

The Brown Family and Social Reproduction in US Capitalism

This chapter conceptualizes processes of capitalist racialization that ensure social reproduction in the United States. This regime materially supports the white commonwealth, whose pursuit of historically evolving models of heteropatriarchal family depends on nurturing and care by disposable brown workers. The provision of social reproduction is part of the mode of rule of popular sovereignty through the racialized possessive attachments theorized in the first two chapters. These attachments underpin a demand for comfort and spaces of regeneration that are secured through the relegation of nonwhite racial groups to the strenuous work required for their provision. This scheme is propelled forward by the capitalist drive for accumulation and advances through the racialization of brown families and the destruction of their intimate and community spaces. The garnering of their bodily energies to serve other families' needs disorders brown families, depleting their emotional spaces and regenerative abilities, recruiting their young into adult roles due to family separation, and/or subjecting members to the constant anxiety of losing their loved ones to detention and deportation.

This chapter focuses on one population central for this function in the United States – Mexicanos, Mexican Americans, and Latino migrants – to conceptualize how separate institutional formations have served the continuous function of securing cheap bodily labor devoted to the care of others. By centering capitalism and its operation through the manipulation and leveraging of racial hierarchies, I expose that the territoriality, jurisdiction, and differentiated functions of political institutions obscure the continuity in the goal of subjection with the aim of accumulation. This focus also allows me to theorize how the unequal relation between

countries (in this case, Mexico and the United States) contributes to racial capitalist processes of subjection. Most importantly, this chapter shows how race works in “structural and agential ways” to organize the political economy of social reproduction, and how, in this process, capitalist exploitation and racialization constitute each other.¹

Historically, conquest, settlement, and foreign investment in Mexican labor-expelling projects of modernization produced an exploitable supply of brown labor. The groups displaced from Mexico that migrated into the United States were met with few protections when arriving through the Bracero Program and, later, with militarized systems of enforcement, all of which secured a workforce to sustain the social reproduction and care of the privileged. This genealogy confirms migration as a crucial component of empire and the vulnerable position of migrants as a purposive aspect of racial capitalism. This account revises presentist accounts of the political theory of migration and grounds post-9/11 immigration politics and the crisis of family separation in the longer genealogy of empire and its role facilitating the expropriation of brown families’ social reproductive capacities to reproduce capitalism.² In so doing, it complements critical theory accounts by conceptualizing the central role of immigration enforcement and anti-immigrant sentiment in facilitating social reproduction through expropriation.³

This account also illustrates how racial immigration regimes – which depend on global inequality and state-backed violence – shape and help solve capitalism’s contradiction between its dependence on racialized labor and its destructive modes of accumulation by continuously conscripting new brown laborers into reproductive functions.⁴ Thus, here,

¹ On “racialized capitalism,” see Tilley and Shilliam, “Raced Markets: An Introduction,” 541–42, Charisse Burden-Stelly, “Modern US Racial Capitalism,” *Monthly Review* 72, no. 3 (2020): 1, 9, Onur Ulas Ince, “Deprovincializing Racial Capitalism: John Crawford and Settler Colonialism in India,” *American Political Science Review* 116, no. 1 (2022).

² I use the term “brown families” in the same way in which Kelly Lytle Hernández uses “Mexican brown,” i.e., as a “conceptual and rhetorical tool that captures the shades of class and color” of the people that immigration policing targets. In my case, the families comprised by this term are indigenous-looking, poor Mexican and Central American families. Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra! A History of the Border Patrol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 13.

³ Fraser, “Expropriation and Exploitation in Racialized Capitalism: A Reply to Michael Dawson.”

⁴ Federici, “Reproduction and Feminist Struggle in the New International Division of Labor”, Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*. For a broader background on the reproduction of capitalism and its reliance on natural and communal resources, see Luxemburg, “The Accumulation

I extend the previous chapter's claim that migration is a world historical force, that is, an event that entails the mobility of subjects and their bodily energy at the global scale in order to address capitalist needs that result from crises, bottlenecks, and the partial liberation of other subjects. Here, unequal power between poor/sending and rich/host countries, is a key factor in facilitating accumulation through labor exploitation. This makes contemporary migration and its regulation a neo-imperial arrangement that racially partitions labor conditions and access to well-being for profit, rather than merely exogenous flows that provoke "backlash." This chapter's account, finally, shows the payoffs of extending the study of empire forward and into the present, demonstrating that (neo-)imperial regimes emerge not as well-structured wholes but as the result of the accommodation, re-organization, and adjustment of a variety of state institutions that respond to the political pressures and imperatives of accumulation.

Via Indigenous, Black, and Latinx feminist thought, I show that racial violence degraded brown subjects and made them readily exploitable to facilitate the social reproduction of white workers, while destroying the intimate family spaces of the former and preventing them from fulfilling their own social reproduction.⁵ This account expands on current understandings of social reproduction by, first, extending feminist theorizations of kinship, property, and race to consider the site occupied by the brown family in this scheme; and, second, by expanding on the understanding of social reproductive work to encompass productive work that is strenuous and dangerous and serves to shelter and protect privileged groups.

The degradation of the abject brown family occurs through the destruction or corrosion of family spaces of nurturing and regeneration for brown workers and the decimation of community realms that could support reflection and resistance. I show later that the degradation of brown

of Capital: A Contribution to the Economic Theory of Imperialism," 262–63, James O'Connor, "Capitalism, Nature, Socialism: A Theoretical Introduction," *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 1, no. 1 (1988): 24, Alan P. Rudy, "On Misunderstanding the Second Contradiction Thesis," *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 30, no. 4 (2019).

⁵ Throughout this chapter I refer to degradation and the creation of abject subjects or families interchangeably. By these terms, I refer to the effect of the systematic conscription of certain racialized subjects to strenuous bodily work over these subjects' bodily integrity and the capacity to replenish themselves physically and emotionally. I note in particular the detrimental effects of coercive regimes on brown families, their integrity, their embeddedness within supportive communities, and their capacity to operate as nurturing spaces of renewal. In this sense, this study departs from studies of the abject that attempt to locate it within cultural realms and instead aims to document the forms and processes of abjection that are central to understand social exclusion and marginalization. Imogen Tyler, "Against Abjection," *Feminist Theory* 10, no. 1 (2009): 95.

families and communities was facilitated by subsequent coercive regimes, including the annexation of northwestern Mexican territory; white settlement in these areas; guest labor; and undocumented migration, coupled with the criminalization of border crossing, surveillance, and mass deportations. In each of these regimes, the separation of families was a prime controlling mechanism, either through transnational migration, forceful family separation at the border, detention, or deportation. The effects on immigrant families exceed the instance of separation, however, because immigrant families who are intact nonetheless remain precarious because immigration policing and the multiple statuses of family members make the enjoyment of a fulfilling and caring family life unattainable. I tie this systematic separation and degradation of brown families to a cruel and resentful backlash against these families' assertion of their integrity and their demand to take up residence where brown bodies are granted only temporary stays. Family integrity is a radical move because it opposes the destruction of an intimate nurturing sphere that resignifies brown bodies as more than just laboring tools, even if it does not deny the persistence of patriarchal arrangements and women's disproportionate shouldering of reproductive work within most families, regardless of race.

In the rest of this chapter, I first introduce and develop a framework to explain how the brown family becomes a site of degradation and how this serves the social reproduction of US capitalism. Second, I use this framework to argue that conquest, settlement, and immigration surveillance secured social reproduction and capitalist profit, while depleting the capacity of brown families to sustain nurturing relationships, health and well-being. Third, I extend the analysis to consider the post-9/11 regime of immigration enforcement and how it targets family integrity.

3.1 SOCIAL REPRODUCTION: FROM GENDER TO RACE, FROM WOMEN TO FAMILIES

Racial capitalism approaches highlight that a variety of gradations of labor exploitation co-exist, acting in a complementary and/or supplementary, rather than competitive, fashion.⁶ Labor may be waged, unwaged, approaching conditions of slavery, informal, and/or intermittent.⁷ This follows from the historical drive of capital to set labor power

⁶ Bhattacharyya, *Rethinking Racial Capitalism: Questions of Reproduction and Survival*, 67–68.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 39–70.

“free” from noncapitalist social contexts and relations and incorporate it into the capitalist system.⁸ Yet this drive does not imply homogeneity, because different groups are assigned positions that range from serfdom to waged labor based on their different circumstances, including race, access to citizenship status, and historical influences, which nonetheless lead to a coherent regime that can be scrutinized as such.⁹ This chapter focuses on one such gradation of exploitation, which historically produced informal, temporary, and vulnerable labor pools of brown subjects that facilitated a durable regime of brown labor that provided for the social reproduction of US white waged labor.

In feminist accounts, social reproduction encompasses the realm and work that guarantees the production and reproduction of the worker, which is disavowed by capitalism despite being a socio-economic activity required for capital accumulation.¹⁰ This means that the presentation of female labor as a natural resource or a personal service, and thus unwaged, is central to capitalist profit.¹¹ These approaches reframe the question of power differentials between men and women as neither cultural nor natural, but as associated with the dependence of capitalism on women’s unpaid labor.¹² I expand this approach by building upon frameworks of race and capitalism to conceptualize social reproduction as thoroughly racialized, and to implicate the family as an important unit of analysis; in particular, I argue that brown families are systematically degraded and effectively relegated to an exploitative and badly paid realm of informal labor to guarantee the social reproduction of relatively more privileged, predominantly white labor.

Moreover, I expand the realm of social reproduction to encompass brown men’s nominally productive activities in the areas of farm work, construction, and landscaping, and generally strenuous jobs in, for example, mining, agriculture, and construction. In the case of farm work, the work of harvesting performed by brown men and women, whose exploitation allows produce to reach consumers at lower prices,

⁸ Luxemburg, “The Accumulation of Capital: A Contribution to the Economic Theory of Imperialism,” 261–62.

⁹ Karl Marx, *Capital Volume III*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Penguin, 1991 [1894]), 927.

¹⁰ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2004), 8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, *Women and the Subversion of the Community* (London: Falling Wall Press, 1972).

¹² Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 8, Dalla Costa, *Women and the Subversion of the Community*.

straightforwardly contributes to the nurturing of wage laborers, and thus their social reproduction. Work in construction, on the other hand, produces affordable housing for these workers and their families, again contributing to the shelter necessary for their social reproduction. The landscaping performed by brown workers, yet again, beautifies the private or public environment that wage laborers and professionals enjoy during their leisure time, in segregated white spaces with generous access to green areas and clean air, which is lacking in underserved Black and brown neighborhoods. Finally, the historically purposeful segregation of brown workers in physically strenuous professions protects white male bodies from extreme weather, injuries, and wearisome activities, yet again contributing to an easier work of reproduction.¹³ The more broadly researched caring work of nurses, nannies, home aids, and cleaners – jobs fulfilled predominantly by brown women – completes the picture of social reproduction by fulfilling the often dirty work of bodily care, distinguished from the more nurturing and supervisory aspects reserved to white women in households and public realms.

My goal here is not to homogenize the trajectory of the diverse sectors that I bring together under a single umbrella. Capital's needs for accumulation drove deep transformations in, for example, the meatpacking and dairy farming industries, which became concentrated and responded to price pressures by corporate buyers by segmenting labor markets and recruiting immigration labor for the worst paid and least safe jobs.¹⁴ These processes played out earlier and differently in the case of agriculture. In the case of the increased demand for badly paid care work inside and outside the home, the drivers were a lack of a social state infrastructure and transformations that made a single-breadwinner

¹³ As Mario Barrera notes in his study of the Southwest, historically racially segmented markets benefited white workers by sparing them the most undesirable work, and the labor reserve role played by Chicano workers cushioned white workers against the worst dislocations of the economy. Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality*, 213.

¹⁴ "Death and Disability in the Heartland: Corporate (Mis)Conduct, Regulatory Responses, and the Plight of Latino Workers in the Meatpacking Industry," *Great Plains Research* 10, no. 2 (2000), Stephanie E. Tanger, "Enforcing Corporate Responsibility for Violations of Workplace Immigration Laws: The Case of Meatpacking," *Harvard Latino Law Review* 9 (2006), David Weil, "Enforcing Labour Standards in Fissured Workplaces: The US Experience," *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* 22, no. 2 (2011), James Wilmers, "Wage Stagnation and Buyer Power: How Buyer-Supplier Relations Affect U.S. Workers' Wages, 1978 to 2014," *American Sociological Review* 83, no. 2 (2018).

household a relic while continuing to underpay women for their work.¹⁵ While recognizing these heterogeneous dynamics, I bracket them to focus on the groups that, through the coming together of a variety of social, political, and economic factors, left their countries and were conscripted into the strenuous bodily jobs needed to maintain the social reproduction of privileged workers.

My argument is that this group – brown families made up of the brown laborers conscripted into strenuous jobs that sustain the social reproduction of relatively privileged white workers – sits at the intersection of reproductive labor and primitive accumulation identified by Marxist feminists as labor that is not traditionally remunerated through a formal wage but belongs squarely in capitalist arrangements. These scholars assimilate the workers who sit at this intersection to the “housewives of the world,” by which they mean female and male peasants engaged in subsistence production and occupying marginalized positions, predominantly in the Third World.¹⁶ The historical reconstruction in this chapter theorizes the systems of coercion that ensure the vulnerability of these workers, regimes that were historically and continue to be part and parcel of western political economies.

Historically, care and reproductive work in the United States depended on systems of coercion such as racial and gendered labor segregation and discrimination, welfare regulations that pushed single mothers into badly paid work, and prison labor programs that placed Black women to work in private homes.¹⁷ The provision for the needs of the social reproduction of white families by brown and Black labor operated historically alongside nineteenth-century narratives of the heterosexual, white, male-breadwinner family. The family remains at the center of politics, now as a site of neoconservative and neoliberal anxiety around racialized families, negotiated through punitive legislation of migration, crime, and welfare. From concerns about marriage immigration fraud, which made migrant

¹⁵ Valdez, “Reconceiving Immigration Politics: Walter Benjamin, Violence, and Labor,” 101–4, Federici, “Reproduction and Feminist Struggle in the New International Division of Labor.”

¹⁶ Claudia von Werlhof, “Women’s Work: The Blind Spot in the Critique of Political Economy,” ed. Maria Mies, Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, and Claudia von Werlhof (London: Zed Books, 1988), 15–16.

¹⁷ Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Forced to Care: Coercion and Caregiving in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 36–37, Sarah Haley, “‘Like I Was a Man’: Chain Gangs, Gender, and the Domestic Carceral Sphere in Jim Crow Georgia,” *Signs* 39, no. 1 (2013).

spouses more vulnerable in the 1980s, to DNA collection from asylum seekers to detect fraudulent families at the border in 2020, attacks on the brown family highlight its political significance.

To theorize the racialized/gendered constructions of Latino families, I turn to Black feminist scholars' sophisticated accounts of social reproduction.¹⁸ Because of the particular forms of subjection that affected them, the formation of gender and Black womanhood in particular has to be understood in the context of property relations, slavery and its sexual economy, and calculated injury.¹⁹ This is also true for the Black family, a support structure that was shaped and modified by a dominant symbolic order aimed at maintaining white supremacy and capitalist accumulation.²⁰ During slavery, notably, Black kinship was limited to making genetic reproduction an opportunity to extend the boundaries of property, through what Angela Davis called "a rigidified disorganization in family life" which proscribed all social structures within which Black people could forge a collective and conscious experience.²¹ These theoretical insights on the destruction of kinship and the loss of natural motherhood associated with slavery indicate that the state and capitalism centrally shaped the realm of the Black family, whose status as a "private realm" was accordingly denied.²²

The destruction of intimate spaces is a more generalized trait of colonization, notably as part of the process of land dispossession of Indigenous peoples, their aggressive assimilation into settler society, and the destruction of their culture and communities. Questions of family and marriage were tightly regulated by British law or rules enacted in the settler colonies, and they all relied on an account of nonnuclear Indigenous kinship structures as lacking a privatized, intimate sphere, and thus as uncivilized and faring poorly compared with the family-making practices of white settlers.²³ Settler colonial interventions upset familial formations and the place of women in Indigenous communities, whose arrangements had not previously resembled western patriarchal structures.²⁴ These policies

¹⁸ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, 97.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 75.

²¹ Ibid., Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," 4.

²² Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," 76.

²³ Mark Rifkin, *When Did Indians Become Straight? Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 146.

²⁴ Shelbi Nahwilet Meissner and Kyle Powys Whyte, "Theorizing Indigeneity, Gender, and Settler Colonialism," in *Routledge Companion to the Philosophy of Race*, ed. Paul C.

included the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families and their education under white women's supervision in residential schools. These regimes of confinement included programs of forced labor for girls (who joined white families as servants) and a variety of calculatedly cruel behavior, including medical experiments, sexual abuse, and outright violence, which resulted in thousands of deaths among the kidnapped children, and thus contributed at once to the cultural and biological elimination of Indigenous peoples.²⁵ This targeting and destruction of Indigenous kinship structures was central to further projects of land dispossession and for asserting settlers' claims of sovereignty.²⁶

Hence, Black and Indigenous families were sites of public intervention, shaped by capitalist priorities of land appropriation, property creation, and the availability of unfree or vulnerable labor. The interventions are dissimilar, in that they aim at maximizing the reproduction of slaves in one case, and at elimination or violent assimilation in the other. Yet they confirm that race, sexuality, and family are mediating categories for capitalist accumulation that need examining to properly theorize expropriation and dispossession. The analysis that follows builds upon this tradition and existing accounts by Latino thinkers to analyze interventions that target the brown family. In so doing, I do not claim these experiences are equivalent to the experiences of oppression of Black and Indigenous peoples through slavery and settler colonialism. Instead, the analysis illuminates how the kinship structures of Mexican Indigenous groups – inferiorized by the Mexican project of *mestizaje* and state formation as well as by the US annexation and labor regime – were also targeted. This contribution thus locates US Latinos within the messy encounters of different racial groups with each other and the state, that is, the entwinement between settlement and forced migration that

Taylor, Linda Martin Alcoff, and Luve Anderson (New York: Routledge, 2017). In the case of the Maori, for example, women were embedded in communal interrelations rather than being confined to the authority of their husbands within a private household. Anne Mikaere, "Maori Women: Caught in the Contradictions of a Colonised Reality," *Waikato Law Review* 2 (1994): 125.

²⁵ Margaret D. Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880–1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), Meissner and Whyte, "Theorizing Indigeneity, Gender, and Settler Colonialism."

²⁶ Mikaere, "Maori Women: Caught in the Contradictions of a Colonised Reality," 127, 33–34, Rifkin, *When Did Indians Become Straight? Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty*, 147.

demands the “careful spatialization of positionalities within ongoing Indigenous dispossession.”²⁷

The kinship structures of Latinos, including Mexican Americans, Mexican migrants, and Central American migrants and refugees, was subsequently shaped by the conquest of the Mexican northwest by the US state and the transfer of its land and skilled labor to agricultural businesses and European settlers, the establishment of guest worker programs, and past and present regimes of immigration enforcement. These groups, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, filled the ranks of workers in low-skilled and physically strenuous jobs that fulfilled tasks of social reproduction. It needs highlighting that the *shifting* populations that carried out this labor were central to the *continuity* of the regime of exploitation. This is because exploitation depended on the continuous availability of subjects who were either recently dispossessed of land by the conquest or recently arrived migrants, who were the most susceptible to exploitation. During the Bracero period, in fact, local Mexican Americans constituted communities that were largely separate from Mexican guest workers and recent migrants, and older arrivals with more secure standing tended to move north in search of better jobs, leaving undesirable jobs for new arrivals.²⁸ In this picture, the intimate lives of Mexican Americans, and of Mexican and Central American migrants, became sites of absorption of public rhetoric, ideology,²⁹ and exploitative practices that sustained capitalist profit. The capitalist imperative to guarantee social reproduction at the lowest possible expense, thus, formed and deformed brown families. In this framework, the family separations produced by guest worker programs, seasonal work, and intensified detention and deportation are the dramatic and intimate personalized effects of this regime and the immigration policing that accompanies it.

3.2 SETTLERS, GUESTS, AND MIGRANTS

In positing the question of migration as continuous with conquest and settlement, my point is to associate these regimes as contributing parts of

²⁷ Jodi A. Byrd, “Weather with You: Settler Colonialism, Antiracism, and the Grounded Relationalities of Resistance,” *Critical Ethnic Studies* 5, no. 1–2 (2019): 209, 14, Robin D. G. Kelley, “The Rest of Us: Rethinking Settler and Native,” *American Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (2017), Justin Leroy, “Black History in Occupied Territory: On the Entanglements of Slavery and Settler Colonialism,” *Theory & Event* 19, no. 4 (2016).

²⁸ Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story* (Charlotte: McNally and Loftin, 1964), 32.

²⁹ Lauren Berlant, “Intimacy: A Special Issue,” *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (1998): 282.

evolving racialized and gradated labor regimes that facilitate US social reproduction and continued capital accumulation. In other words, both the conquest and white settlement of the Mexican northwest and the recruitment of vulnerable migrants through legal or informal ways contributed, through coercion, to putting white and brown workers on opposite trajectories of economic mobility: access to consumption and family formation for the former, and expropriative labor and immobility for the latter. The case of Mexican annexation and Mexican and, later, Central American migration, moreover, illustrates the transnational aspects of subjection, by relating migration to international hierarchy and to displacement through modernization, including the roles granted to brown/Indigenous workers and families in the Mexican national project.

Mexicanos

It is well established that the status of Mexican Americans in Texas and the US Southwest declined precipitously after annexation. The inflow into the area of white groups varied by state and region and even preceded the Mexican–American war in the case of Texas (where US landowners could access “empresario” grants offered by the Mexican government, and land speculators had secured private ownership over land even before white settlement took place).³⁰ This process, jointly with generous land grants, the first homestead law in the United States, and squatter rights, meant that it was “virtually impossible ... for a [white] Texas family to be landless” in the second half of the nineteenth century.³¹ More generally, intimidation and gradual or accelerated settlement dispossessed Mexican American ranchers of land, wealth, and power, a process quickened by the arrival of the railway later that century, which made land desirable for irrigation companies and subject to speculation.³² The shift was equally drastic for nonlandowning Mexicans; a pastoral economy was turned into a capitalist one, transforming the masses into a source of unskilled labor.³³ The gradual replacement of ranching

³⁰ Theodore R. Fehrenbach, *Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans* (New York: Open Road Media, 2014), 283.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Paul S. Taylor, “California Farm Labor: A Review,” *Agricultural History* 42, no. 1 (1968): 54; Victor B. Nelson Cisneros, “La Clase Trabajadora En Tejas, 1920–1940,” *Aztlan* 6, no. 2 (1975).

³³ Alfredo Mirandé, *The Chicano Experience: An Alternative Perspective* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 28.

by mechanized agriculture, and the parallel introduction of technology into mining, similarly transformed the occupations filled by Mexican Americans, who went from serving as cowboys and shepherders or miners to low-skilled farmworkers and mining wage workers.³⁴ In other words, mid- to high-skilled positions formerly occupied by Mexican Americans went to Anglos, and the former were also excluded from new positions operating agricultural machinery.³⁵ Capitalist logics of private property and gradated realms of exploitation thus proceeded via racialization, creating the menial Mexican laborer through land dispossession (legally – through new taxation regimes or laws encouraging homesteading – or through fraud or force) and disruption of non-capitalist forms of production,³⁶ which created a mass of laborers that could only access meagerly compensated and strenuous jobs, without the opportunities for upward mobility that awaited unskilled white migrants arriving in the United States.

These socio-political and economic processes made cheap and strenuous work “Mexicans’ work.”³⁷ Hence, the devaluation of this work depended on the concentration of a “succession of dispossessed persons of myriad races,” in these sectors,³⁸ including, in time, immigrants from Mexico, whose influxes gathered speed in the 1920s and 1930s owing to revolutionary turmoil in Mexico and increased demands from US growers

³⁴ Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality*, 42–45, Mirandé, *The Chicano Experience: An Alternative Perspective*, 29.

³⁵ Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality*, 44. The exclusion of brown workers from less physically demanding jobs or jobs operating machinery was consistent with racist arguments about the fitness of particular races for various industrial employment by, among others, Max Weber, and with the formal and informal practice of preventing black workers from being trained as operators of machinery. Andrew Zimmerman, “Decolonizing Weber,” *Postcolonial Studies* 9, no. 1 (2006): 67, Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, ix, Judith Stein, *Running Steel, Running America: Race, Economic Policy and the Decline of Liberalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 100–1.

³⁶ Donald W. Meinig, *Imperial Texas: An Interpretive Essay in Cultural Geography* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010 [1969]), 54–55, Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality*, 30–31, Mirandé, *The Chicano Experience: An Alternative Perspective*, 21.

³⁷ The societal character of this construction is demonstrated by the fact that only in those areas where certain jobs were overwhelmingly filled by Mexicans were the jobs devalued, while in areas with smaller Mexican groups mining, farming, and ranching jobs were devoid of stigma. Park, “The History of Mexican Labor in Arizona During the Territorial Period”, 180–81, Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality*, 44.

³⁸ Taylor, “California Farm Labor: A Review,” 50.

for cheap agricultural, mining, and railway labor (these demands could no longer be filled by Chinese workers, who were banned). The inflows took place in the context of multiple nativist demands to restrict Mexican migration, demands that were countered from within nativist circles by reframing Mexican influxes as a problem to be controlled so that their labor could be extracted and their permanence prevented. While considered “an inferior race,” or “at least ... different,” Mexicans were assumed well fitted for the work of “picking cotton and grubbing land” and the wages that these jobs would secure, as they produced more and charged less than white and Black workers alike.³⁹ Thus, in the context of a congressional debate, it was assured by Texas Representative Garner that “80 percent of that labor would return to Mexico” and that no more than 2 percent of the remaining laborers “would ever get out of Texas.”⁴⁰ The temporary character of labor migration thus ensured that the inflow of migrants would not “deteriorate the American citizenship, as you and I understand it” and the particular origin of the laborers (“peon labor”) ensured in turn that they would not hold “any of this evil philosophy against capital and property that ... a good many Mexicans have.”⁴¹

The same narrative dominated the debate of an ultimately unsuccessful 1926 bill to limit Mexican migration to the United States. Growers conceded that Mexican workers presented a “racial problem” for the Southwest akin to that the “old South [created] when it imported slave labor from Africa,” but insisted that, in California, “they can handle the social problem.” This was echoed by a Texan agribusinessman: “If we could not control the Mexicans and they would take this country it would be better to keep them out, but we can and do control them.”⁴² In addition to their manageability, growers favored Mexican labor vis-à-vis ethnic whites, as emerges from an exchange between US Representatives William P. Holaday and Czech-born Adolph Sabath from Illinois, on the one hand, and Nebraskan beet grower J. T. Whitehead. According to Whitehead’s testimony, German-Russians would soon “endeavor to try

³⁹ U.S. Congress, *Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization on H. J. Res. 271 Relating to the Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1920), 4, 13.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 5, see also Alexandra Filindra, “The Emergence of the ‘Temporary Mexican’: American Agriculture, the U.S. Congress and the 1920 Hearings on the ‘Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers,’” *Latin American Research Review* 49, no. 3 (2014).

⁴¹ U.S. Congress, *Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization on H. J. Res. 271 Relating to the Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 6.

⁴² Cited in Hernández, *Migra! A History of the Border Patrol*, 29.

to secure farms of their own” rather than remain laborers.⁴³ Here the argument hinged on the differential access to land by racialized groups, and their assimilability; German-Russians, it was argued, were wont to become “very decent citizens” after a few years, while “the Mexican does not become a neighbor.”⁴⁴ Mexicans, instead, were like children, some of whom needed a good deal of discipline, but ultimately made no trouble once growers were “able to talk to them in their own language and explain things to them in a way that they are used to have things explained to them.”⁴⁵

The corporeal focus of racist discourse about brown and migrant labor is notable for how it serves to legitimize the kind of work assigned to them. Race, moreover, is important to determine the differential gendering of white and brown women, which organized the care hierarchy between the nurturing work of white women and the dirty work of the women of color under their supervision.⁴⁶ This corporeality also looms large in the racist discourses of labor competition discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, according to which the ability to perform toilsome work and subsist in degraded conditions distinguished nonwhite from white migrants. It was this racist construction of Mexican workers as adept to toilsome work and requiring only scant compensation for their labor that, in turn, made them into a threat. When objections to the threat of Mexican labor were raised, they entailed further racialization, which attributed to Mexicans a natural reluctance to move away from their laborer position. Moreover, the supposed superior strength and resistance to extreme climate of Black and brown subjects overdetermined their fitness for strenuous bodily work. The associated derogatory accounts of their intellectual capacities additionally marked them as unfit for laboring with machinery, relegating them to the harsh labor that machinery could not execute and “native white men generally will not do.”⁴⁷

However natural these attributes were considered, these corporeal attributes were constructed through the political economy of settlement and migration in the Southwest. In other words, the violent land

⁴³ U.S. Congress, *Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization on Seasonal Agricultural Laborers from Mexico, Book 2* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1926), 106.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 106–7.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁴⁶ Glenn, *Forced to Care: Coercion and Caregiving in America*, 36.

⁴⁷ Melita M. Garza, *They Came to Toil: Newspaper Representations of Mexicans and Immigrants in the Great Depression* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018), 73.

dispossession that followed Anglo settlement created a pliable labor force, violent social segregation prevented Mexicans from accessing the jobs they had fulfilled before the conquest, and coercive labor and controlled mobility led to the avowed reluctance of peons to abandon the status of laborer. In other words, here capitalism can be seen leveraging race to increase accumulation, in a process that both relies upon racial hierarchy and reinforces it further, because the successful labor segregation marks these bodies as belonging to certain jobs and as particularly adept at toilsome work. Accumulation is facilitated by the racialized understanding of bodily capacities because it follows that fewer protections on the job and only pitiable compensation are required. Accumulation, in other words, proceeds through racialization. Family structures are also shaped by racializing capitalism, both because they are restructured according to profit motives and because racialized accounts of their degraded status is posited to legitimize claims that their nurturing is not worth supporting via higher wages.⁴⁸ In fact, the hardships Mexican American families suffered after Anglo annexation and settlement in the Southwest forced women to exit the private realm to work in laundering and caring for white families, a process prompted by land dispossession and the destruction of noncommercial agriculture in the Southwest.⁴⁹ This process of racialization made the family wage a racial construct, one meant to facilitate white women's dedication to nurturing their families. Moves to limit women's working hours to protect the time they could devote to mothering was contested by business interests, but the concern never applied to Black and brown families, where wives' employment was a given.

These racialized dynamics were at play in the exclusion of farmworkers and domestic workers from California's 1911 Eight-Hour legislation for women. The debates motivated by the constitutional challenge of this law in 1915 reveal its racialized and gendered dimensions, but also

⁴⁸ Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Issei, Nisei, War Bride: Three Generations of Japanese American Women in Domestic Service* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 3, Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality*.

⁴⁹ Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality*, 48–49, 89, Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 82, 85. This is not to say that the white family complied neatly with the “traditional” nuclear heterosexual family. As Linda Nicholson notes, the view of the family as *not* including extended family was only consolidated in the postwar period, enabled by a housing boom that made up for the overcrowding and scarcity that characterized the 1930s and 1940s. Linda J. Nicholson, *The Play of Reason: From the Modern to the Postmodern* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 77–78.

the particular place assigned to nonwhite families. In defending the law, California Attorney General Ulysses S. Webb argued that “the limitation of the number of hours women must work ... has a direct relationship to women’s health and, hence, to the health of the race as a whole, as well as the safety and health of those she serves.”⁵⁰ Limiting women’s working hours, Webb continued, “may check the rapid decline in reproduction of the older American stocks” by expanding the amount of time women can devote to “wifedom and motherhood,” which strengthens the race by “the shaping of the child mind [sic], the directing of his habits and the development of his character.”⁵¹ In other words, the exclusion from protection of women workers in agricultural and domestic labor was a claim about which female bodies needed protection and whose families needed nurturing. The wifedom and motherhood functions of brown women did not concern the California Attorney General, nor did the nurturing of the mind and character of brown children. In fact, in the Supreme Court decision, Justice Charles Evan Hughes affirmed the ability of the law to “recognize degrees of harm” and limit restrictions to sectors in which the need is clearest.⁵² Here he was countering the claim of hoteliers that the measure was discriminatory toward their business, but the statement also conveys that the more strenuous and less protected conditions to which women farmworkers and domestic workers were subjected did not constitute harm worth protecting them from. This again confirmed the racialized corporeality of brown women, who disproportionately filled these jobs in California, as objects to be deployed to increase accumulation through unregulated and unprotected hours of toil.

Indigeneity in Mexico

These dynamics of exclusion in which the creation of vulnerability is a precondition to recruiting certain workers into exploitative work are widely recognizable in the Bracero period, as is the strain put on brown families by this program. Yet before turning to this, it is important to understand the parallel processes of dispossession and family construction operating in Mexico. Mexican revolutionary and nation-building

⁵⁰ California Senate Labor Committee, “Preliminary Report of the Senate Labor Committee to the 1957 Session of the California Legislature – Part I: Office Work Occupations under the Eight-Hour Law,” in *Appendix to the Journal of the Senate* (Sacramento: Legislature of the State of California, 1957), 15.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Miller V. Wilson*, 236, 373 (1915).

projects considered the emigrant subject a central actor in the development of the country, although not without ambivalence. Mexican anthropologist and sociologist Manuel Gamio, who studied under anthropologist Franz Boas at Columbia University and served in the Mexican education portfolio in the 1920s and 1930s, was well known and respected on both sides of the border and wrote extensively on the question of Mexican migration.⁵³ He would eventually compose a report on the topic for the Social Science Research Council. Gamio strongly objected to the racist arguments against Mexican migration that circulated in the United States at the time, and couched his response in cultural/developmentalist arguments that positioned most of Mexican Indigenous groups as holding valuable cultural traits. This, however, did not detract Gamio from judging certain Indigenous traits as backward with respect to the modern civilization of the United States, Europe, and Mexican elites. Gamio's notion of development stemmed from a Larmarckian view that tied the biological and cultural development of individuals to environmental factors.⁵⁴ Given this, Gamio positioned migrants who returned from the United States as an important input in the evolution of Mexican culture in more civilized (i.e., capitalist and consumerist) directions, which would also fuel economic development. Gamio's account of emigration echoes the place that Edward Gibbon Wakefield gave British emigration within his theory of colonization.⁵⁵ Gamio, like Wakefield, conceived of temporary Mexican emigration as an important "safety valve" for the Mexican economy, whose uneven development and chronic unemployment problem could otherwise lead only to starvation or rebellion.⁵⁶ Yet, unlike Wakefield, who envisioned British emigrants as permanent settlers, Gamio realistically conceived of Mexican emigration as temporary,⁵⁷ and counted on these journeys to teach the poor and unschooled

⁵³ Benjamin C. Montoya, "'A Grave Offense of Significant Consequences': Mexican Perspectives on US Immigration Restriction During the Late 1920s," *Pacific Historical Review* 87, no. 2 (2018): 347.

⁵⁴ Casey Walsh, "Eugenic Acculturation: Manuel Gamio, Migration Studies, and the Anthropology of Development in Mexico, 1910–1940," *Latin American Perspectives* 31, no. 5 (2004): 120.

⁵⁵ Wakefield, *A Letter from Sydney: The Principal Town of Australasia*.

⁵⁶ Montoya, "'A Grave Offense of Significant Consequences': Mexican Perspectives on US Immigration Restriction During the Late 1920s," 348.

⁵⁷ He judged that the "racial shocks, social discrimination, and cultural antagonisms" could be avoided if "steps were taken to prevent all permanent immigration." Elsewhere, Gamio argued that the only way for racial prejudices toward Mexicans to lose their significance would be if massive European migration to Mexico gradually absorbed "the

classes to live “on a higher scale.”⁵⁸ Gamio deemed this project more realistic than aiming for the permanent settlement of migrants, given the cultural differences between Mexicans and European Americans, as well as the prevalence of “race prejudice” among whites in the United States, which made for “an intellectual, emotional, and traditional disparity too great to be bridged rapidly and perhaps never completely.”⁵⁹ But racialized cultural assessments were not absent from Gamio’s account of the backwardness of the predominant demographic of migrants, Indigenous groups that were “incomparably the inferior of the Toltec, Aztec, and Maya,” as well as of Mexicans of European descent.⁶⁰ Despite these unbridgeable differences, Gamio still trusted the US “schooling” that Mexican emigrants received – including access to better “furniture and clothing,” their use of “machinery and modern tools,” and their acquaintance with “sports and hygienic practices” – to contribute to the progress of Mexico upon their return.⁶¹

This expectation stood in contrast with the actual conditions of exploitation faced by Mexican migrants and their exclusion from work using technological equipment, conditions that were, incidentally, often justified by US discourses akin to Gamio’s own acknowledgment that the needs of Mexican natives were less complex than those of Europeans,

indigenous ethnic characteristics” constituting another country of “occidental descent” in the American continent. This prejudice, however, he accurately found to be “the best defensive wall against a definite American conquest,” given that, in the absence of racial prejudice, “Mexico would already have been peacefully and fatally absorbed by the United States.” Manuel Gamio, “Observations on Mexican Immigration into the United States,” *Pacific Affairs* 2, no. 8 (1929): 468, Manuel Gamio, “Migration and Planning,” *The Survey* 66 (1931): 174, Paul Frymer, *Building an American Empire: The Era of Territorial and Political Expansion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

⁵⁸ This was echoed by many of his contemporaries, including Mexican president Pascual Ortiz Rubio, who encouraged Mexican migrants’ return to improve Mexican well-being and the economy through the spread of the ideas and work habits acquired in the United States. Garza, *They Came to Toil: Newspaper Representations of Mexicans and Immigrants in the Great Depression*.

⁵⁹ Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States: A Study of Human Migration and Adjustment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁶¹ Gamio, “Migration and Planning,” 174. Gamio’s claims about indigenous groups and modernization were not exclusive to his generation. In fact, his claims closely echo intellectual José López Portillo’s early twentieth-century account of “la raza indígena” as naturally defeated by the fitter Spanish race, though the former were not completely hopeless in terms of adapting to “modern life,” if the material bases for regeneration were provided. Thomas G. Powell, “Mexican Intellectuals and the Indian Question,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 48, no. 1 (1968): 34.

as well as to other Mexican racial thinkers of *mestizaje* that praised the “Indian[’s] ... superior organism” and “resistance.”⁶² In other words, there was relatively little debate about the racial undesirability of Mexican migrants of Indigenous extraction on either side of the border. Rather, their admission to the United States was vocally justified by, first, the economic need in the context of the ban placed on Chinese migrants, and, second, their relative “advantage” vis-à-vis other racially devalued groups in the United States, such as Puerto Ricans, Filipinos, and African Americans, given that they were able to repatriate during economic depressions, or could be forced to do so given their lack of status.⁶³

This means that the migrant leaving Mexico for the United States was subjected in multiple ways by racial capitalist projects developing on both sides of the border. The land dispossession and displacement in occupied Mexican territory was matched by Indigenous land dispossession and the decline of collective land holdings in the territory that remained under Mexican control. These transformations were fueled by legal changes, informal takeovers, land speculation driven by the railway construction in Mexico, and foreign investment that led to a boom in agricultural exports.⁶⁴ Their location at the intersection of Mexican and US projects of modernization and state-building meant that Mexican migrant laborers were sent to the United States by a domestic project of modernization that positioned them as uncivilized subjects whose worth would be increased by contact with US culture and their transformation toward the “Western type” of Mexican elites.⁶⁵ This expectation contrasted with their admission into the United States as peons expected to live in barracks, perform only the most basic work, and move only between employment locations to perform their required tasks.

Braceros

Discourses of cultural inferiority and transformation through and for modernization persisted during the Bracero period, both in terms of how

⁶² These thinkers included José López Portillo y Rojas, among others, Powell, “Mexican Intellectuals and the Indian Question,” 34.

⁶³ Benjamin C. Montoya, *Risking Immeasurable Harm: Immigration Restriction and US-Mexican Diplomatic Relations, 1924–193* (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 2020), 239.

⁶⁴ Powell, “Mexican Intellectuals and the Indian Question,” 29, 33, Hernández, *Migra! A History of the Border Patrol*, 25.

⁶⁵ Gamio, “Migration and Planning,” 175.

the Mexican state's project aimed to reform extended family structures predominant among peasants, and the hope that the guest worker program would provide the impetus for "Indians" to abandon primitive customs and nonmodern familial arrangements.⁶⁶ The glowing portrayal of the Bracero program as an opportunity for modernization by the Mexican government was complicated by memories of abuses suffered by Mexican workers on US soil and the experience of mass deportation in the 1930s.⁶⁷ Only the entry of the United States into the Second World War, and the Mexican support for the Allied Powers announced in 1942, provided the basis for more reciprocal cooperation, couched in terms of a democratic partnership against authoritarianism, a situation that did in fact strengthen Mexico's bargaining position, allowing it to negotiate strong protections enforced by the US state rather than growers.⁶⁸ Yet the end of the war and the unending numbers of Mexican workers willing to sidestep the program and head north to work quickly weakened Mexico's position.⁶⁹ This translated into worsening conditions of exploitation for Braceros and resurgent racial narratives of inferiority that served to justify and produce harsh labor conditions. Among these narratives, US authorities highlighted the "superiority" of the Bracero work ethic, connected to their "animal vitality," which allowed the "Mexican worker" to overcome crushing illness and injury, and "literally [work] himself to death."⁷⁰ The shaping of the Mexican family by the Bracero program followed the logic of racialized capitalist accumulation. In particular, the desire to keep Bracero labor cheap and the racial undesirability of settlement dictated that the pool of recruited workers was kept all male. It was acknowledged by the authorities that recruiting women would have required "separate and expensive forms of housing" and that

⁶⁶ Mireya Loza, *Defiant Braceros: How Migrant Workers Fought for Racial, Sexual, and Political Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 64.

⁶⁷ Lawrence A. Cardoso, "Labor Emigration to the Southwest, 1916 to 1920: Mexican Attitudes and Policy," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 79, no. 4 (1976), Deborah Cohen, "Caught in the Middle: The Mexican State's Relationship with the United States and Its Own Citizen-Workers, 1942-1954," *Journal of American Ethnic History* (2001): 112.

⁶⁸ Cohen, "Caught in the Middle: The Mexican State's Relationship with the United States and Its Own Citizen-Workers, 1942-1954," 112-13.

⁶⁹ Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story*, 70-77, Cohen, "Caught in the Middle: The Mexican State's Relationship with the United States and Its Own Citizen-Workers, 1942-1954," 112-13.

⁷⁰ The statement is by the labor director of the Santa Ana county Farm Bureau. Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story*, 238.

“marrying or entering into extended family arrangements” would result in a “combined wage-earning potential” that would encourage Braceros to skip their contracts or settle permanently.⁷¹ In other words, it was explicitly the *cost* of a fulfilled domesticity and family life for Mexican workers that was excised from the Bracero program and expropriated for the reproduction of US capitalism and its waged workers. The exclusively male and temporary character of the Bracero program also fit tightly with the settler colonial project, which reserved opportunities for upward mobility and fulfilled domesticity for white families. This puts into perspective the nonsensical expectation that the program would facilitate “family advancement and modernization of familial economics” for Mexican migrants, positing a respectable masculinity tied to the nuclear family that Braceros could not possibly practice given their separation from their families and the exploitative conditions offered.⁷²

The other side of the coin of this capitalist vision were the female-headed households left behind in Mexico (the program privileged married men, whose sacrifice would pay for the advance of their families).⁷³ For many families in Mexico, the promised remittances never came, and even when they did, they had to be complemented by the wages earned by the women, who were also single-parenting their children – who, in turn, often took up informal jobs – and taking up functions previously performed by their husbands.⁷⁴ When Braceros returned, with or without savings, it was often only for a few months before they renewed their contracts or decided to cross the border irregularly instead.⁷⁵ These processes relativized the meaning of “return” and “home” for workers who spent their lives migrating, as well as for the young who were socialized into a tradition of “norteros,” whose career path was to go north in search for work.⁷⁶ The needs of these families and the emotional and financial hardship the program often implied were signs that value was

⁷¹ Ana Elizabeth Rosas, “Breaking the Silence: Mexican Children and Women’s Confrontation of *Bracero* Family Separation, 1942–64,” *Gender & History* 23, no. 2 (2011): 385.

⁷² Loza, *Defiant Braceros: How Migrant Workers Fought for Racial, Sexual, and Political Freedom*, 66–67.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 7–8.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 65, Rosas, “Breaking the Silence: Mexican Children and Women’s Confrontation of *Bracero* Family Separation, 1942–64,” 385–87.

⁷⁵ Rosas, “Breaking the Silence: Mexican Children and Women’s Confrontation of *Bracero* Family Separation, 1942–64,” 390.

⁷⁶ Víctor M. Espinosa, *El dilema del retorno. Migración, género y pertenencia en un contexto transnacional* (Zamora: El Colegio de Michoacán, 1998).

being produced and appropriated by employers north of the border and Mexico's project of modernization. Vocal complaints, however, were rare because they could have been seen as backward and selfish attempts to derail the government's project.⁷⁷ This meant that reproductive and care labor performed by women left behind by Braceros was made invisible and denied recognition, the optimal form that this work takes in capitalist economies.⁷⁸ The male labor that this reproductive work made possible in the United States, moreover, was also kept out of sight of privileged US citizens by housing workers in barracks near their place of work and significantly restricting their mobility. This hidden labor, supported by the unpaid care networks left behind, ensured war and postwar social reproduction, and guaranteed the continuity of food provision, which had been threatened by the war effort. Later, with the reduced negotiating clout and protections of the postwar period, the costs of feeding, sheltering, and transporting laborers were kept to a minimum and even more labor was extracted from the Braceros.

The Bracero program thus remained a political project to produce vulnerable labor at the intersection of US and Mexican capitalist regimes entangled with their respective racial systems, which were both in need of social reproduction facilitated through uncompensated care work and barely compensated work in commercial agriculture, roadwork, and railway maintenance.⁷⁹ Mexican and US landed interests fought to control the flows of migrants, the former to prevent the outflow from pushing farmworkers' wages upward and the latter to prevent limitations on inflows and state protections on incoming migrants to keep wages low and conditions

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 390. While the scholarship on transnational families during the Bracero program is relatively scarce, Rosas' account is largely consistent with the extensive literature that explores the emotional and familial hardships experienced by left-behind families as a consequence of more recent migration waves. Karlijn Haagsman and Valentina Mazucato, "The Well-Being of Stay Behind Family Members in Migrant Households," in *Routledge Handbook of Migration and Development*, ed. Tanja Bastia and Ronald Skeldon (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

⁷⁸ Maria Mies, "Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale Revisited (Keynote Lecture at the Green Economics Institute, October 2005)," *International Journal of Green Economics* 1, no. 3-4 (2007): 269; Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*.

⁷⁹ Railroad jobs, however, were available to Mexican Braceros only during the war, because of the better conditions and wages attached to them. In fact, the fear of Mexican agricultural workers "deserting" and going "through the country to work on the railroads" was considered a problem in earlier debates about Mexican labor. US Congress, *Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization on H. J. Res. 271 Relating to the Temporary Admission of Illiterate Mexican Laborers*, 16.

exploitative.⁸⁰ Both Mexican and US growers pressured their states to regulate these flows in their favor, at first with US growers coordinating laxer border control with local Border Patrol units. Later, they pressured the Departments of Labor, State, and Justice in 1954 to force Mexico to accept scaled-down protections for Braceros in the renegotiation of the program.⁸¹ The higher relative wages in the United States was a boon for US growers, who could count on an unlimited supply of fresh labor arriving from south of the border. Despite the heavy-handed negotiation tactics and the exploitative conditions that the lack of negotiating clout facilitated, US commercial farmers saw their use of Braceros as “a contribution to Mexican economic uplift,” emphasizing that Bracero wages were higher than the wages paid to native US workers (an accounting trick that calculated the prevailing wage before deductions for “food, transportation, insurance, etc.,” some of which went back to the farmers).⁸² As Texas Representative Ted Regan concluded: “Mexicans ... need North American dollars and we need their labor. [Migration] is an aid to the Mexican economy and to ours.”⁸³ Yet the labor needed had to be actively made vulnerable against the demands of the Mexican government, as is evident in the tone of 1953 Senate hearings regarding the renegotiation of the program. At the time, the majority of the chamber demanded the abandonment of the program altogether, as eloquently put by Iowa Senator Bomke Hickelopper: “Come on, boys, there is work here, come in under your own power and go back under your own power.”⁸⁴

This account shows that social reproduction is a transnational endeavor facilitated by various racialized hierarchies operating at the level of family, country, and the differential status of sending and receiving states. This account corrects the dominant approach in immigration scholarship, whose focus is exclusively on the conditions of migrants in the receiving territory. In contrast, I show that the hierarchical relation

⁸⁰ Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story*, 77, Cohen, “Caught in the Middle: The Mexican State’s Relationship with the United States and Its Own Citizen-Workers, 1942–1954,” 119.

⁸¹ Cohen, “Caught in the Middle: The Mexican State’s Relationship with the United States and Its Own Citizen-Workers, 1942–1954,” 119, Hernández, *Migra! A History of the Border Patrol*.

⁸² Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story*, 103.

⁸³ Excelsior, “Editorial,” January 17, 1954. Cited in Cohen, “Caught in the Middle: The Mexican State’s Relationship with the United States and Its Own Citizen-Workers, 1942–1954,” 119.

⁸⁴ Cohen, “Caught in the Middle: The Mexican State’s Relationship with the United States and Its Own Citizen-Workers, 1942–1954,” 122–23.

between the United States and Mexico, and the victimization of Mexican workers in the United States, requires an examination of the place that Mexican capitalism grants to racialized workers/emigrants-to-be. In fact, US exploitation of migrant labor depended and depends on hierarchies operating both between the United States and Mexico (and, increasingly, the Northern Triangle) *and* within sending countries, which makes the exploitative conditions relatively attractive to would-be migrants. Finally, the claim by US businessmen that they “contribute to Mexican development” by exploiting its citizens is continuous with other aid discourses proper to an unequal world, such as corporations bragging that export-oriented assembly plants offer higher wages than would otherwise be available to the natives of the receiving countries. There is a baseline problem here: The hierarchical world system determines that certain countries can only aim to employ their citizens at home or abroad under expropriative labor conditions attached, which may ease the capital accounts of the country in question but provides only temporary jobs with grueling labor conditions to subjects expelled from their land or subsistence communities by commercial agriculture, infrastructural projects, or war.⁸⁵ Rather than contributing to development, these projects show how racialized hierarchy domestically and international are themselves sources of accumulation when joined with the skewed structure of value that organizes an imperial world (see Chapter 4).

This complex picture of overlapping hierarchies and transnationally enabled vulnerability is the proper background against which to assess the role that brown families are called to occupy in the contemporary US regime of social reproduction.

3.3 THE BROWN FAMILY, SOCIAL REPRODUCTION, AND IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT

The end of the Bracero Program in 1965 generalized undocumented work as the predominant status for the workforce in low-skilled and physically strenuous jobs in the United States. The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act unified quotas for all countries and ended immigration bans for Asian countries whose entry requirements had not already been relaxed. This meant the imposition of the first-ever immigration quota for the western hemisphere, which was not proportionate to the

⁸⁵ Silvia Federici, “War, Globalization, and Reproduction,” in *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2012).

heavy reliance of the US political economy and its social reproduction on migrant labor from this area. Therefore, by putting a ceiling on legal entry, the measure produced *illegality*, a vulnerable status for workers preferred by employers interested in exploitable labor.⁸⁶

The vulnerability of this status would only worsen as border fortification increased in the 1980s, initially in association with the war on drugs. The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act allowance for the regularization of undocumented status provided some respite, but ultimately just shifted the demand for exploitable workers to new arrivals, as had been the practice historically. In the decades since the Immigration Reform and Control Act, and up to the time of writing, there has been no bipartisan consensus for new regularizations. The period leading up to and following these reforms also coincides with transformations on both sides of the border, including the increase in foreign direct investment in developing countries – associated with disrupted labor markets and the familiarization of workers with Western products in export-oriented industries with high turnover – creating a pool of emigrants.⁸⁷ Other trends include weakening union power in several sectors in the United States – notably meatpacking – which led to the replacement of unionized workers with migrant labor. The destabilization of Mexico’s agriculture due to the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement further displaced workers and filled the ranks of would-be emigrants.⁸⁸ The state apparatus that these migrants encountered deepened the level of vulnerability for undocumented workers systematically through border fortification and the expansion of internal immigration policing. Border fortification made immigrants reluctant to risk returning and attempting new crossings, thus encouraging a settled immigrant population and, eventually, the desire to reunite with their families on US territory.⁸⁹ These families – unable

⁸⁶ Nicholas De Genova, “The Legal Production of Mexican/Migrant ‘Illegality,’” *Latino Studies* 2, no. 2 (2004), Lee, “The Case for Open Borders.”

⁸⁷ Saskia Sassen, *The Mobility of Labor and Capital: A Study in International Investment and Labor Flow* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

⁸⁸ Peter J. Rachleff, *Hard-Pressed in the Heartland: The Hormel Strike and the Future of the Labor Movement* (Boston: South End Press, 1993), Walden F. Bello, *The Food Wars* (London: Verso, 2009), Roger Burbach and Patricia Flynn, *Agribusiness in the Americas* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1980), Kim Moody, *An Injury to All: The Decline of American Unionism* (London: Verso, 1988), cited in Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of the Planet* (London: Verso, 2018), 156–57.

⁸⁹ Douglas S. Massey, “The Wall That Keeps Illegal Workers In,” *The New York Times*, April 4, 2006.

to rely on the benefits for unification of immediate family members of legal residents or citizens included in the 1965 law – would be targeted and further degraded through tough crime, welfare, and immigration legislation in the 1990s, which restricted access to welfare for regular and undocumented migrants and increased both the criminalization of brown and Black populations and, symbiotically, the range of legal offenses that triggered deportation, even for permanent residents.⁹⁰ At once, these laws restricted judicial discretion to consider staying orders of deportations based on the existence of strong community and family ties.⁹¹ This regime systematically forced separations through lone migration, long working hours of draining work, detention, and deportation. The families targeted by these regimes are the same that would – through their work – make possible the aspirational features of the white family, now increasingly featuring highly educated women working outside the home. This arrangement exceeded the reliance of professional couples on badly paid work by brown women (and the displacement of the contestation of the division of labor within white families) and came to include more broadly the dependence of these families on brown labor for accessing affordable fresh produce, packed meat, and prepared food;⁹² for construction, renovation, and landscaping work to shelter families and beautify their environment; and for filling the lower rungs of the food service and hospitality industry.

Constructing and Reproducing the White Family

The historical trajectory outlined earlier, complete with the coercive structures that mobilized brown labor, had the outcome of valorizing white families and their well-being while degrading nonwhite families.

⁹⁰ Susanne Jonas and Catherine Tactaquin, “Latino Immigrant Rights in the Shadow of the National Security State,” *Social Justice* 31, no. 1–2 (2004), Desmond King and Inés Valdez, “From Workers to Enemies: National Security, State Building and America’s War on *Illegal* Immigrants,” in *Narrating Peoplehood Amidst Diversity: Historical and Theoretical Perspectives*, ed. Michael Böss (Aarhus: Aarhus Academic Press, 2011), Inés Valdez, “Punishment, Race, and the Organization of U.S. Immigration Exclusion,” *Political Research Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (2016).

⁹¹ Amalia Pallares, *Family Activism: Immigrant Struggles and the Politics of Noncitizenship* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 33, Shoba Sivaprasad Wadhia, *Beyond Deportation: The Role of Prosecutorial Discretion in Immigration Cases* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

⁹² Federici, “Reproduction and Feminist Struggle in the New International Division of Labor,” 71, 73.

The normative white family enabled by undocumented work entailed and entails participation in a “collection of isolated family units,” rather than a real community.⁹³ Brown migrant subjects are conscripted to sustain this white, patriarchal, and atomized family life, through the cheap contracting-out of social reproduction services and the elimination of community exchanges and mutual aid, a structure intensified by white women’s entry into the labor force. This was the product of a branch of the feminist movement that questioned the isolation of women in the private sphere and their lack of access to the labor market, but not the primacy of capitalism over communal forms of organization that could reduce dependence on wage labor and the cash economy.

The vulnerability to surveillance and policing brown migrants face, the exploitative labor conditions this regime enables, and their exclusion from social services makes them ineligible for the society of privatized citizenship, that is, social membership re-defined as acts and values directed toward the privatized family sphere.⁹⁴ Going full circle, this family is what the moralizing discourse and tough policies of welfare and national security protect. In other words, just as the state apparatus separates brown families and pushes them into impossible choices, the resulting “disordered” families are judged abject through discourses of political membership that find them wanting vis-à-vis properly lived private worlds.⁹⁵ These disordered families emerge from the negation of self-care and a nurturing space for social reproduction for brown families whose members perform the essential work of social reproduction for well-ordered families. Several aspects of the contemporary legal and material configuration of immigration enforcement contribute to this degradation, as I now explain.

Disordering the Brown Family

Families shape subjects’ orientation toward the world: it is where their self-identity is cultivated, their children are socialized, strong social ties develop, and culture is transmitted. Family spaces are thus central

⁹³ Valerie Solanas, *The Scum Manifesto* (London: Verso, 2016 [1968]), 49. This is what Lauren Berlant, decades later, would call a “constricted nation of simultaneously lived private worlds,” Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 5.

⁹⁴ Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*, 5.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

sites where workers can access a value system that is an alternative to the racist and capitalist ideologies used to justify their subordination.⁹⁶ In other words, by grounding individuals in place and providing emotional and material resources that nurture them and allow them to thrive, families and social networks strengthen the symbolic and material resources available for political action and resistance.⁹⁷ For undocumented workers, domestic spaces also provide respite from the stress and fear associated with public spaces and the possibility of an encounter with law enforcement. These virtuous connections are destroyed by assaults on brown families, which destabilize them and deprive racialized workers of spaces of refuge from the competitive logic of the market and the exploitation and dehumanization faced in their everyday public lives, furthering their vulnerability to exploitation. Yet the degradation of brown families does not affect all of its members homogeneously. The historical denial of a family wage to workers of color, for instance, “intensifie[s] and extend[s] women’s reproductive labor” by creating tensions and strains in family relationships and requiring women to compensate for poor and unsanitary housing conditions, labor that they perform in addition to subsistence labor outside the family.⁹⁸

These strains have been widely documented in the case of migrants leaving families behind, including the phenomenon of transnational motherhood,⁹⁹ but the legal and material reach of immigration enforcement also creates vulnerabilities among families who are formally together. Their togetherness is relativized by the continuous anxiety created by the threat of involuntary and forceful parting following the detention and/or deportation of family members who are undocumented. Moreover, the constructed vulnerability and uncertainty for undocumented or mixed-status families that live together in the United States produce emotional burdens that are worth examining. The children of undocumented parents, in particular, carry the emotional weight of knowing that their parents may at any time be picked up by law enforcement or federal immigration enforcement and separated from them, first within

⁹⁶ Glenn, *Issei, Nisei, War Bride: Three Generations of Japanese American Women in Domestic Service*, 195–96.

⁹⁷ Federici, “War, Globalization, and Reproduction,” 79.

⁹⁸ Bonnie Thornton Dill, “Our Mothers’ Grief: Racial Ethnic Women and the Maintenance of Families,” *Journal of Family History* 13, no. 4 (1988): 218, 428–29.

⁹⁹ Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ernestine Avila, “‘I’m Here, but I’m There’: The Meanings of Latina Transnational Motherhood,” *Gender & Society* 11, no. 5 (1997): 568.

the country and potentially across the southern border.¹⁰⁰ Parents, in turn, face the reality of parenting children from whom they might be separated.¹⁰¹ Given the growing reach of enforcement, separation is not an extreme, hypothetical situation for Latinx communities. A recent survey found that 66 percent of Latina/os “worry [some or a lot] that they, a family friend, or a close friend could be deported,” a figure that decreases to a still high 43 percent for United States-born Latina/os.¹⁰² Moreover, According to Department of Homeland Security (DHS) data, in the six months between January and June of 2011, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) removed 46,846 parents of US citizens, compared to 180,000 removals of parents of US citizens in the nine years spanning 1998 and 2007. Many of the children left behind were sent by ICE to Child Protective Services (CPS), and some were subsequently put in foster care.¹⁰³ These children face higher barriers to reuniting with their parents because no mechanism exists to connect parents in immigration detention to children in CPS custody and because CPS is unlikely to allow undocumented family members to take the children. Moreover, CPS is biased against children rejoining parents abroad and seldom coordinates with foreign consulates about family reunification, despite this being the single most effective means of reunification.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Ana Elizabeth Rosas, “Some Children Left Behind: Families in the Age of Deportation,” *Boom: A Journal of California* 2, no. 3 (2012): 79.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁰² Mark Hugo Lopez, Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, and Jens M. Korgstad, “More Latinos Have Serious Concerns About Their Place in America under Trump,” in *Hispanic Trends* (Pew Research Center, 2018).

¹⁰³ Seth Freed Wessler, “Shattered Families,” (New York: Applied Research Center, 2011), 6, 11. The 2011 data is the result of a Freedom of Information Act request from the Applied Research Center, and statistics are not regularly released by DHS or ICE. However, to the extent that the growth in deportations of parents is a function of the growth in deportations from the interior, these numbers are likely to have kept pace with deportation numbers, which decreased with the issuing of enforcement priorities that de-prioritized parents in 2014 but likely grew again with the discontinuation of those priorities by the current administration at the time of writing. Inés Valdez, “DACA, DAPA and U.S. Immigration Politics: Plus Ça Change?,” *Newsletter of the APSA Section on Migration and Citizenship* 3, no. 2 (2015).

¹⁰⁴ Wessler, “Shattered Families,” 8. The growth in family separations followed from the reduced space for judicial consideration of ties to the community, including family ties, in adjudicating deportation cases after the 1990s immigration reforms. While this discretion can still be exercised by ICE officers, the agency sees these considerations as detracting from its mission. As a consequence, it was only between 2014 and 2017 that this agency softened its position in response to executive actions that explicitly mandated criteria to deprioritize the deportations of those with strong family ties. Valdez, “DACA, DAPA and U.S. Immigration Politics: Plus Ça Change?”

The separations may be unexpected and follow from chance encounters with law enforcement or they might be the result of equally unexpected but spectacular and orchestrated mass raids conducted by hundreds of immigration officers targeting hundreds of undocumented workers at their place of work. These operations were legally enabled by the turn to employer-focused enforcement instituted in 1986, which, in combination with the 1998 identity theft law, other criminalized immigration violations (such as “illegal re-entry”), and high bonds, are used to pressure migrants into plea deals, quick deportation, and thus family separation.¹⁰⁵ Raids operate in the tradition of the mass roundups and deportations of the 1930s and mid-1950s, but they also have affinities with counter-insurgency operations, at play in the secrecy that surrounds the operations until their implementation, their militarized character, the targeting of hundreds of individuals at a time, the collective court appearances of shackled detainees (in the Postville case), and the deeply traumatic effects on the small rural communities where they take place.¹⁰⁶ In these raids, schools and other social services organizations are not always contacted ahead of time, and the former, alongside faith leaders, have to scramble to ensure the safety of children and their placement with family; this was particularly the case in the pre-2007 and 2019 raids which did not release primary caregivers, departing from ICE 2007 guidance requiring them to do so.¹⁰⁷ Communities also had to deal with the aftermath of the raids, the depressed economic activity for community businesses, the need to organize politically to press for releases, and the trauma for children and partners left behind, which requires the mobilization of therapeutic services to help children and adults process the loss.¹⁰⁸ Increased enforcement, detention, and deportation means that these same outcomes apply in Latina/o communities around the country in less spectacular form. It

¹⁰⁵ Erik Camayd-Freixas, “Interpreting after the Largest ICE Raid in US History: A Personal Account,” *Latino Studies* 7, no. 1 (2009): 132–33, Wendy Cervantes, Rebecca Ullrich, and Vanessa Meraz, “The Day That ICE Came: How Worksite Raids Are Once Again Harming Children and Families” (Washington, DC: The Center for Law and Social Policy, 2020), 6.

¹⁰⁶ In the recent past, these have included simultaneous raids in Colorado, Iowa, Minnesota, and Texas (2006), New Bedford, Massachusetts (2007), Postville, Iowa (2008), Sandusky and Salem, Ohio (2019), and Canton, Carthage, Forest, and Morton, Mississippi (2019).

¹⁰⁷ Ajay Chaudry et al., “Facing Our Future: Children in the Aftermath of Immigration Enforcement,” (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2010), 15, Cervantes, Ullrich, and Meraz, “The Day That ICE Came: How Worksite Raids Are Once Again Harming Children and Families,” 5.

¹⁰⁸ Cervantes, Ullrich, and Meraz, “The Day That ICE Came: How Worksite Raids Are Once Again Harming Children and Families,” 10, 17.

is these detentions that initiate the majority of the 3.1 million migrant deportations from the US interior since 9/11. These have slowly but surely decimated families and communities, and led to the loss of loved ones for an estimated 1.6 million people.¹⁰⁹

Today, just as during the Bracero program, the loss of the primary breadwinner heavily disrupts family dynamics, leading older youth to take one or two jobs, in addition to shouldering the caregiving of younger siblings.¹¹⁰ This disruption, moreover, can follow from enforcement that does not separate families. For example, the Obama administration conducted thousands of “silent raids,” which audited companies’ employment records and mandated mass firings of undocumented workers. Measures such as this contribute to the systematic instability of employment for undocumented workers, which not only confirms their disposability as individuals, as Raymond Rocco notes,¹¹¹ but also cements their vulnerability as families. Even in the absence of raids or unemployment, migrant families’ internal dynamics are heavily shaped by the legal and material environment that they face. Notably, children of undocumented parents who are fluent in English, have access to citizenship, or have status through Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) take on roles as language and culture brokers, tutors, and advocates in the interactions between their parents and a variety of institutions.¹¹² Older children of undocumented parents who are US citizens, in particular, step in to mitigate the legal vulnerability of their parents through access to financial services and by assuming legal guardianship of their minor siblings.¹¹³ The same is true, though to a lesser

¹⁰⁹ The number of deportations is based on the author’s calculations based on DHS yearly releases of removal statistics. The second figure is from Human Rights Watch, *Forced Apart: Families Separated and Immigrants Harmed by United States Deportation Policy*, July, vol. 19 (2007), 6.

¹¹⁰ Cervantes, Ullrich, and Meraz, “The Day That ICE Came: How Worksite Raids Are Once Again Harming Children and Families,” 10.

¹¹¹ Raymond A. Rocco, “Disposable Subjects: The Racial Normativity of Neoliberalism and Latino Immigrants,” *Latino Studies* 14, no. 1 (2016).

¹¹² Laura E. Enriquez, “Gendering Illegality: Undocumented Young Adults’ Negotiation of the Family Formation Process,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 61, no. 10 (2017), Abel Valenzuela, “Gender Roles and Settlement Activities among Children and Their Immigrant Families,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 42, no. 4 (1999).

¹¹³ Isabel García-Valdivia, “Legal Power in Action: How Latinx Adult Children Mitigate the Effects of Parents’ Legal Status through Brokering,” *Social Problems* (forthcoming): 2, Leisy J. Abrego, “Relational Legal Consciousness of US Citizenship: Privilege, Responsibility, Guilt, and Love in Latino Mixed-Status Families,” *Law & Society Review* 53, no. 3 (2019): 664.

extent in accordance with their lesser legal privileges, of youth who are DACAmented.¹¹⁴ Even during childhood, children with access to citizenship are often overwhelmed by guilt and high expectations, which may lead them either to resist their legal privileges or to self-imposed efforts to defy the odds, despite the many obstacles to the progress of Latinx children in US society.¹¹⁵

Thus, in parallel to the production of illegality, there is a production of disordered families through a racializing process that extricates labor from noncapitalist social relations for the purpose of accumulation.¹¹⁶ A key tool in this double production is the regime of immigration enforcement and the attendant anxiety, vulnerability, and uncertainty created among immigrant families, requiring its members to take up more reproductive work and forcing children to assume formal and informal roles to mitigate the vulnerability of their parents and families. The regime positions brown families in impossible situations, such as deciding whether to leave their children behind in the event of a deportation or to uproot them, or deciding whether to stay apart or entrust their unaccompanied children to strangers who will get them across the border. These families are deemed abject vis-à-vis the white, heterosexual, commodified model of family, even if they are produced by a regime of immigration enforcement that places families in these tragic situations, only to deem these behaviors deviant and in need of deterrence.¹¹⁷ The variety of discourses of the supposedly irresponsible mores of migrant families is extensive and targets reproductive practices that are supposedly excessive,

¹¹⁴ Leisy J. Abrego, "Renewed Optimism and Spatial Mobility: Legal Consciousness of Latino Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Recipients and Their Families in Los Angeles," *Ethnicities* 18, no. 2 (2018).

¹¹⁵ Abrego, "Relational Legal Consciousness of US Citizenship: Privilege, Responsibility, Guilt, and Love in Latino Mixed-Status Families," 660.

¹¹⁶ Luxemburg, "The Accumulation of Capital: A Contribution to the Economic Theory of Imperialism," 261.

¹¹⁷ This is the stance of immigration enforcement authorities, who castigate parents for sending their children on a "perilous journey ... with no legitimate claim to enter or remain" in the United States. Chad Wolf, "Memorandum: Reconsideration of the June 15, 2012 Memorandum Entitled 'Exercising Prosecutorial Discretion Withrespect to Individuals Who Came to the United States as Children'," ed. Department of Homeland Security (Washington, DC, 2020), 5. See also ICE, "Unaccompanied Alien Children Human Smuggling Disruption Initiative" (Washington, DC: Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2017), John Burnett, "Transcript: White House Chief of Staff John Kelly's Interview with NPR," *National Public Radio*, May 11, 2018, John Washington, "The Government Has Taken at Least 1,100 Children from Their Parents since Family Separations Officially Ended," *The Intercept*, December 9, 2019.

welfare-seeking, or strategic and devoted to obtaining residency through “anchor babies.”¹¹⁸ The same narrative of shame and bad parenting operates vis-à-vis Dreamers, whose innocence is compared with the reckless law-breaking behavior of their parents, who imposed the condition of illegality on their own children.

In other words, the historical and contemporary process of racialization and degradation I describe produces the social condition of brown families, whose degraded state is cited as an argument against their inclusion. Moreover, the denial of family stability through separation, unsteady, and informal work, and the threat of detection when appearing in public depletes spaces of social reproduction where emotional lives and physical bodies can be nurtured. Mass deportation, moreover, decimates communities and weakens ties that are central to a collective understanding of the conditions of oppression and resistance against these structures. In sum, immigration enforcement should be understood as a regime that coercively creates and racializes vulnerable labor to allow for capitalist accumulation, a process that entails systematic attacks on families, their stability and ability to reproduce physically and emotionally, their integrity, and the integrity of their communities of belonging and ability to engage in resistance struggle.

Family Activism

The dramatic decisions that migrant families face because of their lack of regular status and the attacks on families by today’s regime of immigration enforcement has shaped contemporary activism. The family has become salient in migrant-organizing discourse through the strategic use of family ties by pro-immigration activists in anti-deportation campaigns and through the emergence of the family as a key collective source of identification in debates between immigrant rights and their opponents.¹¹⁹

However, the invocation of families, in general, and family separation, in particular, can be fraught when considered *in isolation* from the

¹¹⁸ Leo R. Chavez, *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), Natalie Cisneros, “‘Alien’ Sexuality: Race, Maternity, and Citizenship,” *Hypatia* 28, no. 2 (2013). Ana Puga and Victor Espinosa focus on the strategic use of melodrama, but see pro-migrant melodramas as different from restrictionist melodramas that cast migrants as criminals and citizens as the suffering victims. My point here instead notes that the handicapped image of brown families is convergent in pro- and anti-immigrant discourse. Ana Elena Puga and Víctor M Espinosa, *Performances of Suffering in Latin American Migration* (London: Palgrave Macmillan), 17–18.

¹¹⁹ Pallares, *Family Activism: Immigrant Struggles and the Politics of Noncitizenship*, 2, 12.

capitalist priorities and coercive racialization that disorder and separate families. This is not to deny that some family-centered activism disrupts strict separations between citizens and migrants and between migrants with and without documents, makes visible alternative family formations, and is led by subjects who take up spaces not given to them.¹²⁰ Yet, as long as they employ genres of melodrama and humanitarianism detached from the political economy conditions that motivate subjection, there are two risks. First, narratives based on the tragic and – for most white audiences – extreme character of the forceful separation of families and detention of children both highlights the spectacular nature of their suffering and dissimulates it by portraying state crimes as melodrama, transforming extreme instances of state coercion into a vehicle for white enjoyment.¹²¹ This activism exploits the spectacle of migrant suffering, which confirms the abject character of the brown family and converges with anti-immigrant accounts that derive enjoyment from immigrants’ suffering, which they attribute to their unruly behavior and irresponsible parenting.

The second risk of making the domestic realm of the family the central axis of activism without scrutinizing the structural conditions of its fashioning is that it misrepresents and thus narrows the character of politics in two ways. First, by positing the harmed brown family as an outrageous overreach of state action, activists both reproduce an illusory strict separation between private life and collective life, and also mark nonfamilial forms of political identification as dangerous.¹²² In an example of the imaginary strict separation between private and collective life, US Congresswoman from Washington State Pramila Jayapal identified “kids in cages ... and moms being separated from breastfeeding children” as “beyond politics ... really ... just about right and wrong.”¹²³ Yet racialized families have consistently been the terrain of politics and state intervention. From sanctioning the heterosexual family and the attendant unpaid women’s labor of social reproduction to sacrificing enslaved women’s maternal kinship for the sake of the slave owner’s property, the state has shaped the family, elevated some families over others, sanctioned an internal pecking order, and relied on these divisions to fulfill different roles within capitalism.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 17–18.

¹²¹ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, 22–23.

¹²² Berlant, “Intimacy: A Special Issue,” 282–83, 88, Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*, 5.

¹²³ Alexandra Yoon-Hendricks and Zoe Greenberg, “Protests across U.S. Call for End to Migrant Family Separations,” *The New York Times*, June 30, 2018.

Second, family-centered activism sanitizes political engagement and contributes to marking nonfamilial forms of political association as dangerous by privileging political action that can be safely grounded in empathy and the defense of the family. During the family separation crisis, white women, in particular, claimed to relate to the suffering of migrants through their experience as mothers (“if it was my child, I would want someone to do something”).¹²⁴ Activist Jess Morales Rocketto from the National Domestic Worker’s Alliance noted that she was “blown away” by the unusually high turnout for the marches against family separations compared to other instances of immigrant activism. A white woman and new mother at the Washington march further illustrates this empathic mindset, saying that she had stayed away from the news because she could not bear the stories of family separation but she realized it was time to “come out.”¹²⁵ Yet the mobilization of white women through the scenario of “shared feeling” only confirms the fungibility of the bodies toward which empathy is being extended, whose sentience is confirmed once the pain is felt – through identification – by the white witness.¹²⁶ Such an identification, moreover, mischaracterizes the structure of injustice because white families are in fact protected, in part by the exploitation of the very same families targeted for separation with whom the claim to empathize. This approach to activism also means that alternative forms of organizing, including those that center the dependence of white families on exploited racialized workers and the functionality of this regime for the minimization of the social reproduction costs of capitalism, are rendered unsafe because they may alienate the wide support that familial scripts can garner.

In other words, truly emancipatory activism needs to highlight *how* families are conscripted to provide social reproduction for white groups and capitalist accumulation and are thus *public* spaces of intervention. This is the reason for the sacrifice of their intimate spaces through the uprooting of members of the family suddenly and with little recourse, through the migration of one or two parents, detention, deportation, or separation at the border. Immigrant families living together, moreover, remain subjected to backbreaking work, economic precarity, and emotional vulnerability due to fears of separation, extensive surveillance, and the multiple statuses of family members (undocumented, DACAmented,

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, 19–20.

with Temporary Protected Status, parolee, resident, or citizen). Activism focused on migrant families that fails to engage with these features misdirects energies toward a supposedly outrageous instance of family separation rather than the systematic and routine production of abject brown families by the coercive regime of mass policing at the border and in the interior, which works alongside US racial capitalism.

In a regime of racial capitalism, what is outrageous – in the sense of disruptive or nonnormative – is the attempt by brown families to privilege their integrity and pursue joint settlement in a polity that aims to extract their labor while blocking their own social reproduction. In this context, the reclaiming of a space where bodies used for disciplined labor production and the care of others could rest and replenish physically and emotionally is nothing short of revolutionary.¹²⁷

3.4 RACIAL CAPITALISM AND THE 2018 CRISIS OF FAMILY SEPARATIONS

The racial capitalist regime of social reproduction theorized in this chapter is the proper context in which to assess the 2018 crisis of family separation affecting migrants and asylum seekers from the Northern Triangle. The arrival of families had already been met with state coercion in the form of family detention during the Obama administration and evolved into the policy of family separations in the subsequent administration. Their arrival as family units conveyed a will to maintain family integrity despite migration, which represents a departure from the historical mode of lone and uprooted labor migration to the United States and explains the violent state response that met them at the border. This is because they counter the logic of social extrication and anti-relationality that relegates these groups to realms of vulnerable labor and propels capitalist accumulation forward. The violent response of the US state is in keeping with its historical record of coercive intervention in intimate family realms and its destruction of kinship among brown, Black, and Indigenous groups.

The search for asylum by Central American migrants fleeing US-supported post- or currently authoritarian regimes at home is reminiscent of the location of Mexican migrants at the intersection of programs

¹²⁷ The disruptive and emancipatory move of reclaiming bodies for activities other than work is highlighted in Mireya Loza's study of Braceros' expressions of "sexual desire, physical violence, and bravado," which contest normative forms of masculinity and redirect their disciplined, laboring bodies for pleasure and recreation. *Defiant Braceros: How Migrant Workers Fought for Racial, Sexual, and Political Freedom*, 65.

of modernization in Mexico and the United States. The structures of subjection causing asylum seekers' exile and those expecting them in the United States are entwined, this time by neoliberal reforms in Central America and the transformation of civil conflict through the economy of drug trafficking and US-led, anti-drug, military doctrine. This updated transnational nexus behind contemporary migrant and refugee flows from the region remains to be theorized.¹²⁸

The genealogy offered earlier posits migration regulation as a structure of racial capitalism that is entangled with racialized labor control resulting from conquest and continuous with the subjection of other racial groups in its effects over kinship. Scholars have noted the connection of the last wave of migration to the contemporary crisis of care and social reproduction, whereas women of color increasingly meet the urgent demand for externalized care following from the increased hours of paid work required to support a family, which sent women into waged work just as the public provision of care diminished.¹²⁹ The racialized migrant women who took up these responsibilities had to transfer their own care duties to their families and communities to other, poorer caregivers, further squeezing social reproductive capacities.¹³⁰

This chapter shows, however, that a pre-existing regime of racialized labor mobility, one already materially supporting the US polity, provided the background for these new and feminized migratory flows. Moreover, by analyzing social reproduction alongside the regime of migration control, the proposed account illuminates the role of state coercion over the brown family as a key mediating factor in delaying the breaking point of social reproduction. In so doing, this analysis specifies, redirects attention, and recategorizes migration regulation as operating at the intersection of systems of racialization and capitalism. This extends Raymond Rocco's work on disposability as a form of political containment by nesting it in a longer historical genealogy that centers the family and locates

¹²⁸ Teo Ballvé and Kendra McSweeney's account of the convergence of geopolitical and capitalist interests in Central America is an excellent step in this direction. The authors show how state actors have "seized upon the geographical realignments of the drug trade to expand the ... military-agroindustrial nexus," suggesting a form of primitive accumulation and labor expulsion that surely remains an important component of the viability of the US regime of social reproduction described in this chapter. "The 'Colombianisation' of Central America: Misconceptions, Mischaracterisations and the Military-Agroindustrial Complex," *Journal of Latin American Studies* (forthcoming).

¹²⁹ Nancy Fraser, "Contradictions of Capital and Care," *New Left Review* 100, no. July/August (2016): 114.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

it at the intersection of the racialized labor regimes of the United States and Mexico.¹³¹

The transnational focus in this chapter illuminates the background location of these peoples as subaltern subjects within the settler Mexican state, expelled by modernizing projects and delivered into exploitative work in the United States, work performed on the lands stolen from Indigenous peoples by the Spanish before they were annexed by the United States.¹³² Like Chapter 2, this chapter makes clear that racial capitalist regimes of forced labor and migration abide by the settler logic. This is because they welcome into settler societies white foreigners, who make their way into “the people” and jointly enjoy access to the land and sanction the carving out of spaces of expropriative labor for nonwhite arrivals, including Indigenous peoples from Meso and North America. In so doing, this project contributes to outlining a colonialism that has settled on Indigenous land but is never static. Instead, this colonialism is a site of the “simultaneous dispossession of Indigenous peoples and racialized, gendered, and caste labour formations,” which relies on “conscriptio, constraint, forced diasporas, and slavery.”¹³³ This vulnerable labor in turn cuts the costs of the white privatized family described in this chapter, whose wages become the means through which the value of the products of forced labor is realized.¹³⁴

Chapter 4 complements this picture by focusing on another case of simultaneous oppression that characterizes the extraction of nature and racialized labor in the colonies. Returning to Du Bois, this chapter reveals how race and technology facilitate the alienation of wealthy peoples from the natural world and the racialized manual labor that sustains them. In addition to theorizing racialization and technology as mediating mechanisms in the devastation of nature, the chapter expands the theorization of the unacknowledged and expropriative material conditions that underpin popular sovereign demands for well-being among privileged groups.

¹³¹ Rocco, “Disposable Subjects: The Racial Normativity of Neoliberalism and Latino Immigrants,” 100.

¹³² David Lloyd and Laura Pulido, “In the Long Shadow of the Settler: On Israeli and US Colonialisms,” *American Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (2010): 797.

¹³³ Nishant Upadhyay, “‘We’ll Sail Like Columbus’: Race, Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, and the Making of South Asian Diasporas in Canada” (York University, 2016), ii, Byrd, “Weather with You: Settler Colonialism, Antiracism, and the Grounded Relationalities of Resistance,” 2019.

¹³⁴ Federici makes this point regarding the links between waged and slave labor, *Caliban and the Witch*, 104.