

Revised and formatted version sept 21

Rising Body Counts on the Border:

Reflections on the Construction of Social Distance



Figure 1: Cartoon reproduced in the New York Times, artist: Nick Anderson, April 16, 2006.

In 2005, deaths on the U.S.-Mexico border reached an all time high of 516. Spending on border enforcement increased ten fold between 1986 and 2002. As a result of increased enforcement of traditional crossing points, by 2002, the proportion of migrants crossing the U.S./Mexico border at 'non-traditional crossings' had risen to 64% from 29% in 1988 (Massey 2005: 1-3). These non-traditional crossing points tend to be in far less hospitable terrain, especially the Sonora desert in the region of Southern Arizona where it can take migrants three days of walking in the desert in temperatures above 100 degrees during the day, to reach the rendezvous points established by their guides. Most individuals cannot carry the water necessary to avoid dehydration, and particularly vulnerable are people traveling with children, those who are not physically strong, and those who are misled by their guides. Other risks include extortion by smugglers (*coyotes* or *polleros*), assault by members of drug cartels that operate on the border and harassment by nativist vigilante groups (the Minutemen, among other groups) that patrol the border on the U.S. side, rounding up undocumented immigrants using weapons and turning them over to the border patrol. Women face particularly high risk of assault, especially sexual abuse, and more than 400 women have been murdered in unsolved crimes in the Ciudad Juárez/El Paso sector alone over the last fifteen years (*cf* LAWG 2006). By virtually all measures: numbers of deaths and acts of violence; corruption; inadequacy of governmental response on both sides of the border; organized crime acting above the law; and disjuncture between the constitutions of each country and the rights accorded citizens and the dehumanization of people who attempt to cross the border, the situation on the border is indeed a humanitarian crisis.¹

This paper examines the seeming obliviousness of the ‘general public’ in the United States to the ‘humanitarian crisis’ on the U.S.-Mexico border. Why is it that the deaths on the border seem not to matter, if we judge by the infrequency of their mention in our news media, the failure of them to register on opinion polls of issues that concern voters, and the relatively narrow scope of civil society responses to the deaths?² How does the border, so poignantly referred to by Anzaldúa as an ‘open wound’ (1987:3) elude comprehension as an integral part of the United States? Does a ‘border’ necessarily imply a ‘margin’ and are people who cross it—especially those who do so illicitly—necessarily ‘marginal’ in the sociological sense as well as in the conceptual sense—only peripherally considered part of the polity, if at all? Are events on the border thought to occur in an in-between space, neither here nor there? Do border-crossers ever supersede their liminal status and become considered crucial members of the body politic or are they fated to always be dehumanized and reduced to their ‘illegal’ status or function in the labor market? This article posits that the invisibility of immigrants which persists even as they literally die to cross the national border is a problem of social networks and the dissonance between their physical and economic presence and the suppression of their social presence. I argue that this dissonance can be understood by examining social networks and the odd and sometimes violent ways immigrants are systematically excluded from the social imaginary.

Scholars of transnationalism in the 1990s threw into question the ‘assumed isomorphism of space, place and culture’ (Gupta 1997:7), by examining the formation of ‘communities without propinquity’ (Webber 1963), communities that can be imagined in our

transnational age as spanning, even transcending, national boundaries and physical distance. However, with this revision of earlier understandings of 'nationalism' and 'the nation', some concepts retained relatively more static meanings, 'community', for instance. Even while identity has come to be understood as unstable, the Durkheimian notion that collective identities are stable and knit together by 'social connectivity', 'the density, strength, symmetry, range and so on of the ties that bind' (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994: 1419) endures. Social network theory, which conceptualizes both symmetrical and asymmetrical ties also tends to reify social relations and, as effectively pointed out by Emirbayer and Goodwin, assume that powerful solidarity is a logical product of dense and symmetrical social relations. Are then, 'communities' an enduring social form even amidst flux and transformations of such grand categories as 'capital' and 'nation'? Must they be limited, in their strictest sense, to the bonds between structural similars? If a community can transcend borders, can it transcend language? 'Culture'? Class? Can we envision a community, even at the largest level of 'national community' that truly encompasses difference of class, language, culture and citizenship status?

Something important happened on 1 May 2006. On the day activists called 'A day without immigrants', the media suddenly noticed immigrants. In what ABC news called an 'economic show of force', by conservative estimates, more than a million immigrants participated in rallies and a nationwide boycott of school, work and spending to call for comprehensive immigration reform. Suddenly, the *New York Times* made immigrants' rights its lead headline on the front page (2 May 2006).³ Immigration reform has received extensive coverage this year with congressional debate on the issue, but even with this

coverage immigrants are rarely discussed in the mass media and mainstream public discourse in ways that humanize and valorize their contributions: cultural, economic, political, spiritual, and more. Even while opinion polls found that immigration was still not ranking among the top issues voters care about, most analysts seem to agree that a change in immigration law is imminent and inevitable. It seemed in May that immigration might become a wedge issue for the Fall midterm congressional elections, but lawmakers were able to postpone compromising long enough for a summer of hearings (what the New York Times called ‘the Immigration road show... a perp walk through the red states’ 22 June 2006, A24), and it seems likely that ‘enforcement only’ provisions already passed by the House of Representatives, may be made law without immigration reform for undocumented people already living in the United States. The next best opportunity for comprehensive reform will likely come after the mid-term elections in November.

There are two main discourses employed to refer to immigrants in the U.S. public discourse. I wish to explore them briefly here as an effort to begin to unpack the means of the construction of social distance. One major discourse is that which comprehends immigrants as workers. The bulk of debates about immigration reform have centered on immigrants’ role in the economy: whether they boost it or take jobs from ‘American’ workers and whether they contribute more to the tax rolls than they consume in public services. Some argue that the 1 May marches were a strong indication that it is in immigrants’ role as workers that their only hope for convincing a resistant public of the need for immigration reform lies. Activists seize this discourse and argue that immigrants

come only to work, that they were driven away from their hometowns by a lack of opportunity to work and to the U.S. by the presence of it. Indeed, in any rational economic argument it is a contradiction that NAFTA and late capitalism and globalization in general have led to the transnationalization of goods and capital, but not laborers who alone must bear the burden of illegality for crossing the border to work. Many immigrants say they pay a sweat equity, and often also income taxes, property taxes and sales taxes and ask for nothing in return. In dozens of interviews, people have told me, 'We don't take welfare, we contribute to society with our work and our culture'. This argument is a very compelling one, however, it contains several pitfalls which I would like to point out.

First, it is difficult, if not impossible, to combine this view with a rejection of guest-worker proposals or, to make it work as an argument for 'the whole enchilada'⁴, amnesty. If all one wants is to work, a proponent for guest worker proposals can argue that it should be made possible to do that, and then as soon as one is unable to work, he or she should go 'home'. However, in the two decades without immigration reform, people who came with the intention of staying for a couple of years to earn money to build a house or start a business and return, have not done so: the great risk and expense of border crossing in our era of more stringent border enforcement has made reluctant settlers out of people who might have been temporary sojourners. In the meantime, they have made their lives here, including having children who would experience hardship being uprooted from the only place they know. As such, the sweat equity argument is difficult to reconcile with an argument that those who are currently here and undocumented, and

their family members, should be allowed to stay and gain citizenship. It also tends to limit the imaginable economic contributions of immigrants to unskilled, poorly paid fields. What if an undereducated and underskilled farmworker wants to work her way through law school? Further, it cannot be reconciled with the very real need for public services among immigrants. Close to 90% of Mexican immigrant women who gave birth in New York City between 1996 and 2004 were covered by Medicaid (Schwartz 2001-2004). The argument that immigrants only give to the U.S. economy and do not receive benefits is not only attacked by conservative pundits who argue the opposite, but is defied by empirical evidence. However, the solution is not to ignore this as an inconvenient fact but to articulate an argument for rights that acknowledges that people need help from time to time, and that this does *not* cancel out their overall worth and contribution in economic and other realms.

Another discourse employed by both sides of the immigration debate which was less visible on 1 May, but has been quite salient in the debates over immigration reform is that of ‘the stranger among us’. The nearly twelve million undocumented immigrants in the United States are often described by politicians, pundits, reporters and members of the general public as members of a ‘shadowy underclass’. This is inserted into national security debates in which unauthorized migrants are imagined to be ‘lurking’ in the shadows, in terror cells, drug cartels, and other ‘unsavory’ locations. However, the notion of ‘the stranger among us’ is also used by some powerful immigration advocates to call for greater mercy and charity for the undocumented. The U.S. Council of Catholic Bishops wrote ‘Strangers No Longer: Together on a Journey of Hope’ (USCCB 2003), calling for mercy for undocumented immigrants who should be allowed to ‘come out of

the shadows’, and asserting the right of human beings to seek a living wherever they may find it, and the immorality of borders if they inhibit that human right to movement. Further they declare, ‘We judge ourselves as a community of faith by the way we treat the most vulnerable among us’ (USCCB 2003: 1.6). This kind of discourse has been quite effectively employed to argue for charity and outreach to undocumented immigrants. Drawing on its principals, Catholic leaders as prominent as Cardinal Mahoney of Los Angeles, Cardinal Egan of New York, and Bishop Josú Iriondo of New York have called on the government for humane immigration reform. Nonetheless, the notion of ‘strangers among us’, and ‘the most vulnerable among us’ does not, I argue, contribute to an understanding of immigrants as individuals with personal life trajectories, stories, needs, demands and rights. Regarding the notion of ‘welcoming the stranger’, an organizer with the American Friends Service Committee in San Diego asked, ‘who’s the stranger?’, noting that calling them strangers contributes to paternalism toward immigrants and the issues that are important to them.⁵ In August 2006, in San Diego, I observed very well-meaning and progressive activists evoke the discourse of the ‘stranger among us’ in organizing soup kitchens and other charitable work for immigrants, but these actions—as committed, enduring and well-intended as they were—were accomplished seemingly without much discussion *with* immigrants about what they might want or need. Perhaps more than a cup of hot soup, the immigrants at the soup kitchen would have preferred workshops on their rights in case of an immigration raid, or legal counsel for pending immigration cases. Further, many of the immigrants in the soup kitchens, migrant camps and churches were hardly ‘strangers’, some of them had lived in the precarious conditions of migrant camps for as long as a decade. If someone can still be called a ‘stranger’ after

that many years, we surely must reconsider our notions of polity, community and our criteria for belonging.⁶ We must also question whether charity, such as a cup of hot soup or a pack of tube socks, is not something more of an insult and whether in fact, urgent and assertive activism is needed to call into question an economic system which makes such ‘temporary’ living arrangements like a migrant camp without running water or electricity, a permanent part of the agricultural production cycle.

Both major discourses, immigrants as workers, and immigrants as strangers, contribute to the dehumanization of immigrants as individuals, as members of families, as human beings. If immigrants are ‘among us’ in every state in the republic, how is it that they are made invisible? Why does it take marches of a half million people to call attention to their claims? Is this a struggle that can only be one by hitting the nation in its pocketbook, calling attention to the reliance of the national economy on immigrants’ cheap labor? Or is there any other way that immigrants can come to be understood as members of the polity?

Social network analysis is the study of the ties linking members of a social structure, and was developed in the early 1960s by sociologists. Network density is one way in which sociologists reckon the ratio of observed ties to the maximum number of possible ties. Social network analysis has moved well beyond sociology and has produced libraries full of research in all of the social science disciplines in the intervening decades. The very initial theorization about social networks assumed that they corresponded to locality—that density and intensity of social interaction would correspond to geographic proximity. Later in studies of migrants, sociologists realized that people who leave the places they

were born to live and work elsewhere engage in local and long-distance social networks (*cf.* Mitchell 1974; Mayer 1963). Transnationalism as a scholarly field has certainly concretized our understanding of social networks as ties which bind people even at a distance. In fact, some of the exuberance about transnational social actors in the early 1990s, depicted people whose lives were lived in ‘transnational circuits’ (for example, Rouse 1989). Air travel, telephones and internet were seen to liberate people who could live in one place, while engaging in politics, economic projects and affective relationships with places and people elsewhere. Mapping social networks would come to involve making sense of ties which stretched beyond borders.

Until now, social network analysis has, I believe, focused on ties and bonds that one assumes should always already be there. The initial unit of analysis, the closed corporate village, neighborhood, or community is split into pieces, over national and transnational territories, and so the social network analysts follow those actors, assuming that their primary bonds will continue to be with the people who constituted their local universe prior to migration. Assimilationists then often take over from there, making predictions about how long after migration immigrants, or usually, immigrants’ children and grandchildren, find their ties to the old country weakened as they are assimilated into life in the United States. Only recently have the persistence of ties of the second and third generation to the ‘old country’ been understood in any context other than as an incomplete stage on a unilineal path to assimilation. As such, there is little ground for assuming within this kind of analysis that immigrants will exhibit important or dense social networks with people who are not also immigrants from the same place. Indeed a

great deal of scholarship even in our post-Gupta and Ferguson (1992) age assumes that the relevant unit of analysis are people who once, if not at present, shared geographic proximity; an archeological exercise, in the end, of tracing people back to primordial places of origin. In fact, the predominant methodology of social science research on immigrants in the U.S. continues to be a focus on people who are from a single community (or sometimes region or state), in one or more particular places in the U.S. Daniel Miller's recent work (2006) is perhaps an effort to invert this practice—by examining a group of people who share only geographic proximity. What social networks tie immigrants in the U.S. to non-immigrants? And could a problem of social networks be the reason that the deaths of large numbers of the former seem to matter little to the latter?

Last fall, the *New York Times* 'Style' section profiled a new book, an academic treatise on the most mundane of topics, 'Laundry'. The author of the piece, Rick Marin, used the apparent absurdity of anyone being interested enough in such a topic to read, let alone write 400 pages on it as his hook. And with that insider tone of cosmopolitan intelligence that is the most enduring characteristic of the New York Times, Marin writes 'For New York's laundry liberals, a variation on the limousine liberal, Latin America exists to lament right-wing regimes and to supply housekeepers. They haven't ironed a shirt since Iran-Contra. And they can't imagine why anyone of their class would want to' (2005:1). This sentence makes it clear, in a most inadvertent way, that there is a blind spot in the United States about Latin America. People in Latin America say this. Recently, a spokesperson for Andrés Manuel López Obrador, candidate for the Partido

Revolucionario Demócrata in the Mexican presidential race said at a campaign event, ‘Only academics in the U.S. care about Latin America, no one else does’ (Vásquez 2006). Is it simply a methodological bias that we tend to see social networks as involving the densest connections between ‘like persons’, people who come from the same ‘place’ or do people really not consider those who are different from them to be relevant in their social network even when they are standing right there, ironing shirts?

Social networks are a method of measuring affective ties, but also other kinds of ties that regulate access to goods, services, information, and so on. The density and breadth of one’s social network is a good indicator of one’s ability to access the resources for social advancement, prosperity, and so on. Networking has become a term in business parlance for creating social networks where they do not occur naturally, for mutual profit. Relationships between employers and employees are mapped in social networks, but with recognition that these are often ‘asymmetrically reciprocal’, and embedded in relations of power. As such, an employee may consider her employer to be one of the key players in her well-being and future prosperity, while the employer may seem to hardly notice that she exists.

I would argue that in the United States, immigrants are being inserted into a national social network in which they are categorized as laborers or strangers, and little else, and that thus there is an embedded blind spot towards immigrants as human beings and as equal and important members of society. There are several reasons for this, as well as several possible solutions, which I will discuss here.

First, why? When asked what the major issues facing the new president of Mexico will be following this summer's election, current foreign minister, Luis Ernesto Derbez said 'migration' (2006). When asked, what, and not trade, security or any of the other big issues, he replied, 'No, NAFTA's working fine, trade is fine, everything is flowing great back and forth across the border'. We know that late capitalism brought an increased flexibilization of flows of goods and capital. The massive influx of unauthorized migrants to the US is recognized by immigrants, immigration advocates, and big business alike as a rational response to the imbalance between jobs and wages between the U.S. and Mexico. As long as there is higher paying work here and a lack of opportunities there, the logic goes, people will find a way to cross the border. However, while NAFTA lifted many of the trade restrictions between the US, Mexico and Canada there was no accompanying liberalization of restrictions on workers.⁷ As such, workers who choose to cross the border in search of a living wage, do so at their own risk. The crossing itself is traumatic, implying a liminal experience, a rupture of the migrant with his or her past, family, home, and language, in which migrants are—literally—stripped down to the clothes on their backs. Of course, many, even most migrants arrive to the homes of loved ones or acquaintances and are folded into existing migrant communities and networks that assist them in acclimating. However, today, unlike at the turn of the century, beyond a few immigrant advocacy groups, there is no fabric of institutions dedicated to receiving and assisting immigrants in adjusting to life in the U.S., developing social ties, or becoming 'integrated' (Wucker 2006). While we might criticize the chauvinism of the role of those institutions in the past which were composed of both native born and

immigrants in projecting a normative vision of ‘becoming an American’, it is certainly arguable that the relative absence of any immigrant-receiving institutions in the U.S. at the moment is worse, for immigrants and for developing relationships between immigrants and non-immigrants.

Further it is clear that the support of President Bush and many Republican law-makers for immigration reform is driven by concern for big business which relies on low-wage workers, and only secondarily by moral or humanitarian concerns for undocumented immigrants’ welfare. It is also clear that were it feasible, the more restrictionist proposition of deporting all undocumented workers and ‘starting fresh’ with legal guestworkers would prevail. Indeed, while Bush has not explicitly denounced the idea of deporting undocumented immigrants, he simply called it ‘neither wise nor realistic’ (Bush 2006). This in itself is evidence of the failure of public discourse to acknowledge the relevance of immigrants to the nation. If the 12 million unauthorized immigrants were suddenly scheduled for deportation, what would become of their estimated 14.6 million family members, including 3.1 million U.S. citizen children (Passel 2006)? If immigrants are only ‘registering’ in the national mindset as workers and strangers, it is not surprising that their lives as parents is overlooked, without mentioning the many other roles they fulfill. What methodologies can we use to comprehend the reach of the impact of immigrants beyond their work lives and as targets for fear or charity? Can we argue that we have simply been failing to ‘register’ their presence as a society, and develop methodologies for *noticing*?

Now, I'd like to turn briefly to three examples, from recent films, in which the problem I have been describing is illustrated, then I will discuss ways that activists have been addressing this issue, in particular through idioms drawn from religion.

Crash, which won 'Best Picture' in the 2006 Academy Awards, chronicles the unexpected intersection of very different lives in Los Angeles. The point of the film, directed by Paul Haggis, is, arguably, that everyone, regardless of class, is complicit with and in some ways a victim of the racialized social hierarchies which pervade social relations. I wish to focus only on one scene in the film here. Sandra Bullock's character personifies white upper middle class paranoia of the racial Other and she is seen in various unflattering moments making assumptions about people of color she encounters. She clutches her hand bag closer while walking past two young African American men, and then, after being carjacked by the same men, later tells her District Attorney husband she wants the locks changed again after a Chicano locksmith installs them, before he runs out and gives the keys 'to his homies'. She is also seen verbally abusing her loyal Mexican housekeeper. However, when she falls down a flight of stairs and all of her similarly rich white friends refuse to come to her aid, she clings to the same housekeeper, telling her she is her only friend. Each of the characters in the film imagines that their social networks do not include those who are different, but they are made to realize that in fact, they do. Sandra Bullock believes her relevant social field is composed of other wealthy white professionals and their spouses, but ultimately, it is her housekeeper who is the only one upon whom she can rely.

In the film *Dirt* (2003), a small production fiction film directed by Nancy Savoca about a Salvadoran housekeeper who works on the Upper East Side, social networks are similarly different from how the characters imagine them. The protagonist is uniformly exploited by her wealthy employers, but in a sequence of events in which her husband is killed in a construction accident and she is fired by her main employer, a Latina woman who is running for public office and cannot be discovered to employ an undocumented domestic, it is in fact a new employer, perhaps the richest, most typically WASP (White anglo-saxon Protestant), most idiosyncratic of them all, who pays for her to fly to El Salvador to bury her husband, no questions asked.

Finally, I turn to *A Day Without a Mexican* (1998), Sergio Arau's mockumentary which asks the question, what would happen if all the Latinos in California disappeared? Aside from the perhaps predictable images of tomatoes rotting on the vine, dishwashing machines failing to be unloaded and the LA freeways without traffic, the filmmakers make the point which is silly in its depiction, but at the same time deadly serious, that Latinos are more important than Californians imagine, and not only to the economy. The orange grower who can't get the fruit to market is more upset that his best friend and foreman José is not around. The blond school teacher misses her husband and son. White Californians are seen dancing with banners reading 'We miss you, please come home'. Suddenly, Californians realize, that contrary to their assumptions, Latinos are important to their social networks and to their affective lives, above and beyond their labor contributions.

These three examples have been chosen deliberately because they represent the kind of liberal humanist message that many activists are critical of. The 1 May actions were designed precisely to deliver an ‘economic punch’ to restrictionist efforts, and some would argue that immigrant rights can only be achieved in the political economic realms of labor rights and political enfranchisement. However sappy, I choose to highlight the films discussed above because they show bonds being made that are not entirely utilitarian and while they are between structural dissimilars, they are not entirely asymmetric. It seems that if immigrants are to be considered a part of the polity they must be considered part of the ‘family’ even if that unit is speciously and problematically imagined. It seems a shorter road to travel to then advocate for more complex understandings of the political economy of migration if undocumented immigrants are always already considered a crucial part of the society (socially, culturally, *and* economically), than to continue to spin our wheels in the morass of arguments for immigrants’ humanity. In the current state of relations between ‘native-born’ and ‘immigrants’ in the United States, one would not be remiss to wonder whether the 16th-century debates between Bartolomé de las Casas and Motolinía regarding the humanity of the people Europeans encountered in this hemisphere had ever been resolved.

While many activist organizations work to signal the economic contributions of immigrants and argue for immigration reform on the basis of ‘sweat equity’, the argument that immigrants’ contributions to the US economy outweigh what they receive from it in services, there are other efforts to force recognition of the human worth of immigrants as individuals, and by extension, to recognize their deaths.

CNN's Lou Dobbs has become the most notorious reporter to utilize the image of the scrambling masses of undocumented immigrants climbing over the border, clambering around contractors' pick up trucks, undifferentiated mobs of denim-clad men (Figure 3). These images are frequently coupled in public discourse with footage of immigrants ferreting out breaches in the fence along the border as shown on news programs throughout April and May. Lou Dobbs and other journalists persistently refer to immigrants as 'illegals' and the border as 'porous', stoking fears of terrorism and an 'unsecure' border and then offering the undocumented immigrant as a scapegoat and repository for those fears. This kind of dehumanization and othering of immigrants is furthered by and also enables vigilante groups like the Minutemen who can only act if they assume that there is something fundamental different, and, arguably, less human about the people they round up.



Figure 2: Day laborers clamor around a contractor's van. Source: <http://www.judicialwatch.org/smsstatic/uploads/day-laborers.jpg>

It is images like these which are perhaps the biggest conceptual hurdle to activists struggling for immigrants to be understood as human beings. In contrast, activists—and responsible media—are working to tell immigrants' stories. They counteract the images Dobbs uses, with images like those in the figure below, for example.



Figure 3: Two teen immigrant workers. Source: <http://www.daylabor.org/TwoBoysBW.jpg>

This kind of image is one example of the work that activists are doing to supply alternative images related to the issue of immigration and to put names and faces to immigrants themselves. Below I discuss various examples of these efforts. A group of reporters at the *Arizona Star* have been working to compile a searchable data base of deaths on the border, with names and identifying characteristics of the dead on the border.

Instead of simply providing a tally of deaths (which they also do each season), they humanize every single casualty. Even the technology of their website forces one to consider the dead as individuals as they are listed with as many unique characteristics as can be found, not grouped into statistics. La Coalición de Derechos Humanos, similarly compiles lists of the dead as individuals.⁸

No More Deaths is an organization that is ‘comprised of individuals, faith communities, human rights advocates, and grassroots organizations who have come together to work for social justice in the Borderlands’ (No More Deaths 2006). They are a descendant of the sanctuary movement which assisted Central American refugees in the 1980s (*cf.* Coutin 1993), even in a few cases going to jail for the assistance they provided. Now, two members of No More Deaths have been arrested by the U.S. Border Patrol for medically evacuating three people from the 105-degree desert in July 2005. These groups keep up to date statistics on border deaths, even creating maps of humanitarian aid stations, and crossing points.

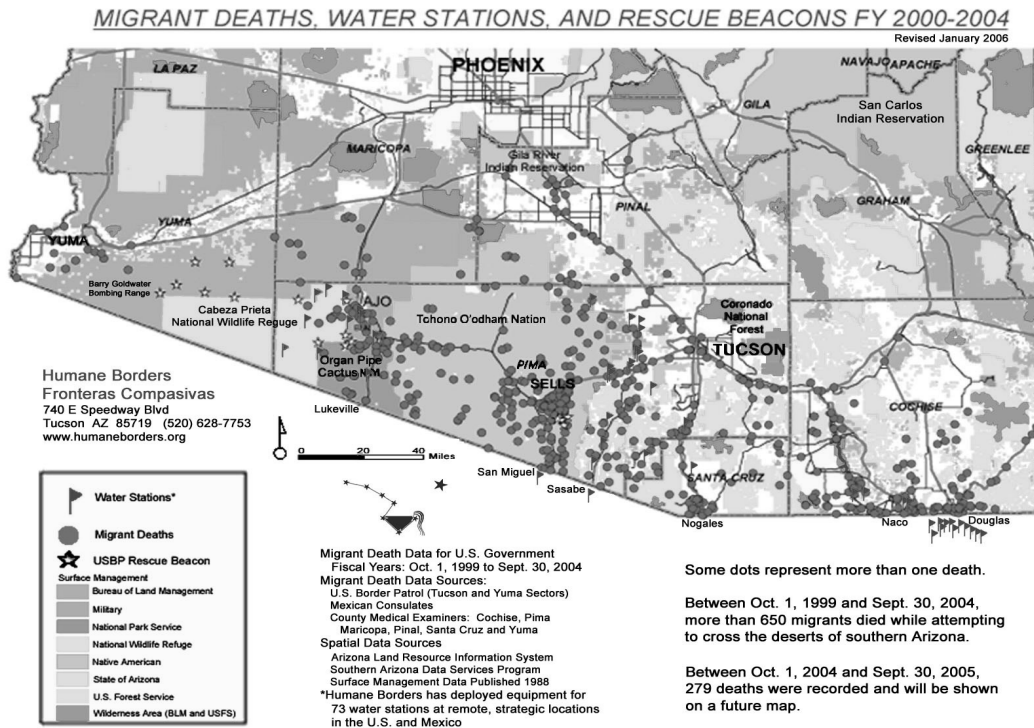


Figure 4: Map of Migrant Deaths, Water Stations and Rescue Beacons, Humane Borders,
www.humaneborders.org

Some of these groups also memorialize those who died crossing the border by placing crosses and shrines in the desert where the dead have been found.

In New York, Asociación Tepeyac holds an annual vigil on the Day of the Dead, a holiday normally associated with honoring one's own dead, for remembering those who have died on the border. While some members of the group balk at the expansion of a highly intimate, home-based ritual to the seemingly political realm of border violence, participants and organizers are moved to name and honor the dead, and they also memorialize them, knowing, in many cases, that the dead might have been them. While most people I have asked do not have anyone in their family who has died on the border,

virtually everyone can name someone—a friend of a friend, someone from their home town, or someone they met in a border town during their own journey across the border. The deaths on the border are not abstract for them and the anonymity of border deaths is tragic. The deaths on the border are almost a surrogate, in some cases, losses acknowledged as a sacrifice so that others could make it to the United States—not in a direct causal relationship but a symbolic one. Further, it is important to note, that participants describe their sense of loss at these deaths in terms of social networks: they and people they love crossed the border, and they can connect themselves to these deaths by no more than one degree of separation.

Tepeyac has also been involved in performing over the last several years a Viacrucis, or Stations of the Cross of the Immigrant. It is a Catholic tradition on Good Friday to enact the Stations of the Cross, the path of Jesus Christ to the calvary. While there are variations, most congregations follow relatively similar scripts of the stations. Tepeyac, however, has developed an alternative script, in which Jesus' travails and the burden of the cross are compared to the difficulties faced by immigrants:

Segunda Estación.

Jesús carga una cruz que no merece y sufre lo que no debía sufrir. Nosotros no merecemos emigrar, dejar nuestra tierra y nuestra gente, sin embargo, tenemos que trabajar para sostenernos y sostener a nuestra familia, por falta de posibilidades en nuestra propia tierra.

Second Station.

Jesus carries a cross he does not deserve and suffers what he need not suffer. We do not deserve to emigrate, to leave our land and our people, nonetheless, we have to work to support ourselves and support our family, for lack of possibilities in our own land (Asociación Tepeyac 2003).



Figure 5: Viacrucis del Inmigrante, April 14, 2006. Photo by the autor.

Recently, in Ontario, California, a church group wrote a passion play related to immigrants which is similar to the Viacrucis del Inmigrante in New York:

On stage, Miguel Cruz and Antonio Lubeno, 16, playing immigrants, walk toward their mother to be blessed before setting out on their journey.

They pass a small white cross planted in a pot of cacti, rocks on either side, with the word 'unknown,' written on it, and they walk away. Jesus then spoke the second word, 'I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.'

The immigrant boys are standing at a table, on stage, laden with a feast, but they're not eating.

[The narrator] said the immigrant sees paradise when he reaches the U.S. border (Rush 2006).

If I am on the right track about the issue of social networks, unless one *can* connect oneself directly to the deaths on the border, it may be they simply will never seem to matter, at least not the way they matter to the people participating in the day of the dead vigils or naming rituals. The members of Humane Borders and No More Deaths are not often immigrants themselves, but they live close to the border and thus have a direct relationship to the people that cross through their backyards, so to speak. Further, by going to the border with water and medical supplies, they are networking with immigrants—creating social networks that are direct and intimate, and by being created in the context of trauma, probably profound and lasting. However, it is possible that through networking as practiced by the sanctuary movement in the 1980s (Coutin 1993)—having immigrants speak to congregations about their experiences, and fostering intimate person-to-person relationships, as well as through idioms of devotional rituals, in which immigrants are symbolically intertwined with religious allegories— people who are neither on the border nor immigrants themselves may be made to understand

themselves to have immigrants in their social networks in intimate, embedded and nonutilitarian ways. However, this has to supersede the discourses of immigrants as ‘strangers’ in need of charity and able-bodied workers, only here to contribute to the economy. If immigrants are made visible in their multi-faceted roles and relationships, we might justifiably begin to hope for humane immigration reform, and indeed social change.



Figure 6: Sign carried at Viacrucis del Inmigrante, April 2003. Photo by the author.

References:

Asociación Tepeyac de New York. 2003. Text read at the Second Station of *el Viacrucis del Inmigrante*, the Stations of the Cross of the Immigrant, organized by Asociación Tepeyac, April 2003.

Blumenthal, Ralph. 2006. '3 More Convicted in Deaths Of Immigrants in a Trailer,' New York Times, Section A, P. 16, 2/9/2006.

Bush, George W. A Nation of Laws and Immigrants. Speech by President G. Bush, May 15, 2006.

Coalición de Derechos Humanos. 2006. Migrant Deaths. Electronic Resource: <http://derechoshumanosaz.net/deaths.php4>, Accessed June 28, 2006.

Coutin, Susan Bibler. 1993. The Culture of Protest: Religious Activism and the U.S. Sanctuary Movement. Boulder: Westview Press.

Derbez, Luis Ernesto. Private communication, March 2006.

_____. 2006. 'Managing Global Migrations: A Mexican Perspective,' Keynote Address for conference: 'Rethinking Global Migrations: New Realities, New Opportunities, New Challenges' New York University, May 25, 2006.

- Eschbach, K, Hagan, JM., Rodríguez, NP. 2003. 'Deaths During Undocumented Migration: Trends and Policy Implications in the New Era of Homeland Security.' In Defense of the Alien 26:37-52. Electronic Resource: http://www.uh.edu/cir/Deaths_during_migration.pdf, accessed June 28, 2006.
- Gupta, Akhil and James Ferguson. 1992. Beyond 'Culture': Space, Identity and the Politics of Difference. Cultural Anthropology 7: 6-23.
- Latin America Working Group (LAWG). 2006. Ciudad Juárez Murders. Electronic Resource http://www.lawg.org/countries/mexico/explore_juarez.htm, accessed June 29, 2006.
- Marin, Rick. 2005. 'A Scholar Tackles the Wash', New York Times, 9/29/05, Section F, p. 1.
- Massey, Douglas. 2005. Beyond the Border Buildup: Towards a New Approach to Mexico-U.S. Migration. Electronic document, http://www.ailf.org/ipc/infocus/2005_beyondborder.pdf, accessed June 30, 2006.
- Mayer, Philip
1961 Tribesmen or Townsman: Conservatism and the Process of Urbanization in a South African City. Capetown: Oxford University Press.
- Miller, Daniel. 2006. 'Beyond Social Science: Social Reproduction in South London', 8th Annual Annette B. Weiner Lecture, April 6, 2006, New York: New York University.

Mitchell, J. Clyde. 1974. Social Networks. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 3:279--299.

No More Deaths. 2006. Homepage, electronic resource: <http://www.nomoredeaths.org/>, accessed June 29, 2006.

Passel, Jeffrey. 2006. Size and Characteristics of the Unauthorized Migrant Population in the U.S.. Pew Hispanic Center, Report March 7, 2006, electronic resource: <http://pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=61>, accessed June 28, 2006

Rouse, Roger. 1989 Migration to the United States: Family Relations in the Development of Transnational Circuits. Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University.

Rush, Kelly. 2006. Church portrays Jesus as illegal immigrant, *The Daily Bulletin* (Ontario, CA), April 18, 2006. Electronic resource: http://www.dailybulletin.com/search/ci_3713552 , Accessed: June 28, 2006.

Schwartz, Stephen. 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004. Summary of Vital Statistics. Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, New York City.

United States Council of Catholic Bishops. 2003. 'Strangers no longer: together on the journey to Hope', <http://www.nccbuscc.org/mrs/stranger.shtml#1> , accessed September 2006.

Vásquez, Talia. 2006. Meeting of Partido Revolucionario Demócrata spokesperson with scholars, 2/28/2006.

Wucker, Michele. 2006. 2006 Lockout: Why America Keeps Getting Immigration Wrong
When Our Prosperity Depends on Getting it Right. New York: Public Affairs
Press.

¹ 'Humanitarian crisis' is the language used by Nancy Morawetz in reference to the situation at the border at an NYU panel organized by Spanish Judge- magistrate Baltasar Garzón on April 27, 2006.

² In 2005, the year in which deaths on the border reached an all time high of 516, there were only 185 newspaper articles mentioning the deaths in major English language papers in the US, UK, and Australia, an average of 1 article for every three deaths. In contrast, for the same period, there were 33 newspaper articles in the same papers for every Israeli death in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Of course, there has been a great deal of well-aimed criticism of the bias of the New York Times and other papers for giving greater coverage to Israeli over Palestinian deaths, factoring in Palestinian deaths for the same period, there are still 5 stories per death in the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Even though more than one migrant dies every day crossing the border into the United States and another immigrant worker is estimated to die on the job each day, these tragedies do not garner much mention in public discourse.

³ The evening of May 1, ABC spent nine minutes of its evening news broadcast on nationwide coverage of the day's events. BBC America seven minutes, and NBC news a full thirteen minutes, more than half the broadcast, even calling on the anchor 'from our sister network' Telemundo, Pedro Sevcec, for commentary. The following morning, the Wall Street Journal dedicated four pages to discussion of the economic impacts of immigrants and their labor in the United States.

⁴ This is the term used in August 2001 (and several times since, in other contexts) by ex-foreign minister of Mexico, Jorge Castañeda to refer to amnesty, immigration reform inclusive of a path to citizenship for those who are already in the U.S. as well as potentially a guest-worker program.

⁵ Personal communication, San Diego, CA, August 8, 2006.

⁶ These experiences were part of a collaborative research project with Dr. Alberto Pulido of the University of San Diego, and funded by the various generous Center for Latino Catholicism at the same institution.

⁷ Indeed, at the time of the negotiations between the U.S. and Mexican governments over NAFTA, the Mexican government thought it prudent to drop the issue of migration, perceived to be too controversial, in the interest of seeing the accord approved (Derbez 2006b).

⁸ <http://www.derechoshumanosaz.net/deaths.php4>