cultural beliefs about what made a good immigrant and a true American. Rural Midwesterners after World War II overlooked historical factors when thinking about what made a good immigrant. They simply transferred an "Ellis Island"

paradigm to all immigrants and ideas about what made a good immigrant. Being good immigrants and true Americans, in the way rural Midwesterners constructed these categories in their commemorations, was not possible for many immigrants.

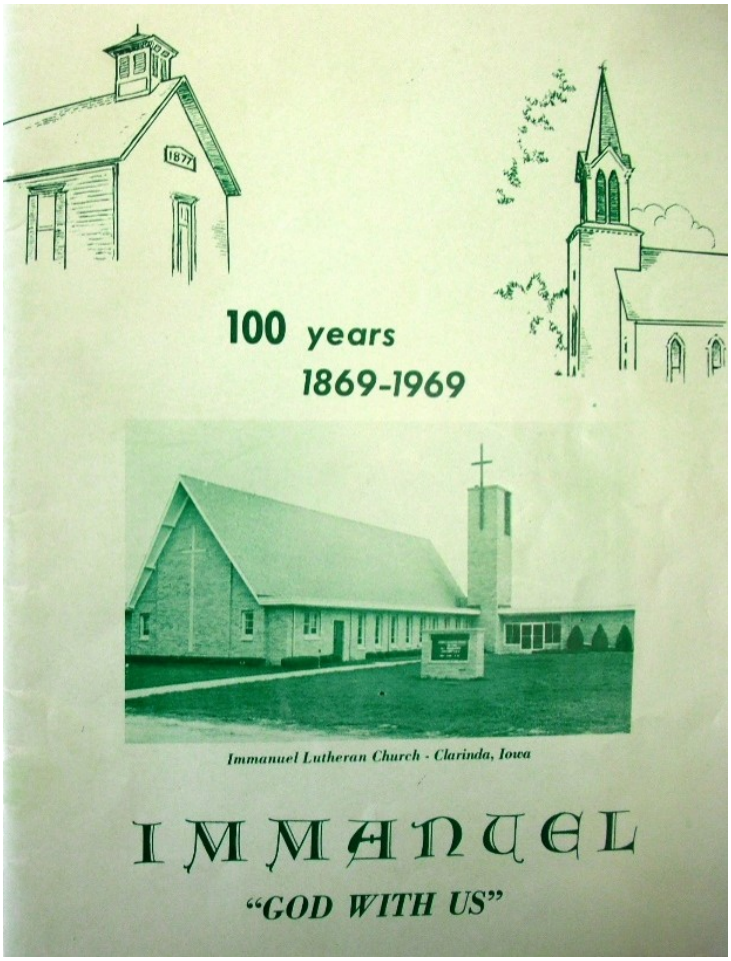
# Institution builders

16 Rural Midwesterners also emphasized how their immigrant ancestors had not only built farms, but also churches and other institutions. The overall chronology of the narrative histories usually followed the building projects of the church. These congregations clearly valued their "little white church" and the work required to build and maintain it. These commemorations reinforced the important role the church and other institutions played for those sitting in the pews after World War II. According to these histories, their immigrant forbearers were institution builders. These histories were meant to inspire loyalty to the institutions as churches faced upheavals. The physical church buildings were presented as tangible manifestations of successful, hard-working immigrants. The histories generally told the story of the first meetings held in homes or some other community structure. More often than not, the first meeting took place in a school. Other first-meeting places might include the town hall or even another congregation's building. When they could gather enough money, they built a simple structure on purchased or donated land. The congregations often needed to replace these first structures as success meant a need for more space. In fact, one congregation boasted that their second building "was as large as any other in Ogden with a capacity of 400 people" (*50th Anniversary: 1914–1964, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Ogden, Iowa*). Even if these early wooden structures succumbed to fire, which seemed to happen regularly, the congregation saw the rebuilding as another way to demonstrate their commitment. Pictures of these various structures graphically showed the commemorators after World War II the importance of the buildings.

17 The images on the cover of the Immanuel Lutheran Church in Clarinda, Iowa in 1969 made this striking framework the cover to their anniversary book (*100 Years: 1869––1969. Immanuel Lutheran Church, Clarinda, Iowa*). The sense of achievement for these

rural Midwesterners in building their buildings is clear through the way they told their stories.

**Figure 3. – Cover image of the Immanuel Lutheran Church of Clarinda, Iowa showing institution success through the various buildings depicted.**




"100 Years: 1869–1969", Immanuel Lutheran Church, Clarinda, Iowa.

18 The histories of these congregations explained how the building projects required hard work and sacrifice. The East Clermont Lutheran Church of Clermont, Iowa noted, "Many of the people here assumed heavy burdens and many great sacrifices were made for the work of the church" (*Centennial Anniversary: 1851–1951, East Clermont Lutheran Church, Clermont, Iowa*). The sacrifices made for the purpose of the institution gave the current generation role models. A pastor's message in the Hull, Iowa's First Reformed anniversary book in 1960 noted that "without the sacrifice, the willingness, the determination and the undaunted faith of pioneering fathers and

mothers the history of this Church could not be read as it does" (*75th Anniversary: 1885–1960, First Reformed Church, Hull, Iowa*). The history of the St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church in Boone, Iowa, noted that "members of the congregation were poor and many of them in strained circumstances, so that it took a great deal of faith and trust in God to undertake the building of a new church edifice" in 1898 (*A Century of Progress, St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, Boone, Iowa*).

19 The success of the congregation was often attributed not just to hard work and sacrifice, but to the shared life of the members. These building projects were accomplished partly through the way the community helped each other. One church's history noted how "the settlers were willing to lend things, and to help one another". In fact, the story went, "these pioneers carried on uncomplainingly amidst privation, discomfort, and difficulties. […] God blessed their efforts, and in due time a measure of prosperity and well-being came to most of them" (*One Hundredth Anniversary: 1853–1953, Big Canoe Lutheran Church, Big Canoe, Iowa*). The Calmar Lutheran Church also remembered how their buildings required help from others after a lightning strike burned the church in 1887. The history remarked that "this shows the spirit of the pioneers to help one another when help was needed" (*One Hundredth Anniversary: 1853–1953, Calmar Lutheran Church, Calmar, Iowa*). Commemorative histories celebrated the corporatism of the early immigrant pioneers (Gerdje 2002, 8-21).

20 Building institutions, both physically and socially, could extend to broader institutions as well. They did not just build their own local church, but united in shared denominations and larger institutions. These post-war rural Midwesterners with an immigrant background emphasized how their forbearers connected with other immigrant enclaves in these efforts. These communal institutions such as academies and colleges often received mention in congregational commemorations. For instance, the St. Olaf Lutheran Church of Bode, Iowa mentioned the Bode Academy that started in 1887 (*Celebrating Our 100th Anniversary: 1870–1970, St. Olaf Lutheran, Church Bode, Iowa*). Many noted the specific synod that the church belonged to over the years. The disputes in the Norwegian Lutheran churches in the 1880s over theology often received a mention in the history of these churches. These seemed to end happily, though, when three

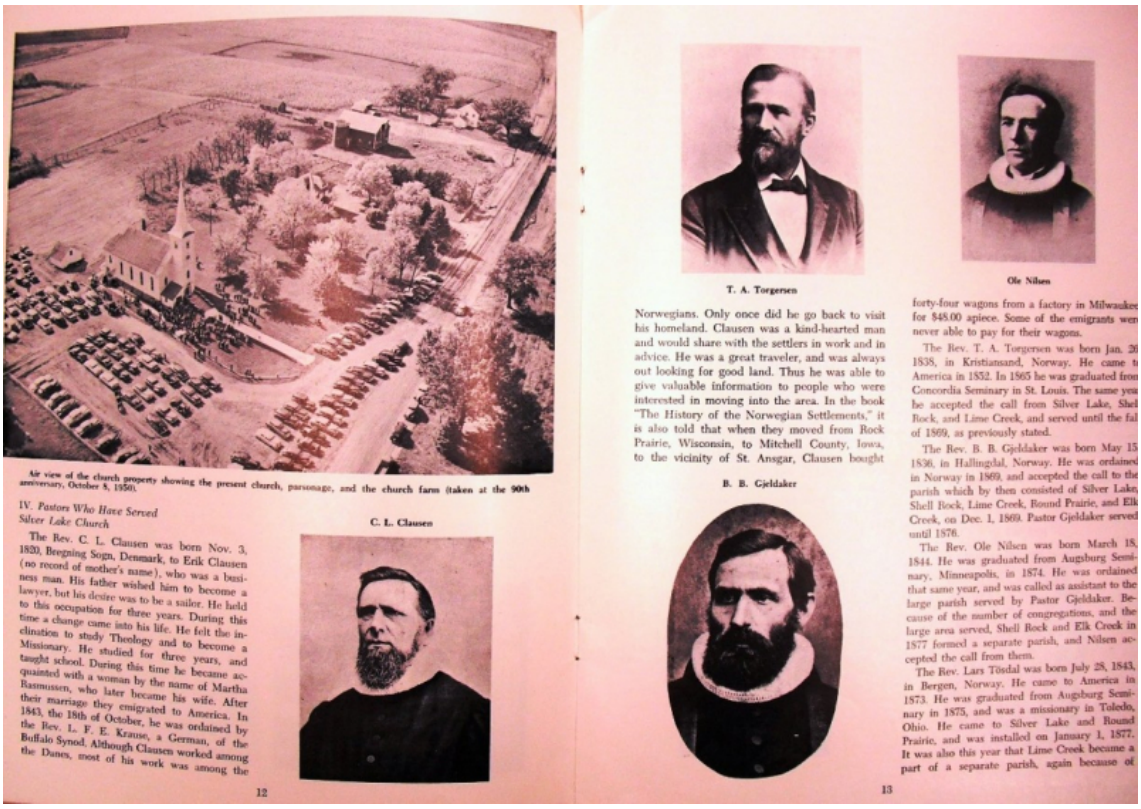
Norwegian groups came together to form the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America in 1917 (*75th Anniversary: 1888–1963, St. Olaf Lutheran Church, Belmond, Iowa*). If there were changes in synod affiliation or name, the history writers duly noted the change. This particularly affected churches who belonged to synods that combined with other synods. A church in Calumet, Iowa felt this acutely when it recounted changing its name from German Zion's Evangelical Church to Zion Evangelical and Reformed Church to Zion United Church of Christ in the span of just over thirty years (*75th Anniversary: 1892–1967, Zion United Church of Christ, Calumet, Iowa*). For many German Lutherans in the Missouri Synod, committing to the denomination meant that they were part of a faithful, orthodox Lutheran denomination, according to the histories (*Anniversary Booklet: 1878–1963, St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church, Germantown, Iowa*; *History: 1875–1950, St. John's Lutheran Church, Adair, Iowa*). The major division between Dutch immigrants in the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church could be felt in histories that recounted the split from either side (Swierenga and Bruins). The denominational connection mattered, particularly as they showed the work of joining with others in common cause.

21 History writers also highlighted denominational and institutional connections by noting where pastors came from and where they went. Pastors played almost as important of a role in framing the congregational narrative as the building projects. According to the histories, early settlers eagerly welcomed pastors' visits. When the congregation finally had enough resources to pay a regular pastor, they felt they had finally succeeded. Pastors meant regular sermons as well as administration of the sacraments. With such an important role in the life of the congregation, the specifics of each pastor's coming and going provided the periodization for many congregational histories. Tracing the geography of where pastors came from and where they went highlighted the connections to other congregations in the denomination and enclaves of other immigrants. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod commemorations specifically highlighted the locations of the pastors, linking these German immigrants together to build a mental map of their denomination (for just one example, see *75th Anniversary, Zion Evangelical*

*Lutheran Church*, *Atlantic*, *Iowa*). Dutch congregations probably had as strong of a geographic sense as any group (for just one example, see *50th Anniversary: 1908–1959*, *First Christian Reformed Church*, *Ireton*, *Iowa*). The commemorative histories highlighted where pastors had come from and where they went providing another connection to the denominational efforts of the congregation.

22 Of course, these broader connections could be tricky to negotiate as denominational affiliations changed. Telling the history of denominational splits and mergers required some sensitivity as issues could still be raw after World War II. For instance, the splits within the Norwegian synods in the 1880s and merger in 1917 needed to be handled carefully. The Norwegian Lutheran congregation in Decorah, Iowa split in the 1880s. The congregations downplayed the theological dispute in their 1963 histories as they were both part of the same denomination after 1917. The Decorah Lutheran Church noted that "opinions concerning this Doctrine differed and divisions occurred in many places" (*Centennial: 1863–1963*, *Decorah Lutheran Church*, *Decorah*, *Iowa*; *One Hundredth Anniversary: 1863–1963*, *First Lutheran Church*, *Decorah*, *Iowa*).

**Figure 4. – Inside page of the Silver Lake Lutheran Church commemorative anniversary book depicting both the rural nature of the church as well as the portraits of pastors.**



Air view of the church property showing the present church, parsonage, and the church farm (taken at the 90th anniversary, October 5, 1950).

IV. *Pastors Who Have Served Silver Lake Church*

The Rev. C. L. Clausen was born Nov. 3, 1820, Bregning Sogn, Denmark, to Erik Clausen (no record of mother's name), who was a business man. His father wished him to become a lawyer, but his desire was to be a sailor. He held to this occupation for three years. During this time a change came into his life. He felt the inclination to study Theology and to become a Missionary. He studied for three years, and taught school. During this time he became acquainted with a woman by the name of Martha Rasmussen, who later became his wife. After their marriage they emigrated to America. In 1843, the 18th of October, he was ordained by the Rev. L. F. E. Krause, a German, of the Buffalo Synod. Although Clausen worked among the Danes, most of his work was among the

C. L. Clausen

12

T. A. Torgersen

Norwegians. Only once did he go back to visit his homeland. Clausen was a kind-hearted man and would share with the settlers in work and in advice. He was a great traveler, and was always out looking for good land. Thus he was able to give valuable information to people who were interested in moving into the area. In the book "The History of the Norwegian Settlements," it is also told that when they moved from Rock Prairie, Wisconsin, to Mitchell County, Iowa, to the vicinity of St. Ansgar, Clausen bought

B. B. Gjeldaker

Ole Nilsen

forty-four wagons from a factory in Milwaukee for $48.00 apiece. Some of the emigrants were never able to pay for their wagons.

The Rev. T. A. Torgersen was born Jan. 20, 1838, in Kristiansand, Norway. He came to America in 1852. In 1865 he was graduated from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. The same year he accepted the call from Silver Lake, Shell Rock, and Lime Creek, and served until the fall of 1869, as previously stated.

The Rev. B. B. Gjeldaker was born May 15, 1836, in Hallingdal, Norway. He was ordained in Norway in 1869, and accepted the call to the parish which by then consisted of Silver Lake, Shell Rock, Lime Creek, Round Prairie, and Elk Creek, on Dec. 1, 1869. Pastor Gjeldaker served until 1876.

The Rev. Ole Nilsen was born March 15, 1844. He was graduated from Augsburg Seminary, Minneapolis, in 1874. He was ordained that same year, and was called as assistant to the large parish served by Pastor Gjeldaker. Because of the number of congregations, and the large area served, Shell Rock and Elk Creek in 1877 formed a separate parish, and Nilsen accepted the call from them.

The Rev. Lars Tösdal was born July 28, 1843, in Bergen, Norway. He came to America in 1873. He was graduated from Augsburg Seminary in 1875, and was a missionary in Toledo, Ohio. He came to Silver Lake and Round Prairie, and was installed on January 1, 1877. It was also this year that Lime Creek became a part of a separate parish, again because of

13

"Centennial: 1858–1958", Silver Lake Lutheran Church, Silver Lake, Iowa.

23 Constructing church buildings and connecting with other congregations in denominations provided the outline for congregational histories. These outlines reflected the importance of the institution building by immigrants and subsequent generations. They had worked hard and sacrificed for these institutions and the post-World War II generation was expected to continue them even in the face of changes. Telling the history of institutions, started by immigrants, showed that immigrants could build institutions through hard work and sacrifice.

# Faithful

24 According to the history told by rural Midwesterners after World War II, the institutions were built and maintained by the immigrants and their descendants because of their faith. In an era of

congregational changes, those in the pews remembered their immigrant ancestors as being faithful. Dedication to immigrant forbearers who had a strong faith proliferated. The commitment to their faith could not be doubted as they had immigrated and built their lives and institutions in a new place. The Buena Vista County, Iowa St. John's United Church of Christ dedicated the commemoration "to those of yesterday, our forebearers [sic] who desired that their worship and service to God may be continued in this new land to which they had come" (*Seventy-Fifth Anniversary: 1888–1963, St. John's United Church of Christ, Buena Vista County*). The Meriden, Iowa Oakdale Evangelical Free Church in 1967 dedicated their efforts to the "highly esteemed pioneers of our church whose labor of love and zeal for Christ merit our gratitude" (*Behold the Works of the Lord: 1892–1967, Oakdale Evangelical Free Church, Meriden, Iowa*). Another congregation dedicated theirs "to the pioneers who down through the years bravely applied their faith as they built […] a Christian community" (*75th Anniversary: 1880–1955, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Forest City, Iowa*). These dedications defined the purpose for remembering the history.

25 The rural Midwesterners told their history to emphasize the role faith played in the lives of their ancestors. Histories of these congregations often emphasized the regular Bible reading and worship services attendance of these early pioneers. One congregation's history even explained how "they kept holy days as well as Sunday" which the writer proudly related had "confused their neighbors" (*100th Anniversary, St. John's Lutheran Church, Madrid, Iowa*). Another history noted how "the family altar was never omitted in their homes and church holidays were religiously observed" (*Centennial Anniversary: 1859–1959, Stratford Evangelical Lutheran Church, Stratford, Iowa*). Calmar Lutheran Church in 1953 noted that "As the church in their homeland had been the central point around which the main events in their lives centered […] the lack of it here in their newfound home was keenly felt" until they could build a congregation (*One Hundredth Anniversary: 1853–1953, Calmar Lutheran Church, Calmar, Iowa*).

26 Being faithful also meant sacrifice. For people living after World War II in the rural Midwest, the sacrifices of their ancestors for the cause of the local congregation and denomination showed the kind of

dedication that inspired continued sacrifice. The writer of the First Reformed Church in Boyden, Iowa in 1963 noted that "we are amazed at the accomplishments of that small group […] Their prayers, sacrifices and hard work" helped build a strong church (*Diamond Jubilee: 1888–1963, First Reformed Church, Boyden, Iowa*). As another history noted "We reap the harvest of their sacrifices in both the material and spiritual realms". The same congregational history noted that to build a bigger church, the congregation had a "willingness to sacrifice for the Kingdom of God" (*One Hundredth Anniversary: 1853–1953, Glenwood Lutheran Congregation, Winneshiek and Allamakee Counties, Iowa*). The faithful sacrifices of the past served as a model for the present congregation.

27 The history writers continually emphasized how the congregation had remained faithful to a particular theology. German Lutherans who formed the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod were particularly ardent in noting the loyalty of immigrants to the cause of orthodox Lutheranism. The language used in these books is revealing as they often noted how immigrants had been faithful to "our faith". Remaining faithful to this particular theology became the overt argument of the writers of the history of Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in Atlantic, Iowa in 1952 who wrote "in a generation when changing creeds are popular, Zion still seeks to hold and confess the Word of God in its truth and purity and to administer the Sacraments accordingly" (*75th Anniversary, Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, Atlantic, Iowa*). Dutch congregations also noted the particular Calvinistic theology their forbearers had specified. For instance, the First Reformed Church of Hull, Iowa in 1960 noted that "early settlers, religious people of Calvinistic extraction" had started the congregation (*75th Anniversary: 1885–1960, First Reformed Church, Hull, Iowa*). Remembering the importance of particular theology mattered to congregations in a time of church mergers and ecumenical initiatives. The St. Olaf Lutheran Church of Bode, Iowa noted that "one of the many typical traits of a Norwegian-American was his intense loyalty to the Lutheran church" (*Celebrating Our 100th Anniversary: 1870–1970, St. Olaf Lutheran, Church Bode, Iowa*).

28 Recounting the faithfulness of the members in the past was meant to encourage the current generation. The histories placed forbears as examples to be followed. Big Canoe Lutheran's history called the

current congregation to "be worthy successors of the founding fathers" (*One Hundredth Anniversary: 1853–1953, Big Canoe Lutheran Church, Big Canoe, Iowa*). St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran made clear in the introduction "We shall aim to carry on the work of a past generation so that the results of our efforts shall be a more abundant blessing for the generations to follow" (*Seventy-Fifth Anniversary: 1894–1969, St. Pauls' Evangelical Lutheran Church, Garner, Iowa*). The dedication of the Germantown, Iowa's St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church's commemoration in 1963 hoped "it encourages this and future generations" (*Anniversary Booklet: 1878–1963, St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church, Germantown, Iowa*). St. John's United Church of Christ in Buena Vista County, Iowa laid out their purpose for the history to be a "reminder of the faith of our fathers, which, amidst the trying time of early pioneer days founded our church and loyally supported it [...] we wish on this anniversary to look forward with courage and faith to a yet more fruitful future" (*Seventy-Fifth Anniversary: 1888–1963, St. John's United Church of Christ, Buena Vista County*). As one history noted, the readers "owe a debt of gratitude to those who have gone before us" and can "most adequately pay that debt by being diligent in our Christian living" (*Dedication Album, Our Savior's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Albert City, Iowa*). The sentiment came through clearly in a rousing call of the Big Canoe Lutheran Church in 1953, "Then shall we be worthy successors of the founding fathers" (*One Hundredth Anniversary: 1853–1953, Big Canoe Lutheran Church, Big Canoe, Iowa*).

# Conclusion

29 Understanding the historical process of remembering immigration via commemorations of rural Midwesterners in a time of upheaval seems particularly pertinent to understanding the rural Midwest, and journalists have been particularly interested in the rural Midwest political culture since November 2016. Commemorations told narratives that "cleaned-up" their immigrant past to meet the needs of the new situation they encountered. These stories left certain parts of history untold. None placed women as central characters. A few mentioned the role of women, usually when the Ladies' Aid Society started, but women did not have a starring role in the stories. These stories also did not place the process of taking the land in the

broader context of American history. Additionally, strife or conflict within the United States, let alone racial and ethnic borders that crossed the Midwest, also did not make the cut for the histories either.

30 At the same time, the writers of these histories did recognize the selective nature of the narrative. For instance, the Stratford, Iowa Evangelical Lutheran Church history noted they had included "only the most interesting highlight in the growth of the congregation" (*Centennial Anniversary: 1859–1959, Stratford Evangelical Lutheran Church, Stratford, Iowa*). The St. Olaf Lutheran Church of Bode, Iowa's history in 1970 noted "there are no doubt some inaccuracies and omissions because of limited data or a complete lack of records" (*Celebrating Our 100th Anniversary: 1870–1970, St. Olaf Lutheran, Church Bode, Iowa*). These selective immigrant stories provide a vision of America centered on an immigrant story of settlement and development while overlooking aspects of conquest and exclusion.

31 Of course, there were other rural Midwesterners in congregations who did not tell stories about immigrant ancestors. These churches did tell stories, but instead of focusing on immigrants, they focused on the pioneers who started the church. While not connecting their church to immigration from Europe, their histories followed much of the same framework. These Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptist stories also had less "exclusive" language of "us" and "our" that is found in the immigrant church commemorations. This juxtaposition points to the value of immigration stories in this era. For those churches who could claim an immigrant heritage, they marshalled it for their own purposes.

32 These stories then show us how people in the rural Midwest constructed a story that placed themselves, and their immigrant ancestors, in the heart of the national story: a national story of good immigrants making the land, building institutions, and having a strong faith. As the world changed around them, these stories would serve their purpose in trying to maintain their way of life and central place in the United States story. These made-in-the-heartland stories then fed into national narratives that others used for political and cultural purposes. The implicit purpose of telling the history of

the church often bubbled to the surface in these church commemorations. The past was being used to place these former immigrant congregations within the borders of the mainstream of the American story.

33 Studying closely the stories of rural Midwest Protestant ethnic churches conceptually forces us to recognize the importance of representations of immigration beyond simple stereotypes. Immigration for the people in these churches had receded into the past. Nostalgia and heritage trumped the reality of immigration and settlement. This study demonstrates how representations of immigration served people who lived in the heartland and found them helpful to make their way in the world (Lenz; Cramer; Hochschild). As the church served at the heart of the community's identity and social world, then how they saw themselves in their time and place gives us insights into cultural border construction. Churches played a role in helping people think through the changes they experienced. This meaning-making function can be glimpsed in church commemorations as people told stories about themselves for themselves (Butler). Only by looking at how people remembered immigration, on the ground, for the people who lived out their immigrant identity, do we get a fuller, richer story of the American experience.

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## NOTES

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## RÉSUMÉ

**English**
This article argues that, after World War II, Americans of the Midwest whose immigrant ancestors had built churches in the 19th century, constructed a story that placed themselves in the heart of the national story, a story of good immigrants making the land, building institutions, and having a strong faith. The geographic focus is on rural Protestant congregations that stood at the heart of the social and cultural patterns of the rural Midwest. The corpus is based upon booklets published on the occasion of congregational anniversary celebrations. They provide the main evidence for understanding how these Midwesterners thought about America and placed themselves—and their immigrant ancestors—within the borders of the mainstream American story. The past is thus used to construct an immigrant identity after World War II that fits a larger narrative about America and its borders.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés**
histoire des Églises (congrégations), Midwest rural, immigration de l'Europe du Nord, identités paroissiales, commémorations

**Keywords**
church histories, rural Midwest, Northern European immigration, church-based identity, commemoration

## AUTEUR

**David Zwart**
David Zwart is an associate professor and assistant chair in the history department at Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan. He started his professional career as a middle school history and social studies teacher in California. Prior to his appointment at Grand Valley State, he was on the history faculty at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa. He received his PhD in history from Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan in 2012 and his Master's degree in history from California State University, Fresno in 2004. He has served as president of the Association for the Advancement of Dutch-American Studies. He has published numerous articles on Dutch Americans in the twentieth century, the rural Midwest, and history education.
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# Moving across Borders: Border Crossing Today

# US Immigration Enforcement and the Making of Unintended Returnees

*Les services d'immigration aux États-Unis et la fabrication de rapatriés involontaires*

**Óscar F. Gil-García**

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## PLAN



## TEXTE

# Background

1 Since 2004, I have conducted ethnographic fieldwork with indigenous Maya from Guatemala in the state of Chiapas, Mexico. In 2007, in one of my return trips, I met Alex [1] and his wife Grace in Chiapas. Grace, originally born in Guatemala, fled as a child (age 9) with her brother (age 14) to escape military conflict from the country's civil war (1954–1996) and join their parents in the US. Alex was born in a refugee settlement in Mexico to parents who, like Grace and her family, fled from Guatemala's military conflict. Barriers to incorporation—visa restrictions to mobility (Kauffer) and discrimination that limited employment options in Mexico—compelled Alex to migrate to the US at age 14 to assist his family. [2] Grace met Alex two years after his

arrival, had a US born child, and lived in the US for 12 and 6 years, respectively.

2 In 2006, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents conducted an immigration raid at his place of work. [3] A new provision, "expedited removal", within the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), normalized deportation as a mechanism for immigration enforcement was used to accelerate the deportations during the 2006 ICE worksite raids. [4] The immigration enforcement operation led to the incarceration and deportation of Alex and many of his co-workers, but also separated families impacting hundreds of children in the US. [5] Alex's deportation to Nogales, Mexico at 1 am, without any form of documentation [6] or money, placed him in great vulnerability. A Mexican national gave him some cash to call Grace, and served as an intermediary to receive wired money, which Alex used to join his family in Chiapas.

3 Deportation caused significant economic hardship for Alex's family. Scholars have identified more than 90% of noncitizens deported from the US in recent years are men, and as fathers are generally the breadwinners in immigrant families, when fathers are arrested or deported in large worksite raids, families lose almost all of their income (Chaudry et al.). Such circumstances reflected Grace's experience. As a stay-at-home mom, she did not participate in the labor market, and relied on her husband's source of income. Consequently, to avoid greater financial strain, Grace moved in with her parents. She also initiated the process to obtain a US passport for her child, but required that Alex sign a notarized document, prolonging their separation. After an additional six months, both joined him in Chiapas to become "de facto" deportees. [7]

4 As opposed to being forcibly removed by the state as Alex was, de facto deportation occurs when parents make the voluntary decision to take their foreign national child back or US citizen-child to another country (Colvin). The latter of the two, however, according to psychologist and migration scholar Luis Zayas (2015), abrogates the young citizens' rights and coerces them into a state of exile. [8] Along with US citizen exiles, scholars have identified how deportees who may have also lived part or most of their lives in the US confront

stigma (McGuire and Coutin) and economic vulnerability (Bengtson et al.) that preclude their integration following deportation.

5 Indeed, significant economic upheaval ensued following Alex's deportation and family's involuntary mobility to Mexico. All moved-in to Alex's family's small (20 x 20-meter lot) home in Chiapas, where agricultural lands for cultivation are not available. The collapse of the coffee market in Chiapas (Collier), where previous generations periodically traveled to the coast to cultivate and harvest, made this option economically unfeasible. Outside of migrating to the US, a significant number of community residents emigrate to the Mayan Riviera to work in the poorly remunerated gendered informal labor sector: construction work for men, and hospitality for women (Gil-García).

6 Within a year of his deportation, Alex befriended a *coyote* (human smuggler) and accompanied him on a series of trips across the Mexico-US border. The higher earnings Alex gained as a *coyote* and greater flexibility to spend time with his family made this work—albeit at great risk—more attractive.

# Methods

7 My presentation and analysis are based on a combination of published sources and four one hour-long informal interviews with Alex in 2014. His wife and seven community members (3 men, 4 women), who relied on Alex to smuggle kin to the US, participated in three informal focus group interviews in 2014 (between 30 minutes and one hour); all confirmed the veracity of his accounts. My longstanding rapport with participants and secondary sources—peer-reviewed scholarship and journalist reports on human smuggling on the Mexico-US border—confirm their observations.

8 In 2015, following his capture and detention by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents, legal options for release was obtained from his attorney. Follow-up telephone interviews with Alex regarding his work as a *coyote* took place in 2016. While being in the US in violation of immigration laws is generally a civil violation, actually smuggling other individuals into the US is considered a federal crime. Scholars

(Brabeck et al.) have identified how case law has been variable on the ability to maintain human subjects protections; the federal government could take an interest in prosecuting him, and subpoena me to testify or provide records.

9 Consequently, to fulfill participants' request to maintain confidentiality and anonymity, and to diminish the risk of producing participant records to comply with a subpoena, field notes (in lieu of audio recordings) de-identified subjects through use of pseudonyms throughout fieldwork. Hopkins has mentioned, however, that to uphold confidentiality with vulnerable populations, it may be necessary to disguise particular details and information to prevent deductive disclosure (Kaiser). As an additional precaution, to protect subjects, certain identifying details in this case have been altered, but findings have not been changed.

# What distinguishes contemporary clandestine migration from the past?

10 In an attempt to specify what differentiates contemporary migration from the past, Anthropologist, Deborah Boehm, in her book *Returned* identifies how deportation from the US has produced a series of emergent migrations that include family members with diverse US immigration statuses, including US citizens, who return after deportation or migrate for the first time.

11 Deportations from the US territory, for geographers Price and Breese, constitute a type of involuntary removal, and produce what they call *unintended returnees*. The rise in deportations of foreign nationals from Latin America, particularly from Central America—Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador—along with Mexico (between 2000–2013) accounted for 3.8 million removals (DHS 2014). Several scholars have explored the incorporation of deportees in countries of origin (Hamann and Zunñiga; Anderson and Solis) with some identifying forms of marginalization upon return (Hagan et al.; Coutin). While Price and Breese limit their discussion of unintended

returnees to removals from US territory, they acknowledge that deportees could potentially return.

12 Scholars have identified how remigration is common, but due to the clandestine nature of remigration, estimates on their frequency vary (Massey et al.; Van Hook and Zhang). Several studies identify deportees as more likely to attempt re-entry in a variety of international settings (Riosmena and Massey; Peutz). Hagan et al. identified how substantial portions of deportees intend to remigrate to the US. For instance, empirical research among deportee men in El Salvador, revealed a greater propensity to remigrate among deportees with children, spouses, and among deportees with both spouse and children in the US than their counterparts without family ties (Cardoso et al.).

13 Cardoso and colleagues also found that Salvadoran deportees with family in the United States have substantial US-specific human capital—work experience, higher education, and English fluency—all important determinants of authorized and unauthorized remigration (Massey and Espinosa), which was substantially greater for deportees with family in the US than those without. Availability of US-specific human capital among study participants, however, was found to be inconsequential to the intent to remigrate. These findings run counter to the research literature's emphasis on social capital—the information provided by migrant family networks that help lower the overhead costs to migrate—identified by Massey and Espinosa as a fundamental force that instigates and sustains more migration. Instead of benefitting from social capital the study's authors found that involuntary transnational family structure served as the most important factor influencing the intent to remigrate (Cardoso et al. 217), despite severe penalties for unlawful re-entry to the US (Massey).

14 The study by Cardoso and colleagues on the intention to remigrate among deportees helps shed light on the influence involuntary transnational families may have in shaping actual behavior among a population that represents a significant proportion of repeat migrants. For instance, data from the Department for Homeland Security (DHS), limited to migrant apprehensions that undercounts repeat migration among individuals not apprehended, identifies

21 percent of deportees in the US as repeat violators, whereas parents of US-citizen children constitute more than a third of repeat violations (DHS 2009). [9] The Cardoso et al. study suggests that the social capital thesis of Massey and Espinosa (Massey and Espinosa) and others (Durand et al.) may no longer hold in explaining the return migration among deportee parents with children in the US.

15 Along with possible changes in the role US-specific social capital may play as a determining factor in return migration, the documented rise in the use of *coyotes* in the last decade in Mexico (EMIF) indicate a greater likelihood among deportee parents to use clandestine means to remigrate. What is new about these return migrations is the nature and extent of vulnerabilities experienced within the larger clandestine political economy.

16 There is on-going debate among scholars, however, about how clandestine crossings are organized; some argue that cartels do not have much involvement in human smuggling (Sanchez), while others say they do (Gurney). Greater consensus exists among scholars that restrictive immigration policies and tighter border controls by migrant receiving states like the US has fueled a diverse market for clandestine migration services (Andreas; Slack and Whiteford). [10] This diverse market according to Ortiz is part of a larger clandestine political economy fueled by the regulation of migration through border security along with cartel activity in drug-and-people-smuggling.

17 To help comprehend Alex's involvement in human smuggling, I deploy Spener's concept of clandestinity as licit and illicit strategies that enable surreptitious cross-border mobility. Reliance on these strategies is tied to limits imposed by states to the legitimate means of movement that increasingly produce involuntary transnational families and reinforce the clandestine political economy. I also employ and broaden Price and Breese's (374) concept of unintended returnee to illustrate how the structural constraints that befall Alex following his involuntary removal is part of a larger continuum that delimits the mobility options for deportees.

18 Restrictions on the legal means to migrate may compel deportees, particularly among those with involuntary transnational families, to deploy clandestinity as a resource and contract *coyotes* to enable

cross-border mobility. Deportees who remigrate to the US are subject to immigration enforcement that increasingly criminalizes non-violent offenses, particularly unauthorized re-entry (Ewing et al.), raising the specter of possible jail time and/or another unintended return.

19 My focus, however, is not on the clandestine practice of human smuggling per se. Instead, I am interested in examining how deportation of individuals with families serves as an incentive to attempt re-entry and the changing dynamics of clandestine crossings. My aim is to also elucidate through my case study how social capital, which helps lower overhead costs to migrating is of marginal importance when the migrant has been deported and separated from family members already in the US. Moreover, I will demonstrate how immigration enforcement measures that fuel deportations and family separation restrict the legal avenues available to returnees who have credible fear claims to obtain humanitarian relief, which in turn erodes the fundamental right to family life, and reproduces unintended involuntary returns.

## The hierarchical organization of human smuggling from Central America and Mexico to the US

20 Migration scholar David Spener in *Clandestine Crossings* identifies how the commercial-transport business of border crossing is one of several strategies that are largely structured by "a loosely networked set of [decentralized] independent contractors" (144). Spener also found, through ethnographic interviews, analysis of court records, and surveys a high degree of *relational embeddedness*—defined as far-reaching yet relatively closed social networks—whereby most migrants form contracts with recommended *coyotes* in their hometowns. The strength of these networks generates a degree of trust necessary to order the illicit cash-on-delivery system of human smuggling.

21 Some scholars, however, have identified a loosening of these networks whereby migrants rely less on local ties established with

known smugglers who may also be linked to drug cartels (Slack and Whiteford). The participation of drug cartels in clandestine smuggling networks has been identified to increase the vulnerability of migrants. Cartels may compel *coyotes* to assault migrants or force them to transport drugs (Slack and Whiteford). Ortiz argues that the increased participation of imposters who pretend to be *coyotes* and recruit migrants only to extort them may inform Slack and Whiteford's findings, which has helped reinforce dominant perceptions of smuggling as intertwined with criminal syndicates (Spener; Palacios).

22 Interviews conducted by Palacios with forty *coyotes* identifies unequal power relations between cartels who deploy violence to extract quotas from *coyotes* for the privilege of operating on the Mexican borderlands of Tamaulipas to facilitate cross-border migration. The association between the two—a common practice made by representatives of the US state security apparatus and humanitarian groups alike [11]—"is actually produced by coercion and operates to the detriment of *coyotes*" (Palacios 58). This unequal power dynamic may help explain Ortiz's ethnographic findings that bolstered border enforcement has resulted in more frequent cartel activity and involvement of *coyotes* in the movement of drugs with that of people across three major cities along the Mexico-US border.

23 Bolstered immigration enforcement and changes in the organizational makeup of contemporary clandestine smuggling networks begin to explain the structural factors that contribute to migrant vulnerability when crossing the Mexico-US border. Within this loose human smuggling network exist *enganchadores* who are charged with actively recruiting potential migrants. A *coyote*, according to Alex however, is more honest in his dealings with border-crossers, who unlike *enganchadores*, must encounter many of the same dangers faced by clients when crossing the border (hunger, thirst, injury, imprisonment, and death). While Alex portrays himself as an honest *coyote*, deception, coercion, and violent relations of power can take place throughout the smuggling milieu (Ortiz; Palacios).

24 The *patrón* plays a managerial role, which involves contracting *enganchadores* and *coyotes*, and regulating the cost and number of

attempts that will be made to cross the international border. Apprehending a *coyote* by US border enforcement results in the loss of funds paid to the *patrón*, and denies clients another opportunity to cross the international border.

25 While Alex used the terms *patrones*, *enganchadores*, and *coyotes* to describe the organization of clandestine crossings, as David Spener's recent work has shown, the lexicon varies greatly over time and space.[12] The vernacular terms used to describe clandestine crossings by Alex may therefore differ in another context. His account, however, confirms other studies that identify a loosening of relationally embedded networks in clandestine human smuggling.

26 Inequities embedded in the current clandestine political economy that require payment of costly quotas, places at a disadvantage less complex or embedded networks, which are linked to small scale clandestine migration (Palacios). These inequities provide loose networks, or what Ortiz calls a "spatially segmented system" of independent contractors who may not necessarily know each other, a competitive advantage. This loose organization has been identified as an effective protection mechanism to prevent identification of parties involved in the smuggling operation in the event a facilitator is arrested (Zhang). As a result, complex spatially segmented networks have been identified as the primary mechanism used by larger numbers of migrants from across the world to surreptitiously cross the US-Mexico borderlands (Palacios).

## Negotiations between *patrones*, *coyotes*, and *enganchadores*

27 By the summer of 2014, Alex completed 14 border crossings over the course of seven years, all in the Arizona-Sonora corridor. The frequency of these crossings enabled him to gain insight on how cartels rationalized clandestine crossings along the Sonora-Arizona border region.

28 The control of border cities provides cartels leverage to pressure *patrones* and independent smugglers to pay a *derecho de piso*, a quota or user's fee for crossing the border; the further from the Mexico-US border crossing clients originate, the more cartels may charge for

access to the border. *Patrones* provide *coyotes* with a location, controlled by a drug cartel, where clients pay up to $600 to enter a safe house. To opt-out and gain authorization to leave the safe house requires an additional $600. These fees are in addition to the $4,000 to $4,500 charged per Central American client to cross the Mexico-US border.

29 For one to three weeks prior to departure from the safe house, Alex scouts border authorities' patrol patterns. Clients are then transported from the safe house by *raiteros* (slang for a driver) on a four-hour journey in Mexican territory controlled by a cartel. To prevent stowaways, heavily armed guards that work for cartels inspect each vehicle to make a final count of all passengers. To ensure that *patrones* pay the right amount for each client, all are periodically asked to provide information on their place of origin. Once all passengers are accounted for, and place of origin is confirmed, permission is granted to continue to their next destination. In one instance, however, Alex described how a cartel identified discrepancies in the place of origin of some clients. The cartel leader, displeased with the attempt by a *patrón* to pay less than the required amount for a *derecho de piso*, alerted all cartels to discontinue business with this *patrón*.

30 The unequal power relations in the illicit informal economy of human smuggling that privilege drug cartels and *patrones*, who take a larger cut of the fees paid by migrants, and place *coyotes* at risk of death or incarceration by immigration authorities became all too clear as Alex shared information about his experiences facilitating clandestine cross border migration.

# Clandestine crossings

31 Alex's numerous clandestine crossings allowed him to gain experience as an independently contracted *coyote* who participated in a spatially segmented smuggling network. Alex quickly established a strong reputation for guiding migrants safely across the border. The following provides a snapshot to one of these crossings.

32 In 2014, Alex and Omar, worked together to guide ten foreign nationals across the Mexico-US border. Six hours into the journey in

the Arizona desert, dehydration and fatigue set in. Unable to reach their designated pick-up point on time, Alex called the *raitero* to inform him of their predicament and decision to hide overnight in the desert bush. They agreed to meet the next day at a new location.

33 Day became night, and without warning, a helicopter and border patrol vehicles appeared near their location. Alex suspected the immigration authorities overheard his conversation with electronic monitoring and identified his location. The group dispersed throughout the bush. Once immigration authorities left, Alex and Omar searched for group members, but could not find them. Omar suggested leaving them behind, but Alex—fearing they would die without assistance—refused. It took several hours before they were found safe and sound asleep.

34 At dawn the group moved close to the pick-up point, but as a precaution remained in the bush. Once again, without warning, a helicopter and a border patrol caravan appeared at the designated site. The *raitero* never came, and a poor telephone signal prevented communication. For a second night, the group remained in the desert where they were in desperate need of water. Alex volunteered to go to a nearby community to search for sustenance. After some failed attempts to find residents at home, an elderly woman and her adult son who happened to be of the Tohono O'odham Nation—a binational indigenous group and federally recognized tribe—opened their door.

35 Alex's limited English prompted him to call his wife in Mexico (who completed seven years of schooling in the US) to translate his request for water, food, and one night's lodging for group members. The hosts agreed to a stay of just two hours and provided nourishment at a cost of $500. Alex called associates to arrange for another *raitero* to pick them up. Michael, a *raitero* and member of the O'odham Nation, was identified as their only option—at the cost of $2,300. Due to the high risk of detection by immigration agents, both *coyotes* accepted the offer on behalf of the group, but the fee significantly reduced their earnings.

36 Once in the vehicle, Alex negotiated—with his wife over the phone—a new business deal with Michael: future transportation services at a fee of $1,000 USD per passenger. Migrants, not *coyotes*, would have to cover the additional cost. Alex calculated that collaboration with

Michael—with established networks and familiarity with O'odham Nation territory—reduced the risk of capture by immigration authorities and future financial losses. Ultimately, Michael agreed to partner in the human smuggling trade.

37 Alex explained how Michael, to diminish the risk of imprisonment for his role in human smuggling, subcontracted duties to other O'odham members to transport Alex's clients across the border. An element of risk, however, underlined their newfound business relationship. For example, Alex disclosed an instance when, under the cover of night, border patrol pursued him and new *raitero* in a car chase as they attempted to transport eight migrants across the border. Once at a safe distance, the *raitero* stopped the vehicle to allow everyone to disperse. Unable to chase everyone, the agent arrested the *raitero* and impounded the vehicle.

38 Michael arranged for another *raitero* to pick them up, but demanded that Alex pay the impounding fee and the bail amount needed to release his *raitero*. Initially, Alex refused, arguing that the *raitero* was at fault for speeding and bringing suspicion to the vehicle, but soon relented. He recognized that entry to the US depended on Michael's cooperation, and paid the fees. US citizenship status provides Michael, and his associates involved in human smuggling, a degree of protection from deportation, but places Alex at a disadvantage when negotiating financial transactions with O'odham. Imprisonment for aiding and abetting unauthorized entry of foreign nationals to the US, however, is an on-going risk for US citizens.

39 US and Mexican disinvestment in indigenous borderlands according to historian Gerardo Cadava fueled smuggling among the O'odham. The economic impact of governmental neglect is captured in a study by the Arizona Rural Policy Institute (2011), which identifies high rates of unemployment and poverty (27 and 41 percent, respectively) among the O'odham. The O'odham borderlands, according to Cadava, contrast with official ports of entry where free market capitalistic exchange is viewed as a modern neoliberal advancement. In this frame, the informal cross-border forms of exchange among the O'odham and *coyotes*, such as Alex, reinforce ideas of disorder and backwardness in the borderlands and justify their neglect.

40 While the O'odham nation formally observes US border enforcement laws, many feel conflicted. Journalist Andrea Filzen identifies how economic marginalization and ethnic profiling by CBP agents of O'odham tribe members fuel resentment toward them. Amnesty International (2012) has documented several cases whereby CBP agents racially profiled, harassed, denied entry and "returned" registered O'odham and other indigenous peoples to Mexico. These circumstances, along with rampant marginalization by the American and Mexican governments, helps diminish the *us-them* distinction between the O'odham and migrants, perchance making partnerships such as Alex's and Michael's possible.

# The unauthorized re-entry

41 The movement of people without state authorization is a dynamic and historically contingent process. Contemporary immigration enforcement measures throughout the Americas (Villegas and Rieteg) have placed deportees and their involuntary transnational families in increased precarity (Bengtson et al.). It is this increased marginalization that forces many deportees to *re-enter* the US. The US enforcement strategy along the Mexico-US border and interior (Coleman; Steil and Ridgley), however, has involved increased convictions for unlawful re-entry—a federal crime—along with a rise in incarceration rates and deportations (Light et al.).

42 In 2014, Grace disclosed how they discussed the possibility of returning to the US soon after her return to Mexico. But, now with four children, their plans changed. I asked Grace what she thought about the prospect of Alex continuing to work as a *coyote*. Anticipating my question, she motioned, nodding her head sideways while holding her temples, and replied: "I don't want him to do it anymore. Every time that he does, I remain worried with the stress that something horrible might happen to him. It is for this reason that I much rather he goes to the US to find employment." When asked if he considered this option, he replied: "I'm undecided." I then asked how long he planned to work as a *coyote*, Alex answered: "The increased cost of living, and lack of employment [outside of the informal economy], require that I do another trip." Mexico's high unemployment (Aristegui Editorial Board) along with institutionalized

racism that disadvantage the indigenous in the labor market (De la Madrid), and Alex's commitment as a husband and father who prefers to spend time with his family informed his decision to continue working as a *coyote*. The risks associated with this line of work, however, became evident with the increased difficulty Alex faced when crossing the Mexican-US border.

43 By the end of 2014, Alex attempted to guide 18 migrants through the Sonora-Arizona corridor, but before leaving Mexico armed men surrounded the group and confiscated their belongings. Alex ran into the desert bush and escaped in the US side of the border. After a night in the desert, without food or water, Alex returned to Sonora, Mexico, where he asked a fellow *coyote* to contact his *patrón* to find out the whereabouts of the migrants, and learned that hostages were released after US kin paid an undisclosed ransom. Alex returned to Chiapas and informed Grace and his parents of the incident; all insisted that he no longer continue to work as a *coyote*.

44 Alex heeded his family's request, and in 2015, Alex and Grace decided to join kin members in the US, where both could accrue more earnings for the upkeep of their family. Alex paid a fellow *coyote* to cross his wife and children (including their US citizen child). This *coyote* informed Alex of successfully crossing mothers and their children in a location on the border where US immigration officials captured and later released migrants.

45 This development on the border reflected a change in DHS enforcement practices; a Federal Court Judge rejected (Preston) use of private detention centers for children and their parents—hastily opened soon after the 2014 media coverage of a reported "surge" of arrivals from Central America—as a "deterrence" strategy to discourage future migration.

46 Alex and Grace agreed to follow this strategy, which in addition to minimizing the risk of fatigue and death in the desert, was also less expensive. Alex, to help finance the cost for his family's crossing, decided to make a final clandestine crossing with eight migrants in the Sonora-Arizona corridor. Hours after beginning their journey, heavily armed men captured and held them hostage in a secluded building. A ransom was requested from US kin for every migrant. Despite Alex's request to pay the ransom for his release, his captors

refused. Instead, Alex remained captive for an extended time period and physically tortured.

47 He escaped his captors, but as he was without food or water, he turned himself in to CBP agents who documented the physical wounds he sustained following his prolonged torture and placed him in detention. Grace, who remained without news of her husband's whereabouts, became increasingly worried that he may have been detained by CBP agents, captured by rival *coyotes*, or perished in the desert, and requested my help to find Alex.

48 I searched for and covered the cost of a reputable attorney who located Alex in a detention center and obtained his consent for legal counsel. Alex expressed a well-founded fear of persecution or torture upon return to Mexico. However, his previous unauthorized entry prompted a Reinstatement of Removal, a new provision under the IIRIRA, which reestablished the previous order of removal subsequent to the 2006 immigration raid. Alex faced criminal charges for unauthorized re-entry and—following a 2009 "detention bed mandate" passed by the US Congress, requiring ICE to fill 34,000 beds in detention facilities across the country (Robbins)—prolonged imprisonment.

49 The attorney advised him of the option to apply for a withholding of removal or protection under the Convention Against Torture (CAT). Unlike asylum, however, both of these remedies do not offer a path to permanent resident status (Campos and Friedland 5). Additionally, a withholding and CAT application required that Alex remain in detention (potentially 6 months to a year) during the course of the credible fear process. Scholars have noted how prolonged detention can exacerbate post-traumatic stress and other harms asylum seekers and their families may have suffered in their own countries (Campos and Friedland 7–8). With no guarantee that the legal process would result in Alex's release following his prolonged detention, in opposition to his wife and parents, who feared for his life should he be deported to Mexico, he refused legal counsel. Under such constrained legal options that denied access to asylum or permanent resident status, and additional detention to adjudicate a withholding and CAT application, following the end of Alex's sentence and

deportation, he opted to remigrate to reunite with his wife and children in the US.

# Discussion and conclusion

50 This article used a case study method to present a "thick description" (Marcus) of the human consequences that befall an involuntary transnational family created by US immigration enforcement. Specifically, I document how the 2006 deportation of Alex produced a chain of events that resulted in multiple returns as a human smuggler (*coyote*) and participation in a larger clandestine border-crossing network.

51 The changing dynamics of the clandestine political economy create conditions where *coyotes* must not only evade border patrol, but also rival smugglers, and cartels that vie for greater control of the border region. Increased border surveillance by these actors has restructured the *relational embeddedness* that once shaped the *coyote*-migrant relationship. Alex's collaboration with *patrones* throughout Central America, Mexico and the US who contact him to smuggle migrants to the US, is illustrative of the transnational scope of the dispersed flexible network that scholars (Palacios; Ortiz) have noted increasingly orders the clandestine political economy.

52 The complex spatially segmented systems (Ortiz) that order clandestine cross border migration are unstable and can involve a variety of different independent contractors. The power relations between these contractors can also be unequal. This is evidenced by the different roles played by *patrones*, *coyotes*, *enganchadores*, and *raiteros*. Each face varying degrees of risk for participating in human smuggling, particularly along the Arizona-Sonora border region where cartels and immigration authorities vie for control. To reduce the risk of capture by border patrol or cartels, Alex partnered with Michael, a member of the Tohono O'odham Nation. Michael's national origin and US citizenship granted a degree of protection from deportation, which he leveraged to negotiate financial transactions that disadvantaged Alex. The increased complexity of the cross-border migration system that involved additional O'odham subcontractors and expenses, informed Alex's decision to redirect the added costs to migrants.

53 It is important to note, that I am not arguing that it is common for cartels or federally recognized tribes in the US to be involved in clandestine crossings. Instead, I argue that cartel activity and bolstered border enforcement measures have created conditions that disturb the normative relational embeddedness that underpinned the *coyote*-migrant relationship to a dispersed transnational flexible network. This diffusion has coincided with record number of US deportations.

54 One of the US government's arguments for bolstered immigration enforcement is that it will deter future unauthorized migration. Deterrence strategies—detention and "fast track" removal procedures—illegal under international and domestic law (2015), are ineffective in reducing the intention to migrate, particularly among those with direct experience with crime and violence who have credible fear claims (Hiskey et al.). Deportations for instance have been found to reinforce structural economic and political inequalities that compound the needs of deportees (Coutin; McGuire and Coutin). Paradoxically, deterrence has produced a deportee population, many of whom have involuntary transnational families in the US, providing a profound inducement—family reunification—for remigration.

55 Scholars have begun to identify how deportees who are separated from kin are more likely to remigrate and rely less on US-specific social capital to attempt re-entry (Cardoso et al.). While reliance on US-specific social capital, which helps lower overhead costs to migration, may be of marginal importance to deportees separated from family members already in the US, the clandestine political economy remains a site where other forms of social capital may be leveraged by deportees to remigrate. This site, however, is undergoing significant change creating conditions that place those who participate in the informal clandestine economy vulnerable to multiple forms of violence.

56 These forms of violence are increasingly illegible by migrant receiving states (Echeverria et al.). Alex's violent torture constituted grounds for credible fear. While several scholars have identified how most smugglers are migrants or asylum seekers themselves (Stone-Cadena 2016; Maher 2016), those who have credible fear claims face

increased obstacles to exercise humanitarian protections by the US state (Menjívar and Rumbaut). [13]

57 The limited legal options to seek asylum and humanitarian protection for individuals who have credible fear claims [14] is evidenced by the marginal number (between 1% and 7%) of applicants from Mexico and Central America who receive asylum (Campos and Friedland 13). Moreover, due to provisions under the IIRIRA, individuals who are deported and subsequently re-enter, are barred from applying for asylum (except for withholding of removal or CAT protection) and face a reinstatement of their previous order of removal. In the absence of effective humanitarian protections that uphold the fundamental right to family life, deportees who are separated from families may have a greater propensity than those without involuntary transnational families to remigrate. Alex's case provides an opportunity to understand the complex motivations that fuel the migration of unintended returnees, particularly when it concerns family reunification.

58 The importance of studying unintended returnees as a unique mobility subject is amplified when we examine US deportations between 2005–2013. During this period, the US deported over 3.1 million unauthorized migrants (DHS 2013). Of this number, using the Capps et al. two-to-one ratio to calculate the number of children impacted by US deportations, [15] we can estimate over 1.5 million children living in the US have been impacted by these removals. Moreover, based on DHS (2009) data on repeat violations, which identifies more than a third of repeat violations committed by parents of US-citizen children, we can reasonably predict that a large proportion of the 3.1 million removals may remigrate to reunify with involuntary transnational families in the US. The staggering number of deportations of parents of US-citizen children—one fourth of all removals between 2010 and 2012 (Wessler)—who have a greater propensity to remigrate to reunify with families (DHS 2009), should give pause to immigration policies that prioritize enforcement measures over humanitarian protection (Vélez and Boehner).

59 While my findings are not generalizable, the strength of this qualitative case study lies in its ability to document how deterrence as a strategy for immigration enforcement paradoxically enabled Alex

—with established long-term residence in the US—entrée to a human smuggling network. As a *coyote*, Alex deployed clandestinity as a resource to operate within the interstices of the dominant systems of migration, linked in both complicit and marginal ways to lawful migration to the US and the contemporary system of human smuggling. Findings also reveal how, despite bolstered immigration enforcement and limited legal options to seek asylum, clandestinity remained a viable, albeit dangerous, strategy enabling Alex to surreptitiously renter the US to reunify with his family.

60 To conclude, returnees and recent arrivals are increasingly systematically denied basic human rights in the US producing unauthorized persons/families who are at risk of deportation for years to come. Current US immigration enforcement policies are not only ineffective in deterring future migrations, but actually fuel emergent migrations that may increasingly rely on non-relationally embedded clandestine smuggling networks. These changes—enforcement and changes in clandestine smuggling networks—place returnees and recent arrivals in greater vulnerability as they attempt to migrate to the US. In lieu of deportations, policies that address structural inequalities in places of origin may curb unauthorized entry to the US and weaken cartels from gaining greater control of smuggling networks.

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## NOTES

1 To maintain anonymity, pseudonyms are used throughout.

2 For information on barriers to incorporation of Guatemalan refugees in Mexico that fueled international migration to the US, see Gil-García.

3 The immigration raid discussed here was part of a larger ICE enforcement operation that took place across six sites throughout two states. For a systematic analysis of the large scale impact these raids had on families and communities, see Capps et al.

4 The provision "allows summary expulsions of non-citizens who have not been admitted or paroled into the US, have been in the US for less than two years, and who are inadmissible because they presented fraudulent documents or have no documents" (Campos and Friedland 5).

5 The total number of children impacted by arrest is based on information obtained from service providers, and as it excludes those impacted by deportations, the precise number of children and families impacted by deportations is unknown (Capps et al.).

6 For fear of being accused of identity theft (a punishable offense) for the use of someone else's social security card, he did not disclose to ICE agents that his wallet was left in his car.

7 Interview dated 25 July 2014.

8 Passel et al. estimate as many as 500,000 US citizens remain in exile. Their figures, however, may be greater as of this writing. US citizen children placed in exile status, "may be subject to greater economic hardship; a weaker social safety net; difficulties in school; and, potentially, the threat of social instability and physical danger" (Capps and Fix 87, see too Cave).

9 It is important to note that while a substantial proportion of deportee parents, the majority from Mexico and Central America (ICE 2015), may intend to remigrate, overall levels of migration from Mexico are down (Krogstad and Passel)—with some investigators suggesting net migration from Mexico is zero (Passel et al.).

10 Scholars have identified several clandestine strategies that enable cross-border mobility, which include: human smuggling, crossings with

tourist visas or borrowed documents (see Chávez; Ortiz).

11 See HCHS and CNDH.

12 For a review of the lexicon used to coordinate irregular clandestine crossings from the Mediterranean to the European Union, see Achilli.

13 Along with the US, the wealthiest receiving countries of international migrants have all refused to ratify the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (see Menjívar and Rumbaut).

14 As of January 2015, of the credible fear interviews conducted at family detention facilities of foreign nationals, 76% from El Salvador, 55% from Guatemala, 70% from Honduras, and 67% from Mexico established a credible fear (USCIS).

15 The Capps et al. study found that for every two adults apprehended in a work site raid, at least one child (two thirds of whom are US-born citizens) is impacted.

## RÉSUMÉ

**English**

US immigration enforcement has led to a rise in the number of deportations. Several studies identify deportees as more likely to attempt re-entry to reunify with family members in a variety of international settings. These demographic changes have prompted some scholars to theorize how deportation produces a unique mobility subject: the *unintended returnee*. The importance of studying *unintended returnees* is amplified when we examine the 3.1 million unauthorized migrants deported by the US between 2005–2013. Over 1.5 million children living in the US were impacted by these removals. Data from the US Department of Homeland Security, indicate that among those who remigrate, the majority are those with US born children. While unauthorized re-entry, is not new, the forms that return migrations take reveal changes in the organization of clandestine border-crossings that heighten the risk of violence. To provide insight on how these changes may impact deportees who remigrate, this article examines the chain of events that followed a 2006 immigration work-site raid and deportation of a migrant who was separated from his US based family. The concept of clandestinity—licit and illicit strategies that enable surreptitious cross-border mobility—is employed to understand how this person, following deportation, leverages his involvement in a human smuggling network as a smuggler (*coyote*) to re-enter without authorization. By drawing inferences from a single case, I elucidate how

immigration enforcement measures, along with limited avenues for humanitarian relief, may create conditions that compel deportees to defy the power of the state to produce involuntary transnational families and rely on illicit clandestine migration services to enable family reunification.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés**
déportation d'immigrants en situation irrégulière, enfants nés aux États-Unis (citoyenneté par le sol), clandestinité frontalière, réunification des familles, réseaux de passeurs

**Keywords**
deportation of illegal aliens, US born children, cross-border clandestinity, family reunification, human smuggling networks

## AUTEUR

**Óscar F. Gil-García**
Óscar F. Gil-García is Assistant Professor in the Department of Human Development at Binghamton University, State University of New York. His research lies at the intersection of forced migration, humanitarianism, gender, and development. With over ten years of experience in conducting ethnographic research with indigenous Mayan refugees from Guatemala, his work examines their incorporation in Mexico's southernmost border state of Chiapas and the United States. Currently, Gil-García studies the legal barriers to naturalization and citizenship of this population following their return or deportation from the United States to Mexico. Findings from this study will be used to shape policies that enable the legalization of stateless migrants who fled the Guatemalan military conflict (1954–1996) and now reside in Mexico. Additionally, he is also engaged in a new research project that will examine the health and social service needs of unaccompanied migrant youth who arrive in the US.
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# Beyond Borders: Revisiting the Concept of “Frontier” in the Age of Global Terrorism

*Au-delà des frontières : revisiter le concept de « frontière » à l’ère du terrorisme mondial*

**Saïd Ouaked**

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## PLAN



## TEXTE

1 President Donald Trump’s recent and repeated efforts to enforce an executive initiative regarding migrants from several Muslim countries have sparked an intense debate among politicians, media pundits, national security and academic experts both in and outside the U.S. Broadly speaking, the argument opposed—as it usually does—two groups: those who see immigration as a potential threat and consider it should be strictly controlled and those who believe that welcoming immigrants is an American tradition and is a vital part of its identity.

2 Interestingly, the executive order *Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States* of January 2017 (often qualified as the ‘Muslim ban’ or ‘travel ban’) has been characterized as a blow to American efforts to combat terrorism (for a timeline of the ban, see McGraw et al.). For the neophyte, this may well sound like a strong contradiction: how can an immigration policy aiming to protect the nation by keeping potential terrorists out of the country, be labelled as favorable to terrorism?

3 The short answer is that immigration is no longer—if it ever was—an exclusively domestic issue, based on unilateral decisions, and even less so in a globalized world where modern communication tools make it possible to report anything happening anywhere on the planet. Immigration is not just a question of bodies crossing borders, and restrictions on movement always lead to questioning the motives behind what limits *free movement*, increasingly considered a fundamental human right (Miller, Hamid, Hines). As democracies struggle to justify restrictions, they often end up with plans that exclude categories of migrants. That creates a dichotomy between 'good' and 'bad' migrants, and can generate a feeling of rejection for the second category that can later be highly destructive not just for the unsuccessful candidates but also for the entire pool of potential migrants. When Donald Trump portrays Muslim migrants as terrorists or Mexicans immigrants as criminals, it upsets millions of people who identify or sympathize with them.

4 As evidenced by the 'Muslim ban' and the debate that followed, the association of the terms 'immigration' and 'terrorism' is now well-established in public discourse. Unfortunately, most debates have displayed a common mistake: while much attention is paid to the material and physical dimension of national security—typically border and airport security—law enforcement and military strikes, the political and symbolic aspect of the issue does not receive the attention it deserves.

5 Yet, one of the biggest challenges for democracies confronted with terrorism is their ability to address a polymorphic and constantly-changing threat that feeds on mutual hate and stigmatizing discourse. Given its global position and involvements in world affairs, the United States should be particularly concerned by the "security frontier", a both concrete and symbolic line where American security interests meet the geopolitical constraints that define its "global threat status". I will argue that the symbolic component of the "security frontier" is particularly responsive to images and representations, especially in the manner immigrants and foreign citizens are depicted in the public and political discourse and treated by American authorities both in and outside the U.S.

6 The ultimate goal of this paper is to show that the current—but not new— immigration discourse and representations in the U.S. harm the American potential to advance its interests on the "security frontier" and exercise sufficient leadership to influence outcomes. Before addressing this topic, immigration will be examined as an issue that is inherently both national and international and that requires to be studied in a global perspective. The relevance and operability of the concept of "security frontier" will be discussed in the second part.

# The international or global impact of immigration policy: recent developments

7 The traditional immigration narrative has long been constructed by a complex combination of messages that mixed information flows about the perception and treatment of immigrants in the U.S. These information flows were, before and for most of the 20th century, largely controllable by the U.S. government and its allies through the traditional diplomatic conduits and mainstream media. That explains, to some extent, the contradiction summarized by the University of Washington's geographer Charles Hirschman (Schwarz):

> Even though the American government and people have not always embraced immigrants with open arms, the image of the United States as a land of opportunity and refuge has become the focal point of the nation's identity at home and around the world.

8 However, the development of modern information technologies, the Internet and social networks, has made it increasingly difficult to control the billions of megabytes that are exchanged daily on the global information network by private and non-state actors, including terrorist groups. To paraphrase Joseph Nye, "information is power, and modern information technology is spreading information more widely than ever in history" (Nye 2004, 3). What remains to be discussed is the kind of power information pertaining to immigration may bring and to whom.

9 As long as the government had the power to control the immigration narrative (Snow), stories of discrimination and humiliation at American ports of entry were unheard of in the public discourse, for obvious reasons. Early on, the U.S. used its power of attraction to serve its interests. As Joseph Nye and the disciples of cultural and public diplomacy explain, the power of attraction (*soft power*) is oftentimes more pertinent and efficient than coercion and the use of force. Immigration can be a very efficient tool in terms of soft power and public diplomacy (Nye 2004, 2012).

10 In 2015, Donna R. Gabaccia published *Foreign Relations: American Immigration in Global Perspective* where she showed how immigration is better debated when examined from a global perspective. "Immigration is an important, continuous, and contentious relationship between the United States and rest of the world" (Gabaccia I). What she underlines is the strong connection between the American immigration policy and the nation's international leadership: "Americans' ambivalence toward China, toward the world, and toward their country's exercise of global power are central themes in a history of American immigration written from a global perspective" (Gabaccia XXII).

11 For much of our history, work on immigration has failed to study immigration as both a domestic and international issue. What is usually the core of most studies is the impact on the migrant and on the source or destination countries, issues that are generally studied separately. And yet, by essence, immigration is what Bayless Manning defined as "intermestic" (both international and domestic). On this subject, James Rosenau writes that: "powerful communications and transportation technologies are rendering the world ever more interdependent and the boundaries that divide local, national, and international communities ever more porous" (Rosenau 78). Victor Cha concurs and shows how issues such as security are deeply affected by globalization as it "creates an interpenetration of foreign and domestic ('intermestic') issues such that national governments increasingly operate in spaces defined by the intersection of internal and external policies" (Cha 391). When one considers immigration, attention should be paid to the potential impact of policies and discourse on the global scale because it directly affects the complex equation that mixes domestic, foreign and transnational matters.

Although quite recent, the awareness of this reality advances in the minds of experts, decision-makers and politicians.

12 In 2009, the influential Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) published a key report simply entitled "U.S. Immigration Policy" stating that

> Immigration's emergence as a foreign policy issue coincides with the increasing reach of globalization. [The] view of the United States as a place of unparalleled openness and opportunity is also crucial to the maintenance of American leadership. There is a consensus that current policy is not serving the United States well on [several] fronts. (IX)

13 The *front* that interests us here is security. Although not obvious for the neophyte, the relationship between immigration and national security was established long ago. The *Alien and Sedition Acts* of 1798, the *Anarchist Exclusion Act* of 1908 are only two examples of how immigration laws used national security to exclude certain categories of immigrants on national security grounds. Interestingly, the destiny of immigration affairs demonstrates how it became increasingly connected to security concerns: immigration was transferred from the Department of Commerce to the Department of Justice in 1940 where it remained until it was incorporated into the newly created Department of Homeland Security in 2003. It is also the opinion of the authors of the CFR report that "[the] link between immigration policy and national security was institutionalized with the creation of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in 2003" (CFR 21).

14 The difficulty to design a sensible immigration approach, as evidenced by Washington's failure to reform an obsolete immigration system despite numerous attempts, precludes the adoption of measures that would help achieve major 'intermestic' goals, including national security. The CFR underlines that "the continued failure to devise and implement a sound and sustainable immigration policy threatens to weaken America's economy, to jeopardize its diplomacy, and to imperil its national security" (CFR 3).

## The “security frontier”: the international dimension of homeland security

15 Of course, as Pierre Mélandri wrote, national security has always been a primary concern for the United States, but even more so since the 9/11 terrorist attacks. As underlined by the different National Security Strategy documents published since 2000, transnational terrorism is now one of the greatest threats that the American people face today.

16 J. F. Kennedy famously declared in his frontier speech: “we stand today on the edge of a New Frontier—the frontier of the 1960’s—a frontier of unknown opportunities and perils—a frontier of unfulfilled hopes and threats”. What Kennedy had in mind was “not a set of promises […] [but] a set of challenges”. Kennedy’s frontier was to be pushed back towards the “uncharted areas of science and space, unsolved problems of peace and war”. I believe the concept of frontier is well adapted to the current national security status of the U.S.

17 What I call the “security frontier” is the multidimensional and elastic line that separates the U.S. from the rest of the world on national security matters. It is along this line that traditional experts such as American officials, diplomats, intelligence officers have worked to negotiate (or impose) the terms of an interaction model that would better serve the interests of the U.S. But today it is also where non-state actors such as NGOs intervene and where debates are constantly redefined by the endless flow of uncontrolled information that can influence the outcome. Drawing from recent work on public diplomacy and globalization, it can be argued that public opinions now also participate in the shaping of the security frontier, for example through national and international mobilizations (Gabaccia; Hady and Singer; Castells).

18 This security frontier can be defined by multinational agreements and alliances (NATO) or bilateral partnerships (bilateral security agreement between the U.S. and Afghanistan). This frontier is most unstable and uncertain in areas where the U.S. fails to establish a

dialogue that would make its partners sympathetic to its arguments and open to cooperation—where the American soft power operates the least. Typically, that is the case of Middle East countries where a majority of people have very unfavorable opinions of the U.S. and where the rhetoric of Islamic terrorist groups continues to recruit jihadists. It is where the worst anti-American rhetoric can be found and where each faux-pas is heavily used to demonize the U.S. government.

19 Homeland security, because of the nature of the threat, involves action within and beyond the national borders and more generally a global/international perspective. It is safe to assume that national or homeland security stretches beyond the natural borders of the U.S., which means that there are both a domestic and international dimensions to the security frontier.

20 Fighting terrorism involves a wide range of strategies to identify, track and eliminate individuals and groups that plan attacks against U.S. interests. But the elimination of individual threats is not enough: if one wants to durably eradicate the problem, the response needs to be not systematic but systemic. That is what it takes to annihilate the recruitment, indoctrination, training and logistical support of current and future terrorists.

21 The only efficient way to do so is to control the early stages of the process of terrorist engineering (recruitment, radicalization, organization, training) and experts in counter-terrorism underline the importance of two dimensions: intelligence of course, and maybe less commonly known, what is labelled “soft power” or “cultural diplomacy”. In both cases, high-technology or heavy weaponry cannot solve the problem in the long term. The heart of intelligence gathering and soft power is *people*. Immigration policy, representation and discourse can enhance or undermine both.

# Immigration discourse and representations in the U.S.: how it impacts counter-terrorism efforts

22 Several examples taken from American history can be used to illustrate how immigration matters both at home and abroad. David Scott Fitzgerald and David Cook-Martin argue that the 1965 immigration reform that put an end to national origin quotas was mainly the result of pressures from the international community and national security concerns in the context of the Cold War. To preserve its credibility as the leader of the free world, the U.S. could not afford to condone racial bias in its immigration system. This opinion reminds us of Nobel Prize laureate Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* in which he considered that segregation and racism against African-Americans would weaken the "American international prestige and power" (Cohen).

23 In that regard, the "war on terror" launched by the Bush administration had disastrous results both in and outside the U.S. Although the Bush administration warned against retaliations against the Muslim community, numerous reports have documented how aggressive law enforcement policies impacted immigrants in general and Muslim communities in particular, violating their civil and constitutional rights (Chishti et al.). That deeply weakened the American soft power at home and abroad. It also made it more difficult for American diplomats to do their job, and more broadly for the government to get the support they needed in the countries where terrorist groups prepared their attacks and where local authorities often are already reluctant to help (Boduszynski).

24 Conscious of the growing anti-Americanism in the Middle East, the U.S. Congress held two important hearings in 2007 and 2008. The titles of the reports underline well the concerns that led to those investigations: the first one was entitled *Declining Approval for American Foreign Policy in Muslim Countries: Does It Make It More*

*Difficult to Fight Al-Qaeda?* (U.S. Congress 2007) and the second *The Decline in America's Reputation: Why?* (U.S. Congress 2008).

25 Both hearings show that immigration policy was key in the decline in approval of the U.S. The evidence presented to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs underlined the widespread feeling expressed by immigrants (not just Muslims) that they were discriminated against in the immigration process and their visa applications, and several reported humiliations at ports of entry. The interesting point is that these stories, shared with friends, colleagues and family contributed to the dissemination of a highly negative image of the U.S. Customs and Border, and by extension, of the United States (U.S. Congress 2008). Thomas Melia, after interviewing numerous American diplomats including ambassadors, concluded that:

> [The] new U.S. visa procedures have adversely affected (or at least greatly complicated) political relationships, trade and tourism, and such staples of public diplomacy as student, scholarly, and cultural exchanges. In consequence, visa and immigration issues now intrude to a greater extent than previously on almost every other aspect of embassy operations.

In other words, the American territory on the security frontier greatly receded during the two terms served by George W. Bush.

26 In the light of these reports, the statements made by Donald Trump during the presidential campaign and the executive order establishing a "Muslim ban" appear to run against the interests of the U.S. by stigmatizing and alienating populations the American security community needs to do its job.

27 Although the Trump administration tried to refute the idea that the president had intended to target an entire community, this defense was shaken when he tweeted his most direct attack on Muslims on 7 December 2015: "Donald J. Trump is calling for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States". Six months later, on 15 June 2016 he reiterated his attacks by expressing his belief that Muslims cannot assimilate in the United States (Johnson and Hauslohner):

> Assimilation has been very hard. It's almost—I won't say nonexistent, but it gets to be pretty close. And I'm talking about second and third generation. They come—they don't— for some reason, there's no real assimilation.

This statement was used as evidence by the State of Hawaii in their response to the Trump administration's challenge of the temporary restraining order (TRO) against Donald Trump's second travel ban (State of Hawaii):

> Throughout these judicial proceedings, the President has continued to make generalized, often inflammatory, statements about the Muslim faith and its adherents. On the night that his revised Order was enjoined, President Trump publicly reiterated his view that it is "very hard" for Muslims to assimilate into Western culture.

While these statements may have played well to secure votes from people who view Muslims as the greatest threat, their violence, both in form and content, was a blow to social cohesion, turning communities against one another. One report by California State University's Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism in 2016 analyzed data across 20 states and reported 196 incidents of hate crimes against Muslims in the U.S. in 2015. That represented a 78% increase over the previous year, while incidents overall increased by about 5% (Levin and Grisham). Although the causes for such an increase are multifactorial, the authors underline that "underlying prejudicial stereotypes that broadly paint Muslims in a negative light are pervasive, making them among the most disliked, distrusted and feared groups in America" (Levin and Grisham 22). They also noted an 87.5% increase in anti-Muslim hate crime in the days directly following Donald Trump's call for a "total and complete shutdown of Muslims" and qualified it as a "troubling development and worthy of concern" (Levin and Grisham 33).

28 Obviously, hate crimes against Americans and legal residents—albeit Muslim—are a problem that goes beyond moral or philosophical considerations. Such incidents weaken the American position on the security frontier *within* the U.S. Lyons-Padilla et al. recently published a study based on the survey of 198 Muslims in the

United States about their cultural identities and attitudes toward extremism. They found that immigrants who identify with neither their heritage culture nor the culture they are living in feel marginalized and insignificant. Experiences of discrimination make the situation worse and lead to greater support for radicalism (Lyons-Padilla et al. 1). The researchers posit that discrimination may be a strong factor in the radicalization of Muslims who, because they are marginalized and discriminated against, look for opportunities to regain significance and improve their self-esteem and self-worth:

> [Many] of the counterterrorism initiatives and surveillance policies currently being used to identify violent extremists may actually paradoxically fuel support for extremism. Recent examples of homegrown plots lend support to this notion. For example, the failed Times Square bomber, Faisal Shahzad, felt angry about the treatment of Muslims in the United States and the West more generally following the September 11 attacks, as well as about American military intervention in Iraq under the pretense of searching for weapons of mass destruction. He told authorities that he had struggled to find a peaceful but effective way to cope before ultimately attempting to set off a car bomb in 2010. Racial profiling and spying programs in the post-9/11 era that target Muslims are likely to induce feelings of perceived discrimination or exclusion and contribute to a sense of significance loss. (Lyons-Padilla et al. 9)

29 Interestingly, terrorist groups understood the “domestic” component of the security frontier a long time ago. Many supporters of terrorist groups backed the Trump candidacy and cheered when he won the election. Analysis of social media content showed that jihadists were confident that if Donald Trump won the election, he would contribute to their war although it is very unlikely that they would have supported a more liberal candidate. Of several motives advanced by jihadists and recent defectors whom *Foreign Policy*’s Mara Revkin and Ahmad Mhidi interviewed, two are of particular interest. First, ISIS hopes that Trump will radicalize Muslims in the United States and Europe and inspire them to commit lone-wolf attacks in their home countries. A concept that is more and more debated, as several lone-wolves have proved to receive logistical support from terrorist organizations. But whether ISIS sympathizers and homegrown

terrorists receive logistical support from abroad or not, their decision to act can be triggered by the same circumstances (Burke).

30 This is consistent with findings by Lyons-Padilla et al. who documented the link between discrimination—including verbal attacks and policies that ostracize Muslims—and the desire of certain Muslims who experience *significance loss* to engage in terrorism (Lyons-Padilla et al. 2). More recently, Sarah Lyons-Padilla and Michele Gelfand authored an article in *The New York Times* where they affirm that:

> […] the most important objection [against the ban], given the ostensible goal of protecting national security, is that these are precisely the sort of policies that can increase radicalization of Muslims already on American soil. […]
> Trump's ban may very well promote the psychological conditions that fuel the radicalization he seeks to combat.

31 A word should be said about the Muslims—about three million—who live in the U.S. and who are not tempted by the jihadist rhetoric. While researching the impact of the war on terror in the aftermath of 9/11, Chisti et al. underlined in their report for the Migration Policy Institute how damaging the aggressive methods used by law enforcement authorities to track potential terrorists were. The result had been a growing distrust between Muslim communities and the government when both needed each other to achieve mutual goals. Haglund and Byman agree that working with local Muslim communities is key to the eradication of the terrorist threat:

> [The president] should press state and local officials to work with Muslim communities, not just to stop radicalism in their ranks […]. Good relations […] will help ensure that radicalization remains low and that, when it occurs, the community cooperates with law enforcement. (Byman)

32 One advantage associated with a strong presence of immigrants is that bridges can be built with the source countries. The flow back and forth of people and information between Muslim countries and the U.S. is a way to cultivate mutual understanding and offer a narrative, different from the terrorist groups', more consistent with a

peaceful and constructive approach. When the same immigrants feel treated badly and unfairly, threatened and discriminated against, they can become sensitive to the jihadist rhetoric and choose to fight the U.S or at best choose to do nothing when they could help identify potential threats or keep easy preys out of the Jihadists' reach.

33 Second, the interviewees considered that "Trump's anti-Muslim rhetoric plays into ISIS's narrative of a bipolar world in which the West is at war with Islam" (Revkin and Mhidi). This argument made the news on a regular basis, backed by former officials and intelligence experts, including in members and sympathizers of the Republican Party. Senator John McCain (R-Arizona) and Senator Lindsey Graham (R-South Carolina) said in a joint statement that the "executive order [may well] become a self-inflicted wound in the fight against terrorism". They concluded by rejecting "apocalyptic ideology of hatred" and warned that the executive order establishing the ban "sends a signal, intended or not, that America does not want Muslims coming into [the U.S.]" and that it may do more "to help terrorist recruitment than improve [security]". Similar arguments were published in papers across the political and ideological spectrum, drawing the lines of a consensus among intelligence and foreign policy experts (NPR, The National Interest).

34 Former NSA and CIA director Michael Hayden—who served Presidents Clinton, Bush and Obama in top intelligence posts as director of the National Security Agency and CIA and deputy director of national intelligence—added:

> What [the government is] doing now has probably made us less safe today […] because we are now living the worst jihadist narrative possible, that there is undying enmity between Islam and the West. Muslims out there who were not part of the jihadist movement are now being shown that the story they're being told by the jihadists—they hate us; they're our enemy—that's being acted out by the American government. (NPR)

35 Hayden confirms that policies that stigmatize immigrants are used by enemies to offer a *competing* narrative in order to undermine the American leadership and turn the situation around by making the U.S. the "great Satan". This strategy was not invented by Islamist radicals.

During the Cold War, the USSR used immigration laws prior to 1965 and segregation to weaken the American leadership by spreading propaganda about the hypocrisy of a country that professed freedom and equality abroad while practicing racial discrimination at home. While this argument did not prevent the collapse of the Soviet Union in the long run, it certainly received enough attention in Washington to impact domestic policies (Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin).

36 In 2016, Harvard Professor Stephen M. Walt authored an article in the *Chicago Tribune* asking the question: "Why is America so bad at promoting democracy in other countries?" His answer is that "America's democratic ideals are more likely to be emulated by others if the United States is widely regarded as a just, prosperous, vibrant, and tolerant society, instead of one where inequality is rampant, leading politicians are loudmouthed xenophobes". Although from a different school of thought, Walt seems to concur with Nye's *soft power* theory: leading by example is always more efficient. Islamophobia, especially when sanctioned by leaders, makes it more difficult to advance the interests of the U.S., whether they are diplomatic or strategic. Again, it weakens the American position on the security frontier.

37 As evidenced by terrorist groups' use of statements made by Donald Trump, it could be argued that the current U.S. president, through his comments on the campaign trail, his attempts to impose tough regulations on immigrants in general and Muslims in particular, his proximity with people who spread anti-Islamic sentiment in public discourse and on media outlets like Fox News and Breitbart News, participates in co-radicalization. Pratt calls "reactive co-radicalization" the "mutual rejection and exclusionary circle currently evident, in particular, with respect to many Muslim and non-Muslim communities". Other researchers, mainly social psychologists, have documented this mutually-feeding hatred between competing groups. According to Reicher and Haslam, "people are more likely to support a bellicose leader if their group faces competition with another group that is behaving belligerently". In that regard, the case of Republican candidate Donald Trump's suggestion that all Muslim immigrants are potential enemies who should be barred from entering the U.S is enlightening: "Far from weakening the radicals, such statements provide the grit that gives

their cause greater traction. Indeed, after Trump made his declaration, an al Qaeda affiliate, the Islamic Somali terrorist group al-Shabaab, re-aired it as part of its propaganda offensive and labelled the U.S. a “racist society” (Reicher and Haslam; Ap).

# Concluding remarks

38 The world in which we live is more interconnected than ever. The digital media and social networks produce a constant flow of information and provide a global forum where publics can engage and mobilize. As a result, people have become less dependent on government-tied media and their official narratives that try to shape public opinions. Public diplomacy developed as a response to these new challenges.

39 However, when nations through their governments interact with foreign publics, they need to prove their sincerity if they want to be taken seriously. As stated before, nothing is more destructive in terms of international political communication that a breached trust and perceived hypocrisy. We saw how this played against the U.S. and how it can be used by terrorist groups to undermine the American diplomatic efforts.

40 The stakes are high for the United States. Despite Trump’s promise to restore economic nationalism and focus on “America first”, the U.S. economy remains highly dependent on global markets. Domestic sectors such as higher education may suffer from the current official discourse of the U.S. government on immigration. A significant drop in enrollment of international students (40% of U.S. colleges have reported a decline in enrollment) means a lot less money for universities (Saul). Because students and high-skilled workers usually have easier access to visas, they are a good bellwether in the attractiveness of a given country. In this regard, the international competition for the best and brightest students and much sought-after advanced skills is an argument that policy makers just cannot ignore (Ouaked).

41 Equally important is the argument that this drop also means a decline in the soft power capital of the U.S. across the world. Fewer students

going back to their home country means fewer potential supporters for the U.S. abroad (Nye 2005).

42 We argued that immigration policy and discourse that disregard their global impact is counter-productive. If we accept the assumption that the U.S. government should consider the opinions of foreign publics to preserve its influence and leadership in the world, it means that the center of gravity of decision-making is shifting from Washington towards a new station in the "frontier area". Given the meaning of this potential change in terms of sovereignty and the positions of the current president of the United States, it is unlikely to happen anytime soon. However, statements about putting "America first" and threats to withdraw from international agreements should not obscure the fact that the U.S. has not abandoned its desire nor has it obliterated its need to remain a global power well-anchored in the international landscape, and recognized by the international community.

43 In the long run, if the U.S. is to keep its global leadership durably, it will have to prove to the rest of the world that its intentions are less about "branding" and more about "wisely using American resources to improve the health, education, and day-to-day lives of people who may love American culture and technology but have come to despise American power" (Seib).

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## RÉSUMÉ

**English**

Parallel to the traditional American immigration narrative runs another historical and political reality of the immigrant in the United States. While the semantics of American immigration has been extremely beneficial to the U.S., the political and legislative apparatus—often with the support of the American public—has never ceased to limit and restrict access to migrants in a country that has nevertheless been described as a "nation of immigrants".

The restrictionist discourse—whether it creates a Manichean dichotomy between 'good' and 'bad' migrants or suggests an identity and cultural gap—relies today on a composite approach that mixes neo-nativist ideas and national security arguments. As exemplified by statements made by Donald Trump, immigrants are sometimes characterized, without nuance or distinction, as potential criminals and terrorists.

Building on the concept of "frontier", the aim of this paper is to refocus the issue of immigration in a more international perspective. Indeed, the current immigration debate in the U.S. draws the contours of a "security frontier", material and physical (border fence and border security) as well as political and symbolic (soft power, diplomacy). The distinctive feature of this "frontier" lies in its necessarily *international* dimension.

The U.S. is therefore faced with a major challenge: while the Congress and the President are pressured to ensure the security of the country, discriminatory measures and stigmatizing remarks against immigrants proliferate in the country, which undermines and weakens the position of the U.S. on the "security frontier".

## INDEX

**Mots-clés**
terrorisme, immigration musulmane, politiques migratoires, frontière sécuritaire, géopolitique

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## AUTEUR

**Saïd Ouaked**
Saïd Ouaked, PhD, is Associate Professor at the University of Limoges, where he is a member of the EHIC (Espaces Humains & Interactions Culturelles) research team. His research work mainly focuses on immigration politics in the U.S. in the 20th and 21st centuries with a special interest in the public diplomacy dimension of immigration policy. His recent work includes "American Multiculturalism in the 21st Century: Achieving Domestic and International Goals in a Globalized World", in Sämi Ludwig (ed.), *American Multiculturalism in Context. Views from at Home and Abroad*, Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2017, and "Soft power, immigration et enseignement supérieur : les États-Unis face aux défis d'un monde post-américain", in *Les stratégies du smart power américain : redéfinir le leadership dans un monde post-américain*, Études de l'IRSEM, 2014.
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# The Conservative Discourse Behind the US–Mexico Border Wall vs. Co-operation for Cross-Border Regional Development

*Deux visions de la frontière américano-mexicaine : le mur-frontière dans le discours conservateur et la coopération transfrontalière régionale*

**Hugo Rangel Torrijo**

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## PLAN



## TEXTE

1 This paper aims to analyze the significance of the wall erected by the US government on part of its southern border. This analysis is particularly pertinent in a context of President Trump’s proposal to continue building that wall along the entire border. This wall, of already 1,000 kilometers, is the result of migration policies, but is additionally, and above all, a consequence of the construction of a closed national identity advocated by conservative groups in the United States (Apple 2003; Hedges). The nativism and fundamentalism of these groups produce the social exclusion of migrants, especially Latin Americans. In this perspective, we propose an analysis of the symbolism of the wall illustrating the great North–South economic and social cleavage. The construction of the border wall is, according to conservative groups, a safety measure to prevent terrorism and stop immigration, but it is rather a response to the fear

conveyed in this xenophobic discourse. Historically, the wall can be interpreted as a crossroads of national projects in the Americas. We therefore analyze the paradoxes and contradictions of the United States and Mexican governments regarding the wall. In the context of a global economy, the wall does not meet economic needs. Paradoxically, the wall prevents the proper management of the border and hampers environmental cooperation.

# Introduction

2 One major proposal of Trump's presidential campaign was the construction of a wall between the US and Mexico. Thus, the wall became a dominant conservative discourse. It is relevant to understand why a marginal far right narrative became a White House policy. As Michael Apple pointed out, it is important to acknowledge, from an academic point of view, how the right wing has been successful in setting this agenda and pushing policies in this direction (Apple 2013, 136).

3 In this sense, beyond a moralizing tone or partisan political opposition to the wall, I will attempt to explain the concept of the wall as a political discourse that drives a conservative narrative (Newton). Moreover, even those who rejected the wall project, such as the Democrats as well as Mexican officials and some activists, lack an alternative narrative. Despite the fact that defeated presidential candidate Hillary Clinton used to say in the 2016 campaign that "We need to build bridges not walls", the general stance of the Democratic Party was ambiguous. In order to explain the narrative of the wall, I make some necessary precisions in the first part of the paper. In a second part, I argue that the wall project is a substitute for a real migration policy.

4 The project of the wall has already been criticized by specialists as a "moronic idea" (Massey) or a "wall of ignorance" (Krugman). Our aim is rather to understand how a narrative has mobilized far right activists and seduced millions of voters. I explain the sources and motivations of this conservative discourse, followed by its signification in regards to migration, security, and environment policies. Even members of Congress have already acknowledged the fact that the wall would be a wasteful investment. Indeed, after

studying border fencing, Texas Rep. Michael McCaul, chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security, said in a 2015 statement that, “In our conversations with outside groups, experts and stakeholders, we learned that it would be an inefficient use of taxpayer money to complete the fence. […] We are using that money to utilize other technology to create a secure border”. This begs the question: why is the wall still a major White House commitment?

5 First precision: There is already a wall. The US Congress approved the *Secure Fence Act* to build a wall on its border with Mexico in 2006. But since the 2016 elections, the wall has become a major issue, because it was a central campaign proposal of the Republican candidate, Donald Trump. The wall has political and discursive motivations. The erection of the wall is linked to the following uses and causes: 1) immigration policies; 2) national security strategy. Both are related to the political commitment of the Mexican government to cooperate on issues related to development issues, environmental questions, and arms control.

6 Second precision: This discourse suggests that the border does not have any surveillance whatsoever. However, the border wall is in fact partially built (along 1,000 kilometers) by the Homeland Security Department (HSD) and more than 21,000 American agents control 48 entry points where people can legally cross (Meyers). The conservative discourse claims that there is no control for illegal immigration, while a *military surveillance system* (including drones and 55-foot surveillance balloons) is currently being deployed to monitor the US–Mexico border. However, operationally, the wall does not respond to the reality of migration dynamics. Some critics point out that the institution’s sophisticated strategies are inadequate and unnecessary.

# The symbolic meaning of the wall

7 Since immigration and security are artificial or indirect causes for the construction of the wall, these two factors point to a discursive cause. Indeed, we must consider the conservative discourse which conceives America as a uniform and fixed nation. This conservatism preaches an essentialist and nativist discourse of nation. Thus, the

wall is the most eloquent expression of a closed and artificially impermeable national identity.

8 To understand the US–Mexico border, one must consider America's history, for it is not eternal nor does it work in a vacuum. This boundary was imposed by the United States following a war in which the United States conquered Mexico. Thus, through the Guadalupe Hidalgo agreements, signed in 1848, Mexico ceded more than half of its territory. This conquest was carried out under the spirit of the Monroe doctrine which advocated the expansionism of the United States. Recalling the conquest of expansive Mexican territories over a century ago is not purely anecdotal because in the US conservatives mention it today in conjunction with a Latin American expansion and conspiracy in order to recover the lost territory. For example, political commentator Patrick Buchanan (2006) alleged that Mexican illegal migration was part of an "Aztlán plot" hatched by Mexican elites to recapture lands lost in 1848, stating that "if we do not get control of our borders and stop this greatest invasion in history, I see the dissolution of the US and the loss of the American southwest" (Chu). This is obviously false, as no political or insurgent group or party claim the recovery of any territory. Samuel Huntington, meanwhile, portrayed Latino immigrants as a threat to America's national identity, warning that "the persistent in-flow of Hispanic immigrants threatens to divide the United States into two peoples, two cultures, and two languages. […] The United States ignores this challenge at its peril" (30). Latin American intellectuals, such as Fuentes, scrutinized and refuted each and every one of Huntington's arguments. In the opinion of Fuentes, Huntington "stigmatized the Spanish language as a practically subversive factor of division" (Fuentes 2004).

9 However, it is more relevant to underline that Huntington's book diverges from classical works on immigration, such as Rose, who notes that the Latino American immigration has the same profile as the past European migrations and reproduces the same pattern: "Mexican immigrants' stories are quite similar to those of people who came in the years 1880–1920" (96). However, for Huntington there are "irreconcilable differences" between Mexican-Americans and "American values", as he argues (44). The lack of academic concepts to back his work is striking; for example the ideal model of "melting pot"

assimilation he assumes does not exist in reality, as Glazer and Moynihan show in their seminal work. For these authors

> The ethnic group in New York, and the United States, is not a survival, but a new creation, each shaped by a distinctive history, culture, and American experience, which gives each group a distinctive role in the life of the city. (20)

10 Moreover, the assumption that Latinos are an "exception" since they are unable to assimilate to the "United States' Anglo-Protestant culture" is clearly questionable. This model has been criticized not only in academic circles (Massey; Newton), but also by public opinion (Brooks; Newsweek). According to Langerak, Huntington developed a conception of immigrants today as deceptive cheaters, "falsely swearing" allegiance when becoming citizens (209) and practicing "bigamy" by holding dual citizenships, a practice detrimental to the "vitality of democracy" (212).

11 Therefore, consciously or unconsciously, Huntington has contributed to the influential conservative movement that had an impact on migration policies. As Oppenheimer pointed out, Huntington's book pleased anti-Latino groups. Indeed, his views lead to the ostracization of Latino people. As Taylor has stated, a negative image of a minority group affects its identity.

12 This is why it is important to state, from the academic perspective, that this discourse contradicts the core of liberal democracies. Indeed, as Fukuyama notes, modern identity politics springs from a hole in the political theory underlying modern liberal democracy, which is jeopardized by radical Islamism, not by immigration itself (Fukuyama 2006). Many authors such as Derrida have embraced cosmopolitanism as defined in Kant's famous *Perpetual Peace* essay on the right to universal hospitality.

13 Beyond this assumption, we agree with Bhagwati, who calls for an alternative status and essentially asks that illegal immigrants be treated with respect. Bhagwati, states that "if asking for full citizenship through the amnesty is currently impossible, we can work instead to raise their comfort level to something much closer to what citizenship brings, without asking for full citizenship". In the same vein, Kymlicka states that the evidence to date suggests there is no

inherent tendency for either immigrant ethnic diversity policies to erode the welfare state. We add that immigration (Hispanic or Latino included) neither erodes national cohesion.

14 "Building that wall between Mexico and the United States has built a wall between the United States and Latin America. It has done more damage already than one could imagine", said Nobel laureate economist Stiglitz (Interview for CNBC, 2 Sept. 2016). Indeed, even before the construction of the wall started, this project had already damaged not only the US–Latin America relations, but also damaged the American national cohesion with its stigmatization of the Latino population. The erection of the border wall in the United States was perceived as a strategy for America's protection against Latin America in the logic of the conservative discourse. In this sense, Castles (2010) points out that "the current policies could contribute to protectionism, and even stronger trends to racialization and the exclusion of minorities". Indeed, as we saw, the Latino American minority is targeted.

15 Nativist narrative is anything but new in America. The Know-Nothing Party was, for example, formed by anti-Catholic and anti-Irish members of the working class during the 1840s and 1850s (Boisonneault). In the popular imagination, the "new immigrants" of the post-1870 period were unassimilable because of their race, ethnicity, and culture (Young 219). Nativists accused the Italians and Greeks of "a distinct tendency to abduction and kidnapping", while the Russians were charged with "larceny and receiving stolen goods" (Kraut 158). Native resentment of the Chinese arose from the perception that they were an "unassimilable, even subversive group, [whose] vicious customs and habits were a social menace" (Jones 1960, 248, cited by Young 220). Trump's nativism shows that old immigration narratives continue to be employed in new ways to elicit predictable responses favoring a conservative ideology.

16 Nativism and anti-migration are increasingly prevalent in the United States following the Tea Party movement, and particularly the electoral campaign of Donald Trump in 2016. Here we must add that many groups actively promote anti-immigration propaganda, some of them working under a false academic façade: influential "think tank" political groups, such as the Center for Immigration Studies, are in

fact a nativist group behind Trump's agenda. Langerak's study demonstrates that the way immigrants are portrayed in the policy-making debate depends heavily on the ideology and motives of the Think Tank doing the portraying (70). These think tanks have great exposure in the media and access to the policymaking community in Washington. We remarked the astonishing homogeneity of the discourse among these groups: They use the same slogans and clichés, and lack sound arguments and analyses regarding immigration.

17 Seen from this perspective, the wall has a wider meaning. The wall reveals the design devised by conservative groups as part of the historical perspective that ignores indigenous peoples and minorities. Indeed, these groups have adopted a conception of America as a uniform, closed, and unchanging nation. The construction of the wall is simply the embodiment of this vision. The function of the wall is to alleviate the fear of conservative people and to avoid the "pollution" of the territory of the United States by, allegedly, another language, religion, values and even blood (Young 224). However, as mentioned, the anti-immigrant campaign went further, and succeeded in imposing a portrait of undocumented migrants as dangerous criminals. This rhetoric depersonalized the migrants themselves, using concepts that robbed them of all humanity. In Trump's speeches, all Latinos are deemed foreigners, even those who have immigration papers or US citizenship. But this discourse of hatred and exclusion persists after the election, as numerous racist incidents have been reported against persons with Hispanic, African American, and Arabic physical appearance. Indeed, we testify to the deployment of this technique or strategy of fear by US conservatism. What are the consequences of the wall?

# The wall as migration "policy"

18 Migration policies in the United States have developed in response to economic demands, but over the past decade they have been linked to pressure from conservative groups. The last reform on migration was put in place by Ronald Reagan. In 1986, The *Immigration Reform and Control Act* (IRCA) was designed to legalize migrant workers and prevent new irregular entries. This reform had a positive impact on

the economy and migration regulation (Zacaria). However, irregular immigration has increased since then. We must question the reasons for this phenomenon. On one hand, this law was not permanent, but rather retroactive; on the other hand, uneven economic dynamics between the United States and Mexico and Latin America continued, producing a disparity in income attracting more and more immigrants. Several economic crises in Latin America have also been a factor in this.

19 A complex economic and socio-political context has created conditions that are conducive to a huge and steady flow of migrants from Latin America to the United States from the late 1980s through to the early 2000s. Thus, the efforts of the US government to stop it went back to the 1990s when the Clinton administration conducted "Operation Gatekeeper", which built fences or barriers and militarized parts of the border. This increase in militarization resulted in a rise in smuggling and migrant deaths, since many are taking long and perilous roads through the desert (Castles 2007). Another important effect of the wall was, paradoxically, the permanent settling of temporary migrants in the United States as border surveillance prevented their return to Mexico after seasonal work (Cornelius).

20 To address this phenomenon, several migratory reform initiatives have been outlined. However, these initiatives failed, notably the McCain-Kennedy bipartisan bill in 2007. This initiative had the support of academics, as well as a significant part of the national press and public opinion in the United States. For instance, the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Washington Post* supported this initiative. Authors such as Zacaria have reported that, if these proposals were rejected as justifying an amnesty, this means that no proposal would be accepted. Indeed, conservative groups prevent the adoption of reforms to regularize migrants already working and integrated in the United States. The rejection of any project on immigration signifies the denial of any recognition of migration. Besides, arguing that every Hispanic or Latino worker is illegal implies that anti-immigration lobbies demand their repatriation and the construction of the wall to prevent the arrival of new migrants.

21 John Kenneth Galbraith underlines the relevance and positive impact of illegal immigrants on the American economy, particularly in the field of agriculture. As Young points out:

> The current rhetoric against undocumented immigrant centers on the charges that they are an economic drain on society (under the perception that they take the jobs of the native-born and disproportionately use government resources, without paying taxes) and that they are dangerous (because wrongly assumed that they commit crimes at higher rates than the native-born). (22)

In this sense we can understand Trump's famous and infamous assertion that Mexicans are criminals and rapists (an open statement of his presidential campaign). However, this assertion is false, since "less than 3% of the 11 million undocumented have committed felonies. The proportion of felons in the overall population was an estimated 6% in 2010" according to Yee et al.

22 It is important to mention that conservative groups have succeeded in spreading distrust of migration reforms. These groups hurt the image of immigrants, arguing that they did not deserve to be admitted to the United States and, since they were breaking the law, they are therefore criminals. Experts disagree: about jobs, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2016) is of a different opinion. As for taxes, Gee et al. refute the fact that immigrants are a drain on resources. Statistics on crime show that the migrant-as-criminal discourse has no basis in fact (Hickman and Suttorp).

23 Many conservatives insist on the dualism: "amnesty" versus border control. The political right wing has since adopted this principle. That is to say, for the conservatives, any reform is interpreted as amnesty for the offenders of the law: since this option is unacceptable, the only policy option is the control of the border by the wall. The message of conservatives is to be tough on migrants seen as law breakers. House Resolution HR4437, which criminalized undocumented migrants, was adopted in this context.

24 Against this campaign of anti-immigrant groups and against HR4437, many events were organized in spring of 2006 in dozens of cities in the United States. Many vibrant and crowded protests challenged the

negative image that was being imposed on immigrants. “We are not criminals”, one could read in the gatherings. The migrants affirmed the *americanity* from which they were excluded. Their slogan, “We are America”, expressed their belonging in the American identity.

25 Already in 2009, *The New York Times* criticized not only the delayed construction of the wall and its costs far exceeding estimates, but its editorial added that “no barrier can keep an immigrant away and absolve the Congress of this responsibility”. It is indeed a wall that acts as a substitute for migration policies. It is not surprising, then, that the conservative groups that have prevented any reform on migration are those that are demanding the construction of a wall and its military reinforcement. The wall itself fails to stop illegal migration. Indeed, as Heyman points out, illegal migration will rather reposition itself.

26 This wall was built to reaffirm the sovereignty of the State (Castles 2007). It is often said that the United States government has the right to build this wall “to defend itself”. However, as stressed by several authors such as Bustamante (2008), the US government has insisted on this interpretation to circumvent the obvious multilateral dimensions of migration. Indeed, it can be recalled that the United States under the Republicans (particularly the Trump administration) can be rather hostile to multilateral institutions. For example, it is pertinent to point out the UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, which entered into force in 2003. This Convention, which the United States has not signed, stresses that irregular (i.e. undocumented) migrants’ rights should be respected. As mentioned, conservative groups deny this right under the pretext of the illegality of undocumented migrants.

27 All authors consulted underline the fact that Mexican immigration has declined (Massey; Young; Yee et al.). Indeed, undocumented Mexican migration had actually begun to decline around 2000—not because of rising border enforcement, but because of Mexico’s demographic transition (Massey). Recently, the border patrol arrests have dropped to a 45-year low. Indeed, the statistics reflects a 25% decline from the previous fiscal year; and 58% of those detainees

come from Central America (Mitchell). Moreover, we should mention that in each year from 2007 to 2014, more people joined the ranks of the illegal by remaining in the United States after their temporary visitor permits expired (Yee et al.). Therefore, these facts challenge the need for the wall in order to stop immigration influx.

28 For the migration specialist Jonathan Kraut, "Illegal immigration is possible because of three factors, none of which have to do with Mexico or any other country, for that matter. Illegal immigration is a crisis that is of our own creation". "First, we don't track the 40 percent who overstay their visas. Second, it seems quite permissible for employers to hire workers without documentation. Finally, the issue has been unaddressed by Congress for so many years that accepting those who are willing to work hard and contribute is now rooted in our culture and society" (Kraut).

29 A final point to consider is that the Trump administration posits that the wall's completion would end illegal immigration. However, President Trump also embraced a proposal to slash legal immigration in half within a decade by reducing the ability of American citizens and legal residents to bring family members into the country (Baker). On one hand, limiting legal immigration could produce illegal immigration; one the other hand, this shows that the conservative project is clearly anti-immigration, regardless of the legal status of migrants.

30 How can we address migration problems? As Castles points out, migration policies fail due to factors arising from the social dynamics of the migratory process, factors linked to globalization and the North–South divide, and factors arising within political systems (2004, 205). Nevertheless, in this case, the whole migration policy relies on a wall. This is a simplistic approach to a very complex problem.

31 Castles (2004) proposes that "migration policies might be more successful if they were explicitly linked to long-term political agendas concerned with trade, development and conflict prevention. Reducing North–South inequality is the real key to effective migration management" (19). Indeed, the United States and Latin American countries should address migration in a cooperative way. However, as Kraut (a noted migration specialist) points out, "Trump

did not talk about how important it is to fix illegal immigration, Trump is simply pointing his finger of shame at Mexico". Indeed, this is a narrative, not a policy on immigration. That is why it is important to go beyond ideological narrative and set up a coherent immigration policy known to policymakers and the public. Beyond a current nativist claim of the border wall, a new immigration policy is essential. Indeed, a "reform that would meet the needs of America's labor market, provide a path to legal entry for immigrants with talent and promise, respond adequately to humanitarian needs and refugee flows, and work to legalize undocumented immigrants, while discouraging and preventing future undocumented immigration" (Young 231). To this I would add cooperation with Latin American countries to reach the goal of migration control.

# The wall as security policy

32 Following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 in New York, a populist view of national security has proliferated in the media. This security populism of the Bush administration exploited the fear of terrorism, thereby justifying any means for security purposes. Thus, the project for the construction of the cross-border wall was integrated into the security discourse: building the wall at the border in order to prevent the entry of terrorists. Trump renewed this narrative. He claims that a mosque attack in Egypt proves that the US needs a border wall with Mexico. Trump's reasoning is, therefore, that a wall on the US–Mexico border will keep Muslim extremists from crossing into the United States (Erickson).

33 However, the facts disprove the claim as no terrorist groups were ever identified on the Mexican border. The reality is that the people who cross this border are doing so for economic reasons, because they are people who are looking for work to improve their financial situation.

34 The conservative discourse in the media also emphasizes the wall's nature of underlying security, highlighting crime rates in Mexico and in Latin America in general. Indeed, Latin America has very high crime rates. However, the Mexican government and the FBI report that a source of this violence is arms trafficking from the United States. In fact, several organizations, such as the IANSA, are

calling for the control of this illegal trade entering Latin America. From 2009 to 2014, more than 70% of firearms—nearly 74,000—seized by Mexican authorities and then submitted for tracing by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms came from the United States (Kinosian and Weigend).

35 As Kinosian and Weigend point out, trafficking guns is a high-profit, low-risk activity. There is no federal law against gun trafficking within the country; although some convicted straw purchasers could then get prison time. They believe that the laws need to be changed rather than enforced and that the legal framework should be built bilaterally. This could be seen as a delusional proposition at this moment in time. However, a political will is needed to undertake concrete measures to control firearms in order to counter violence.

36 The lobbies calling for the construction of the wall also referred to drug trafficking into the United States. However, both official and independent studies indicate that, as long as drug use persists (estimated at 10 million consumers in North America), the drug market will continue. This means that the wall does not prevent the circulation of drugs, a finding confirmed by various sources. Moreover, there are significant differences between the drugs being trafficked. Marijuana, for example, has been legalized in seven states, for both recreational and medicinal uses. Many states have decriminalization laws and many others have legalized psychoactive medical marijuana. This leads to more local production in the United States. Concerning cocaine, studies show that there is an increase in smuggling from Caribbean countries. For example, the INCSR (2016) determined that "drugs flow from and through Jamaica by maritime conveyance, air freight, human couriers, and private aircraft. […] Factors that contribute to drug trafficking include the country's convenient geographic position […] its lengthy, rugged, and difficult-to-patrol coastline".

37 Finally, the US faces a deadly opioid crisis, but these drugs do not only come from across the Mexican border. As a DEA agent put it, "China is by far the most significant manufacturer of illicit designer synthetic drugs, […] [producing] hundreds of [versions], including synthetic fentanyl and fentanyl-based compounds" (Scipioni). Sanho Tree, a fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies who focuses on drug

policies and the border, also expressed concerns about drug traffickers shifting to fentanyl (Alvarez). The role pharmaceutical companies play in the opioid crisis also needs to be considered as it seems that roughly 20 percent of Ohio's population was prescribed an opioid in 2016 and that this state leads the nation in overdose deaths (Semuels).

38 Moreover, to face this crisis, it is essential to abandon the punitive approach and dismantle the basic assumptions about immorality that hamper drug and alcohol treatment (Szalavitz). Therefore, the border has little to do with drug trafficking, and neither will the wall be its solution. This is why the drug problem should be addressed as a public health issue rather than a punitive and security issue. In this sense, bilateral cooperation is needed to tackle hard and synthetic drugs in a peaceful way, since the war on drugs has proved to fail.

## The environment and border mobility

39 One of the major repercussions of the wall's construction is its environmental impact. The construction of the wall has had a negative impact on the ecosystems and wildlife habitats in the border area (e.g. the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge). Accordingly, some environmental groups have opposed the construction of the wall by highlighting its negative environmental impact and many have prosecuted the US government. The wall therefore prevents environmental cooperation in the preservation of ecosystems in the border area.

40 In 2017, President Donald Trump announced that the US would withdraw from the Paris climate change accord. This fact evinces the absence of a global environmental vision by conservative groups in the United States. The wall prevents US–Mexico cooperation in protecting the environment, a clear example of why a global vision is needed to tackle environmental problems. Indeed, Donald Trump's Department of Homeland Security announced that it will waive more than three dozen laws and regulations—most of them requiring environmental review—as it pushes ahead with the first phase of construction of the wall along the US–Mexico border in 2017 (Rainey).

This means that the project completely disregards environmental regulations.

41 On the cultural front, several Native American groups have challenged the construction of the wall by defending their cultural rights, such as the Tigua tribe in New Mexico who had been performing ceremonies for centuries on the banks of the Rio Grande, on the border now divided by the wall.

42 It is important to mention the Kumeyaay in California and the Kickapoo in Texas, as well as the Cocopah in Arizona, all occupying land spanning the US and Mexico. The Tohono O'odham Nation occupies the second largest Native American land base in the country and has so far spoken out the loudest in opposition to the wall: "It's going to affect our sacred lands. It's going to affect our ceremonial sites. It's going to affect the environment", said Moreno, a member of the Tohono O'odham Nation (Levin).

# Transborder mobility and trade

43 On the individual level of populations in the region, people often cross the border for family reasons. For example, youth from the border regions of the United States play soccer in Mexico and many Mexicans adolescents study in the United States (Borden). There exists a tradition of mobility along the border.

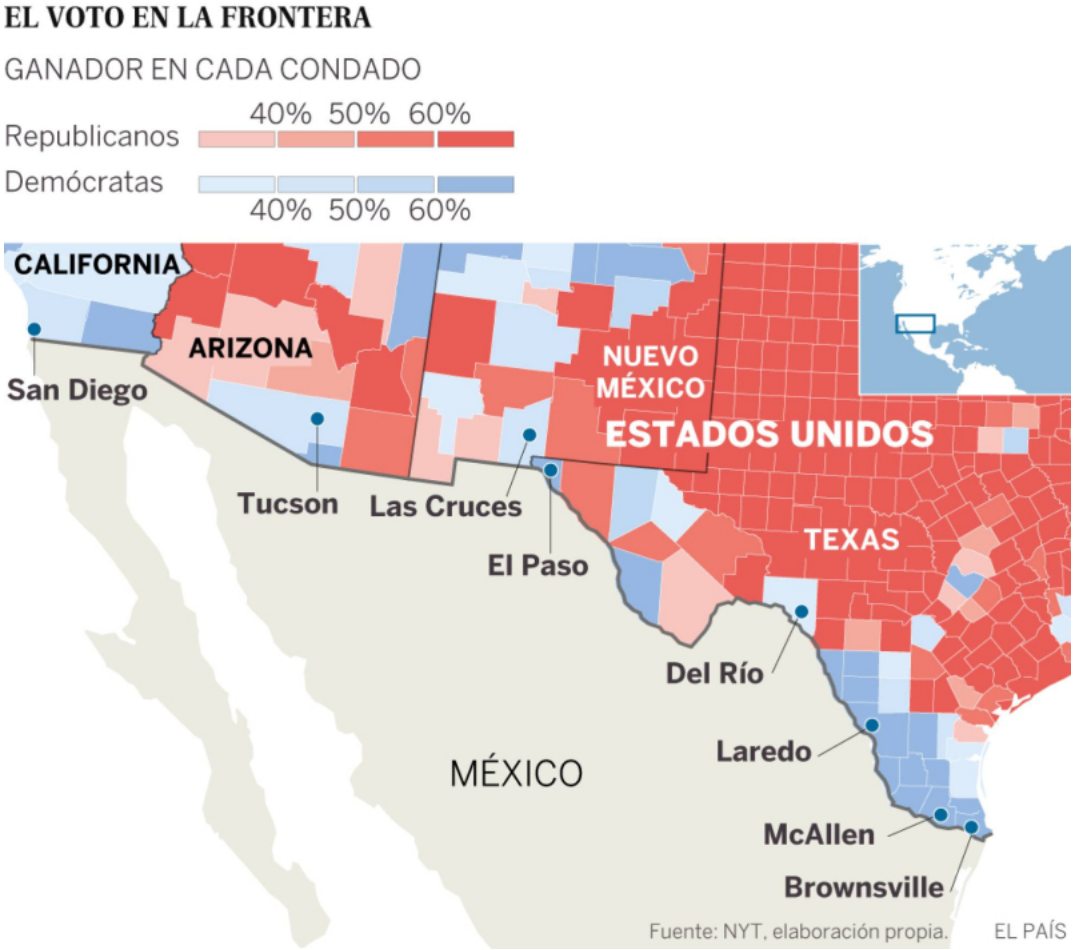
44 Regarding medical issues, Mexican immigrants with green cards or US citizenship go to Mexico for health services. Nearly half a million Mexican immigrants living in California receive medical, dental, or prescription services every year south of the border. "Even with insurance, it can sometimes be cheaper in Mexico", said Steven Wallace, who is an associate director the UCLA (Gorman).

45 Many private clinics that cater to Americans are located across the US border, in cities like Tijuana, Mexicali, and Laredo. The private hospitals in Mexico are usually similar in quality and care to those in the United States. Many Americans therefore go to Mexico since waiting times in these hospitals are not a problem and there is also an option to save on prescription drugs for quicker and smoother aftercare. Moreover, the costs of surgeries in Mexico are almost half of those of the US.

46 Local commerce in border towns is very important for both countries. Most Texans visit Mexican border towns to buy liquor and cigarettes. Indeed, vodkas and tequilas are cheaper there, as is vanilla extract, which is more concentrated than the extracts sold in the United States. Many also purchase straw and leather goods, and cotton dresses. Handcrafts in ceramic, papier-mâché, and wool are also popular. Indeed, studies undertaken by Sullivan et al. concluded that the "results indicate Mexican national cross-border shopper expenditures generate income and create jobs for the local area and region".

47 It should be noted that several Republican groups are opposed to the conservative anti-immigrant movement for economic reasons. For example, agricultural associations have called for a relaxation of laws because the majority of agricultural workers are traditionally from Latin America and Mexico in particular. It should also be noted that trade with Latin America is essential, especially with Mexico. The wall thus represents an obstacle in the local historical and commercial dynamics. Businessmen also complained of the negative impact of the wall's construction on the Rio Grande tourism industry. Pete Saenz, the mayor of Laredo, Texas, said that "it'll be a disaster, frankly. Based on the numbers that I gave you, we're a transportation, trade, commerce, distribution center, warehousing—so we're a trade town" (Garcia-Navarro). Therefore, it should be emphasized that the wall inhibits regional development in the border area, which is a factor in tackling illegal immigration. This explains why the majority of cities and electoral counties voted Democrat in the 2016 presidential elections (see Figure 1 below).

**Figure 1. – Electoral results on the border.**

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48 The reactions of Latin American governments are all in opposition to the construction of the wall. However, this shows the profound contradictions of these countries. These nations lack strategies to counter illegal migration to the United States. Of course, it is very difficult to influence or stop migratory flows, particularly when comparing the spectacular wage differentials between Latin American countries and the United States. But as long as there is a wage difference, migrants will come.

# Final notes

49 The conservative wall project ignores that the border is dynamic. Indeed, those who are building the wall forget that residents near the border have family, historical, and trade ties with Mexico. In this vein,

Cook, the mayor of El Paso, Texas, said that “the united border does not divide our cities”. As reported by journalists, such as Laufer, and several academics, it is fundamental for the US government to work with Mexico to control the border. In this way, the United States can effectively fight against crime problems. Other mayors have also opposed the wall project, calling it, for example, an “offensive and damaging symbol of fear and division”. The Tucson City Council voted on a resolution opposing the proposed border wall that was at the core of President Donald Trump’s campaign for office. The vote took place the same day that the Pima County Board of Supervisors also passed a resolution opposing the border wall.

50 We do not suggest the need to eradicate the border, nor the right of American politicians to implement border security. However, we have noted an exaggerated discourse of fear that does not match reality. Even though it may be a stereotype, the transnational communities are confronted with the political struggles and the social exclusion of which this wall is proof. It fosters a negative view of Mexico and Latin America as a whole.

51 The erection of the wall is presented as a panacea for immigration problems. Indeed, the wall is modelled as a solution to curb illegal immigration, enhance national security, and stop the influx of narcotics. The wall will not solve any of these problems. Immigration continues, according to official police data, and drug trafficking has not decreased. The security justification has no real foundation and border security is not easily separated from local governance. The wall represents an obstacle for the regional development of the border area and prevents setting up effective policies against illegal immigration. Moreover, the wall does not guarantee the security of the border. Opponents to the wall emphasize the need to secure the border effectively to avoid arms trafficking and to prevent the passage of migrants. However, migrants will come and their survival is at stake.

52 We saw that Trump was not the first instigator of the nativist narrative. However, he used it opportunistically in order to get elected. Now that it has become a White House policy, its contradictions must be addressed. That is why immigration specialists and even some conservative political analysts have

objected to the need of the wall. It is far from being an activist claim. We saw that the wall has been a conservative project for the last 30 years, with Trump recently adopting it as a populist party line. Trump insisted on presenting the wall as the solution to all problems: This mirage was one of the campaign symbols and one of the slogans most used by his enthusiastic supporters. However, Trump went further when he asked, and is still asking, that Mexico pay for the construction of the wall. This is evidence of imperial power because it is illegal to force a country to such a financial obligation, estimated at $12 billion.

53 New evidence has shown that Trump seems to acknowledge that his threats to make Mexico pay have left him politically cornered. It suggests that Trump realizes that his demand was unrealistic, but he continues to uphold it in order to avoid the political cost of campaigning on it (Miller et al.). Nobel economics laureate Krugman even ridiculed "President Trump's insecure ego" and his campaign proposal to impose tariffs on Mexico to pay the wall (Krugman).

54 However, the wall is a symbolic way to humiliate those he considers responsible for all of America's problems. As a man without ideology or political principles, Trump changed his position on many campaign topics as president, so it is difficult to predict how far he supports this idea. Nevertheless, he already broke relations with Mexico and transformed the Republican Party, as it adopted the political demand for the wall.

55 The border wall is rather a symbol of the deep economic and social gap between North and South. The wall also evinces a rich country's reluctance to coexist and cooperate with other countries. This wall, however, does not stop the construction of the identities on both sides of the border, always in mutation and transformation. Thus, the wall illustrates, in a clear way, the exclusion and rejection of the other.

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## RÉSUMÉ

**English**

In a context of President D. Trump's policy to build a wall along the entire US–Mexico border, this text aims to analyze the conservative discourse behind that wall erected by the US government. The wall replaces migration policies, and above all, is a consequence of the construction of a closed national identity advocated by conservative groups in the United States. This discourse should be understood in a historical perspective of anti-immigration rhetoric in this country. Actually, the nativism of these groups produces the social exclusion of migrants, especially Latin Americans. In this perspective, we analyze the symbolism of the wall illustrating the great North–South economic and social cleavage. The construction of the border wall is, according to conservative groups, a safety measure to prevent terrorism, stop drug trafficking and illegal immigration, but it is rather a response to the fear conveyed in this xenophobic discourse. The fact that Trump insists unrealistically, that Mexico would pay for this project, is merely a discursive complaint. In the context of a global economy, the wall does not meet any economic needs. In fact, transborder mobility and trade are vibrant and create jobs for the border region in both countries. Contrary to Trump's claims, the wall blocs this mobility and prevents the proper management of the border and the establishment of environmental cooperation.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés**

mur-frontière, immigration en provenance d'Amérique Latine, xénophobie, lobbys conservateurs, représentation de l'Altérité

**Keywords**
border wall, Latin American immigration, xenophobia, conservative lobbies, representation of Otherness

## AUTEUR

**Hugo Rangel Torrijo**
Hugo Rangel Torrijo, PhD (University of Montreal), is Research Professor at the University of Guadalajara and Associate Professor at the University of Quebec in Montreal. His postdoctoral project examined diversity issues. He conducted several international research projects on education policies and prison education. His research focuses on citizenship, democracy, and collective identities.
IDREF : https://www.idref.fr/231895461
ISNI : http://www.isni.org/0000000364961997

# On Immigration, Life, Identity. Interview of Yehuda Sharim by Susanne Berthier and Paul Otto

*Sur l'immigration, la vie, l'identité. Interview de Yehuda Sharim par Susanne Berthier et Paul Otto*

**Yehuda Sharim, Susanne Berthier et Paul Otto**



## TEXTE

1 At the 2017 *Migrations and Borders* conference at Université Grenoble Alpes, coorganized by Susanne Berthier-Foglar and Paul Otto [1], Yehuda Sharim was invited for a screening of his 2016 movie *We Are in It*. The film features visceral scenes from the everyday lives of Karla, Serges, Hussein, Nancy and Tutu. For all of them, Houston is their common space of struggle, pleasure, and shelter. For them, Houston is a second, third or even fourth city of residence, both home and metropolis of hostility. Here, they are safe, restless, part of a diaspora that struggles to find meaning beyond labels of foreigner, immigrant, undocumented, alien, and refugee.

**Technical Specs**

*We Are in It*, July 2016, director Yehuda Sharim
<http://www.weareinitfilm.com/>
Filmed in Houston, Texas
Running Time: 107 min
Ratio 16:9
Digital Frame rate 23.976
Screening format: DCP
Language: English, Arabic, Burmese, Swahili
Subtitles: English and Spanish

**Susanne Berthier and Paul Otto: What brought you to movie making? What is your story?**

Yehuda Sharim: I was always interested in film and writing. From Henri Michaux, and Mike Leigh, to Chantal Akerman, I was obsessed with this wonder and horror of life. After finalizing my Ph.D. at UCLA and having the privilege to join the Program of Jewish Studies at Rice University, Houston, TX, I had a deep urge to write poetry. I wasn't interested in arguments but life… more life… humans… I craved for some sense of community and intellectual work that is part of life (and not isolated from it). In my poems, I wrote about my parents; their experience of immigration; their inability to articulate but their willingness to talk about the slippage of their histories through different gestures, embraces, etc. I took photos of my life. I guess that I was interested in seeing not only what is in front of me but the less evident, the voiceless.

Reminding myself that these narratives of immigration are part of a more significant phenomenon that asks me to cross various intellectual and disciplinary borders, I began thinking about contemporary experiences of migration. At the same time, I met Yan Digilov, a Rice alum and my future collaborator and producer, and he became instrumental in better connecting me in Houston. Then, I rented a camera. I had some film classes at UCLA, but I didn't really know what I was doing.

I began with filming Yan, himself a Russian-Jewish refugee, who arrived in Houston with his family in the early 90's. He started telling me his story. I held the camera, and he was talking. I didn't know what I was doing. But I enjoyed it. Every weekend we met (summer of 2013–2014), I got my camera, and we had a dialogue.

Gradually, I wanted to know more: his parents; friends; other son and daughters of refugees. I was interested, particularly interested, in the role of the camera in contemplating and recording silence. Words are beautiful, although I don't trust most of them. My passion rested elsewhere: moments where we are at a loss, confused, hesitating. To put it another way, I was fascinated with the most humane, that nakedness of the soul, when we are bare, most vulnerable, and thus most powerful.

Then, I found myself in this ocean… in awe… wonder… by and by, all my work and attention followed. You better begin swimming. No preparations, forget about doubt, swimming…

**SB & PO: Why did you choose to work with immigrants? Why Houston?**

YS: I didn't know much about Houston before coming here from LA. I arrived here just because I have been offered a position in Jewish studies at Rice. Thankfully, the head of the Jewish Studies Program, Prof. Matthias Henze, has always given me that ultimate freedom and has always supported my work.

Oh, for me it was not a conscious decision "I have to work with immigrants and refugees, etc." I was aware that this is one of the most urgent challenges of my generation (and generations to come), but for me, it was more personal.

I was alone in Houston (at the time, my wife was a postdoc in Chicago, Northwestern University), and I looked for my "tribe of the displaced", my families, most us are people of color, being forced to search for a new home, hiding our names, polishing our accents, insisting on compassion and love, carrying multiple personas, hungry for justice, being betrayed by our governments and elected politicians for decades, nothing is for free, embracing what is fleeting, just come for dinner, don't call, just be, the door is open…

**SB & PO: How did you establish contact with the immigrants? We understand that some of the immigrants interviewed may be undocumented. Why would they want to talk to you?**

YS: I don't know really why people would like to talk with me. But they do. I usually begin talking without the camera working. I don't have to film everything. Other times, when there is that click, I stop talking and work the camera, always with an agreement… and again, I have no tricks, I try to be honest, and when one is without papers, I will make sure that they feel safe being filmed. When one is not safe, and that happens, then I stop. We just go to have tea/coffee, and we chill.

**SB & PO: As an immigrant to the US was it easier for you to discuss the status of immigrants? Did empathy play a role in**

**your discussion?**

YS: Can you make any work of art without empathy or feeling? Without embracing our feelings, we are missing our life, and it then could become something alien, a tragic event. I don't know about being immigrant as a bonus, but I do know the fact that I am an Arab-Jew, Persian and Israeli, son of working-class parents, often confuses people about who I am and what I am supposed to say and know. That confusion—is he Israeli? Arab? Palestinian? Persian? Academic? Terrorist? American?—has allowed me to feel at home in more than one place.

**SB & PO: How did you get them to trust you? Moreover, as a Jewish person did you have difficulties communicating with Muslim immigrants? Was religion, culture, or ethnicity a factor in the discussions?**

YS: Trust: that is such a challenging question, particularly since in our times when reading the news, most of us lose trust in ourselves and this world! For me, the only way to gain trust is to be honest and kind. I am not here to judge, frequently, I don't even know where I'm heading, but I allow my legs to carry me, and all my eyes (internal and external) are open as I walk into new/old spaces…

I never had a problem communicating with non-Jewish immigrants. Part of being honest, I introduce myself as a Jewish-Arab-Israeli human being. Often, I do talk about my army service, my time in the prison, and my parents. Other times, particularly when I am "the first Jew-Israeli they have ever met", I film myself being interviewed. When meeting Syrian, Iraqi, and Iranian immigrants, it is always emotional: it is like meeting your brothers and sisters, being able to admit that OUR governments blind us.

Life is the dominant theme in our conversations. But sometimes, when words don't help us anymore, a new discussion takes place, I carry the camera, and we walk together, doing laundry in the local washateria.

**SB & PO: Can you tell us about your interview and film technique? How were you able to reduce the intrusiveness of your team?**

YS: To reduce this level of intrusiveness, I understood early on that I must not have a team. I don't think that you reach that intimate space with ten cameras and cameraman, five technicians, twenty assistant directors, etc. At first, I had another cameraman joining me, but that's all. I keep it to the bare minimum.

I don't think that the formal idea of an interview, where questions come from one corner and answer from another, is of interest for me. It bores me. It's predictable. People throw words on each other, but we don't necessarily talk or listen. If at first, I was suggested to have a bank of questions, after my tenth interview I felt stupid. What is your interview technique when you meet your mother? Your love? Listening, it's all about listening, your mother tells she is well, but you hear in her eyes and voice that something bothers her—hey mom are you really ok? Really? Really really? Then you listen to her hand shaking, her gaze drops (but she told she is ok, did she?!). Then she tells you about breast cancer, and her operation will take place next week. We are done talking. Next day, in a crowded flight to Tel Aviv, I try to make sense of voices, questions, answers, cancer, and our love that is always beyond and within answers and questions, if you know what I'm saying.

**SB & PO: You say that writing poetry about your parents and their experiences was like taking photographs of your life. In what ways does the writing of poetry influence your filmmaking?**

YS: Poetry writing has been instrumental in developing my films. But by "writing" I am interested not merely in a combination of words but more with poetry as a state of being, a way of walking, exploring, reading and feeling the world. For me, writing, like filmmaking, is a space of great listening, where one has to be fully attuned.

**SB & PO: You mention your time both in prison and in military service—in what ways have these and other experiences given you particular insights into the people you've interviewed or provided a special handle for documenting their experiences?**

YS: During both my service and time in the prison, I began to doubt words and the ways we abuse/use language. I recall months without words. Mainly in prison, the world appeared stripped of words, bare, revealing, shocking, fragile, offering me a deeper insight into how we

live and handle ourselves beyond what is written in the news and screamed at us from every other corner of the world today.

Of course, the fact that I served in the IS army and prison doesn't mean that all artists/filmmakers should go to the army to develop this or that skill.

**SB & PO: What advice can you offer for others who want to document the experience of immigrants? Where would you like to see filmmaking about immigrants go next?**

YS: Often, it seems to me that most films about immigrants are made and watched from a male-white point of view…

Both *Human Flow* (Ai Weiwei, AC Films, 2017) and *Fire at Sea* (Gianfranco Rosi, 01 Distribution, 2016) represent people of color who seem to become experts in suffering. Their pain appears vivid, even appealing. They live amidst endless ruins, human prisons. As such, from the viewers' point of view, they always need to be saved, rescued, mainly because they are there, somewhere in the distance, yes, that space, Africa, Middle East, far away, never here, not around us. In both films, they appear to us through a few sentences, never a complete story, that stands for large groups of people who are escaping, drowning.

As we watch them drowning in National Geographic hunting scenes with the use of Drones that attempt to give us a sense that the world is finally being revealed, our experiences as viewers of the empire is to be overwhelmed with the amount of pain, cheap sentiment of profound suffering.

Yes, we are the saviors. We need the drones to make us feel, to understand, to understand what? Beyond associating people of color and space of color with catastrophe—it seems that we are back to the Oriental model here—these films naturalize the dangerous view that people of color are carriers of pain, of course, always hyper-sentimental, in love with death. They act as important reminders to the so-called Western world: you are still the savior, the rational, who watches a catastrophe from a distance while THEY are saved or not.

This lie of the privileged that has become more attractive because of its endless attempt to "beautifize" pain and exoticize tragedy

perfumed with the artist-celebrity chic *a la* another visit of Ben Affleck in a refugee camp to raise awareness (without disregarding such a worthwhile venture). This media illiteracy has to be addressed carefully: I am talking here about our inability to see and feel beyond hyper-sensational drone-like shots. I am talking about the lack of understanding that this humanitarian crisis does not take place "there" but everywhere HERE, without Western countries offering much support to its communities of color. And yes, this blindness has a clear racial dimension, which reminds us that at heart it is more a deep denial to recognize inequality. Choosing, we are choosing not to see this world and its inhabitants as equal. But we can choose differently, can we?

## NOTES

1 *Migrations and borders in the United States: discourses, representations, imaginary contexts*, Université Grenoble Alpes, ILCEA4, 29-31 March 2017.

## RÉSUMÉ

**English**
Yehuda Sharim's film *We Are in It* features visceral scenes from the everyday lives of immigrants in Houston. For them, Houston is a second, third or even fourth city of residence, both home, and metropolis of hostility. Here, they are safe, restless, part of a diaspora that struggles to find meaning beyond labels of foreigner, immigrant, undocumented, alien, and refugee.
In *We Are in It*, Sharim's camera follows Hussein, a recent immigrant to Houston, Texas, from Baghdad, Iraq, in a crowd rallying in favor of "A Nation of Immigrants" demanding something like justice. Karla—"My name is Karla, not undocumented!"—walks in her neighborhood through the thickness of the night. She talks about her parents when they crossed the USA–Mexican border. Now, she recalls her childhood, the days that she saved money to fix her glasses. Just like this immense wave of nomads from Africa, Middle East, and Asia, for whom "to migrate", "to cross", and "to seek refuge" is a way of life, Karla has developed that sensibility to see beyond borders.
After leaving his beloved Myanmar, Tutu has lived twenty-five years in a refugee camp in Thailand. Now, eight years after his arrival to the USA, where he is expected to become free finally, he is struggling with providing for his family with a minimum wage of $7.5 per hour. Every day, he films his family growing up in Houston, dreaming of making a movie, and farming his land while growing vegetables in the community garden. Unobtrusively,

Sharim's camera moves into the lives of immigrants who tell their stories and challenges, share moments of their lives and reveal their hopes and dreams.

## AUTEURS

**Yehuda Sharim**
Yehuda Sharim is a scholar, filmmaker, and an assistant professor in the Program of Global Art Studies, University of California Merced. He holds a PhD in Culture and Performance from UCLA'S World Arts and Cultures program. During his five years at Rice as a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Program of Jewish Studies, he directed four films, *We Are in It* (2016), *Lessons in Seeing* (2017), *Seeds of All Things* (2018), and *Hana's Ocean* (forthcoming, 2019). His films provide a comparative study of immigration and displacement, and shed light on the changing constructions of home, nation, and belonging. His book manuscript, *We Are in It: An Anthology of Border Crossing*, presents personal accounts by refugees and those who seek refuge without documentation. Comprised of interviews in monologue form, their stories reveal the fear, trauma, and resilience of immigrants and refugees in Houston, TX. Additionally, his report, co-authored with Yan Digilov, titled *Refugee Realities: Between National Challenges and Local Responsibilities*, which will be published later this year with the Kinder Institute for Urban Research (July 2018), is an attempt to historicize and trace the changes and politics that have shaped refugee resettlement programs and treatment of immigrants in the USA. Sharim is the co-founder of *Houston in Motion: Empowering Houston Refugee Communities*, a multimedia project that provides a window into the lives and experiences of immigrant and refugee communities in Houston.
IDREF : https://www.idref.fr/293303827

**Susanne Berthier**
Susanne Berthier-Foglar is currently Professor of American studies and Native American studies at Université Grenoble Alpes (France). Her previous positions include Professor at University Savoie Mont Blanc (2007–2012), and Assistant Professor at Université Stendhal (1996-2007). She is the adjunct director of ILCEA4. She has published a monograph on Pueblo history (*Les Indiens Pueblo du Nouveau-Mexique*, Presses universitaires de Bordeaux, 2010) and edited books on the genetic identities of the indigenous (*Biomapping*, with S. Whittick, S. Tolazzi, Rodopi, 2012), on the French colonization of the America (*La France en Amérique*, Université de Savoie, 2009), on mountains, power and conflict (*La montagne, pouvoirs et conflits*, with F. Bertrandy, Université de Savoie, 2011), and on the resistance and survival of the Natives (*Sites of Resistance*, with B. Madhu and L. Richard, Manuscrit, 2006).
IDREF : https://www.idref.fr/111738709
ORCID : http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3769-7836
HAL : https://cv.archives-ouvertes.fr/susanne-berthier-foglar
ISNI : http://www.isni.org/0000000080076259
BNF : https://data.bnf.fr/fr/16103045

**Paul Otto**
Paul Otto is Professor of American History, William Penn Faculty Fellow, and Chair of the Department of History, Sociology, and Politics at George Fox University (USA). Formerly he was Associate Professor of History at Dordt College (1996–2002). He is author of *The Dutch-Munsee Encounter in America: The Struggle for Sovereignty in the Hudson Valley* (2006) and has published several articles including "'This is that which … they call *Wampum*': Europeans Coming to Terms with Native Shell Beads", *Early American Studies* (2017). He is the recipient of the Hendricks Award (1999) and has been a fellow at the Henry E. Huntington Library (California) and National Humanities Center (North Carolina).
IDREF : https://www.idref.fr/126542171
ISNI : http://www.isni.org/0000000048074296

# Cultural Mobility: Culture and Ethnic Borders

# Being Arab-American: Stereotyping and Representation in *Arabian Jazz*

*Être Arabe-Américain : stéréotype et représentation dans le roman* Arabian Jazz

**Sonia Farid**

**DOI :** 10.35562/rma.1824



## TEXTE

1 *Arabian Jazz* (1993) by Jordanian-American writer Diana Abu-Jaber constituted a breakthrough in Arab-American literature and is even "thought to be the first novel published about the Arab American experience" (Evans 43). While the accuracy of such statement can undoubtedly be put to question, it does underline the transformation the novel initiated in the Arab-American literary tradition as it departed from the conventional approaches adopted for decades by writers from the community and which basically aimed at catering to the needs of members of this community as well as projecting a specific image to American readership. While Arabs were similar to other minority groups in the United States as far as discriminatory practices or xenophobic attitudes are concerned, the projection of this lack of acceptance on their literature was quite different. While tackling a wide variety of themes that included cosmic philosophical issues, nostalgia, rags-to-riches stories, and the American Dream among others, there was an obvious evasion of attempting a close analysis of the Arab-American condition with all its complexities, contradictions, and conflicts. According to Evelyn Shakir, this started with the first generation of Arab-American writers like Gibran Khalil Gibran, Abraham Rihbany, and Ameen Rihani, all of whom "dressed carefully for their encounter with the American public, putting on the guise of prophet, preacher, or man of letters" (1996, 6). While subsequent generations tackled different topics, they still steered away from issues that would involve exposing the flaws of the Arab culture or the struggles within the Arab community for fear of

confirming already-existing negative stereotypes and to give precedence to solidarity over the realistic depiction of the community's problems as well as in an attempt to avoid the harsh reaction of community members. Women writers were especially stricter in applying this form of self-imposed censorship: "For many years, the real or perceived need for unity among a beleaguered minority has hampered an honest discourse by Arab-American women about topics as controversial as honor killings, arranged marriage, and patriarchal structures" (Shalal-Esa 24). This is exactly how Diana Abu-Jaber marked the beginning of a new stage. *Arabian Jazz*, notes Tanyss Ludescher, managed to break "an unwritten rule in the Arab American community that members should not criticize Arabs and Arab Americans in public" and was, therefore, attacked for what was seen as its "grotesque stereotypes of Arabs" (104).

2 When asked whether she feels responsible for the Arab-American community, Abu Jaber replied that her topmost priority is the creation of authentic characters rather than representing the Arab culture in the United States: "it's not a cultural responsibility—it's more about art" (Field 211). It can, however, be argued that Abu-Jaber did assume a form of cultural responsibility, even one that is entirely different from what was expected of her. It is rather the responsibility to hold a mirror to a culture that is misunderstood in the sense its intricate layers and multiple contradictions are hardly intelligible not only for outsiders, but for Arabs themselves who usually prefer to adopt a unilateral approach that involves "us" and "them". That is why it becomes obvious throughout the novel that she is not restricted by the community's reaction to her representation of Arab characters even as several of them underline negative aspects of the culture that are generally overlooked, at times denied, not only by Arabs in the US, but Arabs in general.

3 Understanding *Arabian Jazz* requires an impartial perspective of an insider into the Arab culture who can at the same time assume the role of an outsider, which is what this paper attempts to achieve through offering an insight into the complicated nature of the Arab culture and the equally complicated nature of this culture's encounter with a world that is as desirable as it is detestable. This requires more emphasis on the novel subject of this research as an

Arab-American text rather than an ethnic American one, hence always focusing on the specificity of the Arab culture and steering away from generalizations pertaining to race, ethnicity, and multi-culturalism. For this to become possible, it is necessary to totally deconstruct all stereotypical perceptions of Abu-Jaber's characters and embark on a process of analyzing how each of them represents a different angle through which the culture can be seen, practiced, and preserved so that alleged stereotypes are questioned, refuted, and at times reversed and where cultural obligation is no longer at the heart of ethnic representation.

4 The controversy stirred by *Arabian Jazz* upon its release was largely attributed to what was perceived as the "cartoonish characterization" (DeHaven 9) and "implausible representations" (Hagopian 1) through which the family of Matussem Ramoud, who emigrates from Jordan and lives in a small town in upstate New York, is introduced to the reader. This particularly applies to Matussem and his sister Fatima, who are initially depicted in a comic manner that makes them seem more caricature-like than human. Matussem's silver rings and oiled hair, which make him look like "a cross between Elvis and Dracula", can arguably be a manifestation of his desperate attempt at assimilating to American popular culture as he perceives it (Abu-Jaber 56). The same applies to the way he decorates the house garden with Disney characters, deer, flamingos, and exotic birds much to the chagrin of his younger daughter Melvina who protests, "There's only so much you can do to become an American!" (106). His keen response to all sorts of commercials from "self-sharpening knives" to "foster-child programs" (106) imply a childish desire to engage in what he assumes are the daily activities of the American middle class. Fatima's appearance is similarly introduced in quite a burlesque manner with her nail polish consisting of "layers of Dragon Lady Red, tough as concrete and hard enough to tear out eyeballs" and eyebrows "tweezed to exclamation points" (41). Fatima is depicted as a loud, imposing woman whose life revolves around nonstop attempts at marrying off her nieces to Arab men "to preserve the family's name and honor" (10) and fixing the girls' Americanized appearance, which makes them look like "starving rats" (116) as she puts it, so that they can be attractive for their potential suitors. Unlike Matussem, she rejects the American culture and constantly

engages in exaggerated actions of preserving her family's traditions, which she feels are under a grave threat in the United States. Matussem and Fatima can, therefore, be seen as one-dimensional characters that conform to prevalent stereotypes as they fit to the extreme ends of the assimilation spectrum and the humorous way with which they are initially depicted gives the impression that it is through them that first generation Arab immigrants are ridiculed, judged, and reduced to simplistic formulas. However, it is only through those alleged stereotypes that those very stereotypes are questioned, deconstructed, and viewed in a new light.

5 The first line in the novel underlines the trauma with which Matussem is haunted and which he conceals by his attempts at assimilating to the American culture: "When Matussem Ramoud opened his eyes each morning, his wife would still not be there" (1). The death of Matussem's American wife Nora places him in a state of limbo where he becomes lost in both time and space. This sense of loss, Pauline Kaldas argues, is reversed since it is not the loss of the homeland as is the case in immigrant literature, but rather the loss of the host country that had the potential of becoming a new home: "Much of Arab American literature mourns the loss of Arab culture and expresses nostalgia for that culture. *Arabian Jazz* turns this view around and looks at the loss of America, symbolized by the death of Nora" (173). Nora was Matussem's only link to the United States and her death severed this tie and left him totally disoriented and unable to deal with a world whose clues only she had: "She taught him how to speak a new language, how to handle his new country. His American lover. Through the year of their courtship she took his hands and fed him words like bread from her lips" (Abu-Jaber, 188).

6 On the other hand, the fact that Nora dies of typhus during the family's visit to Jordan complicates Matussem's relationship with his homeland, which in a way took her life in what symbolizes some form of mutual cultural repulsion. When he goes back to the US, he moves from Syracuse to the isolated, rundown town of Euclid, where he starts improvising his way through the new America and recoiling into his own world that is, in fact, neither Jordanian nor American. It is noteworthy that Matussem is originally Palestinian, which means that Jordan is not his original homeland and emphasizes the significance of Nora's presence in his life as she provided the home he

never had, the home that is not located in a land but rather in a person: “Nora had been his history once; now only the land was left” (Abu-Jaber 260). Euclid, in fact, inspires in Matussem a sense of homelessness that reminds him of Palestine and it is this lack of rootedness that makes it the best place for him to live, “a place of perfect forgetting” (86).

7 In the midst of his detachment from all his surroundings, including his daughters whom he cannot help with their cultural dilemmas, the only connection he manages to maintain is that with his music. This also is related to Nora since he believes it is the only way he can communicate with her and keep her memory alive: “He believed that any music was prayer, sending a message out to the sky. Nora was always his audience; she was over *there* listening. He knew that drumming—its sound and intensity—had the power to penetrate the heavens and earth” (16). Music was Matussem’s way of shielding himself from the reality he is no longer capable of handling following his wife’s death and it is through music that he locks himself into the familiar past to seek shelter from the undecipherable present. Through jazz, Matussem makes sure he never heals, as if healing constitutes an abandonment of the only solid reference he can fall back on and that is why keeping the wound open is necessary for his survival in the United States. This is particularly clear in the description of John Coltrane’s composition “Naima”, which Matussem always identifies with Nora, as “a song so slow and sweetly agonizing that it didn’t sound like there were drums in it at all, but they were, on the edges, moving it along so the song didn’t just stop and close on itself like a wound” (16).

8 His choice of jazz in particular is quite telling in many ways. Jazz is always linked to the improvisation, which is associated with Matussem’s unconventional attempts at formulating an identity in the United States following the death of his wife. According to Mazen Naous, improvisation is also linked to the nomadic background of Matussem’s Bedouin culture, both of which allowing for a state of mobility between different places/cultures. Naous argues that improvisation is in itself a nomadic practice and that is why it is resisted by the dominant culture as jazz and other unclassical forms of music were not recognized when they first emerged:

> The dominant culture becomes suspicious of the nomadic practice of improvisation, since it challenges and negotiates both western and eastern musical and linguistic forms. Consequently, some dominant voices in the western classical music establishment seek to define improvisation as a primitive, other, and aural (as opposed to written) manifestation. (66)

The title of the novel is in itself an indication of the negotiation process in which Matussem is involved as he bestows an Arab dimension on an American music genre that was originally improvised and initially emerged in relation to another marginalized group. The process of improvisation also becomes clear in Matussem's faulty English, which apparently stays as such despite the years he spends in the United States and which could indicate lack of interest in mastering the language of the country with which he loses the only connection he ever had following his wife's death.

9 Matussem's obsession with Jazz does, in fact, underline the similarities between Arab-Americans and African-Americans, both groups being the subject of marginalization at the hands of the dominant culture and attempting to negotiate their identity through an act of improvisation that does not follow the conventional—that is, acknowledged by the mainstream—path towards assimilation or rather does not see assimilation as the ultimate goal in the first place. Matussem's choice of jazz demonstrates the unfamiliar territory he treads as an immigrant, since he does not hold on to some form of traditional music from his homeland, hence rejecting assimilation, nor does he favor a genre typically popular among white Americans, hence fully assimilating. Matussem's position in the mainstream American culture is similar to that of Jazz in American music, both carving their own niche away from traditional choices.

10 It is also noteworthy that the ethnicity of Arab-Americans has always been problematic since it has always been hard to place them under a specific category for after all the term "Arab" is only cultural, but is in no way indicative of physical features or skin color: "Arab Americans come in a range of colors. Some are nearly as dark as sub-Saharan Africans, a few are blond and blue-eyed, most—eyes brown, hair dark, skin tending to be olive—occupy the middle ground shared by other Mediterranean people" (Shakir 1997, 112). The complexity of the Arab

ethnic makeup, or what Lisa Suhair Majaj calls “their ambiguous location with American racial and ethnic categories” (320), combined with the pejorative connotations of the designation “Arab” makes it easier in many cases for white Americans to associate Arabs with another group historically perceived as inferior: African-Americans. One of Matussem’s bosses actually refers to him once as the “sand nigger” (Abu-Jaber 99), which demonstrates the way he as an Arab is classified as a black man who comes from the desert.

11 Jemorah Ramoud’s boss Portia tells her that her father is not different from Negroes and that her mother, “who was so beautifully white, pale as a flower”, made a mistake marrying him.

> “I know for a fact her poor mother—your grandmother—had to ask for a picture of the man for her parish priest to show around to prove he wasn’t a Negro. Though he might as well have been, really, who could tell the difference…” (Abu-Jaber 294–295)

Jemorah’s response highlights the dilemma of the racial categorization of Arabs and also marks the beginning of her own improvisation process: “‘My father’s mother was black… Yeah, a former slave. She married her master who had twenty-six other wives. They were black, brown, and yellow, and some didn’t even have skin’” (295). Through this statement, Jemorah is coming to terms with the black part of her identity whether it is real or imagined. The information she gives about her grandmother might not be correct in the first place, but it serves as a symbolic acknowledgment of the link between Arabs and blacks in the United States. Her response is similar to her father’s choice of jazz, which is a “metonym for black America”, as Michelle Hartman puts it, thus implying that “Arabs can somehow be understood through jazz, or more broadly, in relation to African American culture” (154).

12 Fatima seems more culturally grounded than her brother as she is adamant on preserving Arab traditions and resisting all forms of American influence that might pose a threat to “the ways of her mother and mothers before her” (Abu-Jaber 41). The United States is for her only the land of opportunity, but life is back in Jordan: “Americans had the money, but Arabs, ah! They had the food, the culture, the etiquette, the ways of being and seeing and

understanding how life was meant to be lived" (360). However, Fatima's relationship with the Arab culture is also marked by an experience of loss more tragic than that which defines Matussem's relationship with the American culture. Fatima is haunted by the memory of burying her four baby sisters because her dispossessed family in Palestine could not afford to feed them. This trauma drove Fatima to both adhere to her culture and feel repulsed by it because she realized that for her family the life of one boy was more important than that of four girls:

> babies I buried with my mother watching so this rest could live, so my baby brother can eat, so he can move away and never know about it… he was born so fortunate! Born a *man*, not to know the truth —. (334)

Fatima is left with no choice except subscribing to the patriarchal order to which she belongs because only then can she feel safe. Her firm belief in this order drives her to perpetuate the oppressive practices she might deep down detest. Her ambivalent attitude towards the Arab culture is shown in the statement she makes to her nieces about marriage and in which she offers paradoxical opinions about men and being a woman:

> "[…] it's terrible to be a woman in this world. This is first thing to know when the doctor looks at baby's thing and says girl. But I am telling you there are ways of getting around it… There are things you don't know yet that I know perfect, and first and last is that you must have husband to survive on the planet of earth". (116–117)

13 Fatima's indignation turns into complicity as she decides to perceive the same culture that sanctioned the burial of her sisters as the safe haven that will protect her from any foreign influence. She, therefore, chooses this elusive cultural security over her identity as a women through repressing her "gendered memory", as Salwa Essayah Chérif argues:

> Fatima resorts to a nostalgic invocation of an idealized past of traditional values presumed to constitute selfhood. Ethnic memory in her case, as a means of assertion of self and overcoming ambivalence, Abu-Jaber demonstrates, is highly problematic. Not

> only does it invoke a static conception of culture and an essentialist perception of one's identity, but it also leaves unquestioned the assumption of the homeland's patriarchal structure. (215)

14 When Fatima was detained as a teenager in an Israeli prison in Jerusalem, she believed she would die there, hence atone for her sin against her sisters and that is why her release was a curse: "'I am left even by my enemies. I am returned to die again, again, again'" (Abu-Jaber 335). Fatima's determination to imprison herself within the confines of her patriarchal culture could be the punishment she decides to inflict upon herself in the sense that like her dead baby sisters, she decides to be a victim of this oppression as well. This is demonstrated in the way she inflicts this oppression upon herself when she urges her husband to take a mistress: "'But don't you ever think about it? Aren't you even curious about other women? [...] What wrong with you? Are you man or blob?'" (55). Through Fatima, Abu-Jaber reverses the stereotype of the oppressive Arab male since Fatima's oppression is self-inflicted and she also becomes the source of oppression in the family as she tries to force her view of gender relations on her nieces and in doing so takes the role that should be traditionally played by Matussem according to prevalent stereotypes. When she compares her nieces to wild cows that need "an experienced cowboy" (24), she is assuming a double role in which she belongs to the sex that needs to be tamed while she herself is taking part in the taming process, as Nayef Ali al-Joulan argues: "Although Fatima mentions a masculine figure as necessary to tame the wildness, she herself adopts the taming principle, exemplifying a self-inflicted and self-preserved form of female oppression" (74). By being both submissive and oppressive, Fatima's relationship to her original culture seems one of love-hate, hence both conforming to and subverting the stereotype of Arab women, becoming both predator and prey. Fatima's stance on the Arab culture places her in an ambivalent position in which she can be seen loving and loathing both cultures. It is noteworthy that several of the novel's American female characters are subjected to male abuse, hence discarding the assumption that violation of women rights is exclusive to Arab men or that submissiveness is exclusive to Arab women.

15 Despite her overbearing presence in their lives, Fatima's plans do not constitute part of the cultural dilemma Jemorah and Melvina go

through since while they struggle to come to terms with their hyphenated identity, they are certain that they do not accept that part of the Arab culture their aunt represents. The core of their dilemma is, like Matussem's, mainly related to Nora and the way her death is linked to losing contact with the American culture through losing the mediator that made the passage between the two worlds safe and smooth. Nora's sudden death imprisoned Jemorah and Melvina in time and drove each of them to improvise her own identity in a way that relates in one way or another to the moment of death. Jemorah's last moments with her mother signal the beginning of this state of being frozen in time:

> Jem held her mother's hand, as fever turned body and words to ashes, then cold. Jem sat through the night, stiffening, as if in step with the process of death. She was afraid that if she made a sound and broke the spell that held her mother's silence, her father's sleep, and her baby sister's stare through the bars of the crib, that she would shatter something holding them together. (157)

16 Jemorah's inability to move beyond this moment could be an attempt to hold on to the one link she had to the culture she is unable to deal with on her own: "Her mother had left before she could show Jem where her place might be" (299). The bullying incidents to which she is subjected at school because of her ethnic background and her passive reaction to them underline the impact of losing her mother who was supposed to guide her through the intricacies of the new culture: "She learned how to close her mind, how to disappear in her seat, how to blur the sound of searing voices chanting her name" (92–93). This passivity continues as she grows incapable of making any decisions and fearful of any change, including of course any that would help her negotiate her identity as an Arab-American, which renders her what Kaldas calls "a floating entity" (174).

17 The confrontation with her boss Portia alerts Jemorah to the necessity of coming to terms with her identity. Like Fatima, Portia sees identity as one-dimensional and urges Jemorah to discard her Arab heritage and embark on an Americanization process that redresses her mother's mistake when she married Matussem: "'I want to save whatever of your mother's clean blood is left [...] I'll scrub all the scum right off you, make you as pure and whole as I can'" (295).

While infuriated by Portia's insults, Jemorah does subscribe to her perception of identity, and Fatima's for that matter, when she decides to marry her cousin and live in Jordan, hence admitting that she can either be fully Arab or fully American. With the latter seeming impossible, Jemorah decides to search for herself in the former:

> "It's not enough to be born here, or to live here, or speak the language. You've got to seem right [...] well, I don't know how to accomplish that, and I'm starting to think I won't ever learn if I haven't by now". (328)

While initially seeing her job as a form of confinement that she wants to escape in order to explore other possibilities, this claustrophobic feeling extends to the entire country which she believes cannot accommodate her any more. In other words, she decides to deal with one side of her identity and she selects the Arab one since the death of her mother made the American entirely hostile and unmanageable, a fact that is proven years later through Portia's slurs. When saying, "'We'll try putting some lipstick on you, maybe lightening your hair, make you *American*'" (295), Portia confirms that being "American" is only equivalent to being white or Caucasian and Jemorah realizes that in this case she can only be Arab. The America that Portia presents to Jemorah is so repulsive that she decides to discard it altogether. That is why it is at this moment that Fatima's words keep resonating in her ears: "'This is not our place, not our people'" (298).

18 It is only when she meets her cousin and presumably future-husband Nassir that Jemorah reconsiders her decision. Abu-Jaber once again reverses stereotypes when she does not portray Nassir as the male chauvinist who puts Jemorah off the Arab culture and brings her back to America. Instead, Nassir, who will ironically live in the US for his post-doc at Harvard, is the one who draws her attention to the impossibility of embracing one side of her identity at the expense of the other and the naivety of idealizing Jordan just because she is faced with prejudice in the United States: "'There is nothing unique or magical about the Middle East; it shares xenophobias and violences with all the rest of the world!'" (329). Nassir alerts Jemorah that she needs to accept her hyphenated identity, which by definition implies not belonging to one culture and having to constantly straddle two worlds, a process that might be tenuous but not without

advantage: "'you're torn in two. You get two looks at a world. You may never have a perfect fit, but you see far more than most ever do. Why not accept it?'" (330).

19 Nassir occupies a peculiar cultural position, one that allows him a critical perception of different worldviews, which explains his cynical remarks on both the West and the Arab world:

> Nassir arrives not as a representative of the Old World, but rather with a sense of detachment from all nations [...] despite or perhaps because of the combination of his Arab identity and his Western education, Nassir stands on the outskirts of national affiliation. (Kaldas 181)

Nassir's role in guiding Jemorah towards embracing her hyphenated identity is not only the result of the way he defies the stereotypical depiction of Arab males. Nassir acquires a kind of wisdom that enables him to see both the East and the West quite objectively, a privilege that only Nora could have had. While lacking Nassir's exposure and education, Nora refuses to abide by the rules of cultural superiority imposed by the dominant culture in the United States, as represented by Portia or the bullies at Jemorah's school. Because, as she describes herself, Nora was "someone who thinks what they choose to think" (50), she is never hindered by color, language, or ethnicity, hence loving and marrying Matussem as well as becoming an atheist. Nassir's character is set in stark contrast to that of Farah, Jemorah's suitor at the beginning of the novel and a typical representative of a considerable segment of the Arab-American population, one that believes in arranged marriages as the ideal way to preserve the culture from foreign influence. His question to Jemorah about whether she knows how "'to cook, clean shirts, refinish floors'" (61) underscores this contrast.

20 Like her sister, Melvina remains trapped in the moment of her mother's death. Even though she was only two years old when this happened, the feeling of helplessness she experienced as she watched her die from her crib haunts her for years:

> The veil fell lightly toward her mother, and behind the bars of her crib Melvie was helpless to move her out of the way as she would

> push someone out of the path of a truck […] And it was as if some part of that veil had fallen over Melvina, too, covering her with the memory, a network of sensations that she could never tear away. (178)

21 Her obsession with death and illness lead to her determination to become a nurse, which becomes part of her identity or rather distracts her from thinking about her identity the way Jemorah does: "As a result, being a nurse becomes not simply her vocation but a fixed identity […] Every attempt to save others from death is an attempt to make up for not being able to save her mother" (Kaldas 174). Melvina's ability to find a purpose to her life makes her seem more reconciled with her hybridity than Jemorah, yet locking herself up in the hospital is only a means of avoiding interaction with the outside world in which she would have to negotiate her hyphenated identity. That is why she is at times perceived as a "robot", as a woman who brings in a patient into the hospital tells her (Abu-Jaber 160).

22 Like Jemorah, Melvina is clueless about the American culture following her mother's death. Her constant attempts at remembering her mother and knowing more about her epitomize her struggle to maintain that final link between her and the country she presumably belongs to. Lack of memory of her mother is, therefore, similar to lack of any connection with her American half. She actually accuses Jemorah of trying to keep the memory of their mother to herself: "'You never tell me about her, you never talk about her… Like you want to keep her all to yourself. Well, what about me, Jemorah, I'd like to know what about me!'" (191). It is only when Fatima agrees to speak about Nora that Melvina is able to climb out of her crib and feel capable of facing the world outside the house and the hospital, which have over the years constituted her comfort zone.

23 The vacuum Nora leaves in the lives of Jemorah and Melvina is accentuated by the abandonment of their grandparents who hold Matussem responsible for their daughter's death and could not see the girls because they are his daughters. "His in-laws never forgave him. Although they called the girls on birthdays and holidays, they wouldn't see them in person. 'It hurts so much,' his mother-in-law had said to Jem, 'to see so much of our daughter mixed up with the

body of her murderer'" (85). Through the automatic identification of Arabs with violence, the grandparents stereotype Matussem, consequently his daughters who, by association, become half-murderous themselves, hence in a way responsible too for their mother's death. For the grandparents, the urge to stigmatize Matussem surpasses that of embracing their daughter's offspring. The grandparents' stance gives Jemorah and Melvina an insight into how they are generally viewed in the United States. Ibis Gómez-Vega comments on this point: "They know that one half of them is Arab, the half that they inherit from their father's side, and their grandparents identify that half as the murdering half. This irrational identification of their Arab side as the murdering side colors their own sense of themselves as Arabs in America" (22). Therefore, while Nora was expected to help them reconcile with their hyphenated identity, her parents do the exact opposite following her death as they become the mouthpiece of the dominant culture. This sets Nora apart from them as well as from the entire mainstream. Because the reaction of their mother's family is representative of American society as a whole, Jemorah and Melvina prefer to withdraw from the outside world, which they feel would always reject them, and always attempt to stay within the relatively safe boundaries of their home, no matter how fraught it is with cultural struggles and how unable the remaining family members are to help them.

24 As the complexity of each of the character's immigrant experience is gradually unraveled, the novel becomes "particularly slippery", as Steven Salaita puts it (438), since it becomes obvious that all the stereotypes are discarded and that none of the cultural dilemmas any of the characters go through can be resolved in favor of being exclusively Arab or American or through any of the simplistic formulas that each of the two cultures assumes are viable. It is noteworthy that each of the characters is helped negotiate his/her identity in many cases by other characters who are themselves suffering from a similar dilemma. This is particularly applied to the case of Matussem whose trip back to Jordan, the first since Nora's death, offers the closure that allows him to come to terms with both the loss of his wife and his identity as an Arab-American. While unable to deal with her cultural dilemmas herself, Melvina forces her father to go to Jordan, which coincides with the role she plays

throughout the novel as the protector of the family, especially that she is the less shaken by the immigrant experience at least on the outside. It is also possible that Melvina believes that Nora's death created a rift between Matussem and Jordan and that it is impossible to connect with the American culture without first resolving his ordeal with the Arab part. Matussem's trip to Jordan constitutes the first step towards reconciliation with the past in preparation for accepting the present. One of the most important factors that contribute to that is learning for the first time that Nora has a grave in Jordan, one that was built by his family so that her soul can rest where she died.

> "But her grave is in America," he said, astonished.
> "I know. We had thought she might need a second bed," Rima said and smiled. "We thought her spirit might have become confused on such a long airplane ride back. So we has a second burial the week after you left. We wanted to give her soul ease." (Abu-Jaber 354)

The construction of the grave offers the kind of reconciliation between Nora and Jordan that Nora's parents insisted would never be possible. It absolves Matussem, and Jordan or the Arab culture for that matter, from the guilt of causing Nora's death and symbolizes Nora's acceptance of her fate and an implicit message for Matussem to move forward.

25 Matussem's reconnection with his Jordanian family gives him insight into the meaning of "home" which for him is not associated with a geographical location or blood ties, but rather the people he wants to be around. For Matussem, his homeland is not the United States, but the country where his daughters and his friends live and where he, therefore, can be himself: "'You girls and this guys my family'" (350). By "guys" he means the members of his jazz band, workers at the gas station who are classified as "white trash" by the mainstream, thus are marginalized in a different way. As it crosses racial lines and finds common ground through a genre of music that is in itself based on improvisation and originated by a marginalized group, the band becomes part of Matussem's family and part of the reason why he decides to come back to the United States. According to Mazen Naous, the choice of jazz plays a major role in connecting an Arab middle class immigrant with white American workers: "It comes as no

surprise that Matussem chooses jazz, which allows for myriad styles of music, to extend communicative lines to working-class Anglo-Americans" (76). Through constructing a new type of homeland, Matussem offers a new perception to the immigrant experience where belonging is no longer founded upon a set of rigid cultural values that need to be preserved at any cost.

26 Matussem's relationship to music changes after his trip to Jordan as he realizes that Jazz can be the way to release his grief rather than to trap himself in the past as he did since Nora's death:

> He also returned with a theory about drumming, that it tapped into the heart and broke the spirit free, all the colors and the flavors of the life a person had lived. There were things hidden in the core of a person, feelings and memories so deep, that with the right music the spirits of people could be liberated, new life conceived, and the dead given rest. (Abu-Jaber 352–353)

Jazz is no longer the means through which Matussem laments Nora's loss and isolates himself from the outside world. Instead, it becomes his way of navigating his hyphenated identity, a process which was made impossible by Nora's death. The music he plays at the end of the novel stands in stark contrast to that of the beginning as it no longer holds him captive to grief, but rather sets him free. It is as if his music needed a signal from Nora that her soul is at peace so he, too, can more forward. This is shown in the last scene when he sees Nora dancing as he plays, but this time beckoning to him to let go: "she came to him again, dancing like the original mystery of her language, its jinni's tongue. Her image turned, bent to him, the world in her gesture, the mystery of her love, releasing him" (374).

27 Jemorah's way out of her cultural limbo is not through marrying Nassir despite his role in enlightening her about the complexity of cultural affiliations and the necessity of embracing her position as straddling two worlds. It is Nassir who alerts Jemorah that marrying him in search for cultural stability is an illusion since he himself is "a professional nomad" (342), as he labels himself. Nassir transfers to Jemorah this state of nomadism as she starts to feel that being firmly grounded in one culture is not always possible and therefore accepts her situation as a hybrid between two cultures that are more likely

than not to clash. It is through Nassir that Jemorah accepts her difference, which she realizes is inevitable whether she stays in the United States or moves to Jordan and that is why he makes it clear to her that her decision is only "false escapism", as Ildikó Limpár puts it (251).

28 Jemorah's attraction to Ricky Ellis, who is half Native American and works at the gas station, constitutes a major component of her reconciliation process since she identifies with his cultural and ethnic dilemmas and feels that she can negotiate her hybrid identity with him. According to Alice Evans, Jemorah's connection with Ricky is not only inspired by the fact they share a hybrid identity, but also by the similarity between her legacy as a Palestinian and his as a Native American. Jemorah realizes how "the experiences of Native Americans were so similar to what was happening to Palestinians" and how the victims were always labelled "savages or barbarians" (48). The last scene, in which Jemorah dances with Ricky to Matussem's music, links the different components of her identity together as she embraces the complexities of her immigrant experience and acknowledges her hybridity. Through this dance Jemorah not only forges a bond with Ricky that marks her first step towards reconciliation with her identity, but also makes room for her father's music to guide her through the intricacies of this identity as she becomes able, for the first time, to listen to a different type of jazz—an Arabian one:

> Jem moved closer, placing her head against his chest. They moved, ever so slightly, together, and it felt to Jem like they had begun wending their way along a path of music, finding their way. She could hear the sound of the drums through the movement of Ricky's chest, jazz and trills of Arabic music, bright as comet tails, and through this, the pulse of the world. (Abu-Jaber 374)

29 Fatima is only capable of reconciling with the past when she breaks her silence and tells the story of her four dead sisters to Jemorah, Melvina, and Nassir: "'I have no kind of peace. Their spirits stay with me; there is nowhere else to go'" (335). The peace of mind Fatima reaches when she releases a traumatic memory she kept suppressed for years is accompanied by the closure she has always been seeking. This takes place when Matussem is taken by his sister Rima to the

four girls' grave by the Jordan River where she tells him that their souls are resting in peace:

> "We laid the babies to rest," she said. "You must tell Fatima. It's over. There's no one left to protect, nothing to do now but to mourn and reflect. We want her to come back, to visit and see her home and family again." (354)

Matussem's knowledge of the incident alleviates Fatima's pain since he shares the trauma and finally becomes part of the tragedy as he realizes that those girls' lives were sacrificed in return for his, hence also sharing the shame. Such transformation, which resembles the exorcism of an evil spirit that haunted her, brings down the barrier between Fatima and Jordan, therefore allowing her to follow in Matussem's footsteps and go back in an attempt to reconcile with the past as well as with her identity as an Arab-American. While Fatima's trip to Jordan does not materialize throughout the course of the novel, it is no longer far-fetched as she becomes more open to exploring the different aspects of her immigrant experience, thus seeing both Jordan and the United States in a different light.

30 Melvina's ability to reconcile with the past, hence to reconnect with the American side of her identity, is directly associated with Fatima's confession. For the first time throughout the novel, Melvina sheds off her practical personality and unravels unprecedented emotion when she embraces Fatima and reassures her that her sisters have forgiven her:

> "Auntie," Melvina said. Fatima flinched for just a fraction of a second then Melvie opened her strong arms and took her in. "It's all right, it's all right," she said into Fatima's hair, standing and holding her, the two women moving back and forth, like a cradle. "They forgive you, they all forgive you—can't you hear them? They're here, in the air, all around us. I can hear them, they forgive you." (335–336)

Their embrace confirms the bond they have as women, hence symbolizing Fatima's gradual abandonment of the patriarchal order in which she had for years sought shelter. Realizing that she possesses the power to effect such a transformation, Melvina decides to similarly connect to her past through filling the gaps in her memory

of her mother. Through asking Fatima to tell her everything she remembers about Nora, Melvina starts filling in the blanks and establishing a link with her American side through reclaiming the memory of the only mediator she ever had with America: "Once Fatima releases her own silenced memory of the past, Melvina can finally step out of the bars of the crib that have held her prisoner since her mother's death" (Kaldas 181). While the gap between Melvina and Fatima seemed insurmountable, their newly-forged tie surpasses the cultural tension that had existed between them as they united over the memory of the Arab sisters and the American mother and in the process established their own common ground.

31 The last scene provides an image of harmony in which each of the family members expresses relief in a different way at taking initial steps towards navigating their way through reality and negotiating their identity while coming to terms with their loss. This harmony does not, however, imply finding definite answers for the Arab-American question or hybridity in general, but rather reflects a common desire by the protagonists to attempt answering such question and a realization on their part of how complicated such a process is. The resolution of the novel, therefore, does not end the conflict in favor of one culture or the other. In fact, it does not end the conflict at all, but rather reshapes it so that it becomes a process of ongoing negotiation, or "self-invention", as Chérif calls it (208), one that will not necessarily be smooth and can at times be rather harsh.

32 This particularly shows in the park incident when the Ramouds go for a picnic and invite two passing backpackers to eat with them. When they know they are Arabs, one of them says, "'*Arabs*, Jesus fucking Christ. And we ate their *food*'" (Abu-Jaber 361). It is noteworthy that the young man asked if they were Italians or "Wetbacks", the latter being a derogatory term used in reference to Mexican illegal immigrants, which demonstrates a preconception based on the Ramouds' physical difference from white Americans and the assumption that their presence in the United States is most likely to be illegal. This is contrasted to Fatima's feeling at the Thanatoulos Bakery, originally funded by Greek immigrants then bought by several other families from different ethnicities, the last of which is African American. The different races the bakery embraces makes Fatima feel welcome, hence more relaxed than she in the midst of white Anglo-

Americans: “The place allowed her to visit home without feeling the pain that it had held for her” (365). The bakery, therefore, turns into a cross-border space where multiculturalism is the norm, thus allowing for a smoother transition into the American culture, which is also the case with jazz music. The park, on the contrary, becomes a hostile space that promotes exclusivity and rejects difference. The bakery and the park represent the United States and as the Ramouds embark on that journey of discovery, they are bound to navigate through both and while doing so will gradually get acquainted with the multiple layers of their identity as Arab-Americans. As part of its subversion of simplistic dichotomies, the novel turns the United States from a land that is by definition hostile to Arabs into a space that is constantly subject to negotiation and which can be as fluid as the hybrid identity of those who inhabit it.

33 The bakery, similar to jazz music and the character of Ricky Ellis, places the Arab-American experience within a broader ethnic landscape, which is what makes *Arabian Jazz* a distinctive work. While Arab-Americans are the main ethnic group, the African American heritage is represented through jazz music and the tragedy of Native Americans through Ricky Ellis. Also, when Nassir tells Jemorah, “Our border is an open sore” (333), this echoes Gloria Anzaldúa’s reference to Mexican-American border as “una herida abierta” (25) or “an open wound”, which adds a link to the Mexican American, or Hispanic American, community. This is also the case when the Ramouds are referred to as “wetbacks”. Beside the fact that this offers a realistic portrayal of the United States as a multicultural nation, it also creates a unified “other” discourse that aims at questioning the norms of the dominant culture. Steven Salaita comments on this point: “Abu-Jaber creates an essentialized Other—the Arab American—who interacts with other marginalized characters so that the essentialist tendencies of the dominant society can be mitigated and ultimately restructured” (436). The same applies to the workers in Matussem’s band, who though not technically “other” yet are still marginalized by the mainstream, as well as white American women in Euclid who suffer gender oppression, therefore, share the plight of their counterparts in patriarchal Arab societies.

34 That is why Diana Abu-Jaber’s depiction of her characters and the reality surrounding them is devoid of any tendency towards placating

a particular segment of readers, be they Arab or American, even as she does that at the risk of having her work frowned upon by members of her community. Without any attempts at embellishment or abstraction, her Arab characters came out as fully-fledged humans who at once defy and confirm stereotypes, represent and misrepresent the Arab community in the United States and whose cultural dilemmas and personal struggles are as deeply unsettling as they are strikingly truthful. This is also true of her American characters so that she ends up criticizing both her ethnic group and the mainstream in the American society as well as reversing misconceptions about both. Meanwhile, she asserts the impossibility of isolating the experience of one immigrant group from that of its counterparts as she links Arab-American to other ethnic communities that share the same dilemmas and go through the same arduous ordeals as they attempt to negotiate their hyphenated identity.

35 *Arabian Jazz* marks a new era in Arab-American literature because it transforms the concept of representation from a duty towards the writer's community to a profound analysis of the complexities of this community's culture both back home and in the host country. Through venturing into a territory that is usually left untrodden by writers from her community, Diana Abu-Jaber creates a text that is as complex as its subject matter owing to its immersion into the subtleties of a culture that is at times as incomprehensible for outsiders as it is for natives. As she peels the multiple layers of this culture, she tackles different stereotypes that are unraveled in the process and in doing so addresses the most sensitive issues pertaining to the Arab-American community including those that at times might confirm several of those stereotypes. For this reason, *Arabian Jazz* requires an unbiased reading by Arab scholars who are both well-versed into the intricacies of the culture and capable of distancing themselves from it and a critical analysis by Arab and/or Arab-American readers who are aware of the impossibility of dealing with their culture without a multi-faceted approach that acknowledges contradictions and rejects simplistic dichotomies.

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## RÉSUMÉ

**English**

This paper aims at tackling the dilemma of representation in the novel *Arabian Jazz* (1993) by Jordanian American writer Diana Abu-Jaber. This is mainly done through emphasizing the role the text plays in breaking a decades-long tradition in which Arab American writers were pre-occupied with presenting a carefully-crafted identity that was to be the mouthpiece of the entire community and that was, in many cases, more cosmetic than realistic and representative of how Arabs wish to be seen rather than what they really are. The paper highlights how the author uses the text, released after the Gulf War and the September 11 attacks, to examine the complexity of Arab identity, which does not technically belong to a particular ethnicity —hence does not easily fit into any of the common Western categorizations —, and of Arab American identity, which undergoes a process of constant transformation and negotiation. Through analyzing the intricate relations between Arab and Arab American characters in the novel and their interaction with both the Arab and American worlds, the paper will also look into the extent to which the novelist managed to question, defy, and reconstruct stereotypes, whether those formed about the self or the other, in order to position the text within the Arab American tradition and determine its role in providing a truthful portrayal of the Arab community in the United States. The paper underlines the way Abu-Jaber breathes life into the members a community that had for years been treated as types required to represent rather than humans seeking a voice.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés**
littérature arabo-américaine, stéréotype ethnique, assimilation, intégration, identité

**Keywords**
Arab-American literature, ethnic stereotype, assimilation, integration, identity

## AUTEUR

**Sonia Farid**
Sonia Farid is Assistant Professor at the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University, Egypt. She got her M.A. in Comparative Literature and her Ph.D. in Hispanic-American Literature. She is a member and former coordinator of the Fulbright Alumni Humanities Circle in Egypt, was a member of the Scientific Committee of the Eastern Mediterranean Academic Research Center (DAKAM) Literary Criticism Conference in Istanbul, and is currently a member of the scientific committee of *Journal of Comparative Studies*, Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, Daugavpils University, Latvia. She was a Junior Research Specialist at Latin American and Latino Studies Department at the University of California Santa Cruz in 2006–2007 and a Visiting Scholar at Comparative Literature Department at the University of California Berkley in 2013–2014. Courses she taught include The American Dream, Ethnic Literatures of the US, The Political Novel, Cultural Studies, and Audio-Visual Translation. Her research interests include ethnic American literature, American studies, women's writing, cultural studies, and political fiction. She is also a translator, editor, and political columnist.
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# Dark Passages: African American World War II GIs, Blackness, and Border Town Life and Cultures in 1940s Southern Arizona

*L'identité noire : les GIs afro-américains de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, couleur de peau, vie et cultures dans les villes frontalières du sud de l'Arizona des années 1940*

**Robert F. Jefferson Jr.**

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## TEXTE

"Much that has happened down here on the Mexican Border could not be published. It is interesting to see the hearts of Negro soldiers change and become something else."
(Shirley Graham, Fort Huachuca, Arizona, 1942)

> "Think of me as Shiva, a many-armed and-legged body with one foot on brown soil, one on white, one in straight society, one in the gay world, the man's world, the woman's, one limb in the literary world, another in the working class, the socialist, and the occult worlds."
> (Gloria Anzaldua, *La Prieta*, 1979)

1 Debates over citizenship and rights have always been contentious issues in United States History. From the 1880s with the Chinese Exclusion Acts through the Immigration Act of 1924 and the Mexican Repatriation program of the 1930s and the 1940s to finally, Donald Trump's 2017 Executive Order, suspending the flow of migrants from the Middle Eastern countries of Yemen, Sudan, Iraq, Somalia, Iran, and Libya, U.S. congressional leaders and presidents have sought to impose specific geo-political boundaries on matters governing citizenship. But nowhere were those matters put on vivid display than in the American Southwest during the Second World War. In Arizona in particular, there was a moment when the army's Jim Crow policies, wartime politics, and political theater met the penetrating glare of public scrutiny. Throughout the month of February 1943, members of the Arizona State Legislature gathered for public hearings in Phoenix to discuss what they considered to be a topic of vital importance: immigration. In the days and weeks that followed, both houses engaged in a spirited debate over proposed measures to increase police presence on the Southern Arizona–Northern Mexico border in order to limit what some members of the legislature perceived to have been a burgeoning flow of Spanish-speaking populations into a region that was in midst of an immense defense buildup for war. But many of the speeches delivered by several legislative members on the border patrol issue centered on the growing presence of black draftees and recruits who were arriving at Fort Huachuca, the largest segregated military outpost in the area. During their discussion, partisan lines faded into the background as

both Democrats and Republicans saw in the border issue an excellent opportunity to criticize the Army's employment of black troops, to raise the possibility of African American GIs who were stationed at Fort Huachuca as well to reassure white ranchers, miners, and members of the elite in the area that the existing racial and ethnic status quo would be preserved.

2 For example, no one was more outspoken than State Senators Dan Angius and James Minotto of Cochise and Maricopa Counties respectively. Tying immigration, race, and sexual promiscuity together, Angius introduced a section to a bill that linked immigration to venereal disease. In his remarks supporting the amendment, he hammered home the point that the Army's failure to cooperate with the border policies and activities of federal officials was the problem. Calling for anti-prostitution legislation, he circulated a booklet compiled by the federal security agency's health division, arguing that the rates of communicable diseases like syphilis and gonorrhea dropped sharply when such ordinances directed at certain racial and ethnic groups. Going a step forward, Angius exaggerated the threat that venereal disease posed to the effectiveness of the military and specifically charged that, by allowing black soldiers to cross the Mexican border, Army officials at Fort Huachuca were negligent in discharging their duties and responsibilities as military officers. What's more, he claimed, the Grand Canyon State bore the financial burden of providing care for soldiers who contracted venereal disease once they reappeared at the military base. Minotto echoed Angius's sentiments, proposing that the senate draft a resolution, demanding that the Nogales, Naco, and other Mexican border cities bar the servicemen from their points of entry. "It is either that", he said, "or have the FBI move in and clean up the areas". Agreeing with Angius's proposal, the senate passed the bill by a vote of 9 to 7 ("Senate Adopts New Plan for Taxing Banks", *Tucson Daily Citizen*, 11 February 1943; "Political Ban Facing Debate in Legislature", *Arizona Daily Star*, 12 February 1943, p. 16; Cosulich, Bernice. "Solons Afraid Time is Short to Finish Job", *Arizona Daily Star*, 12 February 1943).

3 That Angius and Minotto used ideologies of race and sexual promiscuity to promote ideas about immigration is hardly surprising. The presumed sexual promiscuity of black soldiers and branding them as the culprits for infecting civilian populations with infectious

diseases colored Anglo-American perceptions of blacks in the American South and Southwest, especially during the first half of the twentieth century. As Tera Hunter reminds us, discourse surrounding communicable disease provided an avenue for not only proscribing black autonomy but also marking black bodies in wider discussions on public health (Hunter ch. 9). And as Neil Foley and others point out, these stereotypical views only intensified during the Second World War. Border issues and the increasingly hostile ethnic and race relations among black GIs, white elite, miners, and cattle ranchers, and Mexican citizens in Southern Arizona–Mexican border towns and cities like Bisbee, Nogales, Sierra Prieta, and Douglas, merely provided the terrain upon which the battles between white assertions of privilege, Mexican prejudice against peoples of African descent, and black claims to equality were fought for all to see. Indeed, episodes that illuminated the troubled relationship between young black men and predominantly white city and townspeople, the diminution of black lives at the hands of white policemen, and black resistance in the face of state sanctioned police brutality were present in all of these cases. Most, if not all, focused on the war-induced wave of state and semi-state-sponsored terrorism against black males in largely northern and southern settings. We are also given a window into the public marking of the black body as dangerous criminals and perceptions of them as seemingly inexhaustible commodities for extermination. And as scholars past and present such as Howard Odum, Ulysses G. Lee, Harvard Sitkoff, Dominic Capeci (*Layered Violence*; *Race Relations*; *The Harlem Riot*), James Burran, Neil Wynn, and Robin D. G. Kelley have well documented, the interracial violence and the demographic changes taking place on an American southern landscape wrought during World War II have long held our scholarly attention (Foley, *Quest for Equality*).

4 But while such interventions have been timely, the need to understand the relations between black soldiers, Anglo Americans, and Mexican indigenous populations in settlements along the Arizona–Mexico international border continues. What's more, scholars are slow to comprehend how newcomers and inhabitants in border areas have developed their own unique set of ever-evolving customs, traditions, and practices. How black soldiers of World War II

saw themselves in relation to these evolving social constructions and how they aligned their identities to adjust to the changing conditions along the international border are important if we are to seriously accept the challenges of scholars Linda Alcoff (ch. 1, 4 and 8), Mustafa Emirbayer, and Walter Mignolo. Despite the theoretical salvoes levied by a talented group of interdisciplinary scholars, the empirical research of a generation of scholars in women's, legal, and African American history, and the forays made by recent scholarship in borderlands studies, Walter Mignolo has provoked new ways of imagining the intersection of local histories and globalism when he writes that border thinking occurs "the moment you realize (and accept) that your life is a life in the border, and you realize that you don't want to 'become modern' because modernity hides behind the splendors of happiness, the constant logic of coloniality" (Preface). Border thinking, thus, becomes an analytical tool and a useful knowledge system for understanding the historical formation of identity and unlocking its potentialities for challenging specific forms of colonialism, racism, and sexism present in the modern world.

5 The problems underlying the tensions generated by World War II and American racism have been well chronicled but we also would be totally remiss if we overlooked the intersections of geography and racial identity in the consciousness of young blacks during periods of the war. More to the point, the tense moments of state and semi-state clashes between black GIs and military police while wearing the nation's uniform and the meaning that these encounters held for those serving in the ranks of the armed forces have largely escaped the gaze of critical scholarship. How and to what degree were the fluid notions of masculinity among black soldiers enveloped in the frustrations they felt when standing face-to-face with state-sanctioned oppression and brutality? And to what degree did they use geography to translate those daily frustrations with state power into new definitions of self?

6 Examining the encounters between African Americans who served in the U.S. armed forces and military, state, city, and local law authorities in southern Arizona during the early 1940s, this essay examines the geographical identities of young black GIs as they struggled to come to terms with the social injustices they perceived both on and off-post. As young black servicemen began to shed their

civilian selves in order to develop new identities as American fighting soldiers, they also had to somehow square the values encoded in the new identities with the institutional and ideological contradictions they saw taking place all around them. The hybrid and increasingly fluid traditions, customs, and practices that existed in the town and city settlements located near the Arizona–Northern Mexico border added a new dimension to the identities of these soldiers that differed from the environs from which they came. And as a result, the space-specific social arrangements based on race and gender had a major influence on their identities as they advanced through latter stages of training towards overseas deployment. Indeed, these frustrations and ruptures of the self provide us with an invaluable model for scholars who wish to understand the historical development of the black male body and those of us who are acutely aware of the need to create an instructive pedagogy for resisting and combatting such anti-immigration politics in the twenty-first century.

7 In order to understand the clashes between black GIs and white MPs in the Southwest, one must begin by exploring the social and political changes that buffeted American society during the wartime period. African Americans who entered the military bases of the Trans-Mississippi West came of age during the economic and social upheavals of the early 1940s. Even before the guns of war exploded in Europe and Asia, young black men had already been exposed to the uneven patterns of the American military expansion. Between August 1939 and November 1941, nearly 500,000 black Northerners and Southerners had enlisted in the Armed Forces. With the passage of the 1940 Selective Service Act, more than 1.7 million blacks between the ages of 21 and 35 appeared before their local draft boards between October and December of that year, making up approximately nine percent of their total population in the country (*U.S. Selective Service in Peacetime: First Report of the Director of Selective Service*, 1940–1941, p. 77).

8 Most of the selectees came from the South (Alabama, Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Arkansas, Texas, Virginia, and Mississippi) with smaller numbers hailing from the Northern Middle Atlantic and East North Central states (New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Illinois) of the nation (*Selective Service System*, *Special*

*Groups*, *Special Monograph no. 10*, *Vol. II: Appendices* A–G, table 43, 99; table 46, 103). By the end of 1943, the numbers of black recruits would reach nearly 2,500,000, constituting well over ten percent of all servicemen (*Selective Service System*, *Selective Service as the Tide of War Turns: The 3rd Report of the Director of Selective Service, 1943–1944*, table 185, 591). Among the expanding numbers of black service personnel destined for the west were the men who served as members of the U.S. Ninety-third Infantry Division. During the period, scores of Pullman coaches arrived at Fort Huachuca from regions scattered throughout the country, carrying more than 6,000 men at a rate of 200 a day.

9 For many whose trip to Fort Huachuca marked the first time they had ventured far from home, the experience evoked mixed feelings of trepidation and excitement. Clarence Gaines, a young draftee from Cleveland, Ohio, recalled:

> I left the reception center at Columbus feeling rather low with the knowledge that we were to be so far from home when our journey ended. But when I arrived at Fort Huachuca, I remembered being pleased with the camp because it was more beautiful than anything I had ever seen.

Reflecting on his departure from a Maryland induction center, a former hospital attendant similarly noted:

> Most of us were excited and very eager to get under way, although we all wanted to be in Baltimore just once more before leaving. But in the days after arriving at Fort Huachuca, we spent our time getting adjusted to army routine, asking questions, and looking for fellows we knew. (Jefferson ch 3)

10 Upon their arrival, soldiers also found that Fort Huachuca, like so many military installations, resided in remote areas that were largely isolated from major metropolitan areas. Several of the largest military garrisons housing black troops such as Camp Wolters and Davis-Monthan Airfield were located in the Eighth Corps area, mostly along the Southern Arizona–Texas–Mexico border. More often than not, these places were similar to the poor to deplorable military outposts that staged black soldiers who served in the post-Civil War West

during the late nineteenth century. As Edward Soulds, a soldier from Great Falls, Montana, who reported to the installation, put it at the time,

> prior to arriving at Fort Huachuca, I learned that it was located miles from any town and I do mean any town. Picture if you can an army camp located at the base of some rather steep hills in an area where it never rains—hot as blazes night and day and shade is not to be found anywhere. Even dogs refused to stay around because there weren't any trees. (Soulds 17)

11 It's important to remember that the growing numbers of African American GIs who arrived at the gates of the southwestern military installation also corresponded with the burgeoning percentages of the black population in the region. Between 1940 and 1950, California, Nevada, New Mexico, and Arizona witnessed a veritable explosion in black population growth as the initiatives waged by the Congress of Industrial Organizations and the Fair Employment Practices Committee resulted in expanded work opportunities in defense industries, aircraft factories and shipbuilding. Southern Arizona underwent a dramatic transformation during the early 1940s. As the aircraft industry mushroomed, the black population in the southern region jumped from less than one percent of the state's total population in 1935 to nearly four percent in 1942 (*U.S. Bureau of the Census, Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Population, Volume II: Characteristics of the Population, Part 1: United States Summary and Alabama–District of Columbia*, 371–374).

12 However, the expanded work opportunities for segments of the African American community were not reflected in areas relating to housing made available to them. In the same areas, Las Vegas's West Side, Los Angeles's Central Avenue, and Houston's Fourth Ward became virtual ghettoes as African Americans faced the discriminatory practices of redlining, restrictive covenants, and heightened racial tensions at every turn (Taylor ch. 9).

13 Even if they had the time, energy, and money to venture off-post, black GIs found the Southwestern socio-economic landscape to be very much familiar to worlds they had just left behind. Business owners in towns including Mineral Wells, Texas, and Bisbee and

Flagstaff, Arizona, turned Black GIs away whenever they appeared at their establishments. In Phoenix, black newcomers who migrated to the city discovered a color line that was staunchly drawn and fiercely enforced by townspeople and police officials. Indelible signs of racial segregation marked public housing and grocery stores as virtually all black Phoenix residents were relegated to sewer-infested shacks located in the southwestern neighborhoods of the city. In fact, Dean E. Smith, a historian of the city described it as an "area settled by ex-Confederates who were determined to build Phoenix in the Southern image". "They came flooding out here after the Civil War and they brought prejudices with them", Smith argued (Taylor 236, 265; Whitaker 58). Indeed, Southern etiquette, traditions, and practices permeated the political, economic, and social fabric of Southern Arizona in ways that were remarkably similar to how W. E. B. Du Bois and Charles Chesnutt described the white supremacist practices of the Jim-Crow South at the turn of the century.

14 However, in other ways, black GIs and recent newcomers found the cities and towns that dotted the southern Arizona landscape to be reflective of a strange mélange of rugged individualism, cotton, copper mining and cattle ranching culture, and what Arna Bontemps and Jack Conroy have labeled as the "mudtown" milieus of early twentieth century America. They were also overlaid with a get-rich quick mentality that permeated the immediate defense buildup of the Second World War period. When combined with the all-too familiar vestiges of Jim Crow, this environment worked to produce numerous moments of mixed emotions among those who came from the sharecropping and tenant farming backgrounds in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and other Deep South states. For example, in Phoenix, black soldiers quickly discovered municipal services and adequate housing accommodations to be virtually non-existent. What's more, the desert state capitol differentiated from the Deep South in that the city's public sphere reflected unique racial customs, traditions, and practices that were couched in multiple connotations of ethnicity. As a case in point, George Schuyler, a syndicated columnist for the *Pittsburgh Courier*, described the racial mores in Phoenix in the following manner:

> While the city owns a golf course where Negroes are not barred, there were separate parks for Negroes, whites, and Mexicans. Negroes can attend the Mexican parks, but not those for whites where the swimming pools are also closed to all except Caucasians. (Bontemps Preface; Schuyler 2)

15 If there was a place where race relations were more rigidly stratified than Phoenix, it was Tucson. As black troops from nearby Fort Huachuca flocked to the southwestern city, they found it to be considerably less hospitable. Elaborately built public parks, swimming pools, and bathhouses bore "Whites Only" signs and public conveyances, dime stores, eating places, and schools were declared off-limits to the uniformed newcomers. Not only did servicemen face the daily indignities of Jim Crow, but they also encountered an alchemic racial dynamite grounded in sex and caste. Throughout the division's initial training, the reaction of people in Tucson to the massive influx of African American GIs was based in racial stereotype and sexual innuendo. As the foot traffic of black servicemen increased, the rapidly changing economic conditions, the housing shortages, and the heightened racial tensions that existed in the city created a cauldron of hostility that more than a few observers feared could boil over at a moment's notice.

16 Black reporters visiting the southern Arizona desert cities throughout the wartime period predicted that a crisis was looming. After touring Tucson, for example, *Baltimore Afro-American* correspondent Henry Jethro wrote in August 1944: "Citizens here are tiptoeing around town on top of racial dynamite. The next gale that sweeps from this western city will doubtless bring the clash of whites, colored citizens, and Mexicans". Hazel Daniels, a white Tucson resident, had earlier voiced the same sentiments. In an *Arizona Daily Star* editorial published around the same time, Daniels noted the ways that the war intensified social relations in the city and warned: "it is problems such as the ones at issue now in the city which will create unrest, antagonism, and hate on the part of Negroes causing them to commit anti-social acts" (Jefferson 107–108).

17 Daniels was partially correct. The social unrest and racial antagonism black troops encountered in cities like Phoenix and Tucson usually took on the appearance of law enforcement. To wear the nation's

uniform in these settings meant to face endless humiliation and abuse. City and Military policemen in both cities patrolled the streets, seeking to tighten their control over the local segregation etiquette, practices, and customs with nightsticks and guns.

18 Not long afterwards, the resentment, suspicion, and fear that white Arizona residents like Harriet Daniels expressed toward black civilian and military newcomers soon boiled over into acts of violence that summer. After spending most of the day searching for housing in Tucson in June 1942, Addie Alexander and Jeannette Kinchion decided to go to a nearby American Legion Hall to order dinner. However, not long after the two women had settled into a booth for an evening free from their frustrations of searching for a place to live, they were promptly informed by a military police officer that the restaurant was "off-limits to prostitutes and that they had to leave". Refusing to simply endure the verbal assault, however, Alexander and Kinchion decided to remain seated. After a bitter exchange of words and blows, they, along with a group of servicemen also visiting from Fort Huachuca, were arrested, charged, and sentenced to sixty days in jail for "inciting a riot" ("Trial Awaited After Battle", *Arizona Daily Star*, 17 June 1942, p. 12; "Two Women Given 60 Days for Part in Negro Battle", *Arizona Daily Star*, 26 June 1942, p. 6).

19 Throughout that summer, most of the skirmishes that had broken out between black migrants, soldiers and city law enforcement officials tended to reflect conflicting sentiments of personal dignity. Following immediately on the heels of the confrontation between Tucson police, Alexander and Kinchion, bystanders stood in awe during the early morning hours of 1 July, as Maxine Willie Welch and Ples Elsworth Russell found themselves being taken away by Tucson city law enforcement officials and charged with assault and battery after they challenged two men who had verbally accosted them. The heated exchange of words quickly escalated into blows as the two black women proceeded to pummel the men on their heads with their fists, shoes, handbags and bottles. Less than twenty-four hours later, a Justice of the Peace ruled that the two women were guilty and ordered them to leave the city after they completed a sixty-day stint in the county jail ("Negroes Jailed in Assault Case", *Arizona Daily Star*, 2 July 1942, p. 14).

20 Often the clashes between soldiers and townspeople produced deadly results. On 11 November 1942, a group of eyewitnesses in Bisbee looked on in horror as Clay H. Moore—a white mining employee—whipped out a pocket knife and stabbed twenty-five-year-old black GI Willie Diggs, in front of a saloon, killing him instantly. After obtaining a twenty-four leave from the desert installation, Diggs was stationed at nearby Fort Huachuca and had just arrived in the Arizona–Mexican border area to help his ailing grandmother find precious housing in the coal-mining town when he was violently accosted. From the standpoint of most black GIs training in the arid Arizona desert during the period, Diggs's fateful encounter with death was all too typical and very much reflective of the volatile relations he and others shared with whites in general and the specific moments when racial tensions periodically had bubbled to surface in the region. Frequently, GIs like Diggs found themselves subject to ridicule, severe punishment, or worse at the hands of the press, white law enforcement officials and servicemen. However, this incident was touched off by what his assailant, Clay Moore, perceived as an egregious affront to military culture and tradition as well as to the peculiar wage work-time discipline of the region: Diggs had worn a wide-brimmed, zoot-suit styled felt civilian hat atop his standard-issued army uniform. In a world where workplace and military clothing served as signifiers of whiteness, manhood, and American patriotism, Diggs's refusal to adhere to the cultural forms and discursive practices and styles of World War II America not only annoyed white townspeople like Moore but it also flagrantly transgressed the racial and gender fault lines that existed along the Southern Arizona–Mexico border.

21 Immediately after the murder, one of the on-lookers contacted Civilian Aide William H. Hastie who then requested that the War Department investigate the events leading up to Diggs' death (*Letter, Gordon T. Rucker to Judge William H. Hastie*, 16 November 1942). Furthermore, the civilian aide dispatched his assistant Truman Gibson to look into the matter but to no avail. Although War Department officials assured Hastie that Moore would be prosecuted for the crime, he was later absolved of all wrongdoing in the matter (*Memorandum, Lieutenant Colonel William Slater for Judge*

*William H. Hastie*, undated; "Murder Cases to Be Set for Trial", *Arizona Daily Star*, 23 January 1943, p. 4).

22 At the same time, the assistant civilian aide expressed some skepticism regarding the eyewitness accounts of the incident, claiming that they "were not fully advised of the circumstances". "You have apparently connected Diggs' death with what you deemed a concerted Fifth Column movement against Negro soldiers in Bisbee", he claimed (*Letter, Truman K. Gibson, Jr. to Gordon T. Rucker*, 26 November 1942). Despite being arrested for the murder, the Phoenix, Arizona, native was released of all charges.

23 Throughout the entire ordeal, however, the killing of Diggs and the refusal of the Bisbee police department to investigate the crime astonished many black migrants who lived and labored in the mining town. "I asked the Chief of Police when the trial would be held", Gordon Rucker, an observer, noted, "he said that he didn't think there'd [sic] be one. How in the name of Blackstone can a man be indicted for murder in any degree I can't guess unless a formal inquest *is* held?" (*Letter, Gordon T. Rucker to Judge William H. Hastie*, 16 November 1942). Shortly afterwards, the concerns voiced by the bystander may have been heard by army officials, who feared further deterioration of race relations in the area. In December 1942, Hardy placed military police personnel permanently in the town when Bisbee officials asked him to head off a future skirmish between miners and black GIs and families (*Memorandum, G. R. Michaels to Edwin Cooley, Regional Supervisor*, 17 June 1943). These measures yielded very little success, however. By the spring of 1943, the small mining hamlet had become a veritable ghost town as it experienced a considerable degree of out-migration after Bisbee town officials declared that the city was "out of bounds" to members of the U.S. Ninety-third Infantry division and requested that Fort Huachuca post officials discourage service personnel and their dependents, friends, and neighbors from moving to the area (*Letter, Wesley T. Allen, President, Bisbee Merchants' Association, Incorporated to G. R. Michaels, Secretary of the Bisbee Chamber of Commerce*, 23 April 1943; Lee 281–282).

24 Quite often the source of the racial strife revolved around appropriate wardrobe as young black servicemen worked to create

their own unique identities. During the period, three young black men, Elzie Smith, Leonard Parker, and Earlie Pierce, were shoved to the ground and arrested in Tucson for allegedly crossing the street against traffic. The incident had occurred days after the young men had arrived in the city from Fort Huachuca where they visited fellow GIs who served in the Ninety-third's 368th Infantry Regiment. While the men were released of all charges, press reports labeled the men as vagrants and local police paid more attention to the conked hairstyles and highly stylized baggy attire sported by the young newcomers more than anything else ("Police Don't Like 'Zoot Suits'; Nab Trio of Wearers", *Arizona Daily Star*, 17 March 1943). Describing them as a "band of young, bushy-haired hoodlums", Harold Wheeler, the city's police chief, directed his officers to stop migrants who adorned the colorful clothing for questioning and to have them present induction classification cards that indicated their draft status. "If they are guilty of any infraction, however small, of any city ordinance, pick 'em up", Wheeler told his subordinates ("Zoot Suit Gangs Drawing Ire of Sheriff, Checkup Planned", *Arizona Daily Star*, 16 March 1942; "Nine Are Held in 'Zoot' Round-Up", *Arizona Daily Star*, 5 April 1943).

25 Police surveillance of black newcomers mirrored the brackish waters that swirled around southern Arizona's racial and sexual politics. The problem that law authorities and white citizens in Tucson had with the large influx of soldiers had more to do with the threat that they allegedly posed to the region's fragile racial and ethnic boundaries more than anything else. And more often than not, like many areas across the country, the racial etiquette, customs, and traditions practiced among the Southern Arizona city townspeople and politicians reflected their fearful images of consensual sexual relations between black men and white women. Since its inception, Arizona state law included measures aimed at controlling the social activities of African Americans and Mexicans, including premarital sex, prostitution, and juvenile delinquency as well as policies banning inter-ethnic marriage and cohabitation. Throughout the city streets of Tucson and Nogales, police officers patrolled the dance halls, cinemas, and amusement resorts of the Mexican-African American immigrant neighborhoods to enforce the separate-but-equal legislation. Over time, tensions increased as police officers rounded

up many transplanted black migrants and Mexican women with loved ones in uniform, arresting them on trumped up charges of solicitation and contributing to juvenile delinquency. “My duty is to not ask persons whether or not they are juveniles or adults”, asserted Maude Howard, a prominent city policewoman at the time, “but to see if they are white, Mexican, or colored”. “Colored persons should have their little affairs to themselves so that they don’t have to bother with white persons”, Howard claimed (Robert B. Elliott, “Policewoman Separates Mexicans and Whites at USO Dances in Arizona”, *Baltimore Afro-American*, 26 August 1944).

26 But it is also in the strange mix of border settlement culture and the fateful encounters between black GIs and civilian and military policemen in Southern Arizona towns that we see the forging of a new identity. For some time, scholars concerned with the intertwined life-histories of Anglo, Mexicano, Chicana/o, Black, and Chinese peoples along the Mexican–Texas border, have described the political, economic, and social processes of labor, the racial and gendered segmentation of labor, the psychological and increasingly hybrid wages of whiteness among ethnic workers, and the coalescing moments of solidarity among black, brown and white workers. These borderlands studies have greatly enlarged our understanding of life and culture in the cotton-growing areas. In a recent work edited by Samuel Truett and Elliott Young, scholars have opened new doors for researching and understanding borderlands culture and economies. As a result, the binaries of southern and western crucibles of identity have been obliterated and where they are constructed have been sufficiently problematized (Foley, *The White Scourge*; Behnken; Delgado; Jacoby). However, few scholars have studied the intersections of blackness, borderlands, and boundaries in specific geographical locales like the towns and cities that rested along the Arizona–Mexico border.

27 At the same time, the conflicting and meshing of identities among these border-town inhabitants and the new levels of consciousness they engendered take on a different meaning when seen through the lens of Chicana and post-colonial feminist studies. Gloria Anzaldùa effectively reminds us that Borderlands mean much more than a specific geographical location. On this point, she maintains that

> The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands, and spiritual borderlands are not particular to the Southwest. In fact, the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle, and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy. (Anzaldùa Preface)

In Anzaldùa's mind's eye, the confluent streams of music, food, sex, language and religion give rise to a new trans-disciplinary consciousness and identities that are not bound by existing ritual, custom, or tradition. Thus, borderlands are marginalized physical and psychological sites where discursive practices and identities are in a constant state of flux.

28 Meanwhile, the politics of domination, migration, subjectivity, exile, and location have animated the writings of Black Women Studies scholars in ways that displace Old World identities and expand our understandings of home, community, and exile. From Zora Neale Hurston to Toni Cade Bambara to bell hooks to Hazel Carby to finally Carole Boyce Davies, Black Feminist writers have examined migration and female subjectivity through a polyvocal lens of trans-nationality, separation and dislocation. Perhaps Pulitzer Prize winning novelist Toni Morrison may have said it best in her masterful work titled *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* when she called for the remapping of identity by "drawing a map of critical geography and use that map to open much space for discovery, intellectual adventure, and close exploration as did the charting of the New World without the mandate for conquest" (Morrison 3). In the process, traditional ideas of geography and boundaries are completely dismantled and redefined as questions of race, gender, sexuality, age, and generation are brought more fully to bear on the social calculus of how and where identities and the self are constructed. And they also raise intriguing questions about how border or liminal spaces provide incisive commentary and compelling challenges to power and dominance in the equation.

29 Such possibilities for re-envisioning the black military experience in the Southwest through Borderlands history and Black Feminist thought might be found through the border city and town

experiences of black GIs and their relations with civil and military law enforcement officials along the Southern Arizona–Mexico Corridor. Throughout the Second World War, there were substantial sleepy towns like Fry (present day Sierra Vista), Agua Prieta, Hereford, and Naco that lay in close proximity to the segregated military camps. For example, before the war, Fry possessed a population of less than 200. By 1942, the population skyrocketed to between 2,500 and 3,000. Part of the explanation for this growth lay in the fact that the area resided less than one mile from Fort Huachuca. Fry's growth was not unique but few border towns of comparable size could boast of serving military base housing more than 100,000 soldiers. Likewise, the towns of Agua Prieta, Nogales, and Naco lay between approximately 25 to 60 miles south of the military camp; each offering much to those who were stationed at the segregated base in the vicinity.

30 For soldiers like George Shuffer and others who trained at Fort Huachuca, the towns afforded rare opportunities for rest, whiskey, and women. Many Ninety-third Infantry Division soldiers took advantage of the physical space provided by the brothels, saloons, dance halls and gambling dens to pursue rare moments of intimate pleasure. But the spaces also offered them rare episodes to transgress the rigid fault lines of race and gender that pervaded much of American society. For example, years later, Shuffer offered the following description of the border towns: "sizable towns closer to the garrison were Nogales and Naco astride the United States (Arizona) and Mexico (Sonora) border. People on the Mexican side offered soldiers complete racial integration in every respect. Whites on the U.S. side, too, were friendly and respectful. Then, too, their community businesses were nurtured with Huachuca's payroll. There were very few segregated or off-limits public places" (*Memorandum, FBI Report: Fort Huachuca, Arizona, James S. Simmons to Harvey H. Bundy, Special Assistant to the Secretary of War*, 29 August 1944; Shuffer 42).

31 Even if a black GI knew virtually nothing about the consciously interracial unity that permeated the border towns, he certainly noticed the difference in the way he was treated by civilian and military police in the region. Little did they realize it at the time but the changes were the result of a new strategy adopted by the post

officials, the Roosevelt Administration, as well as several black entrepreneurs. Beginning in early June 1942, the Provost Marshal Department, Fort Huachuca post authorities, and the Assistant Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War instructed MPs to change their arrest and detaining tactics as an evolving strategy for regulating the illicit economy in the region rather than ending it. They hoped to turn the overcrowded housing and hard-drinking and gambling establishments that made up the towns into "100% Negro towns, to include business houses, town officials, and police departments". As one post commander put it,

> […] in view of the fact that Fort Huachuca is isolated from civilian communities. It is my opinion that a great benefit towards the contentment and well-being of soldiers on duty at Fort Huachuca would be accomplished if there could be provided in the nearby towns, reasonable forms of amusement.

32 As the summer months faded into the fall of 1942, twenty Black MPs were recruited from the British West Indies and trained to aid the town-building initiative. Among the duties they performed for the GIs included offering transportation and prophylactics to those who wished to frequent the dance halls, brothels, and gambling establishments in the border towns. In exchange, the Army offered them permanent residence as United States citizens ("Naturalization Rite Planned at Bisbee", *Arizona Republic*, 6 May 1943, p. 3; "Negro Soldiers Get Citizenship Papers, *Tucson Daily Citizen*, 10 September 1943, p. 5). Such opportunities were virtually non-existent in the American South at the time. Not long afterwards, the efforts made by MPs on their behalf during payday and weekend passes off-post certainly had a salutatory effect on the attitudes of soldiers present in the area, thus resulting in relatively improved race relations between black, white, Mexicano, and American Indian inhabitants. For example, Howard Hickson, a soldier with the unit, reflected years later,

> We would go to little border towns like Bisbee, Douglas, and Agua Prieta. Most military towns had places that were off-limits to military personnel. The social life we had would be over in Mexico. That's where you'd kick up your heels, there were Mexican girls, and that's where the good living was for a while. The MPs would take you

> down to the border and then shuttle you back and forth. We weren't too far from the border.

While we have very few extant records about how the soldiers were perceived by the women, children, and men who lived in the border areas, African Americans in uniform recounted how they were treated as the centers of attraction and how townspeople marveled at them as oddities with dark skin (Hickson, Interview with Maggi M. Morehouse, San Francisco, CA, 31 March 1995).

33 The modifications in the American military racial system and the syncretic cultural processes that it wrought for those who appeared in the Arizona–Mexico corridor captured the attention of black and white pundits alike from all across the country. For example, *Collier's Magazine* reporter Roark Bradford visited the border area on his way to Fort Huachuca during the summer of 1942. After witnessing the improved relations between black and white GIs, Mexican residents, and American Indian townspeople in the unincorporated city of Nogales, Bradford commented, "one or another, soldiers of all races and nationalities managed to have fun. A large number of Nogales citizens and Negro troops form friendships on the basis of character instead of color".

34 That African American GIs received better treatment at the hands of civilian and military police is not to say that the Arizona–Mexico border was free of racism. On many occasions, Black service personnel and close family members expressed their frustrations with the new law enforcement measures. For example, one evening in August 1942, a light brown woman and her soldier husband—a division officer—had just arrived in Nogales from Fort Huachuca when they were approached by a police officer at the entrance of a rental development and asked to provide racial and marital identification. After a careful examination, the police officer still remained unconvinced and informed the couple that the development was for whites and Mexicans only and ordered them to leave the premises. Around the same period, the words conveyed by a twenty-one-year-old married Mexican immigrant woman from Agua Prieta describing her experience while returning home from a long days' work at a local drug store serve as a vivid reminder of what

might happen to those who violated the city's racial and gender etiquette:

> I was going home from work one evening when I met a soldier that I recognized. We stopped on the street to chat a few minutes and as we were about to leave, a cop came up and arrested us. I don't know what they did with the soldier but they took me to jail and told me that if I were ever caught talking with another colored person they would keep me in jail. (Henry Jethro, "Arizona Cops Keep Busy Separating Three Races", *Baltimore Afro-American*, 26 August 1944)

35 And sometimes, hostility between black GIs and border police often spilled over into episodes of violence. Throughout the summer of 1942, American embassy officials reported a number of disturbances at Nogales, Arizona, and Nogales and Sonora, Mexico between local merchants and townspeople and black soldiers from Fort Huachuca, Arizona (Cross-Reference File, Dispatch #375 from Nogales (Armstrong), 16 July 1942, *Subject: Disturbances at Nogales, Arizona, and Nogales, Sonora, Involving Negro Soldiers from Fort Huachuca, Arizona*).

36 That the U.S. State Department filed such observations is hardly surprising. More often than not, black soldier-newcomers discovered that the racial discriminatory affronts they encountered from policemen in border settlements received the blessings of local political figures. Not only that, but their sheer presence also complicated the cultural exchanges between the State Department and the Mexican diplomatic corps during the war. For example, during the spring of 1943, Ciudad Juarez Mayor Antonio M. Bermudez, responded negatively to rumors that the U.S. Army planned to raise the numbers of black soldiers at Fort Bliss, Texas from 4,000 to 10,000. He expressed his concern that such an increase in their numbers in the area "would cause serious trouble between the negro soldiers and the Mexican residents, thereby jeopardizing the present cordial relations between the citizenry of the two border cities and its consequent effect on tourist trade". But Bermudez also pointed out that the increased numbers of black troops would overwhelm Ciudad Juarez's police force, raising the possibility of "a race riot, and other disturbances of a serious nature". U.S. Ambassador George S. Messersmith acknowledged the Mayor's

reservations, agreeing to the removal of the additional troops, but he also observed that while Mexico was firmly committed to the anti-discriminatory character of revolutionary nationalism, such espoused devotion to rights did not extend to *all* people of color. "In this connection", Messersmith told the Secretary of State, "it must be noted that although the Mexican people object very strongly to any racial discrimination or any discrimination of any kind against themselves, they for various reasons are inclined to discriminate against negroes" (Airmail, Stephen E. Aguirre, American Consul, to the Secretary of State, 18 May 1942, *Subject: Rumors of Assignment of a Large Contingent of Negro Soldiers at Fort Bliss. Possibility of Disturbances at Ciudad Juarez, Mexico Involving Such Soldiers*; Memorandum, U.S. Ambassador George S. Messersmith for the Secretary of State, 26 May 1943, *Subject: With Reference to the Rumored Intention of the War Department to Assign a Considerable Contingent of Negro Soldiers to Fort Bliss*; Foley, *Quest for Equity* ch. 1).

37 On the other hand, observers who watched the interaction between inhabitants on the Southern Arizona–Northern Mexico border may have witnessed a dialogue that demonstrated how regional assertions of racial identity making and geography outdistanced the political stances taken by policymakers in official Washington and Phoenix at the time. For as political scientists Jennifer L. Hochschild and Brenna M. Powell have ably reminded us elsewhere, such cultural exchanges and their implications for demographic and geographic transformation often evade official scrutiny and rarely attract the attention of the academy (Hochschild and Powell 90). But as Hochschild and Powell have also asserted, their potential for political identity formation are enormous. For example, in May 1942, Nogales was the scene of a nine-day celebration where groups of regional, city, town, and civic officials stood on platforms where they witnessed waves of black GIs from Fort Huachuca and from Davis-Monthan Airfield, town residents, and Mexican Americans from the border towns of Agua Prieta, Sonora, and Naco, parade through the city streets and stood by as they participated in ceremonial dances, horse racing, bull fights and floral shows. As the soldiers, special guests, and spectators engaged in the rituals of dance, drink, and song that marked the *Fiesta de las Flores*, they gave new meaning to the imaginary borders of race, nation, and origin. A little over a year

later, the Papago Indians held a fiesta celebration at a mission located nine miles southwest of Tucson during which nearly 300 guests from nearby military installations, border towns, and Sonora, Mexico, celebrated Pan-Indian culture and historic identities as Indians and to stake their claims to American citizenship. Over a series of two days and nights, they marked the event by performing ancient rituals predating the colonialist efforts of the Spanish Conquistadors ("Nogales Fiesta Will Continue for Nine Days", *Tucson Daily Citizen*, 29 April 1942, p. 5; "Officials of Tucson Attend Nogales Fete", *Tucson Daily Citizen*, 1 May 1942, p. 3; "Nogales Will Launch Fiesta with Crowning", *Tucson Daily Citizen*, 2 May 1942, p. 11; "Papagos Hold Ancient Rites", *Arizona Daily Star*, 3 December 1943, p. 6). In such spaces, black GIs and border townspeople in the region created an environment that not only transcended existing debates over immigration and citizenship within the nation state but also transgressed the racial and gender strictures of the period. More importantly, they became a part of communities that allowed them to discuss and critique the former homelands from which they came. As a result, for black GIs stationed at Fort Huachuca and other segregated outposts, such geopolitical border crossings and interethnic encounters became the foundational elements of the new identities that they assumed as they began to contemplate the immediate possibilities of war and death that awaited them.

38 In sum, race, gender, and class have had a tremendous impact on the historical relationship between young black men, border travelling, and townspeople in the Southern Arizona–Northern Mexico region. Black encounters with border settlement cultures and the cases of police brutality against black service personnel gave rise to new hybrid identities that were grounded in historical memory, geography, wartime immigration politics, and citizenship rights. Studying the relations between all parties in border cities and towns located along the Arizona–Mexico corridor might not only be the key to understanding power relations between black, brown and white bodies, but also might provide the mental calculus for thinking about the unfixed and fluid characteristics of identity and the perplexing and seemingly contradictory crucibles in which they are forged altogether.

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## RÉSUMÉ

**English**

Through an examination of the fateful encounters between African American soldiers stationed at Fort Huachuca and indigenous populations who lived and labored in areas located in close proximity to the military installation, Robert F. Jefferson argues that the racial and ethnic traditions, customs, and practices that existed along the Arizona–Northern Mexico border during the early 1940s were far more fluid than scholars have ever imagined. Exploring the massive influx of black recruits and military families who entered the region, the piece points out that they found that the cultural mores and racial fault lines established in border towns like

Naco, Agua Prieta, Hereford, and Nogales reflected an elasticity and a syncretic dynamism that was largely absent in desert metropolitan areas like Tucson and Phoenix. In the process, the racial identity making and cultural exchanges that frequently took place along the border frequently outdistanced the racist and xenophobic politics practiced in official Washington and Phoenix at the time. But the moments of interethnic unity were also freighted with danger and uncertainty as black GIs found themselves standing face to face with the racial enmity and class antagonism that structured daily life along the Arizona–Mexico border. The piece concludes that the complexities surrounding the fateful encounters between all of the parties in the border areas during the war and how these interactions were framed and interpreted by politicians, pundits, and border townspeople later in the decade have yet to be fully understood.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés**
soldats afro-américains, villes frontières, racisme dans l'armée étasunienne, Mexicains Hispaniques et Afro-Américains, Arizona

**Keywords**
African-American soldiers, border towns, racism in the U.S. army, Mexicans, Hispanics and Blacks, Arizona

## AUTEUR

**Robert F. Jefferson Jr.**
Robert F. Jefferson Jr. is Associate Professor of History at the University of New Mexico. Jefferson earned his doctorate in African American History from the University of Michigan. He is the author of *Fighting for Hope: African Americans and the Ninety-Third Infantry Division in World War II and Postwar America* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008) which was nominated for the William Colby Book Prize and *Brothers in Valor: The Battlefield Stories of the 89 African-Americans Awarded the Medal of Honor* (Lyons Press, 2018). He is currently writing *Color and Disability: The Many Lives of Vasco Hale in Twentieth Century America* and *When Jim Crow Faced a New Army: World War II and the Non-Segregation of the United States Military*. Jefferson also is a participating speaker in the Organization of American Historians' Distinguished Lectureship Program.
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# Can the Undocumented Immigrant Speak? Exploring Decolonial Thinking in Latinx Literature and Cinema

*L'immigrant sans papiers peut-il parler ? Exploration de la pensée décoloniale dans la littérature et le cinéma latino-américains*

**María Teresa DePaoli**

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## TEXTE

1 The undocumented immigrant has historically been marginal and voiceless in Latinx literature and culture until the last fifteen years (Caminero-Santangelo, *Documenting the Undocumented: Latino/a Narratives and Social Justice in the Era of Operation Gatekeeper*) when more authors began to focus on the topic. Alberto Ledesma portrayed undocumented immigration as "not an experience that I have seen widely addressed in the pages of Chicano literary criticism". For example, two of the most canonical Chicanx novels—Tomás Rivera's *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him* (1971), and Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* (1984)—present an undocumented immigrant character who dies in the end ("la mano en la bolsa" in *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him* and "Geraldo, no last name" in *The House on Mango Street*). Such death not only embodies the devastating circumstances that actual undocumented people confront on a daily basis, but it also symbolizes their invisibility in creative writing and in the fabric of U.S. society before the twenty-first century.

2 Studying the undocumented immigrant is particularly relevant during the uncertainty of Donald Trump's administration, as sanctuary cities are under attack. These are cities where the Immigrant Rights Movement has established projects that built decent homes for immigrant farm workers and provide help with translation of documents, tax and health services, ESL and computer classes, and

endless other services. Moreover, the president appears to be sanctioning neo-Nazi and white-supremacist groups, and has pardoned convicted sheriff Joe Arpaio (found guilty of criminal contempt after illegally targeting Latinx in the state of Arizona), and he has also issued racist comments about immigrants coming to the U.S. from African countries and Haiti. On 12 January 2018, *The Washington Post* reported that Trump allegedly asked lawmakers during a meeting in the Oval Office: "Why are we having all these people from shithole countries come here? Why people from countries like Norway don't migrate as much to the U.S?" (Johnson et al.). Despite their significant contributions, undocumented immigrants today are among the most vulnerable people in U.S. society. According to Jeffrey Passel, over eleven million of undocumented people reside in the U.S. They represent roughly one third of all immigrants in the country. The majority are low-wage workers in the construction, service, agricultural, and food processing industries. Thus, they form an integral part of the U.S. economy and labor force. One of the most sympathetic undocumented immigrant groups is the so-called "DREAMers", due to their support of the DREAM Act. The DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors)—introduced in the US senate in August 2001—as a path to offer legal relief for undocumented young people, brought to the U.S. by their parents as children. While the DREAM Act has changed since its initial drafting, the essential provisions include a pathway toward legalization for individuals who entered the country before the age of 16, have been in the country for over at least five years, have good moral character, have graduated from a U.S. high school or received a GED, and have been accepted to a four-year university or completed two years of military service. The DREAMers are young adults who were brought to the U.S. as children by their parents. They have grown up in U.S. society, and very often don't even remember their countries of origin. Many of them speak little or none of their parent's native language, and have been educated in public and private U.S. schools. Although they consider the U.S. their home, their lives are uncertain because they haven't been able to adjust their immigration status, living in constant fear of deportation. Trump ended DACA (The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) on 5 September 2017. DACA is a policy founded during the Obama administration in June 2012. It allows certain

undocumented immigrants—who entered the country as minors—to receive a renewable two-year period of deferred action from deportation and eligibility for a work permit. Since the end of DACA no agreement has been reached in Congress, thus the future of DREAMers remains bleak.

3 This essay focuses on young undocumented immigrant students by primarily analyzing nonfiction texts: Joshua Davis's *Spare Parts: Four Undocumented Teenagers, One Ugly Robot, and the Battle for the American Dream*, and Julissa Arce's *My Underground American Dream* memoir. I also discuss the *Spare Parts* film, and Jose Antonio Vargas's documentary, *Documented*. As migration theory has largely failed to recognize the importance of race and racism in the process of migrant integration, my analysis incorporates theories that center on dismantling western binaries to create hybrid, new non-linear, third spaces of subaltern enunciation. Therefore, decolonial theory is useful in the examination of the always fluid notion of undocumented immigration. Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano's concept of "coloniality of power", Argentinian-Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel's "principle of solidarity", and Latina theorist Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of "Nepantla" provide essential thinking to my analysis.

4 In *Spare Parts*, Joshua Davis directly addresses the obstacles that undocumented young people confront in the U.S. After coming across this story through an email, he first published an article at *Wired* in 2005. He then conducted interviews, and subsequently published his book in 2014. Davis's text tells the story of a high school robotics team of four kids—born in Mexico and brought to the US without documents by their parents. Under the direction of two teachers, the teens from Carl Hayden Community High School in Phoenix, Arizona, achieved the impossible. They won a national underwater robotics competition against universities such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Cornell in 2004. Despite Davis's best intentions, however, the narration is, at times, punctuated by stereotypes. The story opens with the robotics team standing before a panel of judges from top governmental and industrial engineering agencies. On the one hand, the narrator describes the extraordinary expertise of the team when they explain the science behind their robot. On the other hand, he also focuses on their appearance and the (presumed) reaction of one of the judges:

"Tom Swean developed million-dollar autonomous, underwater robots for the SEALs. He was not used to dealing with Mexican American kids sporting gold chains, faked diamond rings, and patchy adolescent mustaches". Perhaps this description is meant to confront prejudicial assumptions that Davis (in turn) assumes that Swean was having during the competition interview. However, the fact is that unsolicited explanations such as these only serve to perpetuate stereotypes as that type of attire is linked to gangs. Recalling Gayatri Spivak's seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", it is essential to recognize that having an intellectual attempting to speak for the subaltern may only keep the other—the undocumented immigrant in this case—in his/her disenfranchised position. The essential significance of Spivak's essay is located in the first part, which presents the ethical problems of investigating a different culture based on "universal" concepts and frameworks. Spivak examines the validity of the western representation of the other, and proposes that the discursive institutions that regulate writing about the Other are closed to postcolonial scrutiny. She underscores that this limitation is due to the fact that critical thinking about the Other tends to articulate its relation to the Other within the hegemonic system. Also problematic is Davis's use of the words *illegal* and *undocumented* interchangeably, which complicates his role at trying to articulate a case for the undocumented students with whom he sympathizes.

5 Anibal Quijano describes "coloniality of power" as the structures of control and hegemony that were established since the colonial period. These structures stretch from the conquest of the Americas to the present, and have remained, more or less, intact through time. These hegemonic structures stay in place through racist/sexist colonial discourses that date back 450 years when western colonial administrations articulated the relationship between European/Euro-American metropolises and non-European margins. It is essential to understand the importance of "coloniality" in the transnational process of migrant incorporation into metropolitan societies:

> Migrants do not arrive in an empty or neutral space, but in metropolitan spaces that are already "polluted" by racial power relations with a long colonial history, colonial imaginary, colonial knowledge and racial/ethnic hierarchies linking to a history of

> empire; in other words, migrants arrive in a space of power relations that is already informed and constituted by coloniality. (Grosfoguel et al. 641)

6 When Davis assigns a traditional description of gang members to the high school students, he is in fact, reaffirming this "Latino", racist image. Such stereotypes are always constructed in a power relation that reinforces colonial hierarchies, only to keep the other (the undocumented Latino students) on the margins. The biological racism of centuries past, however, has been substituted by cultural racism (Grosfoguel et al. 645). New racist discourses deny their own racism. The current belief is that racism and the colonial hierarchies it produces is a thing of the past. An example can be seen in this recent Trump campaign speech:

> When Democratic policies fail, they are left with only this one tired argument: "You're racist. You're racist. You're racist…" They keep saying it: "You're racist." It's a tired, disgusting argument and it's so totally predictable. (Speech at Manchester, New Hampshire, Rally)

7 By simply avoiding the word "race", cultural racism proclaims to be non-racist, yet racism endures. Also problematic is Davis's occasional use of the word "illegal"—to refer to the high school students—which inevitably criminalizes the undocumented youth. Therefore, the narrator in *Spare Parts* continues to operate within a coloniality of power structure-discourse that reinstates the students as unlawful others.

8 Interestingly enough, the *Spare Parts* movie, released in 2015, doesn't portray the high school students wearing gold chains and/or fake diamond rings, and seldom mentions the word "illegal", and of course, in keeping with cultural racism, there is not even one mention of the word "race". Nevertheless, it grossly simplifies the original story. The Hollywood-like film opts for a happy ending, concluding at the climatic announcement of the winners, and the father of one of the team members—who has a damaged relationship with his son in the original story—showing up at the award ceremony to embrace his son, Lorenzo. Davis offers the actual reaction of Lorenzo after watching the filming of the emotional scene: "My father would never do that."

9 Unlike the movie, Davis does offer a sensible update of the lives of the robotic team winners; a sharp contrast to the film's ending. Because of their undocumented status, two of the four high school students (Cristian and Luis) found it difficult to complete university degrees. Lorenzo completed an associate degree in culinary arts. Oscar completed a bachelor degree in mechanical engineering and was recognized by President Obama during his graduation. Nevertheless, and despite having been married to an American citizen, Oscar had to return to Mexico for some time and work low-paying jobs while others advocated for his permanent residency. Davis juxtaposes all of the undocumented students' struggles with the considerable success, after college, of the MIT white students, who lost to the undocumented high school Latino students. One of the most symbolic scenes in the film is when the high school principal (played by Jamie Lee Curtis) announces the underwater robotic team's win over the school's intercom. Unfortunately, the school is almost empty; no one listens to her exciting news with the exception of a Latino janitor. No one listens; an emblematic part of the movie, since in reality nothing has been done in Washington concerning the pressing, desperate situation that talented, young undocumented students continue to confront without immigration reform.

10 Evidently, both *Spare Parts* text and film fail to articulate real decolonial propositions for the undocumented high schoolers. On the one hand, the text frequently reaffirms stereotypes and "illegal" discourses from the political right that keep the students in their marginal position. The film, on the other hand, dims the harsh reality that undocumented youth currently confront. While the film ends in a happy and hopeful note, the reality is that after the high school students won the robotics competition, serious problems began for them. In other words, that extraordinary winning (praised in classic hollywoodesque style) did not solve their migratory status, nor were their lives improved as a result. Perhaps Davis's major achievement is positioning the struggles of the robotics team within the bigger struggle of undocumented students in the U.S., including a discussion on the impact that anti-immigrant laws, such as Arizona S.B. 1070 (2010, the broadest and strictest anti-illegal Immigration provision passed in Arizona; it has received worldwide attention, and was extremely controversial), and the defeats that the DREAM Act has

faced. Always racialized, DREAMers have been the focus of national anxiety about the changing demographics of the U.S., as Ronald R. Sundstrom describes it in *The Browning of America and the Evasion of Social Justice*. There is no other reason why the DREAM Act has remained in Congress for over a decade, not being able to pass even with sporadic bipartisan support.

11 Another case of undocumented immigration is Julissa Arce, who published her memoir in 2016, entitled *My Underground American Dream: My True Story as an Undocumented Immigrant Who Became a Wall Street Executive*. Arce tells her story as an undocumented young woman who was able to work and succeed on Wall Street with fake documents. Just as the students in *Spare Parts*, Arce was brought to San Antonio, Texas by her parents under a tourist visa that they let expire. She expresses her frustration at realizing the gravity of her situation at age fourteen: "I was no longer just a 'Mexican', which seemed to be bad enough in certain people's eyes. I was an 'illegal', or worse, 'an illegal alien'—like some thing from another planet that wasn't even human" (Arce 60). Once she graduated from high school in the top 5% of her class, Arce was struggling to get accepted at any university for lacking a social security card number. In addition, her family was not able to afford international student tuition. Fortunately, she benefited from House Bill 1403 that passed in June 2001, widely known as the Texas DREAM Act. This bill provides in-state tuition rates at Texas public colleges and universities for Texas residents without legal status. Because of her excellent grades, Arce also qualified for the Texas grant, which covered a good portion of her tuition at UT Austin, where she entered the school of business. In desperate need to pay for the remainder of her college expenses, Arce found a person who supplied her with fake documents: a green card and social security card. Shortly after graduation, using these fake documents, she was able to secure a position as an analyst in the Markets Coverage Group at Goldman Sachs in NYC. On Wall Street, Arce continued evolving as a successful professional but she was very unhappy. Living in the shadows, and always keeping secret that she was an undocumented immigrant came at a high cost; since her freshman year at UT, she developed chronic pain in several parts of her body. In addition, since she was not able to travel abroad, she missed attending her father's

and grandmother's funerals in Mexico, and she wasn't able to visit with her Mexican family for several years. Her narrative expresses the deep levels of stress, anxiety, and depression that she was experiencing. She worked at Goldman Sachs for over six years, achieving the position of vice president at age twenty-seven, with compensation of over $340,000 per year by the time that she decided to resign. She emphasizes that despite having achieved professional success, this was not making her happy: "I couldn't understand why I felt so empty… so alone… over the course of that year my back pain, joint pain, and stomach problems all grew worse" (Arce 248). After taking some time off, Arce worked for Merryl Lynch for two unhappy years until the company laid her off in 2014. Inspired by Jose Antonio Vargas—an undocumented Filipino and Pulitzer-Prize-winning journalist, who came out of the shadows by publishing an article in the *New York Times*, and later releasing a documentary—Arce decided to come out as well by writing her own undocumented experience in a memoir. She was particularly impressed by Vargas's use of the word *undocumented* instead of *illegal*, and the fact that he had highlighted that he was not an *alien* but a human being. She wrote about Vargas:

> [Vargas] a kid who'd been caught in a system that didn't allow him to fix his undocumented status, through no fault of his own. It had never occurred to me just how much shame and humiliation I'd felt… That dehumanizing phrase [*illegal alien*] had seared itself in my mind when I'd first heard it used in San Antonio at the age of fourteen. I believe those words were responsible for one part of the immense fear I felt every time I faced an ID check. *Illegal Alien* is dehumanizing. *Undocumented Immigrant* is not. A piece of paper does not define the entirety of who I am. (Arce 226)

It is important to emphasize how detrimental and dehumanizing the word "Illegal alien" is to undocumented immigrants. In *Documenting the Undocumented: Life Narratives of Unauthorized Immigrants*, Marta Caminero-Santangelo analyzes Peter Orner's *Underground America*, which is a collection of narratives of undocumented lives. Caminero-Santangelo focuses on the undocumented right to human rights that, in theory, go beyond the limitations of citizenship rights. She emphasizes that "the narrators of *Underground America* repeatedly

insist on calling attention to their own bodies, as a trope for insisting on claims both to a common humanity and—albeit more subtly—to American Belonging" (Caminero-Santangelo 462, emphasis added). However, Trump launched his presidential campaign by promising to build a wall on the border between the U.S. and Mexico. He blamed "illegal" immigrants—specifically Mexicans—for bringing drugs and crime into the U.S., as well as for taking American jobs. He did not mention the fact that the disappearing jobs were mostly held by blue-collar white males and that they have been delocalized to other countries, where companies are able to hire cheaper labor, or that they disappeared like coal mining or due to automation and clean energy production. Once again, undocumented immigrants, the most vulnerable and exploited members of society are the scapegoats for U.S. economic troubles.

12 Enrique Dussel's philosophy of liberation could be applied to discuss the options available for DREAMers, specifically the principle of solidarity. According to Dussell, the principle of solidarity could be summarized as follows:

> We must produce and reproduce the lives of the oppressed and excluded, the victims, discovering the causes of their negativity and adequately transforming systems/institutions to suit them, which will, as a result, improve the life of the community as a whole. (Dussel 86)

Dussel implies that in order to comprehend the failures of the system/institution (or the structures of power discussed above), its victims need to be located first, those who suffer the most from its exclusion and oppression. Then, it is essential to address the failure from the perspective of the oppressed instead of from the perspective of the privileged group.

13 Departing from Dussel's perspective, José Jorge Mendoza argues that focusing on the system-failures from the perspective of the oppressed, provides an account from the bottom of the immigration debate: an account of liberation as opposed to an account of domination. An account of liberation is primarily concerned with "transforming the current system of injustice by empowering those who are currently the most victimized and therefore the

most disempowered" (Mendoza 5). This requires understanding the difference between political reform and what Dussel calls "Political Transformation". The former means any action that, although it provides change, leaves the system/institution essentially intact. The latter, on the contrary, starts inside social movements that embody an initiation of previously formed social networks (family, [church] friends, coworkers, neighbors, etc.). These social networks have the potential of transcending civil society and producing a crisis of legitimacy at the political level. Mendoza states:

> In other words, beyond serving a counter-hegemonic purpose, social justice movements, in respecting and representing the alterity of the oppressed and excluded, also serve an "analectical" purpose. Analectical [in Dusselian terms] implies a novel or utopic moment that comes from outside the system, as opposed to dialectical criticism, which is merely an internal critique and is devoid of a utopic moment (e.g. the immanent critique of the Frankfurt school). (Mendoza 6)

14 Social justice movements and the political part they play, directly pertain to the Immigrant Rights Movement. Moreover, they not only react to politics, but social justice movements also have an essential political role. For example, helping to outline and disseminate progressive legislation, such as the DREAM Act. The DREAM Act is an example of counter-strategy that can be designated as empowerment through "solidarity". This happens because several, if not the majority of the people who form the Immigrant Rights Movement—marchers, protesters, and those who volunteer their time and energy to help and protect undocumented immigrants—are not DREAMers, or even immigrants themselves. These people stand in solidarity with the undocumented because they respect their humanity, and the fact that as humans, they should have human rights. They see DREAMers, and all undocumented immigrants, as valuable members of their communities. Although the DREAM Act has not passed, the battle remains through community resistance.

15 To be part of the community that forms the Immigration Movement, no membership is required. Thus, another element that needs decolonization is the concept of citizenship, as it keeps the structures of power in place. While DREAMers may consider

themselves American culturally, traditional legal definitions of citizenship refuse to recognize them, essentially violating their human rights. The DREAMers' exclusion from U.S. citizenship and the refusal of the U.S. government to imagine a U.S. community that may include these migrant others, underscores that, regardless of more humane and dynamic theorizations of national belonging, citizenship is fundamentally built on exclusions that are largely based on racialized identities. The U.S. national imaginary calls for racial homogeneity. White nationalists and supremacy groups feel that they have to protect the country from what they see as the Latinization of America, which would create a bilingual nation where Latinxs exert influence on a daily basis. Through discourses and practices meant to position racialized undocumented immigrants as the binary other to the white, hetero-patriarchal normalized citizen, the decision of who gets to claim normative belonging, and the rights that such belonging allegedly entails, is made along racialized lines meant to create a seemingly homogenous U.S. population. Indeed, citizenship is one of the main pillars supporting and reifying the coloniality of power over subaltern-racialized knowledges, as Walter Mignolo has pointed out in his essay "Delinking". Although in the U.S., citizenship has traditionally been approached as a juridical position dependent on birthright or naturalization, this construct does not account for the DREAMers. These are young people such as the high school robotics team, Arce, and Vargas who—despite having been born abroad—were brought to the U.S. without their consent, lived in the country most of their lives, consider the country their home, and feel national allegiance to the U.S.

16 In her memoir, Arce articulates emotional feelings of marginalization after learning that she is one of those referred to as an *illegal alien* at the age of fourteen. These feelings escalated and transformed into physical symptoms of bodily pain since obtaining fake documents to hide her "illegality". Citizenship as currently construed cannot escape the discriminatory discourses that constitute it. The discursive and legislative criminalization that frames undocumented immigrants and other people of color as threats to the nation, also underscores the dialectic relationship between those who will always remain excluded from the U.S. community—no matter where they were born—and

those who would fit the standard. Margaret Somers has emphasized that citizenship

> is the cold instrument of exclusion to those outside its borders, both internal borders based on race and gender exclusion, as well as nation-state ones based on xenophobia and nationalism. Market fundamentalism has by no means been the cause of today's social exclusion. Yet since the 1970s, it has served to radically exacerbate the exclusions of race and class… The outcome has been an ever-growing superfluous population [that] makes up America's socially excluded and internally stateless who have lost the rights to have rights. (Somers 5)

17 The citizen-noncitizen binary is mainly (re)created by immigration policies that result in the category of *illegal alien*, a group of marginal subjects for whom the opportunity of adjusting their immigration status is denied. Ana Ribero emphasizes that this perpetual illegality of undocumented immigrants "ensures a cheap labor force for capital, and convenes an Orwellian common enemy against whom to unite the nation" (Ribero 37). Citizenship, with its constrained foundations, encourages discourses of fear and patriotism that support the nation—an essential structure of the coloniality of power—that depends on a racialized and dehumanized labor force to safeguard the production of capital and the reproduction of racist hegemonies.

18 Consequently, to articulate the failures of the system, as Dussel suggests, can the undocumented immigrant speak? So far, it has been shown that Davis's—well intentioned—text, as well as the *Spare Parts* movie, largely fail to accurately express the voice and experiences of the undocumented high school students. As a DREAMer, Arce should be able to speak for herself, and she does to a certain extent. However, although powerful at articulating her feelings of exclusion at age fourteen and beyond, there is a limitation. Arce came out and spoke by publishing her text when she was no longer undocumented. When she published her memoir in 2016, she was a citizen of the U.S. since 2014. When Arce was about to quit everything to go back to Mexico, the opportunity of marriage presented another chance to overcome her "illegality". While waiting at her USCIS interview, holding hands with her husband she thinks:

> Why did I have to get married? […] Why couldn't my accomplishments be enough to make it in this country? Why was it that a man had to rescue me from my situation? […] We came to America so I could grow up to be successful, independently from any man. The irony of my situation stung deep in my soul. (Arce 228)

Arce finally got a real green card through marriage. Nevertheless, marriage—as the concept of citizenship—is an institution sanctioned by the hegemonic system that supports the continuation of the coloniality of power. Therefore, on the one hand, Arce's memoir cannot technically be considered an example of decolonial literature. On the other hand, however, she is still part of the Immigration Movement who keep fighting, protecting, and advocating for undocumented immigrants. In Dusselian terms, she is part of the social movement that advances "Political Transformation". Decolonial critique must examine how—through racialized coloniality—citizenship maintains Euro-American hegemony globally and white hetero-patriarchy locally. Locating the racialized features of citizenship underlines the unavoidable exclusionary bases of this structure. A decolonial analysis acknowledges as well that, for people of color, citizenship is an oppositional practice that mimics the desire for recognition and the rights that supposedly come with it. Citizenship is founded by exclusion and cannot be reclaimed in a decolonial project since the objective of decoloniality is equality.

19 As has been previously mentioned above—for inspiring Arce to publish her memoir—the case of 2008 Pulitzer Prize awardee, Vargas, is very interesting. After the journalist came out as an undocumented immigrant in 2011 through a *New York Times* article entitled "My Life as an Undocumented Immigrant", he released a multi-awarded autobiographical documentary in 2014 entitled, *Documented*, illustrating through his own story, the desperate situation that undocumented immigrants—specifically those who arrived to the U.S. as minors—confront. As stated above, he categorically rejects the term "illegal", because he considers the word not only dehumanizing, but erroneous to define him as an immigrant. He arrived to the U.S. without comprehending why, much less agreeing to, his mother sending him (with a tourist visa) from the Philippines to the U.S. to live permanently with his grandparents as a twelve-year-old

in California. When Vargas affirms in his documentary: "I am an American without papers", this statement emphasizes the noncitizen's desire of belonging to the country by (re)configuring citizenship in ways not yet endorsed by dominant discourses. Perhaps the idea of an "American without papers" is a start in a discussion concerning a decolonial approach, as long as becoming "American" is not defined in terms that inexorably exclude other oppressed groups.

20 Vargas does remain undocumented. He is the founder and CEO of *Define America*, a non-profit media advocacy organization that uses storytelling to humanize the conversation around immigration, citizenship, and identity. He is a gay man of color-undocumented immigrant, who has articulated his own story. Therefore, the undocumented immigrant has spoken, right? Well, not quite. Vargas is highly educated, and so in the eyes of many, he holds a status of privilege that prevents him to be equal to the regular, more oppressed undocumented person, such as an unauthorized immigrant working in construction, or in the fields for substandard wages. At the very least, Vargas, just as Arce, is part of the Immigration Movement—the social movement that advances "Political Transformation" to comply with the principle of solidarity that Dussell discusses in his Philosophy of Liberation.

21 It is essential to embark in decolonial projects that reveal the inadequacy, the failures in the system that keep the "illegal" other subjugated by maintaining in place the structures that support the coloniality of power. This requires the dismantling and eliminating of the chimera of homogeneity that citizenship, or even (heterosexual) marriage entail. For example, that feeling of oppression at getting married to obtain a green card that Arce so movingly articulates. Gloria Anzaldúás concept of "Borderlands" underscores the epistemic condition that she defines as "la facultad". According to Anzaldúa, "la facultad" is shaped "in between space", where boundaries breakdown, identity categories dissolve, and new ways of thinking originate. Nepantla for Anzaldúa is the liminal state between worlds, realities, and systems of knowledge. This is the space inhabited by subjects at the borderlands, such as the DREAMers, who are in the U.S. but at the same time don't belong to it, nor do they belong to their countries of origin. They are from neither here nor there:

"Because I, a mestiza, continually walk out of one culture and into another, because I am in all cultures at the same time, *alma entre dos mundos*, *tres*, *cuatro*, *me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio. Estoy norteada por todas las voces que me hablan simultaneamente*" (Anzaldúa 99). This is the state of consciousness that Anzaldúa defines as the condition of the borderlands. An awareness trapped in the contradictions of the border—as a space of inflexible boundaries, and the trespassing of those boundaries at the same time. While "la facultad" is permeated with the experience of deprivation, oppression, persecution and violence, living in the borderlands also ensures novel strategies of coping and transgressing boundaries. Undocumented immigrants resist and transgress the dominant culture by learning to take advantage of the inconsistencies (the border contradictions) of the system, such as the country's economic and political aims—its economic dependence on undocumented immigrants and their political exclusion.

22 Indeed, Undocumented Immigrants are what Gloria Anzaldúa calls *atravesados*, people living in-between cultures, inhabiting a third space, where possibilities of decoloniality can arise. Latinx's literature, cinema, and scholarship have the essential duty of imagining alternate, decolonial realities for the DREAMers, and the undocumented immigrant in general, and finding ways to resist and transcend concepts such as citizenship—which is reproduced by, and continues to produce, the illusion of equality, which is not true. To achieve decoloniality, Anzaldúa suggests to "disengage from the dominant culture, write off altogether as a lost cause, and cross the border into a wholly new territory" (Anzaldúa 101). Undocumented Immigrants resist their invisibility, and their position as disposable labor force by establishing interethnic families, and multicultural communities in the largest U.S. cities, and by organizing to form movements that include a majority who is not undocumented, such as the Immigration Movement. The DREAMers are the hope of unauthorized immigrants, who deserve to be truly part of the country they love, in the land that they have also helped shape with their hard work, their economic contributions, and their rich history and culture.

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**Filmography**

*Spare Parts*. Directed by Sean McNamara. 2015. Santa Monica, CA: Lionsgate Films. DVD.

*Documented*. Directed by Jose Antonio Vargas and Ann Raffaela Lupo. 2014. New York City, NY: Bond/360 Films. DVD.

## RÉSUMÉ

**English**

The topic of undocumented immigration in literature and cinema is particularly relevant during the uncertainty of Donald Trump’s administration, as sanctuary cities remain under attack. One of the most sympathetic undocumented immigrant groups is the so-called “DREAMers”, due to their support of the DREAM Act. These are young adults who were brought to the U.S. as undocumented children by their parents. They have grown up in U.S. society, and very often don’t even remember their countries of origin. Many of them speak little or none of their parent’s native language and have been educated in public and private U.S. schools. This essay focuses on young undocumented immigrant students by primarily analyzing the nonfiction texts: Joshua Davis’s *Spare Parts: Four Undocumented Teenagers, One Ugly Robot, and the Battle for the American Dream*, and Julissa Arce’s *My Underground American Dream*

memoir. I also discuss the *Spare Parts* film, and Jose Antonio Vargas's documentary, *Documented*. Since migration theory has largely failed to recognize the importance of race and racism in the process of migrant integration, my analysis incorporates theories that center on dismantling western binaries to create hybrid, new non-linear, third spaces of subaltern enunciation, which are valuable in the examination of the always fluid notion of undocumented immigration. Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano's concept of "coloniality of power", Argentinian–Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel's "principle of solidarity", and Latina theorist Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of "Nepantla" provide essential decolonial thinking to my analysis on the notion of immigration and citizenship in Latinx literature and cinema.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés**
immigrants en situation irrégulière, culture latino-américaine, dreamers (migrants sans papiers arrivés aux États-Unis pendant leur enfance), identité, loi DACA sur la protection des immigrants arrivés sur le territoire des États-Unis en tant que mineurs

**Keywords**
undocumented immigrants, Latinx culture, dreamers, identity, DACA (The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals)

## AUTEUR

**María Teresa DePaoli**
Maria Teresa DePaoli is Professor of Spanish at Kansas State University. She received her doctorate degree from Purdue University in 2001. She has published various academic articles and book chapters that focus on Latinx and Latin American literature, film, media, screenwriting, and cultural studies. She is the author of *The Mexican Screenplay: A Study of the Invisible Genre, and Interviews with Women Screenwriters* (Peter Lang, 2014), co-editor of *Las Culturas Latinoamericanas* (University Press of America, 2016), and co-editor of *Las guionistas: A Bilingual Anthology of Mexican Women Screenwriters* (Arizona State University Bilingual Press, 2017).
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