

TRANSNATIONAL SPACES THROUGH LOCAL PLACES

Mexican Immigrants in Albuquerque (New Mexico)

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Even though a large part of empirical research has focused on particular localities, literature on transnational migration has neglected the role of place in the construction or permanence of transnational ties between Mexico and the United States. This article explores how relevant the place (i.e., constructions and representations of places, as well as developing a sense of place) is to understanding migration processes and decisions among Mexican immigrants in Albuquerque (New Mexico). Methodologically, the article is based on qualitative research in the Mexican community in Albuquerque, and it focuses on analysis of immigrants' mental maps and spatial discourses. The article concludes that immigrants identify with places at macro (national) as well as micro levels. At the macro level, ideas on Mexico and the United States are key to understanding immigrants' intentions regarding length of stay. Yet the strongest senses of place are found at the micro level. Here, identification with public spaces is associated with radical changes in the immigrants' lives.

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 (Goldin 1999; Rouse 1991). Indeed, the transnational approach implies a radical overturning of geographical concepts of migration (e.g., place of birth, place of origin, or place of destination) that are left behind by more ambiguous (yet more analytically challenging) social spaces. Transmigrants take actions, make decisions, feel concerns, and develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously (Faist 1999; Glick Schiller et al. 1992). Migration takes place in global spaces with multiple dimensions composed of interlinking subspaces which are both limitless and occasionally discontinuous (Kearney 1995). Furthermore, migrants create fluid, transnational spaces, which are defined as both a social terrain that reflects migrants' bi-culturality and a fragmented, diffused geographical reality (Rouse 1991).

Embedded in the theoretical literature on transnational migration are two assumptions about "space." First, transnational communities do not have precise

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geographical limits but instead are created in “de-territorialized nation-states” (Basch et al. 1994), “delocalized transnations” (Appadurai 1996), “hyperspaces” (Gupta and Ferguson 1992), “third spaces” (Bhabha 1994), and “ethnoscapes” (Appadurai 1991) that challenge the very essence of the nation-state (Kearney 1991). Second, Mexico-U.S. transnational communities are social and cultural constructs (Goldring 1996; Rouse 1992). These socially constructed communities have also been described as “imagined” (Chavez 1994), as composed of transnational families (Chavez 1992; Palerm 2002), or in terms of circular movements (Goldring 1992; Rouse 1991), among others.

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 localities (e.g., municipalities or cities) within specific nation-states (for examples, see Goldring 1992; Rouse 1991; Smith 1994). These two places (one in Mexico and the second in the United States) are interconnected by intense social, economic, and even political ties which translate into the circulation of people, goods, ideas, and money. These same interactions take place in “neutral” spaces and flow in both directions. These places may be conceived of as sites of resistance, in which cultural hybridity, transnational practices, and overlapping identities constitute counter-hegemonic practices and discourses (e.g., Kearney 1991).

While studies on U.S.-Mexico transnational migration have often reduced “place” to a mere container, a setting in which social processes occur, some empirical research has recognized migration processes in territorial contexts. By the mid-1980s, Mines and Massey (1985) had already pointed out that the way in which a migration circuit is organized strongly depends on the characteristics of the locality of origin. In their empirical research on two Zacatecas municipalities (Guadalupe and Las Animas), they found that whereas the Las Animas migrant network was dominated by long-term, even permanent immigration in specific U.S. sister communities, Guadalupe out-flows eventually created a legal shuttle community. Similarly Cohen (2004), in his ethnographic research on Oaxaca, found that the proximity to an urban center, in this case Oaxaca City, decreased the probability of emigrating to the U.S. The remarkable findings demonstrate that in many rural areas it was easier to migrate to the United States than to Mexico City (because of poor transportation networks) or even to Oaxaca City (because of a lack of strong social networks). As further evidence of the role of territorial attachment, Cohen (2004) showed the resilience of social networks among Oaxacans, finding that only 10% of migrants eventually cut their ties with those remaining behind and ceased sending remittances. From a journalistic point of view, Martínez (2003) relates the road trip of a family from Cherán (Michoacán) to Missouri’s tomato sector, California’s agricultural area, and the Wisconsin slaughterhouses. Several aspects related to the concept of territory arose, including the role of the border and local social networks. From a different perspective, Menjívar (2000) illustrated how Salvadoran social networks dissolved when faced with harsh living and

working conditions in San Francisco. She argued that hostile immigration policies, shrinking economic opportunities, and resource-poor communities made assistance between migrants conditional and uneven, consequently deflating the expectations of both new immigrants and the relatives who preceded them.

Even if the relevance of territory has been recognized in previous empirical studies, the specific role of place as an immigrant's social construct remains unexplored. This paper argues that the construction of place plays a vital role in preserving (or not) transnational ties, as well as influencing immigrants' intentions to stay (or return). Of special interest is the concept of "lived space," which refers to living spaces as well as to the constructions and representations of places made by immigrants in their process of adaptation to the United States. This nonlinear process may involve the acceptance or rejection of ideas or values associated with places and eventually lead to the development of a sense of belonging in the destination country (i.e., a sense of place). Specifically the article analyzes the relevance of Mexican immigrants' "sense of place" in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in order to explain migration processes and decisions. The underlying argument is that the way in which places are constructed and represented by migrants may play a crucial role in migration decision-making, as well as in establishing transnational or local social networks. The relevance of this research is evident in the systematic neglect of the role of "place" in the literature on transnational migration and its possible implications for migration decision-making.

FROM "LIVED SPACE" TO "SENSE OF PLACE"

The humanistic approach in geography has been used extensively in work on "place" and "space." Space has been characterized as general, as opposed to the particularity of place (Tuan 1974). Space is also often understood as commanded or controlled, whereas place is lived or experienced (Taylor 1999). Linking both concepts, French geographers refer to "lived space" (*espace vécu*) as a new conception of space that considers not only materiality but also subjective experiences in everyday life (Claval 1999; Frémont 1999). It includes emotions, feelings, memories, motivations, preferences, dreams, fears, and wishes. Furthermore this concept considers that representations of space are influenced by the place of residence, frequented areas, and by the characteristics and experiences of individuals (e.g., education, cultural values). From this perspective, the materiality of space is inseparable from the diverse representations that are constructed in order to interpret it (Ortega Valcárcel 2000).

The concept of "lived space" is related to that of "place." Places exist not only as physical entities but also as a result of people's different experiences. Thus places are full of meanings and encompass an existential dimension, an emotional link with the human being. People's lives occur in and interact with concrete spaces with well-defined attributes (Tuan 2003).

In an increasingly unequal global world that is conceived of as a space of flows (more so than a space of territories), places are reevaluated and acquire a greater role in providing security and assurance for individual identities. Massey

(1994) suggests that the reconceptualization and reassignment of meaning to places as a result of globalization processes should avoid restricting the concept to identity-exclusive positions. She argues that assumptions of fixed static places as limited by boundaries with particular connotations should be overcome. By contrast, she proposes that places consist of the complex intersection of processes, social relations, and understandings integrated at different scales, from the local to the global (Massey 1994). From this perspective, places are not static but fluid and dynamic, and consequently, in places, identities find themselves in a continuous process of formation and transformation.

According to this process of identity construction, the concept of “sense of place” conceives the notion of place as a social construct or a subjectivization. The concept is analytically powerful as it transforms *space*, understood as a generic abstraction, into *place* as a result of the actions and experiences of the individuals (Massey 1995). The sense of place, built upon everyday life experience and subjective feelings, can be of such intensity that it becomes a central element in the construction of the individual identity (Rose 1995). Its counterpart, expressed by the idea of placelessness, is related to the lack of meaning of places and a certain loss of authenticity. Globalization, the culture of consumption, and high mobility have created standardized, atemporal spaces which lack, in principle, any emotional connotations (such as commercial malls, theme parks, or airports: Arefi 1999; Relph 1976).

There is a long tradition of empirical studies on sense of place in human geography (see, for instance, Crang 1998; Massey 1995; Rose 1995; Sack 2001). Yet while it has been extensively examined in the geographical literature, the role of the place in migration studies remains largely unexplored (for exceptions see Yeoh and Khoo 1998, whose research focuses on skilled immigrants in Singapore; Nagel 2005, on gendered constructions of places by immigrants; or Mendoza and Ortiz 2006, on representations of Mexico City by skilled Spanish immigrants). This gap is surprising, as migrants’ decision-making may be heavily influenced by their ideas about places. Moreover, in the case of U.S.-Mexico migration, representations and images of places which may be based on prevailing First/Third World stereotypes (e.g., USA/Mexico) may be of such intensity that they could explain migrants’ intentions to stay or return, as suggested in Vila’s (2000) ethnographic research on El Paso–Juárez.

METHODOLOGY

This article is based on qualitative data gathered during extensive fieldwork in the city of Albuquerque (New Mexico) which was carried out in July–September 2005. I conducted 21 in-depth, structured interviews with Mexican nationals who currently live permanently in Albuquerque, and four more interviews with key informants. Although the immigrants were contacted opportunistically, I attempted to get a balanced “sample” of Mexicans, interviewing men and women, as well as professional and manual workers in equal numbers (Table 1). The interviews were preceded by a questionnaire to collect labor and migration trajectories.

TABLE 1
Profile of the interviewed Mexican immigrants

No.	Sex	Birth Year	1st USA Entry	Mexican State of Origin	Current Work	Map of Albuquerque
1	M	1965	1982	Chihuahua	Construction worker	Squared city with personal elements
2	M	1980	2003	Chihuahua	Mexican consulate clerical worker	Functional, squared city
3	F	1967	2001	Sinaloa	UNM clerical worker	Squared city with personal elements
4	F	1972	1995	Veracruz	Teacher	Everyday city
5	M	1951	1978	Chihuahua	Cleaning worker	Unshaped city divided by Central Avenue
6	F	1960	1985	Zacatecas	Site facilitator/ Supermarket employee	Squared city with personal elements
7	F	1969	1999	Chihuahua	Cleaner/Restaurants	Particular plaza
8	M	1948	1988	Chihuahua	Cleaning worker	No drawing
9	F	1976	2001	Jalisco	Caretaker	Roads and streets, plus personal elements
10	F	1973	1986	Chihuahua	Teacher	Everyday city
11	M	1966	1997	Jalisco	Construction worker	Main roads and personal elements
12	M	1959	1996	DF	Manager in transnational corporation	Mountains and river
13	M	1974	1985	DF	Journalist	Rio Grande, Old Town, and personal elements
14	M	1972	1991	Jalisco	Mechanic	No drawing
15	M	1954	1978	DF	Employer	Functional, squared city
16	F	1945	1970	Guanajuato	University professor	Main roads, mountains, and river
17	M	1959	1991	Chihuahua	Student/Part-time worker	Unshaped city plus mountains
18	F	1979	2005	Chihuahua	Housewife	Particular commercial mall
19	F	1960	2000	Chihuahua	Restaurant worker	No drawing
20	F	1956	1994	Durango	Hotel cleaner	Church at Chimayó (100 miles north of Albuquerque)
21	F	1972	1995	Jalisco	UNM clerical worker	Sunset

DF = Mexico City

The 21 interviews, which were conducted in Spanish and lasted at least one hour, were structured around three research lines (work, social life, and geography). Mexican immigrants were asked about their experiences of and feelings about different places (i.e., the city of Albuquerque, her/his particular neighborhood, the U.S./Mexico border area, their place of origin), as well as views on their stay in the United States (i.e., if they see it as a temporary or a permanent stay). Interviewees were also asked to draw a map of the city of Albuquerque, which proved to be a difficult task for some of them. Two interviewees even refused to do so, claiming that they lacked adequate drawing skills. The request was intentionally left open in order not to interfere with people's beliefs and ideas of the city. Mental maps indicate how the city is represented in spatial terms. These spatial representations may be composed of organizing elements which are central to people's lives (or may lack any element that defines a place). Moreover, mental maps are an amalgam of information and interpretation which reflects not only what an individual knows about the places but also how he/she feels about them (De Castro 1997; Ley 2000).

This article specifically focuses on the geographical aspects of the research. First, it revolves around the interpretation of immigrants' views on the city of Albuquerque through the analysis of mental maps and spatial discourses. Second, it examines the particular importance of the immigrants' discourses and views on the United States and Mexico as nations. The underlying assumption is that the representation of places may be framed by prevailing ideas of nations. Before presenting an analysis of the interviews, in the following section I analyze the patterns of geographical concentration or dispersal of Mexican immigrants in Albuquerque. From these data it seems clear that feelings of familiarity (i.e., stronger senses of places) are more intense in areas in which people from one's own national origin reside (even if this familiarity is not always characterized by positive tones, as is seen below).

THE MEXICAN "COMMUNITY" IN ALBUQUERQUE

Albuquerque is not a major destination for Mexican migration. Interviews with key informants in the Mexican consulate revealed that although there is a long history of Mexican migration to the city, which dates back to the late 1800s with the construction of railroads, the relatively low wages in Albuquerque (or even New Mexico) compared with the rest of the United States do not make the city an attractive permanent destination for current migrants. Rather it is a city of passage to destinations in Texas or the East Coast. As one key informant in the Mexican consulate noted,

New Mexico is a poor state with few services. There is tourism in Santa Fe, where the Mexicans work, but they live in La Española. Also [there are Mexicans] in Farmington's oil fields, or in farming in southern New Mexico. There are no big firms. The wages are not high. If anybody wants to risk staying in the USA, they will go for a higher wage. I feel that the Mexicans are incidentally here because they either need to pay the *coyote*, have no money to continue their trip elsewhere, or have relatives or friends [here].

According to 2003 estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau, 77,063 Mexicans resided in the city of Albuquerque, with an annual growth rate for this sector as high as 3.9% in the period 2000–2003 (Table 2).¹ In relative terms, the Mexican population constituted 16.4% of the total population of the city in 2003, which remains fairly similar to the 1990 figure. By contrast, for the foreign-born population as a whole, Table 2 shows a higher growth rate for the 2000–2003 period than for 1990–2000. These data suggest that Albuquerque has attracted other nationalities apart from Mexicans in recent years.

TABLE 2
Mexican population in Albuquerque, New Mexico

	1990		2000		2003		Annual Growth Rate	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	1990–2000	2000–2003
Population	384736	100	448607	100	469426	100	1.5	1.5
Hispanos	131465	34.2	179075	39.9	202054	43	3.1	4
Mexicans	70145	18.2	68537	15.3	77063	16.4	-0.2	3.9
Language (no English)	90209	25.3	116412	27.9	115761	26.5	2.6	-0.2
Foreign born	21310	5.5	39762	8.9	49802	10.6	6.2	7.5

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census

With regard to the geographical patterns of residence, Mexicans are mainly found in Albuquerque's southwestern area, plus pockets around Central Avenue. Specifically, the 2000 census data by tract illustrate a large Mexican presence (greater than 40% of its population) in the Isleta/Bridge, South Valley, Zuni/Louisiana, and East San José areas (Figure 1). By contrast, Mexicans constituted less than 10% of the population in Albuquerque's northeast, where non-Hispanic populations are dominant.

Finally it is important to note that New Mexico has a large non-Mexican Hispanic population. As pointed out by Arreola (2004), in New Mexico some 428,000 respondents to the 2000 Census marked "Other Hispanic," more so than those who declared themselves "Mexican." These Hispanics who do not consider themselves "Mexicans" instead trace their roots back to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Spanish colonial settlement of New Mexico (Arreola 2004). In the case of Albuquerque, the areas with a high concentration of Hispanic population (which includes both "Mexicans" and "Other Hispanic") are similar to the Mexican barrios, with the exceptions of areas of new immigration, such as East San José. The city shows a clear east-west divide by ethnicity in which non-Hispanos occupy roughly the eastern part of the city, and Hispanics the western one (Mendoza 2005).

IDEALIZING NATURE: USE OF THE SYMBOLIC SPACE

The city of Albuquerque lies in the middle of an extensive semi-arid territory which dominates northern New Mexico. The Sandia Mountains flank its eastern part while the Rio Grande winds through Albuquerque's west. These two

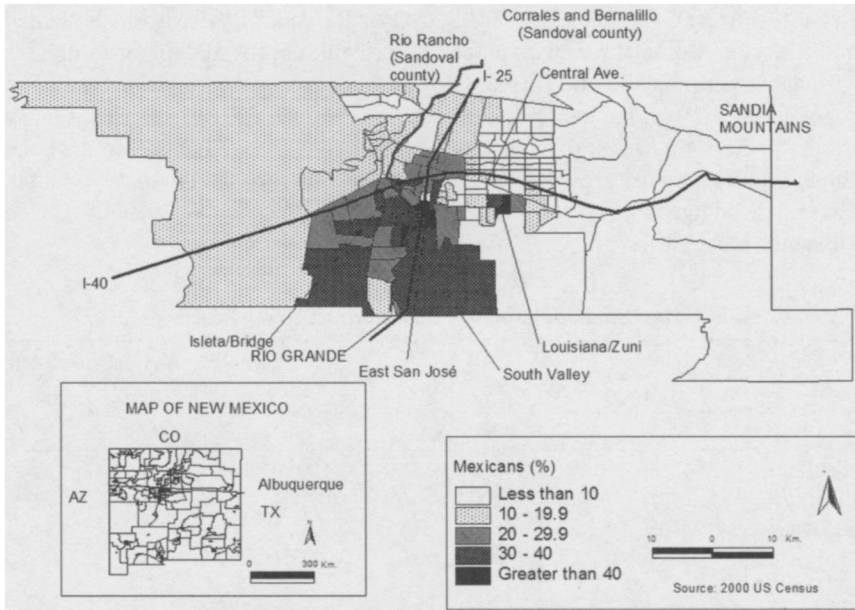


Figure 1. Albuquerque (Bernalillo County) census districts showing percentage of population self-identified as “Mexican” (based on 2000 census).

geographical features provide the city with an extensive valley in which the original village was located (Price 2003).

The mountains, valley, and river are relevant landscape traits that most of the interviewees mentioned in their spatial discourse. For one interviewee, this was Albuquerque (albeit for most of the immigrants interviewed, these characteristics were incorporated into more complex maps). Salvador, an executive director of a Mexican firm, born in 1959 in Mexico City, said that the Sandia Mountains, the Rio Grande, and the Valley *were* the city (Figure 2). In his own words, “Mountains, river, and valley. These are the first things to come to mind, because these are the things that I first see and these elements define this city.”

For Salvador, the relevance of the landscape is not related to “nature” (e.g., outdoor activities), as he prefers to stay at home on weekends to work in his carpentry workshop. In contrast to being in Mexico City, Salvador appreciates Albuquerque’s quietness and its harmony with the environment. Moreover, the landscape offers him an identifying element that links him to his city of origin: “I see the mountains from my house. In Mexico City I could also see the Ajusco.”

Similarly Catalina, born in the city of Veracruz in 1972 and married to a U.S. citizen, starts her mental map with a description of the landscape:

Here are the Sandia Mountains. Here the houses start, very big and nice. . . . The city is divided by Central and, let me think, the I-25. This is the area [northeast, near the mountains] where I want to live, and this is the area [southwest] where I live now.

Here is Bridge Street, the bridge and water. This is the Rio Grande. Every day when I go from home to work, which is around here, I go across the river. As I told you, I love trees, water, something. This is the city.

These two interviewees outlined the importance of nature for their quality of life. These ideas were present in nearly all the immigrants' interviews. Nature becomes an abstract, pastoral, aesthetic consideration of the landscape with no relation to the immigrants' everyday lives or even to outdoor activities. In this sense the natural geography of Albuquerque contributes to an atmosphere, character, and even sense of place for some immigrants. Similarly, Nogué i Font (1993) has argued that the basis for the identification of Garrotxa (Catalonia, Spain) as a distinctive place by local farmers and painters stems from their experiences and feelings about Garrotxa landscapes. More generally, some phenomenological geographers argue that landscape is synergistic, its interconnections creating an environment which is far more than a sum of its material parts. Individuals interpret landscapes through interconnected layers of knowledge, awareness, experience, and sensibility (Coates and Seamon 1984; Seamon 1986). Interestingly, however, the tensions described by Hirsch (1995) did not emerge in the interviews. He suggests that the landscape emerges from a tension between idealized or imagined settings (i.e., "background") against which the "foreground" of everyday, real, ordinary life is cast (Hirsch 1995). For the interviewees, however, landscape remained a largely imagined background with no relation to everyday, real life.

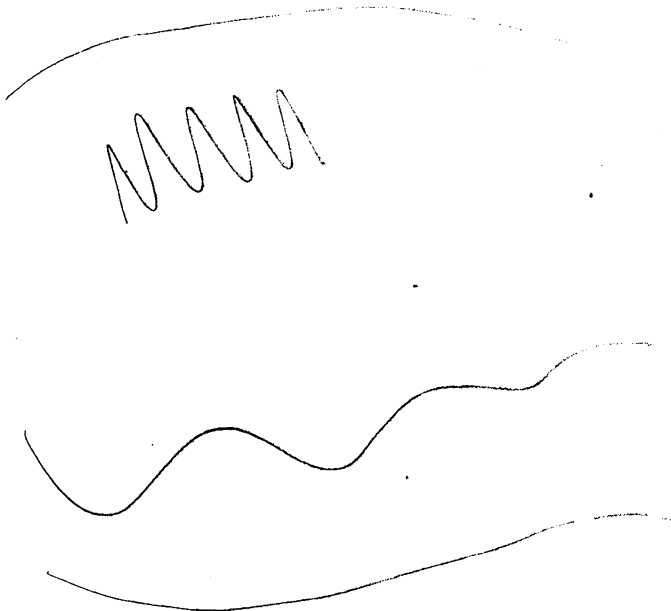


Figure 2. Salvador's map of Albuquerque: "Mountains, river, and valley."

ALBUQUERQUE: A "SQUARED," HIGHLY SEGREGATED CITY

According to interviewees' mental maps and spatial discourses, the city of Albuquerque has no clear limits, and no map accurately depicts the current shape of the city itself. Partly this is because the metroplex stretches north into the areas of Rio Rancho, Corrales, and Bernalillo and has a more dispersed pattern to the south and west (Figure 1). However, even in the absence of well-defined limits, those interviewed had a clearly defined image of Albuquerque. Most of the Mexicans identified the four quadrants into which the city is divided, seemingly by the two freeways and Central Avenue. Specifically, out of 19 interviewees who drew an Albuquerque map, five chose a "squared" map, with three focusing on freeways and main streets (Table 2). For instance, Carlos, a young professional working for a Mexican firm, drew a very clear square divided into four quadrants that, according to his view, identified the city (Figure 3). In his own words,

My idea [of Albuquerque] is a very well-drawn square, divided into four quadrants by Central [Ave] and the two freeways. When I first arrived, I was told that every street goes north-south or east-west. This way I don't get lost. . . . The city is growing north, towards Rio Rancho and Bernalillo. The western part of the city is Mexican. The rich live in the northwest, and the poor in the southwest. On the other side, in the northeast, is the casino, the country club, the big houses. The American community lives there. The Mexicans are mainly in the South Valley.

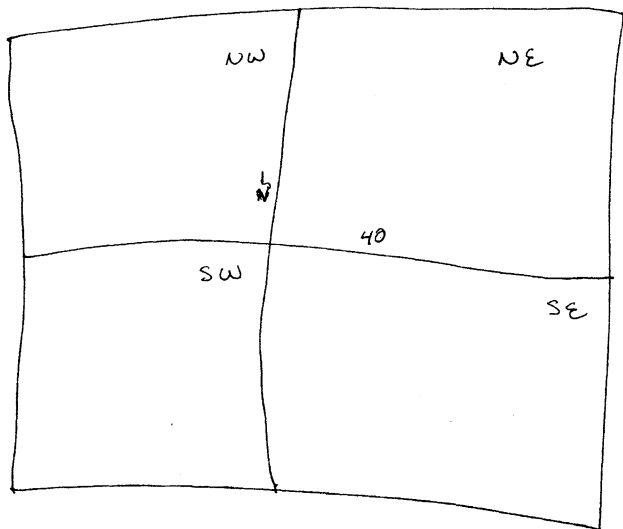


Figure 3. Carlos's representation of the city "squared."

All street addresses in Albuquerque must include a quadrant designation (NE, NW, SE, SW). Without this designation, 301 Louisiana Blvd., for example, could be either 3 blocks north or 3 blocks south of Central Ave. As discussed in this paper, these designations have deeper meanings.

In his map the city lacks any defining element. It is a neutral space in which neither workplace nor home is located. Albuquerque's perfectly drawn squares divided by two freeways reflect Carlos's image of a well-organized, functional city which corresponds to four sectors of society (the north-south divide is the rich-poor one, and the west-east marks the Hispano-Anglo division). He described a city residentially segregated by race and wealth.

Even if Carlos does not attach strong feelings to Albuquerque, he lives there in a different way to that of his native Chihuahua. For instance, he plays golf ("an extremely elitist, expensive sport back in Mexico, but quite normal here"). He also visits bars and discos, though "always in the northern part of the city and [along] Central. I don't go to the South that often." Such an oversimplified image of the city does not reflect a limited use of public spaces. It appears that his image corresponds to a place which is seen as temporary, as he does not know how long he will stay in Albuquerque, and is not particularly worried about the future. In this particular case, migration coincides with a change in lifestyle (before he moved to Albuquerque, to a friend's apartment, he had been living at his parents').

Similarly, Mónica depicted the city as a square divided into four quadrants (Figure 4). Born in Zacatecas in 1960, she is employed as a site facilitator during the week and in a supermarket on the weekend. Unlike Carlos, however, she adds numerous personal elements of interpretation (e.g., a dollar symbol, prison bars, a sad face). She personalizes the city according to her experiences and feelings.

In her spatial discourse, Mónica outlined her limited knowledge of the city, restricted to the areas that she frequents. However, similar to Carlos she had a clear idea of where the rich, poor, and marginal areas of the city are. In her own words,

I don't know the city. I just know what I need. Albuquerque is divided by the freeway and Central [Ave]. This is NE, NW, SE and SW. . . . This is the area [northeast] where I live [sad face]. This is the crime and prostitution area [she draws prison bars]. Here are the mountains. . . . When I first arrived, I looked for a school, a church, a supermarket, the basics. This is the work area, on the other side of the city [cross]. This is poor [area]. . . . Generally speaking, the city is divided in the rich area [draws \$], the poor one [marks on map] where the crime is, and the poor one where there is no money. . . . It's sad when it comes to crime, dirtiness, and so on.

Two general points arise from these interviews. First, as perceptions of spatial organization, these mental maps show how people analyze and organize their space in Albuquerque, and how these, in turn, enable individuals to locate themselves in relative terms and orient themselves in the accomplishment of spatial tasks or journeys within the city. Research on Mexico City mental maps delivered similar results. Both Alba (2004) and Mendoza and Ortiz (2006) found that the city's main roads (Insurgentes, Reforma, Periférico) were organizing elements in mental maps and spatial discourses. Second, Albuquerque representations are directly related to immigrants' intentions of staying in the city. Carlos's oversimplified image of Albuquerque corresponds to a place that he sees as temporary, and

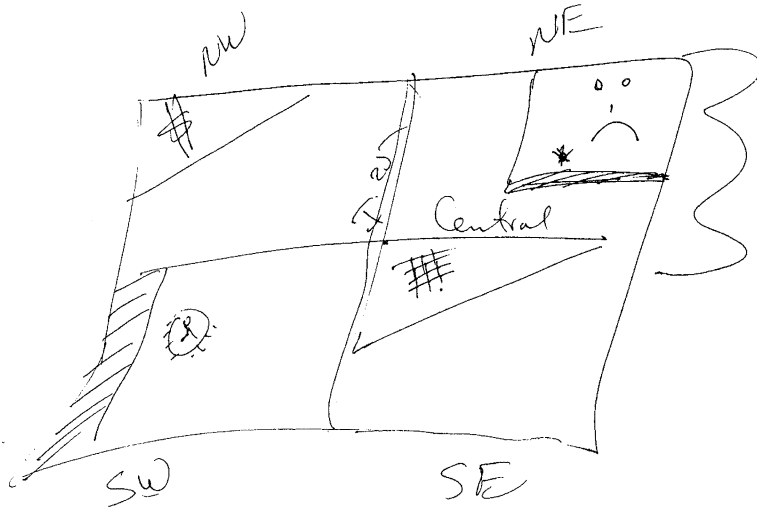


Figure 4. Mónica's map identifies rich, poor, and high-crime areas as well as the area where she lives.

Mónica's negative images capture an overall feeling of her almost 20 years in the U.S., together with her intention of returning to Mexico. In the interview she explained that she had not bought a house in Albuquerque because she has always seen her stay as temporary and was instead building a house in her community of origin. In this case, negative ideas of Albuquerque (and the lack of knowledge of the city and, consequently, a limited use of the space) are intrinsically linked to intentions to stay or to return. Certainly "places possess a marked capacity for triggering acts of self-reflection, inspiring thoughts about who one presently is, or memories of who one used to be, or musings on who one might become" (Basso 1996:55)

PLACE HAS NO SCALE

Unlike in the previous interviews, the next participants picked out particular places to which they attached strong emotions. As Rose (1995) has pointed out, strong feelings of identifying with a place may occur at different scales. A room, a house, or a garden may provide people with intense feelings of belonging, safety, and refuge. After personal use, everyday interaction, and even identification processes, individuals transform home, plazas, neighborhoods, or particular landscapes into places that are full of meanings. Such is the case with Beatriz, who was born in Ciudad Juárez in 1969. Like Mónica, she had two jobs (in a restaurant and a cleaning firm) and is divorced with two children. Beatriz drew a very detailed map of the Mesa Verde Park (Figure 5), stating, "this map means a lot to me." The head-start school her younger daughter attends and the community center are located in this park. Beatriz expressed herself as follows:

In this community center I was taught computing, English. . . . My daughter loves this park. She met her friends here when she was in the primary school.

. . . This place brings me back a lot of memories. I met all my friends here. I still go to this park, even if there is another one near the place where I'm living now. . . . We always go to this park, my daughters and I. This is the park for weekends, I love it. I feel safe, I sit down and I breathe comfortably, my daughters have fun, and I meet up with my friends.

This park means a lot to her because she associates it with her daughters' school, with friends, and with education. Beatriz enrolled herself in English and computing courses in the community center which is also located here; she was an active member in her elder daughter's primary school, and also made friends here. Through these experiences associated with the park, she became progressively aware of her rights



Here start

Figure 5. Beatriz's map is very small both in scale and in actual size.

as a woman, eventually provoking a marriage break-up and a painful divorce. Despite that, Beatriz defined her experience in the U.S. as positive and fruitful. Describing the park as cozy and relaxing epitomizes all these positive feelings, as well as an idea of personal maturity and joy. This place defines a new life in the United States, characterized by positive tones despite her divorce, her irregular situation in the country, and her responsibilities as a single mother. In her discourse, she stressed differences with past experiences in Mexico. "In Mexico women are obedient. They have no rights," Beatriz said. The process of empowerment linked to particular places ("empowering place") is also seen in contemporary Melanesia (Rodman 2003) and Ciudad Juárez (México; Wright 1999).

A different positive experience is described by Aurora, a recently arrived 26-year-old woman. Her main reason for migrating to the U.S. was to rejoin her husband, who was temporarily incapacitated at the time of the interview. As a result, in the three months that she had been living in Albuquerque, Aurora had to drive a car, get to know the city, and become involved in school activities. All of this was cause for excitement. She particularly appreciates the inexpensive shopping options. Consequently, her mental map of Albuquerque consists of nothing more than the Rio Bravo Wal-Mart (Figure 6). It was not only a question of shopping choices, but a question of fewer domestic chores, stating "everything here is easier. Domestic chores are less stressful." Fast food, electric appliances, and shopping malls have become symbols of modernity for the interviewee. Moreover, they imply a more rational use of time and, consequently, a more enjoyable stay in Albuquerque. Aurora stated that she would only return to Mexico if "sent back home," referring to her illegal status in the United States.

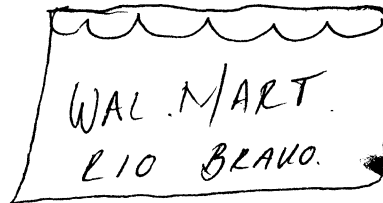


Figure 6. Aurora's map, also small-scale.

These drawings reflect the spatial discourses articulated through the 19 mental maps. The city of Albuquerque provides immigrants with a tenuous sense of place. For them, the city is deprived of historic landmarks, such as Route 66, the Camino Real, or Hispanic emblematic buildings such as the National Hispanic Cultural Center. Similarly, the Downtown and Old Town areas, the latter containing a “Mexican” plaza and New Mexican adobe houses, are mentioned only marginally and rarely included in mental maps. Yet it is these city elements which confer a strong sense of place for New Mexicans. In contrast the roads, freeways, and main streets are always mentioned, emphasizing that Albuquerque is a well-organized, “grid-like” city, a city of flows. Instead, the areas that provide a sense of place are specific sites disconnected from the traditional, global idea of a city. Parks, supermarkets, or churches are filled with meanings for some interviewees. The spatial discourses surrounding these places are very sophisticated and, in some cases, are associated with radical life changes.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD/BARRIO DIVIDE

During the interview Mexican immigrants were also asked for opinions of their residential areas. Many immigrants cannot name the neighborhood itself; instead they merely indicated the city quadrant. More specifically, among the interviewees only Mexican areas appear to have a distinctive name (Barelas, La Mesa, Zuni, Isleta, East San José, and the South Valley). This is not the case for non-Latino, “white” areas, with the exception of Rio Rancho (another locality) and Nob Hill, an area along Route 66 (Central Ave.) that is the subject of an active publicity campaign by business associations in order to stress its particularity as a center for business, shopping, and recreation.

Yet what is clearly identified by the interviewees is the ethnic composition of their residential areas. Comments such as “I live in a zone where there are no Mexicans” or “you can find a lot of Mexicans there” were common. The ethnic divide (non-Latino “whites” and Hispano/Mexican areas), which may be understood in spatial segregation terms (see also Figure 1), is typically identified by immigrants. However, it is surprising that some key informants stress that there are no Mexican barrios in Albuquerque, unlike in Los Angeles or Chicago. Reasons for this may stem from the fact that the Mexican population is “diluted” into the local Hispano population, even if clear differences between the two groups were perceived by those interviewed.

In this regard, immigrants who reside in non-Latino areas (which are located roughly in the eastern part of the city) do not display a strong attachment to their places of residence. This can be exemplified by both Maria, a clerical worker at the University of New Mexico, and Salvador, the executive director of a Mexican firm. Maria explained:

There are no Mexicans where I live [a gated community in Nob Hill]. It’s completely American. I don’t know my neighbors. They move constantly. Neighbors are not like in Mexico. They just don’t care. They don’t nose around like in Mexico.

Salvador introduces a new twist by observing that he did not interact much with his neighbors in Mexico either. Consequently, Mexico's images of neighborhood solidarity and its opposite, interfering in private lives, may be less relevant for urban professional Mexican immigrants. In Salvador's words: "Rio Rancho [where he lives] is a suburb, but in Mexico City I also lived in a suburb. The neighbors were not very friendly down there either."

This latter interviewee shed light on the idea that for highly skilled Mexican professionals U.S. daily life may be very similar to the one they had in Mexico. Differences in quality of life are felt more intensively for manual or unskilled workers (seen above in the case of Aurora's satisfaction with the extensive shopping options in the States). Surprisingly, the literature on U.S.-Mexico migration has paid little attention to qualified Mexican inflows to the U.S. (for exceptions see Alarcón 2000; Gurcak et al. 2001; Lowell 2001) and, even in research that did, the analysis neglected to consider the idea of "place."

In contrast, immigrants who resided in Hispanic barrios had more passionate opinions and mixed feelings about their residential areas. Many interviewees expressed positive, close relationships with neighbors whom they knew and occasionally met socially. Moreover, the number of Hispanics in a particular area was decisive for some immigrants, such as Mónica, in choosing where to live. She explains,

When I first arrived, I was homeless. You're going to be surprised by my story. When I arrived, I had my car and my children. That's it. . . . I broke up with my husband, a Mexican, from Nayarit, and I ran away. . . . We lived in Nebraska. I left Nebraska and I headed for the border. Why Albuquerque? Because it's the border. . . . Why did I choose this area to live? Because when I first arrived, homeless, I asked where the Hispanics were, and somebody sent me here. I arrived here and I'm still here.

Mónica stressed how important it was for her to be a part of the community or to live in an area in which the residents share a similar cultural background. It is both the main reason for her choice of residential area and vital for understanding Mónica's sense of belonging, which in turn is reflected by a strong sense of solidarity (see also Fenster 2004; Ortiz 2004).

Despite this, Mónica, who defines herself strongly as Mexican, maintains a negative opinion of her *paisanos*. When she moved into the block of apartments where she currently lives, Mónica tried to teach English to her neighbors, while her two sons took care of the neighbors' children. When she saw her initiative fail, she associated this with her neighbors' attitudes. "[If] they don't want to progress, what can I say?" This discourse in some interviews on the lack of effort among immigrants implies that Mexicans themselves are responsible for their marginal social situation. Her opinion contrasts with the image of the United States as a country of opportunities, which arose either explicitly or implicitly in almost all the discourses.

Similarly, Catalina, born in the port of Veracruz in 1972 and a Spanish teacher, enjoys living in the western part of the city, an area with a strong Mexican presence

(Figure 1). She appreciates it because of the friendly relationship she enjoys with her neighbors. However, at the same time, she believes that Hispanics do not behave in the same way as “Anglos.” According to her,

I like it because there are a lot of Hispanos. My neighbors are Mexican. It's a married couple. Their little daughter tells me everything. . . . Her father is a mechanic and her mother works in a hospital. Lots of Latinos. I love it. I go to the local shop as in Mexico, but by car. Everybody uses their car. Between Coors and Central you'll find all the Mexicans you want. I find Mexican products. I can cook Mexican. I love it. You can find everything, tortillas, bread.

What about any problems with your neighborhood?

There are a lot of Mexicans. They don't fix things. I'm afraid of dogs. Many people just let them go, as they are used to in their home countries. Dogs foul around. These things just don't happen in Chicago or California. I don't like that, they just don't care. The Fourth of July was more than one month ago, and they still throw fireworks. Yesterday one fell down in my patio. Apart from that, the view is wonderful, and I love the food and the atmosphere.

Catalina would like to move to the northern part of the city where she believes life would be quieter, as certain “values” would be observed. Catalina preferred the values that are associated with U.S. culture, rather than those that are supposedly Mexican. Similarly Gustavo, born in Ciudad Guzmán, Jalisco, in 1972, moved from the Louisiana/Zuni area (Figure 1) to an area “less Mexican.” At the time of the interview Gustavo was living in the Zuni area again with his *compadre*, as he had broken up with his wife.

I lived with my wife in Zuni for many years. But we moved out to an area near Coors. That was much better because there weren't as many *paisanos*. In areas where people of your same *raza* live, there is always someone who does not behave respectfully towards women. They are used to that. We moved to a 100% American area. We liked the quietness. Now I'm living in Zuni again since I divorced my wife. My *compadre* is helping me out.

How do you feel about the Zuni area?

It's not very good, because there are always people who drink, a lot of violence. Yesterday I saw a fight between two people. Cars run along Zuni Street as it were a *freeway*. They don't care about children.

These opinions reflect the argument that Mexican immigrants attach feelings to areas with high concentrations of Mexicans. They are not neutral spaces lacking connotations, as is the case for non-Latino zones. Their sense of place is reinforced by supportive, friendly relationships with neighbors (plus the fact that they

appreciate a certain re-creation of the Mexican way of life: e.g., shops). However, this sense of place is diminished by the problems in these areas. In immigrants' discourses, it is remarkable that these problems are not regarded as part of more general poverty issues or as structural characteristics of neighborhoods, but instead are related to the Mexicans themselves. Following this logic, immigrants would be responsible for the poor situation of Albuquerque's Latino areas. As Curtis (2004) pointed out for the Southeast Los Angeles industrial corridor, the *barrio* is a contradictory social space with a recurring dialectic of positive and negative qualities.

NATIONS AS PLACES

As Appadurai (2003:344) has said, "territorial tropes for the idea of the nation persist because our very ideas of cultural coherence have become imbricated with the commonsense of the nation." These tropes, in turn, reflect the different positions of nation-states in the contemporary world. The article argues that the construction and representations of particular places such as Albuquerque are heavily embedded with dominant images of nations. In the case of the United States and Mexico, this is an overarching dichotomy of First/Third World.

The interviews indicate that views on nations, more so than cities or neighborhoods, are important tools for understanding immigrants' intentions to stay (or return to Mexico). For the most part, these mental constructions are of such relevance that they overshadow (or even cancel out) images of cities or regions. For instance, Federico, born in Mexico City in 1974 and editor of a Spanish-language paper, expressed his views on Mexico as follows:

I could not live in Mexico any more. It's a part of my life that I want to forget. It's a psychological thing. I cannot explain it. I would not like my child to grow up in a Latin America country.

What do you not like?

Poverty. No, poverty, no, because we were not poor. We had a house, a car for my mother. But I believe that everything is more structured here, more comfortable, freer. We do not work so many hours here. Even *lunch* is at a different time. Everything just suits better here.

There is always a positive and a negative side in everything. The positive side of Mexico is television [he names a couple of programs from his childhood], the sweets [he says that when he feels homesick he goes to a Mexican supermarket to buy the sweets that he used to eat as a child], friends. But, there is another side, which is more difficult to face—religion. People are very curious. Why do they like gossiping so much? Gringos are not like that. It's something I like.

His idea of Mexico is imbued with (negative) opinions on family, community, and way of life, which are the three pillars of Mexican life according to most of the interviewed immigrants. This is not true in the case of Catalina—for her, "family is crucial." She and her husband unsuccessfully tried to establish an English school

in Veracruz because she wanted to live closer to her family. However, Catalina said in the interview that she could not live in Mexico anymore because of the country's discomforts, poor-quality services, poor shopping options and supermarkets, and problems associated with poverty. More than a specific place, experiences of and ideas about Mexico and the United States are key elements in understanding why Catalina does not wish to return to Mexico. In her discourse, the lack of comfort is consistent to the extent that it is her reason for staying in the United States. Yet the idea of comfort itself is based on personal experiences and expectations that may be articulated around preconceived ideas. Mexico is associated with underdevelopment and poverty whereas the United States is associated with comfort and development, notwithstanding the fact that Albuquerque, and New Mexico in general, are relatively poor areas of the United States. Similar conclusions were reached by Vila (2000) in his ethnographic research on El Paso/Ciudad Juárez. When asked if interviewees could identify the place in which different photographs on the U.S.-Mexico border were taken, they associated those that showed poverty and poor housing with the Mexican side of the border, which was not always the case.

By contrast, Mónica, who had plans to go back to Mexico, believed that her sisters in Mexico were better off than she is. She missed the Mexican way of life, especially her family. In accordance with her decision to return, she described her relationship with Mexico as follows:

If I can, I travel to Mexico six times a year. I just arrived in June, and in one week's time I'll go back to Zacatecas. I ask my sisters, "What will you do?" "We are organizing a baby shower." "Wait for me, I'll be there." Whatever the excuse, I go there. . . . I took my eldest son to Mexico in June. He is going to finish high school in Zacatecas. He did the third and the sixth year of primary school there.

Her relationship with Mexico is intense, illustrated by her trips to Zacatecas for no particular reason. Although Mónica's attachment to her country of origin is completely different from that of Federico or Catalina, these examples equally reveal a "forced transnationalism," with each wanting to live in a single national reality, either the United States or Mexico. Federico has negative images (closed, heavily influenced by religion, small apartments, miserable pensions, and overly curious people) whereas Mónica dreams of returning to Mexico, a completely idealized country where personal, social, and family relationships are more satisfactory.

Examples of the construction of transnational social fields as spaces of interaction stimulated by constant, back-and-forth movements of people, money, or commodities are rare among interviewees, apart from remittances. Only two interviewees out of 21 maintained a fluid relationship with both the United States and Mexico. For those interviewees, personal, family, and work relations could not be separated and were found equally in both countries. Gabriela, from Guanajuato, who retired from her job at the University of New Mexico, summarizes this "real" transnationalism:

I worked as a Spanish teacher for many years. Even when here in the States, I went back to Mexico in summer to teach Spanish, for my own pleasure. . . .

Do you travel frequently to Mexico?

Yes I do. Last year, for instance, I went for an examination; a second trip was with my students; a third one because of my research project. . . . I went to Mexico seven or eight times, I think. I go for work and for my family. I visit my family at the same time.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article I suggest that the concept of “place” should be taken more seriously in transnational migration studies. This paper has specifically explored the concepts of “lived space” and “sense of place.” The former includes living space, social space, and the values attached to both (Berdoulay 1989). The latter, while also built upon everyday life experience and subjective feelings, embraces a sense of belonging and identity as well (Rose 1995).

For many immigrants “lived spaces” are synonymous with living spaces. This is particularly true in the discourses on Albuquerque analyzed here, which were frequently reduced to freeways and avenues. Mónica’s statement, “I don’t know the city. I just know what I need,” captures this feeling. Albuquerque is systematically ignored by the interviewed Mexicans. When they refer to the city, it is only for descriptive purposes, the container in which everyday life occurs. Moreover in the mental maps all but one interviewee ignored the historical and symbolic Albuquerque landmarks (e.g., Old Town). This does not indicate that the interviewees do not attach any feelings to places. In fact, several women interviewed attached a strong sense to specific places in Albuquerque. This was the case of the supermarket, which epitomizes a certain idea of the American way of life; the church as a spiritual, relaxing retreat; or the park with all the connotations of a new, more independent life.

By contrast, in discourses on nations, immigrants associated negative ideas with Mexico (discomfort, poverty or low wages) which were stronger than the positive ones (family and friends, relationships, solidarity). Furthermore, whereas almost everyone agreed that life was easier in the United States, a significant minority of interviewees did not see the positive sides of social life in Mexico, which some even defined as oppressive. This is also seen in discourses about “Mexican” areas of Albuquerque, where inconveniences sometimes exceeded advantages. Thus the images of Mexico and the United States are of such intensity that they often mask representations of cities. Obviously a nation’s views have been forged through emigration and adaptation (or not) to the destination country and also depend heavily on immigrants’ characteristics. These representations come to generate fields of meanings and are used to justify immigrants’ decisions (e.g., intentions of staying or returning).

In relation to transnational studies, empirical evidence from Albuquerque shows that the construction of social fields across borders is far more complex

(and less ideal) that the reality usually depicted in transnational migration studies. In addition to an attachment to places, migration status, labor market position, or life cycle situation are very relevant for explaining the extent of immigrants' cross-border ties. Therefore, although additional research needs to be done, my fieldwork suggests that the probability of articulating truly transnational spaces is higher for highly skilled professionals than for manual workers, whose relationship with Mexico is mainly channeled through remittances. Finally, my research indicates that a large number of immigrants decide to either sever their ties with Mexico (and somehow integrate into the American melting pot) or return to Mexico in the near future. Real transnational lives are scarce among interviewees.

NOTES

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1. "Mexicans" refers here to "ethnicity," not nationality. In other words, irrespective of their current nationality, Mexicans are the Hispanic population who define themselves as Mexican.

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