

Mexico, Immigration, and Trump: Towards Transborder Thinking

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Introduction: Bans and Walls: Trying to Undo Demographic Diversity

In the U.S. we have an administration that dresses itself in nationalism, national security, and supposedly raceblind/color blind ideologies that are paired with policies that are racist and encourage racial profiling and harassment. New executive orders on travel, interior enforcement, and border security contradict the 1965 and 1986 immigration laws that removed overtly racist components of immigration laws that had shaped U.S. policy since the 1920s and reshaped U.S. racial geography in the past 50 years (Omi and Winant 2012: 319). Past changes in immigration law moved away from a national origins quota system to a focus on family unification and skilled migrants. Reforms of immigration law from the past century resulted in about 50 percent of migrants who have arrived since 1965 being from Latin America and one quarter being from Asia (Pew 2015). A 2015 Pew Report suggests that by 2055, Asian immigrants will become the largest immigrant group. Non-Hispanic whites are predicted to become less than half of the U.S. population by 2055 and 46 percent by 2065. No one racial or ethnic group will constitute a majority and Hispanics will constitute 24 percent of the overall population by 2065 and Asians will be 14% of the total by that same date (Pew 2015). Earlier immigration waves from the mid-19th century to the early 20th century were almost entirely made up of people from Europe. The backlash to this ongoing

dramatic demographic shift has gone from the political margins to the political center and is becoming normalized.

We are living in a moment characterized by both a thinly veiled colorblind ideology that acts as a cover for white supremacy and official policies that are racialized and target nationalities, religions and regions of the world. The twice-challenged travel bans on six countries are explicit in excluding people from Muslim majority countries and the new executive orders on “Enhancing public Security in the Interior of the U.S.” and “Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements” are specifically aimed at Mexico and Mexicans through the proposed construction of a wall and calling for removal of all of those who are undocumented. This is a large group of 11 million people: 5.8 million Mexicans, 700,000 Salvadorans, 525,000 Guatemalans, 3450,000 Hondurans as well as 500,000 people from India, 325,000 people from China, 180,000 from the Philippines, 160,000 from Korea, 100,000 from Haiti, 100,000 from Canada, 275,000 people from various African countries, 140,000 from the Middle East and 500,000 from various European countries (Passell 2016). Outside of half a million people from Europe, most of these undocumented immigrants are from majority non-white countries.¹ Thus we have a set of executive orders that engage in what we could effectively call racial and religious targeting and exclusion with no accommodation for how the 11 million people, many of whom have lived in the U.S. for more than a decade, can earn a path to citizenship. This despite the fact that in a recent CNN/ORC poll of 1, 025 Americans 60 percent stated that in terms of how the U.S. government deals with the issue of illegal immigration they supported, “developing a plan to allow those in the U.S. who have jobs to become legal residents.” When the question is further specified to how the U.S. government should treat “ illegal immigrants who have been in this country for a number of years, hold a job, speak English, and are willing to pay back taxes,” 90 percent say they would favor a bill that allowed “those immigrants to stay in this country rather than being deported and eventually allow them to apply for US. Citizenship” (CNN/ORC International 2017). Given these realities and the complex political and economic integration between the U.S. and Mexico and the rest of the world, it

seems to me that we cannot abandon a transborder framework. I want to illustrate the ongoing importance of a transborder framework by discussing the transborder political economy that ties together the U.S. and Mexico through many different relationships.

Trade and Jobs

As many have pointed out, the U.S. and Mexican economies are intimately bound not only since NAFTA but before. The walling off of Mexico has emerged with the physical proposal of a 50-foot concrete wall that MIT engineers estimated would cost up to US\$40 billion (Huffington Post Canada 2016). The wall has been further constructed rhetorically by Donald Trump. In February of 2017, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly took a two-day visit to Mexico to “smooth over” relations. The trip was headlined in some papers by Trump’s statements in the White House to manufacturers that “Con México tendremos una buena relación, y si no, no” (We will have a good relationship with Mexico, and if not, then not”). (La Jornada 2017). In 2015, Mexico was the third largest goods trading partner of the U.S. with \$531 billion in total (two way) goods trade during 2015. Goods exports totaled \$236 billion; goods imports totaled \$295 billion. The U.S. goods trade deficit with Mexico was \$58 billion in 2015.

According to the Department of Commerce, U.S. exports of goods and services to Mexico supported an estimated 1.1 million jobs in 2014 (All previous figures from Office of U.S. Trade Representative 2016). Some sources put that figure as high as 6 million jobs. Trump has stated that he wants to renegotiate NAFTA because it has resulted in a loss of 30 percent of U.S. manufacturing jobs. He has not considered the jobs that NAFTA creates in the U.S. through exports of goods and services. The primary cause of the loss of manufacturing jobs is automation, not jobs lost to Mexico. Mexico in turn has lost jobs to other countries. A million young people still come of age every year in Mexico and there is nothing near full employment for them.

Mexican workers in the U.S. sent home approximately 25 billion dollars (24.8 billion) in remittances in 2015, according to the Bank of Mexico, overtaking

oil revenues as a source of foreign income for the first time and floating a significant part of the Mexico's economy, particularly in some parts of the country (Associated Press 2016). Between "January and November of 2016, \$24.6 billion flowed back to the pockets of Mexicans from friends and relatives living overseas" (Gillespie 2017). This is Mexico's largest official flow of cash. I will return to this topic with the discussion of the "unofficial flow" below. Undocumented Mexican workers also pay into social security in the U.S. that benefits not them, but many older Americans. Returning undocumented people to Mexico, taking them out of the U.S. economy will have many negative consequences in Mexico and in the U.S.

Unofficial Cash: The Wall, the Transborder Drug Business, and Declining U.S. Health

There is a great deal of complexity to Trump's discussion of "making Mexico pay" for the wall. Part of his January 25th "Executive Order: Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements" calls for "In accordance with existing law, including the Secure Fence Act and IIRIRA, take all appropriate steps to immediately plan, design, and construct a physical wall along the southern border, using appropriate materials and technology to most effectively achieve complete operational control of the southern border" (Trump 2017a).

There is already a barrier that blocks people and vehicles along 653 miles of the U.S.-Mexico border that began in 1997. The additional 1,317 miles lack fencing but for much of that the Rio Grande is a natural border. Building just 413 more miles would cost between \$21.6 billion according to an estimate by Homeland Security (WOLA 2017) and \$44 billion according to MIT engineers. This will add to the \$25 billion the Department of Homeland Security already spends annually to repair existing fences (WOLA 2017).

The vast majority of drugs smuggled into the U.S. come through legal ports of entry, hidden amidst legitimate merchandise on trucks, and in passenger vehicles. A report from the U.S. Department of Justice's National Drug Intelligence Center published in 2010 reported that "Mexican DTOs dominate the transportation of illicit drugs across the Southwest Border. They typically use

commercial trucks and private and rental vehicles to smuggle cocaine, marijuana, methamphetamine, and heroin through the 25 land POEs as well as through vast areas of desert and mountainous terrain between POEs” (U.S. Department of Justice 2010). Drug trafficking organizations control smuggling routes into the U.S. for people and drugs. If the U.S.-Mexico wall is enlarged it will most likely directly benefit the same drug trafficking organizations it is supposed to harm, adding to their profits and control of major corridors on the U.S.-Mexico border and within both countries.

The RAND Drug Policy Research Center published a 2014 report for the Office of National Drug Control Policy that tracked the total expenditures, consumption and number of users of marijuana, cocaine (including crack), heroin and methamphetamine. While the demand for certain drugs varied over the course of the decade from 2004-2014, overall spending on illegal substances remained consistent at roughly \$100 billion per year (Kikmer et. Al 2014:). A 2012 report of the Woodrow Wilson Center put that figure as high as 150 billion (Bagley 2012: 2). Estimates of drug sales vary wildly, with the Justice Department saying in 2009 that Mexican and Colombian cartels sold anywhere from \$18 billion to \$39 billion worth of drugs in North America each year (Stanford 2017).

What is not in doubt is that deaths from drug overdoses have increased and the market for heroine is growing in the U.S. From 1999 to the present, deaths from drug overdoses have doubled. In 2014, 29,230 people died in car accidents and 47,055 died from drug overdoses. In 2015, 25 percent of overdose deaths were from heroine (Nolan and Amica 2016, Rudd et. Al. 2016). In 1999 just 6 percent of overdose deaths were from heroine. According to the Office of National Drug Control Policy,” there are currently around 1.5 million consumers of heroine in the U.S. The Office estimates the value of the market at \$27 million” (Woldenberg, Laura 2016). The impact of the expansion of the opioid market can partially be seen in relation to the declining health of middle-aged and older white men and women. A study published by economists Ann Case and Angus Deaton in 2015, found that since 1999, death rates have been rising for uneducated, non-Hispanic, white Americans between the ages of 45 and 54. They suggest this reversal is

strongly related to rates of drug poisonings, suicides, and alcohol-related liver disease (Case and Deaton 2015). Further study of the CDC data they used by the Commonwealth Institute found that it was more complex. An article by Ola Khazan published in the Atlantic in January of 2016 based on the re-analysis, found that death rates for middle-aged whites with low levels of education failed to decline as people elsewhere live longer and healthier not just due to drug overdoses and suicides. They were also dying of diseases that usually kill people later in life. “That means not only are middle-aged white people drinking more, using more opioids, and killing themselves at higher rates, more of them are getting sick with the diseases that usually kill older people. And when they do get sick, they don’t get better” (Khazan 2016).

Mexico is currently the main provider of heroine to the US, and the third most important opium producer in the world (Woldenberg 2016). The state of Guerrero now occupies a top spot in the production of opium and transshipment of opium from Mexico to the U.S. Until about 2009, the Beltrán-Leyva cartel controlled heroine production until most of its leaders were killed or fled and the organization fell apart. Since then, several spin-off and splinter organizations such as the Rojos, the Guerreros Unidos, The Tequileros, and the Ardillos have been fighting each other to gain control of cities and towns and to control subsidiary businesses such as kidnapping and extortion. The same organizations that produce and traffic heroine into the U.S. from states like Guerrero will benefit from more wall. The most credible theory to explain why 45 Mexican students were disappeared in Iguala, Guerrero in September of 2014 was that they commandeered the wrong bus. They probably got on a bus that had a large opium shipment headed for Chicago.

Higher Prices for Border Crossings and the Fantasma of “Bad Hombres” Disguised as Women and Children Coming in to the U.S.

One clear outcome of a wall will be that the prices charged by coyotes for coming to the U.S. will rise again, as getting over the border becomes even harder. There was a very dramatic increase in smuggling prices after the current wall was

constructed beginning in 1996. Before that time coyotes charged about \$200 in Tijuana and a majority of people didn't use coyotes, according to migrants I interviewed in the 1990s. Now fees to come to the U.S. from Mexico range from between \$4000 and \$9000 depending on how people arrive (with passport waved through port of entry, in truck, through desert). The price is rising. Recent reports from Mexico such as one called "El Efecto Trump" published by the Excelsior Newspaper reports that until November of last year crossing through rugged terrain cost 3,500 dollars per person. In January, the price went up to 8,000. The cost of crossing with a "valid" visa of someone who you look like has risen to about \$12,000 (Mena 2017). Estimates of income for smugglers profiting from human smuggling from Latin America to U.S. was 6.6 billion in 2010 UN report (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes 2010: 15). This number has surely increased since 2010 and will go up even more with the expanded wall between the U.S. and Mexico.

Last summer when I was conducting fieldwork in Guatemala I found that the average price to try to get to the U.S. from western Guatemala (Huehuetenango) was about \$8,000.00. A significant part of these fees are paid as "head taxes" to organized crime groups who control routes and access points in Mexico and at the border as well as in bribes inside of Mexico. Four of the women I have recently worked with in preparing their asylum case declarations described crossing the Guatemalan-Mexican border and then riding by bus up to the U.S. border and attempting to cross at various points in Arizona. They all described bribes paid to Mexican immigration officials and other "taxes" associated with their journeys to the U.S. which were on top of the regular price of \$8,000.00. Prices from Central America are also sure to be on the rise. And at a time when overall apprehensions are way down.

The number of undocumented migrants apprehended on the U.S.-Mexican border is at its lowest level since the 1970s. There is a slight increase in overall apprehensions but more are from Central America. They are primarily women and children who are not trying to avoid capture but are walking into the U.S. and asking for asylum at legal ports of entry. They are fleeing for their lives. This is despite the

fact that the U.S. has been pressuring and funding a harsh deportation policy in Mexico called the Southern Border Program. Started in 2014, this program has dramatically decreased detentions and deportations of Central Americans in Mexico. 153,295 Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Hondurans were detained at Mexico's southern Border in FY 2016 and almost all were deported (Isacson 2016).

During fiscal year 2014, U.S. Customs and Border Protection reported apprehending 68,541 unaccompanied minors, a 77 percent increase from the previous fiscal year. Seventy five percent of the unaccompanied children apprehended in FY 2014 were from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (Stinchcomb and Hershberg 2014:6). Most of the remaining children were from Mexico. While in fiscal year 2015 apprehensions of Central American unaccompanied minors on the U.S.-Mexico border decreased due to increased deportations from Mexico to Central America and a U.S. public information campaign to discourage children from coming, during fiscal year 2016 (October 2015- October 2016), the number spiked again to 59,692 unaccompanied children and 18,913 were from Guatemala (U.S. Customs and Border Protections 2016).

In fiscal year 2014, 68,445 family units were apprehended at the U.S. border. In 2015 these numbers decreased, but rose again during fiscal year 2016 to 77,674 and 23,067 of these family units were from Guatemala (U.S. Customs and Border Protections 2016). The thousands of undocumented women who were a part of this migration were largely invisible in most media depictions. Like the children, undocumented women are often fleeing conditions of horrible violence, abuse, poverty and hunger. And many are fleeing communities and regions controlled by drug trafficking organizations who make and ship opioids and meth. Importantly, they are seeking to reunite with family members.

Re-examining U.S. Aid to Mexico: Plan Merida and Human Rights

In addition to outlining provisions for building a physical wall, The Executive Order titled "Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements," also states, "The head of each executive department and agency shall identify and quantify all

sources of direct and indirect Federal aid or assistance to the Government of Mexico on an annual basis over the past five years, including all bilateral and multilateral development aid, economic assistance, humanitarian aid, and military aid. Within 30 days of the date of this order, the head of each executive department and agency shall submit this information to the Secretary of State” (Trump 2017a).

The biggest chunk of assistance that the U.S. has given Mexico is for an initiative known as about Plan Merida, a bilateral partnership begun in 2007 that focuses on fighting organized criminal groups, re-engineering the judicial system, modernizing the border between the two countries and strengthening civil society groups . According to the U.S. Department of State, “The U.S. Congress has appropriated \$2.5 billion since the Merida Initiative began in Fiscal Year 2008” (U.S. Department of State 2017). The vast majority of this aid is funneled into the disastrous and failed war on drugs. Its stated goal is to support Mexico’s security forces, especially (but not exclusively) for counter-narcotics efforts, ostensibly aimed at disrupting the flow of drugs and dismantling drug trafficking organizations. Plan Mexico (now the Merida Initiative) actually began as a three-year plan under the administration of George W. Bush. President Barack Obama extended Plan Merida through his administration and it may now be open to revision under Trump’s new executive order that calls for reassessing aid to Mexico.

What have been the results of Plan Mexico? Human rights activists such as the parents and family members of the 43 student teachers from Ayotzinapa who disappeared in Iguala, Guerrero in September of 2014 mention the following results in appearances I have attended in the U.S. in Oregon: mass graves in Guerrero, Tamaulipas, Chihuahua, and other states with hundreds of unidentified bodies; widespread disappearances; a huge rise in the violation of rights and safety of transmigrants in Mexico; increased femicides, and a dramatic increase in human rights violations by Mexican security forces, including thousands of documented cases of torture, disappearances, and extrajudicial executions. In an interview with Amy Goodman of Democracy Now in April of 2015, Antonio Tizapa who is the father of missing student Jorge Antonio Tizapa Legideño, commented:

Well, what I would tell to President Obama is to stop supporting Plan Mérida, because the weapons, the arms, with those weapons that are supposedly supporting the war against drugs, those arms are being used to annihilate our students. I ask him to stop that aid. That is what we ask of him, the parents and all the citizens of Mexico, because we are going through a very difficult situation. It is not possible that just because one is a student, they assassinate you. So, please, no more aid to Mexico in the weapons system (Goodman 2015).

Donald Trump is proposing to perhaps re-evaluate the funds from the Merida Initiative and use them in building the wall he is proposing and to help hire 5,000 new Border Patrol agents and 10,000 new ICE agents. Human rights activists in Mexico have long called on U.S. concerned citizens to stop the Plan Merida because of the negative impact it has had on human rights. But they did not ask to have it stopped to build the wall or to increase border and interior immigration enforcement through increased hiring of agents.

A transborder analysis provides us with an excellent set of tools for discerning the complex official and unofficial political economy that ties together the U.S., Mexico, Central America and our larger hemisphere, with varying results on the bodies of men, women, and children differentiated by race, ethnicity, class, region, age, education, and more. Walling off our analysis to only peer inside the container of the nation-state makes these relationships invisible. The gap between actual and expected mortality in 2014 for white, middle-aged, lower educated men and women in West Virginia, which was 273 deaths per 100,000 people (Squires and Blumenthal 2016), and Guerrero's 2014 statistic of 12.8 murders per 100,000 women--about five times higher than the global average—are connected (Lewis 2014). A multi-level transborder analysis makes it possible to “see” and “feel” the “facts” of economic, political, and social integration in the hemisphere.

¹ These numbers and places are also tied to the historic number of 65.3 million people who were displaced as of the end of 2015 according to UNHCR. "Measured against Earth's 7.349 billion population, these numbers mean that 1 in every 113 people globally is now either an asylum-seeker, internally displaced or a refugee (UNHCR 2015). About half of these refugees are children.

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