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Cultural Integration and Hybridization at the United States-Mexico Borderlands

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Abstract

Cultural hybridity is a relatively neglected issue in globalization studies. The term refers to the production of novel cultural forms and practices through the merging of previously separate antecedents. Hybridization is different from integration, in which interdependencies develop while the antecedents remain unaltered. Recent evidence from the United States-Mexico borderlands reveals several forms of integration and hybridization, including large-scale population migration, economic integration, adjustments in law and politics, cultural mixing, and transformations in identity. Although trends toward cultural integration and hybridity are not always positive, such postborder tendencies are regarded as cause for optimism regarding the relations between Mexico and the United States.

Keywords: hybridization, cultural hybridity, borderlands, integration, globalization, Mexico, United States

Résumé

Intégration et métissage culturel dans les régions frontalières du Mexique et des États-Unis

La question du métissage culturel est relativement négligée dans les études portant sur la mondialisation. Ce terme fait référence à la production de nouvelles formes et pratiques culturelles à travers le mélange d'antécédents séparés à l'origine. Le métissage diffère de l'intégration, au cours de laquelle des interdépendances se développent tandis que les antécédents restent intacts. Des données récentes recueillies dans les régions frontalières du Mexique et des États-Unis révèlent plusieurs formes d'intégration et de métissage, incluant les mouvements de population à grande échelle, l'intégration économique, les ajustements législatifs et politiques, le mélange culturel et les transformations identitaires. Bien que les courants menant à l'intégration et au métissage culturel ne soient pas toujours positifs, de telles tendances *post-frontalières* peuvent mener à des considérations optimistes en ce qui concerne les relations entre le Mexique et les États-Unis.

Mots-clés: métissage, métissage culturel, frontières, intégration, mondialisation, Mexique, États-Unis

Globalization is a difficult concept. It is alternately lauded as the best hope for human well-being and vilified as the end of history, the ultimate triumph of the very rich and very powerful. It fails to engage many historians who opine that eras of globalization are commonplace in world history and that the present episode is not the novelty that others claim. It is frequently dismissed because so many ideas are being subsumed under its rubric—including multiple forms of economic, political, cultural and ideological globalizations—that the concept itself has become meaningless. And yet, in empirical terms, the global integration of the world's capitalist economies seems irrefutable and is mirrored (albeit imperfectly) in the emergence of regional and hemispheric trading blocs in the Americas and Europe, as well as large-scale domestic and international migrations. Needless to say, not all nations share equally in global prosperity, and the frictions endemic in world geopolitics are indicative of the continuing ravages of inequality, famine, genocide, and war.

In this essay, we examine one relatively neglected aspect of globalization: the emergence and significance of “cultural hybridities.” This term refers to the production of novel cultural forms and practices through the merging of previously separate cultural antecedents. Hybridization is not the same as “integration”, where interdependencies develop while antecedents remain unaltered. Thus, for example, the emergence of “Spanglish” out of English and Spanish is a cultural hybrid; but the relationship between a United States manufacturer and a Mexican *maquiladora* (assembly plant) is a matter of economic integration. In principle, hybridization and integration can develop independently without any necessary connection; in practice (as this essay will attest), they sometimes develop concurrently, acting in mutually reinforcing ways even though they may be functionally unrelated. Integration and hybridization can be enforced or coerced, either legally or militarily (as during the United States occupation of Japan following World War II); market-driven (as in the Africanized version of the McDonald's hamburger produced for immigrant consumers in Oslo, Norway); or voluntary (as in the rise of Thai immigrant-led factions of Los Angeles street gangs).

Our principal interest is the appearance of cultural hybridities at the grass-roots level along the United States-Mexico borderlands. Such practices tend to be informal and spontaneous, i.e. lacking official sponsorship or authorization. Their juxtaposition may cause conflict, but they may also be readily accepted. Initially, our interest was stimulated by the impacts of a rising Latino presence in the City of Los Angeles, including the 2005 election of Antonio Villaraigosa as City of Los Angeles mayor. In this most ethnically- and racially-diverse of cities, people of Latino origin are now the majority minority. Here, a rapidly evolving diversification of cultural practices is evident in many spheres, including politics, labor markets, sport, marriage, music, food, festivals and language. By now, one out of every seven residents of the United States is of Latino origin; the latinization of the entire country is a predominant demographic trend. Hence, there is every reason to extend our understanding of Los Angeles-style hybridization to a broader national scene.

In this presentation, we first explore the principal conceptual and methodological issues in the analysis of cultural integration and hybridization. Then we examine evidence for integration/hybridization along the United States-Mexico border in

recent years, based mainly on a content analysis of two major national newspapers as well as a field survey of the entire border region on both sides. Finally, our inquiry concludes by briefly considering some of the political implications of our work.

CONCEPTS AND METHODS

Let us begin with some elementary observations on the object, process, and outcome of cultural integration and hybridization. What is being studied? What structural and contextual factors influence the process? And which outcomes may be observed?

We define *integration* as mutually-agreeable contact leading to interdependencies that cause little or no change in contact partners and which does not require their geographical proximity, merging, or adjacency. Though integrated, the essential constitution of contact partners remains intact, sovereign and unaltered. In contrast, *hybridization* is contact that creates novel forms and practices that exist independently of antecedent forms and practices and requires that engaged agents be geographically adjacent for their production to occur. In short, hybrids exist when different cultures come together in the same place to create something that did not previously exist. To illustrate: when criminals are transported across international boundaries in compliance with extradition treaties, the essential integrity of the legal systems of participant nations is not compromised. This is integration. However, when foreign nationals arrive in Los Angeles and create a new cuisine that previously did not exist in their country of origin or at their place of destination, this is hybridization. Caution is advisable in the use of these two categories, which are permeable and therefore sometimes imprecise. Thus, the billions of dollars returned to their homeland each year by Mexicans working abroad represents not only a form of economic integration but can also cause cultural disintegration (through family dislocations) and cultural hybridization (new relationships at the destination).

According to García Canclini (2003: 279), during recent decades the term *hybridity* has encompassed “all the processes that combine discrete social structures or practices, which already exist in distinctly separate forms, to create new structures, objects and practices in which the antecedents merge.” Steven Flusty (2004: 109) underscores the role of place in the blurring of previously-existing cultural norms, describing cultural hybridity as “the coalescence of new personal and collective identities from novel combinations of previously disparate cultural attributes, practices, and influences [...] [e]merging from conditions of being cut off from one’s roots and left without a place of one’s own.” The discontinuities implied by hybridization may have multiple, even contradictory outcomes. In positive terms, hybridization may result, for instance, in a broadening of cultural offerings and a challenge to entrenched attitudes on race; negatively, it can be associated with dislocation, loss of tradition, and social unrest.

The origins of contemporary cultural change can surely be traced to the processes of uneven capitalist development, geopolitical upheaval, and large-scale migration. García Canclini (1995) emphasizes the roles of dislocation (migration) and deterritorialization (consequent upon globalization) in the process of hybridization. Such structural constraints undoubtedly furnish an inescapable context

for both integration and hybridity. But Flusty's penetrating analysis of globalization "from below" also reveals cultural adaptation as a form of local resistance to top-down structural imperatives. Our view attempts to integrate their emphases. Cultural transformation at any level is necessarily and constitutively a dialectic between structure and human agency; in essence, cultural hybridities are manifestations of how individuals confront and respond to contextual change. Success or failure depend very much on their personal and community resources, as George Sánchez (1993) ably demonstrated in his study of immigrants who become Mexican-American.

Even though we may possess a firm grasp of the structural causes of cultural shifts, there is no easy way to predict with certainty the specific outcomes of such transformation. This is because the mix of local and individual characteristics that combine to produce change is volatile, complex, and sensitive to the specificities of place. In this sense, the production of cultural hybridity is over-determined, in that there are multiple causalities often leading to (dis)similar outcomes. The most accessible indicators of causal relationships may be found in the material and cognitive landscapes of cultural change. Such texts help us to relate broad structural trends to street-level outcomes and to trace the local and personal back to deep-seated structures.

Fortunately, a number of precedents are available to guide us in this interpretive task, so let us focus on a few brief examples to illustrate how the concatenations between structures and cultural change may be articulated. At the *global* scale, Arjun Appadurai (1990) has suggested that contemporary capitalism can be read off its five associated landscapes: ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, finanscaples and ideoscaples. These refer to the consequences, respectively, of demographic change, a pervasive media, technological change, capital flows, and struggles for ideological pre-eminence. For evidence at the *urban* scale, we refer to Herzog's (2003) insightful dissection of Tijuana's cultural ecologies, which reveals how contemporary globalization is creating and/or transforming seven types of city space, including global factory zones, transitional consumer spaces, global tourism districts, and so on. When we ratchet down to the level of the *individual*, cultural hybridities cannot simply be read off the physical landscape or any other material manifestations of change, because hybridization is also a state of mind, i.e. it is a cognitive process. In the case of the San Diego-Tijuana border, Guillermo Gomez-Peña (quoted in Rouse, 1996: 248) refers to a "gap between two worlds," which includes not only the possibility of a literal crossing but also invokes notions of a spiritual passage. In Los Angeles, Leclerc and Dear (1999: 3) observed how hybrid Latino cultures emerge from a complicated conjugation of identity, memory, and cultural mix. In later work, Dear and Leclerc (2003) extend the spaces of cultural transformation across an entire borderland, identifying a "postborder condition" as a primary characteristic of hybridization and integration.

This extended version of the hybridization process raises troubling questions of regionalization and periodization. Specifically, what are appropriate geographical scales and time frames for the analysis of integration/hybridization? Or, more colloquially: *Where* is the border? and *When* is the border?

In terms of geography, we concur that the “border” is something within each of us, an individual and collective mentality that is activated each time we contemplate a literal or metaphorical crossing. But this consciousness is also geopolitically—i.e. exogenously—determined. The world view of (say) a financially secure citizen of a global superpower is quite different from that of an African subsistence farmer marginalized by a genocidal dictator. In the hybridization calculus, all geographic scales, from global to personal, are likely to be pertinent. Hence, our work on the United States-Mexico borderlands certainly begins at the boundary line, but of necessity quickly spins out to encompass regional, national and international concerns. Carlos Monsivaís (2003) captures this fluidity neatly in his concept of *la frontera portátil*, or portable border, which is something carried everywhere by everyone at all times.

Then again, our project has been plagued by the problem of identifying the appropriate time frame for observing hybridization. When, exactly, did cultural hybridity commence at the United States-Mexico border? On the face of it, the answer is 1848, when the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo resolved the war between the two nations and established the present-day boundary. Yet most analysts regard the condition of hybridization, or *mestizaje*, as a constitutive feature of the human condition in Central America from the earliest prehistory, through Spanish colonialism, to the creation of the Mexican republic (Fields and Zamudio-Taylor, 2001). Thus our exploration of contemporary border cultures should include consideration of Olmec, Toltec, Mayan, and Aztec cultures, plus the manufacture of racial hierarchy during the Spanish colonial era (Katzew, 2004). In addition, even since 1848, hybridization has proceeded unevenly through time and space, as manifest in the varying fortunes of the *bracero* (guest worker) programs of the twentieth century and the recent emergence of an academic interest in transnational Chicano studies.

In the following analysis, we draw no hard-and-fast analytical distinctions between integration and hybridization. While such categories are analytically convenient and revealing, in practice they are permeable and a single feature will often reveal traits of both processes, especially when considered over an extended time period. Our principal focus will be on recent borderland cultural hybridity, including the structural origins of change and the localized material/mental manifestations of cultural transformation. Our scale of inquiry will necessarily encompass local and international processes, and while our account focuses on the present, we must also necessarily engage a fluid past. The analysis is based in two sources: a field survey of both sides of the entire United States-Mexico borderland undertaken during the past two years, encompassing a total of about 4000 miles [6400 km]; and more particularly, a content analysis of border-related coverage in *The Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times* (national edition) over a five-year period, i.e. 2000-July 2005. This analysis encompasses 337 articles, the majority of which are from *The Los Angeles Times* (69%). A number of other publications on both sides of the border were also reviewed on a more opportunistic basis.

CULTURAL INTEGRATION AND HYBRIDIZATION

The 2000-mile [3200 km] border between the United States of America and *los Estados Unidos Mexicanos* does not lend itself to facile generalization. A simple yet elegant “map” of border development is provided by Kearney and Knopp (1995, 1-4) in one of the few studies that considers the colonial and post-colonial history of Mexican and United States border towns simultaneously. They suggest that the key to understanding borderland geography begins at present day El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, which is the fulcrum between the land boundary to the west and the river boundary to the east. From this highland center to the west lie the two Nogales; and to the east, the two Laredos. Both regions began as mining and ranching centers, becoming export nodes to the United States (and elsewhere) once rail connections had been established. Continuing outwards, we next encounter two great agricultural regions, based in McAllen and Reynosa, and Mexicali/Calexico. Finally, at the two edges lie the port-influenced settlements of San Diego/Tijuana, and Matamoros/Brownsville.

El Paso/Ciudad Juárez also provide a chronological pivot for the borderland. El Paso del Norte (later Ciudad Juárez) began the Spanish seventeenth century as an already-established route for exploration, trade and mission activities. The ports on the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean came next, along with the interior mining and ranching sectors. Finally, the extensive agricultural complexes around Mexicali/Calexico and McAllen/Reynosa later became twentieth century urban centers that completed the essential pattern of economic development and urbanization along the frontier.

Today, the borderlands are among the fastest growing regions in both countries (Massey et al., 2002). Six Mexican border states (Baja California, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, Sonora and Tamaulipas) contain 16 percent of Mexico’s population (over 17 million people), up from 10 percent in 1900. The four United States border states (Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas) are home to 21 percent of the United States population (or 53.5 million people), up from 6 percent in 1900. However, these statistics mask much internal variation along the border. For example, California and Baja California have always had strongly intertwined destinies and are presently powerhouses of urban and economic development focused in the San Diego and Tijuana-Tecate-Mexicali metropolitan regions (though strong ties to Los Angeles remain important). By contrast, communities on both sides of the Texas border have historically been some of the poorest parts of each country, with the exception of Ciudad Juárez-El Paso. Finally, present-day Arizona and New Mexico/Sonora and Chihuahua have the aura of an “empty center” when compared with their more boisterous urban neighbors to the east and west.

The dynamic growth of the Mexican borderland region during recent decades was fuelled initially by the Mexican government’s Border Industrialization Project, which gave birth in 1965 to that country’s *maquiladora* (assembly plant) industry. Two-thirds of all *maquilas* were established in Tijuana, Mexicali and Juárez. The passage of the North American Free Trade Act (NAFTA) in 1994 gave further impetus to demographic, urban and economic development, including the rise of the northern industrial giant, Monterrey. The following analysis examines evidence for integration and hybridization in this rapidly evolving transnational region.

CROSSINGS

In his book, *The Bear and the Porcupine*, [Jeffrey] Davidow portrays the United States as a clumsy bear treading on its neighbor's sense of sovereignty, and Mexico as a hypersensitive porcupine attuned to insults, real or imagined (Kraul, 2003: A3).

At the most elementary level, cultural interdependency can be observed in the number of people crossing between two countries. These include both permanent residents and those who cross regularly for work, family, tourism and related purposes. We have mentioned that one of every seven residents of the United States is of Latino origin. At border settlements this proportion can be much higher; in some Texas towns, for example, the proportion of Mexican-origin residents exceeds 90 percent. The flow of people and investment is not simply one way, nor is it confined to border towns. Baja California has witnessed a land rush by United States consumers and investors, especially since 1997 when foreign ownership of Mexican coastal property was made possible through locally administered land trusts. About 100 000 United States citizens now live in Baja, plus an unknown number of illegal residents. About one-quarter of Rosarito's inhabitants are of United States origin, and many new development plans are directed at consumers north of the border (Weiner, 2003).

During 2001, approximately 286 million people crossed the border between Mexico and the United States legally, along with more than 97 million vehicles. The busiest crossing points were San Ysidro (San Diego)-Tijuana, Calexico-Mexicali, El Paso-Ciudad Juárez, Laredo-Nuevo Laredo, and Hidalgo (McAllen)-Reynosa. That same year, the United States Customs Service collected about US\$22 billion in duties and fees (Weiner, 2002b). Tourism is Mexico's third most important source of foreign currency earnings, creating Mexican *gringolandia* landscapes where invading tourists can feel comfortably at home while tasting the exotic (Torres and Momsen, 2005).

No one knows how many illegal immigrants come to the United States each year. Official estimates put the number of crossings from Mexico at around 350 000 people per year, although others suggest a figure of between 400 000 and 500 000. In 2002, agents in the Tucson district of the United States Border Patrol apprehended illegal immigrants from 51 different countries, though only 1.2 percent of those arrested were from outside Latin America (Baum, 2004: 12). Some of the fastest growing non-Mexican immigrant groups are from Brazil, Ecuador, El Salvador, and Honduras (Chu, 2005). Until recently, large numbers of illegal crossers were apprehended around the four urban ports of entry: Tijuana, Nogales, El Paso and Brownsville. The United States government responded by sealing the borders (Nevins, 1998), and the enormous fortifications created at these four crossings have reduced apprehensions in their vicinity. However, waves of immigrants have subsequently moved away from urban areas, crossing in more remote regions such as the deserts of Arizona. As a result, the number of deaths from exposure and drowning has increased from 57 in 1994 to 422 in 2003 (Zeller, 2001; Kraul, 2004); migrants are less likely to return to Mexico because of difficulties in crossing (Nevins, 2000); and migrant smuggling has become a big business (Richardson and McDonell, 2002).

Border policing has also extended beyond the boundary line. In 2004, a “deep-repatriation program” began voluntary deportations by air, returning border crossers to their hometowns across Mexico instead of simply depositing them across the line in border towns (Alonzo-Zaldivar, 2004; Kraul, 2004). In addition, an “interior checkpoint” program began arresting suspected illegal immigrants further north in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties of Southern California. Such roving patrols have been in operation for many years throughout the United States southwest, especially in Texas (Wilson, Reza, and Murillo, 2004). However, their reintroduction into Southern California in 2004 caused much alarm (Wilson and Murrillo, 2004), disrupting everyday activities such as shopping, school attendance, and medical visits. A different kind of local response, in southern Arizona, has been the rise of local vigilante groups opposed to immigration (Baum, 2004). The Project Arizona Now movement seeks to deny services to illegal immigrants, in a move reminiscent of similar, earlier anti-immigration ballot initiatives in California.

ECONOMY

There is now a two-way channel—people flowing north, money going south—that has become central to the social stability in our hemisphere (Suro, 2003: B11).

The structural cause of much migration is economic opportunity. After NAFTA, California’s trade with Mexico and Canada boomed, jumping from a US\$12 billion value in 1993 to US\$26 billion by 2002. In 1999, Mexico overtook Japan as the state’s leading export market, accounting for more than 17 percent of the state’s exports (Iritani, 2004). The growing integration of the two economies is best revealed in the data on remittances sent back to Mexico by migrant workers. In the first six months of 2004, Mexican emigrants (many in California) sent a record US\$7.9 billion to Mexico, a rate 26 percent higher than the previous year. The average transaction is about US\$400 and is destined for household budgets across Mexico for spending on personal consumption items (Dickerson, 2003). Remittances are now second only to oil as Mexico’s largest source of foreign exchange (Thompson, 2003a). For Roberto Suro (2003), remittances represent a new kind of integration among nations; migrant workers are “players in the era of globalization,” part of transnational networks operating beyond traditional markets and institutions.

Local adjustments to economic integration are equally prominent. When, in 2002, border residents began to drive over the line to purchase much cheaper gasoline, PEMEX announced that Tijuana prices would set at the same rate as Chula Vista, and Juárez prices the same as El Paso, in order to retrieve some of the US\$54 million being lost by PEMEX each year (Gorman, 2002). The market in mailbox addresses is another example of how border dwellers thread their lives between the two countries. In San Ysidro, a community of 30 000 people, there are more than two dozen private mailbox services with 26 000 postal boxes that mostly cater to Mexican customers. The United States post office has a further 6000 postal boxes. Demand is fueled principally by the unreliability of Mexican postal services (Ellingwood, 2001). In McAllen (Texas) as many as 80 percent of new businesses are owned by Mexicans, a reversal of the proportions from five years earlier. McAllen now draws

a greater share of Mexican spending than any other United States city, affecting everything from retail sales to home purchases and vacations. Most of the influx of dollars into McAllen comes from the booming city of Monterrey, only two hours away by high speed toll road. So common is this trip that a new Spanish verb has been coined—“*macallenear*,” literally “to do McAllen” (Romero, 2003).

Once again, the effects of these transformations are not always positive. Local economies are also expressing the stresses caused by integration. The American Hospital Association estimated that in 2000 the 24 southernmost counties from Texas to California accrued US\$832 million in unpaid medical bills, a quarter of which were directly attributed to illegal immigrants (Janofsky, 2003). Moreover, the trend toward economic integration extends to the deleterious effects of transnational crime, including trafficking in drugs, human beings and contraband goods. After 9/11, several small settlements on both sides along the Big Bend portion of the Río Bravo have seen their livelihoods wither. Dependent for many generations on unofficial rowboat crossings, residents in Lajitas (Texas) now face a six-hour drive to cross at Presidio instead of a 15-minute boat trip. The new restrictions have sparked protests and unity rallies on both sides of the border as well as spontaneous efforts at cross-border financial assistance (Yardley, 2004).

LAW AND POLITICS

[S]pecialists in human smuggling [...] have increasingly been dominated by sophisticated criminal gangs who have merged their narcotics and people-trafficking operations. Arizona law-enforcement officials complain of a spreading epidemic of smuggler-related crime and homicide, which has recently erupted into bloody gunfights around Phoenix (Cooper, 2003: 28).

Following 9/11, the lines at the San Diego-Tijuana border crossing were endless. One enterprising entrepreneur began a thriving bicycle rental program that would enable pedallers to avoid pedestrian and vehicle lines by riding rented bicycles to the front of the queues, crossing, and then dropping off the rental. The trouble was, in so doing, they inadvertently broke local by-laws on the United States side, which require cyclists to wear helmets. The crisis was solved in less than 48 hours. Local laws were amended to permit cycling without a helmet within a mile or so of the border crossing.¹

International relations between Mexico and the United States are dominated by two larger issues we have already mentioned: free trade and immigration. But beyond these hot-button issues lie a host of other unresolved cross-border tensions. Chief among these is water, especially the sharing of the Colorado River and the Río Grande/Río Bravo. According to Enrique Martínez, governor of the state of Chihuahua, “the struggle for water will be the gravest problem for this country” (Weiner, 2002a). Under the terms of a 1944 treaty, Mexico now owes the United States 465 billion gallons of water (enough to satisfy the needs of New York City for one year). But the Río Bravo Valley, home to about 200 000 people in 1944, now has 20 million inhabitants. This vastly increased demand, plus many years of drought, has caused the Falcon Dam reserve to shrink to one-twelfth of its capacity.

A closely linked problem that requires international cooperation is pollution, including issues of water contamination, air quality, and exposure to pesticides. Raul Arriaga, undersecretary of the Mexican environmental protection agency, states the problem succinctly: "The environment does not know boundaries [...]. On the contrary, the geography and resources that we share are the element that validates our friendship and binds our destinies" (Bustillo, 2003: A24). In 2003, Mexico and the United States signed the *Border 2012* agreement, extending a pact that had expired the previous year and intended to ensure security and address the problems of pollutants, a contaminated water supply, and so on. Critics complain that the agreement comes without a financial commitment from either country. The United States government during the Bush presidency has tended to withdraw from both international and domestic regulation of environmental pollutants, casting further doubt on the future of the *Border 2012* agreement.

Integration and hybridization are reflected in a host of other legal and political adjustments. For instance, Mexican law prohibits the extradition to the United States of criminals facing death sentences or life-without-parole prison sentences. As a consequence, there may now be as many as 3000 United States murder suspects who have fled to Mexico to escape prosecution, causing many in the United States to call for changes in Mexican statutes. Others have lobbied for the end of the death penalty in the United States (Briscoe, 2004). Such cases starkly illustrate how current disputes in international law are rapidly exceeding the political capacities of the nation state. The Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) street gang formed in MacArthur Park, Los Angeles, during the 1980s and has become an international phenomenon. With up to 50 000 members, including 10 000 in the United States, their influence is prominent at the border (Kraul et al., 2005). MS-13 members often rob immigrants who are crossing the border, and take part in human smuggling into the United States. There is increasing pressure for law enforcement agencies in North and Central America to curb gang activity. Situations also arise where cross-border lives confront inadequate legal protections. Perhaps most poignant are child custody battles, which usually arise when Mexican parents in the United States seek to be reunited with children they left behind in Mexico. The legal and emotional difficulties are exacerbated when the United States-based family is illegally in the country and cannot easily return to Mexico to confront antagonistic relatives (Mena, 2004).

One of the most intriguing political trends in cross-border relations is participation in Mexican elections by United States-based Mexican nationals. In 1996, Mexico amended its constitution to allow citizens to cast ballots from outside their voting precincts. Four years later, President Vicente Fox promised to extend the franchise to the approximately 11 million Mexican nationals in the United States, an absentee voting provision approved by the Mexican congress in June 2005 (Kraul and Quinones, 2005). The desire of United States-based Mexicans to participate in the politics of their homeland, at least at the local level, is strong. Migrants say they have learned a lot about politics in the United States, and now desire to make "real change" in Mexico, as well as "to give something back" to their country (Thompson, 2004). In 2003, under pressure from migrants who send US\$2 million per day to Zacatecas, state governor Ricardo Monreal signed a constitutional reform ending

residency requirements for elected office in the case of United States-based Mexicans born of Zacatecan parents. Two seats in the legislature were set aside for migrants only (Thompson, 2004). A California university professor was recently elected to the state government in Michoacan.

Perhaps the greatest problem facing the Mexico-United States borderlands today is the extent to which illegal immigrants have been caught in the web of crime. As border crossing becomes more difficult, immigrants increasingly employ the services of *coyotes*. Marc Cooper (2003) suggests that smuggling gangs are well-organized and growing, with links to the *narcotraficantes*. If border-crossers make it over the line without being assaulted, they are transported to "safe houses," often in large cities such as Los Angeles and Phoenix, where they are required to pay hefty ransoms before being released (Moore and Becerra, 2004). In Phoenix, homicide rates are at their highest ever; police report that almost two-thirds of the city's crime is related to smuggling and kidnapping (Kelly, 2003). The smugglers' cargo increasingly includes young children being escorted across the border to be reunited with parents in the United States who lack legal status. One 12-year-old from Guerrero was arrested walking in the desert north of Naco (Arizona) on the way to join her mother in Long Island. She was one of over 10 000 unaccompanied minors who were intercepted at the border in 2003 and repatriated by the Mexican foreign ministry. Two days after her release, the 12-year-old crossed over again, this time succeeding in joining her mother (Thompson, 2003b). The crisis of child migration is inspiring the Mexican federal government to legal reform (Ballinas and Becerril, 2005), but the broader diplomatic crisis associated with drug wars and national security remains relatively neglected. Once in a while, the United States State Department issues advisories to citizens traveling in Mexico, or even closes a local consulate, but such actions are seldom more than a gesture or a temporary inconvenience.

CULTURES

As the number of Latinos in the United States has grown (there are currently more than 35 million), [quinceañera, or coming of age] celebrations have become more commercial and more mainstream. Wal-Mart now stocks quinceañera gowns in 200 stores in 30 states. [...] And the gatherings are spreading outside the Catholic Latino community [...] [guests] increasingly consist of multiethnic lineups (Miranda, 2004: 70).

At the levels of culture and identity, the shift from integration to more complicated forms of hybridity becomes more apparent. The most revealing example of hybridity is the rise of "Spanglish", a mongrel language somewhere between Spanish and English. From Texas to California it is possible to find radio and TV stations fluidly mixing both languages—what linguists call "code-switching"—in which words and phrases from one language are inserted haphazardly into sentences in the other language. (More complicated forms arise in the invention of new words in Spanglish.) Part of the reason for Spanglish is the need to communicate—forms of Spanglish have certainly been present since English speakers arrived at the border—but present-day Spanglish is also practiced for fun, for the sheer pleasure of playing with language. It is moving out of Latino neighborhoods and is even

used as a marketing device for consumer products (Hernandez, 2004). Ilan Stavans, professor of Spanish at Amherst College, takes the rise of Spanglish (*el espanglés*) very seriously. He believes that it might even become a full-fledged language that, centuries from now, will replace Spanish (Stavans, 2000; 2003).

Another rich vein of postborder sensitivities is to be found in the art world. A postborder aesthetic has been directly implicated in the explosion of cultural activities in Tijuana during the past decade (Kun, 2004). At the University of Southern California's Fisher Gallery, a 2002 exhibition examined the concept of *postborder* in artistic production (Dear and Leclerc, 2003). And, for many years in Tijuana and San Diego, the InSite collaborations have produced cross-border art on an international scale. The imbrication of cultural spheres is also evident in film, television, music and video productions.

Cultural hybridities are not confined to border communities. Mexico City resident Rossana Fuentes-Berain (2004) observed how ten years of NAFTA has changed Mexican supermarkets. Mexican brands now compete for shelf space with products like Gatorade, Hershey bars and Dove soap, and United States supermarkets stock more products with the label *Hecho en México*. Salsa has already replaced tomato ketchup as the favorite family condiment in the United States. Such changes are not always welcomed. In Oaxaca, for instance, the opening of a McDonald's fast-food restaurant in the town *zócalo* was rejected. Local residents claimed a preference for slow food, mole sauces, and *chapulines* over "McTacos" (Weiner, 2002c). Their resistance derives from a sense of history and traditions being violated; it pertains to the mental or cognitive structures that go into creating culture and identity. These systems of belief and memory can extend over many thousands of miles. The popular *Virgen de Guadalupe* has by now become a universal symbol of spirituality in both the United States and in Mexico, its place of origin. The reverence afforded to the newer *La Santa Muerta* ("Saint Death")—the patron saint of the very poor and criminals—has spread from tough neighborhoods of Mexico City to Tijuana and other frontier settlements. She is believed already to be making her way to Texas, Chicago and Los Angeles (Johnson, 2004).

A pivotal link between broader cultural trends and individual perceptions lies in the question of attitudes. Stephen D. Morris (2005) observed that, after NAFTA, Mexicans seemed to be slowly developing a more tolerant view of the United States, but he also claims that perceptions of the United States as "power-hungry, hypocritical, and anti-Mexican" still pervade public discourse (Morris, 2000). Cross-border attitudes are sensitive and volatile. So when Mexico issued a postage stamp series commemorating a favorite cartoon character, Memín Pinguín, African-Americans on the United States side vocally objected because the character represented a stereotypical black boy with "thick lips, big eyes and protruding ears" (McKinley, 2005). Both nations' presidents were quickly drawn into the dispute: Fox defended the issue as a long-lived Mexican tradition; Bush, through a spokesman, condemned racial stereotyping. The issue became the focus of a vitriolic cross-national debate on cultural misunderstandings regarding race, which was welcomed in some Mexican quarters as a stimulus to a long-overdue debate on that country's racism. The stamps themselves quickly sold out, becoming collectors' items.

IDENTITY

California is becoming the country's Hispanic heartland, where American and Hispanic cultures are melding into something singularly Californian (David E. Hayes-Bautista, quoted in Murphy, 2003: A13).

Most controversial and most difficult to measure are those forms of integration and hybridization that take place in the mind. They involve the accumulation of past and present attitudes and behaviors that may be positive or negative, welcoming or hostile, and volatile or contradictory. Yet it is at the level of identity that some of the most profound changes may be occurring.

The United States-Mexico War is remembered differently in the two countries. According to Weiner (2004: A4), "in the United States, almost no one remembers the war that Americans fought against Mexico more than 150 years ago. In Mexico, almost no-one has forgotten." For some residents, the Mexicanization of the United States borderland is simply a re-occupation of territories that once belonged to Mexico—a peaceful *reconquista*. In California, where fully one-third of the population self-identified as "Hispanic" in the 2000 census, Hispanics increasingly define what it means to be Californian. In July 2001, for the first time since the 1850s, a majority of newborns are Hispanic, and more than two-thirds of those babies are being born in Southern California. (In 1975, Hispanic births accounted for only one-quarter of the state's total.) Hispanic population growth is now principally driven by natural increase, not immigration, and a new "California identity" is foreseen as inevitable (Murphy, 2003).

Not everyone contemplates this future favorably. Roberto Lovato (2004) already pinpoints a backlash in white minority politics. Although they represent only 47 percent of California's population, Anglos are still more than 70 percent of the registered electorate. A series of state ballot initiatives has sought to deny public education to children of the undocumented and has attacked affirmative action and bilingual education programs. Other United States states along the border have witnessed the formation of so-called "Minutemen" groups comprised of private citizens who volunteer their services to support the efforts of the United States Border Patrol. They have also begun to mimic the initiative process pioneered in California, producing their own anti-immigrant measures under such rubrics as "Save Arizona Now."

Legal and illegal immigration is one of the hottest political buttons throughout the border states. And yet by many measures, Mexican immigrants assimilate relatively rapidly, often within one generation: they learn to speak English, progress up the economic ladder, become geographically dispersed instead of ghettoized, diversify their consumption habits (for better or worse), become homeowners, and volunteer for military service (Brooks, 2004; Myers, 2002). Curiously, opponents of continuing immigration (especially by the undocumented) are often former immigrants themselves. Some of the greatest foes of bilingual education in New York are Spanish-speakers who moved to the United States to give their children opportunities for advancement, including fluency in English (Freedman, 2004).

Meanwhile, enormous numbers of migrants who arrive at the Mexican border are no longer intent on crossing but are focused instead on getting jobs in the booming border economies. The consequent urban sprawl out of Tijuana and Mexicali bears a striking resemblance to that of any Southern Californian city (even if housing standards are not as high). A preference for United States-style suburban lifestyle is clearly evident among those Mexicans who can afford it, even though they may remain profoundly Mexican at heart. At its jingoistic extreme, patriotism in Mexico can be just as discriminatory and exclusionary as in the United States and even though demographic diversity in Mexico is developing more slowly than its northern neighbor's, an intensification of prejudice is already being noticed, as in the rise of neo-Nazi groups in the central state of Aguascalientes which target gang members and "cholos" (indigenous and *mestizo* persons who adopt western habits) in their hate messages (Appendini, 2005).

This reminds us that borderland identity is not solely a matter of "Anglos" and Mexicans. Indigenous groups have also laid claim to borderland spaces and memory. For instance, in both New Mexico and Texas, conflicts broke out over the commemoration of the role of Spanish conquistador Don Juan de Oñate. Near Española, at the Oñate Spanish Heritage Center, a group of Ácena Indians sawed off the right foot of a statue of Oñate, mimicking one of Oñate's especially gruesome sentencing practices (Kosek, 2004). In El Paso, Texas, a plan to erect an 11-ton, 36 foot (11 meter) high statue of the conquering Oñate has met with intense opposition from local indigenous groups who remember only Oñate's extreme brutality. (Oñate was tried in Mexico City, found guilty, and exiled from New Mexico.) Local Mexicans appear to have accepted the statue as a necessary part of their heritage; the feelings of local "Anglos" seem split between pride and embarrassment (Blumenthal, 2004).

CONCLUSIONS

Cultural integration and hybridization are slippery concepts. However, our investigations reveal many tendencies in this direction, sometimes positive in their effects, other times negative. Most basic is the growing demographic merging of the populations on either side of the border, especially in the United States, but also evident in the millions of annual crossings for purposes of work, family, leisure and tourism. Monsiváis' notion of a portable border is demonstrably present in both countries. One of the principal forces behind demographic mixing is economic opportunity, causing massive migrations to the north, but also large-scale domestic migration within Mexico toward the border communities. Economic integration is perhaps most spectacularly observed in the rise of Mexico's *maquiladora* industries, but also in the emergence of transnational criminal organizations and their often murderous activities. Other, smaller-scale measures are equally striking, including mailbox and cross-border investment practices, the integrated labor markets characterizing twin towns along the border, as well as charitable efforts to offset the negative trade impacts of post-9/11 border shut-downs in adjacent townships. In the legal and political sphere, long-term collaborations involving trade and immigration are supplemented by burgeoning problems concerning shared water resources and environmental pollution. But adjustments are also developing regarding the extradition of criminals, child custody laws, and the growing poli-

tical influence in Mexico of Mexicans living in the United States. The advance of hybridization is perhaps most demonstrable in the cultural sphere, through the emergence of Spanglish, consumption practices, and collaborations in the worlds of art, film, and television. The urban landscapes on both sides of the border are increasingly alike, and spiritual practices manifestly know no borders. Finally, the development of new identities is proceeding apace, especially in the state of California. This process is sometimes difficult to pinpoint since it pertains to cognitive dimensions of belonging, nationalism and tradition, and is complicated by the presence of multiple races, ethnicities, and long-existing indigenous populations and traditions. Cultural sensitivities on both sides of the border are volatile, each side seemingly alert to the slightest hint of malfeasance by the other.

The future of Mexico and Mexico's northern border is inextricably linked to the United States, and vice versa. Federal and state governments in Mexico continue to invest heavily in borderland infrastructure and urban development. In the "politics of proximity" at the United States-Mexico border, competition, conflict and cooperation are equally prevalent, at all levels, from the individual to the international. The public sphere where these intersections are being played out include cross-border bridges, where couples meet to exchange marriage vows, as well as international courts of law. Despite the difficulties linked to integration and hybridization, and their sometimes negative effects, we regard such postborder tendencies as positive developments in the international relations between Mexico and the United States.

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NOTE

1 Norma Iglesias, personal communication, 2005.

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