

PATRICIA ZAVELLA: *I'm Neither Here nor There: Mexicans' Quotidian Struggles with Migration and Poverty*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.

Patricia Zavella's extensively documented and long researched book *I'm Neither Here nor There* explores Mexican migrants' experiences as they travel to and within the United States in search of a better life. As she and they discover, the improved material conditions achieved by migrating to the US, either temporarily or permanently, may have a very high emotional cost. The sense of being part of a "marginalized" sector of the population in Mexico, which motivates most migrants to look for better opportunities north of the border, is often felt even more acutely in their new surroundings. Almost all of Zavella's research participants reported having experienced some form of prejudice or discrimination, either on the job or in other types of social interactions in the US.

In the first chapter Zavella analyzes the context within which migration from Mexico to the United States currently takes place, while reminding readers it is a process that "has been deeply influenced by the history of relations between" these two countries since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, and therefore "in some ways is unique." She argues that "restrictive immigration laws purportedly intended to deter migration nonetheless have been instrumental in sustaining migration from Mexico, including those without authorization, by allowing migrants to find work and remain in the United States." She refers to the widely generalized agreement among scholars that "there has been a sharp rise in racial nativism in the United States" over the past few decades. She points to the "clear relations between economic downturns, alarmist images about immigration, and public opinion supporting regulating immigration" and shows how in some instances "the media help construct hostilities toward migrants." Furthermore, she denounces the fact that as a result of "racialization," "even those Latinos who are legal citizens are perceived as being unauthorized and subject to substantive curtailment of rights and entitlements."

The reasons for going north are as unique and varied as the individual migrants themselves. However in most cases economic factors play an important role and range from general conditions of widespread poverty and limited employment opportunities to specific personal goals like building a house, starting a small business, acquiring land or livestock, or to meet health care emergencies of their parents, spouses, siblings or children. Gendered notions of masculinity and femininity also come into play. In communities with a long history of migration it is almost a rite of passage for young men. Others may perceive that it is the best or only way to fulfill their obligations as a breadwinner. Women often migrate to join a husband who went before them, and thus escape the surveillance and

control exercised by a domineering mother-in-law, or sometimes to escape from abusive male family members. Parents almost always cite the desire to provide a better life for their children. Whatever the initial motivation for their journey might be, most migrants are surprised by the circumstances they encounter when arriving in the US for the first time. As Zavella finds, “those who were able to return to Mexico for visits often took great pains to display their relative wealth and to conceal the difficulties of their living conditions.” As one of her informants says “people don’t tell you how things really are in the United States.” The author’s central argument throughout the book is that “in the policies, practices and representations about migration from Mexico the human costs of crossing the border and establishing new lives have been silenced.”

In the next three chapters she helps migrants to Santa Cruz County in California break that silence by retelling their stories. “The working conditions that many recent Mexican migrants must endure are exploitative, demeaning, and occasionally truly traumatic. Farm work is notoriously dangerous.” “Migrant workers, especially the undocumented... are denied most of the rights to which the rest of the working population takes for granted.” In general, “racial prejudice or discriminatory treatment by employers” was found to be commonplace. Even those “research participants who had advanced degrees began their work histories in the United States at the bottom of the labor market,” and after several years “still find themselves working at jobs for which they are overqualified.”

Nevertheless, as their continued presence in the US shows, most migrants believe that their employment and earnings options are better there than in Mexico. Furthermore, an individual’s decision to migrate, to remain in “the north” or return to Mexico, at any given point in time is strongly influenced by existing, desired, or anticipated family relationships. Families in turn are profoundly affected by migration. Zavella has masterfully synthesized her research participants’ experiences and narratives to help readers grasp “how the circumstances of migration influence families.” As a result of migration families may be “separated,” either temporarily or permanently, or “reunited,” or even “suspended” as in the case of those “where plans to form families are put on hold as migrant workers save up to purchase land, build their homes, pay for weddings, or secure authorization to reside in the United States; these goals may take many years to achieve.” Thus “divided homes” and “mixed status families” become the norm for most migrants.

The force of Zavella’s text, as she recreates these narratives, which can by no means be captured in a few brief paragraphs, inevitably leaves readers wondering why anyone would choose to migrate under such difficult circumstances. The answer of course is self-evident. Migrants are convinced that in some ways at least they are better off for having migrated. Nevertheless, a form of “transnational

subjectivity” that the author refers to as “peripheral vision” frequently engenders “feelings that one is neither from here nor from there, not at home anywhere.” In a few instances, however, it may allow some to feel “at home in more than one geographic location.” This seems to be the case, at least implicitly, for the three musical groups she focuses on in the final chapter. “With their transnational collaborations and imaginaries (these) cultural activists ... negotiate social differences in ways that transcend national borders.” “Their work evokes powerful moments of identification, celebration, self-critique, reflection, and dialogue that create a sense of community, however momentary.” Zavella concludes that “though they have divergent aesthetic styles, these cultural activists’ respective visions of social justice help build an imagined community among displaced and resident Mexicans who cope with the realities of capitalism and state repression in their everyday lives.”

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LAURA GOTKOWITZ (ED.): ***Histories of Race and Racism: The Andes and Mesoamerica from Colonial Times to the Present***. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.

Race and racism are two problematic categories that are used in this book to reflect on recent political events in Latin America – events that are historically rooted in deep and conflictive societal relationships. From the election of Evo Morales in Bolivia, to the use of archaeological ruins for the construction of a national narrative mixed with *Indigenismo* ideologies, *mestizaje* discourse and ideology, and the formation of indigenous movements, the book presents (I borrow the title of one of the chapters), “A Postcolonial Palimpsest: The Work Race Does in Latin America.” The chapters explore issues of class, gender, regionalism, nationality, and the idea of nation.

The idea of race has been explained in terms of cultural categories rather than biological ones. For example, the ethnographies of Peter Wade in Central America, and Marisol de la Cadena in Peru, among others, show the intricate relationships of race, ethnicity, and the new forms of being indigenous. Gotkowitz has brought together an important and representative group of scholars to historicize the idea of race in Latin America in order to understand new forms of racism and antiracism movements in the region. The contributors focus on the effects of the idea of race, rather than its meaning. In that sense, they follow an