DEBATES

Immigration Matters

Don't Panic, We are Hispanic!
Migración y resistencia social

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Los desplazados de la tierra

Para mediados de este siglo, habrá más de cien millones de latinos y latinas en Estados Unidos, cifra similar a la actual población de México. Este escenario implica una acentuación de los procesos transnacionales y un importante fortalecimiento de las comunidades internacionales, además de significativas transformaciones en los ámbitos socioculturales latinoamericanos y estadunidenses. Los desplazamientos al norte junto con la ofensiva antimigratoria están definiendo inéditas expresiones protagonizadas por los migrantes, cuya manifestación más contundente la observamos durante la primera mitad del año pasado. Estos elementos requieren que ubiquemos de manera general los escenarios previsibles de estos movimientos en el contexto de las condiciones que definen las trayectorias de vida de los países pobres caracterizados por el incremento de la desigualdad social.

Los escenarios globales muestran de manera contundente las condiciones que conforman el soporte social del proceso migratorio y, en particular, de los desplazados por el miedo y la pobreza. Entre los pilares que definen estos soportes, tenemos que la mitad de la población mundial sobrevive con menos de dos dólares diarios, al mismo tiempo que una quinta parte lo hace con menos de un dólar al día. Este proceso ocurre al mismo tiempo que unos cuantos resultan favorecidos por un modelo económico que produce una inmoral concentración de la riqueza. Tan sólo en América Latina, cerca de la mitad de sus habitantes (226 millones) viven en condiciones de pobreza y hay 95 millones de indigentes, al mismo tiempo que en México, 25 personas concentran ingresos superiores a 25 millones de mexicanos. En la mayoría de los países latinoamericanos crecen los niveles de pobreza, así como los niveles de vulnerabilidad social, mientras que, en el año 2000, la malnutrición afectaba a 55 millones de latinoamericanos y caribeños, siendo los países más afectados Haití, Nicaragua, República Dominicana, Guatemala, Bolivia y Venezuela.

A la información proporcionada, podemos añadir la existencia de bajas tasas de crecimiento económico, que siete de cada nueve empleos se generan en la informalidad, o que nuestras economías no están generando los empleos que requiere la población que ingresa al mercado de trabajo. Sólo incorporando este escenario podemos entender el papel central del desplazamiento como opción disponible para millones de latinoamericanos que han sido expropiados de la posibilidad de conformar trayectoria de vida digna en sus propios países. Por si fuera poco, los bajos salarios y la precarización laboral se añaden como factores que inciden en los desplazamientos latinoamericanos.

Junto a la pobreza y precarización de la población latinoamericana, la violencia y los imaginarios de miedo participan de manera importante en la decisión de muchas personas que optan por dejar sus lugares de origen, así, los desplazados del miedo se suman a los desplazados de la pobreza, conformando los rasgos definitorios de la migración latinoamericana, africana y, en general, de las regiones pobres. En los escenarios latinoamericanos de las últimas cuatro décadas, la violencia ha tenido un papel importante en la decisión de dejar el sitio de origen, abandonar el terruño y los entornos entrañables. Desde hace más de tres décadas, los desplazamientos derivados de las violencias han sido conspicuos, especialmente durante los regímenes militares en Brasil, Chile, Uruguay y Argentina. De igual forma, durante los años setenta y ochenta, cientos de miles de centroamericanos se vieron obligadas a salir de sus países huyendo de la violencia y la muerte generada por los gobiernos dictatoriales de El Salvador, Guatemala y la Nicaragua Somosista.

En la actualidad, las formas de violencia política se combinan con otras expresiones de violencia social, como ocurre con el narcotráfico, propiciando el desplazamiento de cerca de 4 millones de colombianos, por señalar el caso más impactante, aunque en otras comunidades latinoamericanas también se generan múltiples migraciones vinculadas a la violencia del narcotráfico. Estos desplazamientos generan una de las formas extremas de vulnerabilidad social, donde la gente "se tiene que ir", muchas veces sin poder despedirse. En ocasiones, el desplazamiento forzado confronta peores escenarios como la desaparición o la muerte.

Los desplazados por motivos económicos constituyen una importante realidad de los escenarios latinoamericanos. Generalmente estos migrantes son sobre explotados en otros países latinoamericanos o en Estados Unidos y en Europa, pues se ven expuestos a mayores condiciones de vulnerabilidad, recibiendo pagos inferiores a los que perciben otros trabajadores y viviendo en condiciones de indefensión social y riesgo de deportación. Pagan impuestos sin recibir servicios sociales y están expuestos al racismo o la discriminación.

En muchos casos, el desplazamiento se interrumpe por la detención, lo cual acentúa las condiciones de vulnerabilidad de los migrantes frente a los organismos policíacos, la gendarmería o los agentes migratorios.

En otros, el viaje termina con la muerte, como ha ocurrido con cerca de 4,000 migrantes que han perdido la vida en la frontera México-Estados Unidos desde el inicio de la Operación Guardián en 1994 y el incremento del riesgo en el recorrido.

A pesar de las vicisitudes y avatares de la migración indocumentada, la población de origen latinoamericano crece en Estados Unidos, país que necesita de esta fuerza de trabajo pero mantiene un doble juego que incrementa las ganancias de los empleadores y participa como elemento de presión en el ajedrez político, (re)produciendo la vulnerabilidad social y la sobre explotación de los migrantes.

Según datos censales estadounidenses, la población latinoamericana en Estados Unidos representa 12.6 por ciento de la población total de 282.1 millones y, de acuerdo con estimaciones recientes de la Oficina del Censo, para mediados del presente siglo, cerca de la cuarta parte de la población total de Estados Unidos será de origen "hispano", lo cual significa más de cien millones de personas, cifra similar a la población actual de la República Mexicana (se estima que 420 millones de personas vivirán en Estados Unidos, de los cuales 102.6 millones serán de origen hispano).

La vulnerabilidad de los trabajadores migrantes incluye tres escenarios que se complementan. Inicia con condiciones de pobreza y carencias que influyen en la decisión de emigrar (en otros casos son las condiciones de inseguridad o de riesgo las que obligan a irse), posteriormente se encuentran los problemas y riesgos del camino, las agresiones, las incomodidades, y, en ocasiones los ataques físicos o la muerte. Finalmente se encuentra un escenario de vulnerabilidad social definido por la condición indocumentada, la cual implica aceptar los peores empleos, abusos laborales, pagos por debajo de lo establecido para trabajadores con documentos legales, invisibilización social, temor ante el riesgo de ser deportado, limitación o inexistencia de derechos ciudadanos, problemas para asegurar servicios educativos y de salud para los hijos. A todo esto, se añade la manipulación de la migración bajo el argumento de que ellos generan los problemas económicos, el desempleo, la inseguridad o, la división política y cultural de los Estados Unidos. Este es un viejo argumento conservador recuperado por Samuel Huntington, conocido profesor de Harvard. Desde una perspectiva asimilacionista decimonónica, Huntington ha vuelto a plantear la condición unívoca y monocultural que sentencia la desaparición de todas las culturas en una cultura dominante, destacando que sólo existe un sueño en la sociedad estadounidense, el "sueño americano", creado por la población angloprotestante y que los mexicoamericanos sólo compartirán ese sueño si sueñan en inglés.

De cara a los escenarios de pobreza latinoamericana, el incremento en la desigualdad en la distribución del ingreso, la no generación de los empleos que requiere la población que ingresa al mercado de trabajo, el fortalecimiento de los imaginarios de riesgo vinculados a la violencia, podemos considerar que la pobreza y vulnerabilidad latinoamericana seguirán presionando para que muchos latinoamericanos decidan dejar sus lugares de origen, fortaleciendo la condición de que los 3,100 Kilómetros de frontera común entre México y Estados Unidos, son también la frontera latinoamericana de la pobreza y la desigualdad.

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Entre las muchas lecciones que se pueden extraer de las impresionantes movilizaciones contra la ley del congresista republicano F. James Sensenbrenner (propuesta HR4437) que convocaron a millones de personas en las calles estadunideses, destacan las siguientes:

En primer lugar, la capacidad expresiva de los inmigrantes que hicieron retroceder de manera coyuntural, los rasgos más agresivos de la ley, especialmente lo referido a la criminalización de los migrantes indocumentados (cerca de 11 o 12 millones) y de quienes les ayuden de alguna manera, así como la intención de construir el tercer muro fronterizo. Destaca la capacidad de convocatoria demostrada en las manifestaciones, que fueron de enorme contundencia, movilizando a millones de personas: Más de medio millón en Los Ángeles, 50,000 en Denver, 3,000 en Charlotte, 4,000 en Sacramento, 200,000 en Chicago, 30,000 en Milwaukee, 80,000 en Atlanta, 20,000 en Phoenix, 30,000 en Washington, y muchos otros en San Francisco, Tucson, Kansas City y otras ciudades. (Véase David Brooks, "Megamarcha en Los Angeles", *La Jornada*, Portada, Domingo 26 de Marzo de 2006.)

En segundo lugar se encuentra su integración plural que logró la participación de diversos sectores que se involucraron como organizadores y convocantes, tales como organizaciones de paisanos, iglesia católica (el cardenal Roger Mahoney de Los Ángeles, el Padre Luis Ángel Nieto, de la Iglesia de la Placita Olvera), sindicatos, frentes indígenas (Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales (FIOB), MAYAVISION), decenas de miles de jóvenes, estudiantes, comunicadores radiales y espacios periodísticos en español, como La Opinión de Los Angeles. Las movilizaciones

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también tuvieron el apoyo de artistas y de algunos políticos como Antonio Villaraigosa, Alcalde de Los Ángeles, o Rob Blagojevich, Gobernador de Illinois. Junto a la pluralidad de organizaciones participantes, vale la pena considerar la transformación del propio perfil de los migrantes indocumentados, que, como ocurre con los mexicanos, que han incrementado el peso urbano, letrado, femenino y con mayor capacidad de vinculación social a través de los medios de transporte o de los recursos mediáticos y electrónicos.

Es notable la dimensión horizontal de las redes de organizaciones involucradas en las marchas, que no se corresponden con la dimensión vertical de las organizaciones que lideraron movimientos previos, conformados desde posiciones etnoclasistas. Estas movilizaciones ya son consideradas como las mayores de manifestación latina de la historia estadunidense. Resulta necesario destacar que, pese a los discursos que criminalizan a los migrantes, no se presentó ningún acto violento o delictivo, ni enfrentamientos, ni desmanes.

Esta condición fue explícitamente destacada por los manifestantes, quienes coreaban: "¡No somos criminales ni terroristas!", "¡Don´t panic, we are hispanic!", "¡El que no brinque es migra!", "¡Aquí estamos y no nos vamos y si nos echan nos regresamos!".

Desde hace varios años, la disputa migratoria se ha sido una pieza importante en el tablero político electoral como se ha podido observar de manera conspicua con la manipulación del fenómeno migratorio con fines de reelección por parte del ex Gobernador de California Pete Wilson, o la incorporación de los efectivos de la Guardia Nacional en el patrullaje fronterizo y en el levantamiento de un nuevo muro de 1125 Kilómetros. Al mismo tiempo, las perspectivas supremacistas actualizan sus discursos anti-migrantes y grupos como White Power, Metal Militia, Wake up Washington, Ku Klux Klan, Skin Heads, Light up The Border, American Border Patrol, Ranch Rescue, pierden visibilidad frente al nuevo protagonismo de Los Minuteman Project, con sus estrategias públicas de reclutamiento de prosélitos para capturar inmigrantes, y sus actividades de vigilancia armada. También en Arizona, el Sheriff de Maricopa, Joe Arpaio, junto con cerca de trescientos agentes y voluntarios civiles, patrullan la frontera cazando indocumentados, en una cruzada para *ajustar cuentas* con los migrantes que cruzan por lo que el define como su territorio. Justo en este condado ha entrado en vigor una ley llamada "anticoyotes", que penaliza a los indocumentados que pagan para que les crucen a Estados Unidos. Producto de esta ley antimigrante, Juan Villa destaca el hecho inédito derivado de esta ley, donde en la cárcel de Maricopa han encarcelado a 350 migrantes, quienes enfrentaran juicios debido a que se auto culparon de haber pagado para que algún coyote les ayudara a cruzar la frontera.

…y si nos echan, nos regresamos

De manera creciente, la lucha de los migrantes incorpora aspectos que rompen la condición referida al estado nacional, como ocurre con la ciudadanía transnacional, el respeto de los derechos humanos independientemente de la condición migratoria, la transformación de los marcos político-electorales, donde crece el esfuerzo por captar los votos de los paisanos en el exterior, las nuevas adscripciones en marcos socioculturales transnacionales, su peso económico en las comunidades de origen, el papel creciente de las remesas y la necesidad de romper su condición fetichizada, pues las remesas no son sólo dinero que cruza las fronteras, sino un soporte emocional y socioafectivo conformado desde las redes de relaciones familiares y comunitarias. Finalmente, la lucha de los migrantes se inscribe como parte de la misma lucha contra la vulnerabilidad, la precarización y el empobrecimiento de la gran mayoría de los habitantes del planeta.

Uno de los aspectos centrales que subyace a las manifestaciones que realizaron los migrantes y sectores solidarios en 2006, corresponde a la condición límite que conlleva la pérdida del proyecto de vida. Los migrantes son desplazados por la pobreza o la violencia, desplazados de sus sitios de origen de donde deben salir buscando oportunidades de vida digna canceladas en sus lugares de origen. Son desplazados en el lugar de destino donde deben habitar en intersticios subrepticios donde se les niegan derechos ciudadanos. La propuesta de reforma migratoria HR4437, conllevaba un nuevo desplazamiento que los regresaría a la situación original de indefensión y pobreza. Por ello desencadenó reacciones decididas de quienes han dejado su trabajo y una parte importante de sus vidas en Estados Unidos. Al igual que los jóvenes franceses que reaccionaron contra la Ley del primer empleo, los migrantes indocumentados expresan la expresión de la vulnerabilidad extrema y la expropiación de la esperanza producida por el capitalismo global contemporáneo. ■

Crossing-back Methodologies
Transnational Feminist Research on Incest in Mexico

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In Fall of 2006, I went back home to immerse myself in the field to collect my data as part of my second project as a sociologist who studies sexuality with populations of Mexican origin. In this transnational research journey, I went back to Mexico after migrating to the U.S. southwest with a *licenciatura en psicología* in hand. I eventually mastered my still accented English, completed a Ph.D. in sociology, and began to conduct research with Mexicans on the U.S. side of *la frontera*. Since I came in 1986, I have gone back to Mexico regularly for short visits to my family. However, this was the first time I went back to conduct sexuality research, inspired by feminist and community-based perspectives and ideologies.

In this ongoing research project, I study the sociology of incest in Mexican society, while paying special attention to the sexual and romantic histories of 60 adult women and men who have experienced sex within the context of the family during their childhood or adolescence. I collected these histories through individual tape-recorded interviews conducted during the 2005-06 academic year and Fall 2006. I also interviewed professionals who work with these populations, such as activists, attorneys, psychotherapists, and priests. Conducting my fieldwork in highly industrialized locations in Mexico (i.e., Ciudad Juárez, Guadalajara, Mexico City and Monterrey), I have worked mainly with activists and community organizers, some of whom have been my friends for a long time, and who also work with these particular populations.

Why incest in Mexican society? The incestous relationships of the Mexican immigrant women and men I interviewed for my previous project touched me deeply. I originally intended to work with Mexican immigrants for this project, but the invisibility of sociological research on this topic in Mexico became clearly evident as I advanced my research, while also listening to a group of activist friends working on related issues and concerns in Ciudad Juárez. In our informal conversations, they highlighted the urgent need to do this kind of research in Mexico. They kept motivating me to pursue it for a long time. More than two years have passed since then. Today I reflect about the different lessons and challenges this project has offered me as a feminist and a sociologist.

In the fall 2005, I left for Mexico with a romanticized image of transnational feminist research; a series of disappointments, dilemmas, and unexpected positive experiences gradually emerged as soon as I immersed myself in the field. Going back to work with community-based agencies helped me reconnect with different regions that have changed since I have been gone—changes that were not easily perceived during my previous short visits. And while those changes took place, I also evolved. I went back to these different locations (including my hometown of Monterrey) while having to explain myself repeatedly, "I am from here but I migrated to the United States 20 years ago." Some people kept reminding me of something that had been in my mind all along: "How much do you know about these issues locally and nationally? Things have changed, for how long you have been gone? 20 years?! You are definitely a *gringa*." My professional and cultural legitimacy was tested by some professionals and potential interviewees who kept asking me questions designed to measure my cultural literacy and professional expertise. I truly understood and appreciated their interest in making sure that I was qualified to do research on such a sensitive topic in Mexico. While the legitimacy was tested and finally received the approval, I became "*la investigadora de Texas*, who used to be from here."

Many times I also felt like the representative of some kind of intellectual *maquiladora*, some kind of intellectual invader who was in Mexico in order to practice some form of exploitation: interview people, get and organize the data, and then disappear to go back North. I received complaints from activists (who eventually became close friends) about researchers from Mexico and from the United States who have been in Mexico to conduct research. Reportedly, these investigators got their projects going, received local support, but they never heard back from them after they finished them. Before I was asked about what I could give in return for their priceless help, I openly talked to them about what would help them feel reciprocated for all the support they were offering me. I told them I identified myself as an intellectual activist, and talked about my commitment to challenge any form of exploitation.

These experiences have invited me to explore and promote creative forms of intellectual and activist solidarity with these community-based agencies. In the places where I have conducted my work, I have also offered seminars and workshops on feminist-informed research dealing with gender and society, and feminist psychotherapies, which I learned more than ten years ago as part of my training as a couple and family therapist. These presentations took place at the community-based agencies where I identified and interviewed my informants. In these meetings, I also had informal conversations about other research topics, including informal dialogues on my preliminary

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findings. In these conversations, I became self-critical and open to others' criticism when my preconceived ideas or training were perhaps too Western and non-representative of their own social realities. After all, in this project I am also incorporating issues identified as crucial by my informants, as well as by the clinicians and activists working with these populations and involved communities.

While I dealt with these issues in some locations, in others, I experienced the opposite. In some places, I became *la doctora de Austin*, "the expert" who was qualified to give voice to women's local problems. At times, I experienced deep discomfort after realizing that I had being invited to participate at special events addressing the issues affecting women locally, while local feminists—who were far more qualified than me on these topics—had been excluded from these conversations. Through these experiences, I soon learned about the many conflicts and internal divisions historically experienced by activists and other intellectuals within their local, regional, and national groups. While keeping myself on the margins of sensitive or unresolved tensions, I also kept myself as humble and respectful as possible, and very receptive to all community contacts.

This project also invited me to explore some of the issues and concerns with regard to my own internalized intellectual colonization. "What does a Mexican feminist do in the United States, and in Texas, *la tierra de Bush*?!" I was confronted in this manner by some professionals who eventually became good friends. In these conversations, as well as in my presentations and workshops, I became aware of how hyper-vigilant I have become as I monitor myself regarding ideologies, theories, and concepts used to articulate ideas I wanted to share with these professionals and activists. These reflections never did stop. If I was so progressive, what was I doing living in "the land of the enemy"? How have I resolved this contradiction? I kept thinking about the ways I have been able to learn to explain *myself* not only to myself, but also to others in the United States and to some professionals back in Mexico.

As I went through this experience, these feminist metholodologies of crossing-back unfolded intellectually stimulating opportunities for professional and personal development. In the process, I kept exploring ways to organize and grow from these challenges and lessons. In my mind, I kept going back to the archives of Anzalduan concepts and theorizing on the multiple dimensions of the borderlands. My *mestiza* consciousness, now on the Mexican side, organized my migration-back experience. My professional self discovered the multiple layers of permanent transition lacking clear boundaries. The quintessential state of consciousness identified as *nepantla*, that long ago had explained my life as an immigrant, was now experiencing a more mature and much less distressing yet parallel dimension of the very same process. No matter on what side of the border I find myself, Anzaldúa's quitessential *nepantla* had become that state of consciousness that identified and "normalized" a feeling of permanent displacement and a sense of being always-in-transition, lacking rigid boundaries and frontiers. The meaningful conversations I had with some of my beloved *chicana* friends as a graduate student and at some point as a professor, kept coming back to me thorughout the entire process. Being in the borderless inellectual borderlands meant professional expansion in an act of "spiritual activism" or interconnectedness with informants and professionals, including the honest and committed activists who have taught me so much as I conducted my data collection for a year and a half.

The day before I returned from Mexico City to Austin, nostalgia embraced the process of professional awareness and transformation I had experienced. I paid a visit to Coyolxauhqui, a soothing reflection of the image of myself in this process and the iconic reminder of my gratitude to Anzaldúa. As I approached the entrance to the Templo Mayor, I heard someone say, "Is that you, Gloria? What are you doing in Mexico?" A *chicana* friend, a professor who had gone South during the summer, greeted me at the entrance to the museum. We were both surprised by the coincidence, but the encounter was a good way to wrap up the experience in a meaningful way; "*la coincidencia fue para cerrar con broche de oro*," as my mother would say. She also reminded me of the ways in which my emotional and cultural uprootedness, anguish, and distress, experienced after migrating 20 years ago, became well-healed scars, symbolic reminders of the yet uncovered lessons and challenges as a feminist and a sociologist going back and forth to do research. Many are the countless *retos y lecciones* of doing research while crossing-back, I keep reminding myself, as I make plans to go back to the field to continue nurturing the modest research I conduct in the Americas without borders, in the always-changing borderlands. ■

Why the Immigrant Rights Struggle Compels Us to Reconceptualize Both Latin American and Latino/a Studies

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What is Latin America? Who is a Latin American? To what do "Latin American Studies" and "Latino/a Studies" refer? To what ought they refer? These are not new questions. But they are in my view all the more pressing in light of the transnational processes sweeping the Western Hemisphere and the world as globalization proceeds. These processes compel us to reconceptualize Latin American as well as Latino/a Studies. Among the most salient of these processes are a worldwide upsurge in transnational migration as global capitalism reorganizes economies, labor markets, and social hierarchies in every locale in accordance with its logic of integrated transnational accumulation.

We know that Latin America—both the name itself and the reality which is purported to denote—is itself an invention. If that invention is going to have any relevance in this new century beyond a "colonial matrix of power," to use Walter Mignolo's phrase,[1] it must refer to all those peoples who have become inextricably bound up over the past 515 years within that matrix. This includes the 40 million people of Latin American descent in the United States, some 20 million of them immigrants. Immigrant communities in this country, as elsewhere around the world, are increasingly transnational communities. The patterns of assimilation into a particular nation that corresponded to an earlier era in the global system have given way to ongoing bi- and multi-directional flows of people and culture, and to the rise of truly transnational social structures.

"Latin American Studies," let us recall, emerged in U.S. universities as an object of Cold War "area studies." The knowledge that was supposed to be generated by these "area studies" would help guide U.S. foreign policy and resolve problems of stability, development and integration of these areas into the post-World War II capitalist world order. What use did the powers that be, and their organic intellectuals, have for integrated, world-historic knowledge of Latino/a population in the United States? "Latino/a Studies" emerged from a very distinct dynamic, that of struggles to establish in the North American academy ethnic, racial, diaspora, anti-colonial and multicultural studies in the wake of the civil rights movement and other popular, national, and radical movements in the United States and around the world. But much of Latino/a studies became swept up in a nation-state framework of inquiry and more parochial and disabling U.S. race/ethnic relations paradigms.

Today, more than ever, the historical, socioeconomic, political, and cultural forces and dynamics shaping the reality of Latinos/as in the United States are the same ones that shape the lives of the 500 million people living south of the Rio Bravo. To consider inquiry into the reality of U.S.-based Latino/a populations as "Latino/a Studies" and inquiry into that reality south of the Rio Bravo as "Latin American Studies" is patently absurd. But it is more than that: it is epistemologically bankrupt and politically disempowering. It renders invisible to "Latin American Studies" the 40 million Latinos/as in the United States and cuts them off from the larger reality in which their lives are grounded at a time when our struggles and fates are more than ever shaped by our engagement with global-level processes and structures.

These Latino/a and other immigrant communities took the political stage by storm with unprecedented mass demonstrations across the United States that involved millions of immigrants and their allies in Spring 2006.[2] The immediate trigger was the introduction in the U.S. Congress of anti-immigrant legislation, but, more broadly, the protests represented the unleashing of pent-up anger and repudiation of what has been deepening exploitation and an escalation of anti-immigrant repression and racism. Dominant groups and the state were terrified by the mass mobilizations and they responded with a wave of repression, including stepping up raids, deportations, and anti-immigrant hysteria. What is the larger backdrop to these developments?

The latter decades of the 20th century began a period of massive new migrations worldwide, generated by the forces of capitalist globalization. A low-end estimate by the United Nations placed the number of immigrant workers in 2005 at some 200 million by the new century, double the amount of 25 years earlier. During the 1980s eight million Latin American emigrants arrived in the United States, nearly equal to the total figure of European immigrants who arrived on U.S. shores during the first decades of the 20th century, making of Latin America the principal origin of migration into the United States. This wave of outmigration from socially and economically devastated communities in the Hemisphere accelerated in the 1990s, and in the first decade of the new century, as globalization and neo-liberalism ravaged the region, displacing millions and generating a social disaster of unprecedented magnitude.[3]

The same capitalist globalization that triggers this mass migration also generates an escalating demand for immigrant labor. The division of the global labor force into citizens and non-citizens, immigrant and native workers, is a major new axis of inequality. The maintenance and strengthening of state controls over transnational labor creates the

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conditions for "immigrant labor" as a distinct category of labor in relation to capital, replacing earlier direct colonial and racial caste controls over labor worldwide. Most transnational immigrant workers become inserted into segmented labor markets as low-paid, low-status laborers under unstable and precarious work conditions without the political or labor rights accorded to citizens. They are racialized to the extent that cultural and physical markers can be used—or constructed—to demarcate these workers. Class, race, national borders and transnational processes all come together to generate explosive relations of exploitation and oppression, as well as new forms of resistance.

Repression and xenophobia against immigrants from Third World countries, of course, is ingrained in both U.S. and Western history. As indirect mechanisms have replaced colonialism in the mobilization of racialized labor pools, states assume a gatekeeper function[4] to regulate the flow of labor for the capitalist economy. U.S. immigration enforcement agencies undertake revolving door practices—opening and shutting the flow of immigration in accordance with the needs of capital accumulation during distinct periods. Immigrants are sucked up when their labor is needed, and then spit out when they become superfluous or potentially destabilizing to the system.

But these gatekeeper functions become more complex—and contradictory—as transnational capital comes to be increasingly dependent on immigrant labor. Latino/a immigrant labor became structurally embedded in the North American economy by the turn of the 21st century. Although immigrant labor sustains U.S. and Canadian agriculture, by the 1990s the majority of Latino/a immigrants were absorbed by industry, construction, and services as part of a general "Latinization" of the economy. Latino/a immigrants have massively swelled the lower rungs of the U.S. workforce, often displacing African American and white ethnic laborers. They provide much of the labor for hotels, restaurants, construction, janitorial and house cleaning, child care, domestic service, gardening and landscaping, hairdressing, delivery, meat and poultry packing, food processing, light manufacturing, retail, and so on.

Now more than ever, employers and the state must sustain a vast exploitable labor pool that exists under precarious conditions, that does not enjoy the civil, political, and labor rights of citizens, that face language barriers and a hostile cultural and ideological environment, and that is flexible and disposable through deportation. It is the *condition of deportable* they wish to create or preserve, since that condition assures the state the ability to super-exploit with impunity, and to dispose of without consequences, should this labor pool become unruly or unnecessary. Hence, a reserve army of immigrant labor must remain just that— *immigrant* labor, and, therefore, undocumented. Sustaining this reserve army of immigrant labor means creating—and reproducing—the division of workers into immigrants and citizens.

This requires contradictory practices on the part of the state. From the vantage points of dominant group interests the dilemma is how to deal with the new "barbarians" at Rome's door. This contradictory situation helps explain the frightening escalation of hostilities and repression against Latino/a immigrants. The system needs Latino immigrant labor, yet the presence of that labor scares dominant groups and privileged, generally white, strata. Political and economic elites fear a rising tide of Latino immigrants will lead to a loss of cultural and political control, becoming a source of counter-hegemony and of instability, as immigrant labor in Paris showed to be in the late 2005, uprising in that European capital against racism and marginality.

The preferred solution for capital and its political representatives are "guest worker" programs that would convert immigrants into a quasi-indentured labor force, alongside campaigns to criminalize Latino/a immigrants and to militarize their control. The state must lift national borders for capital, but must reinforce these same national boundaries in its immigrant policies. In its ideological activities, it must generate a nationalist hysteria by propagating such images as "out of control borders" and "invasions of illegal immigrants," given the special oppression and dehumanization involved in extracting their labor power.

The migrant labor phenomenon will continue to expand along with global capitalism. Just as capitalism has no control over its implacable expansion as a system, it cannot do away in its new globalist stage with transnational labor. Immigrant labor pools that can be super exploited economically, marginalized and disenfranchised politically, driven into the shadows, and deported when necessary, are the very epitome of capital's naked domination in the age of global capitalism. Therefore, bound up with the immigrant debate in the United States is the entire political economy of global capitalism in the Western Hemisphere, the same political economy that is now being sharply contested throughout Latin America with the surge in mass popular struggles and the turn to the Left. The struggle for immigrant rights in the United States is, thus, part and parcel of this resistance to neo-liberalism, intimately connected to the larger Latin American—and worldwide—struggle for social justice.

No wonder protests and boycotts took place throughout Latin America on May Day 2006

in solidarity with Latino immigrants in the United States. The immigrant rights group that I am involved with, the Los Angeles-based *March 25 Coalition*, which played a key role in organizing the Spring 2006 mobilizations, sent several delegations to Mexico in 2006 to show solidarity with those protesting electoral fraud, and with the struggle in Oaxaca. It is also lobbying Latin American governments and social movements to brandish as their own the banner of the immigrant rights struggle in the United States.

As the peoples of Latin America on both sides of the Rio Bravo transnationalize their collective struggles we need a parallel intellectual and epistemological transnationalization in the academy. This would start with acknowledgment that "Latin American Studies" must include the reality of Latino/s in the United States and other transnational processes that go beyond the geographic map of Latin America, and that "Latino/a Studies" is but a component of a more expansive historical and contemporary domain beyond U.S. race/ethnic and cultural studies. This, of course, is just the beginning. We need to develop a global perspective across all fields and disciplines in the social sciences and humanities as we rethink what it means to study/engage particular regions, peoples, cultures, and histories in the global system.

Endnotes

[1] Walter D. Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, Blackwell, 2005.

[2] William I. Robinson, "Aquí Estamos y no Nos Vamos!: Global Capitalist and the Struggle for Immigrant Rights," *Race and Class*. 48(2).

[3] On these topics, see William I. Robinson, *Global Capitalism and Latin America*, Johns Hopkins, forthcoming.

[4] Joseph Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper: The Rise of the "Illegal Alien" and the Making of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary*. Routledge, 2002. ■