

RECENT RESEARCH ON THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER

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DOWN BY THE RIVER: DRUGS, MONEY, MURDER, AND FAMILY. By Charles Bowden. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002. Pp. 433. \$27.00 cloth.)

HUESOS EN EL DESIERTO. By Sergio González Rodríguez. (Barcelona, Spain: Editorial Anagrama, 2002. Pp. 334. \$18.86 paper.)

GENDERS IN PRODUCTION: MAKING WOMEN WORKERS IN MEXICO'S GLOBAL FACTORIES. By Leslie Salzinger. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003. Pp. 217. \$55.00 cloth, \$21.95 paper.)

FRONTERAS NO MÁS: TOWARD SOCIAL JUSTICE AT THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER. By Kathleen Staudt and Irasema Coronado. (New York and Basingstoke, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. Pp. 204. \$69.95 cloth, \$22.95 paper.)

ETHNOGRAPHY AT THE BORDER. Edited by Pablo Vila. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003. Pp. 345. \$63.95 cloth, \$22.95 paper.)

CROSSING BORDERS, REINFORCING BORDERS: SOCIAL CATEGORIES, METAPHORS, AND NARRATIVE IDENTITIES ON THE U.S.-MEXICO FRONTIER. By Pablo Vila. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000. Pp. 290. \$42.50 cloth, \$19.95 paper.)

COLONIAS AND PUBLIC POLICY IN TEXAS AND MEXICO: URBANIZATION BY STEALTH. By Peter M. Ward. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999. Pp. 287. \$45.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.)

Interest in the U.S.-Mexico border has increased significantly in recent years, with both positive and negative consequences. On the positive side, there are a greater number of social science studies of the border. On the negative side, issue-driven coverage of the border, both journalistic and scholarly, often leaves a lot to be desired.

The long history of sensationalist journalistic treatments of the border reflects American uneasiness about the edges of the nation-state and its ambiguous relationship to the Midwest and East Coast centers of power and mainstream culture. As a liminal zone, the border has become a repository for fears about racial mixing, cultural purity, moral decadence, economic decline, and political threat. Hence lurid accounts of violence, drugs, and illegal smuggling pervade journalistic representations of the border. Enter Charles Bowden, a gifted writer of fiction and non-fiction accounts of nature and the American Southwest. Bowden's award-winning 1998 book *Juárez: The Laboratory of our Future* presented a scary tableau of a world gone awry: a dreadfully unjust, polluted nightmare reminiscent of the movie *Blade Runner*. In Bowden's Juárez, teenage girls slave away mercilessly in toxin-spewing factories (run by heartless North American capitalist exploiters) while in the street, vicious gang members and drug traffickers terrorize the population. If you did not get the message, the startling photographs of cadavers, billowing smokestacks, and urban sprawl and decay hammer home the point. These images and Bowden's prose were powerful enough to bring accolades to the author and photographers, and spark controversy in the El Paso/Juárez area where a forum to critique Bowden's representation of the border was held at a local art center. Local writer Debbie Nathan also wrote a rebuttal of Bowden's book.

Undaunted, Bowden produced a longer and more detailed account of border crime, corruption, and vice—the best-selling *Down by the River*, a riveting story of the killing of the beloved brother of a Mexican-American U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agent, Phillip Jordan, and the Jordan/Forti family's desperate attempts to obtain justice. Written with Bowden's usual panache and vividness, *Down by the River* is a remarkably intimate, detailed look inside a Mexican American/Mexican border family. The strength of the book is its revealing illustration of family dynamics, Catholic religious practices, and *barrio* life in El Paso. Few social scientific treatments of border families can match the vigor and depth of Bowden's descriptions.

But what of the usefulness of Bowden's broader arguments about drug trafficking, law, and violence along the border? As in his earlier work, the writer sees a border netherworld, perhaps more powerful than official society, in which illegal drug trafficking, police corruption, and murder rule Ciudad Juárez and extend their deleterious tentacles deep into the heart of the U.S. side. He also attempts to situate drug profiteering, violence, and associated corruption within changes occurring at the highest levels of Mexican politics and Mexican society as a whole. Sadly, his tendency to amplify or play fast and loose with the facts, overemphasize bizarre and outrageous events, and jump to extreme conclusions weakens the impact of the book. Thus, after a

colorful account, no less sensational than the *Kingpin* television series about border drug trafficking, but not without considerable insights and some uncovering of new data, we are left where we started, not “down by the river” but “in the dark.”

We desperately need to know more “real” information about the border drug trade—verifiable information about how it works in daily life, how much it affects families, businesses, society and culture—but to date, neither journalists nor social scientists have made much progress on this dangerous and subterranean activity.¹ Yet, while the drug issue is important to our understanding of border life, the way in which shocking stories about drugs and killings have monopolized treatments of the border have obscured more nuanced understandings. Unfortunately, this tendency for single issues to dominate journalistic attention has also pervaded social science research on the border. Much work has been issue-driven such that a small core of topics—*maquiladoras*, drugs, pollution, and female homicides—as important as they are, tend to obscure or color our insight into the more mundane but equally important aspects of economic, social, political, and cultural life on the border.

One spectacular border issue that has captured recent public attention is the serial killing of women in Ciudad Juárez. The best book on this subject is *Huesos en el desierto* by Sergio González Rodríguez. Since 1993 approximately 300 women have been murdered in Ciudad Juárez, of which about 100 may be serial murders (both figures are hotly disputed). Initially, the reports of growing numbers of female homicide victims attracted little attention outside of the Juárez/El Paso region. The 1990s were the heyday of the Carrillo Fuentes drug cartel (and various others), and the rise in violence associated with them overshadowed other forms of violence on the border. But eventually the repeated discovery of mutilated cadavers of poor, dark-skinned teenage girls on the desert fringes of Juárez provoked panic and public outcry. The corrupt, inept, brutal, and preposterous handling of the cases by local and state police and court officials convinced no one. Numerous nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and feminist activists condemned the government, theories and rumors abounded, and the killings continued. Countless investigations by criminologists, reporters, relatives of the victims, and others turned up little solid evidence. The best data were mislaid and destroyed by the Juárez police. So after one of the worst cases of femicide in world history, we are left with speculation—powerful politicians or rich businessmen did it, satanic killers did it, a deranged gringo did it, the police did it, copycats did it, all Juárez men hate women, Juárez is a “city of fear,” and so on—but few answers.

1. Fortunately, a few good studies of *narcocorridos* have appeared recently, viz., Wald (2001), Valenzuela (2002), Edberg (forthcoming).

Like Bowden, González is an adept writer and narrator, and his book reads with the pace and suspense of a detective novel. Unlike Bowden, González, a reporter from Mexico City, engaged in extensive, painstaking on-the-ground research in Juárez. His tight, chronological recounting of the killings, thorough documentation (given the murkiness of the cases), interviews with police investigators and victim's relatives provide us with the most solid version of the killings available at this time.

What do the Juárez serial killings tell us, if anything, about the lives of women and gender relations along the U.S.-Mexico border? Did the border environment create conditions that made such a tragedy possible? Are the *maquilas*, in some sense, responsible? These are some of the unpleasant issues that social scientists who study the border must confront. One popular notion is that the *maquiladora* industry, by pulling thousands of poor, vulnerable young women away from the small but safe towns and *ejidos* of northern Mexico and thrusting them unprotected into a drug and alcohol-ridden, chauvinistic border city that they must travel around at all hours of the day and night should be held accountable for the crimes. There is some truth to this argument. The *maquiladora* industry did quickly increase the number of young single women in Juarez. It seems only just that the profitable industry should have some responsibility for the transformative impact it has had on border society: recruiting poor rural women whose lives were endangered by commuting to and from the job and the general dislocation of previous economic, social, and ecological conditions in the area. But it is too easy to make the *maquiladoras* the catch-all scapegoat, just as it is a facile conclusion to assume that the killer must be a North American because Mexico supposedly has no tradition of serial killings. Surely the growth of the hyper-violent narcotics trade and the rampant spread of weapons associated with it are just as responsible for the pervasive climate of violence on the border. But these are questions that require hard, no-nonsense research. Further speculation will be of little use.

Moreover, while it might be comforting to find a single culprit for the murders and consider the cases closed, a more unsettling possibility is that there is no single killer but many murderers preying on defenseless young women. Is border culture uniquely, virulently misogynistic as is sometimes alleged? We do not really know. What about the elements of class, race/ethnicity, and age in the killings, that is, the fact that a large number of the victims have been young, working-class *morenas*? Additionally, could it be that the sensationalized media focus on these killings has prevented us from recognizing the larger story of gender on the border, i.e., that Mexican women overall are gaining ground educationally, economically, politically, and in terms

of rights and spaces within families and popular culture? Could it be that the rapid social changes fomented by migration, population growth, U.S. cultural influence, economic expansion, hyper-commercialism, drug abuse, greater freedom and mobility, all too frequent violence, weakening of family ties, and media saturation have made Ciudad Juárez a city of postmodern anonymity and anomie? No simple answers are possible, only the realization that we need more careful, creative empirical studies and theorizing to cut through media shibboleths, popular stereotypes, and confusing information.

Maquiladoras have drawn considerable attention from journalists and scholars because they epitomize the global role of the border region, given their international export orientation and predominantly young and female workforce. Leslie Salzinger's *Genders in Production: Making Women Workers in Mexico's Global Factories* questions this simple representation. Previous *maquiladora* research emphasized how gender subordination in the wider patriarchal society penetrated the workplace, so Salzinger portrays this literature as assuming that women are already and always "docile, dexterous, and cheap" (10). Such a view is less a description of reality than a statement about managerial ideology, which affects but is not the same as the complicated performances of gender inside specific plants. This powerful analytical approach allows Salzinger to address the diverse outcomes as men start working as factory operatives in large numbers, viewing such instances not as a totally new kind of *maquiladora* but rather as a field of struggle over gender relations and meanings. To this end, she offers four case studies from Chihuahua state (three from Ciudad Juárez).

At Anarchomex (all factories are pseudonymous), the management ideology of passive female workers contradicts the reality of active, mixed male and female workers, leading to a failure of top-down capitalist discipline in favor of widespread flirting, sexual favoritism, and sexual harassment. By contrast, Particimex, owned by the same U.S. firm but operating in a small city away from the border and using participatory work teams, has little sexual harassment and allows considerable equality to women in a region where non-factory gender relations expect women to defer to men. Still, few women ascend to management. At Andromex, there is likewise little flirting and harassment, but a great deal of conflict among workers and between workers and management, centered on quotas and piece rates. However, to accept Salzinger's argument that this plant treats both women and men as if they play a male gender role, one must buy her assumption that in Mexico it is 'male' to maximize earnings, help support a family, and engage in struggles with authority. The fourth case study, Panoptimex, does not have the ethnographic strength of the other three, since the author was only permitted to observe and not participate with young

women workers who, we are told, are constantly monitored and who respond to this regime by dressing up and wearing make-up.

We must appreciate Salzinger's accomplishment in providing us with rich and varied portraits of *maquiladora* managers and operatives at work. It is thus disappointing that the author misconstrues earlier *maquiladora* research. Her critique of gender theory in export manufacturing pivots on Annette Fuentes and Barbara Ehrenreich's *Women in the Global Factory* (1983) but this is, after all, a work of activist journalism, and not a place to go for sophisticated fieldwork and analysis. Likewise, she describes previous scholars as relying on "primarily quantitative data showing women's preponderance in assembly jobs and managers' accounts of their own decision-making" (14). Her ostensible breakthrough, then, is doing shop floor ethnography where gender and other relations are performed. But this minimizes Patricia Fernández-Kelly's (1983) pioneering *maquiladora* participant-observation, the rich personal accounts collected by Norma Iglesias Prieto (1985; 1997), and Devon Peña's (1997) intriguing discussion of *tortuguismo* and other forms of shop floor resistance. It also bypasses Susan Tiano (1994), Katherine Kopinak (1996), and Altha Cravey (1998) who rely more on workforce statistics but use them to show complexity and demystify gender ideologies.²

Salzinger's contention that previous scholars treat the non-factory side as rigid and deterministic justifies her isolating the shop floor for study, but a preferable strategy would be to follow her emphasis on the complex interplay of gender ideologies and practices by extending their study to the connections between household relations (gender, generation, etc.), urban conditions (housing, consumption, transportation, etc.), and work relations (a start on this is Fernández-Kelly 1983, 151–89). We would want to know about divorced or separated women with children, either living on their own or with parents, about married women with and without children, about childless young women and men living with one or both parents, about men living with wives and children, men separated from children and former partners, and so forth. We would want to understand how these people carry various personal experiences, needs for income, and gender ideologies into the equally complex shop-floor setting. It might be less that working-class Mexican women are disposed to be docile than that they are (in various and complicated ways) disciplined by their needs and desires to earn incomes to survive and thrive. We could then avoid attacking the 'straw woman' of gender determinism by recognizing the mutual effects of

2. One should note that Salzinger cites these works, but does not engage directly with them. We also note the ethnographic work of Melissa Wright (1997, 2001, and the chapter in Vila's *Ethnography at the Border*) and Alejandro Lugo (1990).

work and non-work domains on each other. In doing so, we might better grasp how working people view their jobs in the totality of their personal, family, and collective histories.

Such a perspective would help us address questions now skirted by the *maquiladora*-focused border literature. One is reluctant to criticize this literature for not tackling other topics, since the factories are so extensive and important. Still, we welcome stronger discussions of the changes in women's lives in Mexico in recent decades, including the border cities. Working outside the home does not necessarily alter oppressive gender relations, but Salzinger found a number of instances where factory women asserted their individual and collective voices, a sound echoing throughout Mexico. We also advocate widening the study of work and working people on the border. Construction laborers, migrant maids and gardeners, brick-makers, shop clerks, managers, secretaries, bookkeepers, prostitutes, drug dealers, small vendors, and so on also deserve attention. These multiple occupations combine in interesting ways through gender and generational codes and power relations. Bringing together multiple experiences, then, we could explore a dramatic and enduring topic, the making of a vast working class in Mexican border cities.

Such syntheses will surely need to engage Pablo Vila's important corpus of work on identities and ideologies along the border. Vila compiled *Ethnography at the Border* as a report of ethnographic encounters with the El Paso/Juárez region during the 1990s when the "crossing border" metaphor had become the most influential way of viewing border culture. Most of the researchers were affiliated with the University of Texas and/or the Colegio de la Frontera Norte (COLEF) in Juárez. Their research, in the words of the editor, offers "a more nuanced, complex, and even contradictory picture of the U.S.-Mexico frontier than what is usually found in border literature" (ix).

In the introduction and conclusion, Vila wields his customary robust theoretical apparatus in a critique of contemporary ethnography and mainstream border theory. Of most interest to border studies are his criticisms of border theory for: (1) neglect of Mexican perspectives, (2) essentializing border cultures, (3) overemphasis of the idea of border crossing at the expense of understanding border reinforcement, (4) the construction of the border crossing hybrid (usually a Chicano) as a kind of existential hero, (5) promiscuous use of the border metaphor to study almost any aspect of cultural life, and (6) the confusion of shared culture with shared identity (i.e., the mistaken conflation of Mexican and Mexican Americans). Vila, along with contributors María Socorro Tabuenca and Eduardo Barrera, skillfully dissects the limitations of the trendy performance art of Guillermo Gómez-Peña (1991) and the literary work of much-celebrated Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) for a social

scientific understanding of U.S.-Mexico border populations. Literary theorists David Johnson and Scott Michaelsen (1997), from an unmarked identity position, are also taken to task for their airy construction of a borderless utopia that ignores power relations that no Juárez *aspirante a indocumentado* can afford to forget. Finally, Vila criticizes a version of Chicano identity politics that invokes a Mexican/Mexican American brotherhood that does not exist, thus papering over differences and silencing the real tensions that divide communities like El Paso and Ciudad Juárez.

Overall, Vila's research, exemplified in the introductory and concluding theoretical discussions and three substantive chapters (concerned with gender, border meanings of the word "Mexican," and environmental problems, the latter chapter coauthored with John Peterson) demonstrates the powerful insights of a poststructural approach combined with extensive interviewing for an understanding of border discourses and identities. Notwithstanding the penetrating understandings provided by this approach—used to good effect by contributors Jessica Chapin on border conceptual schemes and subjectivities; Melissa Wright on gender, nationality, and value in *maquiladoras*; Salzinger on the production of gendered subjects in a *maquiladora*; Sarah Hill on *colonias*; Barrera on the El Paso Border Patrol Museum; and Tabuenca on the depiction of the border in the writings of Rosario Sanmiguel—the reader may at times pine for a more materially grounded discussion of work and family lives, and community life in general, issues that may be just as important, if not more so, to border residents than the place of their identity in discursive frameworks. Also notably absent from this volume is any sustained discussion of drug trafficking, Mexican national politics (Juárez has been an important arena for Partido de Acción Nacional [PAN] - Partido Revolucionario Institucional [PRI] conflict), street crime, and the wave of violence that hit Juárez in the 1990s. However, David Spener's chapter on Operation Blockade, Tim Dunn's piece on debates about the construction of a border wall, and Victor Ortiz's essay on El Paso's condition as a permanent frontier (also see Ortiz-González 2004) provide concrete perspectives that help balance the volume.

Although Vila's *Crossing Borders* preceded the more polemical *Ethnography at the Border*, it follows conceptually because it deepens and substantiates his stance within border studies. As pointed out above, facile assumptions about identity and culture pervade the field, justification for which often rests on ideological common sense or poorly investigated anecdotes. Vila's impressively systematic book draws on 254 open-ended interviews in Ciudad Juárez and El Paso. Using local photographs, he elicited extended discussions of how people viewed (or as he frames it, "narrated") themselves and others in terms of various

relational symbols, notably poverty, wealth, and social status between and within the two nations.

It is hard to do justice to the rich findings reported in this book. Among other points, Vila finds many *Juarenses* play back and forth between a sense of unfair stigma imposed from the U.S. side and a sense of superiority over poorer and less modern southern Mexicans. Established Mexican Americans narrate both a nostalgic view of ancestral Mexico as filled with rich traditions and customs, and contemporary Mexico as a scene of crudity, poverty, and social ills. Recent immigrants from Mexico to the United States reflect in very complex ways both Mexican and Mexican American perspectives, while Anglo Americans rely heavily on the metaphor of Mexico as poverty and disorder. He allows much room for individual reflection and variation, however, and explores interesting variants such as African Americans, whose views of the border express both inclusion and stigmatization within the United States. His analysis rests largely on spoken narratives, but gains important support on the behavioral side from the widespread support by Mexican Americans in El Paso of Operation Hold-the-Line, an intensification of immigration law enforcement beginning in 1994. This support for the U.S. state seems paradoxical from the perspective of border hybridity but follows quite well from Vila's analysis.

Vila draws our attention to the resilience of narrative positioning in the face of seemingly compelling 'objective' evidence, as for example pointing out that photographs categorized as Mexican poverty and disorder were actually taken in the United States. Addressing this phenomenon, he achieves a theoretical and methodological breakthrough in the sixth chapter, where he reports the results of a study encouraging people to make their perspectives more flexible and encompassing not by confronting them with 'facts' but with dialogues about the bases of their social categorizations. In this activist effort, he broaches the question of how best to proceed with cross-border social justice movements, the central topic of Kathleen Staudt and Irasema Coronado's *Fronteras No Más: Toward Social Justice at the U.S.-Mexico Border*. Their studies of social justice movements in three areas—the environment, human rights, and labor/trade—illustrate both the conceptual barriers among various peoples across and within borders and some possible strategies for overcoming them. An 'objective' look at border issues shows that many of them span the international boundary, but 'subjective' understandings of these issues often end up with the bitter polarization of potential cross-border allies. Staudt and Coronado show how this division, both derives from and can be overcome through personal and institutional features of border political life.

They focus particularly on the development of cross-border activist and governmental networks, a question of significant interest in

border studies. This region fosters close personal ties both within and across the boundary, which are both a strength and a limitation. Staudt and Coronado argue that effective movements toward social justice require a wider mobilization of weak ties as extensive constituencies to strengthen transnational institutions (which they diagnose currently as weak and in some cases largely symbolic). In making this argument, the authors offer many fascinating observations, for instance national and transnational NGOs in the borderlands may bring generous resources and genuine concern, but may also lack patience, language, and social skills, and thus tend to reproduce inequalities and barriers between the two nations. Although at times critical, Staudt and Coronado carefully note the lessons for future struggles for social justice from today's nascent cross-border movements.

One topic that elicits considerable social justice sentiment is the community-housing phenomenon called *colonias*. *Colonias* (in the United States) and *colonias populares* (in Mexico) are settlements characterized (in the most part) by uncertain land tenure, lack of adherence to land planning regulations, absence of formal financing, and emphasis on housing self-construction. On the U.S. side, *colonias* draw attention, indeed anxiety, all out of proportion to their size compared to other types of settlement or their fit in the urbanization process of the region. Peter Ward's *Colonias and Public Policy in Texas and Mexico*, however, deftly escapes this moral panic through two moves: grounding *colonias* in the broader social and economic development of the borderlands, and comparing *colonias* in Mexico and the United States. The fieldwork for this study, jointly directed by Ward and Duncan Earle, covered the El Paso-Ciudad Juárez, Laredo-Nuevo Laredo, and Brownsville-Matamoros areas. In this poor, eastern segment of the border, *colonias* result from rapid growth in employment involving low wages and purchasing power, and limited or no investment in public services for the poor, including housing.

Colonias populares typify Mexican cities, in part because of the complicated land-tenure situations that surround them (*ejidos*, private ranches) which would choke their growth were it not for an informal but widely recognized system of illegal sales and invasions. Because such settlements are frequent in Mexico, society has developed a regular set of policies for resolving at least some of their challenges, albeit within the limitations of scarce public investment in Mexico and patron-client politics. Ward contrasts the lessons of Mexican *colonia* policies with the treatment of *colonias* in Texas, where state and local governments treat *colonias* as public health and community standards problems. While sometimes this results in significant improvements pushed by local activists and concerned officials (water and sewer service, police protection, paved roads, electricity and street lighting, etc.),

its general effect has been for governments to use land and utility rules to freeze or erase existing *colonias*, ignoring the gradual process of community improvement. Thus, Ward devotes considerable effort to diagnosing existing policy flaws and making useful and perceptive recommendations.

Ward effectively links the literature on the political economy of Latin American and North American urbanization, including fascinating studies of developers who laid out *colonias* and their tools for deceiving county planning agencies, lending money to settlers under highly exploitative arrangements, cultivating support among the residents, and walking away with money in their pocket. Cecil McDonald's "recipe" for Texas *colonia* creation is worth the price of the book by itself. However, aside from a few observations on the weakness of community organization in most U.S.-side *colonias* as opposed to the initially highly organized Mexican ones, the book tells us little about the personal trajectories and worldviews of *colonia* residents themselves. Quoting Peter Lloyd, he terms them "slums of hope," a "solution" as well as a "problem," (1) but to dispel the ideology of abnormality surrounding *colonias*, we need to do more to deepen our understanding of the people who live in them.

The few available studies include George Towers's (1991), Duncan Earle's (1997), Alejandro Silva and Howard Campbell's (1998), and Leo Chavez's (1998, 76–77). More studies are needed because the general public discourse about *colonias* is filled with stereotypes and "culture of poverty" rhetoric. Social activists emphasize *colonia* poverty in order to extract subsidies from the federal and state governments. Conservatives deride the supposed gang crime, rampant spread of disease, and social disorganization of *colonias*. None of these almost invariably negative and stigmatizing discourses addresses the heterogeneity and diversity of the *colonia* experience or the many stories of success and optimism that can be found in *colonia* communities. Ironically, many *colonia* dwellers epitomize the virtues—strong work ethic, individual initiative, independent spirit—of the American pioneer myth. Researchers not only need to combat stereotypes, but also to examine the history and evolution of *colonias* (rather than seeing them as fixed, static entities), their ecological consequences, and their internal cultural dynamics. The latter include changing gender roles, emerging subcultures, and new subjectivities (especially vis-à-vis issues of citizenship, nationality, and ethnicity). For that matter, research is also needed on the lives and aspirations of non-*colonia* urban residents on both sides of the border, including residents of low- and middle-income housing on the U.S. side and inhabitants of subdivisions and public housing on the Mexican side.

U.S. southern border law enforcement against drug smuggling and undocumented migration began to intensify in the 1980s and exploded

in the 1990s. In response, researchers have produced an admirable body of engaged scholarship, combining solid research with explicit attention to public policy. Karl Eshbach, et al. (1999) systematically tally deaths during border crossings, and connected them to the risk taking resulting from heightened border law enforcement. Dunn (1996) documents the “militarization” of the border, noting increased roles of the military in civilian policing and the ways that civilian border policing itself has come to resemble counterinsurgency, “low intensity” warfare. In a series of articles, Josiah Heyman (1995; 1998) connects the daily work practices of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service officers and managers to the power regime governing cross-border migration. In *Border Games*, Peter Andreas (2000) offers a sustained critique of U.S. policy assumptions about interdicting drugs and undocumented migrants, emphasizing their ineffectiveness in the long run (see also Spener 2001). He explores the apparent paradox of a “borderless economy and a barricaded border” (2000, x) both for the U.S.-Mexico case and through comparison with Europe (Andreas and Snyder 2000; a related literature speaks of “rebordering” processes [Spener and Staudt 1998]). Joseph Nevins (2002), finally, reads the politics behind the border build-up as emerging out of an ideology of U.S. national-territorial identity promoted by regional and national state-builders.

CONCLUSION

We began this review by expressing concern about the sensationalism and ‘hot issue’-driven quality of U.S.-Mexico border studies. This attention derives from images of the border held on both the Right (expressing fear of national decay) and the Left (exaggerating social degradation and searching for “proletarian heroes”). We moved through a series of studies of hot issues, among them drug smuggling, border patrolling, *colonia* settlement, global factories, and cultural identity. With few exceptions, the authors reviewed here have been thoughtful and responsible, so our concerns derive less from specific intent and performance than from the way in which this region has come to be viewed. To take one example, *maquiladora* studies since Fernández-Kelly’s pioneering work (1983) have become narrowly focused on work organization and gender identity, and have lost track of women’s and men’s complex web of experiences and relationships in Mexican border cities. Studies of this region and of the ‘border’ concept have followed the postmodern trend toward fragmentation and appearance over depth. Researchers do not feel it necessary to do holistic ethnography (Mintz 2000), thereby losing unexpected insights and connections that could inform specific issues. The portrait of people involved in hot issues becomes fractured and incomplete, and people whose lives are not

germane are ignored. We find the valuation of issue over people problematic.

Our agenda is not to return to untheorized community studies, but rather to advocate greater attention within theory or topic-driven studies to context in the form of regional-historical views of culture and political economy, and also to imaginative explorations of experiences that do not surface in hot journalism and academic theory. For example, residents of border cities are often more concerned with life in their own city and nation than with the other nation, as the focus on either border hybridity or border reinforcement would imply. Yet there are few ethnographies of Mexican border cities that integrate multiple topics and virtually no ethnographies of daily working-class and lower middle-class life in U.S. border cities, except for those involved in the most florid issues, like *colonias* (but see Richardson 1999). The focus, then, tends to be on the extremes in border life. For example, the literature on U.S. border patrolling is necessary and urgent, and documents a major escalation of coercive force that touches many people's lives. Still, we do not have adequate ethnography delving into the various sources of coercion and violence in Mexican border dwellers' lives (and the way that, following Vila, border actors narrate this), including not only the U.S. state but also drug traffickers, bandits, corrupt police, and so on. In doing this, there is no substitute for systematic, enduring, and intimate conversations with a wide cross-section of people.

In addition to this holistic, ethnographic impulse, we advocate viewing the U.S.-Mexico border as a study in current history that confronts major questions of state-building, the wave-like motions of capital, the rise and erosion of classes, the self-transformation of women's lives and gender relationships broadly, and so forth. Let us take but one exemplary topic: smuggling and law enforcement. Beyond the shocking and titillating details of drug lords and drug murders, we need to be asking how these massive sums of money and firepower shape northern Mexican and southwestern U.S. power elite formation and transformation. We likewise need to examine how law enforcement and military agencies are rapidly becoming the major employer, the ideological voice, and the institutional core of U.S. border life. We might connect this to Nevins's provocative historical argument that the U.S.-Mexico border is witnessing a process of the increasing coherence and institutionalization of the two nation-states (especially the U.S. one) rather than a case of disappearing borders and merging societies. In this perspective, the existence of the border itself—both political and socio-cultural—is only one factor, though a highly important one, in the set of dynamic processes that we need to encompass and understand. Existing border theory from this perspective seems narrowly preoccupied with only certain conceptual categories, processes, and crossings, especially cultural identity.

Taking this sort of approach, in turn, will help us understand other Western Hemispheric borders with their own unique dynamics, and could offer comparative Latin American borders studies with a shared theoretical language. Other Latin American border zones are now escaping the “new ethnocentrism” of the U.S.-Mexico border about which the Argentine border scholar Alejandro Grimson writes (2000). Not all Latin American borders are as unequal, economically and politically, as the U.S.-Mexico border. Others, where migrants encounter inequality and brutality comparable to the U.S.-Mexico case, need attention in their own terms (e.g., Martínez 1995). And the obsessions and anxieties about identity peculiar to the U.S.-Mexico border need to be handled carefully before being imported either as theories or empirical precedents to other borders (Grimson is again eloquent and thoughtful on this subject). Still, for all our critical and (we hope) constructive comments, we see real energy and intelligence in the books we have reviewed, and we look forward to continuing vitality and richness in border studies, within and beyond our home border.

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