

The Politics, Economics, and Culture
of Mexican-U.S. Migration

Both Sides of the Border

Edited by Edward Ashbee,
Helene Balslev Clausen,
and Carl Pedersen

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Introduction

“Nuestro Himno” (“Our Anthem”) was the Spanish-language version of “The Star-Spangled Banner.” The recorded version featured artists such as Wyclef Jean, hip-hop star Pitbull, and Puerto Rican singers Carlos Ponce and Olga Tanon. It was released at the end of April 2006 and played on many of the U.S. Spanish-language radio stations during the mass protests against congressional efforts to restrict illegal immigration. The altering of particular words, the irreverent chords that broke with the anthem’s customary solemnity, and the use of Spanish all provoked controversy. For his part, President George W. Bush said those who wanted to be U.S. citizens should learn English and “ought to learn to sing the national anthem in English.”¹

“Nuestro Himno” was only in the news for a short period. It had significance because it was tied to a much more sustained controversy about the economic and political consequences of migration and the changing character of both U.S. and Mexican identity. It is a controversy that has led to significant divisions within the United States. Whereas President Bush backed reforms that opened the way for “guest workers” and held out the promise of eventual U.S. citizenship to many who were in the United States illegally, other Republicans sought the imposition of restrictions on the number of legal immigrants allowed in the country and a rigorous clampdown on illegal immigration. Although there was more agreement about the need for greater border security, supported by Democrats as well as Republicans, some were concerned about the impact a fence would have on the relationship between the United States and Mexico. According to Illinois Senator Dick Durbin, “What we have here has become a symbol for the right wing in American politics . . . our relationship with Mexico would come down to a barrier between our two countries.”²

There was greater unanimity in Mexico, and few dissented when President Vicente Fox, like other Mexican politicians, compared the proposed U.S. barrier to the Berlin Wall: “Building walls, constructing barriers on the border does not offer an efficient solution in a relationship of friends, neighbors and partners. . . . We will go on defending the rights of our countrymen without rest or respite.

CHAPTER 8

Beyond Border Crossing and Soulless Places: The Role of Mexico's Northern Border Cities in the Construction of Transnational Social Spaces

Cristóbal Mendoza

Transnational approaches have challenged traditional views on international migration, which was previously characterized as a permanent change of residence between two nation-states, leading to assimilation in the migrant's destination.¹ Indeed the transnational approach implies a radical overturning of geographical concepts of migration (e.g., place of birth or place of destination) that are left behind by more ambiguous, yet more analytically challenging, transnational social spaces. Transmigrants take actions, make decisions, and develop identities within social spaces that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously.² Furthermore, migrants create fluid, transnational spaces that are defined as both a social terrain that reflects migrants' biculturalism and a fragmented, diffused geographical reality.³

Embedded in the theoretical literature on transnational migration are two assumptions about "space." First, transnational communities do not have precise geographical limits, but instead are created in "deterritorialized nation-states," "delocalized transnations," "hyperspaces," and "third spaces."⁴ Migration takes place in global spaces with multiple dimensions composed of interlinking subspaces that are both limitless and occasionally discontinuous.⁵ Second, Mexico-U.S. transnational communities are social and cultural constructs.⁶ These socially constructed communities have also been described as "imagined," as

Indeed recognition of the role of “place” in empirical studies on Mexico-U.S. transnational migration has been limited to its examination within specific localities in the United States and Mexico. As a result, even when it is recognized that the concept of “community” is delimited by social relations and not by specific geographical entities, the bulk of empirical studies continues to focus on particular municipalities or cities within specific nation-states.⁸ These two places in Mexico and in the United States are interconnected by intense social, economic, and even political ties that translate into the circulation of people, remittances, goods, and ideas. Yet these interactions take place in “neutral” spaces and flow in both directions. These places may be conceived as sites of resistance, in which cultural hybridism, transnational practices, and overlapping identities may constitute counterhegemonic practices and discourses.⁹

This chapter argues that the role of “place” needs to be reasserted in transnational migration studies—particularly those places that lie in between Mexico and the United States, such as the northern cities in Mexico. Moreover, since the literature on Mexico-U.S. “transnational social spaces” has focused on their social and cultural aspects, the geographical aspects of these spaces (e.g., distance, barriers, or even border) have been systematically ignored. The exception to this rule is the concept “migration circuits.”¹⁰ Yet, even in this case, the concept is mainly used for description, rather than for analytical purposes. Indeed, transnational spaces are constructed in many cases without even considering any reference to their territorial base.¹¹ Yet even in this global world, borders play a relevant role for migration, and a significant part of the migration between Mexico and the United States still takes place over land.

Certainly border towns are both cities of passage in Mexico-U.S. migration and destination for Mexico’s migration internal outflows. Due to the increasing militarization of the border in the 1990s, potential U.S. immigrants from inland Mexico have been “locked” in border towns.¹² Yet the image of these towns as places of passage is well rooted in the collective imaginary, even if these cities themselves attract a large number of migrants from inland Mexico and even from the United States, mainly (but not exclusively) of Mexican origin. In the reassertion of “place,” this chapter argues that the Mexico’s border region constitutes a “place” that is defined by its contiguity with the United States and characterized by strong migration flows. Giving a twist to the argument, the characteristics of U.S.-Mexico migration may be directly related to the construction of the border as an intrinsic “place.” This construction in turn depends on political, economic, social, and cultural dynamics that may go well beyond the border area.

However, more than a discussion based on theory, the debate on the “border region” has been focused on a controversy regarding the definition and extent of the border region.¹³ Some authors assert the existence of a common U.S.-Mexico region contiguous to the international border, while others criticize such conceptualizations as lacking a solid theoretical base or empirical frame of reference.¹⁴ It has been argued that resolving the debate may require delineating and comparing the essential demographic features of a huge area,

one that is situated north and south of an international border that extends nearly three thousand kilometers.¹⁵

This debate has a clear demographic bias. Early sociodemographic studies of northern Mexico focused on its particularities with respect to the close proximity to the United States.¹⁶ The essence of the argument was that strong interactive effects of movements of people, capital, and goods across the international line influenced population patterns in the region. Even if implicitly stated, this literature considers diffusion effects from the United States to Mexico to be the basis for change. For example, an early demographic transition in northern Mexico compared to the rest of the country was attributed to the spatial congruity of the two nations.¹⁷ In the 1990s, sociodemographic studies of northern Mexican states also began comparing trends in the region with those elsewhere in the country.

In the United States, on the other hand, studies of the sociodemography of the Southwest concentrate on migration and ethnicity, with the flow of undocumented workers and the use of the Spanish language being the most popular topics, in addition to poverty.¹⁸ While not always stated clearly in the debate on poverty, the interconnections of immigration and Mexican proximity to the United States are generally assumed. Certainly this coincides with popular views about migration in U.S. border towns.¹⁹ Yet the debate on the relationship between poverty and migration goes beyond the border area. For instance, in *Losing Control*, Saskia Sassen argued that structural conditions of U.S. urban labor markets, rather than characteristics of the labor force, are the fundamental reasons for the precariousness and downgrading of jobs in the United States.²⁰

What is clear from this sociodemographic literature is that, even if Mexico’s northern border cities may share common characteristics with others in the country, migration makes them unique. This is a key aspect of this chapter, since its main objective lies in the analysis of the role of the border in the construction of U.S.-Mexican transnational migration. This chapter uses data from the Survey on Migration in Mexico’s Northern Border (Encuesta sobre Migración en la Frontera Norte, EMIF) whose objectives are to quantify and characterize migration flows in border cities.²¹

Survey of Migration on Mexico’s Northern Border (EMIF)

EMIF is a flow survey. It consists of four connected questionnaires that correspond to a unique theoretical framework. This survey has been conducted in the main border cities of northern Mexico (from west to east, Tijuana, Mexicali, Nogales, Ciudad Juárez, Piedras Negras, Nuevo Laredo, Reynosa, and Matamoros) since 1993 and is the result of coordinated efforts of three institutions: Consejo Nacional de Población, Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión Social, and El Colegio de la Frontera Norte. The main objectives of the EMIF are to quantify and characterize four migration flows that originate from central, western and southern Mexico, border cities, the United States, and migrants deported by the U.S. Border Patrol. Since 1993 seven specific surveys have been conducted.

Specifically, this chapter focuses on data from the questionnaire “Migrants from the South” (i.e., migrants from inland Mexico who arrive to the border towns either to stay or to migrate to the United States). The scope of the questionnaire is persons from twelve years old or older who were neither born in the United States nor reside in Mexico’s border cities, and arrive at one of these cities with no plans to return to their place of origin. The “Migrants from the South” data allow us to separate the migrants who want to stay at least for a period of time in Mexico’s northern cities (“border migrants”) from those in transit to the United States (“migrants in transit”).²² In this we use data from the period 1993–2001. The specific data of each survey have been aggregated in calendar years, since the methodology of the surveys is comparable.

Migrant networks and transnational social spaces

A first approach to the concept of transnational social space may come from the more easily delimited social networks. The sociodemographic literature has made a relevant contribution to this, since it has amply demonstrated that the strengthening and reinforcement of social networks between immigrants, old immigrants, and nonmigrants nonimmigrants in sending and receiving areas has an impact on the continuity and expansion of outflow migration.²³ Moreover, since networks reduce risks that are associated with displacement, the expansion of social networks in the places of origin increases the probabilities of emigration among those groups that are less likely to migrate.²⁴ This is to say that social networks expand and increase the magnitude of social capital that circulates within them.²⁵ Recent literature on transnationalism has also recognized the relevance of migrant networks for understanding the construction of social spaces.²⁶

EMIF contains several “classic” demographic questions that throw light on the way that networks on the border help articulate transnational social spaces. First of all, EMIF questions relatives or friends in Mexico’s northern city where the survey has taken place. Thus Figure 8.1 shows the percentage of migrants who have family or acquaintances in the city, broken down by destination (i.e., “border migrants” and “migrants in transit”). Figure 8.1 shows that half of the border migrants in the period from 1996–2001 have relatives or friends in Mexico’s northern cities. Furthermore this trend clearly increases through time. This is quite revealing because migrants in transit to the United States do not display these kinds of social connections. For this group, the border is simply a place of passage. These data also suggest that the higher the number of social networks in the region, the less the probability of migrating further north into the United States. Taking the argument further, this may suggest that both flows may be different in nature and, consequently, not interchangeable. This would mean that the fact of having relatives and friends does not decrease in principle for further migration up north, but border immigrants chose this destination because of the existence of networks within family and friends in the area.

In line with this, Table 8.1 shows the kind of help that was received by migrants in their last trip to the border city, broken down by type of migrant

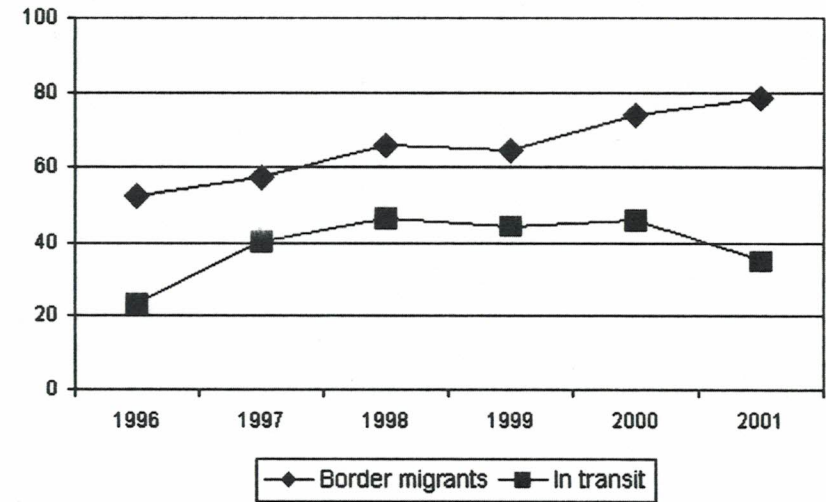


Figure 8.1 Migrants from inland Mexico with family and friends in border cities, 1996–2001 (percentages)

Source: Encuesta sobre Migración en la Frontera Norte, EMIF.²⁷

(i.e., “border migrant” and “migrant in transit”). Data are restricted to those with relatives or friends in the border region; it comes as no surprise that migrants in transit not only have less social relationships, but the quality of their networks is considerably poorer than that of the border migrants. Interestingly enough, with the exception of 2001, around one fourth of the border migrants received monetary support from family or friends on their last trip to the border city. This percentage drops dramatically for those in transit (Table 8.1). Furthermore, both groups display substantial differences regarding the continuity of patterns through time. While data on border migrants are consistent through the 1990s, the migrants in transit show an uneven, irregular trend during the decade (Table 8.1).

As for job search strategies, more than 40 percent of border migrants in the period from 1996–98 (but 30 percent in 1999–2001) find a job in their last visit to the city surveyed through relatives and friends. This trend is not seen for those in transit, for whom this way of obtaining a job through informal channels fluctuates remarkably through time (Table 8.1). In other words, the quantity and quality of social networks are vital for understanding why migrants in northern Mexico stay.

Yet this picture would be incomplete if we did not take into account the group of border migrants who wants to stay only temporarily in Mexico, but may migrate into the United States in the future. To be specific, for the period

Table 8.1 Assistance provided by family and friends in their last migration to the border city, 1996–2001 (percentages)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
<i>Border migrants</i>						
<i>Money</i>						
Yes	29.0	25.6	25.8	21.6	22	16.9
No	71.0	74.4	74.2	78.3	77.1	83.1
<i>Accommodation and food</i>						
Yes	79.2	83.3	83.2	79.7	76.7	88.3
No	20.8	16.7	16.8	20.2	23.2	11.7
<i>Assistance to obtain a job</i>						
Yes	43.7	40.4	41.8	32.9	28.9	33.4
No	56.3	59.6	58.2	67.1	71	66.6
<i>Work contract</i>						
Yes	3.1	1.8	9.2	4.9	3.8	0.8
No	96.9	98.2	90.8	95	95.4	99.2
<i>In transit</i>						
<i>Money</i>						
Yes	0.9	8.4	27.1	12	9.3	8.9
No	99.1	91.6	72.9	84.5	90.6	91
<i>Accommodation and food</i>						
Yes	38.7	83	77	59.8	75.3	58.9
No	61.3	17	23	39.8	24.6	41
<i>Assistance to obtain a job</i>						
Yes	0.0	18.3	34.6	17.5	6.2	2.8
No	100.0	81.7	65.4	79.3	93.7	97.1
<i>Work contract</i>						
Yes	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.8	0.2	0.6
No	100.0	100.0	99.9	95.9	99.7	99.3

Note: Proportions calculated from the total number of migrants who declare that they had family and/or friends in the city of survey. "No answer" is not included.

Source: Encuesta sobre Migración en la Frontera Norte, EMIF.

of 1993–97, a remarkable 35 percent of this group said that they had a clear intention of migrating into United States (albeit this has decreased to less than 20 percent for 1998–2001). This change in trend suggests that the border towns increasingly retain a large part of the Mexican outflows to the "north" (i.e., border towns and the United States) in the 1990s.

Probability of Emigration to the United States

In the previous section, the quantity and quality of social networks explain why migrants choose to remain in Mexico (or alternatively migrate to the United

States). In this section, the analysis goes a step further and examines reasons for migrants continuing their trip to the north once they find themselves in border cities, using two regression models that calculate probabilities of migrating to the United States according to demographic, economic, and social characteristics. In both models, the dependent variable is the intention of emigration to the United States (person does not want to migrate = 0, person does want to migrate = 1), and independent variables include sex, age groups, year of survey, the labor experience in previous migrations, social networks in border cities, and region of origin in Mexico (western states, border states, the center, and southern and Caribbean states). Model 1 refers exclusively to border migrants (i.e., those who want to stay temporarily or permanently in Mexico's border cities), and Model 2 includes both border migrants and migrants in transit.

Table 8.2 shows the probability of emigration by selected demographic, economic and social variables. First of all, the gender of the migrants is highly significant (<0.01), with the probability for women migrating to the United States being half that of a men (0.53, Model 1). This is not the case of Model 2 though, since men and women have roughly the same probability of crossing the international border (0.96). As for the year of survey, the variable is also highly significant (<0.01), and the odds of crossing the border decrease with time, especially for border immigrants only (Model 1). This confirms that the border area increasingly retains a higher percentage of emigrants from inland Mexico.

The two tables also show that the probability of migrating to the United States increases with age. This relation is even clearer in Model 2. But more than immigration, this higher probability of the elderly may be related to mobility (i.e., displacements between Mexico and the United States), since elderly immigrants are more likely to possess migration documents than the young ones.

Taking the western states as the category of reference for the origin of migration across the U.S. border is half than that from the western part. For other states, this is even smaller, with Mexico's southern states having 25 percent probability of emigration compared to the western ones. This is hardly surprising since the western states, the so-called traditional area of emigration, have been sending emigrants to the United States since the beginning of the twentieth century.²⁸ Here differences between the two models are negligible. Similarly, having a job in the thirty days prior migration affects negatively the intentions of migration, which is being reduced to 60 percent. Likewise, those with family and friends in the border have a probability of emigrating 30 percent lower than others.

Characteristics and Destination of Mexico's Outflows

The previous models show that the demographic characteristics of emigrants (e.g., sex or age) from inland Mexico may differ depending on their final destination. In this section, this point is further explored. Specifically, this section examines whether border cities and the U.S. destinations compete for the same

Table 8.2 Logistic regression models: Probabilities of emigration to the United States

	<i>Model 1: Border migrants</i>			<i>Model 2: Border migrants and migrants in transit</i>		
	B	S.E.	Exp(B)	B	S.E.	Exp(B)
Sex						
Women	-0.65	0.005	0.53	-0.043	0.003	0.96
Age group						
20-24	0.06	0.004	1.06	0.18	0.003	1.20
25-29	0.55	0.004	1.73	0.51	0.003	1.66
30-34	0.95	0.005	2.58	0.84	0.004	2.32
35-39	1.01	0.005	2.73	0.96	0.004	2.61
40-44	1.00	0.005	2.71	1.03	0.004	2.81
45-49	1.08	0.007	2.95	1.22	0.005	3.39
50 and older	1.04	0.006	2.82	1.35	0.005	3.84
Year of survey						
1994	-0.07	0.005	0.94	-0.26	0.004	0.77
1995	-0.08	0.004	0.92	-0.12	0.003	0.89
1996	-0.14	0.005	0.87	-0.05	0.004	0.95
1997	-0.10	0.004	0.90	-0.08	0.004	0.93
1998	-0.55	0.005	0.58	-0.17	0.004	0.84
1999	-0.75	0.004	0.47	-0.02	0.003	0.99
2000	-0.95	0.004	0.39	-0.15	0.003	0.86
2001	-1.26	0.007	0.29	-0.03	0.004	0.97
Region of origin 1						
Border	-1.46	0.003	0.23	-1.09	0.002	0.34
South/Caribbean	-1.51	0.005	0.22	-1.61	0.004	0.20
Center	-0.53	0.003	0.59	-0.61	0.002	0.54
Labor experience						
30 days prior to emigration	-0.51	0.003	0.60	-0.52	0.002	0.60
Relatives or friends in border cities	-0.35	0.002	0.70	-0.29	0.002	0.75
Constant	0.13	0.005	1.14	0.37	0.004	1.45
-2 log likelihood		17,465		33,015		

Categories of reference: Men, 12-19; year of survey, 1993; Western region; emigrants without labor experience in the thirty days previous to migration; and no relatives or friends in border cities.

1. Western states: Aguascalientes, Colima, Durango, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacán, Nayarit, San Luis Potosí, and Zacatecas.

Border states: Baja California, Baja California Sur, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, Sinaloa, Sonora, and Tamaulipas.

Center: Distrito Federal, Estado de México, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Morelos, Puebla, Querétaro, Tlaxcala, and Oaxaca.

Southern and Caribbean states: Campeche, Chiapas, Quintana Roo, Tabasco, Veracruz, and Yucatán.

Source: Encuesta sobre Migración en la Frontera Norte. EMIF

niche of workers (or alternatively migrants go to one point or another depending of their sociodemographic characteristics).

Unlike previous sections of this chapter, the data here are clustered according to final destinations of migrants (not their temporary destination). In other words, we place those border migrants who want to migrate into the United States in the future with those in transit into the category "U.S. immigrants." The ones who want to stay permanently in Mexico are classified as "border immigrants." Thus Table 8.3 shows two contrasting sociodemographic profiles. The U.S. immigrants are older, have a higher probability of being married and being more likely to be from the western states than the border immigrants who tend to be young, single men with a less narrowly defined geographical origin.

These demographic profiles have different points of interest. First, they stress the relevance of social networks, since the western states, an area with a tradition of emigration of more than a century, are still the main sending area. Second, U.S. immigration is mainly composed of middle-aged men who travel alone, irrespective of their marital status. By contrast, for the young, migration to the border may imply both the incorporation to more flexible labor markets and a more open social atmosphere.²⁹

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that transnational social spaces are "rooted" in specific places that are interconnected by migration circuits.³⁰ Circuits are not only units of analysis in which people, goods, remittances, or information flow; but circuits also confer "character" to places along them. Indeed places also may influence the intensity, destination, and volume of migration flows. In this regard, the border itself is considered a place because of the particularities and characteristics that make it unique. Among these characteristics, migration stands out as a primary defining element. In this context, this chapter analyses data from the EMIF, a flow survey, in order to assess the relevance of Mexico's northern border in the construction of a transnational space between Mexico and the United States from a demographic point of view.

In this regard, the EMIF survey gives us a considerable amount of data about the characteristics of migration flows from inland Mexico to border cities and the United States. The analyses of the EMIF results are quite revealing. First of all, they confirm the classic profile of U.S. immigrants. International flows are composed of men who migrate on their own, regardless of their marital status, with an average age of thirty-five. This does not correspond with the usual picture of international younger immigrants whose average age is around twenty-five to twenty-seven.³¹ This is because EMIF is a flow survey, and mobility increases with age (Table 8.2). On the other hand, according to our data, female immigration to the United States only reaches 19 percent of total numbers at their peak. This is certainly of interest because literature on transnational social spaces usually does not take properly into account the demographic subject. Middle-aged

Table 8.3 Migrants' demographic profiles by final destination

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
U.S. immigrant									
Women (%)	3.9	3.0	2.7	4.6	3.8	18.9	13.5	18.8	16.6
Average age (years)	31.0	30.3	31.3	31.9	32.3	31.7	33.9	36.3	35.7
Heads of household (%)	66.3	69.5	67.1	69.1	71.1	52.4	64.0	67.0	70.7
Married (%)	57.5	56.9	60.7	63.8	63.4	50.6	57.4	70.0	65.0
Single (%)	39.1	34.8	35.5	33.5	32.0	44.0	35.0	24.4	26.7
Origin: Western Mexico (%)	48.4	61.5	55.7	50.7	61.2	37.5	47.0	43.3	46.2
Labor experience 30 days prior to migration (%)	66.1	70.0	56.8	49.2	56.3	85.8	86.5	89.3	88.0
N	450,265	134,702	354,573	179,352	248,405	202,975	414,096	362,084	137,707
Border immigrant									
Women (%)	9.2	4.7	8.2	7.1	9.8	11.7	14.7	13.4	11.8
Average age (years)	27.5	26.4	27.4	30.5	28.0	28.2	29.1	29.8	28.4
Heads of household (%)	54.3	52.0	52.1	61.6	51.5	44.8	51.8	52.9	55.0
Married (%)	42.2	50.4	45.4	53.7	46.0	35.6	43.2	45.9	42.7
Single (%)	51.3	46.1	50.6	42.0	48.5	55.2	49.5	44.3	46.6
Origin: Western Mexico (%)	26.6	36.0	30.5	23.8	33.4	25.3	25.0	23.0	28.6
Labor experience 30 days prior to migration (%)	72.4	78.8	72.5	72.5	72.1	79.0	90.0	88.7	93.0
N	530,339	190,298	415,539	191,121	267,903	325,076	527,564	507,495	172,152

Source: Encuesta sobre Migración en la Frontera Norte (EMIF).

men are more likely to travel or migrate between Mexico and the United States and consequently to construct transnational spaces (as opposed to women or young people [see Model A, Table 8.2]). Moreover the demographic factor is also vital since the border immigrant is normally younger and has fewer family ties. In this regard, the border cities attract a certain type of people with substantially different characteristics from the U.S. immigrant (Table 8.3).

As a place of passage, the Mexican northern border appears increasingly to retain a higher percentage of total Mexican outflows. This is directly related to stricter crossing controls and even the militarization of the border itself since the mid-1990s.³² Our data also point out that once in Mexican border towns, the odds of emigration to the United States are higher for middle-aged men from western states with no social networks in Mexico's north than for other groups (Model A, Table 8.2). As seen before, the access to social networks is crucial for understanding the intention to stay in Mexico. Thus those with family and friends in the border cities are more likely to stay in these cities. Moreover, for all the years surveyed, the migrants in transit have fewer networks in the Mexican northern region than the border immigrants (Figure 8.1). Likewise the quality of networking is substantially worse for the former than for the latter (Table 8.1).

Secondly, the life cycle also appears to be a key factor for a better understanding of transnational spaces. The younger and the single prefer the border cities as final destinations. As mentioned, these young people are less likely to possess U.S. migration documents. It is surprising, however, that the northern part of Mexico has mainly been considered as a previous stage in migration into the United States, when the border itself is a destination for a significant part of Mexican outflows. Furthermore, for these young people, the border may be associated with a component of freedom or adventure that is rarely recognized in the literature. The border cities of the northern Mexico might be an option for those young people who want to take advantage of new opportunities in the labor market and to break away from strict social constrictions in inland Mexico without the additional risk of illegally crossing the border. This may be especially true for migrants from areas without connections to the United States.

Last but not least, the border is a "place" that is clearly integrated in Mexico-U.S. transnational migration to the point that migration even defines the region itself through several popular images (cities of passage, migrants' cities, the north). However, it would be necessary to overcome this collective imaginary that implies that migration is always from Mexico to United States and reduces it to bipolar terms from a less developed country to one with more levels of development, because data from EMIF show a more complex picture.³³ In this regard, this chapter constitutes a demographic approach on how to integrate these "in between" places to a more general discussion on transnational spaces. This has been done from a quantitative perspective. However, it is clear that a broader discussion of the border as a "place" would require taking into account other movements that take place in the area (i.e., north to south), as well as a deeper analysis of reasons for migration and certainly a more qualitative stance.

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CHAPTER 9

Changing Representations of the Border

Mario Alberto Velázquez

The Human landscape can be read as a landscape of exclusion.

—David Sibley¹

The image of Mexico that the United States has constructed contains elements that in large part come from their shared border. While it is not possible to say that the United States' perception of Mexico in general and of the Mexican border in particular is the same, there are many elements that are assumed to be the same. What this chapter attempts to demonstrate is the possibility of an idea of Mexico constructed by U.S. society based on a series of elements that are distinctive to the border.

How does a border become a delimiter of images as well as a danger zone? The political boundaries between countries are generally spaces of intense exchange between two or more cultures. In this sense, these areas function as spaces of cultural tolerance. The particular case I will be discussing is where the greatest number of goods and people are exchanged in the world. However, it also contains an important dimension: it is the boundary between two very different ways of interpreting the Western world. The point where the United States ends and Mexico begins can be seen as a critical point for the conservation of cultural, political, and economic differences. This chapter will attempt to explain how threats have been constructed from the point of view of the United States.

The border shared by Mexico and the United States is 3,200 kilometers long, and it includes thirty-nine Mexican municipalities, twenty-five U.S. counties, and fourteen pairs of sister cities that straddle the international line. The border area