2012

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A Comparative Analysis of Mexican-and European-Origin Immigration to the United States: Proposing an Interactive Colonization Theory

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Received December 2011; Accepted July 2012

Abstract
From the 1970s, Latin American immigration, mainly from Mexico, increased rapidly surpassing European migration in the 1980s for the first time in US history and now constituting over half of the total foreign-born population in the United States. In this paper, I compare this newer, Latin American wave of immigration to earlier, European waves and find that though a combination of push-pull and structural perspectives does much to explain the European experience, it fails to explain Mexican-origin migration and nature of incorporation. Therefore, I argue for an interactive colonization approach to understanding the uniqueness of the Mexican-origin immigration experience.

Keywords
Mexican Migration, Colonialism/Neocolonialism, Race/Class/Gender

From 1970 to 2010, Latin American immigration, particularly from Mexico, increased from 1.8 million (10%) to 20.5 million (53%) of the total foreign-born population of 38.5 million in the United States (Grieco and Trevelyan 2010:2). The four-decade, net-plus immigration from Mexico slowed around 2006 and may have possibly reversed in the past year (PEW Hispanic Center 2012:6,13). These trends have excited many scholars and policy makers seeking to understand the causes, experiences, and consequences of the largest and continuous immigration from Mexico, a third of the total foreign born (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Sassen 1988, 1996). Much of the scholarship relies uncritically on theories based largely on the European experience. This paper contests the generic application of traditional frameworks in explaining the causes of Mexican-origin migration and the form of

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incorporation into the United States. To this end, I compare the newer wave of immigration (predominately Mexican) in late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries to earlier ones (overwhelmingly European) in the mid-nineteenth through the twentieth century. This paper shows that Mexican-origin migration is rooted to neo-colonial/internal colonial domination and subjected to unjust borders violating human rights (Teyefi 2007:289–290; Falcón 2007:221).

Comparing the contexts of exiting and reception for both European- and Mexican-origin migrations and examining their general group incorporation trends, the paper shows that a combination of structural and push-pull perspectives explains the European experience but fails in explaining Mexican migration. These findings are significant because these frameworks are generally used to make sense of Mexican migration (Massey, Alarcón, Durand, and Gonzalez 1987; Massey et al. 2002), and frame human rights concerns as matters of economic development, subordinating the human rights and self-determination of indigenous people (Frezzo and Araghi 2007:11-12, 15).

To understand the Mexican-origin migration experience, one must recognize that Mexicans are generally indigenous, though racial-ethnic diversity and mestizaje are common among them (Aguirre Beltran 1972:234; Ochoa Serrano 1997:38; ScienceDaily 2010: May 3). Several historical, anthropological and other empirical studies inform this observation. Menchaca (1993: 591, 593–595) examined how US acts generally treated Mexicans as indigenous people denying them citizenship by birth and naturalization until the mid-twentieth century. Gamio (1930:197) described migrants in the 1920s as predominately indigenous and mestizos. Bonfil Batalla (1996:15–18, 45-58) problematized mestizaje as largely a de-indianization project in Mexico, and Leon-Portilla (1990:10) and Quijano (2000:541) elucidated how indigenous cultures were endangered within oppressive national contexts. After the 1910 Revolution, for instance, Mexico aggressively advanced a melting-pot ideology known as mestizaje, articulated by José Vasconcelos in La Raza Cosmica (1948), which sought to Mexicanize indigenous communities. Wolf (1959:44) documented that by the 1950s only about half the Mexican population maintained an indigenous language, though Mexican people remain very indigenous in many other forms, i.e., religious expression,

Mexican-origin people, in brief, have experienced colonial projects that have dislocated them from their lands, resources, and ethnic identities, and their experiences with incorporation into the modern nation reflect their continuous historical marginalization along racial-ethnic, gender, and class lines. I therefore propose an interactive colonization framework to explain Mexican migration, which highlights the historical dialectical relationships of domination shaping immigration to the United States.

PUSH-PULL

A common theory of immigration is the push-pull model. Its simplicity and alignment with the dominant philosophy of neoclassical economics make it intuitively popular, though not necessarily empirically or historically valid. Three core tenets form the theory’s explanation of migration (Massey et al. 2002). One, unequal distribution of resources (e.g., political, economic, and cultural) among global regions creates attractive regions and unattractive ones. Thus, good conditions pull people in, and bad ones push them out. Two, supply and demand market forces encourage migration. The US economy has jobs (i.e., agriculture, service, transportation) and needs workers, and the homeland has low wages and an abundance of unemployed and/or underemployed workers. Three, migrants are rational actors, who assess the costs and benefits of migration and ultimately decide whether or not to migrate. New economic theories elaborate the push-pull model by placing rational actors in a web of family and community relations that shape their decision to migrate (Massey et al. 2002; Yang 2011).

Assessment of Push-Pull Model

The push-pull model and its variants seem evident because they seem to capture a movement of people from a relatively poor region to a richer one, but upon closer examination one finds serious flaws. They do not explain why some regions fitting the conditions of
push-pull have emigration and others do not, as the Mexican and
European immigration comparison will demonstrate below. Further,
the push-pull models do not elaborate the historical origins of
resource differences between regions or elaborate the structural
relationships between the sending and the receiving societies that
precede the initial migrations (Gonzalez and Fernandez 2003;
Parreñas 2001; Portes and Rumbaut 1996). These omissions obscure
the causes of modern migration and fail to consider that the
differential regional conditions are interconnected (Bonacich and

Furthermore, push-pull models do not explain the
“differential inclusion” of foreign laborers and the racism and sexism
that underpin their exploitation (Espiritu 2003; Gonzalez 2006). For
instance, migrants are not necessarily absorbed as cheaper labor
through supply and demand economic principles, e.g., shortages of
workers do not translate into better wages in farm labor (Barajas
2009:108–109; Ngai 2004:106–109); and immigrants are not all
devalued and exploited in the same way, contingent on race, gender,
class, and national origin (Barrera 1979; Bonilla-Silva 2001; Ngai
2004).

STRUCTURAL PERSPECTIVES

Overcoming the push-pull model's flaws, structural theories
identify imperialism—that is, monopoly capitalism—as the chief cause
of mass migration from specific world regions. This approach corrects
the causal order of migration and roots it in global capitalism
(Cockcroft 2010; Fernández-Kelly 1983; Gómez-Quiñones 1994; J.
Gonzalez 2000; Gonzalez and Fernandez 2003; Kearney 1986, 1996;

From this perspective, capitalism has intrinsic contradictions
and imperialistic tendencies. The system suffers from recurring crises
rooted in “a decline in the rate of profit, leading capitalists to reduce
their investments, which in turn leads to rising unemployment, and so
on, in a downward spiral” (Bonacich and Cheng 1984:4). Consequently, capitalists cross borders in search of new markets,
higher profits, and still lower costs in labor, inputs, and regulations.
Corporate and national interests in foreign resources, therefore,
contribute to the politics of empire, that is, military, political, and/or

Table 1

<table>
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<th>European Percent</th>
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<td>3,635,906</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>16,102,268</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>18,262,392</td>
<td>47.7</td>
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Sources: www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/tabs/tab02.xls,
Nascent capitalism at the turn of nineteenth century in northern Europe displaced rural people from a feudal economy and directed them into an industrial economy based on wage relations and mass production (Massey et al. 1987; Zolberg 2006). Emigration from Europe to the United States correlates with these political-economic dislocations in the European continent (See Table 1 and Figure 1). As capitalist relations spread and displaced or articulated with feudal economies in Southern and Eastern Europe in the mid-nineteenth century, one finds similar population shifts from the rural zones to the urban industrial cities and to the United States. The European economic integration disrupted local economies in the mid-nineteenth century and pushed peasants into migration across the Atlantic Ocean (Sassen 1988:33–34; Zolberg 2006:130). European immigrants predominately from Ireland, Germany, Britain, and Switzerland…and later also from Italy, Portugal, Spain, Russia, Poland…went from being disposable proletarians and peasants to small farmers and citizens in the newly colonized territories west of the Mississippi.
Assessment of Structural Perspectives

Structural theories examine how historical unequal relations benefit some nations with wealth and development and disadvantage others with debt and poverty and thus contribute to contemporary labor migration. Structural views vary in what economic process they stress—global exchanges and/or labor exploitation—and how they theorize capitalism relating to other modes of production—displace it or integrate it (Brewer 1990:181; Gonzalez and Fernandez 2003:6–7, 48; Kearney 1996:83; Stavenhagen 1979:31–36), but overall the perspective underscores how monopoly capitalism impacts world economies and forces people into migration (Massey et al. 2002:144–146; Portes and Rumbaut 1996:282–284).

There are several concerns, however, with structural views’ application to Mexican migration. For one, their near-exclusive focus on how the political economy shapes labor migration neglects the roles of racism and patriarchy (Espiritu 2003; Gonzalez 2006; Gonzalez and Fernandez 2003). The modern nation-states developed concepts of citizenship, boundaries, and rights that excluded, segregated, and marginalized racialized natives and women (Glenn 2002; Menchaca 1993; Nevins 2002). These countries differentially incorporated immigrants into the nation on the basis of race, gender, and class, and excluded indigenous people from the Americas (Espiritu 2003; Menchaca 1993; Ngai 2004; Zolberg 2006).

Secondly, the structural perspective suggests that imperialistic relations between regions stimulate migration from the subordinated region to the dominant one (Sassen 1988:34). This does not account for why the United States, which did not have such relationships with Europe, nonetheless received most of its migration from there in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The structural dislocations of peasants in Europe merely coincided with and contributed to the territorial and colonial expansion of the United States through the nineteenth century.

Lastly, Mexico also experienced structural dislocations from the mid to latter part of the nineteenth century, but these produced only a small fraction of the total international migration to the United States (see Figure 1; Pew Hispanic Center 2009:1). Hence, the structural perspective does not explain why Europeans constituted the great majority of the immigrants throughout the nineteenth and for
most of the twentieth century, when Mexican-origin people experienced similar dislocations within their territory, had lost most of their land by the turn of the twentieth century, suffered labor exploitation by the few who owned most everything, and were closer and integrated to the United States and its expanding industrial economy (Barajas 2009:76–77; Cockcroft 1998: 82–90; Casanova 1963, 292–294; Gonzalez and Fernandez 2003:38–43; Hart 2002:262–267). From 1860 to 1910, Mexican migrants averaged a mere 1 percent of the total foreign-born population compared to the 85 percent plus from Europe. A fuller explanation of Mexican migration is warranted, and an integrated and historical explanation is offered below.

AN INTERACTIVE COLONIZATION THEORY OF MEXICAN-ORIGIN MIGRATION AND INCORPORATION

Unlike European immigrants, the first waves of Mexican migrants originated from a nation that had recently lost half of its territory and whose remaining territory also became subordinated to US national interests (Acuña 1988; Casanova 1963; Cockcroft 2010; Gonzalez 2000; Hart 2002). Racial and patriarchal structures intersected with economic ones to create unique Mexican-origin migration patterns. For example, Mexican-origin men were recruited as “imported colonial labor” or as guest workers (Gonzalez 2006:2, 5, 31–38; Ngai 2004:94–95). Although exploited in the United States, they experienced relative material improvement and escaped overlapping oppressions, one from their own nation (internal colonialism) and the other international (neocolonialism) (Casanova 1963, 1965; Stavenhagen 1964). The proposed interactive colonization framework (XC) therefore examines relationships of domination within and between nations to understand Mexican-origin migration. In what follows, I outline XC and elaborate how Mexicans have been historically incorporated into the United States.

Interactive Colonization (XC): An Outline

XC integrates the colonial, structural, and transnational frameworks, highlighting three central concepts: colonialism, dialectics, and social interaction. Thus, XC grounds the migration and incorporation experiences in a historical context shaped by
colonialism (various and overlapping forms), dialectical relations (intersecting systems of racial, class, and gender oppression), and social interactions (transnational networks). Unlike the structural perspective and other colonial models, XC integrates macro to micro level processes, underscores specific dialectical systems of oppression, and elucidates emergent social formations across borders for understanding labor migration. XC’s central concepts are elaborated below.

Colonialism

XC underscores the historical fact of colonialism in the making of existing national and global inequalities and consequently in the shaping of migration and incorporation patterns of dislocated people (Quijano 2000; Grosfoguel, Cervantez-Rodriguez, and Mielants 2009; Mirandé 1985). Regarding Mexico, Casanova (1963, 1965:32–36) and Stavenhagen (1964:1156–1158) noted the continuity of colonialism, observing that while the expression of domination had changed, its practice—racial, cultural, and class oppression—persisted. The historical repression of indigenous communities “de-indianize” many of them (Bonfil Batalla 1996; Leon-Portilla 1990; Wolf 1959), and reflect an internal colonial continuum of domination with the indigenous people at the bottom, emergent mestizas/os (westernized or mixed indigenous people) in between, and Europeans at the top (Casanova 1965:35). Quijano (2000) articulated the “coloniality of power” that imposes a Eurocentric modernity in the entire global system concentrating wealth and power along racial lines.

Building from this foundational scholarship, my conception of colonialism stresses the following ideas: 1) colonialism specifies the history of the Americas that constructed race and nation and that universalized them along with gender and class hierarchies; 2) it advances a fuller analysis of intersecting dialectical systems of domination—i.e., race, gender, and class—not subsuming any as less important; 3) it considers that colonial domination can occur within a nation (e.g., internal colonialism of indigenous people within the United States or Mexico), between nations (e.g., neocolonialism of Mexico by the United States), and both (e.g., indigenous people are internally colonized in Mexico, which is neo-colonized by the United States) (Casanova 1965:33-36); and 4) it emphasizes “oppression”
rather than “competition” or “influence” to underscore relationships of domination and exploitation. In effect, overlapping forms of colonialism have produced migrations from Mexico to the United States, distinguishing it from European migrations.

After the US conquest of Mexican-claimed Southwest territory in 1848, original (native) people, whether Mexicanized or not, experienced dislocations from their lands, resources, and cultural identities. These forced migrations occurred within each emergent nation, but Mexico’s international migrations to the United States correlated with the overlaps of neocolonial and internal-colonial conditions, which occurred most acutely during the Porfiriato period (1876–1910) and neoliberal period (1980–present) (Barajas 2009:76–78; Portes and Rumbaut 1996:275).15

Mexican immigration is rooted in US neo-colonialism that appropriated the former’s wealth, including labor, and directed it to the north (Portes and Rumbaut 1996; Gonzalez 2006). Immediately after the Mexican “Independence,” the 1823 Monroe Doctrine warned Europe that the Americas were off limits to their colonial ambitions, and enacted the US Manifest Destiny. By 1848, the United States took over half of Mexico’s territory and soon after benefited from colonized labor on both sides of the newly imposed border (Cockcroft 2010; Gómez-Quiñones 1994; Hart 2002; McWilliams 1990; Mize and Swords 2011); and through “peaceful conquest” neocolonized the rest of Mexico without incurring the cost of military occupation and of national entitlements (Gonzalez 2006:19–20; Grosfoguel 2003:240–41). The saying “I didn’t cross the border, the border crossed me” is thus historically accurate.

The Porfiriato dictatorship (1876–1910) collaborated with US neocolonialism and sought an illusory “dependent development” by opening itself more to foreign investment (Cockcroft 2010:52–53; Hart 2002:266). The dictatorship intensified internal-colonial conditions for indigenous people dislocating them from their lands, resources, and cultures (Bonfil Batalla 1996; Casanova 1965). The Baldío Laws of 1883 and 1884, for instance, freed hacienda expansion onto indigenous communal lands, and “Criollo landowners were thus able to achieve what not even colonial elites had been able to do: take over the vast of majority of land” (Cockcroft 1998:72). Only about 3 percent of the population in Mexico owned agricultural lands by 1910
Porfiriato also allowed the appropriation of national resources by foreigners, who constructed railroads, roads, and ports that directed much wealth and labor out of Mexico and into the United States (Galarza 1964; Gamio 1930; Gómez-Quiñones 1994; McWilliams 1990), and as elaborated below the migratory flows reflect the dialectics of capitalism, racism, and patriarchy.

Dialectical Relations

Dialectical relations involve power inequalities and exploitation, and produce oppositional interests among those involved in these relationships. A dialectical analysis thus examines relationships rooted to systems of domination such as capitalism (capitalists vs. workers), white supremacy (Eurocentric racism vs. multiculturalism), and patriarchy (male domination vs. gender equality). Such relationships have been theorized by various scholars, including Mario Barrera's class segmentation (1979), Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s racialized social system (2001), Patricia Hill Collins’s categories of analysis and connection (2003), Kimberlé Crenshaw’s intersectional theory (1997), and Evelyn Nakano Glenn’s integrated framework (1994, 2002). These theorists explain how race, gender, and class inequalities are constructed, and how they structure patterns of opportunity and mobility. In this case, through a dialectical analysis I examine how each system of oppression and their intersections shape the migration and incorporation of Mexican-origin people.

subsidies and legal protections over communal land and resources, and multinational corporations and foreign investors benefited from a Mexican export-oriented economy with 80–90 percent going to the United States (Cockcroft 1998:326–328, 332; Hart 2002:439–441, 451–452; Hing 2010:26, 61). Mexico was subordinated to the consumer needs of the United States (Mize and Swords 2011:xxvi–vii), and became more dependent on remittances from US relatives, whose contributions surpassed any other sources of revenue, including foreign investment, petroleum, and tourism (Gonzalez 2006:164).

The national inequalities are revealed in the growing gap in GDP per capita between the NAFTA participants. In 1993, a year before NAFTA, the GDP per capita difference between Mexico and the US was $17,752, and in 2008, almost double at $32,685 (see Figure 2). As migration from Mexico increased so did the US GDP per capita.

Figure 2

GDP Per Capita by NAFTA Participant: 1970-2008

income. The gains of a more productive and exploited workforce, however, do not benefit everyone, as income and wealth inequality increased within each NAFTA participant, particularly Mexico (Collins and Yeskel 2005; OECD 2011:6).

In this NAFTA context, overlapping national and international oppressions stimulated the Zapatista rebellion in 1994, when original peoples of the Americas rebelled against the latest in a series of colonial acts that have dislocated them from their land, resources, and Mesoamerican cultures (Stavenhagen 2005:18–22; Bonfil Batalla 1996: 112, 129). Migration from Mexico to the United States rose to unprecedented heights, increasing from 2.1 million in 1990 to 12.4 million in 2010 (Pew Hispanic Center 2011b:8).

From 2006 to 2010, however, the US economic downturn and enforcement-only immigration policy reduced border crossing to and from Mexico (Pew Hispanic Center 2011b:3). Although some claim that national inequalities are decreasing and that the standards of living in Mexico (i.e., education, health, and income per capita) are improving (Esquivel 2010; Maganini 2011), others document that the nation suffers from higher levels of wealth inequalities, poverty, violence, militarization (war on drugs), and continued US dominance (Cockcroft 2010:41–45; Gonzalez 2006:142–143; Tucker 2011). In 2002, 58 percent of rural Mexico lived below the poverty line, earning less than $3.00 a day (Taylor, Mora, Adams & Lopez-Feldman 2005:23); and from 2008 to 2011, the poverty rate grew by 2 percentage points, increasing the impoverished to at least 52 million people, about half the population (Geo-Mexico 2011).

Political-economic domination, important as it is, has not alone shaped Mexican migration to the United States. If it were all determinant, migration north would continue given Mexico's subordinate economic position observed above. As in the past, racial and gender dialectics mediate migration and incorporation of Mexican-origin people across borders.

From the formation of the nation, racist and patriarchal structures restricted membership to the United States. The Naturalization Act of 1790 restricted full citizenship and membership to “free white persons” (Glenn 2002:24–25). The modern nation-state was a new construct in the Americas, and people of color, particularly women of color, were not desired or treated as equal members...
From about 1607 to 1803, Northern European colonists were largely concentrated east of the Mississippi; and with the colonization of the western territories (1803 and 1848), settlers and labor were in demand. Land and immigration acts encouraged White settlement west of the Mississippi, including the Gwyn Land Act of 1851 which set a land review board that did not validate all land grants from the Mexican period; the Homestead Act of 1862 which encouraged squatting and dispossessed indigenous people from their land; the Immigration Act of 1864 which facilitated European migration to the United States; and the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869 that connected the east with the west.

Restrictive immigration policies targeted Asians and other people of color in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During this Social Darwinist period, Mexican-origin men were exempted from the exclusions and recruited as imported- (from Mexico) and internal-colonial (from Southwest) workers (Barrera 1979; Ngai 2004; Gonzalez 2006), because they were native to the land, though their full humanity was oppressed in terms of race, gender, culture, and work (Bonfil Batalla 1996; Casanova 1963, 1965; Gamio 1930; Menchaca 1993; Ngai 2004). After the restrictive Immigration Act of 1924 and the deportations of the 1930s (Balderrama and Rodríguez 1995:121–122; Ngai 2004:60–87), the identification of Mexicans as “natives” changed to the stereotypical view of “Mexican aliens” and after the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965 to “illegal immigrants” (Barajas 2009:31; Nevis 2002:111–112; Portes and Rumbaut 1996:274). In effect, US acts historically have constructed Mexican-origin people as “aliens” to the nation.

The patriarchal order intersected with these racial and class structures (Dill 1988; Glenn 1994). While women were generally marginalized in society, women of color were denied the ideals of domesticity (imposed on White women) at the turn of the twentieth century, and many labored in colonial-type jobs, such as agriculture and service, along with men and children. Mexican-origin women were also excluded from the various guest-worker programs enacted throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Such exclusions discouraged Mexicans from settling in the United States and kept their numbers and cost of reproduction low (Chavez 1997, 2008). So while
the United States actively recruited men from Mexico and other non-European regions, women were not encouraged to come or settle in the nation, unlike migrants from Europe, who were desired for populating and controlling the newly acquired territories west of the Mississippi (Dill 1988; Espiritu 2003; Glenn 1994; Gonzalez 2006). Consequently, European migration to the United States was more gender balanced, and Europeans constituted the great majority of foreign-born immigrants from 1790 to 1980, only exceeded in numbers by Mexican-/Latin-origin and Asian migrants for the first time in 1990. Gender balancing did not begin until the 1960s in the context of US civil rights and de-colonial movements throughout the world (Donato, Alexander, Gabaccia & Leinonen 2011; Sassen 1988).

The Hart-Cellar Act of 1965 ended National Origin Quotas and permitted family reunification and exercise of employment preferences. Previously, many Mexican-origin people had been split from their families for generations, reflecting the US interest in forming a racial-ethnic homogeneous nation (Anderson 1991; Barajas and Ramirez 2007; Dill 1988). Evidently, Mexican migration patterns were shaped by racist and sexist labor markets and nation-state acts. The changes in the racial and gendered makeup of the foreign-born population began in 1960s, as the regional and global dialectics of resistance heightened against internal-, neo-, and classical colonial systems. In the United States, civil rights, women’s rights, farm labor rights, and antiwar movements advanced, and the internal colonialism changed from legal and manifest forms to informal, subtle systemic racial, gender and class domination.

US domination, nonetheless, continued and expanded in Latin America (e.g., the border industrial program of maquiladoras in Mexico and military interventions in Central America) and in Asia (e.g., the Vietnam War) in an effort to slow the decline of the United States’ hegemonic global position (Frezzo and Araghi 2007; Wallerstein 2003).

Migration followed from those impacted regions, whose politicians and domestic elites facilitated the subjugation of their people. Neo- and internal-colonial processes expelled Mexicans into international migration, which now represent the largest group of immigrants at 32 percent, and Filipinos, a distant second at 5 percent (Pew Hispanic Center 2009:1). Along with other Latinos, the
Mexican-origin population account for half of the US nation’s growth over the past decade (Pew Hispanic Center 2011a:1; US Census Bureau 2012: Table 42). Nativistic immigration policies, however, keep 55 percent of the Mexican immigrants as undocumented and make them 60 percent of the total unauthorized population (Pew Hispanic Center 2009:1). From 2007 to 2010, the removal of undocumented immigrants averaged 335,694 a year for a total of 1.34 million, exceeding the total number of deportations from the great depression period (http://lawprofessors.typepad.com/files/removals2007-2010_0727101.pdf; Ngai 2004:72–73). Moreover, the militarized racist and patriarchal border perpetuates systematic violence and rape against women crossing the southern border (Falcón 2007:204–208). These migration trends can only be understood from a colonial, dialectical, and interactional framework, which reveals a long US tradition of excluding, subjugating, and removing people on the basis of race, gender, and class in clear violation of human rights (2007:218–219; Tamez 2012:5–6).

Social Interactions

An analysis of social interactions zooms in closer to the migrant subjects and their social networks for understanding the migration process across borders (Massey et al. 1987, 2002; Menjívar 2000; Portes and Rumbaut 1996, 2006; Richter, Taylor, and Yúnez-Naude 2007). Many scholars conceive of migrant’s networks as social capital, which constitutes assets that reduces the cost of migration (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991:13; Massey et al. 2002: 18–21). Accordingly, as they mature over time, networks form a social structure that makes migration self-sustaining and independent from the original factors that caused it. Portes and Rumbaut note, for example, “At some moment, networks across international borders acquire sufficient strength to induce migration for motives other than those that initiated the flow” (1996: 276). Massey et al. similarly observe, “Once the number of network connections in a community reaches a critical threshold, migration becomes self-perpetuating because each act of migration creates the social structure needed to sustain it” (2002: 20).

The social networks alone, in spite of the expectations above, do not cause and sustain migration without controlling for the
continued unequal and exploitative relations between sending and receiving nations (Barajas 2009:39). If social networks stimulate migration long after the initial structural dislocations (e.g., Richter et al. 2007:286), why did European migration cease to dominate in numbers by 1990? Irrespective of Europe’s recovery from World War II, Europeans with more relatives and social ties in the United States should have benefited more from the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act’s family reunification provision than all the other nationalities. It was the expectation (Zolberg 2006:330–336). However, it was the Mexican-origin migration that increased in that period, because of overlapping internal- and neo-colonial relationships in the sending country that involved the receiving nation’s politics of domination.

In The Xaripu Community across Borders (Barajas 2009), for example, the case study shows the migratory changes of a small community from Michoacán, Mexico, to the United States throughout the twentieth century. During the Porfiriato period the first Xaripus, Purepecha-origin people, migrated to the United States. The migrants were mostly young men working throughout the country in various industries (agriculture, railroads, and steel) and then returning to Mexico. Many continued their migration throughout their lives, and were later accompanied by younger cohorts (second-generation migrants) during the Bracero period (1942–1964). Only during the civil and labor rights movements of the sixties, Xaripu families (third-generation migrants) began to settle in the United States, leading to a transnational experience, that is, having a dual sense of home and maintaining active social networks across national borders (2009:147).

The Xaripu case illustrates how the change from labor migration to transnational migration during the late twentieth century was intensified by neocolonialism, advances in technology, and racist nativism in the United States (Barajas 2009:146–147; Espiritu 2003:70–71; Goldring 2003:166–170, 189; Guarnizo and Smith 2003:24). Beginning in the 1970s, Mexico’s emigration rates increased not primarily because of mature social networks and/or liberal immigration policy (the Hart-Cellar Act 1965 and, later, IRCA 1986) but because of the overlaps of internal and neocolonialism in Mexico (paralleling the Porfiriato period). The Hart-Cellar Act, in fact, imposed the first quotas of 20,000 per nation in the western hemisphere (Ngai 2004:227–228). Mexican-origin migration had been
unrestricted before 1965, and up to half a million Braceros had been brought for 6 to 9 months annually from 1942 to 1964, for a total of 5 to 7.5 million over the 22-year period (Gonzalez 2006:118; Mize and Swords 2011:8–9).27

By the end of the sixties, the Xaripu networks that had developed over the twentieth century facilitated the migration and settlement of their families in the United States. The receiving country, however, was far from being open and welcoming. Xaripu families experienced occupational, residential, educational segregation and racist nativism that blocked their full integration and that of later generations as full members of the nation. Thus, their networks work within powerful dialectical barriers noted above, and their emergent transnationalism reflects a desire to embrace their full humanity, feeling complete across borders (Barajas 2009:222). They moved from being “ni de aquí, ni de alla” [neither from here nor from there] to “de aquí y de alla” [from here and there]: sin fronteras [without borders]. Some scholars see “transnationalism from below”28 as empowering (Alicea 1997; Espiritu 2003; Goldring 2003) and others disagree (Parreñas 2001; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Portes and Rumbaut 1996). In the Xaripu case transnationalism reflects the dialectics of survival among those who live in-between two very unequal worlds and attempt to weave the best of them by transcending the modern nation that imposes racial/ethnic, gender, and class borders as criteria for full and equal membership (Barajas 2009:174–176, 181; Guarnizo and Smith 2003:6; Mahler 2003:89, 91). They create networks of support, build transnational communities, and develop identities that reflect their new experiences in a context of unequal power relations.

CONCLUSION

The study of Mexican-origin migration and incorporation has been simplified by frameworks claiming universal application based on the European immigrant experience. Research on migration is dominated by political-economic perspectives: on the one hand, neoclassical models emphasize modernity, supply and demand forces, and rational actors shaping migration processes; and on the other hand, structural perspectives underscore monopoly capitalism and highlight relationships of political-economic domination dislocating people

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from their homelands. Other dialectical relationships—i.e., racial and gender oppression—are considered less significant and often as functional or super-structural systems to capitalism. This paper moves beyond these reductionist views and proposes interactive colonization theory as providing more comprehensive and integrated understanding of Mexican-origin migration experiences.

Overlapping internal and neo-colonialisms have caused Mexican-origin migrations as seen in the Porfiriato period and more recently in the neoliberal period. These migrations can only be understood from a longitudinal historical perspective and with a dialectical analysis of the intersecting systems of racism, patriarchy and capitalism. In a fairly short period of human history, Mexican-origin people, generally indigenous, were largely displaced from their land, resources, and cultures/identities. Today, as before, these forced migrants are treated and imagined as “aliens” to the modern nation. The dehumanization goes beyond economic exploitation, because it denies their right to exist within distinct cultural communities and to move, express, and pursue their dreams freely and with dignity (Bonfil Batalla 1996; Casanova 1965; Leon-Portilla 1990; Stavehagen 2005). In 2010, for example, Arizona’s SB 2281 outlawed Mexican American Studies and SB 1070 formalized racial profiling and detention of perceived undocumented immigrants; and in 2011 Alabama’s HB 56 went further, essentially outlawing undocumented people’s right to exist, by denying them the right to employment, housing, education, transportation, and private or public assistance. In violation of Human Rights, the construction of borders and “illegal aliens” oppress the original peoples of the Americas (Tamez 2012), and the treatment of their homelands as frontiers to be civilized/ liberalized/modernized alienate them from their lands, resources, and cultures (Smith 2011).

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ENDNOTES

1. “Latin America” should really be “Indigenous America” as a way of recognizing the continued existence and influence of Indigenous people in the Americas. The use of “Latin America” privileges only the contributions and influences of Latin European cultures in the American continents and suppresses those of the indigenous nations. In addition, the melting-pot concept (and ideology) of “Latino” or nationality-based labels such as “Mexican” obscure the racial, class, and gender stratification universalized by colonialism in the Americas, and omit the political-ideological state efforts to Latinize and/or Mexicanize diverse indigenous nations into an imposed nationalism (Barajas 2009:75, 219).

2. Nonetheless, over the past decade, the general Latino population grew from 35.3 million to 50.5 million, accounting for 56 percent of the national growth (PEW Hispanic Center 2011a, 1), and non-White births became the majority for the first time in the nation’s history (New York Times 2012: A1).

3. Mestizaje refers to racial and/or ethnic mixing, and is often associated with Spanish and indigenous mestizas/os though it can be of any mixture.

4. Without dispute, Mexico is racial and ethnically diverse, and mestizaje is very common, as it is within the United States and its major racial categories, e.g., Black and White. These categories do not reflect more pure racial groups, but reflect the politics of racial formation, whereby racial classification and valuations are imposed (and resisted) on to ethnicities with the purposes of placing them in a social hierarchy (Omi and Winant 1994).

5. Mexico had extended formal citizenship to indigenous people since early in the 19th century, possibly because they were the majority right after the Mexican Independence (Menchaca 1993).
6. Ngai (2004) illustrates the devaluation of Filipino workers based not on supply and demand principles or the workers’ willingness to work for less but, rather, on racist employers.

7. In the never-ending competition for greater profits, capitalists overproduce a good which hurts its product’s price. Employers respond by downsizing the workforce, maintaining high levels of production with fewer workers, depressing wages, and/or automating to reduce labor cost. Eventually, high unemployment leads to low consumption rates and lower profits (Bonacich and Appelbaum 2000:102–3; Bonacich and Cheng 1984:7–8; Cockcroft 1998:172–73).

8. England did have such an imperialistic relation with Ireland, and also experienced high levels of Irish migration during the mid-nineteenth century (Smith and MacRaild 2009:153).

9. In Mexico, indigenous communities were forced into labor migration to neighboring and distant haciendas that had appropriated their lands (Barajas 2009:77–78; Fonseca and Moreno 1984:95–95).

10. In neocolonialism, a colony gains independence but becomes subordinated to another empire [or the same one]. When Mexico won independence in 1821, the United States appropriated half of their territory by 1848, and eventually neocolonized the remaining half of Mexico’s territory, monopolizing its resources and infrastructure. Across borders indigenous people went from being externally colonized by European Kingdoms within their territories to becoming internally colonized by newly-formed nations. In effect, indigenous people suffer the impacts of overlapping oppressions, one from within Mexico and the other from the United States. Mestizos [acculturated or mixed indigenous people] occupy an intermediary position.
11. The transnational perspective relates to the conceptual framework of interactionism (e.g., George Mead’s and Herbert Blumer’s symbolic interactionism), because it underscores social ties and relationships affect thought/behavior, self concept, and sense of community. The transnational perspective further communicates the ability of people being able to relate/exist across national borders through their social networks that facilitate communication, migration, and the reproduction of community.

12. For example, Quijano’s (2000) “coloniality of power” is one of the most comprehensive discussions of colonialism and its continuous impacts on the modern world, global capitalism, and cultural/racial domination. Quijano’s theory, however, does not explain migration; for example, why Mexican-origin migration was low or high over time? Interactive colonization offers a better specified framework with broader explanatory power for understanding labor migration and incorporation of Mexican-origin people into the United States. For instance, Mexican migration occurs in specific historical periods when internal and external colonialisms overlap, and the dialects of racial, gender and class mediate its form and level.

13. “De-indianized” refers to the suppression of their cultures and identities, and what some called mestizaje.

14. G. Gonzalez (2006) uses the concept of colonialism, but does not employ the term of internal colonialism. Quijano’s (2000) theory of “coloniality of power” misses the internal diversity within the colonized and colonizers. Barajas (2009) draws attention to this internal diversity (45), and also elaborates how intermediary groups are formed in a context of unequal power relations (51–55) and develop distinct interests reflective of their social location.

15. Sassen (1988, 31–34) suggests that colonial-based migrations took place in earlier stages of capitalism and that newer forms of migrations are not directly forced as in the past. I argue that Mexican-origin migrations are as voluntary as they were in the past, and that the general context stimulating these movements are responding to top-down policies and acts that benefit largely those that resemble and/or share the values of the earlier colonizers.
16. Dialectics is an important analytical concept focusing on unequal and exploitative relationships that create conflict and change; and while Quijano (2000:548–549) examines such oppressive relations (e.g., contradictions and ambiguities of modernity) he does not employ an explicit dialectical analysis.

17. These dialectical relations produce binary representations that justify and normalize the dominant group’s hegemony, for example, primitive/modern, savage/civilized, and irrational/rational.

18. The structural perspective above underscores one dialectical relation, monopoly capitalism, as the most important explaining modern migration, and some scholars expand the analysis to include racial and gender systems as well, but subsume it in significance to the global economic system (Gonzalez and Fernandez 2003; Gonzalez 2006; Sassen 1988, 2003).

19. Article 27 of Mexican Constitution that protected collective land grants (ejidos) was dismantled in the early 1990s, facilitating the sale of ejido lands and leading to the concentration of farm lands in fewer hands.


21. These exclusionary acts targeted Chinese (1882, 1892), Japanese (1908, 1913), and more generally Asians and Africans (1921, 1924). While Southern and Eastern Europeans were later targeted by the National Origins Quota Acts (1921 and 1924), they were not categorically excluded but restricted to a quota of 15 percent of the legal entries to the United States, reserving 85 percent of the admissions for northern Europeans (Ngai 2004:21).

22. Ngai (2004) elaborates that though the national origin quotas exempted Mexicans from the restrictive immigration act, the law nonetheless created the concept of “illegality,” which became primarily applied to Mexican immigrants, irrespective of their immigration status.
23. The top sending countries of immigrants during the 1990s all had experienced colonial and/or neo-colonial interventions by the United States (Portes and Rumbaut 1996:274–76; Sassen 1996:76–85).

24. Other research, however, points to the limits of social capital as an explanatory factor and demonstrates how access to networks is mediated and shaped by gender, class, generation, and race/ethnicity (Barajas and Ramirez 2007; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003; Mahler 2003; Menjivar 2000; Parreñas 2001). Moreover, individuals and their networks are placed in larger contexts—national politics, labor market opportunities, and the receiving society’s attitudes to migrants—that affect the form and success of their incorporation into the nation (Menjivar 2000; Portes and Rumbaut 2006).

25. Since the foundation of the US nation, European immigrants had constituted the great majority of the total immigrants up to 1980.

26. Resources differences were less different between Europe and the United States in the late 20th century, but they had been less different throughout history given both regions’ colonial position in the world, and yet only recently did Mexican migration numbers to the United States surpass Europe’s.

27. Economic domination, via foreign investment (Sassen 1988), is not sufficient in itself to cause migration in Mexico. Casanova (1963: 292–294) documents that the US increasingly dominated foreign investment from 65 percent in 1938 to 75 percent in 1963, monopolized about 60 percents of its imports and exports, and unilaterally absorbed a surplus value from a very unequal trade. However, during that twenty-plus year period, migration from Mexico did not rise, and in fact, remained flat from 1940 to 1960 (Hispanic Pew Center 2009:1). Moreover, now about 80–90 percent of Mexico’s exports go to the US, reflecting a subordinate export-oriented economy, but migration has paused since 2008 (Hing 2010).

28. “Transnationalism from below” (Guarnizo and Smith 2003) or “alternative circuits” (Sassen 2003) are networks of common people as opposed to those of global corporate elites.
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