Social Theory Working Group

Professor Rhacel Salazar Parreñas
Monday, September 17, 2007
6:30-8:30pm

Pound Hall, John Chipman Gray Room

Readings:


Mae M. Ngai

IMPOSSIBLE SUBJECTS

ILLEGAL ALIENS AND THE MAKING OF MODERN AMERICA
Chapter Four

Braceros, "Wetbacks," and the National Boundaries of Class

Let us go to the United States
To earn good salaries,
Because the Big-Footed people
Need workers
—Mexican corrido, "Advice to the Northerners"

He no gotta country, he no gotta flag
He no gotta voice
all got is the lan'
To work like the burro, he no gotta lan'...
—Américo Paredes

In 1958 the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the government's revocation of Clemente Martínez Pérez's citizenship. Martínez, who was born in El Paso, Texas, and therefore an American citizen by native birth, lost his citizenship because he had voted in an election in Mexico and failed to report for U.S. military service during World War II, both of which acts were grounds for citizenship revocation under the Nationality Act of 1940. Dissenting in the case, Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote, "Citizenship is man's basic right, because it is nothing less than the right to have rights." But, it would not be until 1967, during the rights revolution in law, that the Supreme Court would rule that citizenship was inviolable and not subject to compulsory revocation by the state.

Clemente Martínez's case is of interest not only because it is part of the history of legal conflict over the boundaries and terms of American citizenship. It also opens a window on the heterogeneous and transnational character of the Mexican/American political subject. Martínez was a U.S. citizen, but not only had he voted in a Mexican election, suggesting an assumption of Mexican citizenship (although there is no evidence that he naturalized as a Mexican citizen), he also inhabited additional legal-status categories as a bracero, that is, a Mexican national contracted to work in the United States, and an illegal alien.

Born in 1909 in El Paso, Martínez was taken back to Mexico by his parents
in 1919 or 1920. He married and had children and lived in Mexico without interruption until 1943. During World War II Martinez entered the United States twice, as a Mexican-national contract worker under the wartime Migrant Labor Agreement between the United States and Mexico, commonly known as the bracero program. On both occasions he worked as a railroad laborer and returned to Mexico upon the completion of his contract. In 1947 Martinez tried to enter the United States as a U.S. citizen, claiming his birth in Texas, but because he admitted to avoiding military service and voting in a Mexican election, the INS excluded him on grounds that he had expatriated himself. In 1952 he entered the United States, this time claiming he was a Mexican national in order to get a berth as an agricultural worker in the bracero program. A year later, in San Francisco, the INS ordered Martinez deported on grounds that he was an "undesirable alien." From the Court's recounting of his case, Martinez had "surrendered himself" to immigration authorities. This suggests that he was not a typical bracero who "skipped" his contract and was subsequently apprehended by the INS, but that he had perhaps deliberately presented himself to the INS in order to get a hearing, hoping to regain his U.S. citizenship. He might have planned to bring his family to the United States to join him. But if that were the case, his strategy backfired. A federal court rejected Martinez's claim that he could not be deported because he was a native-born citizen of the United States, ruling that he was not a citizen. With the outcome of the Supreme Court's ruling, Martinez was deported to Mexico, even though he never actually possessed legal status as a Mexican citizen, notwithstanding his three-time participation in the bracero program.

Clemente Martinez's career and shifting fortunes as an American citizen, a Mexican bracero worker, an illegal alien, and a deported Mexican national might be read as a small treatise on the hybrid and ambiguous legal identities of ethnic Mexicans living in the border region. These identities were shaped and reshaped as they were buffeted between the transnational social realities of cross-border migration, life, and work, and the legal demands of nation-states, which resist transnational experiences. Martinez's story also suggests that citizenship was both an abstract concept imposed from above by the state and a utilitarian instrument of migrant agency.

This chapter examines the legal production and state policing of a transnational Mexican labor force during the middle decades of the twentieth century, which formed the context of Clemente Martinez's story. It argues that immigration law and practices were central in shaping the modern political economy of the Southwest, one based on commercial agriculture, migratory farm labor, and the exclusion of Mexican migrants and Mexican Americans from the mainstream of American society. In particular, immigration policies helped create a Mexican migratory agricultural proletariat, a racialized, transnational workforce comprising various legal status categories

across the U.S.-Mexico boundary—Mexican Americans, legal immigrants, undocumented migrants, and imported contract workers (braceros)—but which, as a whole, remained external to conventional definitions of the American working class and national body. I argue that that this transnational Mexican labor force, and especially its bracero and "wetback" constituents, constituted a kind of "imported colonialism" that was a legacy of the nineteenth-century American conquest of Mexico's northern territories. Modern, imported colonialism produced new social relations based on the subordination of racialized foreign bodies who worked in the United States but who remained excluded from the polity by both law and by social custom. I do not mean to suggest a formal structure or model of colonialism in the classical sense. Rather, imported colonialism is better described as a de facto socio-legal condition embedded in formally noncolonial relationships and spaces, in which free citizens of Mexico, an independent nation-state, voluntarily contracted to putatively free, waged labor, within the United States proper.

The chapter first discusses the formation of the Mexican migratory agricultural workforce from the 1920s to World War II. It then discusses the bracero program (1942–1964), America's largest experiment with a "guest worker program," today's euphemism for the federally sponsored importation of contract labor. Third, I discuss the problem of illegal immigration, the so-called wetback problem that emerged simultaneously, and in intimate relationship with, the bracero program, and the enforcement measures taken by the INS. Finally, the chapter examines the liberal critique of bracero and wetback labor by Mexican American civil rights groups and organized labor, and considers how the opposition was shaped and limited by its own understandings of and commitments to nation-state boundaries.

The Creation of the Mexican Agricultural Proletariat in the United States

From the turn of the century to World War I, labor flowed more or less freely from Mexico into the United States. Mexican workers provided the human labor power for the region's agricultural revolution and laid the infrastructure for the modern Southwest's economy: they laid railroad tracks that connected the region to the national market, cleared ranch lands for farming, and dug irrigation canals. By 1914 Mexicans had become a noticeable presence in the burgeoning agricultural regions of south Texas and California. Agricultural production in the Southwest expanded rapidly after World War I. By 1929 California, Arizona, and Texas accounted for 47 percent of the nation's large-scale cotton farms, and California alone contained 37 percent of all the large-scale farms in the United States. Between 1920
and 1930 the population of south Texas doubled, to 322,000, and the California farm labor force grew to some 200,000. The ethnic Mexican population in the United States more than doubled during the same decade, to over 1.4 million.¹²

More important than quantitative growth was a structural transformation of agriculture and the farm labor market. In Texas the mode of farming shifted from small- and medium-sized, family-owned and operated farms and sharecropping to large farms owned by banks, lawyers, and merchant investors. Moreover, the organization of the labor force shifted. Mexicans who entered south Texas in the 1900s and 1910s could still find year-round employment on farms and ranches, which still carried the marks of the traditional patrón-peon relationship. Others settled in small rural hamlets and began to raise families in the United States, even as they continued to travel frequently to Mexico. In the 1920s, however, the agricultural labor market assumed a distinctive migratory character. Migrant streams of landless laborers, including families, now followed the seasons of cotton, fruit, and vegetable crops on a year-long search for work at wages as low as $1.50 a day. The shift overwhelmed and displaced older patterns of work and settlement. The migratory agricultural workforce drew large numbers of new immigrants from Mexico—an average of 62,000 legal and an estimated 100,000 undocumented entries a year during the 1920s¹³—and swept more established immigrants and Mexican Americans into its embrace as well. Mexican Americans, old immigrants, and new immigrants alike worked the two major intrastate migrant streams in Texas and California; at the same time, smaller streams followed the cotton crops in Arizona and New Mexico, and reached northward to the sugar-beet fields of Colorado, Michigan, and Montana.¹⁴

The formation of the migratory agricultural workforce was perhaps the central element in the broader process of modern Mexican racial formation in the United States. Agribusiness desired large numbers of Mexican laborers, but the economic and social segregation and isolation of Mexicans was necessary to insure continued Euro-American control and domination. A settled resident workforce would have encouraged both labor organization and more stable communities, and all that they imply—higher wages, education, political participation, growth of a middle class. Such trends were not, in fact, entirely absent in the Southwest. Mexican American communities were established in Los Angeles and El Paso in the early decades of the century. But the structure of the agricultural labor market that emerged in the 1920s mitigated such development.¹⁵

Immigration policy and practices powerfully influenced the economic and spatial reorganization of the Southwest. Whereas before World War I the absence of a practical border policy bespoke frontier-like qualities like expansiveness, possibility, and lawlessness, by the 1920s the frontier gave way to a new spatiality marked by large commercial farms and hardened borders.¹⁶ As discussed in chapter 2, restrictive policies created Mexican illegal aliens—migrants who were “undocumented” because they crossed the border without going through formal entry and inspection and therefore lacked the requisite papers: visas, head-tax receipts, border-crossing cards, inspection certificates, bathing certificates, and the like. Moreover, the new emphasis on formal status and the complexity of the deportation statutes generated confusion in an area long characterized by informal crossings. The possibility of sweeps, detention, interrogation, and deportation was ubiquitous. It spread apprehension among Mexicans and loomed as perhaps the single greatest indication that Mexicans did not belong. Thus, even when deportations created labor shortages and drove up wages or temporarily disrupted production, restrictive immigration policies ultimately served the interests of agribusiness by creating a vulnerable “alien” workforce.

Euro-Americans perceived Mexicans as foreigners even though the major-
latter's labor needs. Casting Mexicans as foreign *distanced* them both from Euro-Americans culturally and from the Southwest as a spatial referent: it stripped Mexicans of the claim of belonging that they had had as natives, even as conquered natives. That is also why segregated communities formed in tandem with the reorganization of the labor force. The act of distancing was one way by which the "other" was constructed, out of what Tzvetan Todorov called the failure (or refusal) to identify the self in the other. It differed from the colonial stance toward native subjects, in which the other is a ward to be converted, civilized, and otherwise remolded in the colonialis't image. No such sense of responsibility inhered in the colonialis't relationship to imported labor."

At the same time, Mexican labor differed from colonial imported labor in several important respects. In the 1920s Mexican labor was not unfree but free, waged labor. The destruction of semifeudal relationships of mutual obligation on the ranches and the shift to wage labor was, in fact, necessary to create the agricultural proletariat that modern agribusiness needed. Economic relations between absentee owners and migrant laborers were impersonal. Said one grower: "The relations between Mexican laborers and American employers are fine, and are regulated under economic, not personal[.] pressure."

The modern economic relationship was a double-edged sword, however, which made a complete realization of imported colonial labor difficult. Commercial agriculture required seasonal wage-labor, but that also meant that the market determined wages and that Mexicans derived a certain leverage from their status as waged workers. To be sure, an overabundance of labor kept wages down, but the growers' dependence upon Mexican labor also gave workers some room to negotiate. A potato farmer in Colorado said, "First they [Mexicans] worked by the sack. Then they wanted a contact by the acre. The rascals struck for their own rates." Spontaneous strikes for improved wages broke out during the 1920s and 1930s in southern California. Farmers complained that "they will all sit down in the field, and not work if they hear somebody is paying a couple of cents more." After investigating a labor strike in the Imperial Valley in 1928, federal officials concluded that Mexican workers were neither "docile" nor "contented." Rather, investigators said, "many [Mexicans] do not favor any peonage attitude toward their race."

Moreover, as free labor, Mexican workers exercised the right to quit. The potato farmer continued, "They will quit a job if they don't like the treatment even if they haven't food for the day and no other job in sight." A Texas onion grower said similarly, "The Mexicans' only protection is that they are the only labor available and you can't treat them too badly and hold them."

Freedom of movement operated both at the level of the individual
grants settled permanently, in both cities and rural towns, even as they continued to participate in seasonal migrant agricultural work.²⁵

The economic structure of migratory wage-labor produced other contradictions, as well. Growers wanted not only seasonal workers. They also wanted a labor surplus so they could obtain workers on demand, at low wages, and in plentiful supply to pick their crops early and quickly. Herein lay the truth of the growers’ perennial complaint of labor shortages. The rush to market not only encouraged an oversupply of labor, which depressed wages, but also flooded the market, which depressed prices. These trends were the ruin of Anglo small farmers and sharecroppers. A large onion grower admitted, “There is no scarcity of labor here. The little man is being crowded off the map. The market demands 100 cars of onions a day and we ship 300. The big farmer beats the little fellow because he ships quicker. The present situation will ruin us. The farmers would be better off here if we did not have so many Mexicans.” Many farmers compared their plight to that of small white farmers in the South “injured by the Negro slavery system before the Civil War.”²⁶

These tensions and contradictions lent instability to the agricultural industry and frustrated growers’ efforts to secure a cheap, disposable labor force entirely under their control. Labor militancy and permanent settlement in particular belied important assumptions that Euro-Americans held about Mexican workers and upon which agribusiness relied—that they were tractable and returned to Mexico after each season.

The repatriation of over 400,000 Mexicans and Mexican Americans during the early 1930s created a temporary labor shortage that agricultural workers used to their advantage to press for higher wages. Throughout the 1930s labor unrest attended southwestern and western agriculture. In 1933 and 1934 in Texas, Mexican onion seters and shed workers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley and pecan shellers in San Antonio organized unions and strikes. Strikes were especially prevalent in California. In 1933 a wave of strikes involved two-thirds of the value of the state’s crops.²⁷

In 1933 and 1934, Mexican workers in the Imperial and San Joaquin Valleys staged over fifty strikes, many of which were attended by vigilante violence. The 1933 strike of 18,000 cotton pickers in the San Joaquin Valley saw three workers killed and thirteen wounded in confrontations involving hundreds of strikers and vigilantes. Cotton pickers in Kern County struck in 1938 and again in 1939. Paul Taylor and Clark Kerr noted there were more than forty agricultural labor unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, mostly in the South and Southwest, in addition to the left-wing Cannery and Agricultural Workers Union. The Berkeley economists said the “uprisings” on the farms were the inevitable result of the “rise of intensive

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4.2 Contrary to conventional belief, Mexican agricultural workers settled and raised families in the United States. This family lived in a three-room house without indoor plumbing in San Diego, 1941. (Courtesy of Russell Lee, FSA/OWI Collection, Library of Congress.)
agriculture [that] has given us, almost unnoticed, a rural proletariat." They asked, "Is it a matter for surprise that proletarians strike?"

In general, New Deal farm policy did not support agricultural workers. The central farm program of the New Deal, the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA), assisted the largest farmers and encouraged the further consolidation of landholdings through programs that accelerated mechanization and paid benefits to farmers to restrict production. The political calculus in Congress, moreover, led northern Democrats to acquiesce to southerners' demands to exclude agricultural workers from social and labor legislation. Agricultural workers were thus not covered by the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, the Social Security Act of 1935, or the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, which recognized the right to organize and bargain collectively, provided for social insurance for the elderly, and established a minimum wage, respectively. The exclusion of the agricultural proletariat from the legal definition of "worker," at least within the meaning of basic federal labor and social welfare legislation, was perhaps the single greatest guarantee that agribusiness would continue to have free rein over its workforce and that the South and Southwest would remain racialized, colonial-type backwaters of the nation.

One small program of the AAA, the Resettlement Administration, and its successor, the Farm Security Administration (FSA), attempted to address the plight of migrant farmworkers by constructing labor camps for migratory workers. The camps aimed to provide "minimum facilities" for health and safety, hot and cold running water, laundry, recreational activities, democratically elected self-government, health care, and liaisons with local schools. Ironically, Mexicans and Filipinos, the foundational agricultural workforce with a compelling interest and desire to raise agricultural labor standards, remained virtually untouched by the FSA camp experiment. Mexican workers tended to live in rural colonias, and Filipinos lived almost entirely in labor camps operated by their co-ethnics. In the main, Dust Bowl refugees and transients populated the FSA camps. In some respects they were the neediest migrants because they had no local communities of their own. But they also had few stakes in the long-term prospects of agricultural wage-labor. Formerly independent farmers and tenants, they carried a conservative reputation and moved to urban areas when industrial war-production jobs became available in the late 1930s. In fact, the FSA chose white migrants for its social experiments in part because they presented a conservative, docile image to the public. Dorothea Lange's iconic photograph "Migrant Mother" delivered the FSA's preferred message that migratory workers were white, pathetically poor, singular, and passive.

New Deal policy did little, then, to resolve the problems of agricultural labor. Against the backdrop of instability and conflict, growers increasingly called for the government to import Mexican nationals as contract laborers.

In 1936 growers in the Texas counties of Mercedes and Weslaco pressed the state labor commissioner, their representatives in Congress, and the Department of Labor to declare an emergency labor situation. However, the Immigration Service reported that 50 percent of the cotton crop had already been picked and that no emergency existed. The director of the WPA in Texas stated flatly that labor existed if "reasonable wages" were paid.

Again in 1937 the INS rejected growers' claims of a labor shortage, pointing out that cotton wages were higher in Arizona and even in Mexico than in Texas. In 1941 and 1942 growers of cotton, sugar beets, fruits, and vegetables flooded the Department of Labor with formal applications requesting exemption from the immigration laws prohibiting foreign contract labor. Although a labor shortage did exist in the nation, caused by the enlistment of 15 million men and women into the armed forces and the demands of war production, the INS continued to report that no emergency labor situation existed in southwestern agriculture. In Texas the WPA population numbered 32,000, but growers were willing to pay only half the rate of WPA wages, which were 40¢ an hour. The Bay City, Texas, Chamber of Commerce "flatly declined to even consider" hiring 3,000 unemployed laborers congregating in federal camps at Harlingen and Raymondville. In fact, growers did not want Mexican American workers. Whereas during the 1920s white Americans typically viewed Mexican Americans and immigrants without distinction, growers concluded from the labor unrest of the late 1920s and early 1930s that Mexican Americans demanded too much.

While field reports from INS, Employment Service, and WPA district offices argued that the labor shortage was artificial, the resolve of their superiors in Washington began to collapse under pressure from members of Congress representing southwestern districts. On April 30 and May 4, 1942, the Department of Agriculture convened an interagency conference with the Farm Security Administration, the INS, the Department of Labor Employment Service, the Board of Economic Welfare, the Office of Inter-American Affairs of the State Department, the Office of Agricultural War Relations, the House Committee on National Defense Migration, the War Relocation Authority, and the War Production Board. The putative agricultural labor shortage trumped the Labor Department's concerns over wages and standards and the INS's warning that imported laborers would not return to Mexico upon the completion of their contracts. Preparations were made. In late May the U.S. Employment Service (USES) certified the need to import six thousand workers as contract laborers.

The decision to use foreign contract labor was a momentous break with past policy and practice. The United States had outlawed foreign contract labor in 1885. Since the time of the Civil War, Americans had believed that contract labor, like slavery, was the antithesis of free labor, upon which democracy depended. Like the slave, the contract laborer was not free to bar-
gain over wages or working conditions, either individually or collectively. He did not have the right to choose his employer or to quit. Although, by the late nineteenth century, industry and monopoly had eroded the independence of craft workers and undermined the attributes of free labor, the incipient trade-union movement drew an absolute line against contract labor because the latter was unambiguously unfree. Americans’ rejection of contract labor was so embedded in the national political culture that its practice in Hawaii was terminated in 1898, when the United States formally annexed the islands. Nor was contract labor ever instituted in the Philippines or Puerto Rico, which in the same year came under American colonial rule.26 That decades later, and in the mainland United States, Americans would turn to a colonial labor practice that they had rejected in their own colonies is explicable only in part as a response to a perceived war emergency. It was also an expression of the legacies of slavery and conquest. The old plantation class and its modern cousins in agribusiness in the South and Southwest succeeded in molding the modern agricultural workforce into modes of racialized labor that had more in common with nineteenth-century colonial practices than with modern industrial relations. As African American sharecroppers and tenant farmers in the South continued to bear the marks of race slavery, Mexican workers in the Southwest and California were racialized as a foreign people, an “alien race” not legitimately present or intended for inclusion in the polity.

The Bracero Program

The bracero program was not the only instance of imported contract-labor in the United States in the mid-twentieth century. During the same period, contract workers came from the British West Indies to perform farm labor in the Southeast and along the Atlantic seaboard. Puerto Ricans, who were American citizens, also migrated under the island government’s auspices for migratory seasonal agricultural work in the northeastern United States. But the bracero program was by far the largest project, involving some 4.6 million workers.27

Mexico agreed to the program despite its concern that its nationals were treated poorly in the United States during the First World War. The project was proposed as an alternative to Mexican participation in the Allied armed forces. Some scholars have also argued that Mexico had come to the conclusion that if it could not prevent mass emigration, it would try to regulate or manage it. The United States admitted the first braceros on September 27, 1942, in time for the sugar-beet harvest. Under the wartime agreement (which was extended to 1947),28 the United States imported some 215,000 Mexican nationals to work as agricultural laborers and 75,000 to work for the Southern Pacific and some twenty other railroads for maintenance of way and track work.29

From 1948 to 1964, the United States imported, on average, 200,000 braceros a year. Braceros worked in twenty-six states, the vast majority in California, Texas, and other southwestern states, and dominated crops such as cotton, citrus fruits, melons, lettuce, and truck vegetables. Only 2 percent of American farm operators employed braceros, but they were the wealthiest ones, the largest “industrial” farms. Braceros and other contracted foreign workers comprised a relatively small sector of the total U.S. farm labor force of 10 million, about 2 percent, but they were one-fifth of all migratory waged farmworkers.30

During the 1950s government economists spoke of the nation’s “long-term dependence on foreign agricultural labor,” citing the sectoral shift from small, tenant-operated farms to large commercial farms and the latter’s need for large numbers of “off farm” temporary workers. Postwar liberals did not view foreign contract labor as a form of imported colonialism but, rather, as a statist solution to various economic and political problems. The Truman commission on migratory farm labor argued that government-sponsored contract labor would eliminate illegal migration, bring order to the farm labor market, and protect foreign nationals from abuse. The belief that braceros were the “legal successors to the illegal ‘wetbacks’” was particularly widespread.31

In fact, the continued use of imported contract-labor long after the end of the war signaled the consolidation of industrial farm production as a low-wage enterprise beyond the reach of federal labor standards and workers’ rights. In 1955 farm wages in the United States were 36.1 percent of manufacturing wages, a decline from 47.9 percent in 1946. That downward trend in large part resulted from the semicolonial use of foreign contract and undocumented laborers—workers who had no legal standing in the society in which they worked.32

Two elements born of wartime politics—direct contracting of foreign labor by the U.S. government and binational sponsorship and management—defined the wartime program and continued to undergird the program’s myriad contradictions and conflicts after the war. In 1951 Congress passed Public Law 78, which, along with a diplomatic agreement negotiated with Mexico known as the Migrant Labor Agreement, governed the program until its completion in 1964. To facilitate the importation of Mexican agricultural labor, Congress lifted the ban against contract labor that had been law since 1885.33

The Migrant Labor Agreement stipulated that Mexican contract workers would not be used to replace domestic workers or to depress domestic farm wages. Braceros were guaranteed transportation, housing, food, and repatria-
tion, and were exempt from American military service. Wages were set at the domestic prevailing rate and in no case less than an established minimum (30¢ an hour during the war and 50¢ throughout most of the 1950s), and workers were guaranteed work for 75 percent of the contract period. These were elementary provisions, but some growers complained that they were excessive, even "socialistic," pointing out that such guarantees and benefits were not available to domestic agricultural workers. The agreement also provided that braceros would not be subject to discrimination, such as exclusion from "white" areas of segregated public accommodations. Mexico had unilateral power to blacklist states, counties, or employers that were found to discriminate, until that power was curbed in 1954. At Mexico's insistence, recruitment centers were situated in the interior of Mexico. Mexico believed this was essential to its ability to control emigration. It worried that border recruitment would encourage a labor depletion from northern Mexican states, deny the privilege of participation to its citizens in other regions, and draw migration to the border for illegal entry into the United States. The agreement stipulated that reports of contract violations would be jointly investigated and determined by representatives of both governments. A provision added in 1951 gave braceros the right to select representatives from their own ranks to "communicate" with employers, but not for purposes of collective bargaining or altering the terms of the contract.

Finally, the international agreement designated the two parties to each "Individual Work Contract" as the individual Mexican national as the "worker" and the United States government as the "employer." These terms reflected Mexico's desire to protect each national it sent abroad. It worried that Americans would not respect each bracero as an individual person. Indeed, there were some growers who wanted to merely contract large numbers of braceros without bothering to take their names. Mexico also knew it had no leverage with individual employers. Thus the federal government assumed the role of labor contractor, responsible for contracting and delivering agricultural workers to American growers. The Farm Security Administration of the Department of Agriculture served as the lead administrative agency for the program until 1949, when that responsibility transferred to the U.S. Employment Service in the Department of Labor. The INS was responsible for admitting and repatriating workers.

In May 1955, forty-four men from Aguacaliente de Garate, a small town in the state of Sinaloa, Mexico, entered the United States as contract agricultural workers. Earlier that spring, the bracero program had been the talk of Aguacaliente. Ricardo Velasquez recalled first hearing about it in a radio broadcast from Mazatlán; others read about it in the newspaper. As news spread quickly throughout town, the mayor circulated a paper for those interested to enlist. Many were family men; Velasquez, for example, was thirty-four years old, married, and had five children. As farm laborers, they earned 8 pesos a day, or 65¢ (U.S.). They heard that wages for braceros in Texas were 50¢ an hour and thus regarded the program as an opportunity to "make a lot of money."

Their migration to Texas was not easy nor cost free. First, the men had to pay for one of their group to take the papers to the state capital, Culiacan, and then to Mexico City for approval. This may have included the payment of mordidas, or bribes, to officials. They then journeyed to the contracting center in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, where they waited for ten days before being processed. The cost for the initial authorization and subsistence in Monterrey to each man was 300 to 400 pesos. After finally being processed at Monterrey, Velasquez and five other Aguacaliente men were taken to a depot, fed lunch, and put on a train. They arrived at Reynosa, near the border, at 4:00 a.m., and then transferred to the U.S.-INS reception center at Hidalgo, Texas. There, they received breakfast and a routing slip, with which they proceeded, along with hundreds of other men, to be interviewed, photographed, and fingerprinted. They received a brief medical examination, a chest x-ray to detect tuberculosis, and fumigation for hoof-and-mouth disease. The INS reception centers processed from several hundred to several thousand incoming braceros a day. The maximum pace was set by the capacity of the x-ray machines, which each handled 175 braceros per hour. The operation assumed the character of "batch processing" that alienated individual braceros and also strained INS personnel, who complained of a shortage of staff and equipment, long hours, temperatures from 108 to 117 degrees, and a "stench of sweaty, unwashed human bodies."

The six men left Hidalgo at noon, each with a work card and a contract with the Valley Farmers Cooperative Harvesting Association. The contract provided for employment in Hidalgo, Willacy, or Starr County, from May 11 to June 8, 1955, as "harvest hands, Veg.—50¢ per hour" and, for "sustenance," a daily payment of $1.15 for provisions to furnish their own meals.

An employee of the Valley Farmers Cooperative drove the men to a tomato- and melon-packing shed in Edinburg, Texas, and later that evening to a house that Velasquez said "didn't have a lock on it." Aurelio Ocampo said it was "in poor condition and very dirty. We didn't have a chance to clean it as we arrived after dark." The foreman, Eduardo Morales, delivered $3.19 worth of groceries for the six men. Ocampo added, "We didn't sleep good because of the condition of the cats."

The next morning they traveled for two hours to the field in a truck with six or seven other men, who were "specials"—formerly undocumented workers who had been legalized as braceros. These men told the new arrivals that wages in the valley were 30¢ an hour, corroborating what the latter had heard from compatriots in Reynosa. When they arrived at the melon field,
that braceros would not be used to undermine domestic wages or to displace
domestic workers, was a fiction. The Department of Labor determined the
"prevailing wage" by calling local meetings of growers, grower associations,
and farm organizations. It made no independent investigation of the labor
market and took no input from domestic workers, labor unions, or indepen-
dent organizations. The prevailing wage was thus whatever growers decided
it to be. The effect of imported contract labor on domestic wages was unmis-
takable. Over a ten-year period, the wages for tomato-picking in the San
Joaquin Valley in California dropped 40 percent, during which time the propor-
tion of braceros hired to pick them rose by 90 percent. Between 1953 and
1959, overall farm wages in the nation rose by 14 percent but remained
frozen in areas that used bracero labor.14

The displacement of domestic farmworkers was both specific and deliber-
ate, as in cases where domestic workers were fired and replaced with bra-
ceros, and generalized, as evidenced in the wholesale outmigration of Mexi-
can American workers from south Texas each year during the harvest period.
Over ten thousand union jobs in the Imperial and Salinas Valleys in Califor-
nia and in Arizona were lost in 1953 when growers abolished the packing
sheds and moved packing operations to the field, where the work was done
by braceros.15

Braceros had the right to file complaints if they believed the employer
violated the contract. Data for the entire program are incomplete, but avail-
able evidence suggests that workers registered upwards of several thousand
formal complaints a year. According to a Bureau of Employment Service
official, braceros filed some eleven thousand formal complaints from 1954 to
1956, involving one to several hundred workers in each instance. Violations
were found in roughly half the cases. Underpayment was the most common
cause for complaint. Others concerned housing, subsistence, illegal deduc-
tions, threats, mistreatment, and occupational risks.16

The complaints made by braceros provide evidence of the working and
living conditions experienced by many workers. Of course, not all employers
violated the contract and the number of formal complaints was small com-
pared to the total number of contracts—perhaps 5 percent. But contempo-
rary observers consistently reported widespread contract violations and
noticed that many braceros were afraid to complain. Moreover, the labor-
intensive character of commercial agriculture made the industry sensitive to
wage competition, so that efforts by some growers to cut labor costs easily
spread to other employers. Bernardo Blanco, the Mexican consul at McAllen,
Texas, estimated that over 50 percent of the contract workers in the Lower
Rio Grande Valley were underpaid. Blanco received six to seven complaints a
day from braceros about wages; most commonly, employers made braceros
sign blank receipts and paid them 30–35¢ an hour instead of the contract
rate of 50¢ an hour.17
Housing violations were common. USES routinely found deficiencies in one-third to one-half of its housing inspections. Workers hated the food. They complained about poor quality, lack of variety, and scant servings. A committee of braceros contracted to the Sunskit camp at Escondido, California, visited the Mexican consul in San Diego to complain about “tacos served [to] them . . . in a state of decomposition” and of workers taking ill en masse.81

Rarely did the government terminate an employer’s contract. Most violators merely received a warning. In 1956, for example, only 50 out of 1,631 employers determined to have violated the contract were removed from the program, about 3 percent. Termination seems to have been reserved for extreme cases involving physical abuse, as in the case of N. A. Dugan, a grower in Muleshoe, Texas, who struck Miguel de Jesus Castañeda in the face because he left the field to get a drink of water.82

Contract enforcement was lax in part because federal agencies lacked adequate resources to do the job. In southern California, where fifty thousand braceros worked, the Department of Labor had six enforcement officers on staff.83 Perhaps more problematic was the department’s decentralized monitoring system, which was grounded in the close relationship between local branches of state employment and farm-placement services and growers’ associations. An internal investigation conducted by the Solicitor’s Office of the Labor Department in 1959 found a widespread practice of compliance personnel accepting gratuities (crates of fruits and vegetables), clerical assistance, and other favors from association offices. The largest growers dominated the associations and, in a perverse use of power, disciplined small growers who complied with the contract by subjecting them to an “abnormal number of investigations.” Mariano Arevalo quit his job as a federal compliance officer. “I got sick of it,” he said. “Pressure was always applied by the growers and I was often instructed [by Labor Department superiors] to take it easy.”84

In addition to providing evidence of work conditions, the record of complaints belies the conventional view held by contemporaries as well as by scholars today that braceros were docile or ignorant of the terms of their contracts.85 Undoubtedly many braceros could not read the contract or the message from the minister of foreign relations, Manuel Tello, that came attached to each one. The “special introductory message” praised the braceros’ “intention of working diligently and showing . . . the good qualities of our race and the prestige of our nationality.” It urged them to “fulfill then all your obligations and demand also that the employers fulfill exactly all the clauses of the contract they have signed . . . and immediately advise the Mexican Consulate of violations and irregularities.” But even though many braceros could not read or write, the entire process of recruitment and migration was a crucible they experienced collectively, and within that collective process knowledge was diffused by word of mouth through family and village networks. In an essay about a prototypical bracero, a journalist described Rafael Tamayo as having had “only three years of schooling,” but stressed that “he is no fool . . . [H]e is fairly well informed about the problems he faces before and after becoming a bracero . . . He gets all this from talking to his friends who have already been in the program and returned [to Mexico].”86

On rare occasions braceros took direct action. For example, Mexican nationals who were contracted to a lettuce grower in the Imperial Valley went on strike in November 1942, protesting low wages and other contract violations. Police forced them back to work while others reportedly “escaped” back to Mexico. The Pirus Citrus Company in southern California reported that braceros contracted to them lost “from one to three hours of [work] every morning while they bickered for wage rates.” The workers objected as a group to the piece-rate because although the majority earned between five and six dollars a day, “some of them, no matter how hard they tried, could only earn around three dollars a day.”87

More often, braceros complained to the nearest Mexican consul. One employer indicated just how important the consuls’ role was. The contract, he said, “is just a piece of paper. If we get along with the men and are able to satisfy them and they don’t go to the Mexican consul and kick, we get by.” Indeed, it seemed that during the bracero program the consuls were the only ones who could get American officials to intervene against employers who abused workers or otherwise violated the contract.88

The INS believed that the consuls made an “international incident” out of every complaint and created a high volume of work for U.S. investigators. In the early 1950s American officials accused the consuls of “constant interruptions” in the operation of the program, “arbitrarily fixing minimum wage rates,” and “unilaterally” raising subsistence rates.84 In the summer of 1952 Mexican consuls stationed at the El Paso reception center refused to contract braceros to central Texas at the rate of $2.00 per hundredweight (cwt) for picking cotton, the rate set by the Labor Department, and insisted instead on $2.50 per hundred weight, which they argued was the equivalent of the stipulated minimum wage of 50¢ an hour. Mexican consuls at Harlingen and Eagle Pass refused to certify contracts with less than $1.50 a day for subsistence. Disputes like these persisted throughout the early 1950s. Mexican officials insisted that their “consuls have the right to ‘represent’ braceros as similar to ‘minor wards’ and would not renounce this right.” The Americans argued that the consuls did not “represent” braceros and were not “bargaining agents” for them.89

The issues were finally resolved in amendments made to the Migrant Labor Agreement in March 1954. Mexico succeeded on a number of specific remunerative matters—raising the daily rate of subsistence, increasing insur-
nance payments for work-related injuries, and adding nonoccupational insurance and burial expenses. Mexico also won an agreement on principle that the prevailing wage would not be affected by the presence of illegal labor. More important, however, the United States prevailed on questions of procedure. Mexico conceded that contracting would not stop on account of disputes over interpretations. It relinquished its right to unilaterally blacklist employers or counties, although an employer could be blackballed if the two nations jointly determined discrimination or physical abuse. With these two concessions Mexico lost the only practical leverage it had over the determination of wages and the treatment of braceros. Mexico also agreed to a liberal policy for recontracting braceros at the border, which effectively undermined whatever ability Mexico had to control the process of emigration.

Why did Mexico make these concessions? In the immediate context, Mexico was under tremendous pressure. In 1954 growers continued to use illegal labor as leverage to change the bracero program to their liking. They also demanded a termination of the bilateral agreement in favor of a unilateral program of procuring Mexican agricultural labor. Illegal emigration and unilateral contracting potentially meant a total loss of control for Mexico. More generally, the ruling party in Mexico had moved to the right during World War II. The growth during the war of a Mexican industrial class with ties to American business and the postwar status of the United States as a world superpower informed this ideological and practical shift, notwithstanding the continued nationalist rhetoric expressed by the Mexican state.

While some workers filed complaints, others showed their dissatisfaction by simply leaving the farms. Within one month of the first 1,800 braceros’ arrival in the United States, the INS reported 103 workers missing and repatriated 165 others at their own request—a “failure” rate of 15 percent. Workers who left farms in Arkansas and were apprehended by the INS in Indiana in 1949 explained why they deserted their contracts: “I left because I had not made much money and lost a lot of time because of rain. The company did not furnish me meals.” “We were promised room and board but had to pay for it.” “We could not see how much cotton we picked because they would not let us weigh it ourselves or see how much it weighed.” “We stayed in a shack, the roof leaked, and there were bugs all over.” “I wanted to come see my sister Amilia.”

Some skips said they would “rather go back to being a wetback than be a bracero.” Carlos Morales cited paying a $48 mordida to get a contract in Mexico, only to come to the United States to find terrible conditions and to be cheated of wages. “As a wetback, alone, safely across the border,” he said, “I may find a farmer who needs one man. He will pay me honestly, I think. But as a bracero, I am only a number on a paycheck . . . and I am treated like a number . . . not like a man.”

Some braceros deserted in groups that comprised kinfolk or friends from the same hometown in Mexico. When the six men from Aguacalte found out the rate for picking melons was $20 an hour, they talked it over and decided to refuse the work and to return home. They walked for five hours before they caught a bus to McAllen, where the INS apprehended them. The men told the INS they wanted to return to Mexico. As Pedro Cardozo said, “We had bad luck.”

Other skips tried to improve their luck by finding jobs at farms where conditions were better, or by making their way to cities, where there were higher-paying factory jobs. A former bracero explained that he had earned only $26 a week in farm wages but $27 for two days of work in a factory. Officials also complained of “labor hijackers,” contractors from southern states who came at night and lured braceros away with false promises of better pay. In the border area, many braceros simply went home after they had earned what they wanted or when their contracts ended, without formally checking out with the INS.

The data on skips are scattered but suggestive. In 1951 the INS estimated a desertion rate of 10 percent. A sample survey of employer-reported skips in thirteen states in 1953 revealed an overall skip rate of 4.4 percent, but with rates from 14 to 30 percent in some counties. During the mid-1950s officials estimated the desertion rate in the Lower Rio Grande Valley at 20 to 35 percent. Skipping was especially common in areas like Stockton and Salinas, where the wage structure was under continuous dispute, and in the sugar-beet region, where growers paid according to piece-rates. An INS official complained, “The laborer has absolutely no responsibility except to do as his own desires dictate.” Another believed that, as a class, the braceros were “defiant.” The INS despaired that the problem could be solved. Appropriation, said one official, “is impossible on a case basis because . . . there is no indication where the alien may have gone after he leaves the authorized employer.”

By deserting their contracts, of course, legal workers became illegal aliens. They joined an even larger population of undocumented Mexican migrants living and working in the Southwest.

The “Wetback Invasion”

The bracero program was supposed to be a solution to illegal immigration, but in fact it generated more illegal immigration. It was perhaps ironic that this began during the war as an unintended consequence of Mexico’s exclusion of Texas, Arkansas, and Missouri employers from the bracero program on grounds of race discrimination. Mexico objected to segregation practices in these states, which refused Mexicans admittance to white only areas of public accommodations, movie theaters, restaurants, and the like. Growers in
the border towns on both sides of the line had “mushroomed” due to illegal traffic.76

Critics associated “wetbacks” with “misery, disease, crime, and many other evils.” An INS official repeated the conventional view that illegal aliens were by definition criminal: Because the “wetback” starts out by violating a law, he said, “it is easier and sometimes appears even more necessary for him to break other laws since he considers himself to be an outcast, even an outlaw.”77

The district attorney of Imperial County, California, said “wetbacks” were “criminal types from Mexico,” including “destitute females from Mexico [who] cross the line and are transported by wildcat taxis and trucks to the various ranches . . . for purposes of prostitution.” The association of the illegal entry of women with prostitution was common but not grounded in fact. A contemporary researcher found that, in southern California, prostitutes who plied the cantinas were often local women whom braceros had promised to marry but left stranded with child. Ostracized by the community, they turned to prostitution in order to support themselves. Another group comprised “older women” who traveled from town to town. The association of prostitution with illegal immigration reflected the assumption that illegal migrants were by nature criminal. It also constituted an erasure of the wives of illegal migrant farm laborers, who often worked as domestics, out of public view.78

The construction of the “wetback” as a dangerous and criminal social pathogen fed the general racial stereotype “Mexican.” A 1951 study by Lyle Saunders and Olen Leonard, conducted as part of a project sponsored by the Mexican American social scientist and civil rights advocate George I. Sánchez, stated, “No careful distinctions are made between illegal aliens and local citizens of Mexican descent. They are lumped together as ‘Mexicans’ and the characteristics that are observed among the wetbacks are by extension assigned to the local people.” Wetbacks, said one official, were “superficially indistinguishable from Mexicans legally in the United States.”79

In fact, undocumented migrants were part of a heterogeneous ethno-racial Mexican community in the southwestern United States. More precisely, they represented that generation of newcomers that exists in nearly all immigrant groups, which is distinguished by its concentration in low-waged jobs, its lack of acculturation, and, simultaneously, by its settlement and assimilation into the resident ethnic community. Saunders and Leonard observed “a certain amount of integration of the wetback and the local Spanish-speaking population.” The new arrivals gravitated to the “Mexican section of town” and shared with settled residents “common language and cultural traits.” The undocumented included families as well, another indicator of settlement. In 1947 a Texas official reported that many undocumented Mexicans came with families and enrolled their children in valley schools. In July 1954,
when the INS apprehended thirty illegal aliens on five Texas farms, more than half were women and children. In other cases, Saunders and Leonard noted, undocumented male migrants "court[ed] or marr[ied] the daughter of a [local] Spanish-speaking family." Saunders and Leonard concluded, "The longer [the undocumented migrant] stays, the more he becomes like the groups he lives among."

As they settled, undocumented Mexicans got nonagricultural jobs as city and county laborers, as school janitors, and as construction workers. A resident of Mission, Texas, claimed that "wetbacks" worked in "all kind of jobs . . . [as] carpenters, breakdancers, [sic], painters, and laborers, restaurants, sheds, drug stores, bakers, household, shineboys, all wetbacks." For some, the passage of time also involved spatial distancing from the border. The INS believed northern California attracted "illegal entrants from the entire border due to work opportunities, high salaries, and a large indigenous Spanish-speaking population." An undocumented migrant in Chicago working in a butcher shop earned $2.25 an hour—an entire day's wages in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The INS believed that as "wetbacks" moved farther from the border they were "more difficult to apprehend."

At the same time, undocumented migrants often pursued transnational lives. Some undocumented workers maintained family households in Mexico and traveled illegally to work in the United States. An immigration inspector observed that some "cross the river early in the morning, work all day on a farm adjacent to the river, and return to their homes in the evening." Others commuted weekly, monthly, or seasonally.

The process of integration of undocumented workers into the ethnic Mexican community in the 1950s was complicated by a third element, the braceros. In Texas and California, many growers routinely employed both "wetbacks" and imported contract-workers, in addition to Mexican Americans, who worked as shed workers or foremen. At times growers treated illegal and bracero workers equally; in other cases, undocumented workers earned less than braceros and had inferior living conditions. For example, Miguel Molina, who waded across the river near Brownsville, planted cotton seed for $2 a day. He slept in a shed with a canvas covering and ate food brought to him by a worker named Pancho, one of three braceros employed at the ranch.

Braceros and "wetbacks" were sometimes members of the same family. Some illegal migrants were male relatives whom braceros recruited for their employers. José and Ricardo Adame were brothers who worked for the Gray Farm in Los Fresnos, Texas; José was a bracero and Ricardo was undocumented. Other braceros arranged for their conjugal families to migrate illegally so they could live and work together in the United States. In August 1955 the INS in southern California reported six cases of braceros "smuggling family" into the El Centro area. In other cases, braceros courted and married local Mexican American women. Braceros learned they could become legalized if they established families in the United States and some waited the requisite seven years to apply for a suspension of deportation and adjustment of their status to permanent resident. It is impossible to know how many braceros remained in the United States, although clearly the number was small relative to the total bracero population. But even if uncommon, the practice underscored a comingling of status categories within the family as well as in the realm of work.

Five members of the Carmona-Velasquez family worked for the Wilson farm in south Texas. Their experience illustrates how the intertwining of bracero and illegal migration affected families. In June 1954 Ramón and Célia Carmona, a young couple in their early twenties from Nuevo Leon, Mexico, entered the United States illegally, wading across the Rio Grande at a point near the town of Santa María, Texas. They proceeded to the farm of Walter Wilson, where Célia's older brother, Pedro Velasquez, was employed as a bracero. Célia's father and twelve-year-old brother also worked illegally on the Wilson farm during the cotton harvest. Ramón and Célia picked cotton on the Santa María farm for about a month. In August, Wilson took them to Rio Hondo, where he owned additional acreage. There, Ramón worked in the field and Célia worked in the Wilson's house as a maid. Ramón and Pedro both earned $3 for a twelve-hour day and worked six or seven days a week. Célia received $5 for a five-day work-week.

Later that month the Border Patrol apprehended the Carmonas and returned them to Mexico. After a few days, the couple went back to the border in order to contact friends on the U.S. side, hoping they could retrieve the household items they left at the Wilson farm. Wilson sent word with Célia's father that Ramón should go to Rio Rico to meet Wilson's son, who would bring papers that legalized Ramón as a bracero. Ramón soon returned as a legal contract-worker to Wilson's farm at Rio Hondo, leaving Célia to live in Mexico with her father, who had returned from Texas.

Wilson, however, was not happy with the arrangement. He angrily asked Ramón why he had not brought his wife back with him, as he needed her to work in the house. Ramón had not done so in part because he knew that if she were caught he would lose his bracero contract but also because Célia had decided she wanted to stay in Mexico. But, Ramón recalled, "I saw that he was beginning to get mad, so I decided to . . . do whatever he said." Célia's little brother, Lupé, delivered a letter from Ramón across the river to Célia and then escorted Célia back across the river and to Santa María. Wilson met them with his pickup truck and drove Célia back to Rio Hondo. Lupé hung around the Santa María farm for a while before returning to his father in Mexico. Soon after, however, the Border Patrol apprehended and repatriated Ramón and Célia again.

The experience of the Carmona-Velasquez family suggests how fluid was the line between "wetback" and bracero. The grower in this case appeared to
prefer illegal to bracero labor, but was willing to contract braceros if necessary; whereas the workers seemed to prefer having a contract, probably for the security. There seems also to have been some confluence between workers' and growers' interests in hiring families. While young adult men comprised the backbone of the labor force, children, older men, and women worked illegally as supplemental labor. Women worked both in the field (though infrequently) and in the house. Celia Velasquez's experience does not appear to be atypical: throughout the Southwest private homes employed "wet" maids, who were likely the wives of braceros or illegal migrants working on nearby farms.

Finally, families had to decide whether it was better to stay together and risk deportation, or to live apart for safety and in order to secure steadier work.

INS Policy: Carrot and Stick

During the 1940s the INS continued the general policy that had evolved in the late 1920s—it attempted to apprehend smugglers and illegal entrants but pursued a policy of moderation with regard to undocumented workers on the farms. A government official described the INS's historical policy of control as "not rigid, [but] reasonable" with regard to the needs of the harvest. In 1948 the INS district director at El Paso advised his staff, "We do not have the personnel and means to prevent all these [Texas] farmers from using illegal labor; therefore, unless and until Texas farmers are given the privilege of legally importing farm laborers from Mexico, their farms should not be indiscriminately raided."

Texas growers continued to use illegal labor after the state was removed from the blacklist in 1949. California growers also continued to employ illegal labor, especially in the Imperial Valley, even as they contracted braceros in the late 1940s and early 1950s. "Wetback" labor was cheaper and involved no bureaucratic delays. Some said braceros were "unsatisfactory" and that "wetbacks" were the "good workers." Defiant, the growers invoked their "right to hire and fire farm labor as we [see] fit."

Growers further believed that too many federal agencies were involved in the program and specifically that the Department of Labor intruded upon the employment relationship. (They wanted the program placed under the Department of Agriculture.) They said the program was "too exacting of employers and too solicitous of the workers" and called the terms of the bracero contract "absurd and unworkable." They lodged "serious objections" to the principle of regulation by the federal government and lobbied for allowing Public Law 78 and the binational agreement to expire in 1955. They sought instead a unilateral program based on direct employer recruitment of temporary agricultural laborers from Mexico.82

With the growers restless and illegal immigration continuing unabated, it was increasingly difficult for the INS to continue its policy of selective enforcement. The INS felt pressured to control illegal migration, which depressed not only domestic wages but also bracero wages and destabilized the recruitment of legal contract-workers as well. Illegal immigration also seemed more glaring, more "illegal," when a "legal" method of procuring farm labor existed. Growers' reluctance to use braceros mocked the government's program.

During the early 1950s the INS made a greater effort to search farms for illegal workers. In February 1950 the Border Patrol increased its monthly apprehensions by 30 percent in Texas. The Los Angeles district of the INS mounted an aggressive campaign in 1953, in which it apprehended 175,000 undocumented workers during the three summer-harvest months. But these efforts provoked farmers into "open rebellion to our . . . whole enforcement operation." Critics accused the INS of using "Russian methods" and of acting like the "Gestapo." A national farm organization resolved, "We consider a man's farm much more analogous to his home than a factory, and it should be more secure from search."

The INS was hamstrung not only because the growers had the sympathy of elected officials in Washington. It had also accommodated growers by legalizing their illegal workers on several occasions, some highly publicized, giving them little incentive to participate in the bracero program. This practice was called "drying out the wetbacks." In the famous "El Paso Incident" of October 1948, the INS (with the approval of the White House) opened the border at El Paso to allow the entry of some seven thousand migrants who had massed there and threatened to overrun the border. The INS "arrested" them and then paroled them to employers, explaining that this was a humanitarian gesture because both the laborers and farmers were "desperate." In 1949 the INS legalized four thousand illegal farm laborers for work in California and Arizona and eighty thousand in Texas. In 1953 the United States authorized bracero contracts to some five thousand illegal agricultural workers with who were longtime employees of American ranchers. The "specials" program was supposed to be for illegal workers who performed skilled labor, such as tractor driver or machine operator, but in practice employers used it to legalize unskilled farm hands as well.82

A second "border incident" took place in January 1954, when the INS orchestrated the legalization of several thousand farm workers by allowing them to effect a voluntary departure—in some cases stepping eighteen inches over the international boundary line—and then "enter" the United States under the Ninth Proviso. These included illegal workers whom the INS had previously apprehended and released at the border and those whom farmers "pushed back" over the line in order to have them legally reenter.

Thus believing the INS would ultimately accede to their demands, growers
legalization of illegal workers on the other hand. But whereas previous INS policies had been haphazard and reactive, Swing rationalized them into a comprehensive whole and executed his program aggressively.64

Swing made the program more user-friendly by devising administrative methods to give growers what they had not been able to get the State Department to negotiate with Mexico: border recruitment, recontracting, and the legalization of illegal workers. He revamped the “specials” program, which legalized longtime illegal skilled workers, to create a larger system of “pre-designating” workers for return. The general declared, “Our policy will be to re-contract as many braceros as possible.” He described the “ultimate objective” as “the creation of a reservoir of competent, security-screened farm workers who may be readmitted from time to time under a more efficient and satisfactory procedure.” Also, by making recontracting contingent upon a satisfactory evaluation, Swing had found an innovative method of discipline against complaints, job actions, and skipping. While some employers chose to contract new braceros, “pre-designated return” became the preferred method of procuring labor.65

Swing’s reforms effectively undermined the bracero program’s official recruitment process of local selection and interior processing, which had aimed to regulate the distribution and flow of migration. During the spring of 1955, the recruitment center at Monterrey, Mexico, ceased processing braceros for lack of orders. The INS reception station at Hidalgo doubled, in effect, as the recruitment center for the entire valley. Mexican consul Bernando Blanco believed “specials” were merely “wetbacks with contracts,” whose “legal” employment subverted the entire bracero program. In California, USES inspectors reported that upwards of 90 percent of the “specials” whom farmers called up had no record of prior contracts. By 1956 recontracting had increased by 43 percent from the previous year.66

If General Swing reasoned that growers would participate in the bracero program if it met their needs, he also believed they only convert if they were also deprived of illegal workers. “Operation Wetback” was a massive enforcement effort aimed at apprehending and deporting undocumented agricultural workers from the Southwest, especially south Texas and southern California. It was, in other words, the stick behind the carrot.

The project was conceived and executed as though it was a military operation. According to Swing, the “alarming, ever-increasing, flood tide” of undocumented migrants from Mexico constituted “an actual invasion of the United States.” Operation Wetback commenced in June 1954 with a “direct attack . . . upon the hordes of aliens facing us across the border.” The campaign involved approximately 750 immigration officers, Border Patrol officers, and investigators; 300 jeeps, cars, and buses; 7 airplanes, and “other equipment.” The INS transferred personnel, vehicles, and radio equipment from northern and eastern districts to the Mexican border district.67 This “full mobilization” of its forces and equipment was deployed in “direct ac-
tion at the line.” As Swing described, “Planes were used to locate wetbacks and to direct ground teams working in jeeps. Transport planes, trucks, and [buses] were used to convey the arrested aliens to staging areas, and to discourage reentry, many of those apprehended were moved far into the interior of Mexico by train and ship.” A “special mobile force” made “searches in the interior” and “seize[d] those who have illegally crossed the border.” The operation extended to Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Chicago, where the undocumented had long settled and enjoyed a degree of prosperity.  

At the outset of the campaign, Operation Wetback apprehended 3,000 undocumented workers a day and some 170,000 during the first three months. The INS also reported an immediate increase of over 100 percent in the number of bracero contracts, both first-time contracts and renewals. In all, the INS apprehended 801,669 Mexican migrants from 1953 through 1955, more than twice the number of apprehensions made from 1947 through 1949. It returned them to Mexico by bus, train, and boat. More than 25 percent were removed on hired cargo ships that ran from Port Isabel, Texas, to Vera Cruz, on the Mexican Gulf Coast; a congressional investigation likened one vessel (where a riot took place on board) to an “eighteenth century slave ship” and a “penal hell ship.” The number of braceros admitted during the same period rose from 148,449 in 1954 to 245,162 in 1955 to 298,012 in 1956.  

Some observers were less sanguine about Operation Wetback’s success. An American labor official acknowledged that the INS had “performed a major task in clearing the border areas of literally hundreds of thousands of wetbacks” but added that Operation Wetback had “dumped” thousands of illegal workers over the border, creating problems on the Mexican side. In July 1955 “literally hundreds of thousands of braceros were roaming about the streets” of Mexicali, he reported. Some eighty-eight braceros died of sunstroke as a result of a round-up that had taken place in 112-degree heat, and he argued that more would have died had Red Cross not intervened. At the other end of the border, in Nuevo Laredo, a Mexican labor leader reported that “wetbacks” were “brought [into Mexico] like cows” on trucks and unloaded fifteen miles down the highway from the border, in the desert.  

Swing also wanted to build a chain-link fence along sections of the border in California and Arizona and towers at strategic locations. He argued that a fence would be particularly effective in deterring the illegal migration of “disease-ridden” women and children who he said comprised over 60 percent of those entering surreptitiously after Operation Wetback. The Mexican government and local labor and civil rights groups vehemently opposed the construction of a fence; the State Department envisioned photographs in the Moscow newspapers.  

In fact, the INS’s enforcement campaigns could not “solve” the problem of illegal immigration. At best, Operation Wetback was a short-term success.

### Table 4.1

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>437,643</td>
<td>17,777</td>
<td>455,420</td>
<td>30,196</td>
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<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>315,846</td>
<td>18,883</td>
<td>334,729</td>
<td>29,651</td>
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<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>291,420</td>
<td>18,955</td>
<td>310,375</td>
<td>29,877</td>
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<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>194,978</td>
<td>22,032</td>
<td>217,010</td>
<td>30,272</td>
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<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>186,865</td>
<td>22,353</td>
<td>209,218</td>
<td>39,124</td>
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<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>177,736</td>
<td>22,286</td>
<td>200,022</td>
<td>48,844</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4,646,199</td>
<td>349,013</td>
<td>4,992,212</td>
<td>4,879,419</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


NA1: Not available.

Illegal migration was curbed insofar as the INS legalized illegal workers and gave bracero contracts to erstwhile illegal workers whom employers recruited near the border. In fact, the “pre-designated return” program encouraged illegal migration, even as it channeled it. Officials knew that border recruitment was a “magnet for prospective wetbacks.”

Illegal migration continued even as the bracero program stabilized in the late 1950s. By 1961 the Border Patrol had an authorized force of 1,692 officers and pilots and 8 transport planes. Of those deported by train and air in 1960–1961, upwards of 20 percent were so-called repeaters. In six months in 1963 the INS apprehended over 17,000 aliens in the Southwest district, of which some 9,000 were Mexican adult males and 1,200 were adult females.
and children. Although differences in enforcement effort make it difficult to compare apprehension and deportation data, it should be clear that, notwithstanding various programmatic and enforcement efforts made by the INS, bracero and illegal labor continued to coexist.

Critique and Opposition: Drawing the National Boundaries of Class

From the late 1940s through the 1950s, Mexican American civil rights advocates, trade unionists, and liberal elites tried to combat what they perceived were the pernicious effects of illegal and contract agricultural labor. The opposition had little success, however, until the early 1960s. Their problem was, perhaps, overdetermined. Mexican Americans and migratory farm workers had virtually no political standing in the face of powerful agricultural interests. When Congress finally terminated the bracero program in 1964, a more liberal mood had arrived in Washington. Just as important, growers’ demands for a steady oversupply of cheap farm labor abated after the mechanization of cotton and sugar beets was achieved in the early 1960s.

But while political and structural forces impeded reform, the opposition also suffered from its own internal contradictions. Its general problem might be described as a conflict of loyalties. Mexican Americans empathized with the plight of undocumented workers and braceros, with whom they shared a common ethno-racial identity. The Los Angeles journalist Rubén Salazar called Mexican Americans and braceros “racial brothers.” Indeed, as we have seen, they were sometimes members of the same family. Moreover, Mexican Americans were tied to braceros through various economic relationships. The former worked as labor-camp managers, ran bars and other local establishments catering to braceros, and plied a petty trade servicing bracero labor camps on weekends, offering “clothes, soda pop, cigarettes and tobacco, illegal booze, personal items other sundries, and even prostitutes.” Indeed, the bracero program stimulated the growth of an ethnic Mexican consumer market and a middle class of Mexican American entrepreneurs. In her study of Santa Paula, in Ventura County, California, Martha Menchaca found that “before the appearance of the braceros, the weekends were quiet and very few people visited the Mexican business zone . . . [which] had only one cafe, two grocery stores, and a cantina. Once the braceros settled in Santa Paula, Mexican entrepreneurs began opening more businesses. By the mid-1940s there were at least six cantinas, three grocery stores, one bakery, two cafes, and three boardinghouses.”

At the same time, Mexican Americans believed that “wetbacks” and braceros were the direct cause of their own social and economic problems. Mexican Americans considered braceros “scabs,” who depressed wages and took jobs from locals. On occasion tensions broke out in fights over jobs or over the affections of Mexican American women. Braceros believed “the ones who treat us bad are the . . . Mexicans that are born [in the United States]. They felt resentment against us. They feel uncomfortable with us . . . They try to take advantage of us . . . They laugh [at] us.”

These dynamics were complex. Congressman Henry Gonzalez of Texas observed that the braceros, through no fault of their own, “used to bring the misery of a people in one country to further depress the misery of a people in another country.” A Mexican American activist elaborated the point:

Naturally, we feel sorry for the braceros. We do what we can to see that they are exploited as little as possible up here. After all, our own parents were in pretty much the same position as the braceros a generation ago. . . . But look at what the program is doing to us. We’re trying to climb our way up the social ladder. . . . It’s a hard enough fight, at best. The braceros come along, and hang on to the tail of our shirts. We can’t brush them off, because that wouldn’t be human. But their weight is dragging us down.

Mexican Americans, especially among the middle classes, also chafed at the racial degradation they believed illegal migrants brought upon them. One writer called the borderland a “twilight zone” where “wetbacks and even Spanish-speaking U.S. citizens will do work at wages that even Negroes and white trash refuse to do. . . . The Mexican peasantry,” he said, “lives in near Asiatic poverty.” The comparison to “Asiatic poverty,” of course, invoked the specter of the yellow peril. By situating the “Mexican peasantry” with “Asiatics” opposite (and below) “Negroes and white trash,” the writer suggested that all Mexicans were not only foreign but as backward as the world’s most dangerous backward race.

Mexican Americans tried to combat these associations and to forestall their own decline. They invoked their citizenship in order to distinguish themselves from undocumented workers and braceros. It seemed particularly outrageous to some that braceros, who were aliens, enjoyed privileges and guarantees that eluded domestic workers, who were citizens. A Mexican American from Lytle, Texas, wrote to President Eisenhower, “One glaring inequality which people cannot understand is why the United States will guarantee to an alien a specified wage and deny the same to its own citizens. Doesn’t charity begin at home?”

The League of United Latin-American Citizens, or LULAC, criticized the INS for “allowing an avalanche of illegal Mexican labor,” which “signifies the lowering of wage standards almost to a peonage level and will force thousands of native born and naturalized Americans to uproot their families, suspend the education of their children and migrate to other states in search of a living wage.” A group of Mexican American workers noted that the “annual Grapes-of-Wrath-with-a-Spanish-accent movement” coincided with
the late-summer Texas primary elections and thus "deprived [them] of their prerogatives as voting citizens."

The emphasis on citizenship remapped the lines of race loyalty. In a 1949 statement, LULAC leaders disentangled themselves from the "Mexican-American" axis by arguing that the Spanish-speaking person in the Southwest was "in the same position as the Negro." Both, they said, were "subject peoples" with a long history of discrimination. But that history was nothing compared to the problems caused by "wetbacks," who they felt were really dragging down Mexican Americans. This was an interesting departure from LULAC's view during the 1920s and 1930s, which stressed that the "Latin American" or "Spanish-speaking" people in the Southwest were of Spanish descent, that is, that they were white. The shift perhaps reflected the influence of the post–World War II black civil rights movement. At the same time, locating Mexican Americans with black people seemed to say that even if they were both second-class citizens, they were citizens nonetheless and, therefore, still apart from and above the "wetback."

The "wetback's" illegal status seemed to be an irresistible hook for Mexican American civil rights leaders. The logic was normative: if illegal aliens were present, they should be removed. In 1948 LULAC sent telegrams to President Truman alleging that the illegal entry of laborers from Mexico constituted "a direct danger to our own citizens" and called for law enforcement to deport illegals. The American GI Forum, a civil rights organization, called for strengthening the Border Patrol.

But the call to deport elided the fact that undocumented immigrants and Mexican Americans were part of a larger transnational community. When the INS actually made mass deportations, the consequences of the policy struck home. A Harlingen resident described the effects of a 1950 "drive by the Immigration Service to return Mexican families with their American-born children." He said, "Their home life was [abruptly] broken, they were compelled to sell homes [and] possessions at a great sacrifice; their incomes ended and they were picked up by the Border Patrol at night and 'dumped' on the other side of the river in numbers so great [that] Mexico's railroads and bus lines could not move them into the interior fast enough. . . . Thousands of these families were stranded along the border destitute without food or funds or employment." Similarly, Mexican Americans were of two minds about Operation Wetback. The Texas CIO's Latin American Committee praised the INS for "tightening up the border." But it opposed the INS's use of bloodhounds to track down illegal migrants and its proposed fence along the border, warning that the "militarization" of the Border Patrol would create an even "greater evil" than illegal immigration.

Organized labor also wrestled with conflicting loyalties. Were braceros and "wetbacks" fellow workers, part of a single working class in the United States? Or were they a foreign element of unfree labor, whose introduction into the country brought only disaster to American workers?

In general, unions viewed illegal immigration as an unmitigated evil, a flooding of the domestic labor market with cheap labor. The National Agricultural Workers Union (NAWU, formerly the National Agricultural Laborers Union) of the AFL said illegal labor displaced local labor, especially Mexican Americans but also "colored [and] Okies," and called upon the INS to round up and deport all illegal aliens. In 1949 NAWU organized a demonstration of six thousand people in the Imperial Valley at the U.S.-Mexico border, protesting illegal migration. Union activists dramatically made "citizen's arrests" of alleged "wetbacks" and took them to the INS. The union's "anti-wetback" strike against lettuce growers in the valley in 1951 included picket lines at the border to dramatize opposition to illegal labor. U.S. and Mexican labor delegates meeting at an international trade union conference in 1953 resolved that the "wetback" was their number-one problem and agreed that the United States should enact legislation that imposed criminal sanctions on employers of illegal labor.

At times, unions conflated illegal and contract labor, believing employers used both as a "stick" to keep wages down and unions out. NAWU organizer Ernesto Galarza said, "Braceros and 'wets' are the two sides of the same phony coin" that aimed to "cut down the wages of farm labor, to break strikes and to prevent [union] organization; to run American citizens off farm jobs, especially on the corporation ranches." Both were forms of unfree labor: the "wetback" was "legally a criminal in connivance by and with" the government, kept in "a position of peonage"; the contracted laborer likewise had no "civil rights." Each was "democracy in reverse." Contract labor was not compatible with a "system of free men," which included "freedom of mobility, association, [and] anything else meaningful." Braceros were "unassimilable, not by nature but by an act of Congress." Organized labor's opposition to contract labor was echoed by liberals: the bracero was a "legal slave," a "rented slave, kept as if in [a] concentration camp."

The use of slavery and concentration-camp metaphors emphasized the unfree nature of contract labor and aimed to evoke sympathy for the victimized braceros. Yet, that discourse also had the effect of constructing braceros as a foreign element entirely outside the American labor force and society, obscuring the many points of contact and integration that braceros had with other ethnic Mexicans in the United States and the transnational character of the agricultural workforce.

While unions opposed both illegal and contract labor on principle, their practical policies towards these two groups sometimes diverged. The NAWU consistently argued for enforcement (that is, deportation) as the solution to the "wetback problem" and did not try to organize illegal workers into the union, but it did try to recruit braceros. In the early 1950s in the Imperial Valley, Garlaza organized braceros as dues-paying union members. His effort dovetailed with ethnic-organizing strategies that he had already successfully deployed in the valley—using Spanish-language materials and creating
“Mexican committees” of the union that sponsored cultural activities and discussed the workers’ specific concerns. His approach, as Stephen Pitti has argued, evinced a transnationalist sensibility to labor organizing. The number of braceros that joined the NAWU was never great, although one Labor Department official believed it might have been “substantial.”

The approach was supported by the U.S.-Mexico Joint Trade Union Committee, which resolved unanimously to “seek the full enjoyment of the right of Mexican braceros in the U.S. to organize and elect representatives as their bargaining agent.” It decided that the Confederación Trabajadores de Mexico (CTM), the official trade union movement in Mexico, would issue leaflets in Mexico, urging braceros entering the United States to join NAWU, which would “accept the Mexican workers as members and seek to represent them in maintaining their contracts with employers.” The CTM reportedly also planned to organize braceros in Mexico directly, by forming “committees in all of the work centers where camps of legally contracted laborers are situated.” However, there is no evidence that these committees existed.

NAWU’s strategy was to interpret Article 21 of the Migrant Labor Agreement of 1951, which provided for braceros to select representatives to communicate with employers, to include union representation. When pressed, the Labor Department said that braceros could elect “anyone” to represent them but that the union would have to win a majority of workers of a unit, which was defined as the multigrower association, something clearly difficult if not impossible to achieve. Moreover, the department stated, the union, if elected, could only “present” grievances and could not bargain over wages or working conditions.

There is scattered evidence that small organizations not related to the official Mexican labor movement attempted to organize braceros in Mexico. The Alianza Nacional de Braceros (National Alliance of Braceros) was formed in 1948 or 1949 by former braceros in Mexico City. The Alianza wrote exposés of the bracero program in the Mexican press, especially the racketeering that went on both in Mexico and in the United States. It is not clear if it organized braceros directly. An organization called the League [for] Braceros Welfare reportedly recruited “agitators” in Guadalajara at 1,000 pesos a head to “infiltrate” the bracero program and “spread discontent” among braceros. Investigators found that one alleged agitator “invited [coworkers] to tell him their troubles” and “provoke[d] arguments” with field foremen. (He was repatriated.) In 1958 an INS investigator reported that an agitator at the Espalme, Sonora, recruitment center, was “talking to individuals and small groups, advising them to insist on their rights in their contract, and not to become victims of exploitation.”

Although these advisors probably made braceros more aware of their rights, neither U.S. nor Mexican efforts bore fruit organizationally. The employers were powerful, but more important, neither the U.S. nor Mexican government had an interest in seeing the braceros organized and neither country’s labor federation put meaningful financial or political resources into it. NAWU leaders were particularly bitter about the AFL’s meager support and by jurisdictional competition from the CIO’s packinghouse workers union. Galarza challenged the AFL’s leadership, “Will we protect the braceros and if so, how?”

On the Mexico side, the CTM did not actually organize among the rural farming population that comprised the bracero constituency, as the Mexican state had severed the historical ties between industrial unions and peasant leagues in the 1930s as part of the process of forming an official labor movement. The CTM’s real role was to provide political support for the Mexican government and the ruling party’s foreign policy interests in the binational venues established under the Migrant Labor Agreement. In truth, both the AFL-CIO and the CTM’s support for organizing braceros remained in the realm of rhetoric.

The lack of federation support not only meant that the NAWU was unable to organize braceros; it also crippled its central mission, which was to unionize domestic farmworkers. Believing that bracero and illegal labor “doomed in advance” any effort to organize farmworkers, NAWU turned its attention to defeating the bracero program. During the 1950s Galarza’s work increasingly focused not on direct organizing but on researching and publicizing the negative effects of the bracero program on domestic farmworkers’ wages and employment. Despite his transnational cultural sensibilities, Galarza remained challenged by the legal distinctions between “domestic” and “foreign” farmworkers. While sympathetic to the plight of braceros, Galarza ultimately identified with the interests of domestic workers against those of braceros and “wetbacks.” The title of his 1956 exposé, Strangers in Our Fields, signaled this orientation.

In the same vein, the unions tried to influence the terms of the Migrant Labor Agreement and pressured the Department to enforce the “no adverse effect” rule. For example, NAWU and the CTM argued that they should participate in the binational negotiations over revisions and extensions of the program. In 1955 the CIO proposed to the Department of Labor that it serve as an official “watchdog” for the bracero program, on grounds that it had a “third party interest” in the proper enforcement of the Migrant Labor Agreement. (The Labor Department rejected the proposal.) Making a pitch to the AFL-CIO for a major campaign to organize domestic farmworkers in 1956, NAWU emphasized, “Problems arising from the importation and employment of Mexican contract workers will have to be faced in the beginning. Provisions of Public Law 78 giving job preference for American workers over Mexican nationals will have to be enforced.” These efforts followed a logic, which reasoned that if the government enforced the “no adverse effects” rules, employers would find little advantage in using imported contract labor and the program would wither.

In 1959 the AFL-CIO made a renewed commitment to organizing domes-
tic farmworkers that directly confronted bracero labor. The federation's new organizing project, the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC), took a different approach than previous efforts. It adopted a militant, "flying squadron" strategy, whereby a small number of domestic workers called strikes at farms and then demanded that the Labor Department remove braceros employed on those farms. The strategy was effective: in 1960–61 AWOC conducted some 150 strikes, mostly over wages, of which 90 percent the Labor Department certified as "bona fide" labor disputes.

This was a marked change from previous policy. Throughout most of the 1950s the Labor Department had construed Article 32 of the Migrant Labor Agreement, which barred use of braceros in strike situations, to mean that such action was required "only in such serious situations where the security of the Mexican worker and, in addition, friendly relations between the two governments are threatened, or jeopardized." In 1959 Secretary of Labor Mitchell began to certify work stops and to remove braceros from strike situations. Under the Kennedy administration the Labor Department promoted the policy further. At the height of AWOC’s strike activity in early 1961, when there were twenty-two strikes involving 379 striking domestic workers, the Labor Department removed 2,052 braceros from California farms, including 1,000 braceros from the Imperial Valley lettuce strike in February. Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz also agreed to AWOC’s demand for "gate hiring," which aimed to enforce the domestic-preference hiring rule. AWOC’s militancy and the Labor Department’s removal policy resulted in a serious disruption of the bracero program.

The union’s strategy also had a darker side: a growing hostility towards bracero workers. In August 1960, a group of fifty AWOC picketers at Tom Bowers’s peach ranch in Gridley, California, charged into the orchard where braceros were working. The strikers shook the braceros’ ladders and assaulted them with wooden staves from broken fruit crates. The Mexican consul demanded that the braceros be removed, citing concern for both their physical safety and their "subject[ion] to indignities." AWOC also staged demonstrations at bracero housing camps, some of which degenerated into violent attacks, with union members beating braceros and, in one instance, setting fire to their barracks. The attack on the Corona bracero camp near El Centro during the 1961 lettuce strike by one hundred AWOC members resulted in the hospitalization of four braceros and the arrest of forty demonstrators. The union was badly damaged by negative publicity and lawsuits. AFL-CIO president George Meany cut support to AWOC within a year.

AWOC’s strategy also organized principally among disaffected transient white workers, the so-called fruit tramps, which got quick results but discouraged long-term organization. The union did not attempt to organize the more stable Mexican American and Filipino workers, and AWOC leaders rebuffed overtures from the Agricultural Workers Association, a group of farmworkers organized by the Catholic Church and community organizers, including César Chávez. AWOC did not understand, as Chávez did, that organizing farm workers required a “social movement.” That road was also considered but not taken in Texas. In 1960 the AFL-CIO ignored a proposal made by Jerry Holleman, head of the Texas AFL-CIO, for a community organizing strategy for Webb County in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Holleman argued for an effort "directed at the entire community . . . to every person who works for wages in Laredo.” Moreover, he noted, the “younger generation” of Mexican Americans wanted to fight race discrimination: “Many of the young Latin attorneys and community leaders have offered their assistance free in any organizing drive we wish to launch.”

The AFL-CIO’s lack of interest reflected its general skepticism that farmworkers could be organized at all. Craft and industrial unionists in the United States historically viewed farmwork as a “feudal” vestige that would be eliminated by mechanization and other modern improvements in agricultural production. They also had a history of complicity with racism and segregation in the South; it fell there to socialists and communists to organize black and white tenant farmers and sharecroppers. Trade unionism’s ideological disposition against farm labor organizing was reproduced during the post–World War II period. In the 1950s and early 1960s, organized labor’s priorities lay elsewhere, in negotiating high-wage packages that made their members in the northern primary labor market into middle-class consumers. The bracero program, illegal migration, and the displacement of domestic farm labor constituted a difficult and messy problem far removed from the federation’s central concerns.

It might be argued that organized labor has been given too much credit for ending the bracero program. Its opposition, after all, amounted to little more than rhetoric. The liberal turn in public sentiment against the bracero program was no doubt in part influenced by the AFL-CIO’s words, but it was also informed by the emergence of a broader political agenda of civil rights and civil liberties. In this context a number of sensationalized stories about the conditions of migrant farm labor and the bracero program appeared during the late 1950s and early 1960s on television and in the press. For example, a CBS broadcast in August 1956, “Farms Labor Exposed,” likened braceros’ conditions to that of a “concentration camp.” Ernesto Galarza’s critique of the bracero program, Strangers in Our Fields, caused an uproar when it was published in 1956 and garnered additional publicity when the DiGiorgio Corporation, long the nemesis of farmworker unions, sued him for libel. Such negative publicity bruised postwar liberal sensibilities. Like the persistence of Jim Crow segregation in the South, the condition of American farmworkers blighted the nation’s claim to be leader of the free world. In a time of postwar prosperity and national triumphalism, liberals were shocked by the impoverishment of migratory farmworkers. In this context, the bra-
cero program could finally be understood as what Andrew Biemiller of the AFL-CIO called "imported colonialism."

At the same time, American agribusiness found itself far less dependent upon imported contract labor. Cotton, the chief crop drawing braceros in Texas, Arizona, and parts of California, was mechanized by the early 1960s. The mechanization of sugar beets reduced demand for braceros in other western states. In California, where the majority of braceros were employed after 1961, growers felt increasingly inconvenienced by the Labor Department's tougher enforcement practices and anticipated the mechanization of tomato-harvesting, which was finally achieved in 1965.

Terminating the bracero program, however, was only one part of the solution to imported colonialism. There remained the other side of the problem, the exploitation of undocumented labor, which, predictably, increased after 1964. The liberal opposition fell back on calls for greater border enforcement and immigration restrictions. They did not pursue more substantive strategies, such as reforming the nation's labor laws, even though they understood that establishing labor standards in agriculture was fundamental to any meaningful change. Perhaps it would have been too much to expect that liberals, who were fighting southern racists over African American civil rights, would have simultaneously fought the same "solid South" on the matter of agricultural labor rights. But this lack, and the continued construction of Mexican migrant workers outside the American working class and outside the national body, meant that "imported colonialism" would in fact continue, through the ongoing, if informal, importation of undocumented Mexican migrants—a condition that has endured into the twenty-first century.
Outsourcing is a term haunting middle-class Americans, who fear, for the first time, being cast adrift from the great corporate job machine. On a California radio program in 2004, a caller dubbed the current outsourcing of knowledge jobs to Asia a “betrayal” of the public. The rise of the Internet was supported by taxes, she argued, so citizens have a claim on the jobs created by the information industry. Furthermore, this American claim on high-tech jobs is implicitly acknowledged when call centers in Asia require their workers to adopt American accents in order to serve American customers. An African American professor asked what universities beyond elite institutions were having programs funded by high-tech industry. Very few minority students have gained employment in the high-tech boom, she said. “People of color are still waiting for crumbs to fall on their laps.” The view that the high-tech industry is American and high-tech jobs belong to American citizens was questioned by a third caller, who identified herself as a social scientist. She rejected blaming foreign workers for job losses. Where, she asked, were American complaints when the “brain drain” from developing countries sent their students and scientists to help American knowledge industries? She bemoaned the fact that “venture capitalists think globally, but activists not enough.” Silicon Valley CEOs on the show were happy to describe the necessity of outsourcing jobs that are based on specialized knowledge. They claimed that with offshore outsourcing, companies that wanted new expertise would not need to train their own employees or hire new ones. Instead, they can have skilled workers in China and India bid to offer the services at a cheaper rate. Outsourcing, they argued, saves labor costs and time, and it ensures that new products are developed and get to the market soon. Many small companies might never get started without the economic benefits of offshore outsourcing. The gains for Americans, besides lower prices for goods and services, include stock options for employees in the company.
In chapter 5, I discussed how post-Fordist ethnicized production enforces disciplinary exclusions on workers of color. With the offshore outsourcing of high-tech jobs to Asian professionals, it appears that another Asian-American nexus has opened up, not in the factory jobs but in the realm of knowledge-based work, the kind of expertise that has symbolized twentieth-century American identity and character. Outsourcing may be conceptualized as a form of the “immutable mobile,” Bruno Latour’s term for global forms that have “properties of being mobile but also immutable, presentable, readable, and combinable with one another.” Here, the immutable market rationality of efficiency, codes, and protocols is drawn together with mobile knowledge and skills, an interaction that changes the claims of American citizenship. As corporations seek lower costs for knowledge workers, entitlements become delinked from citizenship and relinked to the mobile economic and cultural skills in global circuits. Labor arbitrage involves shifting well-paying jobs across borders, a process of territorialization that also separates traits associated with middle-class American masculinity, while reterritorializing such features in skilled actors located elsewhere.

Knowledge as Commodity and as Symbolic Capital

Since the early days of capitalism, the commodification of labor power has been inseparable from profound disruptions in low-skilled labor markets; indeed, the very circulation of capital relies on the availability of floating pools of workers who can be easily substituted for one another. The circulation of capital made labor displacements a routine transnational affair, but it was a phenomenon mainly confined to low-skilled markets. Starting in the 1970s, Japanese and Western firms began to export low-skilled manufacturing and clerical jobs to overseas locales where they could be done more cheaply. As the global center of science and technology, the United States continued to be a citadel of intellectual workers, who seemed immune to replacement by foreign labor markets. Indeed, the steady influx of well-educated immigrants and students after World War II helped to ensure the nation as a secure site of knowledge-driven jobs. American scientific and technical innovation created the information technologies that are the lifelines of cutting-edge industries the world over.

High-paying, knowledge-based jobs symbolize a distinctive form of American middle-class identity, the fruits of personal and family achievement for native-born citizens and immigrants alike. Especially in the aftermath of the Sputnik challenge, science and technology became the area where the United States represented to other societies and to itself its ingenuity, dynamism, and power. In the early industrial era, the Horatio Alger story of the immigrant who goes to college and joins mainstream society shaped the sense of masculine entitlement to middle-class status. Beginning in the 1970s, the digital revolution recast the rags-to-riches story. In the new version of American can-do optimism, ingenuity, and hard work, smart students tinkering in garages can launch a thousand computer companies.

At the height of the dot-com boom in the nineties, Robert Reich (a former U.S. labor secretary) argued that continued growth in the “new economy” required that more Americans become “symbol analysts,” people who work with language, ideas, and icons to invent products, designs, services, and markets. These analysts—bankers, managers, consultants, lawyers, engineers, and software programmers—train themselves to stay ahead in the knowledge fields. Symbol analysts, who constituted 20 percent of the American labor force, would safeguard America’s continuing prosperity—but even in the 1990s, their inflation-adjusted income had been falling steadily for a decade.

Nevertheless, to many middle-class Americans, knowledge is more than a high-priced commodity, or something you apply at work; it is also a symbol of the promise of American citizenship. To be American is to be self-reliant, self-improving, and technologically savvy, qualities that ensure access to college education and a comfortable middle-class life, with all its accoutrements. We have long admired heroes with scientific talent—say, the astronaut Neil Armstrong, or the discoverers of the DNA, James Watson and Francis Crick—though lately the celebrities have tended to be cyberheroes such as Steve Jobs (and entrepreneurs such as Donald Trump). It appeared that the digital revolution would produce a superclass of high-tech “masters of the universe” who embody scientific prowess and the frenetic lifestyle of the new superachieving American male.

The recent outflows of high-tech jobs have dealt a blow to the ineffable security that links American science and middle-class masculine ideals. By outsourcing, American corporations seem to betraying a fundamental belief in the entitlements that come with college degrees, and the promise that science is a means to masculine economic and social success. Furthermore, the status of middle-class Americans has been tied to their claims as territorialized citizens, “good” subjects who do not make claims on welfare like less-educated Americans, but only make claims on jobs sheltered from
the buffeting of capitalism. But increasingly, educated Americans, like high school dropouts, are becoming exposed to the fluctuations of the global market as the very same companies that launched the digital revolution find labor arbitrage more and more tempting.

**Deterritorialization and Arbitrage**

Accelerating market-driven flows destabilize not only the job prospects of low-skilled, low-wage workers; new corporate practices are steadily moving up the skills ladder to wear away the foundation of the labor aristocracy. The market’s “best practices” are liquefying solid ground, and dissolving with it the assumptions entailed by one’s attachment and claim to a national territory. We might think of the nation as a space of territorality and deterritoriality, as a coupling of territorialized home and deterritorialized flows of capital, knowledge, and actors. A whole new ecology spanning different wage zones in the United States and in Asia is sustaining the growth of the information economy. Such de- and reterritorializations of actors and jobs reconstitute the grounds of citizenship, making people vulnerable to corporate decisions that undermine an established sense of what citizenship is worth. Double movements of migrants and jobs between sites have had a dramatic disembedding effect on the accumulation of benefits and claims that we associate with middle-class citizenship in both the original sites of skilled labor and the sites to which jobs are exported.

**Arbitrage** is a term normally used in financial markets, referring to the practice of buying low in a market and selling high elsewhere. Arbitragers exploit price discrepancies between money markets in order to make a profit. In extreme distortions of arbitrage, wealthy financial traders can directly influence rates of profit by overselling in order to force down the price in certain markets. In the late 1990s, in a case of arbitrage-turned-gambling, New York-based traders attacked Asian national currencies by short selling, precipitating a regional financial crash that threatened to take down economies across the world.

Trading that exploits price discrepancies has existed as long as markets have, but until recently, the term arbitrage was not applied to labor markets. The global search for cheap labor in manufacturing, I argue, can be called a kind of industrial labor arbitrage that operated according to the logic of same skills, different prices. As I noted above, in the 1970s, Japanese, American, and European firms moved production to cheap industrial labor markets in Southeast Asia and Mexico. American blue-collar workers protested the melting away of secure factory jobs. But the steady deindustrialization of America seemed inevitable as working-class Americans adjusted to an expanding service economy, as well as to the idea that America has evolved beyond making toasters and refrigerators. There was and is a widespread belief that America’s ingenuity in science and technology would be the basis of its economic preeminence in the world. But skilled labor markets assumed to be the domain of American men soon proved susceptible to global competitive prices as well.

At the turn of the century, offshore operations received a boost from Y2K remediations that sent thousands of lines of code to offshore providers. Suddenly, it became possible for huge segments of business operations to be shipped overseas, opening up opportunities for large-scale and permanent outsourcing of technically sophisticated systems. An outsourcing company coined the term **labor arbitrage** to mean “the ability to pay one labor pool less than another labor pool for accomplishing the same work, typically by substituting labor in one geography for labor in a different locale. The outsourcing industry is now applying labor arbitrage widely; it is transitioning from a novel approach to a competitive requirement.” Since labor is a major percentage of any company’s costs, labor arbitrage is the new value-adding practice for cutting costs and leveraging gains across different sites of production. American firms are exporting knowledge-driven jobs, mainly in areas such as customer service and financial data processing, but increasingly, jobs in research and development as well. One may say that digital innovations enabled companies to drive down high-tech wages by making alternative, cheaper skilled labor markets more accessible.

Besides electronic communications, labor arbitrage relies on the fragmentation of high-tech jobs into smaller, standardizable, and repeatable tasks. Under Fordism, the production process was decomposed and standardized to increase labor productivity, but such decomposition also allows automated, labor-intensive branches of manufacturing to be exported to lower-wage offshore sites. Today, knowledge is increasingly subjected to a similar form of computerized coding and decomposed into small, rote labor functions. Many everyday business functions—such as data entry, customer servicing, and software development—are easily customized and done in back offices established offshore. The new susceptibility of cognitive functions to a computerized division of labor is what makes labor arbitrage a compelling
marketing strategy, since profits can be made by having the same standardized knowledge jobs performed elsewhere at a cheaper price. In this digitalized network, not only cognitive skills are being floated away. Also arbitraged, it seems, is some notion of American masculinity tied to technical know-how, as low-cost and high-quality versions can also be found offshore.

The Global Tradeability of Asian Skills

Knowledge is like light. Weightless and intangible, it can easily travel the world, enlightening the lives of people everywhere.

Meanwhile, across the ocean, knowledge economies are emerging at the instigation of the World Bank and of homegrown nationalists. In the late nineties, on the cusp of spreading financial crises, knowledge became the new answer to the problems of the developing world. World Bank pundits note that knowledge as a free-floating resource is more valuable than material resources—land, tools, labor—in playing catch-up in the global economy. The building of skilled labor markets, it is claimed, allows emerging economies to leapfrog over decades of infrastructural development. Developing countries were told to focus on rapidly narrowing the knowledge gap by improving the intellectual quality of their populations through “life-long learning.” In emerging economies such as India and China, there is already a major focus on technical and scientific training as linked to national development.

The new stress on human talents has given these regions a boost in the IT field. Over the past decade, the output of scientists and engineers from India and China has been astonishing. Each year, China graduates close to 200,000 engineers, and India almost 130,000. By comparison, there are barely 60,000 engineering graduates in the United States, 40,000 less than in Japan. The vast Asian expertise in science and technology is growing a globally oriented labor force that is easily tapped by industries at home and abroad.

Since the 1990s, India has emerged as a major source of IT workers, who help build its fast-growing leadership in the IT software and business-processing industry. There are thousands of technical institutions in India, among which are seven leading Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) that are graduating thousands of top-notch engineers each year. These engineers have made the Indian firms Infosys Technologies and Wipro into transnational companies, providing software services to businesses in Asia, Europe, and North America. At present, about twenty-five thousand graduates of IITs are working in the United States, demonstrating the importance of Indian workers to the long-term health of the Silicon Valley economy. These software engineers, who are much cheaper but just as qualified as their American counterparts, are the reason why American companies are outsourcing jobs to India. So, despite the media focus on the attractive Indian woman working in an offshore call center, the target of labor arbitrage is the Indian engineer, usually but not always male, who can maintain business software systems throughout the world, and for a lower salary than American workers. An economist at Morgan Stanley warns that “today’s offshore outsourcing platforms now offer low-cost, high-quality alternatives to goods production and employment on a scale and scope the world has never before seen.” Let us consider how the Indian engineers first migrated to American computer jobs, and then how the jobs migrated to India. There are two steps in the arbitrage of Asian knowledge workers. The first phase involves the temporary migration of Indian software engineers; the second phase is marked by the steady outsourcing of white-collar jobs to India.

Body Shops in Silicon Valley

There is a synergy between the rise of skilled markets in Asia and the role of Asian knowledge workers both as technomigrants in California and as employees in high-tech ventures outsourced to their homelands. The West Coast is the world’s most innovative and influential region when it comes to using cheaper Asian workers in the information industry. The first step toward offshore labor arbitrage was “body shopping,” or a system of labor contracting that relocates cheaper skilled labor in a high-wage high-tech market such as Silicon Valley. Throughout the 1990s, leaders in the computer industry pressured the federal government to raise the quota of foreign high-tech workers granted the H-1B visa. Another visa, the L-1, allows transfers within multinational corporations. This visa allows a majority of Indian technomigrants to be brought in as a temporary and cheaper skilled labor force to help fill backlogs of orders. They were subjected to a specific kind of governmentality, that is, by labor-contracting companies, or body shops, that controlled where they worked and when they were paid. As short-term skilled workers on two-year contracts, technomigrants were vulnerable to exploitation, and kept in line by their lack of opportunities to gain American citizenship.
I interviewed a software worker I call Sajit from Amritsar, Punjab, who received his degree from the Guru Nanak Engineering Technology Institute.18 A few months into his first job in India, Sajit applied to Aviance, a body shop, to be sent to the United States. Aviance obtained his ticket and visa and found him a job in a software company in Houston. When this particular project was completed, Sajit joined the body shop Novetel Network, which operates mainly in California. He claimed that Novetel paid him US$1,200 a month for six months while locating a job for him in Silicon Valley. Meanwhile, still waiting for the job to materialize (or “sitting on the bench”), Sajit was driving a cab, a profession that is dominated by his compatriots. It seemed a flexible way to pick up some money, but it was “hard for an educated man” to take the abuse from some passengers. Sajit was feeling a bit depressed about sharing a small apartment with three other migrant workers in order to save money while waiting for the economy to pick up again. If it did not, they might have to return to India. Meanwhile, he dreamed of the day when he would be free of the body shop and could find work on his own. If an American company took him on as a permanent worker, he could make up to $75,000 a year and have a good chance of getting a green card. But such opportunities are extremely rare, since body-shopped migrants are by definition a circulating low-wage workforce entirely at the mercy of the fluctuating needs of the labor market.

As a mechanism of labor arbitrage, transnational body shops delivered low-cost, skilled labor under conditions of strict discipline. Recruitment practices have included receiving bribes from would-be workers in India, where some candidates buy false papers and diplomas. Once contract workers arrive in the U.S., many are vulnerable to exploitation. Besides controlling their access to jobs and wages, body shops take a percentage of the technomigrants’ earnings (from 25 to 50 percent). Furthermore, by holding the workers’ visas, the body shop makes it risky for the them to change employers, complain about illegal working conditions, or join a union, since this could jeopardize their prospects for a green card.19 Body shop operators use the workers’ desire to obtain citizenship to intimidate them. An Indian engineer complained that a body shop threatened to send some workers back to India if no contracts materialized. Some were left without money, too ashamed to ask for help from their families back home.20 Constrained by their fear of losing their temporary visas, some technomigrants can be reduced to a kind of indentured high-tech servitude. Nevertheless, I was told that thousands of Indian programmers considered body shops an important step toward their dreams of becoming Americans, and that by hard work and some luck, they could one day trade their temporary work permits for green cards. Despite the reported cases of abuse, Silicon Valley executives kept up demand for technomigrants during the dot-com boom, paying them much less than long-term employees.

Body shops as a mechanism of labor arbitrage thus index the beginning of the ethnicization and lowering of earnings for high-tech work diffused across borders. The visa and employment programs that favor Indian technomigrants because of their skills and body-shopped availability in the computer industry constituted the ethnicity of software engineers as Asian or associated South Asian men with the performance of cheaper high-tech jobs.

According to labor organizers, the real issue for importing technomigrants was not the lack of qualified Americans, including those of African-American and Latino ancestry, but that companies have had trouble finding engineers and programmers willing to accept the salaries offered. Due to the body shops’ control of high-tech labor circulation, computer jobs are becoming a form of ethnic specialization that further disqualifies non-Asian American minorities from jobs in the high-tech industry. Clearly, the neoliberal rationality of cheap labor substitution does not include investing in or training native-born American minorities, preferring to ship in already skilled Asian workers under a form of labor substitution. South Asian technomigrants recognize their role as “cybercoolies,” being paid much less for the same work than mainstream American software engineers. But by the beginning of the twenty-first century, body shops began to be phased out, and a more stringent business visa came to replace the temporary work visas, allowing only a few well-placed immigrants to work in the high-tech industry.

Sending Jobs to Asian Cybercenters

Following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, and with a persistent economic recession, the boom has faded from Silicon Valley as a site of employment. Asian expatriates and technomigrants have been leaving as work opportunities dry up. There has also been a steady decline in the numbers of Asian students entering the country to attend American universities. Post-September 11, tighter immigration rules have dissuaded many Asian students from coming to the United States. At the same time, America’s preeminence in the science fields is being challenged by the large numbers of technical institutes and science centers in South and East Asia. The decreasing supply
of Asian knowledge workers is so serious that the National Science Foundation sounded an alarm about America’s shortfall in graduates in science and technical fields, combined with rising numbers of departing Asian experts. In late 2003, Andy Grove, chairman of Intel Corporation, appealed to Washington policy makers to transfer a tiny amount of agricultural subsidies to universities, but his plea fell on deaf ears, and education budgets continued to be trimmed everywhere.

But the greatest challenge to the American computer industry is not so much the declining supply of Asian knowledge workers in the United States as India’s emergence as a site for high-tech jobs. Expatriate Indians shifted from operating body shops in Silicon Valley to setting up high-tech centers in India. Conditions that favored this move to Asia were in part prepared by American companies, which foresaw the logic of relocating high-tech jobs abroad.

In 1991, the Indian government began systematically to dismantle tariff and export controls. Soon, Jack Welch of General Electric spearheaded the drive to develop high-tech labor in India. GE formed joint ventures to make medical instruments and contract the development and maintenance of software by workers in India. The company was also among the first to initiate backroom work and call centers in India. Contracts from GE boosted the revenues of India’s largest software company, Tata Consultancy Ltd., beyond the billion-dollar a year level; GE also facilitated Tata’s overseas expansion to develop high-tech labor markets in China and Eastern Europe. In short, GE played “a starring role” in India’s high-tech emergence by making early investments that helped fuel the technological and service sectors in India, making it a cheap source of expertise.

Within a decade, Indian IT companies have emerged as the global leaders in back-office or business-processing expertise. High-tech centers include Bangalore, which has over a hundred software companies with strong connections to Silicon Valley firms. Asian expatriates in the United States have returned home to build up the IT economy. One estimate put the number of “returned nonresident Indians” in Bangalore at thirty-five thousand. But clearly, the outflows of Asian computer expatriates and of American jobs are irreducibly linked to the cost-cutting measures of American corporations, taking advantage of the ease with which they can shift from high-cost to low-cost skilled labor markets.

American managers view India and China as new providers of knowledge workers who offer the same quality for lower cost, thus creating an opportunity for companies to maximize profits by relocating offshore. The wage differences for like quality work are huge. The chief executive officer of a major offshoring company (Everest Group) notes that an Indian call center worker with a university degree earns under eight thousand dollars a year, while his or her American counterpart with similar experience typically earns fifty thousand dollars plus benefits and overhead. The gross savings for companies that participate in offshoring is frequently over fifty percent. As the U.S. economy recovers from recession, Silicon Valley venture capitalists are requiring the outsourcing of up to half of a firm’s workforce as a condition for funding it. Major Indian software companies have grown to the extent that American consulting firms such as Accenture are setting up offices in India in order to compete with Indian counterparts. The Indian dominance of this field is expected to gain from the half a million Indians expected to be in back-office jobs worldwide by 2006. Meanwhile, American competitors such as IBM Global Services and Computer Services Corporation were expected to erase a total of eight hundred thousand American jobs by the end of 2005, and almost 3.5 million by 2015. In short, the ethnicization of high-tech workers, the reverse brain drain, and the rise of low-wage cybercenters in Asia have converged, making global labor arbitrage a relentless logic in knowledge-based industries.

Arbitrage of Americanism?

Labor arbitrage as a corporate technology is challenging Americans’ cherished belief that they are citizens of the world’s leading scientific nation. This has been expressed by two leading high-tech executives. While many male business leaders in California have defended offshore outsourcing as a logical economic policy, the most articulate framing of the issues in cultural terms has been done by female chief executives. Carly Fiorina, the former CEO of Hewlett-Packard, remarked in defense of outsourcing: “There is no job that is America’s God-given right anymore. It is interesting to me that so many people talk about China or India or Russia as being a source of low-cost labor. Truthfully, over the long term, the greater threat is the source of well-educated labor. And if you look at the number of college-educated students that China graduates every year, it’s close to 40 million. The law of large numbers is fairly compelling.” It seems that Fiorina felt she need not mention the shortage or future supply of American knowledge workers, because the situation of the American labor market is becoming irrelevant in the global depression of high-tech wages. Another former CEO, Carol Bartz of Autodesk, was more candid about
the profit motive: “When you can get great talent at 20 percent of the costs, it isn’t about waving the American flag. It’s about doing what’s right to have a good company. We would be irresponsible if we didn’t find a way to get our costs in line with what other people are doing. I have enough belief in open markets to believe that there will be other things for our people to do here.”

Bartz explicitly stated that the American entitlement to knowledge jobs is in jeopardy, and her suggestion that there will be alternatives to high-tech jobs is left ominously vague. Fiorina and Bartz chose to question directly American beliefs in God-given entitlements and flag waving. They brusquely dismissed such deep-seated sentiments as outdated in a world where growing skilled-labor markets cost one-fifth as much as equivalent American labor. Both executives played the role of the iconic strong female figure who appears in a time of crisis to shore up middle-class masculinity, only this time they are actually dismissing “masculine” birthrights as irrelevant in an era of globalization. Suddenly, the college-educated American male is not only threatened by downward mobility, his ideal masculine role as main breadwinner is further imperiled.

**Have Asians Become More Flexible?**

Outsourcing thus involves not only a displacement of jobs but also a displacement of American middle-class values and entitlements overseas. The relocation of knowledge was facilitated by Indian professionals who seek to bring “America’s best practices” to new business and government projects in India. A new casualized work ethic links floppy hair, jeans, and rolled-up sleeves to the introduction of e-commerce and e-government. While salaries are lower than those earned in the United States, returnee executives can enjoy a higher standard of living in India, complete with servants and chauffeurs. Former Silicon Valley denizens recreate American middle-class lifestyles, including gated communities and sport utility vehicles. These individuals embody in Asian environments, where the availability of cheap labor serves U.S. corporations, the can-do, technologically savvy, and entrepreneurial figures celebrated in American neoliberalism.

The most aggressive outsourcing of “American” jobs has been in second-tier jobs that capitalize on Indian skills in technical as well as in cultural knowledge. At Bangalore call centers, Indian workers perform a kind of Americanism. In order to make their American customers feel at home, they acquire American names and try to neutralize the influence of their mother tongues by trying out Midwestern accents. They are prepared to offer snippets of a fictional American background, family stories, geographical facts, and characters in TV shows and sports. Thus labor arbitrage not only finds substitutable but cheaper labor overseas, it also requires Asia-based workers to assume virtual American personalities.

While values of self-improvement and entrepreneurialism have long shaped notions of what it means to be American, the rapidly shifting conditions of skilled employment now also include the capacity and potential to become a border-crossing professional. Cross-cultural skills, alongside knowledge skills, are important components of global marketability in a world of shifting nodes of hypercapitalism. South Asian professionals seem to display this flexible response to a variety of globalized work environments. Their geographical and cultural flexibility allows them to accumulate wealth, rights, and honorary white status in the United States. At the same time, as “nonresident Indians,” these mobile high-tech actors are able to consolidate and expand economic and social power in their home countries. Thus the South Asian knowledge worker comes to represent the disarticulation of citizenship entitlement from its territorialized base and its connection with tradable skills as deterritorialized claims in a spectrum of market zones.

Knowledge is weightless and ubiquitous, no longer the monopoly of middle classes in advanced capitalist countries. Indian workers in the technological fields — broadly defined — constitute only one million of their country’s more than one billion citizens. China’s middle classes are only 300 million people in a total population of a similar magnitude. These islands of Asian expertise in oceans of national underdevelopment have arisen to challenge Western monopoly over knowledge and skills required in contemporary circuits of capitalism. In the space of a decade, Asian professionals have rapidly acquired technical and cultural knowledges that make them globally marketable and competitive with U.S.-based engineers. Below is a graphic representation that actually underestimates this challenge to the “American” workforce.

In July 2004, the New York Times printed a cartoon “graph” of “America’s Shortage of Quality Jobs” (fig. 1). There is a pun in the use of “shortage,” indicating ceilings (in jobs and skills) as well as the height of Asians (the figure on the left) compared with Americans (the figure on the right) depicted in the diagram. Asian men are represented as 10 percent as skillful as Americans, and costing 10 percent less than American men. This representation of the changing stakes in competing skills markets hints at, but does not
show, the actual differences by industry and by occupation that are remaking the landscape of knowledge industries. If one were to narrow the comparison to the skills in question—engineering and automated high-tech work—then the Asian figure would be as tall or taller than his American counterpart, while the cost differentials would remain constant. Asian workers are also rapidly catching up in research fields in the biotechnology industry. The stakes are much higher than depicted for Americans to hold on to their job entitlements.

On the same page as the cartoon, six letters submitted to the newspaper grudgingly accept the outsourcing of well-paid American jobs, but they also bemoan the lack of government and corporate help to cushion the blow for American workers. After all, at least a quarter of the American labor force is losing its capacity to provide for its basic needs. This is clearly identified as a threat to the middle class: “Although wage differentials between countries present excellent business opportunities for multinational companies, and may create some high-paying jobs within the United States, the bulk of our middle class will continue to experience downward pressure on wages until the wage gap closes. Why should the middle class accept these policies?” If we continue to ignore this issue, a day of political reckoning is inevitable.82

But middle-class workers, still adhering to the older view of America as an enclosed political and economic space, are currently focused on protesting the outsourcing of jobs as “un-American.” There is a basic assumption about the entanglements of nationalism and capitalism, a citizenship belief that is being undermined by the globalization of information-based jobs. A major response to the sense of displacement and betrayal by corporations is disdain for foreign ways. As a result of complaints about Indian service and accents, the computer firm Dell closed one of its Indian call centers. New Jersey is planning to pass a bill to block outsourcing to India, even though high-tech jobs are also leaving for China, Ireland, the Philippines, and Canada. A white-collar labor war is brewing as American unions—TechsUnite.org (Calif.), the Alliance of Technology Workers (Wash.), and “Rescue American Jobs” (Ohio)—pressure politicians to outlaw the shifting of state jobs overseas. As part of the post-September 11 resurgence of nativist nationalism, more displaced workers are demanding legislative restrictions and tax constraints on the outsourcing of white-collar jobs. Meanwhile, the negatively received news about outsourcing has moved off the front pages, which are still dominated by post-9/11 concerns about terrorism and corporate scandals.83 This vanishing from the public consciousness gives the impression that outsourcing has gone away, but nothing is further from the reality. The territory of national citizenship and the territory of labor arbitrage are pulling away from each other, cutting well-educated Americans off from the ever receding world of high salaries.

Masculinity and the Job Machine

Labor arbitrage is thus nibbling away at the foundation of American knowledge economy and reworking American ideals of masculinity. Middle-class professionals find themselves vulnerable to the same shifting currents of global labor markets that have long affected poor working Americans. Ironically, outsourcing dislocates American professionals in the very spaces in which they are the presumed heirs to Americans’ global lead in information technology and innovation. Outsourcing disrupts the capacity of middle-class Americans to get good paying jobs, to accumulate capital, and to realize the good life. There is a growing insecurity as American middle-class men find themselves in direct competition with Asia’s middle classes, expensive brainpower competing with cheaper brainpower, becoming subject to the valuing and devaluing of their status as moral persons by the switching mechanisms of the profit machine.

Clearly, a new set of expectations now confronts the well-educated American male as this new wave carries jobs overseas. In the 1970s, the economic boom fueled a trend whereby men began to turn away from the 1950s masculine ideal of chief breadwinner. Feminists have critiqued this shift in mas-
culinity as a prolonged phase of youthful indulgence and a flight from domestic responsibility. But there was still the expectation that college-educated men would be able to get well-paying jobs when they were ready to do so, if only to pursue a comfortable single lifestyle. But by the 1980s, the erosion of solidly middle-income jobs—in the transportation and computer industries—had cut further into the norm of masculine respectability based on a good salary and homeownership. Katherine S. Newman calls this process “falling from grace,” as laid-off middle managers and air traffic controllers found that “they could still be evicted from the American dream.” The loss of guarantee of a good job meant a “broken covenant” that stripped men of their self-respect; the loss of access to a good life was further compounded by the deprivations and insecurity suffered by their families. Many were bewildered and no longer sure what the “cultural rules” were for reversing this downward slide. The dot-com crash in the late 1990s further exploded the myth of easy male entitlement to a good life.

We are now at a historic moment when new rules are set by the neoliberal exception, which enforces the internalization of ideals of “self-responsibilization.” American neoliberalism is now articulated by the Bush administration as “every citizen an agent of his or her own destiny.” American liberty is tweaked to mean freedom from state protection and freedom to respond autonomously to the turbulence of global markets. The “master-of-the-universe” trope is a register for a new male ideal that can transcend the loss of guarantees of high-paying jobs at home. But this figure mocks the laid-off engineers and managers who, in the prime of their lives, are often unable to find jobs with the same salary or benefits as their old ones. There is a rising tide of bankruptcies among middle-aged, middle-class Americans. Being jobless or bankrupt at middle-age seems to imply the loss of key values of being American—self-reliance, self-sufficiency, competitiveness, and respectability. Growing irrelevance to new trends in the global economy cuts at the heart of middle-class America. There is a profound irony here because a short decade ago, Robert Reich complained that the symbol analysts in the new economy were becoming increasingly isolated from the rest of America through intensified segregation by job, income, residence, education opportunity and achievement, privatization of services, and a less progressive taxation system. These qualities perhaps describe the current conditions produced by nonresident Indians in their homeland, not a middle-class America under siege by progressive job losses despite education and hard work, and losing a sense of who it is and what it can be.

For the younger generations, an era of greater uncertainty and lowered expectations looms. Some worry that educated Americans will be eligible only for geographically fixed service jobs such as sales. Not only are they losing their cutting edge as preeminent symbol analysts, they may be becoming less globally competitive as well. Americans are less flexible and hireable, because they are geographically based in a high-wage country. Over time, as diverse kinds of cognitive functions and skills flow out, the homeland itself may be affected. A commentator points out, with some exaggeration, that “a country whose work force is concentrated in nontradable domestic services is a Third World country.”

The late twentieth century of American values of education, innovation, and entrepreneurialism are have now been adopted by elites the world over. Colin Gordon has argued that the “neo-liberal homo economicus is manipulable man, man who is perpetually responsive to modifications in his environment.” Furthermore, this calculative, self-enterprising subject is required to acquire skill, aptitude, and competence in order to build up human capital; in short, to be self-enterprising. Most Americans think that they monopolize such “quintessentially American values,” and that these values constitute the ethical foundations of what it means to be American. But Asian knowledge elites, like those from Europe, Russia, and Latin America, have also acquired neoliberal capacities and traits, but in far larger numbers. In addition, they possess cultural skills to be more flexibly relevant to diverse global zones in a way that many American professionals and businessmen, long dominant in global markets and dependent on native mediators, cannot. Increasingly, in a world of labor arbitrage, global cultural expertise is part of being a risk-taking entrepreneur in global circuits.

Global labor arbitrage has wide-ranging implications for the American middle class, which, held hostage by a globalized economy that sends high-paying jobs abroad, finds itself on suddenly shaky economic ground. There is betrayal beyond the strictly economic losses. If indeed the Protestant ethic makes work a calling, this Weberian claim is most likely to be found among middle-class Americans for whom diligence and rationality are impersonal social virtues. Following Weber, we have long assumed that the economic ethic—or a calculative and methodical attitude toward the acquisition of skills, competitive gain, and market activities—is a fundamental necessity for participation in the capitalist environment. But Weber did not live to observe the incredible dynamism of contemporary capitalism that can exclude some categories of calculative actors. Increasingly, their skills are unmarket-
able if they do not include neoliberal elements of manipulability, and therefore they cannot be equally valued in fluid market conditions.

Global arbitrage threatens to remove the social order of things in which the middle-class subject has long lived, casting him out of the economic cosmos that defines the ethical coordinates of his status as an independent actor. Increasingly, middle-class American men, like educated women and men everywhere, are obliged to acquire features of manipulability as free agents navigating a borderless world. But, rooted in a set of work attitudes and habits long framed by American capitalism, middle-class professionals are insufficiently manipulable. The knowledge economy presents an interesting paradox, deterritorializing white-collar jobs while territorializing American citizens. It is true that American senior managers and young MBAs are flocking to Asia to manage corporations (see part IV), but these constitute a fraction of the American middle-class population that is unable or unwilling to leave the home country and compete directly with Asian engineers and technical workers in lower wage zones. There is a basic belief that conditions for their reproduction as middle-class citizens cannot be deterritorialized in the world's wealthiest country. Even as conditions for making the American dream have slipped outside the territory of the nation, many Americans cling to a notion of entitlement and privilege that is resolutely place-bound. Being “American” and doing “American” jobs have proven to be truly tradable qualities, but “real” Americans may not be so marketable across globalized sites after all.

Are we in a post-Protestant ethic moment when the instrumental rationality that is a basic ideal of American citizenship has become so tradable that the mere possession of calculative skills no longer guarantees remaining in the game of modernity? Has the country given up “the ghost in the machine,” and has the spirit of rational ethos and flexibility migrated east? Labor arbitrage is the latest technique to exploit time-space coordinates in order to accumulate profits, putting into play a new kind of flexibility that makes the American worker ineligible in some high-tech domains. We thus see a widening gulf between America as the preeminent site of rational citizen-subjects and the critical mass of highly skilled workers emerging in Asia. Will American workers have to give up their image as heroes of late-twentieth-century capitalism? The more profound betrayal is perhaps not the loss of American entitlements to well-paying jobs but rather the sense that American men have become less competitive with elite Indians and Chinese, or that they have become excepted from the spaces of neoliberal optimization that have shifted to Asia.
TRAFFICKED?

Morals, Migration, and Filipino Migrant Hostesses in Japan’s Nightlife Industry

(Under contract with Harvard University Press)

Rhacel Salazar Parrenas

Project Introduction

My project examines the labor and migration of Filipino entertainers in Tokyo, meaning those who sing, dance, and do hostess work in a club, pub or snack bar. For my data, I rely primarily on 61 in-depth interviews conducted between April and November 2005 with female and transgender/sexual entertainers and nearly three months of participant observation working as a hostess in a Philippine pub in Tokyo. Documenting the migration of “entertainers” and the work of migrant hostesses, this project unravels the ways that the moral boundaries of gender, sex, love, and money intersect to shape migration conditions, including the policies of Japan and the Philippines, the nature of hostess work, the intimacies that hostesses maintain with customers, and finally discourses of trafficking in the lives of migrant Filipina entertainers. Two sets of questions direct my study. The first set is directed at the labor migration process and the second analyzes the work of “entertainers”.

1) What are the conditions of migration for Filipino “entertainers” in Japan and how do they negotiate them? How do moral values shape these conditions, significantly state migration policies that determine their migration and settlement? What are the consequences of these morally-driven policies?

2) What are different forms of commodified sexual intimacies that migrant hostesses perform inside and outside the workplace? Under what conditions, social relationships, and in what ways are commodified sexual intimacies morally acceptable or unacceptable for hostesses?
CHAPTER 4 HOMeward Bound: The Temporal and Spatial Segregation of Filipina Migrant Entertainers

Clubs celebrate not the arrival but departure of entertainers. They host a party, which members of the community refer to as sayonara (meaning goodbye) parties, a grand affair in which entertainers wear gowns—long evening dresses—that range from Philippine couture to generic taffeta or chiffon prom dresses. In sayonara parties, festive décor would brighten the club from a banner announcing the departure of one or a group of entertainers to balloons pinned on walls and ceilings to party favors on tables. Usually the departing entertainers decorate the club themselves with some help from co-workers. Some spend as much as 10,000 yen, which would include the cost of feeding co-workers, to decorate the club for the party.

Sayonara parties represent the finale of an entertainer’s six months in Japan. Entertainers view these parties as their last opportunity to say goodbye to customers and as such also their last chance to collect presents from them. Entertainers aspire to receive gifts from customers, at least their regular customers, as token recognition for their entertainment. Once in the Philippines, entertainers would fondly remember those who extend gifts to them which could range from cash presents to hi-tech gadgets such as a high definition flat screen television or a portable DVD player to jewelry. During the height of the “bubble economy” of Japan in the late 80s, entertainers left Japan with much larger presents than they do today. Back then, entertainers aimed for a “bahay, lupa, kotsa,” meaning “house, land, car.” Reflecting the decline in the Japanese economy, entertainers by 2005 could only expect cash presents that usually reach no more than 10,000 yen from regular customers and 50,000 to 100,000 yen from special customers, meaning customers who are particularly fond of them.
Although sayonara parties take place during their last night of work in Japan, entertainers sometimes make preparations for this party soon after arriving in Japan. This is almost always the case in *okama* (transgender) pubs, where sayonara parties are a grander affair than in female hostess pubs. In sayonara parties, entertainers in okama pubs perform a solo dance performance while those in female pubs only have to entertain customers via conversation at the table. In okama pubs, all entertainers wear a gown during a sayonara party while in female pubs only those leaving do. To stand-out from the rest of their co-workers, entertainers in okama pubs must wear an extra-ordinary gown.

The experience of one’s sayonara party in okama pubs, including its preparation, illustrates how settlement for entertainers in Japan is a process of returning home to the Philippines. Sayonara parties show us how entertainers make plans for their departure soon after they arrive in Japan. For instance, gay entertainers begin to design sayonara gowns not long after they unpack their clothes for their stay in Japan, envisioning not just the design but also color and material. Then, two months after they arrive in Japan, they have a designer in the Philippine sew the gown. On average, gay hostesses spend US$200 on the gown, which is significantly less than the cost of a comparable dress in Japan. However, risks come with sending back the design to the Philippines as sometimes the designer would alter or not quite understand the instructions and drawing of the entertainer. Hence, entertainers much prefer to receive their gown months before the actual sayonara party. In this way, they have time to alter the gown or accordingly lose weight if the gown does not quite fit. Gay entertainers also prefer to have their gown in advance so they can envision a solo dance performance that suits their gown. Rarely do entertainers dance with their gown but design different attire for the dance performance that would not clash but blend well with the character projected by their gown.
In sayonara parties I attended, entertainers project their own unique characterization of a sophisticate, an angel, a femme fatale, a beauty queen, or a superstar. They display this characterization not only in the gown but also the dance performance, the speech, and lastly their last walk on the stage. For instance, Nikki, a twenty-seven year old bakla with a tall svelte figure, wanted to project the image of someone “naughty and nice” for her sayonara party. She had designed a baby blue taffeta gown, which looked quite demure from the front but revealed a backless rear. Keeping up with her “naughty and nice” motif, Nikki played the character of an angel for her solo dance and wore a white sequined halter top with feathered wings and form-fitting white pants. With a wand sprinkling angel dust, Nikki ran around the club as if she were soaring to the sky to the song “If I Could Reach Out” by Gloria Estefan.

Nikki gave quite an emotionally uplifting performance, which I had known she dreaded for months. She practiced this dance during her last month in Japan. Yet, the solo dance performance had only been one of her worries. Nikki also dreaded having to deliver a speech, which she memorized and practiced in front of me at least three weeks before her sayonara party. Like a beauty queen, entertainers in okama bars deliver a “goodbye” speech and then give their final walk on stage, before proceeding to approach all the guests so as to individually thank them for coming to their sayonara party. This last goodbye is usually the last opportunity for entertainers to secure a tip from a customer. Nikki told me that the speech matters a great deal for compelling customers to extend that tip. Accordingly, Nikki wrote, practiced, and memorized her speech – which she had to deliver in Japanese – at least a month before her sayonara party. She practiced the speech with customers to correct her grammar and also remind them of her impending departure. In the speech, she describes how she learned and grew as a person in the last six months, and for this feels a tremendous gratitude to Japan and its people. It must have
been an effective speech as quite a few customers handed her a 10,000 yen bill after her final walk on stage.

Sayonara parties show us that entertainers who work in okama pubs start planning their departure soon after they arrive in Japan. Likewise so do entertainers in female pubs, who demonstrate how they anticipate their return to the Philippines not through their anxiety over sayonara parties but instead through their daily concern over the extent of their material acquisitions in Japan. Open and partially filled balikbayan boxes, six cubic feet cardboard containers, usually greet any visitor to resident apartments of entertainers, that I could not help but think the very first time I entered an apartment of entertainers that some of them must soon be returning home to the Philippines. After all, “balikbayan” literally means to return home and such boxes are usually used by return migrants to store perishable goods including chocolates and canned goods such as Spam that they would bring home to the Philippines. Scattered throughout the crowded apartments of entertainers who I visited are boxes which unavoidably become a table if not sealed and stacked on a corner. Transported via cargo ships, balikbayan boxes reach the Philippines in 15 to 21 days and cost approximately 9,000 to 10,000 yen to send to Manila regardless of weight and a few thousand more to other areas of the Philippines.

Entertainers begin to acquire goods to fill these large cardboard boxes within their first two months of arrival in Japan, if not earlier. They aim to send three boxes back to the Philippines before their labor contract ends in six months. Yet, as they usually send these boxes for their own consumption of Japanese goods once they return to the Philippines, they usually do not send the boxes until closer to their date of return. Still, in anticipation of their eventual return to the Philippines, entertainers purchase items to throw into a balikbayan box as part of the daily routine not long after they arrive in Japan. For this habitual practice, they would visit hyaku (one-
hundred) yen shops to buy chocolates, kitchen ware, soaps and detergents, school supplies, and many other sundry items. I even participated in this practice by giving each labor contract migrant I interviewed a case of ramen and two or three bags of chocolates to put in their balikbayan box. Lastly, relations with customers would sometimes revolve around balikbayan boxes as courtship and friendship rituals in the club would involve gift-giving of the usually more costly items entertainers desire for balikbayan boxes including CDs of popular Japanese music, gourmet chocolates, cups of noodles, and stuffed toys.

Sayonara parties and balikbayan boxes symbolize the sojourn of entertainers and illustrate how their settlement is a process of returning home. They show how entertainers anticipate and plan for their return to the Philippines not long after they arrive in Japan. Lastly, they indicate how entertainers remain conscious of their limited duration of settlement in Japan. How does the knowledge and consciousness of one’s short duration of stay, in other words temporal segregation in the host society, shape experiences of migrant settlement? In this chapter, I explore the experience of temporal segregation for migrant entertainers who are under contract to work in Japan. Excluded from this discussion are marriage visa holders, including permanent residents, and undocumented workers, as their long-term settlement in Japan makes my discussion inapplicable to their lives. Focusing on contract workers, I interrogate how the limited duration of stay in a host society would affect migrant integration. For instance, does it hamper assimilation or feelings of belonging, in other word citizenship, in a host society?

Current discussions on migrant settlement, as they are often based on long term settlers, fail to account for experiences of settlement for sojourners and how the anticipation of one’s limited duration of stay would affect the migrant’s level of integration in society.
This chapter considers how settlement for the growing number of temporary labor migrants in the globe would require a paradigmatic shift in our formulations and framework for understanding migrant settlement. To do this, I explore the integration of migrants through the lens of time and space. I consider the category of time so as not to lose sight of temporal restrictions on settlement, and use the category of space to analyze the extent of migrant integration. Because I assume that temporal restrictions would limit the extent of institutional integration for temporary labor migrants such as entertainers in Japan, I look at their access to and uses of spaces as a more apt indicator of the level of their integration in the host society.

This chapter begins with a literature review in which I present how current discussions on migrant settlement do not apply to the experiences of temporary migrants. Then, I describe the temporal segregation of migrant entertainers and examine how time restrictions would affect their level of integration in the host society. Next, I examine the uses of space in the migrant community so as to illustrate their level of integration in Japan. The temporal and spatial segregation of migrant entertainers from dominant society establishes their limited integration in Japan as it shows how their social interactions tend to be with co-workers and customers either inside or outside the club. I end with a discussion on the theoretical contributions of using time and space as analytic categories for understanding migrant settlement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Settlement being a process of returning home is peculiar to current theorizations of migration. In the literature, settlement constitutes of multiple processes of assimilation, postnational membership, and/or transnational migration. Yet, the peculiar condition of settlement for migrant Filipino entertainers is perhaps not new. It arguably reflects the experiences of sojourners in the past including Chinese railroad workers in the United States.
during the 19th century, the majority of whom returned to China, and Italian labor migrants in
the United States during the early 20th century.\(^1\) Both groups faced restrictive migration laws
that excluded or severely limited their entry to the United States. Consequently, many ‘settled’
with the primary intention of amassing sufficient savings to invest back home. Many sojourners
in the past traversed back and forth, in the process keeping families – a wife and children –back
home and maintaining not dual loyalties but instead retaining their primary affiliation with the
country of origin.\(^2\) Yet, whether or not everyday experiences of settlement for sojourners in the
past consciously or subconsciously consisted of preparations to return home is difficult to
document. We can speculate that the slower pace of life made this unlikely and instead pushed
the assimilation of sojourners who did not all return to their country of origin.

A long standing framework used to explain migrant settlement is the assimilation
perspective. Formulated by Robert Park (1928), classic assimilation theory asserts that upon
arrival migrants encounter the contradictory pull of the marginal man, meaning they are pulled in
the direction of the host culture as their culture of origin simultaneously draws them back.\(^3\) They
negotiate this bipolar process, which takes place in various institutions including but not limited
to schools, the labor market, housing market and government, through the natural race relations
cycle of contact, competition, accommodation, and assimilation. Upon achieving assimilation,
migrants eventually abandon their old ways of life and blend into and/or amalgamate into
mainstream culture and society. Through the years, scholars have reassessed and accordingly
reformulated classic assimilation theory, with the primary critique being it does not take into
account structural constraints and how such constraints would differentiate the ways of life of
groups in a society.
The most useful of these reformulations is the concept of segmented assimilation, which enumerates three possible patterns of adaptation among contemporary migrants and their offspring. Determined accordingly by structural constraints, these three patterns of adaptation include the path of upward mobility to the middle class, downward mobility to the underclass, and lastly the lagging of acculturation through cushioning in the ethnic community. Describing these three patterns, Portes and Zhou explain: “One of them replicates the time-honored portrayal of growing acculturation and parallel integration into the white middle-class; a second leads straight into the opposite direction to permanent poverty and assimilation into the underclass; still a third associates rapid economic advancement with deliberate preservation of the immigrant community’s values and tight solidarity.” By assimilating into the ethnic community, the third group of immigrants is more likely than either of the first two groups to experience cultural preservation in settlement, because they adapt not to dominant society but to a semi-enclosed immigrant community and economy. Notably, adaptation outside dominant society does not necessarily limit possibilities of economic advancement for immigrants as the ethnic community still enables the possibility of economic integration into the American middle-class.

While a useful concept for explaining the integration of immigrants into the host society, assimilation does not explain why many still maintain ties to the country of origin, participate in nation-building efforts not only in the country of destination but also the country of origin, and lastly regularly move back and forth the country of origin and destination. To account for the cross-national affiliation of immigrants, Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Christina Szanton Blanc situate our understanding of migrant settlement in a transnational terrain. They assert that migrants do not inhabit a geographical terrain but instead maintain transnational social fields that they create through their everyday practices and social, economic, and political relations. To
better understand the transnational practices of migrants, Alejandro Portes, Luis Guarnizo, and Patricia Landolt (1999) propose to examine individual actions in order to trace the political, social and economic activities that migrants maintain across nations. Michael Smith and Luis Guarnizo (1999) further emphasize the need to distinguish “transnationalism from below,” meaning the everyday practices of migrants from the systems of governance in global capitalism, which they refer to as “transnationalism from above.”

Despite their usefulness, these discussions on transnationalism overlook the process of integration of migrants to nationally bounded territories, whether they are in the country of destination or origin. Peggy Levitz (2000) advances our understanding of transnational migration and moves beyond the imagined space of “transnational social fields.” In her study on transnational migration, Peggy Levitz calls attention to the ways migrants remain active in both the country of destination and country of origin. Not viewing assimilation and transnationalism as incompatible, Levitz asserts that migrants “are integrated, to varying degrees, into the countries that receive them, at the same time that they remain connected to the countries they leave behind” (2001, 5). Roger Waldinger and David Fitzgerald concur with the formulation of Levitz that migrants inhabit particular local ties across nations. As they insist, “what immigration scholars describe as transnationalism is usually its opposite: highly particularistic attachments antithetical to those by-products of globalization denoted by the concept of "transnational civil society" and its related manifestations” (2004: 1178).

Illustrating how migrants negotiate membership in migration, scholars examine questions of citizenship and how social, political, and economic boundaries shape the sense of belonging of migrants. Nira Yuval-Davis (1997) envisions a multi-tier negotiation of membership among migrants and describes citizenship as the categorical membership of peoples into various local,
ethnic, national, and transnational communities. Yet, citizenship is not limited to one’s legal status. According to Yasmin Soysal (1994) nations recognize postnational membership on the basis of human rights discourse, which grants membership to migrants regardless of citizenship. Speaking of their supposed “postnational membership” (Soysal, 1994), migrants achieve denizenship, including the right to vote in neighborhoods in certain countries like the Netherlands, social rights to welfare benefits in various countries including Italy and the civil rights to work in most host societies. Yet, in some cases, denizenship does not eliminate xenophobia, as illustrated for instance by the recent raids of work facilities employing undocumented migrants in the United States. This tells us that postnational citizenship does not necessarily transgress national orders when it comes to undocumented workers. Indeed, intact national cultures are a prerequisite for liberty and consequently national bounded citizenship is a premise upon which the liberal tenet of human rights discourse is based. Will Kymlicka (1995), who writes about multicultural citizenship, describes how nations integrate migrants while respecting and protecting their ethnic identities, however not without limits that maintain national identity. Social and political barriers do hamper the citizenship of migrants. Pointing to the structures that control citizenship, Stephen Castles and Alastair Davidson describe how host societies enforce a process of differential exclusion and accept immigrants only within strict functional and temporal limits; host societies are more likely to welcome immigrants as workers but not as settlers and as temporary sojourners and not long-term residents.

Experiences of differential exclusion consequently encourage migrants to extend citizenship beyond the territorial boundaries of the nation-state and to inhabit a transnational sphere. They create a sense of diasporic citizenship and construct a sense of belonging in multiple communities, not randomly, but according to the cultural-political communities forged
by geopolitical dynamics in their migration history (Siu, 2005). Diasporic citizenship describes their sense of contingent belonging to these multiple communities—contingent in that their belonging to any one community is historically situated and geopolitically determined. As these conditions shift, so too does their ability to claim or achieve belonging to any one or combination of these communities.

Discussions on assimilation, transnationalism, and citizenship expand our understanding of migrant settlement beyond monolithic models void of structures. However, current discussions are more applicable to our understanding of long-term rather than short-term migrants as they do not account for how temporal boundaries transform experiences of settlement. It does not capture certain particularities in their experiences such as settlement as a process of returning home. To better consider the experiences of short-term migrants in our current theorizations of settlement, I utilize the concepts of time and space as analytic categories for examining migration. I use the concept of time so as to underscore the migrant’s limited duration of settlement and take into consideration how temporal segregation shapes a migrant’s sense of belonging and membership in the host society. I then look at the use of space so as to account for the extent of social and political integration of short-term migrants during their limited duration of settlement.

Because of the temporal restrictions on their migration, it is unlikely that the traditional ways of measuring integration—such as access to institutions including schools, the labor market, and communities—would be an effective indicator of settlement for temporary labor migrants. Instead, the access of migrants and their utilization of a variety of spaces would better illustrate the extent of their integration into society. As such, in this chapter, I show how space
and time provide useful analytic tools to move beyond the conceptual limits of current theorizations on the settlement of permanent migrants.

QUESTIONS ON TIME

Building from the sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel (1981), I see the category of time as organizing qualitative experiences in society. Temporal profiles of a situation could be defined by the following parameters, according to Zerubavel: “sequential structure” that describes the order of events; “duration,” meaning how long an event or experience lasts; “temporal location,” referring to when an event takes place, and lastly “rate of recurrence,” meaning how many times an event occurs (1981: 1). Yet, the category of time does not only organize experiences but also exclude and discipline.

Inequalities in the operation of time emerge, for instance, in the speed up in the pace of life. The instantaneity of communication that occurs in this age of late capitalism tells us that we live in an era of rapid movement. As Arjun Appadurai has succinctly observed, “we are functioning in a world that is fundamentally characterized by objects in motions... ideas and ideologies, people and goods, images and messages, technologies and techniques” (1999). In our world of flows, we increasingly inhabit postmodern spaces and experience “time-space compression... the speed-up in the pace of life, while so overcoming spatial barriers that the world sometimes seems to collapse inwards upon us” (Harvey, 1989: 240). Yet, the compression of time and space is not a uniform but instead a varied social process, one shaped by class and gender. One’s social location in the intersecting and multiple axes of social inequalities [e.g. gender, class, rural vs. urban families, etc.] distinguishes the experience of time-space compression. For instance, the pace of transnational communication would depend on the resources of individuals as it requires capital and capital fixity (Sassen, 2000). As Saskia Sassen
reminds us, capital is not self-generative but instead requires "vast concentrations of very material and not so mobile facilities and infrastructures" (2000: 217). These include electricity, telephone and internet service providers, wireless communication towers, and other international telecommunication infrastructures.

Because of structural inequalities in access, transnational communication and the achievement of intimacy would be therefore a greater challenge for migrants with families located in rural areas without the appropriate facilities and infrastructures. For instance, some rural areas in the Philippines are not only been out of reach of telecommunication towers but also do not have 24 hour electricity service. The greater challenge of those in rural areas tells us that transnational families do not exist in a vacuum; social and geographical inequalities shape the quality of intimacy in transnational family life. Families in rural areas are less likely to benefit from the communication enabled by the compression of time and space. As succinctly described by feminist geographer Doreen Massey (1994), time-space compression excludes according to its "power-geometry" which differentiates who has access to mobility and who does not.

In the disciplining of subjects, the control of the "anatomo-politics of the body" also takes place in the manipulation of time (Foucault, 1979). The subjection of bodies as manipulated by authority and functionally constrained occurs with the imposition of time tables that maximize the exercises of the body, the obligation of rhythmic motions of the body, the mechanization of gestures, and the sequential normalization of actions (Foucault, 1979: 149-56). The control of time is necessary to the formation of docile bodies, which in turn enable the guarantee of "time without impurities or defects" and "time of good quality" (Foucault, 1979: 151). In short, the maximization of labor comes from the control of time.
My discussion of time does not so much concern the minute details of its operation. Instead, I turn to the category of time so as to explicate the experience of migrant settlement for entertainers in Japan's nightlife industry. In particular, I take into account how the temporal segregation, i.e., the short duration of settlement, and temporal dislocation, i.e., the different time clock, of migrant entertainers define their qualitative experience of migration. Building from the temporal mapping of the experiences of migrant entertainers, I illustrate the stunted integration of migrant entertainers in Japan. More specifically, I show how both forms of temporal displacements engender their experience of settlement as one of spatial segregation. Migrant entertainers experience spatial segregation vis-à-vis members of dominant society and other members of the Filipino migrant community.

THE TEMPORAL DISPLACEMENTS OF FILIPINA MIGRANT ENTERTAINERS

Migrant entertainers face two forms of temporal displacements, one being their temporal segregation as short term visitors to Japan and second being their temporal dislocation as nighttime workers. Both forms of temporal subjugations shape their integration, settlement, and incorporation into Japanese society, and as I argue lead to their spatial segregation in Japan.

Temporal Segregation

Time constraints on the duration of settlement undoubtedly shape experiences of migration. The different accesses of social groups to the duration of migration point not only to categorical exclusions, for instance between skilled and unskilled workers as the latter tends to be restricted to a shorter duration of settlement, but also to a qualitatively different experience of migration. This qualitative difference is what I seek to describe so as to analyze how the category of time contributes towards our understanding of the different experiences of settlement for permanent and temporary migrant workers.
Around the world, temporary labor migrants outnumber permanent migrants. While the facilitation of high-speed communication and low-cost transportation enables cross-national flows of all types of workers, nations are turning towards the encouragement of temporary labor migration. In the United States, the push for a guest worker program by President George Bush throughout the 2000s is a case in point. Employers, such as large high technology firms in growing economies, support the utilization of temporary migrant workers as they are attracted to short term migrant workers who can be let go without penalty whenever the economy is low.

From the need for skilled labor in rapidly developing economies to the need for unskilled workers in nations with an aging working population, temporary migrants much more than permanent migrants are likely to be those responding to labor shortages. For instance, most labor migrants from the Philippines are temporary contract workers. Many countries restrict labor migrants to guest workers ineligible for permanent resident status. This is the case in Singapore and Taiwan (Lan, 2006). Even the United States depends on temporary labor migrants as it admits more than 600,000 of such workers per annum (Meyers and Yau, 2004).

In Japan, entertainers are restricted to three month visas that are renewable for a maximum stay of six months. The visa restricts the employment of the entertainer to the sponsoring club. Working elsewhere would constitute of a “flying booking” and if caught would leave them vulnerable to deportation and banned from entry to Japan for at least five years. The length of six months is a particularly short period and makes it difficult for entertainers not to think of themselves as temporary members of Japanese society. Yet, familiarity with Japan and its night-life industry does develop, as my interviewees include those who have returned to Japan for at least 13 times in the last 10 years or so.
At the end of six months, entertainers usually acquire rudimentary knowledge of the language, which they study by following the hiragana and katakana characters in the karaoke machine playing in their club every night, writing down and then forcing themselves to use new words they encounter inside and outside the club, and practicing with customers at the table. While they may not speak grammatically correct Japanese, they do manage to carry a conversation with customers before they leave Japan for the first time. Making an effort to learn Japanese usually endears them to customers who would feel compelled to give them a more generous sayonara present for their effort to acquire some Japanese cultural practices.

We can envision the life of entertainers as a process of temporary settlement between Japan and the Philippines. Contractually bound with managers in the Philippines, entertainers have to go to Japan for at least five times in the next six years. This indicates the need for entertainers to acquire a certain level of assimilation and acculturation to Japan. Yet, their short duration of stay and continuous movement between Japan and the Philippines calls into question the applicability of the assimilation perspective for our full understanding of their integration into Japanese society. Yet, Filipino entertainers also do not fit the profile of transnational migrants, as they do not equally invest in both their lives in Japan and the Philippines. Instead, they view their visits to Japan as moments when they must put their life in the Philippines on hold. Moreover, they only view their sojourn as a means for mobility in the Philippines.

Nikki, the bakla whose sayonara party I had described earlier, does not look forward to her return to Japan when in the Philippines and extends her stay until she can no longer avoid the calls of her manager to once again process her papers or audition with a Japanese promoter in Manila to set in motion her next trip to Japan. If given a choice, she would rather not work in Japan. Describing to me her well-being when in Japan, she says:
I have not really fully adjusted to this place. The emotional trauma of being away is still there. For example, there are times you get so lonely. You feel so homesick. You look for the people who can be there for you in times of needs, even with the small things. Before, I just make a phone call and my friends all come right away. Here, I have no one to call. No one is here to take care of me except myself... But I have feelings of needing to force myself to work. This is because I need to make a living. But let me tell you it is hard. It is very hard. There is not one day here that I do not cry. Everybody does here.

Once in the Philippines, it takes Nikki some time to get over the “pressure, exhaustion” of her work in Japan. She rarely thinks about Japan when in the Philippines. This makes her not a transnational migrant who maintains her allegiance to both Japan and the Philippines but instead a temporary visitor to Japan who goes there to secure a comfortable life for herself in the Philippines. Consequently, she often thinks about the Philippines when in Japan.

Angie, a 23 year old female entertainer who is finishing her fourth contract to work in Japan, describes how working in Japan puts her life as a mother on hold. As she told me, “I want to be with my child. But my money is better here. If you work you have money monthly. In the Philippines, if you do not have a job, then you struggle... you just let go of money and money never comes in.” Angie sees her migration as temporarily putting her life on hold to earn money so she can then acquire the money to go on with her life in the Philippines. If given a chance, she would rather run a business in the Philippines, like an internet shop or a small eatery behind a mall to cater to the workers. However, Angie realistically knows that while she is fairly young her best option for earning money is to work as an entertainer in Japan. Angie is like Nikki as she thinks about her life in the Philippines when in Japan, and rarely about her life in Japan when in
the Philippines. She only often does when she runs out of money in the Philippines and needs to go abroad once again to earn a living for her family.

Nikki and Angie maintain a fragmented lifestyle of “earning abroad to spend money in the Philippines.” Their temporal segregation as migrant entertainers promotes this fragmentation as it limits their investment in Japan. We can imagine that other temporary labor migrants share this same lopsided sense of greater belonging in the country of origin than in the country of destination. Likewise, we can speculate that other temporary labor migrants – for example, Filipino workers constructing the prisons in Guantanamo; Filipino factory workers in Korea; or Filipino construction workers in Saudi Arabia – share the sentiment of Nikki and Angie that migration is an experience of putting one’s life on hold. In the case of migrant entertainers, this sentiment is aggravated by their temporal dislocation as nighttime workers whose schedule further limits their assimilation and sense of belonging in Japanese society.

Temporal Dislocation

Constraints of time do not only occur via temporal segregation for migrant entertainers, but it also emerges from their different rhythmic pattern of daily life from most of Japanese society. Entertainers maintain a different time clock from most of Japanese society, which they have termed in the community as “vampire hours.” They are awake when most of Japan is asleep. They work from 7 pm to 4 am, or for a shorter period of time between these hours. The working hours of entertainers result in a time clock of sleeping at around 9 am and waking up at around 4 pm.

Even though I also worked as an entertainer during the course of my research, I never quite got used to the different rhythm of life led by entertainers and like them adjust by replacing day with night. At four o’clock in the morning, I rarely had any energy to stay up longer after
work and would fall asleep as soon as I would get home. In contrast, my co-workers who often slept over my apartment would stay awake until after the sun rises. I would often hear them talk on the telephone and watch a pre-recorded bootleg television program from the Philippines. I learned that my co-workers often did not go to sleep until 9 am. After work, they would stay up – eat, talk on the phone, watch a video recording, or just stay up reading a ‘pocket book.”

The different temporal location of entertainers engenders their limited spatial integration into Japan. Being awake at night and asleep during the day limits the access of entertainers to spaces occupied by members of dominant society. Entertainers have to adjust business and leisure activities according to their work schedule, which means they would have to attend to such activities from 4 am to 9 am and/or from 4 pm to 6 pm. These activities include grocery shopping, banking, dining out, attending church service, doing laundry, cooking, renting DVDs and CDs, and other such mundane activities we often take for granted. Because most of Japan is asleep when entertainers are awake, including the train system that does not run between midnight and 5 o’clock in the morning, social interactions between entertainers and members of dominant society are minimal.

Consequently, entertainers tend to be socially isolated from most members of Japanese society including other members of the Filipino migrant community, meaning the non-entertainers who would include domestic workers, male construction workers, factory workers, and other low-wage service workers. While these other members of the community could go to church at noon or patronize a restaurant at 8 pm in the evening or go to the bank at 1 pm in the afternoon, the rhythm of life of entertainers bars them from performing such activities during these typical temporal locations.

THE SPATIAL SEGREGATION OF MIGRANT ENTERTAINERS
To establish the limited degree of integration of migrant Filipina entertainers, I now turn to describe their spatial segregation, which as I had noted result from their temporal segregation and temporal dislocation as temporary night time workers in Japan. More precisely, I refer to the bifurcations in their use of space in everyday life first from members of dominant society and second from non-entertainers in the Filipino migrant community. Their experience of spatiality or more specifically “the partition of [their] space” from others reflects the social inequalities that limit their integration in the host society (de Certeau, 1984: 123, Lefebvre, 1977). The spatial segregation of migrant entertainers manifests in their limited spatial mobility in Japan, as shown by their restricted movement within their neighborhoods and concentration in apartments, and their temporally and spatially bifurcated use of space vis-à-vis non-entertainers in the community.

Suggesting their imprisonment, entertainers spend most of their free time indoors in apartments and if outdoors restricted within their neighborhood. Unless with the club owner or customer, entertainers rarely venture outside of their neighborhood and travel via train or bus around Tokyo. Illiteracy surely discourages entertainers from travel, but the operational hours of the train system also work against their schedule. Entertainers also do not leave their neighborhoods so as to minimize their expenses; as sojourners, they would rather spend their money in the Philippines and not in Japan. This is why entertainers appreciate the service of “hatid-sundo” (meaning pick up – drop off) that they receive from clubs as it does not only offset the cost of transportation but also provides them safety and security. Ironically, the sight of entertainers being escorted in white vans to and from their home and place of work, as well as during the other times they venture outside of the club, for instance to go to church, has left members of mainstream society suspicious that Filipina entertainers are “imprisoned” by clubs.
While this is not an unlikely conclusion, it is not true. Entertainers stay indoors not by force but by choice, one that they make in the context of the constraints they face as temporally segregated migrants who see their settlement in Japan as a period of putting their life in the Philippines on hold. Moreover, they feel “safe” if they also reside and hence do not have to leave their workplace. As May, a former entertainer tells me, “I was safe [at work] because… I never had to leave the premises.” Notably, May tells me this immediately after she nonchalantly mentions that the customers frequenting the club where she worked had mostly been members of the yakuza.

Further underscoring the segregation of space and time is the bifurcation of the public spaces of the Filipino migrant community by space and time. Entertainers occupy different spatial and temporal locations than other Filipinos in Japan. They patronize different restaurants than do non-entertainers and go to Philippine grocery stores at different times of the day. While non-entertainers usually visit stores at the expected temporal locations of anytime between 9 am and 7 pm, entertainers usually do at 4 o’clock in the morning. As a result, non-entertainers by default have become the public face of the Filipino migrant community in Japanese society. This temporal bifurcation of Filipinos speaks of the marginality of entertainers in a community already located in the margins of dominant society.

*Private Spaces: Housing*

Entertainers spend most of their free time indoors, if not at work then at home in apartments. Yet, entertainers are often without the freedom to move in these spaces, thus symbolically mirroring their experience of settlement as one of spatial restriction and segregation. The private spaces of work are usually dark smoky dens in which the movements of entertainers are restricted and closely monitored by management. Yet, entertainers are not
without the relief of space or movement in the other private space that they occupy, which is the apartment, as such places are usually cramped and enclosed quarters.

Entertainers usually split their time between home and work. The time they spend outside these two private spaces are from 4 o’clock in the morning to six o’clock in the morning and a few hours in the afternoon and early evening before they have to clock-in work at 7 o’clock in the evening. Entertainers do not officially begin work until the club opens at 8 o’clock in the evening and yet club owners still often expect them to be inside the club waiting for customers no later than 7 pm. Discouraged from spending the night with customers, entertainers are imposed with a 6 am curfew that could cost entertainers as much as a 10,000 yen penalty if they are ever caught not inside their home past their curfew hour. Due to their limited free time, entertainers spend many hours in the enclosed quarters of their apartment.

In fact, entertainers spend most of their free time in their apartment. They rarely venture outside, not even to purchase clothes they wear in the club. Peddlers – many being Filipina wives of Japanese men – sell “omise” (club) clothes, usually brightly colored polyester dresses, to entertainers in their apartments. Other female entrepreneurs also sell jewelry or offer door-to-door delivery service for remittances. Consequently, the interactions of entertainers with others are often limited to customers, the peddlers who market clothes, jewelry and door-to-door remittance service at their homes and the store clerks around their neighborhood.

The residential apartments of entertainers symbolically represent their spatial segregation from the rest of Japanese society. Provided by the club, they are usually dark, enclosed and crowded spaces from which outsiders are often barred from entry by club owners. The barring of visitors is to discourage customers from entering these apartments but also perhaps to hide their unsanitary condition. Mold, mildew, cockroaches and mice are common sites in these
apartments; where unlike all other residences I have entered in Japan do not expect visitors to take off their shoes upon entry.

Entertainers claim that they get free housing as part of their contract to work in Japan. Whether or not entertainers receive these apartments for free is questionable, because the contracts that they file with the Philippine Embassy stipulate a 30,000 yen monthly deduction for housing from their 200,000 yen minimum monthly salary. Considering 10-12 entertainers usually share each residential unit, clubs make a tremendous amount of profit from the rent of entertainers as clubs technically receive at least 3,000,000 yen per month for these small, cramped and infested apartments. For example, I learned that one unit in a building that houses Filipino entertainers cost the tenant no more than 60,000 yen, which is significantly less than the 3,000,000 the clubs collect from the entertainers for a similar unit in the same building. Moreover, these apartments are not usually located in prime neighborhoods but instead in seedy red-light districts of Tokyo.

During the course of my research, I had the opportunity to visit a few of these apartments. I first had the chance to do so when I accompanied a nun during one of her regular visits to entertainers at their residence, which she does to extend what she calls “pastoral care” to her constituency in Tokyo. The apartment that I first visited with one of the resident nuns of Tokyo is located amidst other nightlife industry businesses including pink salons for sexual massages, soaplands for assisted baths, and esthe clubs for sexual role play. Familiar with these neighboring businesses, Filipino entertainers have illustrated to me the various hand gestures men use to ask for sex from these establishments. Customers had shown them these hand gestures when asked how they know if they could receive sex, a story that a couple of them extended to me after they
explained why they are not prostitutes. One of the reasons being customers could always go to these other places where they could expect sex, which is not a hostess bar.

I frequently visited residents of entertainers after the introduction of the nuns in the community. I met many entertainers at their homes and some at church. Catering to entertainers, one church in Tokyo offers prayer services to Filipino workers at 4 o’clock on Wednesday afternoons, which unlike the twelve o’ clock Sunday masses that cater to other Filipinos, is a time slot that actually fits the schedule of entertainers. Before I would visit entertainers at their homes, I usually set up an appointment to do an interview at their house. We usually would agree to meet at 3 o’clock in the afternoon, a few hours before they would have to get ready for work, but my interviewees would often still be asleep when I arrive in their apartment. I did not mind having to wait as it gave me the opportunity to look around their apartment and get a better sense of their living conditions.

It is hard to forget the first apartment of entertainers that I visited in Tokyo and the rancid smell of used cooking oil permeating in the thick air throughout the space. All the other apartments I visited were a lot like the first – dark, squalid, and cramped. Usually no more than 400 square feet in size, these two bedroom, one bath apartments can barely accommodate the 12 entertainers expected by management to live in there that often the last group of entertainers to arrive from the Philippines usually have to make do with the hallway, living room or kitchen for their bedroom. This is what happened to Kay and Rachel, two experienced entertainers who arrived two months after the last batch of three entertainers had taken the last spaces available in the bedrooms of their apartment. Traveling to Japan for her tenth contract, Rachel told me that she was even daunted to learn that her bedroom was actually going to be somewhere in the kitchen. She then showed me that the wall separating her and Kay’s bedroom from the kitchen is
actually just three layers of cardboard boxes and a heavy tarmac hanging from the ceiling. To hold the boxes up, they moved one of the bunk beds from their tiny room into the kitchen. They then leaned the boxes against this bed, which has since become a storage space for the rest of the entertainers in the house. Piles of suitcases, balikbayan boxes, and plastic bins are stacked on the bed.

Inside the “room” were one bunk bed and two plastic bins that Kay and Rachel used as drawers. They had no closet but had one string across the corner of the room to hang their clothes. Rachel explained to me that this corner of the kitchen that is now their bedroom was nothing like this when they first arrived a few months ago but instead looked like a storage room piled with junk and furniture. They had to figure out how to clear and sleep in this space that management pointed to them would be their sleeping area. Rachel and Kay eventually did make a bedroom out of the kitchen corner allocated to them, which they were only able to do after they not only cleared the excess furniture but also blocked the lights shining into the room. In order to sleep, they had to cover the window with dark shower curtains and cardboard boxes so the “room” would be pitch black in the day time. Like in the apartments of other entertainers, there are no open windows in the one that Rachel and Kay share with ten other women. Clearly the lack of ventilation puts the health of entertainers at risk. Yet, the image of their apartments as enclosed units with cardboard boxes blocking windows is striking as it underscores their experience of Japan as one of spatial segregation.

Due to their different temporal location, entertainers sleep throughout the day, which explains why they must cover windows with cardboard boxes so as to block the sun. Consequently, air rarely circulates in the enclosed housing units of entertainers, leaving them at risk of tuberculosis and other such airborne diseases. Lessening their risk of disease, entertainers
must pass a bill of clean health to be eligible to work in Japan. However, even if with less risk of contagion from tuberculosis, they are still prone to illness from residing in an unsanitary location. As I noted earlier, cockroaches crawled freely in these residential units. Cockroaches crawled everywhere – in the kitchen, hallway, and bedrooms. They came in different sizes from incredibly small ones to medium sized ones to large ones. Sometimes entertainers would have to double wrap their food to prevent the smallest critters from crawling into the tiny cracks of pots and plate covered bowls. Unfortunately, rodents also infest some apartments. Many complained to me that “Mickey Mouse” would eat their food from bread to chocolate bars while they work in the club.

Overcrowding, lack of ventilation and unhygienic conditions surely pose public health risks on entertainers. Yet, the housing conditions of entertainers do not only put their physical health at risk but also their mental health. In apartments, the bunk bed that each entertainer occupies is not just their only private space but also their only living area. Rooms in the apartments barely have any walking space between bunk beds, which would be covered with blankets at both sides to achieve some semblance of privacy for the entertainers. Entertainers do everything except eat on their bed. This is where they do their make-up, read, write letters, watch DVDs, and talk on the phone to their families in the Philippines or customers from the club. Personalizing these spaces are family pictures of the entertainers, usually pictures of siblings or children, pinned on the side of the bed.

The very small space of the bunk bend is technically the only space an entertainer can claim as theirs in the apartment. The only semblance of privacy in this space is provided by the blankets enclosing the bed. Individual halogen lamp shades would light this enclosed space and blankets would be pinned at the corners to prevent the light from brightening the rest of the
room. Entertainers cannot spend time elsewhere in their apartments as they tend not to have a living room space, hallways would be blocked by jumbo balikbayan boxes, while kitchens would not be conducive to anything else but eating a quick meal. For example, kitchens sometimes would not have a table and entertainers use small plastic pails for seats when they eat. Consequently, the bunk bed is often the only space of leisure that entertainers have in their apartment.

Despite their limited space within the cramped quarters of their apartments, entertainers still spend most of their free time in these apartments. As I noted earlier, this is because their temporal segregation and temporal dislocation encourage they minimize their spatial mobility. Their limited duration of settlement encourages they minimize their expenses, which they achieve by staying indoors or within their neighborhood, while their different time clock from the rest of Japan limits their physical mobility as they sleep when Japan is awake. Looking at the private spaces occupied by entertainers, the enclosed space of the bunk bed and apartment with sealed windows are metaphoric representations of the segregation of migrant entertainers from larger Japanese society. Because entertainers spend most of their time in Japan in the encaged and segregated space of their apartments, we are hard pressed to claim that they assimilate or integrate into Japanese society. Instead, we can say that they put their life on hold until they return back to the Philippines.

*Public Spaces of Community and Leisure*

While their temporal segregation and dislocation limit the spatial integration of entertainers, these temporal subjugations also shape the spatial division in the Filipino migrant community. The community is spatially bifurcated between entertainers and non-entertainers. The bifurcation of the Filipino migrant community in Tokyo reflects the spatial practices of its
members. Entertainers occupy different spatial and temporal locations from others in the community. The public face of the community is arguably the face of non-entertainers. For this reason, it took me a while to access the community of entertainers as the events representing the Filipino community in Tokyo and serving as the gateway of outsiders to the community rarely represented or included entertainers in their program. For example, the theatre group sponsored by the Embassy of the Republic of the Philippines in Japan caters to domestic workers. Only one active member is an entertainer. Similarly, the beauty contest that I attended in Tokyo in hopes of meeting entertainers during my first month in Japan surprisingly did not include any entertainers among its contestants. Most contestants were domestic workers. The stigma of “hostess” work in the Filipino community leads to a stratified relationship between the spatially and temporally marginalized hostesses and the rest of the community. Entertainers are excluded in public affairs representing the community, as shown for instance by the removal of the advocacy group Kaffin, and the short skit prepared by its members who are mostly entertainers, from the program of the Philippine Embassy’s official Philippine Independence Day celebration in July 2005 in Tokyo. To find entertainers, I had to visit the community not during the day but at night, and not in the most visible public spaces but in the subculture spaces of Filipino restaurants and host clubs.

The spaces that hostesses and non-hostesses occupy are usually distinct. Some spaces like to be known as hostess spaces and some are not. When talking to the owner of a grocery store in the southwestern neighborhood of Meguro, I took note of the absence of “hostesses” in her response to my question on what types of jobs Filipinos hold in Japan. She responded, “A lot, but mostly maids. There are some professionals in the office, but most are maids. A lot of jobs. Some are in construction.” In contrast to the store at Meguro, which is run by a woman who I
mistakenly thought had once been a hostess due to her tight fitting attire, heavy jewelry, thick
make-up and dyed blond hair, is the store run by another woman in the northeastern
neighborhood of Oyama. Like the storeowner from Meguro, this storeowner also wears her hair
long and dyed and prefers tight fitting clothes. Yet, in contrast to the store in Meguro, this
storeowner does not deny the presence of entertainers in her store but actually caters to them as
she operates her business from 3 am to 6 am as well as from 3 pm to 10 pm. Perhaps due to the
stereotype that entertainers tend to exude their sexuality more than others, the first thing one sees
upon entering this store in Oyama is a tall pink vending machine that sells “g-string” underwear.
For 1000 yen, one could get anywhere from one to three panties. This machine does not seem to
offend the customers as it is usually sold out as customers frequently try their luck in winning
three pairs of underwear for the measly price of 1000 yen.

The stratification of the community manifests spatially as hostesses tend not to spend
time in spaces occupied by non-hostesses. If they do meet, rarely do they socially interact
directly. The few Catholic churches that offer English-language masses in Tokyo are the spaces
where hostesses and non-hostesses are likely to encounter one another. The largest of these
churches is St. Ignatius by Sophia University, which holds an English language mass at noon
every Sunday. Outside of St. Ignatius would be one line of vendors selling Filipino food products
on the sidewalk facing the church. During a brief period before and after mass, the place turns
into an open market with vendors selling various cooked foods such as *adobo*, *kalderetta,*
*afritada*, which would be served with rice as well as desserts of rice and milk cakes such as
*kutchinta*, *puto*, *maligkit*, *leche flan*, and *bibingka*. These food products are mostly pre-packed
into “obento” boxes for customers to conveniently take home.
About eight vendors sell food outside of the church. Others sell non-perishable products such as underwear, bootlegged videos of Philippine TV shows, and religious images and figures of the Virgin Mary, Santo Niño, and various saints. One vendor sells a variety of Filipino food products such as noodles, cooking mixes, and other ingredients for the preparation of food. Vendors for the most part do not sell drinks, just cooked foods or other snacks, as they do not expect customers to eat at the premise but only pick up food to take home. A snack of rice porridge, fried hotdog, or fried banana is the most they are expected to eat at the premise.

Vendors begin to set up a little after 11 o’clock in the morning and stay only until around 2 pm, approximately one hour after the mass ends, leaving people, including entertainers and non-entertainers, with not much time to socially interact with one another.

For the most part, the leisure spaces inhabited by entertainers differ from those of non-entertainers. The restaurants, grocery stores and after-work drinking holes frequented by entertainers cater to their hours and operate between midnight and nine in the morning. This explains why I struggled to find interviewees during my first two months in Tokyo, as I visited Filipino business establishments such as restaurants during the day and not during the times that entertainers would be there. I was advised to meet them at 3 o’clock in the morning, which I eventually did, despite the difficulty of traveling in the middle of the train’s non-operational hours. Prior to leaving Tokyo, I circled the various areas in and around Tokyo with Filipino grocery stores and restaurants, all of which maintained non-typical operating hours. Nanay’s Lugaw is open 24 hours, a small restaurant near the Philippine Embassy that caters to nightlife industry workers after midnight and Embassy patrons during the day. Flash Philippines in Oyama is open from 3 pm to 8 pm and then from 2 am to 6 am. Bahay Kubo in Nishi-Kawaguchi is open from 6 pm to 6 am. Jungle in Higashi-Jujo operates from 8 pm to 8 am. So does Boracay
in Kinshicho. Likewise, Filipino food stores tend to stay open until women get off work at 4 o’clock in the morning, or reopen at around 2 am and close at 6 am so as to accommodate entertainers during their free time after work.

While I encountered many Filipino entertainers at various establishments in the early morning hours of the day, I could not quite interact with them because rarely do entertainers visit Filipino restaurants alone. Customers usually accompany them both before and after work as the price of dishes are outside of their budgetary range. For example, a plate of marinated steak cubes would cost 2700 yen, a fried whole fish would be 2500 yen, and noodles would cost no less than 1500 yen. At most, entertainers can afford the 1000 yen tabehodai (all you can eat) that restaurants provide on Sundays. Consequently, rarely did I get the opportunity to interview entertainers at these restaurants as their customers usually occupied their attention.

Besides restaurants, the leisure space of choice among entertainers are host bars, meaning bars that are the male equivalent of hostess bars where instead of male customers receiving the attention of the good looking workers at the club it would be the women customers who do. During the course of my research, friends, co-workers, and interviews repeatedly invited me to visit Philippine host bars. Like hostess bars, host bars vary by ethnicity. There are Korean host bars, Philippine host bars, and Japanese host bars. Philippine host bars cost less than other host bars as the cover charge in Philippine host bars are no more than 1000 yen for the evening. The bar makes most of its profits from food and drinks. These bars operate from midnight to nine in the morning and are located in areas where there are also hostess bars. Customers often accompany hostesses to these clubs after the hostess bars close at 4 o’clock in the morning, which would just be in time for the variety show performance of the male hosts. Philippine host bars are quite popular among hostesses including those from Korea, Rumania, and the
Philippines. Perhaps they go there for the variety shows which are not a feature in host bars with Korean and Japanese men.

Variety shows in host bars usually begin at 4:30 am. The show would last for approximately 40 minutes and would include five heart-pumping or breathtaking dance performances. The performances I observed in host bars sharply contrasted with those I saw in hostess bars, which tend to be just filled with blatant sexual overtures in female bars and cute and bubbly jumps in _okama_ bars. In contrast, performances in host bars are all about heart pumping dance moves demonstrating the skills of complicated hand and leg movements. It was a struggle to take my attention off of these men whose bulging muscles would flex in almost every move, but I forced myself to look around to see the response of the audience around me. I could not help but notice the large groups of Filipino women accompanied by only one Japanese man, who we can safely assume is a customer. Often hostesses would accommodate the request of a customer to get something to eat after the bar closes only if the customer allows co-workers to chaperone them. While the women’s faces would indicate their excitement, the boredom or lack of interest of their customers would pose a sharp contrast to their excitement. Many customers looked like they were falling asleep. If they are not, they usually are not paying attention to the men on stage but trying to catch the attention of one of the hostesses at their table.

One such man was a frail elderly man who must have been more than 70 years old. I notice his attention only on the prettiest woman in his group of seven Filipinas, a tall svelte dark skinned woman with curly hair cascading past her shoulders. While she looked intently towards the stage, the man kept on puckering his lips towards her for a kiss. As her attention was only on the stage, I could not help but feel sorry for him. However, I also pitied her as his overt sexual advances clearly disrupted her view and enjoyment of the show. Except for the hosts that
showered me with attention and gazed deeply into my eyes, I could not easily meet Filipino entertainers at these clubs. The women I wanted to meet came here to release their tension from work and to receive the entertainment that they themselves give to Japanese men every night. It was only as I had been with my own co-workers that we had gotten to interact with other Filipinas.

Like it had been difficult to meet entertainers in restaurants and other nighttime establishments, it was also hard for me to meet them at the Embassy and Philippine remittance centers, places where I would have expected to encounter a representative sample of the Filipino community. Because these establishments operate during usual business hours of 9 am to 3 pm in the case of banks and 9 am to 5 pm in the case of the Embassy, I rarely if ever encountered entertainers in these commercial spaces. Service is usually so slow in these establishments that the short span of free time that entertainers have in the afternoon is not sufficient to complete the simplest transaction, such as sending money to the Philippines. For example, the tedious process of remitting money can take up to one hour at the Philippine National Bank even if only a few customers wait in line to send money. My field notes indicate how wearisome the process of sending money could be:

It was slow at the bank. It also took a long time to get remittances processed as a few and not one individual processes the remittance. It begins when one signs up with the receptionist, who then guides the remitter to fill out a form and inserts this form along with one’s remittance identity card in a clear folder. The remitter is then instructed to wait until someone calls out their number. This folder is then taken and processed by another person. In my case, this process took more than an hour despite the fact that there
were only around eight of us waiting to send money back to the Philippines. To send money, one can do an 1) immediate deposit to a Philippine National Bank branch; 2) a deposit that will take 2-3 business days to another bank; 3) “advice and pay” for those without a bank account, meaning they are advised by phone that they have money waiting for them at a specific branch which they are then paid after they show up at the specific branch declared by the sender. The receiver goes to the section ‘Remittances,’ which is a special line in the bank in which individuals who receive remittances go to collect their money. This type of remittance is also called “over the counter.”

Because of the inaccessibility of banks to many Filipino entertainers, most choose to send money via door to door remittances through peddlers that visit their apartments who then instruct their contacts in the Philippines to deliver the funds to the doorstep of the recipient. Banks charge no more than 2000 yen while door to door peddlers have a prorated fee. A 10,000 yen remittance would cost 1000 yen, while a 50,000 yen remittance would cost 5000 yen. Although more expensive and risky, entertainers still resort to door to door remittance options because of the inconvenience of banking in Japan. Likewise, entertainers rarely have time to visit the Embassy as one would have to spend the whole day there to order a passport, file a marriage license, or do any other business that needs certification from the government of the Philippines. To cater to the large number of service workers in the community, the Embassy now operates on Sundays, but still most entertainers find the hours of operation of the Embassy not to be conducive to their work schedule.

CONCLUSION

The temporary contract workers who I met in Japan are not likely to think of themselves as transnational migrants who equally entrench themselves in the Philippines and Japan. They
view themselves as visitors to Japan who are putting their life on hold in the Philippines. Consequently, they remain conscious of their eventual return to the Philippines during their entire duration of settlement. As such, we can describe the settlement of many of them as a process of returning home to the Philippines. Emblematic of this process are their preparations for sayonara parties and constant accumulation of goods for balikbayan boxes.

Notions of migrant settlement in the literature have not taken into account how temporal restrictions would qualitatively shape migrant experiences. In this chapter, I look at the spatial and temporal incorporation of migrant entertainers. In the process, I shift from the dominant paradigm of analyzing migrant integration through the lens of institutional access. My discussion reveals that the incorporation of entertainers into Japan is one of spatial restrictions. These restrictions include their isolation in apartments and neighborhoods, inhabitance of a different temporal location from most of Japanese society, and occupation of separate spaces from other members of the Filipino migrant community. The limited spatial mobility and segregated space of entertainers tells us of their limited membership in Japan and marginal membership in the Filipino migrant community.

The bounded spatial practices of entertainers emerge not only from their temporal segregation as contract workers but also temporal dislocation as nighttime workers. Due to their temporal dislocation, they inhabit different spaces of leisure than most other members of Japanese society and patronize businesses that operate in the early hours of the morning. This is when they do their grocery shopping at Filipino stores or go out to eat at Filipino restaurants that stay open for them until 6 o’clock in the morning. Their different spaces of leisure are largely invisible from mainstream Japanese society, making this group quite inaccessible to the general public. Perhaps it is this inaccessibility and the consequent absence of first-hand knowledge on
this group of workers that catalyzes the misconception of these women as shackled, imprisoned, and forced into prostitution.

The negative image of migrant entertainers is held not only by mainstream Japanese society but also by non-entertainers in the Filipino migrant community. The temporal and spatial segmentation between entertainers and non-entertainers minimizes interactions between the two groups, engendering a stratification in which entertainers are invisible in the public spaces representing the Philippine community of Japan. The spatial and temporal bifurcation of the community leads not just to the minimal interactions among Filipinos in Japan but also to the lack of knowledge on entertainers and their stigmatization in the community. This marginality engenders their status as outsiders not only in Japan but also in the Filipino migrant community, one reflected in their glaring absence in public events representing the community such as beauty contests, Independence Day celebrations, and theatre performances.

As I have illustrated in this chapter, settlement for migrant entertainers is one of spatial and temporal segregation from Japanese society. This segregation undeniably stunts their societal integration into Japan, resulting in migration as a process of returning home to the Philippines for the many contract workers that go in and out of Japan every year as well as migrant settlement being not a dual transnational entrenchment in host and origin countries but one in which one’s life in Japan is a process of putting one’s life in the Philippines on hold. My analysis of space and time as indicators of the degree of settlement of migrants applies not only to contract workers but also to the case of long-term settlers as their different temporal location than most members of Japanese society minimizes their interactions with others, including non-entertainers in the Philippine migrant community, and consequently leads to their similar spatial segregation as entertainers under contract to work in Japan.
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