The Border as a Life Experience: Identities, Asymmetry and Border Crossing between Mexico and the United States

La frontera como experiencia vital: Identidades, asimetría y cruce fronterizo entre México y Estados Unidos

Laura VELASCO ORTIZ
El Colegio de la Frontera Norte
lvelasco@colef.mx

Óscar F. CONTRERAS
El Colegio de la Frontera Norte
ocontre@colef.mx

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the effects of the Mexico-United States geopolitical border in social and cultural differentiation, using the crossing experience as the analytical core. Based in 60 life histories of residents of the Mexico-USA border region, a typology of life experiences structured around border crossing is developed, including a wide range of life experiences, from those that involve never having crossed the border to those that are precisely the product of border crossing. The experienced border encompasses the subjectified experience of the region, integrating both the meaning of crossing and the structural elements that historically have defined the border: proximity, asymmetry, and interaction.

Keywords: 1. Mexico-USA border region, 2. border crossing, 3. experienced border, 4. border identities, 5. cultural borders.

RESUMEN

En este artículo se examina el efecto diferenciador de la frontera geopolítica, abordando la experiencia vital del cruce fronterizo como núcleo analítico para explorar la relación entre fronteras territoriales y socioculturales. Con base en 60 relatos de vida de residentes de la región fronteriza México-Estados Unidos desarrollamos una tipología que intenta captar la diferenciación de las experiencias de la frontera estructuradas en torno al cruce. La noción de frontera vivida involucra la experiencia subjetivada de la región, integrando tanto el significado del cruce como los elementos estructurales que históricamente han definido a la región fronteriza: proximidad, asimetría e interacción.

Palabras clave: 1. frontera México-Estados Unidos, 2. cruce de fronteras, 3. frontera vivida, 4. identidades fronterizas, 5. fronteras culturales.

Fecha de recepción: 21 de agosto de 2013
Fecha de aceptación: 3 de diciembre de 2013

INTRODUCTION

The Mexico-United States border is considered, "the largest known structure of inequality in the contemporary world" (Grimson, 2006), since there is no other border in the world with greater inequality in terms of power, economic development and social conditions (Álvarez, 1995). In the past decade, inequality has increased due to the massive investment in infrastructure for the surveillance and control of movement from south to north and the increase in deportations from north to south. This one-way control of mobility in the border area translates into an overlapping of social hierarchies (Tarrius, 2000:45), producing different ways of experiencing the border.

This article analyzes the differentiating effect of the geopolitical border, addressing the life experience of crossing as an analytical core. It takes up the problem raised by Michael Kearney (2008) on the relationship between territorial and socio-cultural borders. The article presents an analytical approach to the different ways of experiencing the geopolitical border between Mexico and the United States by constructing a typology of border crossing experiences.

A key forerunner in this direction is the pioneering work by Martínez (1994), which classified residents of the Mexican border as "national border" and "transnational border" and developed a typology of the latter according to the intensity of their interactions with the United States. However, in the current context of increasing interaction coupled with powerful restrictions on mobility, it is important to consider the direction and conditions of border crossing in order to understand the processes of social and cultural differentiation of society border on the Mexican side. Crossing conditions underwent a significant change from the 1990s onwards, with increased use of tourist visas to enter the United States for work purposes, as documented by Chávez (2011). The direction of the crossing has also changed. In addition to the traditional flow from south to north, there is now an increasing flow from north to south as a result of the deportation of Mexican immigrants in transit and inside the United States (Coleman, 2007).

What is called the *structural boundary* in this paper is the economic and institutional framework in which residents of the region evaluate and organize their life choices. This concept is very close to that of structural power posited by Eric Wolf (1990) referring to the power that structures political economy and "shapes the sphere of action which makes certain types of behavior possible and others less so or impossible" (586-587). Moreover, the concept of the experience of border

life is similar to that of cross-border lives put forward by Stephen (2007) to characterize life trajectories where multiple spaces, times and social relations intersect, with particular emphasis on the experience of the border in its geopolitical dimension. In acknowledging the fact that people are subjects of their own destiny but also objects of the coercion of the environment (Tarrius, 2000), it seems important to clarify some of the constituent elements of what has been called "structural border" in this article.

PROXIMITY, INTERACTION, AND ASYMMETRY: THE ESTRUCTURAL BORDER

Due to the massive increase in the flows of capital, goods, services, information and people worldwide, the thesis of the weakening of borders has gained ground in academic literature over the past twenty years. According to this idea, physical boundaries would become increasingly porous, social and economic relations would become increasingly detached from territory while territorial borders would become less and less relevant as regards their former role of controlling entries and exits, and setting limits on states' powers (Castells, 2001; Ohmae, 1995; Florida, 2007; Anderson and O'Dowd, 1999).

There is evidence, however, that national states continue to play an important role in regulating global processes at the local level. Although flows have intensified almost all over the world, borders continue to define the limit of heterogeneous regulatory regimes, endogenous institutional frameworks and idiosyncratic economic trajectories (Hall and Soskice, 2001; Lundvall, 2007). And beyond the economic sphere, the world's geopolitical borders have increased their control and surveillance devices linked to national security. Over the past twenty years, the Mexico-U.S. border has seen an accentuation of the trend towards decreased fluidity and border porosity in relation to human mobility, while trade flows and social interactions have increased. Both aspects, the increase in interaction and the reduction of porosity are discernible in light of the history of inequality and asymmetry between the two countries.

In 2010, the border region was inhabited by 14.1 million people: 6.8 on the Mexican side and 7.3 on the U.S. side. Throughout its 1911 miles, 350 million legal crossings and millions of regulated transactions are performed at the 25 border checkpoints. Mexicans crossing into the U.S. make retail purchases of 7 500 million U.S. dollars annually, while Americans crossing into Mexico spend over 2 500

million U.S. dollars on purchases (Bringas and Toudert, 2011). In addition to the crossings in both directions for shopping and sightseeing, social networks are ancient and widespread, as shown by the constant family visits and festivities shared across the border. This series of exchanges and understanding facilitate the emergence of cross-border social agents. In recent years, local initiatives to establish or strengthen ties through cooperation agreements and institutions have multiplied, together with the collaboration of social or cultural groups (Pavlakovich-Kochi, 2011). A growing network of civil society organizations hold joint activities covering a wide range of interests. A small example of this are the five projects and organizations that received the U.S.-Mexico Innovation and Cooperation Award in 2013, focusing on: *1)* linking return migrants from the United States to Mexico to institutions and organizations to obtain identity papers and job opportunities; *2)* restoring degraded ecosystems and balancing water management in the Colorado River; *3)* promoting children's welfare in the region through a social welfare center; *4)* providing educational opportunities for women living in poverty; *5)* promoting the protection of the environment and natural resources in the Río Bravo/Rio Grande international basin (Senate, 2013).

Despite the massive flows of people and goods and efforts to build a partnership, the geopolitical dimension of the border continues to define the limit of well-defined regulatory regimes and political entities with an enormous power asymmetry. For example, waiting times to cross into the United States through border checkpoints may be as much as two to three hours depending on the level of terrorist alert. U.S. border checkpoints conduct 260 million annual inspections, including vehicles and people crossing on foot (Chávez, 2012), which implies a physical infrastructure and a vast bureaucratic apparatus for monitoring the legal border flow. Conversely, at the entrance to Mexico, there is no immigration inspection and customs inspection is random, using a fiscal traffic light. Mexican immigration personnel handle the reception of migrants sent back from the United States, and do not supervise the regular border flow from north to south.

This imbalance in the control of human flows follows the global logic of mobility control from south to north and at the same time, reflects a unilaterally imposed adjustment of the social and institutional dynamics of the border for political and ideological (labor mobility) and security reasons (combating terrorism and drug trafficking). As Heyman (2001) notes, border checkpoints are places of surveillance and control where everyday interactions are negotiated in increasingly complex frameworks, but always marked by unequal power.

Although the most important trade agreement between the two countries, signed in 1994 (NAFTA), substantially increased binational business transactions (406 billion U.S. dollars in 2010), it did not include the flow of labor. With a wage differential of nearly tenfold between the two countries, undocumented labor migration was already massive at that time, and the Mexican side of the border had become a safe haven and transit area for thousands of workers and their families. The different types of flows and interactions outlined a border region characterized by the "power asymmetry" (Bustamante, 1989) and the "adjacency of differences" (Joy, 1989). Moreover, from 1994 onwards, the Gatekeeper and Hold the-line operations laid the foundations of what Chávez (2011) calls the closed border, by devoting more resources and attention to controlling the Mexican border.

Currently perhaps the most significant features of the asymmetry can be seen precisely in border surveillance and the control of migration flows. In 2010, the U.S. Border Patrol had 18,000 agents responsible for monitoring the border, whereas in Mexico the only police group remotely similar to the Border Patrol, the Beta Group, charged with protecting migrants in transit on the Mexican side of the border, had a mere 150 agents. As of 2002, immigration control became part of the state security policy, as a result of which border control measures encompass a range of actions involving the fight against terrorism, drug trafficking, human trafficking and the crossing of undocumented persons.

When a Mexican wishes to cross the border to the north, he must apply for a visa, for which he must prove financial solvency, the fact that he lives permanently in Mexico and has no criminal or terrorist record, while a resident of the United States can cross into Mexico without no need for any formalities or to show any documents.

No American has died trying to enter Mexico, whereas in the past 15 years, approximately 5 000 migrants have died trying to enter the United States. In 2011 alone, 418 000 deportations were recorded, nearly a fifth of which affected long-term residents in the U.S. (El Colef, 2013). After many years of living in the United States, thousands of deportees are sent to a country they do not know, to which they feel they no longer belong, in addition to the fact that this often means they will be separated from their families. This phenomenon has intensified as a result of legislative changes that blurred the distinction between "legal offense" and criminal or terrorist activity in the 1990s, as a result of which resident undocumented migrants are treated as if they were entering the United States

(Coleman, 2007:60). Insofar as undocumented residence is criminalized, border control extends into the United States.

IDENTITIES, ASYMMETRY AND BORDER CROSSING

In the late 20th century, the city of Tijuana (more than other border cities in the north of Mexico) was seen as the cultural laboratory of postmodernism, a privileged area for observing the processes of hybridization (García, 1989). The still young border cities were the prototype of cities with the cultural diversity characteristic of globalization and at the same time, spaces for the production of hybrid identities due to their interaction and adjacency to the U.S. border (Anzaldúa, 1999; Valenzuela, 2003).

This image corresponds to a point marked by interactions characteristic of a fluid, porous yet unequal border. It was a time when one could cross the border just by saying *I am an American citizen.* Immigration agents would be satisfied by that statement and a cursory glance at the person attempting to cross: a few sentences in English and an appearance that failed to trigger racial or ethnic prejudice were an effective substitute for a visa for many years. But in the 1990s, restrictions on crossing began to increase, tightening dramatically after the terrorist attack in New York in 2001. This change in the fluidity of the border revealed certain aspects of the asymmetry that were hidden behind the apparent permeability and caused some scholars (Heyman, 1994; Vila, 2000) to distance themselves from what they saw as an overemphasis on the symbolic dimension of the border, to the detriment of the territorial and political dimensions.

Criticism targeted the ontological exaltation of the hybrid and the assumption of hybridization as the only significant result of symbolic border crossing (Vila, 2000; Grimson, 2003, 2008), within the framework of the proliferation of the discourse of hybrid identities that led to the acclamation of *commuters* or *betweennees* as icons of border identities and to the emphasis on border crossers as border residents par excellence. As Hutnyk (2010) points out, the discourse of hybridization was a vindication of the diversity and blends produced by migrations and diasporas, but became more of an anti-racist political strategy than an appropriate analytical framework for illustrating the heterogeneity and multiplicity of identification and cultural differentiation processes in the new scenario of strengthened geopolitical boundaries. In the midst of this discursive effervescence, less attention was paid to the cultural processes of a broad layer of the population that does not

cross the border yet experiences its structural effect through cultural consumption, border employment and cross-border family networks.

Both urban studies from the Manchester School and those of the Mexican school of anthropology have shown that knowing and interacting with *culturally different others* does not always produce hybridization or the desire to be like *others*. Beyond the analytical role of the perspective of hybridization, the discourse of cosmopolitanism can mask relations of subordination and exclusion. Friedman (1997) notes that cosmopolitan elites view with suspicion the essentialist strategies of indigenous movements, whom they disparage as traditionalists and uncosmopolitan. Vila (2000) illustrates this with his studies on the east of the Mexican border: meetings between the residents of Ciudad Juárez (Chihuahua) and El Paso (Texas) often lead them to reinforce their prejudices rather than mutually influence each other, because of the widespread undervaluation of what is Mexican. Meanwhile, studies by Valenzuela (1988) show processes of cultural entrenchment in certain categories of lower class youths from Tijuana as a result of poverty and discrimination. This is because cultural interactions do not occur in a field lacking value but in the context of economic and political relations marked by historically configured, asymmetric power relations.

Given the marked inequality between Mexico and the United States, the geopolitical border is a source of social and cultural differentiation that conditions processes of hybridization such as mixing and opening as well as processes of possible closing, entrenchment or essentialization. It is difficult to find hybridization processes in the everyday practices of those who are hiding from the police or prosecution or those deprived of the American Dream by being deported after years of residence in the United States.

U.S. unilateral border control policies are the most conspicuous expression of the asymmetry of relations on the border, which have their counterpart in the ideology of opportunity that still prevails on the Mexican side of the border. The process of cultural blending takes place in a horizon of subordinate ethnic and racial relations and processes of exploitation, exclusion and expulsion.

García (1989) and Anzaldúa (1999) are right to point out that the hybridization process always involves the crossing of symbolic and sometimes physical borders, although one should add that the opposite is not always true: crossing physical and symbolic borders does not always entail hybridization. Cultural contact may produce the symbolic crossing of borders, but may also elicit rejection or cultural indifference, processes in which domination mechanisms operate,

where certain cultural elements have a lower value in a symbolic hierarchy of a transnational order. In this regard, Heyman (1994) and Kearney (2008) highlight two considerations: on the one hand, geopolitical boundaries constitute a filter mechanism for people who cross them, which changes their features by incorporating them into a new classification where cultural elements have hierarchies that produce differentiated subjects. On the other, people often exercise active resistance to these classifications, either by avoiding crossing or employing strategies of cultural invisibility or camouflage once they cross the geopolitical border. And so a vision of the border linked to space emerges, like a political ecology (Heyman, 1994) where relationships and social interactions are organized by reporting relationships of subordination, structurally defined on either side.

The phenomenon of *non-crossers* put forward by Vila (2000) can then be taken up not only in a symbolic sense but also as regards its link with the territorial level. In other words, they are not necessarily acts of rebellion against mixing or hybridity, as part of the vindication of alleged cultural purity, but rather the result of multiple exclusion mechanisms that operate in the territory and are linked to mobility. Even in conditions of territorial adjacency, not everyone can cross the border since they lack the resources to cross, whether legally or illegally. In a regional perspective, it is necessary to analyze border issues by involving not only the people crossing the border, but also those who have never crossed it, which Martínez (1994) analyzes as national border as opposed to transnational border residents. According to Heyman (2012), the processes of constructing difference do not necessarily correspond to groups of people and instead are processes that can be experienced by the same person at different times in their lives.

At the same time, cultural differentiation due to either hybridity or polarization or essentialization is a contingent result of profound socio-historical processes that condense on the border. The strength of this thesis might suggest that there is no point in exploring the characterization itself (Heyman, 2012). However, recognizing how this socio-historical sedimentation produces various lifestyles and involves multiple strategies also involves identifying new, previously neglected socio-historical processes such as the drug trafficking economy and migration policy.

BORDER LIVES: THE CROSSING EXPERIENCE

The attempt to capture the complexity and multiplicity of the processes of cultural identification and differentiation in a region marked by its border condition can

hardly exclude the analysis of the experience of border crossing for people living in the area or passing through it.

In this paper, a typology is proposed on the basis of 60 life stories (28 women and 32 men) of persons classified in various social profiles. The stories were constructed through biographical interviews lasting between one and three hours. Half the interviews were conducted between 2007 and 2010 in the city of Tijuana and are reported in Velasco and Contreras (2011). The other 30 accounts were obtained at subsequent stages of the fieldwork in Tijuana (three accounts), Ciudad Juarez (14 accounts) and Matamoros (13 accounts) in 2012 and 2013. Social profiles were constructed as ideal types, using occupation, immigration status and intensity of border crossing as classification criteria.

In the life stories, the border emerges in people's narrative in different ways. Sometimes it appears with intensity and drama, as the linchpin that lends meaning and coherence to the life experience, and sometimes it is barely visible through tangential references to consumption and the lives of others. But the truth is that it is there, marking the times and spaces of people's lives, their jobs, social relations and perceptions of the opportunities available in the environment.

The typology proposed in this section seeks to capture the diversity of ways of experiencing the border, organized on a continuum ranging from those that do not directly involve the experience of crossing the border to those that are literally the result of border crossing.

The Uncrossed Border

Although the expectation of crossing the border to the north is the powerful magnet that attracts tens of thousands of people each year, many of those who are on the verge of crossing remain on the Mexican side of the border, either because their attempt failed or because they never tried. Crossing the border is not a general condition of all the inhabitants of the region, since there are segments of the population on both sides whose lives are determined by the reality of the border but live on just one side and rarely or never cross the line. People who do not have a visa to cross into the United States live in low-income neighborhoods and work in maquiladoras, services, formal or informal trade or agriculture, generally with higher wages than in the south of the country.

Thus, the first type of existential experience of the border refers to the lives of residents on the Mexican side of the border who do not cross the line into the United States, but whose lives are marked by the region's border condition. Examples of this

type include the cases of migrant women heads of household. Rosalía, an agricultural day laborer in Valle de San Quintín; Elena, who performs piecework at home, and Rosa, who is engaged in prostitution. Although none of them has crossed the border, their lives are marked by the effect of proximity and the asymmetry of the border with the United States, through their engagement in economic activities (agriculture, export industry and sex tourism) directly linked to the California consumer market and the low cost of the labor force on the Mexican side.

For Rosalía, the border she has never crossed is only a vague reference yet one that nonetheless determines much of her life, since for the past 22 years she has worked for an export company that supplies fruits and vegetables to the California market, in addition to the fact that the husband who abandoned her lives in the United States. Elena, a domestic employee, worker and social activist, spent years at home making signs for a U.S. maquiladora, meaning that every day her products were sent across the border she never crossed. Rosa came to Tijuana fleeing domestic violence in her place of origin and has worked as a prostitute for years on the streets of the Northern Zone, a dense social space where tourists crossing from north to south in search of sexual entertainment and migrants from the south seeking accommodation and company converge.

In the narratives of people with this profile, the border region is experienced as a place that provides the opportunity for family or personal improvement, not directly by crossing into the United States but because of the dynamics of the border town on the Mexican side, where they find employment and other opportunities (housing, greater access to consumption, and occasionally some form of government support) which they did not have in their places of origin. For this type of persons, opportunities are already available on the Mexican side, and crossing the border is remote, a vague image conveyed by friends, family and the media. Knowing that it is impossible to cross, they do not regard this option as a possibility or a source of anguish, so it is not mentioned. Their life is on this side, their ups and downs, joys and expectations are on the Mexican side of the border. The geopolitical boundary exists, and its structural effects shape much of their life experiences, but it is not as significant as the symbolic border with the south of Mexico, which is based more on contrasts than territorial limits. In this type, interaction and asymmetry play their structuring role fully; however life on the other side of the border is not usually idealized. The mix of cultural patterns, consumption of clothing, music and food coexists with patterns of identifying with their hometowns.

The Border as Background

The second type of perception of border life includes the experiences of people who have occasionally or sporadically crossed the border, yet whose occupations are defined by border labor markets, usually in services or trade, performing tasks that may be of a legal or illegal nature.

This type includes two contrasting cases, that of Ofelia, the indigenous Mixtec woman devoted to hawking on the streets of Tijuana, and Juan, a drug dealer who operates on a small or medium scale depending on his luck. Both are migrants who at sometime in their lives have crossed the border. Their work is not linked to crossing the border, but acquires meaning in the context of trade markets in the region, both legal and illegal, one based on the purchase of Mexican crafts by visitors from the United States and the other on the use of illegal drugs on either side of the border.

In these cases, the possibility of sporadic crossing is present as an option based on the existence of family networks, friendship or business across the border. Consequently, the imaginary of the United States implies much greater familiarity and both crossing and transactions are constantly mentioned in the respondents' accounts, usually in connection with consumption, wage differentials and the contrast between the legal systems in the two countries. This type of experience suggests that physical adjacency does not suffice to enable crossing, which also requires certain economic and social resources, particularly access to cross-border family networks. The border is experienced as a backdrop permeating the life experience of people who only occasionally cross the border because of the difficulties imposed by the U.S. inspection system. Increased surveillance and border control have also increased the scope for illegal activities such as drugs and people trafficking, opening up opportunities linked to organized crime and cross-border corruption networks. The narrative of opportunity is also present, although here it is linked to the possibility of quick profits by taking advantage of loopholes in the state to do business. The symbolic crossing associated with the physical crossing is less clear, in terms of acceptance, the desire to resemble the other or the adoption of cultural features linked to the different trips for consumption and everyday cross-border encounters.

The Everyday Border

The third type includes life experiences in which border crossing is the primary livelihood in everyday life. This is the type of border experience par excellence, insofar as

crossing is a strategic resource that articulates people's lives, through either legal or illegal jobs. It comprises people living on the Mexican side and working in the United States *(commuters)* in very different occupations, usually low-skilled and very often without legal authorization to work in the United States (Chávez, 2011); professionals and technicians employed on either side of the border, as well as traders and entrepreneurs operating in border markets or who purchase supplies, equipment and services on both sides of the border. It also includes people and drug traffickers who exploit their knowledge of the region and their social and family networks on the border to move smoothly between the two countries.

The broad range of experiences related to this type can be illustrated by two cases, Eloísa, a college student who crosses the border at weekends to look after the elderly in California, and El Pantera, a "coyote" who smuggles migrants. Eloísa's account depicts the life of a commuter, defined by residence on the Mexican side of the border and working on the U.S. side to optimize the wage differential, in less skilled, stereotyped jobs for Mexicans in the United States. The case of El Pantera shows the life of people smugglers, for whom undocumented migration is a business, and the lives of undocumented migrants are commodities to be bought, sold, and sometimes lost.

Constant mobility across the border requires a greater capacity for adaptation than in the other types, as well as the command of certain cultural skills, such as a certain level of English proficiency and the ability to handle normative differences between the two societies. These resources are usually complemented by access to family and social networks on either side of the border. The legal status of the crossing makes a major difference in this kind of experience, because for those who cross the border without the appropriate documentation, social and family networks are more important. This type of border experience usually involves the Mexican side, although the choice of place of residence is extremely sensitive to economic downturns on either side of the border and changes in security policies and border control, as well as the violence on the Mexican side, meaning that people may go back and forth at different times in their lives.

Structural inequality plays an important role not only in shaping material choices, but also in the symbolic dimension, insofar as a sense of identification is developed whereby *the appreciation of the other* who lives across the border implies a range of possibilities due to cultural heterogeneity. For example, crossing the border may be an encounter with others *from a similar ethnic background,* due to their Mexican heritage, but still there is a certain degree of experience of the cultur-

ally other or indecipherable, especially with all those who are ethnically distinct, whether Asians, blacks or whites. Here there is no cultural indifference, as in the first type, but rather varying degrees of incomprehension of the other and at times a certain cultural devaluation, mediated by the recognition of a power relationship and a compensation for reasserting one's heritage linked to the Mexican border, even though many were born and raised in the United States. What prevails is a somewhat ambiguous viewpoint showing an instrumental yet at the same time affective sense of their residence in Mexico, which attributes a warmth and freedom to the Mexican side that is lacking in the United States. As Grimson notes (2006), cultural traits do not always correspond to cultural identification.

The Boundary Transposed

The fourth type of experience of border life arises from the transposition of the border due to the effect of international migration and the settlement of migrants in the United States. In these biographies, the border is Mexico, which they left behind, because although their experience is fully based on Mexican elements, through family and work, their life horizons are directed toward their country of residence, the United States. The Mexican border is not an opportunity, but rather part of the origin and past they have managed to overcome with pride. Examples of this are people who came to the U.S. as children as migrants and after years, achieved their residence and citizenship, and the second generation of migrants who have experienced social mobility compared to their predecessors in Mexico. Two cases illustrating this condition are Emilio, a college student at an elite college in California, and Julius, a Border Patrol officer of Mexican origin. Emilio was raised and educated as a U.S. citizen. Although proud of his origins, he has fully embraced the values of the society in which he lives. In the case of Julius, this assimilation of values has reached its peak, since this son of hardworking Mexican immigrants has become a Border Patrol agent, whose task is to pursue and arrest those who enter the United States without documents. Moreover, this is a task he performs with conviction and pride.

In general, people who belong to this type have both an affectionate and a critical attitude towards Mexico: although generally proud of their origins, they have assumed the values of the society in which they live to varying degree. The life trajectories of these people take place on the border on the U.S. side with occasional visits to Mexico. One constant characterizes the type of life of the transposed border, namely that their lives are constantly compared with their parents.

In other words, parents represent Mexico, providing a sense of continuity with Mexico, yet are a baseline for assessing their personal achievements or failures in the United States.

For them, the border is of a cultural and political order, with ambiguous values such as the warmth of the people and the corruption of the political system. The narrative of the regularization of residence and citizenship flows through the backdrop of legitimate state violence to control the border and the conversion process of the government as subject. There is a patriotic conversion in this type, which contradicts the nativist view of immigrants' difficulty in assuming the vision of the U.S. national common good, but also supports the transnational vision of the difficult of forgetting one's origins. This not only due to the nostalgia that runs along the threads of the emotional connection with one's ancestors, but because their origin continues to be a criterion that defines their existence, since they are classified as being of Mexican origin or Latinos in censuses and government offices, and remains active in defining their inter-ethnic coexistence with their peers at school and work.

Here a different mechanism from previous ones operates, which involves ridding themselves of attachments they regard as characteristic of their ethnic origins to open themselves up to new attachments. In the process of detachment from their origins, there appears to be a devaluation of what exists on the Mexican side, such as disorder, garbage, corruption and violence, which permits the shift to the assessment of opportunities, converted into virtues and being an American citizen protected by the law and progress. This mechanism entails shedding cultural elements to which they have a certain attachment: "Mexican" being equivalent to warmth, fun and relaxation. It seems appropriate to relate this phenomenon to the *de-identification* process (Muñoz, 1999), which operates in the opposite direction to attachment, and may be the result of the subordination due the devaluation of what is one's own. Elements of what is one's own may be abandoned or placed at a low level to open oneself to attachment to other values and other identifications. To some extent, there a competition and cultural dispute regarding the image of himself, which experiences mixing and miscegenation as a painful path offset by the instrumentality of selecting cultural elements that are useful for surviving better in a highly risky, discriminatory context.

The Interstitial Border

The last type of experience is the extreme expression of economic and political asymmetry between north and south, and also shows the effects of the expan-

sion of immigration control mechanisms into the U.S. (Coleman, 2007). The experience of the interstitial border reflects the human drama of undocumented migration and the misfortune of deportations, embodied in undocumented migrants in transit or waiting for an opportunity to cross into the United States, and those deported from inside the United States who, on their return to Mexico, are persecuted and marginalized in the border region. It not only involves those who were deported in their unsuccessful attempt to enter the United States but also immigrants who had settled illegally in the United States and in many cases, had been living in that country and had developed strong social bonds, kinship relationships and life projects.[1]

This type of experience is illustrated by the cases of Luis, a specialist welder who lived illegally in the United States for 22 years and was arrested and deported for drunk driving, leaving his wife and three children in that country, and Norberto, a car mechanic who lived in California for 18 years, with two children and several younger siblings born in the United States, who was deported after two years in prison for a fight that left several injured. Both were deported to Tijuana and settled in the area called “El Bordo” in the bed of the Rio Tijuana, a spontaneous, makeshift camp where several hundred people live in precarious conditions. Also worth mentioning is the case of Fernando, a skilled plumber originally from Morelos, who lived in San Diego, California for 20 years, has three children born in the United States and was deported after a raid at work. His eldest son stayed in the United States, while Fernando and the rest of the family settled in Tijuana because his two youngest children only speak English and were unable to adapt to his native Morelos. He lives in Tijuana waiting for the youngest children, who are U.S. citizens, to reach 18 and apply for U.S. residence for himself and his wife.

The number of men and women deported after a lengthy residence in the United States has grown in the last decade and now constitutes nearly one-third of annual deportations. This group includes many people who had low-skilled jobs in the U.S., but increasingly also includes technicians and professionals who after a successful career, were deported for being undocumented or imprisoned for a misdemeanor. Their residence times in the United States vary, meaning they can be English speakers with very little knowledge of Mexico

[1]The term “deported” is used because how people define themselves; however, the authors are aware of the legal differences in the procedure.

or bilingual in Spanish and English who left the country while they were still young. This life experience is marked by the trauma of expulsion and a sense of failure, the interruption of their everyday lives and close ties, and the precariousness of their horizons. Trapped in the gaps between the two nation states, one that expels them and another that does not receive them, and instead pursues and marginalizes them, they are forced to live in hiding or in temporary shelters, left to the fate of their personal resources. Depression and trauma are sometimes exacerbated as in the case of war veterans deported for an offense or crime who experience expulsion as disloyalty by the country to which they swore allegiance with their lives yet which betrayed them by expelling them on their return from the war. The patriotic attachment of military ideology makes expulsion more painful and erects a wall of resistance to joining an incomprehensible local border society.

The experience of deportation or rather the repeated attempt to cross is also tempered by the possibility of settling in border cities with the expectation of securing a job and avoiding being chased by the police or mistreated by society and stigmatized, which reduces their living horizons to surviving from day to day, often assisted by drugs. This is an increasingly precarious way of life in which they do not matter in either the receiving society or the one that expelled them.

CONCLUSIONS

By way of a conclusion, three lines of reflection are proposed to analyze the role of the geopolitical border in the construction of socio-cultural difference: *a)* the importance of global and local logics in controlling border crossing for the production of life experiences; *b)* the complex coexistence of cultural mixing, hybridity, essentialism and strategic detachments associated with positioning in social hierarchies; *c)* the diversity of life forms linked to crossing the border and their consequences in the identification process.

a) According to Smelser (2003), the context of the production of a cultural phenomenon is part of this same process. In the case that concerns us, this means that the experiences of the territorial border incorporate the processes that define it. The importance attached by the United States to border security since the early 21st century exacerbated the structural inequality in the region, strengthening the cultural dynamics of fragmentation and social separation linked to social stratification between those who do and do not cross the border, those who can do so

legally and those who do so without documents, and between undocumented residents who remain in the U.S. and those who are deported.

Faced with the evidence of the heterogeneity of life experiences, it is necessary to analyze the mechanisms involved in the production of life forms marked by the experience of mobility, transit and border crossing. People construct their everyday lives in well-localized contexts of unpredictable border interactions, making decisions on options presented to them as viable alternatives, whether or not they are legal. Border lives are permeated by the dynamics of illegality, associated with people and drug trafficking, because in families' lives, there is an increasing legitimation of illegality as an option that is as valid as any other. In identity terms, cultural openness to mixtures coexists with the re-elaboration of one's own characteristics in an essentialist manner. The conditions and direction of border crossing filter the social experience that does not end in this territorial space, but is crucial for positioning itself in border stratification. Border control acts as a hinge that articulates local stratification with the logics with which global markets of production and consumption (both legal and illegal) and migration policies operate.

b) Crossing the border does not always produce hybridization or cosmopolitanism. It may cause rejection or strategies of invisibility and the more or less explicit decision not to cross the physical or symbolic border. Evidence of this type of processes that summarize and condense as life forms prompted the use the concept of life experience to grasp the complexity of mixtures, rejection, indifference and cultural resistance in the context of border life, in which not everyone manages to integrate the cultural elements arising in asymmetric, violent relationships. In these vital configurations, the intersection between the legal status of crossing and residence in the United States is a new element of stratification and social differentiation even on the Mexican side of the border. Deportation is a new sign of stigmatization in Mexico.

c) Evidence of the heterogeneity of life experiences on the border requires a critical perspective (Vila, 2000; Heyman, 1994 and 2001; Grimson, 2000; Wilson and Donnan, 2000; De Genova, 2012), capable of recognizing the over dimensioning of the symbolic to the detriment of economic and political dimensions in order to analyze multiple identities and civic construction in a social order marked by the paradoxical combination of global integration processes (production, services and communications) with compulsive deportation and border control policies.

REFERENCES

ARFUCH, Leonor, 2002, *El espacio biográfico. Dilemas de la subjetividad contemporánea,* Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica.

ALEGRÍA, Tito, 1989, "La ciudad y los procesos transfronterizos entre México y Estados Unidos", *Frontera Norte,* Tijuana, El Colef, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 53-90.

ALVAREZ, Robert, 1995, "The Mexican-US border: The Making of an Anthropology of Borderland", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Lafayette, IN, Annual Reviews, vol. 24, no. 1, pp. 447-470.

ANDERSON, Jameas and Liam O'DOWD, 1999, "Borders, Border Regions and Territoriality: Contradictory Meanings, Changing Significance", *Regional Studies,* United Kingdom, Regional Studies Association, vol. 33, no. 7, pp. 593-604.

ANZALDÚA, Gloria, 1999, *Borderlands. La Frontera: The new mestiza,* 2nd. edition, San Francisco, Aunt Lute Books.

BRINGAS, Nora and Djamel Toudert, 2011, *Atlas: Ordenamiento territorial para el estado de Baja California,* Tijuana, El Colegio de la Frontera Norte.

BUSTAMANTE, Jorge, 1989, "Frontera México-Estados Unidos: Reflexiones para un marco teórico", *Frontera Norte,* Tijuana, El Colef, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 7-24.

CASTELLS, Manuel, 2001, *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business and Society,* Oxford, Oxford University Press.

COLEMAN, Mathew, 2007, "Immigration Geopolitics Beyond the Mexico-US Border", *Antipode*, United Kingdom, John Wiley & Sons, vol. 39, no. 2, pp. 55-76.

CHÁVEZ, Manuel, 2011, "Navigating the US-Mexico Border: crossing strategies of undocumented workers in Tijuana, Mexico", *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* United Kingdom, Routledge, vol. 34, no. 8, pp. 1320-1337.

CHÁVEZ, Manuel, 2012, "Border Theories and the Realities of Daily Public Exchanges in North America", *Eurasia Border Review,* Japan, Okkaido University, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 101-114.

DE GENOVA, Nicholas, 2012, "Border, Scene and Obscene", in Thomas WILSON and Hastings DONNAN, editors, *A Companion to Border Studies,* Wiley-Blackwell, pp 492-505.

EL COLEGIO DE LA FRONTERA NORTE (EL COLEF), 2013, *Encuesta sobre Migración en la Frontera Norte de México, 2011 (Emif Norte)*, Tijuana, El Colegio de la Frontera Norte.

FRIEDMAN, Jonathan, 1997, "Global Crisis, the Struggle for Cultural Identity and Intellectual Pork-Barreling: Cosmopolitans versus Locals, Ethnics and Nationals in an Era of De-hegemonisation", in Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood, editors, *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism,* London, Zed Books, pp. 70-89.

GARCÍA CANCLINI, Néstor, 1989, *Culturas híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad,* Mexico, Grijalbo.

GRIMSON, Alejandro, 2006, "Cultures are More Hybrid than Identifications. A Dialogue on Borders from the Southern Cone", *Latino Studies,* Chicago, Palgrave Macmillan, no. 4, pp. 96-119.

GRIMSON, Alejandro, 2003, "Introducción", in Scott MICHAELSEN and David JOHNSON, *Teoría de la frontera. Los límites de la política cultural,* Barcelona, Gedisa.

GRIMSON, Alejandro, 2000, "Introducción: Fronteras políticas versus fronteras culturales?", in Alejandro GRIMSON, compilator, *Fronteras, naciones e identidades. La periferia como centro,* Argentina, CICCUS/La Crujía, pp. 9-40.

HALL, Peter and David SOSKICE, editors, 2001, *Varieties of Capitalism: The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage,* Oxford, Oxford University Press.

HEYMAN, Josiah, 1994, "The Mexico-United Status Border in Anthropology: A Critique and Reformulation", *Journal of Political Ecology,* Tucson, University of Arizona, vol. 1, pp. 43-65.

HEYMAN, Josiah, 2001, "Class and Classification at the U.S.-Mexico Border", *Human Organization,* Oklahoma City, Society for Applied Anthropology, vol. 60, no. 2, pp. 128-140.

HEYMAN, Josiah, 2012, "Culture Theory and the US-Mexico Border", in Thomas WILSON and Hastings DONNAN, editors, *A Companion to Border Studies,* United Kingdom, Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 48-66.

HUTNYK, John, 2010, "Hybridity", in Kim KNOTT and Seán MCLOUGHLIN, *Diasporas. Concepts, Intersections, Identities,* United States, Zed Books, pp. 59-63.

KEARNEY, Michael, 2008, "La doble misión de las fronteras como clasificadoras y como filtros de valor", in Laura VELASCO, editor, *Migración, fronteras e identidades étnicas transnacionales,* Mexico, El Colef/Miguel Ángel Porrúa, pp. 79-116.

LUNDVALL, Beng, 2007, "National Innovation System: Analytical Focusing Device and Policy Learning Tool", Tsama, Swedish Institute for Growth Policy Studies, available at <http://www.tsama.org.za/index.php/documents/category/1-articles?download=83:innovation-lundvall-national-innovation-system&start=20.>, last accesed on May 3, 2013.

MARTÍNEZ, Oscar, 1994, *Border People: Life and Society in the US-Mexico Borderlands,* United States, University of Arizona.

MUÑOZ, José Esteban, 1999, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics,* Minessota, University of Minessota Press.

OHMAE, Kenichi, 1995, *The End of the Nation State: The Rise of Regional Economies. How New Engines of Prosperity are Reshaping Global Markets*, London, Harper Collins.

PAVLAKOVICH-KOCHI, Vera, 2011, "Cooperation and Regional Responses to NAFTA and Globalization", in Dorism WASTL-WALTER, editor, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Border Studies,* Great Britain, Ashgate Publishing Limited, pp. 481-503.

SENADO DE LA REPÚBLICA, "Galardón a la innovación y la cooperación transfronteriza México-Estados Unidos 2013", México, Centro de Estudios Internacionales Gilberto Bosques, available at <http://centrogilbertobosques.senado.gob.mx/docs/eventogalardonmexeu.pdf>, last accesed on November 16, 2013.

SMELSER, Neil, 2003, "On Comparative Analysis, Interdisciplinarity and Internationalization in Sociology", *International Sociology,* Madrid, International Sociological Association/SAGE, vol. 18, no. 4, pp. 643-657.

TARRIUS, Alain, 2000, "Las circulaciones migratorias: conveniencia de la noción de 'territorio circulatorio'. Los nuevos hábitos de la identidad", *Relaciones,* Michoacan, El Colegio de Michoacan, vol. 21, no. 82, pp. 39-66.

STEPHEN, Lynn, 2007, *Transborder Lives: Indigenous Oaxacans in Mexico, California, and Oregon,* Durham, NC, Duke University.

VALENZUELA, José Manuel, 2003, "Centralidad de las fronteras. Procesos socioculturales en la frontera México-Estados Unidos", in José Manuel VALENZUELA, *Por las fronteras del norte. Una aproximación cultural a la frontera México-Estados Unidos,* Mexico, Fondo de Cultural Económica.

VALENZUELA, José Manuel, 1988, *¡A la brava ese! Cholos, punks y chavos banda,* Tijuana, El Colegio de la Frontera Norte.

VELASCO, Laura and Oscar CONTRERAS, 2011, *Mexican Voices of the Border Region,* Philadelphia, Temple University Press.

VILA, Pablo, 2000, *Crossing Borders, Reinforcing Borders: Social Categories, Metaphors, and Narrative Identities on the U.S.-Mexico Frontier,* Austin, Texas University Press.

WILSON, Thomas and Donnan HASTINGS, 2000, *Border Identities. Nation and State at International Frontiers,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.