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Borders of Belonging: Struggle and Solidarity in Mixed-Status Immigrant Families

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U.S. immigration policy has become increasingly exclusionary, relegating nearly 11 million undocumented immigrants to the margins of society. Their educational, economic, and social exclusion is achieved through federal immigration policy as well as state and local policies and practices that determine their ability to obtain driver’s licenses, access higher education, and interface with municipal offices. In *Borders of Belonging: Struggle and Solidarity in Mixed-Status Immigrant Families*, anthropologist Heide Castañeda turns attention to the family unit to explore how undocumented status is shared among *all* family members.

With vivid ethnography, Castañeda takes the reader to the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas, introducing us to everyday life along the U.S-Mexico Border. Here, mixed-status families are common – approximately one in ten residents are undocumented – but often rendered invisible. Drawing on interviews with 167 members from 100 families, she sets out to explore “how this illegality impacts the entire family, what it looks like on a day-to-day basis, and how people respond” (p. 5). She argues that the undocumented status of one or more family members influences the opportunities and resources available to all family members, including those who are U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents. Family members actively negotiate illegality, deploying their legal status and the

opportunities it carries to benefit all family members. Finally, she establishes how the unique nature of the border region informs these experiences.

The book covers a wide range of aspects of family life. Chapter 1 introduces us to life in the borderlands, tracing the geography of the region, the pervasiveness of border enforcement, and the social demography of the region. Chapter 2 explores how immigration status structures interpersonal dynamics within mixed-status families while Chapter 3 turns outward to see how one's own and family members' immigration status structures relationships with those outside the family. Chapter 4 returns to questions of geography, exploring how physical mobility is limited in the highly-militarized 100-mile border zone. Subsequent chapters then review a number of topics that structure incorporation and belonging: education, work, and social mobility (chapter 5), health and wellbeing (chapter 6), deportation and family separation (chapter 7), and legalization (chapter 8). Its breadth makes it important reading for migration scholars and would be an excellent text for courses on immigration or family, especially as chapters also stand well on their own.

Each chapter covers important subject matter to illustrate the overall argument. Castañeda expertly provides vivid description all the while centering the words of her participants. She often puts multiple family members in conversation with one another, either by sharing their perspective on the same topic or sometimes directly through joint interviews. This style effectively conveys the shared nature of illegality

among family members, providing detailed descriptions and multiple examples of the many ways in which immigration status is made salient and negotiated in everyday life. Its breadth provides a detailed introduction to the far-reaching impacts of illegality, but this has come at the cost to the depth to which she can explore intricacies. Readers may be left wanting more details about the processes and ways in which immigration status is shared and negotiated among family members.

The book's most novel contribution is its discussion of space and geography. As Castañeda points out, we know little about this region which is the "poorest, most heavily enforced areas in the country, where a high proportion of people are undocumented" (p. 8). It is a unique space that can inform understandings of the consequences of ever-increasing interior immigration enforcement. Indeed, the uniquely militarized and surveilled nature of the region allows her to explore how deportation threats can become a pervasive and salient aspect of illegality. Given participants' palpable preoccupation with such threats, she is able to disentangle the effects of deportability (the potential for deportation), denounce-ability (the threat of being reported to immigration authorities), and deportation (actual expulsion).

The experiences portrayed in the book are not meant to be understood as representative of other sites, nor necessarily an omen of what is to come with increased interior enforcement; but rather this case provides readers with an understanding of how illegality is experienced and produced in a

highly exclusionary context. It offers a picture of the most exclusionary edge of illegality. Understanding such a context, provides insight to larger questions of spatial variation in the experiences of undocumented immigrants. Specifically, Castañeda highlights the importance of physical and social geography – proximity to the U.S.-Mexican border, racial/ethnic history, and characteristics of the local community. When put in conversation with studies conducted in other contexts, scholars will develop a deeper sense of how and why experiences of illegality and deportability vary across state and local contexts.

Beginning to interrogate other forms of variation, Castañeda points to the importance of other intersectional identities – race, phenotype, class, gender, birth order – in determining how individuals experience and negotiate illegality. However, she does not fully disentangle the ways these become relevant and to what extent they account for variation in participants experiences. Her large sample suggests that there was likely substantial variation that would have allowed her to intentionally compare across lines of difference to illuminate how other intersectional identities become relevant. However, she provides no demographic information for the overall sample and does not provide comparisons across intersectional identities. This is where the books breadth may again leave some readers wanting more – more analysis, deeper interrogation, and better articulation of the representativeness of the examples provided.

In short, this is an important book, one that expands our understanding of the far-reaching effects of immigration policies. It immerses readers in detailed description of key aspects of everyday life in a mixed-status family and the larger implications of illegality for the incorporation of immigrants and their children. It serves as an excellent introduction to one of the most hotly debated policy issues of our time, shedding light on the social costs of exclusionary immigration policies and humanizing those who fight carve out a life for themselves and their families.