

Representations of Labor Migration in Guatemalan and American Media

Genevieve Gilbert

and

Harald Bauder

Department of Geography
University of Guelph



May 2005

Abstract

Globalization and neoliberal economic practices have resulted in the migration of people from Central America to the United States. In this essay we examine the representation of migrants and the migration process from the viewpoints of both origin and destination. A content analysis of newspaper articles published in Guatemala and in Los Angeles revealed that the Guatemalan media present emigration to the United States as a process embedded in global economic circumstances. Migration is depicted as an option of escape Guatemala's economic crisis. American media, on the other hand, pay little attention these global circumstances but present migration mostly as a national and local issue. While immigrants are valued as labor, they are rejected as human beings. We suggest that these representations play a role in mobilizing the departure of migrants from Guatemala and in legitimating the social and economic subordination of the same migrants in the United States.

Introduction

Labor migration from Central America to the United States has reached unprecedented levels with the global ascent of neoliberalism.¹ In 1990, an estimated 1 million Central American migrants lived in the United States, excluding the number of undocumented immigrants.² Over 65% of Los Angeles County's population is immigrants from Latin America. Los Angeles is the city with the world's largest number of Central American residents outside of Central America.³

In this essay we examine the media representations of the international migration process from two different vantage points: From the place of origin and the place of destination. Mass media play a vital role in shaping public discourse and raising anxieties about social and economic change.⁴ Media representations also constitute an integral element in the regulation of labor, in particular the labor of migrants and immigrants.⁵ By comparing the representations of migrants and migration in United States and Guatemalan newsprint media, we seek to unravel different meanings encoded by both media onto the same migration stream.

The results of a media content analysis reveal different ideological underpinnings of the representations of migrants and the migration process in the United States and in Guatemala. While the Guatemalan media often acknowledge the influence of global economic processes on the migration process, the United States media typically deny these processes and instead focus attention on national and local impacts of migration. The different representations, we argue, facilitate the departure of migrants from the place of origin, while they legitimate the subordination the same migrants at the place of destination. Media discourse at both origin and destination thus complement each other in their material effects on international migration.

Background

International Migration and the Global Economy

Dependency theory suggests that unequal power relationships between the nation states enable the systematic exploitation of the global periphery and the appropriation of surplus value by more industrialized countries.⁶ In recent decades, following the debt crisis of the 1980s, many peripheral economies have sought neoliberal economic strategies to cope with their dependency. Some Latin American countries have in fact

¹ Nora Hamilton and Chincilla Stoltz, "Central American Migration: A Framework for Analysis," *Latin American Research Review* 26, no. 1 (1991): 75-110.

² Ana Patricia Rodriguez, "Refugees of the South: Central Americans in the U.S. Latino Imaginary," *American Literature* 73, no. 2 (2001): 387-412.

³ Gabriela Kohpahl, *Voices of Guatemalan Women in Los Angeles: Understanding Their Immigration* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1998), 3.

⁴ Stuart Hall, "Culture, the Media and the Ideological Effect," In James Curran (ed.) *Mass Communication Society* (London: Open University Press, 1977) 315-348. Ernesto Laclau, *Policy and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (London: New Left Books, 1977). Ulrich Beck *Risikogesellschaft: Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986).

⁵ Bauder, Harald (forthcoming) *Labor Movement: How Migration Regulates Labor Markets* (Oxford University Press).

⁶ Ted Lewellen *Dependency and Development* (Westport CT: Bergin and Garley, 1995) and Andre Gunder Frank *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

served as testing grounds for the neoliberal model.⁷ Powerful international institutions, including the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, have assisted Guatemala and other Central American countries in implementing structural adjustment programs and create *laissez-faire* economic systems that endorse unfettered market forces and the reduction of state intervention.⁸

As an effect of economic restructuring, many Third World countries are witnessing massive unemployment, high inflation, and growing inequality among their population. In addition, inflowing foreign investment has uprooted many people from their “traditional” economies and mobilized large segments of the population into the waged labor market. People previously involved in subsistence work witnessed the disruption of their traditional source of livelihood, the commodification of their land and the ‘Westernization’ of their lifestyle and consumption habits.⁹ Globalization and economic restructuring led to the migration of landless peasants and workers in search for the means for survival and to quench their increasing thirst for consumption. The movement of capital and ideology from the ‘First World’ to the ‘Third World’ is intimately connected to the movement of labor in the opposite direction.¹⁰

In Guatemala, agricultural production for export, the increasing modernization of production and the feminization of the labor force pushed many farmers and workers into migration. While some of these displaced workers migrated to the cities and other parts of the country, many others migrated to the United States.¹¹

The expansion of the low-wage employment sector has been a fundamental feature of neoliberalism—not only in the periphery but also in the economies of the core.¹² Before and after migration, workers from Guatemala and other Latin American countries who travel to the United States, constitute a subordinate labor force, supporting global economic expansion and capital accumulation.¹³ Not uncommonly, migrants become “unfree” labor,¹⁴ bonded to jobs and employers through processes of

⁷ Jamie Peck, “Geography and public policy: Constructions of neoliberalism,” *Progress in Human Geography* 28 no. 3 (2004): 392-405.

⁸ Alan G Gilbert, “The Economy: Growth Diversification, and Globalization” in Brian W. Blouet, and Olwyn M. Blouet, *Latin America and the Caribbean* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2005).

⁹ Saskia Sassen, *The Mobility of Labor and Capital: a Study in International Investment and Labor Flow* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1989).

¹⁰ One could even argue that the United States government’s intervention in Guatemala’s civil war is related to neoliberal politics and exacerbated not only the dislocation of people but also triggered migration flows of refugees to the United States; see Stephen Schlesinger and Kinzer Schlesinger, *Bitter Fruit* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). As Nora Hamilton and Chinchilla Stoltz, (“Central American Migration: A Framework for Analysis,” *Latin American Research Review* 26, no. 1 (1991): 106) says: “Overall, U.S. foreign policy appears to have been more effective in generating refugees than U.S. immigration and refugee policies have been in preventing their entry.”

¹¹ Nora Hamilton and Chinchilla Stoltz, “Central American Migration: A Framework for Analysis,” *Latin American Research Review* 26, no. 1 (1991): 90.

¹² Jamie Peck, *Workfare states* (New York: Guilford Press, 2001). Saskia Sassen, *The Mobility of Labor and Capital: a Study in International Investment and Labor Flow* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

¹³ Bauder, Harald (forthcoming) *Labor Movement: How Migration Regulates Labor Markets* (New York: Oxford University Press).

¹⁴ Nandita Sharma, “Birds of Prey and Birds of Passage: The Movement of Capital and the Migration of Labour,” *LABOUR, Capital and Society* 30, no. 1 (April, 1997): 19. Robin Cohen, *The new helots:*

discrimination, criminalization and cultural subordination. It is at this junction where the media play a vital role in constructing, reproducing and legitimating the existence of a subordinate labor force of international migrants.

Migrants, Migration and Media in the United States and Guatemala

Popular opinion in the United States is skeptical of international migration and immigrants. A survey by Public Agenda, an American polling organization, revealed that almost eight out of ten respondents support stricter penalties on 'illegal' immigrants; more than half confirm that 'illegal' immigrants do not deserve legal protection; almost eight out of ten agree that the government should be able hold a non-citizen for up to seven days without charge; and roughly two out of three believe that the United States admits too many immigrants.¹⁵

According to Jorge Bustamante there is an enormous discrepancy between reality and public opinion in respect to immigration in the United States.¹⁶ Media coverage likely contributes to this discrepancy. For example, migrants in the United States tend to consume less in comparison to non-migrants, and their consumption patterns exert relatively little pressure on public resources.¹⁷ Yet, media coverage often blame migrants as responsible for increasing unemployment rates and as a drain on social security coffers. Latin American women are sometimes presented as "baby machines," and reported statistics of high birth rates among Latina women invoke images of welfare dependent women and children.

Although a growing body of scholarship recognizes international migration as an inseparable component of global economic processes, United States media tend to discuss migration as a local and national phenomenon. Geographers have unveiled this kind of "scale shifting" as a common strategy of misrepresenting migrants and migration processes in order to promote particular local and national interests.¹⁸ The failure to make the connection between immigration and global economic forces denies local and national responsibility and instead shifts the burden of accountability to the migrants themselves.¹⁹

Public opinion in Guatemala reflects a high level of anxiety about the country's economic development. The Guatemalan CID Gallup polling agency reports that more than six out of ten Guatemalans believe that their country's economic development is

Migrants in the international division of labour (Aldershot U.K.: Avebury, 1987). Robert Miles, *Capitalism and unfree labour: Anomaly or necessity* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1987).

¹⁵"Public Agenda," Los Angeles Times,

http://publicagenda.org/issues/majprop.cfm?issues_type=immigration.

¹⁶Jorge A Bustamante, "The Mexicans are Coming: From Ideology to Labor Relations," *International Migration Review* 17, no. 2 (1983): 323 – 341.

¹⁷ Saskia Sassen, *The Mobility of Labor and Capital: a Study in International Investment and Labor Flow* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1989), 39.

¹⁸ Harald Bauder, "Landscape and Scale in Media Representations: The Construction of Offshore Farm Labour in Ontario, Canada," *Cultural Geographies* 12 no. 2 (2005): 41-58. Don Mitchell, *The lie of the land: Migrant workers and the California landscape* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). Don Mitchell, "Scales of justice: Localist ideology, large-scale production, and agricultural labor's geography of resistance in 1930s California" In Andrew Herod, *Organizing the landscape: Geographical perspectives on labor unionism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998). 159-194.

¹⁹ Grace Change, *Disposable Domestic: Immigrant Women Workers in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press, 2000).

problematic; three out of four are unhappy with the recent increase in cost of living; most Guatemalans feel that their families' financial situation is deteriorating and will continue to worsen; and the majority attribute rising violence and crime to a lack of good-paying jobs.²⁰ Migration, however, is not seen as the source of economic hardship, but rather as a solution. According to the same poll, four out of five Guatemalan's know someone who emigrated to the United States in search for work.

Based on the existing literature we hypothesize that the representation of the same migrant process from Latin America to the United States differs significantly in the American and Guatemalan media. In particular, we anticipate that the Guatemalan media puts the migration process in the context of economic hardship resulting from economic globalization. Following James Tyner's observations of Filipino emigration, we also examine whether migrants are depicted as "heroes and heroines" driven by patriotism and rewarded with economic success.²¹ In the American media, we anticipate media discourse to focus on the costs of immigration for the American public and expect to observe the vilification and criminalization of migrants.

Research Design

Media representations do not simply reflect a pre-existing material reality. Rather, media representations and material reality are recursively related with each other. Raymond Williams acknowledges the role of communication in general in the construction of reality:

We have been wrong in taking communications as secondary. Many people seem to assume as a matter of course that there is, first, reality, and then, second, communications about it. . . . we need to say what many of us know from experience. . . .that the struggle to learn, to describe, to understand, to education is a central and necessary part of our humanity. This struggle is not begun, at secondary hand, after reality has occurred. It is, in itself, a major way in which reality is continually formed and changed.²²

From Williams we can infer that messages and meanings encoded in media discourse help defining reality and shape our taken-for-granted world. Negative and exaggerated images of migrants can project a sense of crisis and evoke an awareness of threat among the population.²³

We focus our investigation of the representation of migrants in the American media on the city of Los Angeles. In this city, Guatemalans represent the third largest group of Central Americans.²⁴ We did not narrow our geographical focus inside of

²⁰ "Previous Studies," CID Gallup, <http://www.cidgallup.com/en/opinion.shtml>.

²¹ James A Tyner, "The web-based recruitment of female foreign domestic workers in Asia," *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 20 no. 2 (1999): 149.

²² Raymond Williams, *Communication* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1962), 11-12.

²³ Sean P. Hier, and Joshua L. Greenberg, "Constructing a Discursive Crisis: Risk, Problematization and Illegal Chinese in Canada," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 25, no. 3 (2002): 490-513.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 3.

Guatemala, because the country is, with a total population of only 14.3 million²⁵, relatively small.

In each area we selected one popular and widely distributed newspaper (the *Los Angeles Times* and the Guatemalan *Prensa Libre*) and one less popular newspaper (*The Daily News* for Los Angeles and *La Hora* for Guatemala). The American newspapers were accessed through Gale Custom Data base; Guatemalan newspapers were available through their websites. Articles were selected based on a search using the following keywords for the American newspapers and their Spanish translation of the Guatemalan newspapers: American dream, economy, Illegal(s), labor, Latino(s), migrant(s), migration, and public resources. The articles identified by the keyword search were skimmed for their contents, and if they related to the topic of research they were included in the final sample. The final sample, consisting of 65 American and 57 Guatemalan articles, covers the period between January 1, 1999 and February 29, 2005. The quotes from Guatemalan newspapers presented below have been translated from Spanish into English.

Media discourse produces multiple meanings and interpretations of single issues and subjects.²⁶ In fact, discourse is the “most complex system of signification and, therefore, produces the maximum possibilities for different interpretations.”²⁷ To evaluate individual narratives and representations for their relative significance within multilayered media discourse, we considered the frequency with which a particular narrative or representation occurred in the newspaper articles. In addition, the relative importance of narratives and representations can be assessed through cross-referencing with poll statistics which substantiate or reject the significance of a particular viewpoint.

Results

Guatemalan Perspectives of Migration

The sense of economic crisis—a perception substantiated by the poll results presented earlier—is a reoccurring theme when Guatemalan newspapers report on international migration. This narrative suggests that migrants seek to improve their economic situation by migrating to the United States. The attempt to escape the Guatemalan economic crisis through migration persists even in light of a keen awareness of intolerance towards migrants in the United States and the risk of deportation. *Prensa Libre* reports:

The economic crisis forces thousands of people to look for a better future than in their country, but much of their dreams are not realized. In the first six months of

²⁵ “Summary Demographic Data for Guatemala,” U.S. Census Bureau, IDB, <http://www.census.gov/cgi-bin/ipc/idbsum?cty=gt>.

²⁶ Irving Crespi, *The Public Opinion Process: How the People Speak* (London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 1997). Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1992). Robert Fowler, *Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the Press* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

²⁷ Jacquelin Burgess, “The Production and Consumption of Environmental Meanings in the Mass Media: A Research Agenda for the 1990s,” *Transaction of the Institute of British Geographers* 15, no. 2 (1990): 143.

the year, 4,452 Guatemalans have been deported from the United States and Mexico . . . and many return to try again.²⁸

Prensa Libre publishes poll statistics to validate that the idea that the lack of economic opportunities causes migration:

We took a public opinion poll and of 235 Guatemalans, 162 would like to go to the United States. This would change if there were more opportunities [in Guatemala].²⁹

La Hora publishes articles that reflect similar narratives. For example:

“I’m going north [again] even if they deport me.” It took her [Izabal, a young migrant] twenty-five days to arrive and be admitted to the United States where she worked for fifteen days and was captured in a police raid. The others are trying for a second or third time [to migrate to the United States].³⁰

In the context of the narrative of economic crisis, we also encountered the acknowledgement of unequal power relations in Guatemalan society, and the recognition that neoliberal national policies have increased the rift between rich and poor Guatemalans, which “translates into new migration.”³¹ The Guatemalan media, however, do not represent the economic crisis as an entirely home grown problem. In fact, it recognizes the global economic forces that trigger international migration. *La Hora* quotes Ademar Barilli, director of Casa del Migrante in the city of Tecún Umán in the Department of San Marcos:

The principle causes of migration from Central America are the economic crisis and the phenomena of globalization . . . Barilli said that Guatemala and the rest of the countries in Central America have been beaten down because of this phenomenon which provokes migration. “Many campesinos have lost their land or have left it due to drought and they confront immense difficulties in order to survive, and globalization is very damaging to small businesses.”³²

In addition to recognizing the global embeddedness of the Guatemalan economy, the Guatemalan media tend to connect migration flows with the demand for labor in the United States. In some cases, the Guatemalan media demonstrate a keen awareness of the connection between migration and global political economy. *Prensa Libre* writes:

²⁸ Lorena Seijo and Gema Palencia, “Migración: Seis mil 742 deportados cada mes,” *Prensa Libre*, August 30, 2004.

²⁹ Crista Kepfer, “Migrantes demandan participación cívica: Insisten en derecho a voto; Gobierno asume compromisos,” *Prensa Libre*, June 17, 2004.

³⁰ Carlos Cáceres, “La migración indocumentada y el tren de la muerte,” *La Hora*, January 5, 2005.

³¹ Maite Garmendia, “Manuel Angel Castillo: Migrantes son personas,” *Prensa Libre*, May 9, 2004.

³² “Crisis económica causante de migración en Centroamérica,” *Presna Libre*, March 6, 2002.

The phenomenon of migration, far from diminishing, is increasing. . . in a globalized and asymmetrical world in which the industrialized countries need a flow of people from the developing countries.³³

Migrants are an attractive labor force to employers in the United States and other industrialized countries because of their low wage expectations and the high degree of vulnerability.³⁴ In the same article, the author presents a quote by immigration scholar Manuel Ángel Castillo on the simultaneous demand of labor and intolerance towards immigration in receiving countries:

The receiving countries have adopted hypocritical measures because they have two faces. On the one hand they speak of the necessity to hold back the arriving avalanche; but on the other hand they take advantage of cheap labor in order to maintain the growth of their economies.³⁵

The Guatemalan newspapers we surveyed drew attention to the international income gap and the lack of political will by the migrant receiving countries to narrow this gap. For example, when United States President George W. Bush proposed to create a temporary workers program for undocumented immigrants in January 2004, *Prensa Libre* published an editorial with the following response:

Underneath Bush's plan, millions of undocumented migrants will be left alone for a while – three years, maybe six – but after, they will return to being undocumented. Whatever migration proposal, you would need to also include a program of investment that will level the salaries of the entire American Continent. With your proposal, you are dancing around the problem. You are neither permanently resolving the migration situation of eight million undocumented migrants, nor planning the basis for an ordered and secure flow of immigrants in the future to the United States.³⁶

Another topic that appears repeatedly in the Guatemalan press relates to the issue remittances. The following quote from *Prensa Libre* puts remittances into the context of the asymmetrical economic relationship between the United States and Guatemala:

The trust and happiness with the continued growth in family remittances, is the same as accepting that our country is condemned to misery and underdevelopment.³⁷

³³ Maite Garmendia, "Manuel Anel Castillo: Migrantes son personas," *Prensa Libre*, May 9, 2004.

³⁴ Harald Bauder, (forthcoming) *Labor Movement: How Migration Regulates Labor Markets* (New York: Oxford University Press). Michael J. Piore, *Birds of passage: Migrant labor and industrial societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

³⁵ Maite Garmendia, "Manuel Anel Castillo: Migrantes son Personas," *Prensa Libre*, May 9, 2004.

³⁶ Jorge Avalos, "Gracias Bush, pero no es suficiente: Una propuesta poco realista para aplaudirla," *Prensa Libre*, January 18, 2004.

³⁷ César A. García, "Hablando Claro: Esperanzados en la pobreza," *Prensa Libre*, April 12, 2005.

Most articles we encountered, however, put the sending of remittances in a positive light. In line with scholars who note the benefits of remittances,³⁸ *Prensa Libre* reported following statistics:

Remittances sent by migrants constitute a second form of income - foreign exchange. Remittances represent almost 10% of the Gross National Product of the country. The money of Guatemalans in the United States sent to their families in Guatemala sustains 722 469 families: more than 4 million people.³⁹

The narrative of the benefits of remittances has become deeply ingrained in Guatemalan media reporting. It sends powerful a message to the readership about the perceived opportunities of migration.

Nevertheless, challenges to this narrative have also been published. Some Guatemalan media reports put the value of remittances in perspective of the dangers and hardship endured by the migrants. For example: “Juan is scared for his wife. Now he only waits from them to send her back to Guatemala. But why? ‘So we can try to leave again, since I have to support my five children.’”⁴⁰ Other reports question the value of remittances sent home by the migrants. For example, *Prensa Libre* presents the following quote from Maricela Garcia, the president of the Coalición de Inmigrantes Guatemaltecos (Conguate), an organization that promotes the rights and efforts of integration of Guatemalans in the United States:

Immigration is painful: it entails leaving everything one knows and loves, putting your life at risk in order to arrive in a county where you are invisible because you don’t have documents. This is a violation of human rights and it doesn’t permit immigrants to live with dignity. In Guatemala, all that is seen of immigrants is the remittances that they send.⁴¹

By questioning the value of remittances Guatemalan newspaper reporters are intervening in dominant discourse and shed a critical light on the perceived benefits of migration for Guatemala.

In both Guatemalan newspapers we surveyed, this critical perspective is further accentuated by reports about the risks and unfavorable conditions which migrants face en route and after they arrive in the United States. For example, *Prensa Libre* reports:

The limitations and hardships of more than a million immigrants who live in the United States range from the lack of health services and education to legal problems which put them at risk being deported by the American authorities.⁴²

³⁸ Manuel Orzoco, “Globalization and Migration The Impact of Family Remittances in Latin America,” *Latin American Politics and Society* 44, no. 2 (Summer, 2002): 41-66.

³⁹ Crista Kepfer, “Migrantes demandan participación cívica,” *Prensa Libre*, June 17, 2004.

⁴⁰ Lorena Seijo and Gema Palencia, “Migración: Seis mil 742 deportados cada mes,” *Prensa Libre*, August 30, 2004.

⁴¹ Luisa Rodríguez, “Marcela Garcia: El reto es dignificar a los inmigrantes,” *Prensa Libre*, June 20, 2004.

⁴² Luisa Rodríguez, “Los migrantes pedirán apoyo: Lideres se reunirán con Oscar Berger en Washington, D.C.,” *Prensa Libre*, April 25, 2004.

A Guatemalan reporter states in *Prensa Libre*:

There is a mistaken perception. . . They [immigrants] are the scapegoat for everything: if there is a crime, it is the immigrant; if there is a problem, it is the immigrant. The perception is that we Latinos are illiterate, that we come to use up public services and that we represent a threat because we bring our language and our culture.⁴³

Referring to the imprisonment of immigrants awaiting deportation, another report in *Prensa Libre* states:

We are mixed in with prisoners. We will be judged like delinquents; shackled by our feet, hands and waist. “It is humiliating,” said Ludwid Marroquin, the only migrant to give his name.⁴⁴

La Hora reports about the dangers of the journey to the United States:

In some parts of the journey, undocumented men, women and adolescent confront another danger: when the train is traveling at a slow speed or stops, delinquent groups called *maras* appear. They are also products of poverty, political instability, and socioeconomic crisis that Central America suffers, but they are organized in gangs and their objective is violence.⁴⁵

Newspaper reports of the physical dangers and humiliation of migration are supplemented with sentiments of estrangement and non-belonging. A migrant living in the United States reported in *Prensa Libre*: “At the bottom of it, we are outsiders in the country.”⁴⁶

United States Perspectives of Migration

Contrary to the Guatemalan media, the American media often presents the issue of migration at local and national scales rather than the international scale. For example, a cover story in the *Los Angeles Times* relates migration to national border security, the American labor market and the local economy:

Because the nation can’t control its border, the number of illegal immigrants grows by an estimated half-million each year. They come because we invite them with lax law enforcement and menial jobs. Their presence makes our own poor

⁴³ Luisa Rodríguez, “Marciela Garcia: El reto es dignificar a los inmigrantes,” *Prensa Libre*, June 20, 2004.

⁴⁴ Lorena Seijo and Gema Palencia, “Migración: Seis mil 742 deportados cada mes,” *Prensa Libre*, August 30, 2004. That most migrants refused to give their names signifies to the reader that the migrants are threatened and humiliated by speaking to the reporter about their migration experiences.

⁴⁵ Carlos Cáceres, “La migración indocumentada y el tren de la muerte,” *La Hora*, January 5, 2005.

⁴⁶ Munaíz, Claudia, “Las esquinas de la esperanza: Migrantes esperan oportunidad en calles de Los Angeles,” *Prensa Libre*, July 2, 2004.

more destitute, creating a Third World chaos in the California economy that we are only beginning to understand.⁴⁷

Particular debates of migration-related issues further illustrate the focus on the national scale: While the Guatemalan press related President Bush's proposed temporary workers program to international income inequalities, the American media discussed this proposal from a national perspective. The *Los Angeles Times* published a quote by a law professor which draws attention to the failure of national immigration policy: "It's camouflaged amnesty. No one wants to use the word 'amnesty' because the American people recognize it for what it is – admitting defeat of our immigration system..."⁴⁸ Another illustration of the national focus of media debate is the striking absence of reporting on remittances in the two Los Angeles newspapers. This absence indicates the relative insignificance these newspapers associate with the international embeddedness of migration.

A reoccurring narrative in the Los Angeles newspapers is that migrants from Latin American impoverish and exploit the United States. Ideological representations in the American media have apparently turned the tables, pointing the finger the migrant as the source of economic hardship. Newspapers often quote numbers to convey the costs of migration to their readers. For example, the *Daily News* states: "The cost [of illegal immigrants] to the taxpayers is \$83 million a year."⁴⁹ The article, however, fails to clarify whether the figure refers to California, the United States or any other political entity. Apparently, the large number of \$83 million suffices to convey the magnitude of the threat posed by undocumented immigration. The reporting in the *Los Angeles Times* also features this narrative. For example: "What is known is how the tax drain is changing society . . . someone else pays."⁵⁰

A counter narrative that appears in our sample of newspaper articles recognizes that immigrants are a structurally necessary labor force⁵¹ for the American and Californian economy. Many articles reflect the idea that America has become dependent on undocumented laborers who often take jobs that citizens do not want. The *Los Angeles Times* writes: "Undocumented immigrants have become an essential, perhaps inextricable, part of the U.S. labor force."⁵² The growth of the American economy in tandem with the growth in immigration is clearly illustrated in the following excerpt:

Around 5 a.m. each day, thousands of people line up at these agencies looking for minimum-wage jobs. . . Many are recent immigrants. Many are

⁴⁷ Fred Dickey, "Undermining American workers: Record Numbers of Illegal Immigrants Are Pulling Wages Down for the Poor and Pushing Taxes Higher," *Los Angeles Times*, July 20, 2003, Part 1, 12.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ "Briefly more inmates are illegal immigrants," *Daily News (Los Angeles, CA)*, Dec 7, 2000, N8

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ The notion of migration as a "structural necessity" has been developed by Cohen (Robin Cohen, *The new helots: Migrants in the international division of labour* (Aldershot, U.K.: Avebury, 1987), 135 and, in the Canadian context, by Basok (Tanya Basok, *Tortillas and tomatoes: Transmigrant Mexican harvesters in Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens's University Press, 2002).

⁵² Warren Vieth, "Economists See Benefits to Bush's Plan," *Los Angeles Times*, January 8, 2004, Part A, Page 14.

homeless. They work on assembly lines, in construction, landscaping or hotels. . . Experts say the temp industry took off after the 1982 recession spurred American companies to downsize, creating demand for a cheaper, more flexible workforce. As the economy rebounded, companies began to depend on day laborers.⁵³

Many newspaper articles present these conflicting views of immigrants simultaneously – the perceived crisis they create, but also their benefit to the American economy. The *Los Angeles Times* states: “Even cities big enough not to fear for their survival rely on Latino workers to keep their economies humming.”⁵⁴

In tandem with the image of migrants as essential labor, the value of the migrants as human beings is diminished through their portrayal as social problems and criminals. High birth rates among Latina women are often blamed for infrastructure degradation and an increase in poverty. For example, *The Daily News* reports:

Large-scale migration of Mexicans to Southern California and the United States undermines the economy, overtaxes schools and other services, and creates a permanent underclass of uneducated and unskilled poor, a nonpartisan think tank said in a report on Tuesday. . . The report by the Center for Immigration Studies [CIS], a Washington-based research organization focusing on immigration, cited Southern California as the epicenter of social and economic ills.⁵⁵

The newspapers often use quotes by prominent politicians to convey the socially problematic nature of immigration. In the context of high fertility rates among Latina immigrants, the *Los Angeles Times* quotes John Vasconcellos, a Democratic state senator from San Jose: “The state is truly in dire straits. I’m not a pessimist and I’m not a doomsayer, but I’ve never been so frightened by the state in all my 37 years of serving the Legislature.”⁵⁶

We found several articles that suggest that Latin American women cross the American border in order to give birth to their babies in the United States and that child birth is a deliberate strategy among immigrants to abuse the welfare system. Although researchers have demonstrated that immigrants use relatively view social resources,⁵⁷ media reports continue to promote the idea that immigration drains social security coffers, the medical system and other social resources. Immigrants are presented as undeserving beneficiaries of public spending.

⁵³ Kate N. Grossman, “Day Laborers Organizing to Fight Temp Agency Employment Abuses,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 2000, Part A, Page 14.

⁵⁴ Stephanie Simon, “Latinos Take Road in Midwest,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 24, 2002, Part A, Page 1.

⁵⁵ Bill Hillburg, “Report: Mexican Immigrants a Drain on Region’s Resources,” *Daily News (Los Angeles, CA)*, July 13, 2001, N1.

⁵⁶ Lee Green, “A Human wave is Breaking Over California,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 25, 2004, Section Los Angeles Times Magazine, Part 1, 12

⁵⁷ Grace Chang, *Disposable Domestic* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press, 2000), 27, Wendy Walker-Moffat, “Recent Mexican migrant Women to the US,” 8.

The criminalization of immigrants is common in the two Los Angeles newspapers. The *Los Angeles Times* featured a speech at Arizona State University by Kathy McKee of the organization *Protect Arizona NOW*:

[She] told the mostly student audience that many illegal immigrants are not coming to Arizona to work. “Some come for crime. Some come for welfare. Some come for a good, cheap education. We are trying to take away the incentives,” said McKee, who used the analogy of taking away cheese from a mouse.

“Come on. Wake up,” said Cindy Billings during her turn at the microphone. “We have to do something. ‘Illegal’ means it’s against the law, and we need to enforce it. It’s not racist.”⁵⁸

The dominant narrative of the ‘illegal’ migrant draws broad support from the American public, as reflected in the poll results presented earlier.

In the context of this narrative, the link between discursive processes and material circumstances becomes apparent, as legislation, legal practices and enforcement often follow popular opinion. The link is also established through reporting that makes recommendations to law-makers and state agencies. For example, the *Los Angeles Times* reports:

A controversial new study by a Washington group favoring reduced levels of immigration draws a grim picture of the economic and social consequences of large-scale immigration to the United States ... the continuing influx of poor settlers from Mexico provides marginal economic benefits while burdening public services and schools and creating generations of poverty. ... The study’s recommendations include more guards and barriers along the U.S Mexico border and deep cuts in legal immigration.⁵⁹

Although this article fails to name the Washington group which published this study,⁶⁰ newspaper reporters and editors obviously selected information that presents a particular viewpoint to the reader.

The simultaneous references in the media to the positive economic effect of cheap immigrant labor and the construction of Latino immigrants as social burden and criminals are not a contradiction. The following statement in *The Daily News* blatantly puts the two ideas together in the same paragraph:

Barring these [education] and other benefits, such as health care, would go a long way to solving the immigration problem. American demand for labor is a significant force promoting transnational migration to the United States.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Richard Marosi, “Decade Later, Prop. 187 Has an Echo in Arizona,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 2004, A1.

⁵⁹ Patrick McDonnell, “Dim View of Mexico Migration,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 13, 2001, 1.

⁶⁰ The media apparently presents these groups as respectable organizations that enjoy broad support. However, many groups such as CIS, FAIR, and Numbers USA have the same staff, the same funding sources and the same agenda. All three groups also have the same founder, a man named John Tanton (Eunice Hyunhye Chou, “Who’s Behind the Attack on Immigrants? Exposing the Anti-Immigrant Right,” *Network News: National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights*. (Spring-Summer, 2003), 4.

The combination of the two seemingly opposing narratives produces the dual effect of objectifying and subordinating immigrant labor. The two narratives justify the use of Latino immigrants as abstract labor that is needed in the United States economy and simultaneously strip them of any social and political power that would compromise this use.

Conclusion

The same stream of migration—from Latin America to the United States—is represented very differently at its origin and destination. The dominant narratives in the Guatemalan newspapers draw clear links between Guatemala’s situation in the global economy, neoliberal practices and policies, and the resulting flows of migrants. Guatemalan media view migration as humiliating and extremely dangerous with high personal costs. In addition, they present an image of the United States as a land of injustice, hardship and danger for migrants. The Guatemalan media tend to recognize that migrants are rendered non-humans and abstract labor in the United States. Contrary to our initial expectations, we did not encounter the image of heroic migrants who venture out into the world to seek opportunities for themselves and their families. What we found instead is a narrative suggesting that economic crisis and desperation provide no viable alternatives to migration. The simultaneous acknowledgement of hardship faced by migrants and the dire economic realities in Guatemala creates a sense of imprisonment that leaves Guatemalans with few options but migration for survival.

Unlike the Guatemalan media, which stresses that migrants are human beings and deserve basic social and economic rights, the Los Angeles newsprint media depicts immigration as an us-against-them issue, whereby Latin Americans invade and exploit the United States. It paints an image of immigrants as being disconnected from and non-belonging to society. In addition, media discourse assigns the label “illegal” to Latino immigrants. This narrative of illegality denies migrants their agency and their social and political power. Rarely do American media question the legal processes that produce the category of “illegal.” While criminalizing immigrants and denying them their humanity, American newsprint discourse also presents Latino immigrants as abstract labor that is vital for the national economy.

Geographical scale is an important discursive strategy deployed in the representations by Guatemalan and American media. The Guatemalan media presents migration to the United States as a international phenomenon that relates to global economic processes and practices. The American media, on the other hand, strategically shifts its reporting and interpretation of migration to the national and local scales. At these scales, media discourse emphasizes the threat of immigration to national and local social order. This focus on national and local scales distracts attention from the larger economic and social forces that drive transnational migration and ignores a global perspective that would offer a more comprehensive treatment of the cost and benefits of migration.

Media discourse has concrete material effects, and media representations are not passive reflections of popular opinion but they actively shape politics, social practices

⁶¹ Steve Carney and Jesse Hiestand, “Costs, Benefits Associated with Illegal Immigrants,” *Daily News (Los Angeles, CA)*, April 18, 1999, N3.

and the economic realities of migrants. In Los Angeles, the treatment of Latin American migrants by employers, public agencies and non-migrant citizens is related to the representations offered in the media. These representations legitimate current policies and practices that render immigrant workers subordinate. Likewise, the media perpetuate the fear of deportation and harassment among migrants and may thus diminish their willingness to negotiate higher wages, fight for better working conditions or simply ask for more respect from their non-migrant fellow residents. In Guatemala, media discourse creates a sense of desperation that pushes workers to migrate to the United States in search for better economic fortune. In addition, the acknowledgement of the dangers of the journey, the abuse and humiliation experienced by migrants in the United States, and the possibility of deportation mentally prepares emigrants for the trip and life abroad. Media representations at both source and destination complement each other in regulating this international labor migration flow.

References

- Bauder, Harald. "Landscape and Scale in Media Representations: The Construction of Offshore Farm Labour in Ontario, Canada," *Cultural Geographies* 12, no. 1 (2005): 41-58.
- Bauder, Harald. (forthcoming) *Labor Movement: How Migration Regulates Labor Markets*. Oxford University Press.
- Basok, Tanya. *Tortillas and tomatoes: Transmigrant Mexican harvesters in Canada*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens's University Press, 2002.
- Beck, Ulrich. *Risikogesellschaft: Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986.
- Burgess, Jacquelin. "The Production and Consumption of Environmental Meanings in the Mass Media: A Research Agenda for the 1990s." *Transaction of the Institute of British Geographers* 15, no. 2 (1990):139-161.
- Bustamante, Jorge A. "The Mexicans are coming: From Ideology to Labor Relations." *International Migration Review* 17, no. 2 (1983): 323 – 341.
- Change, Grace. *Disposable Domestic: Immigrant Women Workers in the Global Economy*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press, 2000.
- Chase-Dunn, Christopher. "Guatemala in the Global System," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 42, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 109-126.
- Chou, Eunice Hyunhye. "Who's Behind the Attack on Immigrants? Exposing the Anti-Immigrant Right," *Network News: National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights*. (Spring-Summer, 2003), 4.
- Cohen, Robin. *The new helots: Migrants in the international division of labour*. Aldershot, U.K.: Avebury, 1987.
- Crespi, Irving. *The Public Opinion Process: How the People Speak*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 1997.
- Fairlough, Norman. *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1992.
- Fowler, Robert. *Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the Press*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Frank, Andre Gunder. *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971.
- Gilbert, Alan G. "The Economy: Growth Diversification, and Globalization." In Brian W. Blouet, and Olwyn M. Blouet, *Latin America and the Caribbean*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2005.
- Hall, Stuart. "Culture, the Media and the Ideological Effect," In Curran, James. *Mass Communication Society*. London: Open University Press, 1977, 315-348.
- Hamilton, Nora and Chinchilla Stoltz. "Central American Migration: A Framework for Analysis." *Latin American Research Review*, 26 no. 1, (1991): 75-110.
- Hier, Sean P. and Joshua L. Greenberg. "Constructing a Discursive Crisis: Risk, Problematization and *Illegal Chinese in Canada*." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 25, no. 3 (2002): 490-513.
- Kohpahl, Gabriela. *Voices of Guatemalan Women in Los Angeles: Understanding Their Immigration*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1998.
- Laclau, Ernesto. *Policy and Ideology in Marxist Theory*. London: New Left Books, 1977.
- Lewellen, Ted. *Dependency and Development: An Introduction to the Third World*. Westport CT: Bergin and Garley, 1995.

- Massey, Douglas. "The New Immigration and Ethnicity in the United States." *Population and Development Review* 21, no. 3 (September 1995): 631-652.
- Miles, Robert. *Capitalism and unfree labour: Anomaly or necessity*. London: Tavistock Publications, 1987.
- Mitchell, Don. *The lie of the land: Migrant workers and the California landscape*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Mitchell, Don. "Scales of justice: Localist ideology, large-scale production, and agricultural labor's geography of resistance in 1930s California." In Herod, Andrew. *Organizing the landscape: Geographical perspectives on labor unionism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, 159-194.
- Orozco, Manuel. "Globalization and Migration The Impact of Family Remittances in Latin America." *Latin American Politics and Society* 44, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 41-66
- Peck, Jamie. "Geography and public policy: Constructions of neoliberalism." *Progress in Human Geography* 28 no. 3 (2004): 392-405.
- Peck, Jamie. *Workfare states*. New York: Guilford Press, 2001.
- Rodriguez, Ana Patricia. "Refugees of the South: Central Americans in the U.S. Latino Imaginary." *American Literature* 73, no. 2 (2001): 387-412.
- Sassen, Saskia. *The Mobility of Labor and Capital: a Study in International Investment and Labor Flow*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Schlesinger, Stephen and Kinzer Schlesinger. *Bitter Fruit*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Sharma, Nandita. "Birds of Prey and Birds of Passage: The Movement of Capital and the Migration of Labour." *LABOUR, Capital and Society* 30, no. 1 (April 1997): 8-38.
- Tyner, James A. "The web-based recruitment of female foreign domestic workers in Asia." *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 20, no. 2 (1999): 193-209.
- Williams, Raymond. *Communication*. Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1962.