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Abstract

This paper leverages the repressive turn in U.S. migration policy to understand how a cross-border perspective can illuminate the experiences of two different, but contemporaneous second generation populations: those whose lives have unfurled in the United States, all the while growing up in internationalized families with ongoing homeland ties; and those whose childhoods began in the United States, but were disrupted as part of the “Great Expulsion,” and thus migrated to Mexico, albeit often with U.S. citizenship and almost always with cross-border ties to family members still living in the United States. As the paper will demonstrate, looking across borders highlights the importance of the territorial frontier and the continuing power of the national to undermine the forces that produce cross-border connections.

After the transnational turn:

Looking across borders to see the hard face of the nation-state

The transnational turn in migration studies is now almost thirty years old. It began with the appearance of a publication that rarely captures much attention: the collected papers of a conference held under the auspices of an organization mainly concerned with the health and physical sciences. That publication promised to provide a « transnational perspective on migration ». In fact, the book's introduction never explained what a transnational perspective on migration might entail, nor how such a perspective might differ from those that then prevailed. Instead the then unknown, later famous organizers of the conference — Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton — highlighted a phenomenon so new and distinctive that it required the novel concept that they introduced, transnationalism. The phenomenon involved a “new kind of migrating population, composed of those whose networks, activities, and patterns of life encompass both their host and home societies (Schiller et al, 1992: 1).” The ethnographic evidence provided in the article pointed to ways in which the migrants were at once oriented towards and yet strangely disconnected from their home societies : in one case, a migrant donated several thousand dollars for a sports complex in his hometown, without however thinking about where the money for staffing or maintenance would come ; in another case, an association donated an ambulance to its hometown — a place so impoverished that it possessed neither a gas station nor a hospital. While those examples did demonstrate the continuing connection between migrants and their places of origin, they also highlighted the anthropologists' preoccupation with the migrants, as opposed to the

broader social field involving both migrants as well as the people they left behind. And the very fact that the migrants exemplifying the transnational phenomenon would sacrifice resources earned through hard labor in the country of immigration so that they could be wasted in the country of emigration put into question whether these were truly people living in two societies simultaneously, as the authors maintained.

Thus, right from the beginning, rather than developing a transnational perspective transcending the nation-state frame, encompassing states of immigration and emigration and the flows of people, resources and ideas that connected them, Glick Schiller and her collaborators confined the phenomenon to that of immigration. As they explained it, the concept of transnationalism “would allow researchers to take into account the fact that *immigrants* live their lives across national borders and respond to the constraints and demands of two or more states (Glick Schiller et al, 1995: 54; emphasis added).” Yet, this formulation rendered their approach vulnerable to an entirely predictable attack: that migrants’ homeland connections were transient by-products of recency, destined to decline with time.

Moreover, as cross-border ties – whether involving communication, remittance-sending, travel, or long-distance political engagement – are to be found whenever and wherever international migrations occur, defining the phenomenon proved difficult. Transnationalism, Glick Schiller and colleagues conceded, was not shared by all migrants: neither immigrants – putting down roots – nor sojourners – shuttling back and forth between home and host society qualified; only those maintaining strong home connections warranted the label of transmigrants. But these limitations – amplified by prominent scholars who emphasized the significance of the phenomenon while noting that it was “grounded on activities of only a

minority” of the populations concerned (Portes, 2003: 878) -- failed to explain why connections to the place of emigration would be maintained by some migrants and yet abandoned by others. Later work would emphasize the migrant experience as a pivot “between a new land and a transnational incorporation”, with the challenge now that of explaining “the variation in the way that migrants manage that pivot (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004: 1011).

Looking backwards from the vantage point of 2020, it is not simply the root understandings about the nature of the migration process that seem questionable. No less problematic, are the unspoken assumptions regarding the context in which migration transpired: namely, the idea that the world was trending towards greater open-ness, in which immigrants and their descendants could decide on their own whether or not to “pivot” and “live lives across borders” and that states would create the conditions for meaningful “simultaneous incorporation” at both points of origin and destination.

Those assumptions may have seemed reasonable at a time when the Berlin Wall had just tumbled and the polarities that had frozen the globe in place for nearly half a century suddenly dissolved. However, they no longer apply to the world that has emerged in the intervening three decades. Moreover, the nascent counter-trends were visible to close observers at the very moment when transnationalism made its debut. As noted by the Mexican anthropologist, Patricia Arias, in the sphere of Mexico to US migration, “ethnographic evidence taught the exact contrary (2007: 54)” of the core transnationalism claims. Rather than illuminating, transnationalism “eluded and, in a certain manner, deflected attention” from a “fundamental social change – that migration had been converted into emigration.” Indeed, just as Glick Schiller and her collaborators issued their manifesto, Mexican immigrants began to find

themselves caged on US territory, as two simultaneous policies -- the amnesty of the mid-1980s, which fostered settlement by allowing for legal family reunification in the United States and the onset of intensified enforcement at the US-Mexico border – transformed formerly mobile migrants into a fundamentally sedentary population (Massey, Durand, and Malone, 2002).

Subsequent decades provided confirmation of the recurrence of international migration and the cross-border ties that it spawned – just as the scholars advancing the transnational perspective had predicted. Yet the past thirty years also accentuated the tendencies working in the opposite direction, with ever more intense state efforts at bounding the societies they enclose and civil society attempts to reinforce the boundaries of the national community that international migration threatens to disrupt (Fassin, 2011). In a world in which millions in the developing world are eager to move but are locked in place because controls make immigration impossible while countries of immigration are not just building walls but deporting long-term residents, the idea that immigrants have the option to “live lives across borders,” already at the verge of obsolescence when first bruited, now clearly belongs to a different era.

But greater territorial closure also offers an opportunity to see how the perspectival lesson generated by the literature on transnationalism can generate intellectual dividends. The conventional wisdom directs migration scholars to put their backs to the border, restricting the focus to post-migration changes that uniquely unfurl on receiving society soil. Like any way of seeing, this conventional approach is also a way of *not* seeing: in this case, it obscures the impact of the bounded, national contexts of states of both immigration *and* emigration, which can only appear when the two are contrasted to one another. Thus, this essay, building on the

author's prior scholarship (Waldinger, 2015) and synthesizing findings from a broad, bi-national literature, uses the cruel and repressive turn in U.S. migration policy to show how a cross-border perspective can illuminate the experiences of two different, but contemporaneous second generation populations: those whose lives have unfurled in the United States, all the while growing up in internationalized families with ongoing homeland ties; and those whose childhoods began in the United States, but were disrupted as part of the "Great Expulsion" (*The Economist*, 2014), and thus migrated to Mexico, albeit often with U.S. citizenship and almost always with cross-border ties to family members still living in the United States. As the paper will demonstrate, looking across borders highlights the importance of the territorial frontier and the continuing power of the national to undermine the forces that produce cross-border connections.

International migration v everyday nationalism

Migration from the developing to the developed world is good for the migrants. Those effects stem beyond the narrowly economic, as in passing from poorer to richer countries the migrants also move to reasonably well functioning societies, where everyday security is taken for granted, the rule of law is observed, officials are generally not corrupt, bureaucracies function in predictable ways, elections are generally (or at least used to be) honest, and the country's economic wealth allows for investment in public goods and the maintenance of a safety net that compensate for the material shortcomings of the deprived, even if in ways that fall greatly short of the potential or the desirable. Under these conditions, immigrants do significantly better than the people left behind; their children, especially when the offspring of persons who are poorly educated or even illiterate, far surpass the achievements of their

parents, which necessarily means that the second generation average is far closer to that of the natives of native origin than was true for the parents.

Insofar as the migrations serve to meet the domestic labor needs of the country of destination, the migrants are wanted without being welcomed, a preference that promotes a flow of single, adult workers (Piore, 1979). While the liberal democracies of the developed world can impede and postpone settlement and family formation, these outcomes prove inevitable, and all the more so since migration selects for persons who move precisely at peak child-bearing ages. Hence, the arrival of adult immigrants is soon followed by the emergence of a second generation. Moreover, as indicated by the concept of “bureaucratic incorporation,” the logic of governance brings newcomers into the fold, as needs for order maintenance, public health, and reproduction of the labor force compel institutions to attend to the everyday wants of immigrant populations (Marrow, 2009). By the same token, the logic of administration generates practices of identification and corresponding pieces of documentation needed to determine eligibility for state services (Torpey, 2000).

The different institutional context yields transformative effects. At the outset, newcomers moving from developing to developed societies may maintain a dual frame of reference, assessing conditions “here” in light of the advantages relative to circumstances known “there”. Over time, however, exposure to an environment characterized by abundance and consumption patterns far above those that prevailing in the country of emigration yields its effect, generating material expectations and preferences for self-expression at variance with the more solidaristic practices predominant in the country of origin.

Those impacts hit immigrant offspring with particular force. Theories of socialization presume that youth internalize a more or less stable social order, with schools serving as the agent of socialization for membership in the nation, transmitting the precepts, beliefs, and practices that prepare children for citizenship. However, in crossing from one political jurisdiction to another immigrants disrupt that stability: having been socialized for membership in one social, economic, and national context, the parents arrive with dispositions and orientations that are foreign to the place that their children experience as their native world. Thus, immigrant parents expose their children to competing influences, a contest that is rarely equal, as for the parents the process of adaptation is long, error-prone, and entailing interactions with persons and institutions that occur on uneven ground.

This resulting process takes the form of “fragmented socialization,” to borrow a concept from Zuñiga and Giorguli (2019), in which children navigate between the inside world of the parents and the outside world of the neighborhood, peer group, and schools. While these immigrant offspring typically search for some means of accommodating to the preferences of the former, frictions prove unavoidable, with the lessons taught by the outside world usually emerging dominant.

To some extent, those lessons are learned without any explicit instruction. As settlement quickly gives rise to the understanding that no one wants to be labeled as “FOBs” who are “fresh off the boat,” immigrant offspring learn that certain behaviors – dressing in styles favored in the place of emigration, using the dominant tongue but in heavily accented fashion, or even associating with the newest arrivals – are to be avoided whenever possible (Pyke and Dang, 2003: 230). Immigration states do make allowances for the multi-lingual needs

of new arrivals, for reasons related both to the logic of bureaucratic incorporation as well as the struggles of immigrant communities to expand rights and access. In the United States, linguistic accommodations take a variety of forms: publishing official documents in multiple languages; requiring the use of translators in hospitals and courts; special education and even bilingual programs for children from non-English speaking homes. Nonetheless, the native code has to be mastered, as there is neither expectation that the nationals will learn a different tongue nor institutional practice that would pressure them to do so. On the contrary, instruction occurs in the dominant tongue, impeding, if not obliterating, the capacity to feel fully competent, if not comfortable, in the parents' home language (Luthra et al, 2018). Indeed, the much more rapid linguistic assimilation of immigrant children turns them into language brokers for their parents, a role entailing additional burdens but also signaling the greater relevance of the national code (Katz, 2014).

Immigrant offspring are also socialized by state-controlled schools, which are organized to produce citizens who understand themselves as members of a larger, abstract national collectivity. That awareness is buttressed by the tools of banal nationalism -- flags, anthems, ceremonies, armies which happily enlist immigrants and their offspring, as well as ritualized forms of evoking the national community and linking its past with its present -- that the states of immigration use to nurture and reinforce national identity among the entire population (Billig, 1995).

Though powerful, the nationalization of immigrant offspring goes unseen in the conventional accounts, largely because the analysis remains focused on the country of immigration. This context simultaneously obscures the commonalities in national identity and

prevailing expectations shared by immigrant offspring and their longer established compatriots while highlighting the factors that divide them. By contrast, looking across borders highlights what cannot be seen within them. Since migration is selective it inevitably pulls kinship networks apart, producing separated families, with internationalization made persistent by receiving states' intensifying efforts to police national boundaries, inevitably leaving at home those who lack the resources needed to traverse the political barriers to mobility. Thus immigrant offspring grow up embedded in internationalized families, making temporary displacements to visit relatives and communities left behind a common second generation phenomenon. However, travel is not for all, but rather for the fortunate possessing the rights and status allowing for both re-entry and lifelong presence, with the result that family separations are longest for the unauthorized -- precisely that segment of the immigrant population most likely to belong to internationalized families.

Moreover, for a growing number of immigrant offspring born or raised in the United States movement to the country of emigration, in this case, Mexico, involves not a temporary, but rather a long-term displacement, a shift powered by the increasingly repressive turn in U.S. migration policy and further accelerated by the steep economic contraction that began in 2008. In contrast to their parents, who had entered the United States as both legal and sociological foreigners, these migrants arrive in a doubly liminal condition. Sociologically, they are not fully foreign, as they bear characteristics -- names, appearance, kinship network and oral language competence -- that mark them as members of the national people whose territory they join or rejoin. And yet, they are not native either. Even though some are U.S-born whereas others are Mexico-born, but U.S., these immigrant offspring instead comprise "American Mexicans," to

borrow Zuñiga and Hammann's formulation (2015) lacking the competencies and dispositions that make presence on that territory a taken for granted reality. Legally, the U.S.-born among them are often neither fully alien nor fully status-bearing citizen: as children of Mexican citizens entering a territory with a *jus sanguinis* citizenship system, they possess a lineage that provides a claim for citizenship status and its corresponding rights. Yet, as status and other citizenship rights (such as access to education) are contingent on the capacity to certify citizenship claims, rights can only be unlocked with possession of the appropriate documents – all of which are emitted by the state authorities of the territory that the immigrant offspring abandoned and which their parents can usually no longer enter.

As we shall now show, these similar, but contrasting second generation experiences provide a strategic site for examining the degree to which social boundaries converge with or instead transcend state boundaries.

Conflict in the cross-border sphere: temporary displacement

The contemporary second generation in the United States comes of age in contexts where the familial circle is found in both country of emigration and country of immigration (see Luthra et al, 2018, especially chapter 8). Among a large sample of immigrant offspring surveyed in the Los Angeles region in 2004, for example, almost 6 percent reported that at least one parent *never* came to the United States, a proportion that jumped to 13 percent among those who came to the United State after the age of 5 (but before the age of 15). A much larger fraction – 80% -- had relatives still living in the country of origin; even among those with one U.S.-born parent, over 60 percent had kin in the foreign-born parent's home country. Moreover, those connections were the fulcrum around which familial activities, often involving

the use of scarce resources, get organized. 60 percent of the 1.5 to 2.5 generation respondents grew up in households where parents sent home remittances. 12 percent reported that their parents had returned to the home country at least once during childhood and almost another 8 percent reported returning with parents for a stay lasting at least 6 months.

For most of these immigrant offspring, the home country was not an abstraction, but rather a reality that the respondents had themselves encountered. Reflecting those experiences, most immigrant offspring agreed with the statement “I am interested in the politics of my/my parent’s home country”, with almost a sixth stating that they strongly agreed. On the other hand, symbolic commitments seemed a good deal stronger than the material engagements requiring respondents to use their own resources to help out relatives abroad: only one-third reported having ever sent remittances, of whom more than half did so more than once a year. Overall, relatively few proved completely detached from home country connections altogether: 13 percent fell into a category that we have elsewhere called “the bordered” – having neither visited the home, nor sending remittances, nor displaying any level of interest in home country politics. But the fraction evincing a more consistent cross-border orientation was barely larger: only 16 percent sent remittances, had made at least one trip to the home country while in adult, and expressed interest in home country politics. Rather, the overwhelming majority of respondents maintained some type of home country connection – possibly remitting, or visiting, or just retaining an interest – but not all.¹

¹ Tabulations are from the Immigration and Intergenerational Mobility in Metropolitan Los Angeles (IIMMLA) survey ; they pertain to respondents either born abroad but migrated to the United States before the age of 15 or respondents born in the United States to at least one foreign-born parents.

Direct, in-person exposure to the parents' homeland was thus common among the respondents of this survey, though not shared by all. Those with childhood experiences of visiting, with parents who remitted, or who grew up in households where the parents' language was mainly spoken and who therefore possessed the tools needed for successful interaction with relatives and friends at home were more likely to visit as adults. By contrast, those *lacking* U.S. citizenship, even though mainly possessing permanent residence, were least likely to do so, despite possessing all of the other ingredients that stimulate home country engagement.

But as demonstrated by a growing body of literature that has attended to the quality of the visits, these encounters often underscore the gap between life in the place of residence and the place of origin (Wessendorf, 2010). Language shift, from the parent's tongue to that of the receiving environment, produces language shock, as even self-described bilinguals discover that their mastery of the native tongue entails kitchen Spanish or Chinese or Korean, but not the vocabulary or expressiveness that native language-speakers possess (Kibria, 2003). Every day interactions – as when one doesn't fully understand a cashier's or a waiter's comment and ask for it to be repeated – can convey the lesson that one does not quite belong (Ramirez, Skrbis, and Emmison, 2007; Itzigsohn, 2009).

Not only is the taken-for-granted comfort experienced when one is truly at home missing; finding acceptance can be difficult, largely because second generation assimilation to the country of destination simultaneously involves dissimilation from the country of origin, a disconnection exacerbated because immigrant offspring transition to adulthood in an environment characterized by consumption and a preference for individual expression. Thus, visits demonstrate how little sameness is left, not simply because returning immigrant offspring

lack full conversational comfort in the locals' tongue, but also because they present themselves in ways that denote their membership in a different world. The signs of that foreign membership can be material, as when immigrant offspring arrive with "designer sneakers, fashionable clothes, and gold chains" (Smith, 2006: 247), or symbolic, as when returnees "sport an American flag on their clothing or vehicle as a way to make claims to a higher status (Fitzgerald, 2009: 140)," gestures accompanied by the knowledge that the visitors can return to the country of immigration whenever they want, an option not available to the stay-at-homes. But even "dressing down" can be a meaningful indicator of cultural change, as informality is an increasingly common trait of the postmaterial societies in which the second generation grows up. Though the outsized "dream houses" (Villanova, et al., 1994) that immigrant parents build in their hometowns express the parents' new preferences, their design and use is also affected by the new, more privatized needs of the immigrant offspring who want "individual space... privacy and independence, including rooms, stereos and televisions of their own (Fletcher, 1999: 76)."

Thus, identity with the place of *origin* is weakened by the ways in which the expectations of the place of *residence* are internalized, altering the self and leading to a fit between identity and location. Those expectations are generic to the affluent, post-material societies on which immigrants from the developing world have converged. But sameness is also weakened because immigrant offspring grow up to think of themselves as part of an imagined, *national* community whose boundaries are delimited by the borders of the state where they live. To some extent, identification with *the people* of the state of residence takes the form of a banal, almost unconscious nationalism, as illustrated by the Mexican immigrant

who told a team of Mexican sociologists that his US-raised children refused to live in Mexico because they missed “*their country, their game of the Dodgers and those things, or McDonalds, which they liked, and all those little things* (Alarcon et al, 2016: 123).” Moreover, since “here” and “there” are not only divided by space, but by wealth and status, preferences for the richer, more comfortable, often more powerful place of residence are hard to repress. Thus, the second generation encounter with the homeland conveys more than the cultural changes that have distanced immigrant offspring from their cousins back home. As discovered by the authors of a study of second generation New Yorkers, it also underscores the socio-economic gap between places of origin and destination that originally motivated the migration and the insidious evaluations associated with that disparity:

Chinese respondents often complained of the strange lifestyle and lack of amenities in China (squat toilets and the lack of air conditioning). One Queens resident dismissed Guangzhou as a dirty, crowded city – “like Chinatown only on a bigger scale.” The home country’s lack of opportunities and amenities was often mentioned by 1.5 generation Dominican and West Indian respondents who could not imagine relocating permanently to the Caribbean. (A striking number of respondents talked about the bugs and lizards they had encountered there).

A young Dominican American woman interviewed for this same study explained that the situation she encountered during her home country visit was a bit like “country mouse and city mouse;” while the experience was fun she was also glad that she could go “back home to *civilization* (Kasinitz et al, 2008: 262; emphasis added),” an expression that says it all.

Not surprisingly, the response of relatives and friends in the communities of origin is to return the compliment, as Fitzgerald (2009) describes in his deeply researched historical ethnography of Arandas, a small Mexican city with a century-long experience of emigration. As Fitzgerald explained, the Arandanse tended to see their migrant relatives as *agringado*, becoming more like “them” – e.g., the *Norteamericanos* – and less like “us”. Convergence with the perceived U.S. norm took a variety of forms, including adopting the “cholo” fashions of the U.S. underclass, a tendency towards disorderly conduct, and abandonment of national loyalty, a behavior so despised that some naturalized migrants would conceal their new U.S. citizenship when in Mexico.

Conflicts upon return: permanent displacement

Though the repressive turn in U.S. migration policy dates back to the early 1990s, that same decade actually experienced the most sizeable outflow from Mexico. The single largest yearly emigration occurred in 2000, with sizeable departures continuing until 2007, when the Mexican population resident in the United States hit its historical zenith. Thereafter, the size of the Mexican immigrant population began to fall, in a decline driven by the Great Recession of 2008 and intensified deportations, the cumulative effect of which has amounted to a Great Expulsion. Though deportations principally involved adults, the return flow included a large population of children; as of 2015, over 600,000 U.S.-born minors were living in Mexico, in addition to 32,520 children who had been residing in the United States as of 2010 (Zuñiga and Gorgiuli, 2019: 69).

In both exiting the United States and entering Mexico, the children experience the ways in which the hard face of the nation-state does not simply preclude “living lives across borders”,

but rather shapes the very conditions under which access to the territory and its institutions is enjoyed. Although born in the United States, as the offspring of Mexican nationals, the children arrive with the right to Mexican nationality. Yet unlike national identity – which is intersubjective and therefore informal – nationality is matter of law, determined upon production of the relevant identity documents. Likewise, access to educational institutions requires identification, whether to demonstrate the appropriate age or completion of some prior schooling level.

For returning Mexican parents and their U.S.-born and/or U.S.-raised children, meeting these prerequisites proves deeply challenging. Due to Mexico's entrenched ambivalence towards emigration to the United States – tacitly accepting its incapacity to retain its own people and yet seeing emigration as an act of national abandonment – it had long prohibited dual nationality. As emigration swelled to unprecedented heights at the end of the 20th century, that stance changed as Mexican officials began to see the emigrants as a resource to be retained. Hence, in 1993, Mexico approved a law that allowed for automatic transmission of Mexican nationality to children born abroad to at least one Mexican-born parent, a measure followed by a law allowing for dual citizenship (Hoyo, 2015).

Thus, while U.S. children of any Mexican citizen have a guaranteed right to Mexican citizenship based on lineage, that lineage has to be certified, a process that can follow several tracks, depending on where and when the certification is sought. When on U.S. (or other foreign) soil, parents wanting to transmit citizenship to their children may register the birth with a consulate. That requirement is exacting: despite the growth and geographic extension of Mexico's consular network in the United States, Mexico, like all other countries with citizens

abroad, lacks the capacity to maintain the administrative density on foreign territory that exists on native grounds. Hence, registering with a consulate entails resource and time demands that many immigrants – especially those living away from the larger cities where the consulates are based -- lack. Alternatively, as a signatory to the 1961 Hague Convention on the Legalization of Foreign Public Documents, Mexico accepts a certificate known as an “apostille” and issued by a secretary of state (in any one of the 50 U.S. states) in lieu of registration in the consulate. For families on U.S. soil, the procedure can be conducted by mail and is simple, requiring an official birth certificate and a very modest fee, though time-consuming. However, practice often proves more complicated. As consulates lack programs needed to educate returnees about requirements for documentation and return often occurs precipitously and unexpectedly – most notably, when it is the U.S. government, not the migrant, that effectively makes the decision – families frequently cross back into Mexico without the documents that children need to easily access the Mexican educational system.

Consequently, families returning from the United States discover that acquiring the proper documentation becomes a central challenge, with the irony that persons who may have been deported because of their undocumented status in the United States find themselves undocumented in Mexico as well (Anderson and Solis, 2014). Once in Mexico, birth and educational documents originating in the United States can be certified, but that process requires a notarized translation, which increases the time and costs entailed. Children lacking proof of citizenship are considered foreigners and are required to register for a *Clave Unica de Registro de Poblacion* (CURP) without which they are ineligible for medical care, public services, and educational credentials (Medina and Menjivar, 2015). Yet most foreign-born students in

Mexico lack an officially validated CURP (Jacobo-Suarez. 2017: 8); absent a CURP, school authorities may bar children from attendance. Late adolescent returnees, many of whom arrive with schooling levels above the Mexican average, face still more daunting barriers. Institutions of higher education require not just the birth certificate, but any diploma issued by a U.S. school, as well as information on the course of study acquired before return to Mexico, without which the only alternative is to redo coursework already completed in the United States (Jacobo and Landa, 2015).

Once documentary requirements are traversed, migration from the United States to Mexico entails an abrupt change in the underlying expectations that comprise taken for granted realities of any national context. On the one hand, the sociological liminality of the returned children, combined with the prevalence of a nationalist logic rooted in Mexico's history as a country of emigration and not immigration, renders the children's foreign experiences difficult to perceive. Invisibility is augmented because the children comprise an unmarked minority: they bear none of the linguistic, vestimentary, or phenotypical traits that would stamp them as different; they prove reluctant to reveal their U.S.-birth – understanding that their foreign origin is a source of stigma -- (Bybee, et al, 2020). Hence, school administrators and teachers do not fully see their American-Mexican students, as illustrated by this description provided by Zuñiga and Saucedo in their pathbreaking book on the migrant children that they label "Generation 0.5":

In October 2004, we visited a school located in the town of Santiago, Nuevo Leon, with the idea of piloting the questionnaire that we would use for the survey. We chose that school without having any previous knowledge about the students enrolled in it...The

school director was intrigued because she assured us that there was no student in her school who had previously been in American schools...The teacher, like the director, affirmed, that there was no child with prior schooling in the United States in her group. We passed out the questionnaire and, to the surprise of the teacher, we found two students who had studied in the United States. When we talked with one of the students we gave her the option of having the conversation in English or Spanish. Neither the director nor the teacher could hide their surprise: the student spoke English like a native speaker! (Zuñiga and Giorguli, 2019: 185-6).

Precisely because schools are institutions that explicitly socialize for membership in the nation, the moment of encounter between the school and the “American Mexicans” poses the most significant challenge and yields the greatest dislocation, as the children are compelled to “integrate themselves into a monocultural and monolingual nationalist educational system,” which remains shaped by the post-revolutionary goals of homogenizing Mexico’s culturally and linguistically distinct populations (Despaigne and Jacobo, 2016). Up until the moment of the migration to Mexico they had been prepared for membership in a different society, the lessons of which were useful in that context, but turn out to have limited value in the new environment:

The international migrant students do not know the Mexican national anthem, do not have the most remote idea of who is Miguel Hidalgo, do not know the names of most of the states of the Mexican Republic, have not developed loyalties to Mexico as a nation-state (Zuñiga and Giorguli, 2019: 183)

However, the national does not just yield its impact when it is explicitly evoked; just as fish are swimming in water without knowing it, the national is omnipresent even when not noticed, which is why the encounter with a new national reality leads to additional dislocations. Pedagogical models used in Mexico differ from those prevailing in the United States, the curricular content is distinctive, everyday cultural references are novel, and material conditions also vary – with American Mexican students particularly likely to highlight the lack of libraries, gyms, and science labs (Despaigne and Jacobo-Suarez, 2016). Consequently, as argued by Jacobo-Suarez, a Mexican political scientist (2017: 3), “the educational experience in Mexico is something new, an integration to a schooling culture that is unfamiliar.”

As learning effective communication in the dominant language is an inherent part of socialization for membership in the nation, still more important is the linguistic disjuncture accompanying entry into a Mexican school environment. Most returning U.S.-born or –raised students arrive with at least a reasonable level of Spanish-language proficiency, though in the states of traditional emigration as well as those bordering the U.S. a significant number of students report not speaking Spanish (nor an indigenous language and therefore presumably only English (Jacobo-Suarez, 2017: 8). Nonetheless, the basic interpersonal communication skills that they possess are bound up with the personal and private matters of the household; as prior to departure from the United States, higher level intellectual competencies had all been acquired in English. Mirroring the banal nationalism of U.S. schools, which had deprived the “American Mexican” students of the cognitive academic language that Mexican schools require, that very same feature was found in the monolingual skills of Mexican teachers, who lacked the capacity to assess what their U.S.-origin students knew (Jacobo and Jensen, 2019).

Moreover, just like international migration itself, the arrival of persons who do not command the national language disrupts the logic of nationalism – which posits a world in which “we” nationals live “here” and “they” (the foreigners) live in foreign lands “there”. Since “to be a ‘normal’ Mexican is to speak Spanish (Despaignes, Semiotic, 8),” “not only teachers...but relatives of the returning migrants cannot understand that their relatives, who share characteristics shared with a Mexican ethnic identity, do not know how to speak or understand their own language (Mora and Santos, 2019: 83).” Thus, the child migrants from the United States find that their connection to the school is typically further fractured: as the gap between the competencies with which they arrive and those that schools and teachers expect is the source of continuing humiliation (Panait and Zuñiga, 2016), , everyday school tasks yield repeated failure, and with failure, comes shame (Zuñiga and Giorguli, 2019; Silver, 2018).

Conclusion

The transnational turn in migration studies is now three decades long. Though generating controversy from the start, the new approach that it encouraged generated a badly needed, but fundamental lesson: namely, that migration researchers need to adopt a different standpoint, one that enlarges the boundaries of inquiry to include both sending and receiving places. The conventional wisdom, adopted by the literature on assimilation or integration, directs scholars to put their backs to the border, restricting the focus to those post-migration changes that uniquely unfurl on receiving society soil. Like any way of seeing, this conventional approach is also a way of not seeing: in this case, it neglects the continuing back and forth of people, ideas, information, resources, and political and communal engagements that international migrations inevitably trigger. By contrast, the transnational literature provided a

new and better optic. However, that literature quickly went a step too far, leaping from a transnational *perspective* on migration to *transnationalism*, a claim about the persistent nature of the phenomena extending across borders and the ties between places of origin and destination.

This paper has built on the transnational turn in migration studies, albeit taking it in a direction that is unlikely to please its proponents. The political and social logic of international migration ensures that immigrant offspring typically grow up in internationalized families, with kinship networks stretched between “here” and “there.” However, migration is selective: some who could depart, do not want to leave; and not all who want to leave have the resources that departure requires, most importantly because they lack the capacity to surmount the barriers that migration control policies have imposed. Consequently, the experiences of the migrants and the stay-at-homes necessarily diverge, with the migrants and especially their children increasingly transformed by the distinctive environment that they encounter after migration. To some extent, those changes derive from the very place of destination advantages that motivated the migration from the start: namely, the opportunities for economic advancement, the fruits of which loosen constraints on consumption, encouraging the pursuit of individualistic life styles oriented towards self-expression and thus at variance with the more solidaristic, survival-oriented strategies prevailing back home. But just, if not more important, are the shifts resulting from the move into a new political jurisdiction, one with institutions that function in ways to generate a sense of common peoplehood. While immigrant parents retain the marks of their earlier socialization for membership in the country of emigration, immigrant offspring are turned into nationals of the society that their parents had entered. Thus, for the immigrant

offspring whose lives unfurl in the society of destination, the ongoing cross-border ties that are a regular, recurrent by-product of migration become vectors of conflict. In returning to their parents' places of origin, immigrant offspring as well as the relatives and community members whom they encounter, discover that their lives have been disconnected, not simply by physical, but by social, distance, as both parties to the interaction find themselves to be inescapably the products of the national societies in which they have come of age.

The same holds true for the growing numbers of immigrant offspring with extended childhood experiences – possibly beginning at birth -- in the United States, but who have been compelled to return to their countries of origin, largely because their parents have been the victims of the Great Expulsion. In traversing back into Mexico from *el norte*, the young returnees confirm the recurrent nature of the cross-border connections that international migrations inevitably produce, as the great majority leave behind at least one family member still residing in the United States (Despaigne and Jacobo-Suarez, 2016). Yet once in Mexico, the returnees find themselves in a profoundly liminal condition, as they “are here, but are not from here” (Bybee et al, 2020: 123). Legally, citizenship status and citizenship rights should be in grasp; however, as status citizenship cannot just be claimed, but must be documented, and document production is territorially based, access to schooling and other social rights proves problematic. Sociologically, the returnees are American Mexicans, to use the expression coined by Zuñiga and Hamann (2015). Yet they arrive in a context where that the logic of nationalism combined with a century-long history of emigration leads that identity to be perceived as incompatible with everyday understandings of the world. Hence, the American Mexican are

institutionally invisible, even though their quotidian experiences of mis-fit provide ongoing reminders of their prior lives in a foreign country.

That condition could be alleviated through intervention by both Mexican *and* U.S. governments, a process underway as of this writing, though with still considerable progress yet to be made. U.S. consulates have begun information campaigns directed at families with U.S.-born children, lacking the documentation needed to live legally in Mexico, working in concert with Mexican governmental agencies, mirroring similar efforts by the municipality of Tijuana. A more effective response would entail initiation by Mexico of a “symmetrical diaspora policy” providing rights to identity to Mexicans both abroad and at home, as suggested by Mateos (2020). Ending the repressive turn in U.S. migration policy would, of course, have the greatest impact.

In the end, this comparative study of the conflicts associated with the temporary and permanent displacements of immigrant offspring highlights the fundamental problem encountered when migration studies took its transnational turn. While much was to be learned from a transnational perspective, looking across borders and finding transnationalism proved erroneous. In the end the students of immigrant transnationalism reproduced the familiar antinomies of social science, most notably that of a “closed” past and “open” present. More importantly, they failed to confront the alternative hypothesis advanced by Arendt (1951) seventy years ago, who, unlike scholars of transnationalism celebrating the potential to “live lives across borders”, concluded that the condition of having *no* home – *not two homes* – marked the contemporary world.

Looking backward from mid-20th century, Arendt saw an old order that had exploded with World War I, though she conceded that the episodes of persecution and forced migration that followed the Great War represented nothing new. “In the long memory of history,” she wrote, developments of this sort “were everyday occurrences.” What had changed, rather, was the emergence of a world completely organized into nation-states, conceived of and understood in familistic and communitarian terms. Entire classes of peoples found themselves expelled, “not because of what they had done or thought, but because of what they unchangeably were.” And those deprived of a state, found “themselves thrown out of the family of nations altogether,” as “the loss of home and political status became identical with the expulsion from humanity altogether (Arendt, 1951, 294).”

While the Arendtian and turn of the 21st century worlds may not be fully identical, she fully captured the underlying trend. In the long run, the rise of massive state apparatuses *controlling* population movements between states, and rationalizing distinctions between foreigners and citizens, represent the most striking developments. While persons migrating across international boundaries are assessing the right mix of costs and benefits, as the economists insist, they must also confront “a problem of political organization,” just as underscored by Arendt. It is precisely that problem of political organization that separates immigrant offspring in destination countries from kin and communities left behind and has forced the American Mexicans to endure the experience of strangeness in a country that should, but does not, feel like home.

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