



La Libertad neighborhood of Tijuana.

# Views from South of the Río Bravo

## Migration to the United States as a Field of Inquiry

(Part Two)

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### INTRODUCTION

If the dramatic upsurge in Mexican literature about migration that we discussed in Part One of this article became obvious by the late 1980s, Mexican academic research in the last 10 years has evolved enormously and has increasingly been instrumental in redefining migration as a national priority. Moreover, the cohort of researchers both in Mexico City and nationwide has diversified to include many more perspectives and disciplines. A great number of Mexican scholars addressing migration are still demographers but other disciplines are becoming more common.

Several factors converged in the 1990s to heighten public awareness about immigration in Mexico. Even though the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) did not directly address Mexican immigration to the United States, the conditions it imposed have done nothing to diminish movement north. On the contrary, some analysts have suggested that economic development along the border may have exacerbated migration by creating jobs and expanding the labor market there. What is certain is that the NAFTA's implementation fostered a much greater interest in the United States and the dimensions of Mexican participation in NAFTA among Mexican readers. Moreover, as part of a larger manifestation of nativism in some regions of the

United States,<sup>1</sup> the 1994 campaign around California's highly controversial Proposition 187 focused Mexican public attention on the community of Mexican origin in the United States as nothing else has at least since World War II. Not only did the Mexican public become keenly aware of the problems confronting both documented and undocumented migrants, but of migration as a multi-faceted national and international political issue. While Proposition 187 did not consistently receive appropriate or balanced treatment in the Mexican press, it did highlight the complex character of Mexican immigration and the lives of Mexican immigrants and their families in the United States.<sup>2</sup> The controversy Proposition 187 generated marked

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a turning point in Mexican perception of immigration and provided the Foreign Relations Ministry with justification for proposing and jointly implementing the Binational Commission that outlined the parameters of Mexican immigration as a binational issue.

The following literature review traces recent significant lines of academic inquiry in Mexico regarding the increasingly complex question of migration and its implications. Space limitations prevent a comprehensive survey, but such an exercise does point to some research priorities.

#### ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN MEXICO

Given their predominance, we begin our survey with demographers. Demographer

graphy and Data Processing (INEGI) to sketch the parameters of Mexican immigration, particularly for Guanajuato, and then to place its implications in the context of individual households.<sup>3</sup> We might add that Colef has a team of demographers and others who deal with migration regularly. Rodolfo Tuirán, currently the director of the National Population Council (Conapo) and a demographer trained at the University of Texas, has also emerged as an articulate observer of Mexican immigration. A member of the Binational Commission, his position in Conapo affords him the visibility to address migration in many public fora.

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Rodolfo Corona of the Northern Border College (Colef) has emerged as a most articulate academic interpreter of statistics on the movement and residence of Mexican immigrants in the United States. A member of the Binational Commission, he has published extensively in many fora. In “Dimensión de la migración de guanajuatenses a Estados Unidos desde la perspectiva de los hogares” (Aspects of Migration from Guanajuato to the United States from the Perspective of the Household), for example, Corona interprets the 1992 National Demographic Survey conducted by the National Institute of Geo-

Jorge Santibáñez, an anthology of articles written for a 1995 meeting of the Latin American Sociology Association (ALAS) in Mexico City. The continental focus of the meeting meant that the volume includes articles not only about Mexican immigrants in the United States, but also international migrants in Argentina<sup>4</sup> and the Caribbean (Santo Domingo),<sup>5</sup> as well as Mexican immigration policy toward undocumented Central American immigrants.<sup>6</sup> The same volume contains a study of Mexican immigrant maintenance workers in California’s Silicon Valley by the Colef’s Christian Zolniski, in which he

posits their exploitation and substandard working conditions within a profound restructuring of the regional economy.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Sergio Zendejas-Romero of the Michoacán College explores the *ejido* as a focus not only of agricultural production but of the affection and political and cultural identification for migrants from a local rural community.<sup>8</sup> Jesús Arroyo Alejandre and Jean Papail of the University of Guadalajara propose that for some towns in traditional migrant-sending areas of Jalisco the patterns of migration may be stabilizing or even diminishing due to changing employment conditions in the United States. Those immigrants who return to their hometowns in Jalisco do so under very different circumstances, often becoming small businesspeople or local entrepreneurs.<sup>9</sup>

Gabriel Estrella Valenzuela of the Baja California Autonomous University studies an unanticipated effect of the 1986 Simpson Rodino Bill and the austerity of the Mexican government on the phenomenon of commuters, based on research he conducted in 1991 funded by the Mexican Population Association. His study shows that after 1986 the origin of commuters (including temporary residents in the United States, called “rodinos”) in Tijuana and Mexicali broadened to include a more diverse socio-economic group. He concludes that the lack of employment opportunities in Mexico combined with the increased difficulties of crossing illegally into the United States generated a new cohort of more highly educated commuters. Estrella identified several areas of concern for commuters, including fiscal matters and voting and property rights.<sup>10</sup> The migration of women has received increasing attention. In 1994, Ivonne Szasz published “Migración y relaciones socia-

les de género: aportes de la perspectiva antropológica" (Migration and Social Gender Relations: Contributions from an Anthropological Perspective), focusing attention on social inequality and gender in the migration process both within Mexico and to the United States. The author posits that an interdisciplinary approach (anthropology, sociology and demography) is more necessary to the understanding of labor markets in the places of origin and the final destination of women than for male migrants. The article is unusual in that it gives equal weight to migratory movements within Mexico and to the United States.<sup>11</sup> In an article about the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the development and implementation of NAFTA, published in the Mexican College's *Foro Internacional*, Cathryn L. Thorup discusses how NGOs in Tijuana and San Diego such as California Rural Legal Assistance and Friends of the Immigrants, concerned with the plight of Mexican immigrants in San Diego County, have promoted discussions about human rights and the development of networks. Nevertheless, Mexican organizations must seek to formalize and institutionalize their contacts and relationships with U.S. groups to maximize the benefits and anticipate the sometimes unreliable interest of the Mexican government.<sup>12</sup>

The trend that I noted in the first part of this article about the increasing attention directed toward local and regional variables and consequences in Mexico generated by emigration has continued. Paz Trigueros Legarreta, a sociologist at the Azcapotzalco campus of the Autonomous Metropolitan University, and a member of the Binational Commission, has been following the consequences of migration

for a small town in Michoacán for over 20 years. In "Los migrantes laborales mexicanos en EU y su inserción en la economía informal" (Mexican Migrants Workers in the U.S. and Their Participation in the Informal Economy), Trigueros argues that Mexican workers who migrate to U.S. cities tend increasingly to stay there, thus contributing to the formation of new networks.<sup>13</sup>

Agustin Escobar Latapí, a sociologist in Guadalajara, has not only published extensively about migration to the United

of a December 1996 conference, "Mexican Migration to the United States." The original program contained presentations on a number of topics including women and families, legal protection and human rights, economic issues, social and political change, the border region and other studies focused on the migration from Guanajuato.<sup>16</sup> I should note that the Guanajuato state government has an office dedicated to immigrants living in the United States. In *Migración y fronteras* (Migration and Borders), Manuel Angel Castillo contri-



Migrants trying to cross the border at Nido de las Aguilas, in Tijuana.

States, but also about local labor markets and rural-urban migration in the Guadalajara area.<sup>14</sup> In 1999, together with Frank D. Bean and Sidney Weintraub of the University of Texas, Escobar Latapí published *La dinámica de la emigración mexicana* (The Dynamics of Mexican Emigration) in which they correlate the increase in Mexican immigration with economic, social and demographic changes in Mexico, and the composition of the Mexican-origin community in the United States.<sup>15</sup> In 1998, the state government of Guanajuato published selected proceedings

butes an analysis of Mexican immigration policy as it relates to Central American immigration. Mexican treatment of undocumented Central American immigrants along the border with Guatemala and the migration route north is a pivotal, albeit relatively unknown, aspect of migration north to the United States. A researcher at the Mexican College, Castillo is exploring a difficult yet necessary aspect of the immigration process to the United States.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, anthropologist Carlos Flores A., in an article published in 1993 a little before NAFTA came into effect, sug-

gests that the incorporation of Mexico into a regional economic arrangement alters the role of Guatemalan immigration to Mexico. Central American immigrants are not just migrating to the United States using Mexico as a corridor, but are migrating to the NAFTA countries. Moreover, Mexican economic development acts as a magnet for migrants from the much poorer and less developed Central American republics.<sup>18</sup>

In 1995, Ana Alicia Peña López, of the UNAM Institute for Economic Research, published a comparative study of international labor migration, considering migration to the United States and Canada, but also to the other major geopolitical regions of the world, such as Europe and Australia. Although she devotes only one chapter exclusively to the

determine the extent of AIDS among migrants. The incidence of AIDS in Mexico obviously brings with it public health dilemmas for Mexican society.

Although few historians in Mexico research migration, we can include some interesting contributions. In *Franjas fronterizas México-Estados Unidos. Tomo I* (Mexico-United States Border Areas, vol. 1), published by the UNAM Institute for Economic Research, author Angel Bassols Battalla approaches the conflicts and dynamics of northern Mexico as part of a long process of integration of the border region. The author recognizes that the Mexicans who were incorporated into the United States through the conclusion of the Mexican American War (the first migration, in a way) suffered the loss of property and painful consequences of the denial of

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United States, an analysis of migratory movements in such a broad context is unusual in Mexico.<sup>19</sup>

The advent of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases among the transient migrant population has serious public health implications for Mexico, and the possibility of contracting AIDS while a migrant dramatically alters consequences of migration. Some estimate that 25 percent of AIDS patients in Mexico may have contracted the disease during their experience as migrants.<sup>20</sup> Nelson Minello of the Mexican College conducted fieldwork in both the United States and Mexico to

basic human rights.<sup>21</sup> Historian Fernando Alanís Enciso recently published *El primer programa bracero y el gobierno de México 1917-1918* (The First Bracero Program and the Government of Mexico, 1917-1918) as a way of understanding Mexican immigration during World War I and the actions of the Mexican government.<sup>22</sup> *Me voy pa' Pensilvania por no andar en la vagancia: Los ferrocarrileros mexicanos en Estados Unidos durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial*, by the author, discusses the little known recruitment of Mexican workers for U.S. railroads during World War II.<sup>23</sup>

## NEW DIRECTIONS

In conclusion, distinct lines of inquiry have emerged in Mexico regarding very different implications of migration. These represent contributions to migration studies different and complementary to what has been published in the United States and underscore the bilateral nature of northward migration and its attendant analysis.

Although not yet as common in the United States as in Mexico, the National Human Rights Commission has been very successful in applying the concept of human rights to conditions that Mexican migrants encounter while crossing the border. In 1991, the commission published a report detailing various forms of human rights violations on the Mexican side of the border based on data generated by the Colef's Cañón Zapata Project, such as extortion by Mexican authorities and assaults, and on the U.S. side based on information provided by Mexico's Foreign Relations Ministry, the American Friends Service Committee, Center for Support of Migrant Workers, the Center for Migratory Information and Studies, as well as its own surveys conducted in San Diego. Human rights violations in the United States, concentrated in San Diego County, are mostly committed by law enforcement officers and include mistreatment, abuse of authority and illegal detention.<sup>24</sup>

In 1993, the National Human Rights Commission published a diagnostic of the consequences of migration on Mexican children who had been repatriated to Mexico. Based on data from Mexican consulates along the border, as well as the Northern Border College and NGOs, the report pre-

sents a profile of the Mexican child who had migrated and returned to Mexico, and further, lays out the web of institutional relationships in Mexico and the United States that participate in some aspect of these children's welfare, from the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service to Mexico's National System for Integral Family Development (DIF) and the UNICEF.<sup>25</sup>

The 1994 campaign for and approval of California's Proposition 187 provoked more discussion and debate in Mexico than any one issue since the *bracero* program. The discussion centered in the mass media but it created a public and political awareness about Mexican immigration and immigrants that nothing else has, and a consensus emerged that Mexican immigrants who have traditionally avoided U.S. citizenship so as not to jeopardize their Mexican citizenship should be able to participate in elections that affect them. Thus, one long-term consequence of Proposition 187 has been the amendment of the Mexican Constitution to allow for dual citizenship. CISAN founder Mónica Vereá has explored the treatment of Proposition 187 in the Mexican press in a report commissioned by the Binational Commission.

Indeed, modifications to the Mexican Constitution now allow for dual citizenship and include the right to vote in Mexican elections while living outside the country, thereby introducing a new and relatively unexplored set of variables regarding Mexican immigrants in the United States. While these reforms will not be implemented until the presidential elections of 2006, the modifications have generated much discussion inside and outside academia. Indeed, the Federal Electoral

Institute conducted its own year-long analysis about extending the vote to Mexicans living abroad, which resulted in a multi-volume study released in December 1998. The requirements for voting in Mexico involve much more red tape than in the United States, and normally each voter is provided with a detailed national voter registration card. Applying those requirements to a wide diversity of living conditions of Mexican citizens residing in the United States presents formidable political, logistical and economic obstacles.

A conference held at CISAN March 19, 1999, to discuss the issue illustrates the logistical and legal complexities of extending the vote to Mexican immigrants in the United States. Since the notion of absentee balloting as we know it in the

they live. Nor is it clear how extending the vote to Mexican immigrants will affect their potential participation in U.S. electoral politics. Discussions about the political culture of Mexican immigrants in the contexts of both countries are inevitable. Leticia Calderón, a sociologist at the Mora Institute, explored this issue in her Master's and doctoral theses.

As one avenue to address migration comprehensively, former Colef director Jorge Bustamante espouses the establishment of a bilateral commission to undertake independent studies of the border region with a view to eventually developing a permanent treaty to regulate migration. Such a treaty would involve as much negotiation as NAFTA, given the longevity and the complexity of the phenomenon.<sup>26</sup>

In spite of the overwhelming importance of migration issues for Mexico and the research we have discussed here, Mexico does not have a single academic research center dedicated to studying emigration to the United States or its consequences.

United States is not contemplated, questions such as how to administratively issue voter registration identity cards, how to establish physical conditions for voting and how to conduct political campaigns among Mexican immigrant communities become important. Moreover, the extent to which the Mexican government is willing to actually guarantee immigrants the right to vote is not clear. Urban immigrants living near Mexican consulates present fewer difficulties than isolated rural families and individuals. Yet some have interpreted the regulation to include all Mexican citizens, regardless of where

Incredibly, in spite of the overwhelming importance of migration issues for Mexico and the research we have discussed here and much more, Mexico does not have a single academic research center dedicated to studying emigration to the United States or its consequences for emigrants living in the United States and those who return to Mexico. The broad scope of academic researchers throughout the country, as demonstrated by the Mexican participants in the Binational Commission, clearly shows that the time has come for Mexico to grapple with the issue as forcefully as possible. **NM**

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> George J. Sánchez, "Face the Nation: Race, Immigration, and the Rise of Nativism in Late Twentieth Century America", *International Migration Review* vol. 31, no. 4 (Winter 1997), pp. 1009-1030.
- <sup>2</sup> This information comes from an unpublished report for the Binational Commission by Mónica Vereá on the Mexican press's reaction to Proposition 187.
- <sup>3</sup> Rodolfo Vázquez Corona, "Dimensión de la migración de guanajuatenses a Estados Unidos desde la perspectiva de los hogares," *Coloquio internacional sobre migración mexicana a Estados Unidos* (Guanajuato: Gobierno del Estado de Guanajuato, 1998), pp. 11-48.
- <sup>4</sup> Alicia Maguid, "La migración internacional reciente en la Argentina. Características e impacto en el mercado de trabajo," Castillo, Lattes and Santibáñez, eds., *Migración y fronteras* (Tijuana: Colef/ALAS/ El Colegio de México, 1998). Maguid is a researcher in Argentina affiliated with the National Council of Scientific and Technological Research of Argentina.
- <sup>5</sup> Marina Ariza, "Migración, familia y participación económica. Mujeres migrantes en una ciudad caribeña." Castillo et al., op. cit.
- <sup>6</sup> Manuel Angel Castillo, "La política de inmigración en México: un breve recuento," Castillo, et al., op. cit. Castillo is a Guatemalan researcher working at the Mexican College studying Central American migration in Mexico.
- <sup>7</sup> Christian Zlolski, "Reestructuración industrial y mano de obra inmigrantes. El caso de los trabajadores mexicanos en la industria de la limpieza de edificios en el Silicon Valley, California," Castillo, et al., op. cit.
- <sup>8</sup> Sergio Zendejas-Romero, "Migración de mexicanos a Estados Unidos y su impacto político en los poblados de origen. Redefinición de compromisos con el ejido en un poblado michoacano," Castillo, et al., op. cit.
- <sup>9</sup> Jesús Arroyo Alejandre and Jean Papail, "Los cambios recientes en la migración internacional de las ciudades medias del estado de Jalisco," Castillo et al., op. cit.
- <sup>10</sup> Gabriel Estrella Valenzuela, "Migración internacional legal desde la frontera norte de Mexico," *Estudios demográficos y urbanos* vol. 8, no. 3 (September-December 1993), pp. 559-597.
- <sup>11</sup> Ivonne Szasz, "Migración y relaciones sociales de género: aportes de la perspectiva antropológica," *Estudios demográficos y urbanos* vol. 9, no. 1 (January-April 1994), pp. 129-150.
- <sup>12</sup> Cathryn Thorup, "Diplomacia ciudadana en América del Norte," *Foro Internacional* 35, 2 (April-June 1995), pp. 155-218.
- <sup>13</sup> Paz Trigueros Legarreta and María de la Paz Rivera, "Los migrantes laborales mexicanos en EU y su inserción en la economía informal," *Sociológica* vol. 13, no. 37 (May-August 1998), pp. 165-187. *Sociológica* is the academic journal of the Social Sciences and Humanities Division of the Azcapotzalco campus of the Autonomous Metropolitan University. Triguero's 1986 master's thesis is entitled "Migración y transferencia de valor" (Migration and the Transfer of Value).
- <sup>14</sup> Agustín Escobar Latapí, "Movilidad, reestructuración y clase social en Mexico, el caso de Guadalajara," *Estudios Sociológicos* vol. 13, no. 38 (May-August 1995), pp. 231-259. Also, "Autoempleo e informalidad en Guadalajara: 1975-1982-1990," mimeo (Guadalajara: CIESAS-Occidente, 1993).
- <sup>15</sup> Agustín Escobar Latapí, Frank D. Bean and Sidney Weintraub, *La dinámica de la emigración mexicana* (Mexico City: CIESAS, 1999).
- <sup>16</sup> Margarita Ortega, José Hernández H. and Laura González-Martínez, *Coloquio internacional sobre migración mexicana a los Estados Unidos* (Guanajuato: Gobierno del Estado de Guanajuato, 1998).
- <sup>17</sup> Manuel Angel Castillo, "La política de inmigración en México: un breve recuento," Castillo et al., op. cit. A reflection of his earlier work, "Políticas de refugio y políticas de inmigración ¿posibilidades de conciliación?" published in 1995 in *Foro Internacional*, deals with the politics of refugee policy in Latin America. The movie *El Norte* directed by Gregory Nava provides a fascinating visual image of undocumented Central American immigration through Mexico to the United States.
- <sup>18</sup> Carlos Flores A., "La frontera sur y las migraciones internacionales ante la perspectiva del Tratado de Libre Comercio," *Estudios demográficos y urbanos* vol. 8, no. 2 (May-August 1993), pp. 361-376.
- <sup>19</sup> Ana Alicia Peña López, *La migración internacional de la fuerza de trabajo (1950-1990): una descripción crítica* (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas, 1995).
- <sup>20</sup> Juana Imelda Herrera Pérez, "Migración y SIDA: binomio impostergable en la agenda del educador comunitario," *Coloquio internacional sobre la migración mexicana* (Guanajuato: Gobierno del Estado de Guanajuato, 1998) pp. 69-77. Herrera Pérez works with the Regional Center for Cooperation on Adult Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (CREFAL).
- <sup>21</sup> Angel Basols Batalla, *Franjas fronterizas México-Estados Unidos. Tomo I: Dominio, conflictos y desintegración territoriales* (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas, 1998).
- <sup>22</sup> Fernando Saúl Alanís Enciso, *El primer programa bracero y el gobierno de México, 1917-1918* (San Luis Potosí: El Colegio de San Luis Potosí, 1999).
- <sup>23</sup> Barbara A. Driscoll, *Me voy pa' Pensilvania por no andar en la vagancia: Los ferrocarrileros mexicanos en Estados Unidos durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial* (Mexico City: Conaculta-CISAN, 1996). A later version was published in English: *The Tracks North: The Railroad Program of World War II* (Austin: CMAS Books, 1999).
- <sup>24</sup> Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos, *Informe sobre la violaciones a los derechos humanos de los trabajadores migratorios mexicanos en su tránsito hacia la frontera norte, al cruzarla y al internarse en la franja fronteriza sur norteamericana* (Mexico City: Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos, 1991).
- <sup>25</sup> Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos, *Informe sobre el menor mexicano repatriado desde Estados Unidos* (Mexico City: Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos, 1993).
- <sup>26</sup> Jorge Bustamante, "Mexico-United States Labor Migration Flows," *International Migration Review* vol. 31, no. 120 (Winter 1997), pp. 1112-1121.