

(Re)Mapping the Border  
Mobility and Survival Across a Geography of Borders  
by  
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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved July 2020 by the  
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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

August 2020

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the San Diego border region to understand migrant construction worker's mobility, autonomy, and labor power. San Diego County is enclosed by a network of internal immigration checkpoints and roving patrol operations that constrain migrant worker's labor power to the territorial boundaries of the county. The project uses 'differential mobility' as a strategic concept to highlight the ways in which borders differentiate, sort, and rank among noncitizen migrant construction workers to meet local labor demands. The project reveals worker's collective struggle to evade and cross border enforcement operations to maintain consistent employment across a border region that is marked by internal immigration checkpoints, roving patrol stops, and state surveillance measures. In addition, the project examines migrant men's emerging workplace narratives about the body and penetration that symbolize workers' understanding of social domination in a global economy. These expressions open up a critical space from which migrant men begin to critique a global economy that drives men northbound for employment and southbound for retirement—inhibiting a future that is neither entirely in the United States or Mexico.

## DEDICATION

To all the workers that continue to build and regenerate the university, while being denied academic admission. Even though we built the university, it was never meant for us. And yet, our flesh is on their walls.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the collective efforts of drywallers, family, friends, activists, and dissertation committee members *trabajando preguntando* to imagine an alternative.

It would be a session where it could start with two dudes. They start cooking, meaning rhyming. And next thing you know those three guys would turn into like six, seven, dudes. And these dudes blow my mind. And after being in there with these dudes for a few weeks and listening to this shit, I wrote my first rhyme with Rae; and that was it. I always wrote rhymes to impress these dudes, in that staircase area. And I still write like that. I just want to impress my dudes. Fuck everyone else. –Method Man on writing his first rhyme

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

*Our “everything for everyone” does not recognize borders. The struggle against Capital is worldwide. -Subcomandante Insurgente Galeano*

On April 2017, the Zapatistas held a seminar, The Walls of Capital, The Cracks on the Left, to insisted that, if we allow it, capitalism is going to turn the entire world into its plantation. The Zapatistas contend that:

In today’s capitalism, the capitalist patrón says: I’m going to my plantation Mexico, I’m going to my plantation Guatemala, I’m going to my plantation Haiti, I’m going to my plantation Costa Rica... all of the capitalist underdeveloped countries are going to be plantations.<sup>1</sup>

The capitalist world is turning into a walled plantation and national governments are its overseers. Thus, according to the Zapatistas, migrants do not leave their communities because they want to but,

because life in their communities or on the plantation (to not say country anymore) they were from was crushing them. So now they have nothing. If they had anything to begin with, they had to sell it or pawn it in order to have money to be able to go to the United States, because it is assumed that there is work there.

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<sup>1</sup> (2017, April 12). *The capitalist world is a walled plantation* [participation of the EZLN Sixth Commission in the critical reflection seminar]. The Walls of Capital, The Cracks on the Left, San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas. <https://chiapas-support.org/2017/04/29/the-capitalist-world-is-a-walled-plantation/> Originally translated by Chiapas Support Committee <https://chiapas-support.org/>. Original Spanish available at: <http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2017/04/12/palabras-del-subcomandante-insurgente-moises-miercoles-12-de-abril-de-2017/>

So, they're already there and now they're being chased out. How will they go back to the plantation if they have nothing left?<sup>2</sup>

The Zapatistas insist this is capitalism's new hidden agenda. It has created a new geography of struggle that is signaling not only "a new a paradigm with consequences for theory... [but] also signaling a problem that has consequences for struggle;" a struggle that is global and "borders get in the way."<sup>3</sup>

I begin with the Zapatistas because it provides a pathway to understand the proliferation of borders in the 21<sup>st</sup> century beyond any single nation-state. It destabilizes the classic understanding that borders begin and end at the territorial boundaries of nation-states. Instead the function of the border is changing to the demands of capital production across the globe. Although this dissertation interrogates migrant construction worker's local mobilizations against the regulatory force of the San Diego/Tijuana border and U.S. interior immigration checkpoints in San Diego, California, it is important to understand that these political boundaries do not function in isolation to borders worldwide. As borders divide and create differentiated spaces for capitalist production across the globe, it has created a new geography of struggle for migrant's mobility to

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<sup>2</sup> Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés. (2017, April 13). *Organized Coffee Against the Wall* [participation of the EZLN Sixth Commission in the critical reflection seminar]. The Walls of Capital, The Cracks on the Left, San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas. <https://radiozapatista.org/?p=21026&lang=en>; Originally translated by Chiapas Support Committee <https://chiapas-support.org/>; Original Spanish available at: <http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2017/04/12/palabras-del-subcomandante-insurgente-mois-es-miercoles-12-de-abril-de-2017/>

<sup>3</sup> Zapatistas. (2017, April 14). Lessons on Geography and Globalized Calendars [participation of the EZLN Sixth Commission in the critical reflection seminar]. The Walls of Capital, The Cracks on the Left, San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas. <https://radiozapatista.org/?p=21029&lang=en>; Originally translated by Chiapas Support Committee <https://chiapas-support.org/>; Original Spanish available at: <http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2017/04/14/lecciones-de-geografia-y- Calendarios-globalizados/>

move from one place to another in order to access greater resources and higher wages for survival. This new geography of struggle has been extended to the interior of nation-states, and state's of a nation, especially with the emergence of an internal border, in which the freedom to move across and beyond the San Diego/Tijuana region is being governed by nation-state established borders that attempt to regulate migration through policies and timeliness that meets local labor demands.

Capital production relies on nation-states as crucial regulators, consumers, and suppliers of capital, labor, resources and goods that are vital for facilitating the requisite infrastructure for capital accumulation (Brown, 2010; Sassen, 2005). According to David Harvey (2007), the restructuring of states in the interests of private property owners, multinational corporations, businesses, and financial capital are examples of a neoliberal state. In this framework, the role of the state is to create and preserve, by force if need be, the institutional framework of strong private rights, free markets, and free trade; and “if these markets do not exist... then they must be created, by state action if necessary” (Harvey, 2007, p. 2). These neoliberal programs of development and growth are described by political theorist H.L.T. Quan (2012) as savage developmentalism; a concept that accounts for the human costs that come from an aggressive capitalist growth strategy that centers order, expansionism, and antidemocracy over human life. It is the organizing of people and communities, the battle for human survival against *the materiality of savage developmentalism* (emphasis the authors) (Quan, 2012, p. 9), and the refusal to be exploited by an inequitable global system, that is driving thousands of people across borders in search of work and survival. The Zapatistas call this the 4th

World War. Not a new war, or a war between two nation-states, but a war against humanity with the neoliberal state and capital on one side and people on the other.

But as people refuse to remain sedentary, challenging the “established stratified sociospatial global order” (Rodríguez, 1996, p. 23), borders are becoming increasingly mobile. Nation-states have begun to manipulate the location and even the meaning of borders (Miller, 2017; Walia, 2013; Weber, 2006). Borders are no longer lines on maps that distinguish the exclusive territoriality of one sovereign nation-state from another but manifest themselves as walls of police, military, media representations, law and persecution, public policies, barricades and checkpoints, the ever-expanding budgets, and the relationship between these elements that encompass overlapping nation-state and local jurisdictions (Cohen, 2019; Miller, 2017; Walia, 2013). Historian Mike Davis (2000) has drawn attention to the emergence of a ‘second border’ at highway checkpoints in the southwest borderlands that “nominally reinforces the international border” and a ‘third border’ that “tend to follow working-class Latinos wherever they live and regardless of how long they have been in the United States” (p. 60). Along similar lines, Mezzadra and Neilson (2008) suggest that the emergence of an internal border means that the division works in a fundamentally different way that is not designed to impede the flow of migrants but rather construct differentiated laboring subjects. Thus, the border is not intended to restrict migration but to institutionalize ungovernable streams of people into governable ones that respond to labor demands (De Genova & Peutz, 2010).

Border-area legal scholars have studied the legal implications of the prominence of interior immigration checkpoints within the United States interior. Legal scholars trace its roots to the legal doctrine known as the “border search exception” that has

constitutionally extended the exception of search and seizure rights to the U.S. interior. These scholars argue that the emergence of immigration checkpoints since the 20<sup>th</sup> century have created differentiated zones of law enforcement and policing between checkpoints and the border. In these areas, fourth amendment and equal protection doctrines have been suspended (Chacón, 2010; García Hernández, 2009; Mirandé, 2003; Motomura, 1999). Yet, over the years, the legal term “border search exception” has epitomized the nation’s history on race, labor, and geography across the southwest borderlands (Chacón, 2010; Gurman, 2017; In search of the border, 1972; Ngai, 2014).

At the intersection of Border Studies, Migration Studies, Masculinity, and Labor Studies, this dissertation interrogates how migrant men have come to understand and mobilize against the regulatory force of borders across the international San Diego/Tijuana border and internally within the United States. The project charts an understanding of the border grounded in everyday experiences by engaging workers collective efforts to escape border operations across the region. Collective mappings to navigate border checkpoints, daily routines to share-labor and payment, and the meaning-making that accompanied these practices and relationships offer insight into the creative ways that men, families and communities not only survive, but thrive with dignity. At the same time, new meanings were created for caring for each other as men, for strategizing how to negotiate a better wage, share work for safer conditions, and generally disrupt the centralized and hierarchical labor patron system.

San Diego County is circumscribed by two borders: the international San Diego/Tijuana border and a line of interior U.S. Border Patrol checkpoints located seventy to twenty miles north of the international border. The strip of territory between

the border and immigration checkpoints is known as the “100-mile border zone” through which U.S. Border Patrol and other immigration enforcement units are in constant motion on the roads and in the air (Heyman, 2010). As a workforce that is required to travel between job projects for employment, the constant presence of the U.S. Border Patrol on major highways and roadways has changed the political geography for migrant construction workers mobility. In addition, anti-gang injunctions and pop-up and roving DUI checkpoints within migrant communities have intensified the enclosure of shifting and overlapping jurisdictions of immigration policing.

This dissertation is an ethnographic account of the ways and local history of migrant drywaller’s everyday strategies to navigate borders and state security as they move between job projects across San Diego County and beyond. It interrogates migrant men’s emerging workplace border narratives that complicate previous understandings of migrant men’s masculinity formations around dangerous, exploitative, and difficult job tasks. It is a research project that begins to remap the border and its functions from the perspective of the *cuadrilla*, work crew, as it moves, organizes, and strategizes to escape the regulatory force of borders, in turn creating a community of care and safety within conditions of social precarity.

The following questions are asked: how might worker’s organized movement as part of a drywall *cuadrilla*, or work crew, critically inform our understanding about the border, specifically within the context of an internal border, in its workings to regulate people’s mobility, neighborhoods, cities, and the local San Diego economy? How are migrant worker’s regional struggles in San Diego, California part of larger transnational, transborder, and global struggles to survive and resist capitalism? And, how do migrant

men understand life beyond labor in the United States? In asking these questions, I am trying to tease out how migrant men first come to understand the interconnectedness between the border and their labor power, and, second, how they begin to construct an alternative to navigate this space.

### **Migration, masculinity, and autonomy**

This project is theoretically guided by an autonomy of migration thesis that understands migration as an organized political strategy with its own logics and strategies of escape and survival against a capitalist global economy. By migration as autonomous, I mean that migrants exercise mobility against and beyond control. That is, migration as an organizing practice that does not merely respond to control but is independent of state regulation and delegitimizes its sovereign power through struggles, practices, and strategies to escape control (Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013; Rodríguez, 1996).

Therefore, this project is neither an investigation about contemporary migration as a social subject against the workings of sovereignty and capital that seeks to influence public policy and mobilize migrants to seek rights at existing institutions such as trade unions, nor about uncovering the specific strategies that migrants use to cross borders. Rather, the project is about engaging migrant's everyday collective practices to construct an alternative mobility around and across borders to get to work and return home safely.

Within the collective organizing to keep moving along, across, and beyond the extension of border is both a politics of care that demonstrates a support network for the freedom of movement (Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013) and an emerging workplace border narrative, “*querías norte ahora te chingas*, [you wanted to come north now your fucked]”, that complicates previous understandings of migrant men's masculinity

formations around dangerous, exploitative, and difficult job tasks. Masculinity literature has made attempts to connect migrant construction workers life-threatening migratory experience across the border and the extremely dangerous workplace conditions that they face in the U.S. with men's masculinity (Chávez & Altman, 2017; Ramirez, 2011; Saucedo & Morales, 2010).

Construction is a high-hazard industry with some of the highest rates of workplace fatalities and non-fatality injuries among Latinx workers in the nation (Arcury et al., 2014; Arcury et al., 2012; Escamilla et al., 2017; Menzel et al., 2010). It is common for workers to compromise their safety in an effort to increase productivity by “cutting corners” in safety training and equipment usage due to strict production deadlines and being paid by piecework (Arcury et al., 2012; Arcury et al., 2014; Escamilla et al., 2017; Menzel et al., 2010). Latinx workers, especially those that are foreign-born, are overrepresented in the toughest trades that provide the lowest wages and benefits (Menzel et al., 2010). Masculinity research on migrant men commonly highlight how men justify and revalue dangerous and undervalued jobs through masculinity formations that embrace exploitative conditions (Chávez & Altman, 2017; Ramirez, 2011). Saucedo and Morales (2010) have gone as far to suggest that migrant men in the construction industry use their life-threatening border crossing experience as narratives to justify dangerous workplace conditions and low-wage work (Saucedo & Morales, 2010). These scholars highlight men's initial migration to fulfill a gendered script to provide for their family and on arrival to dangerous and denigrated jobs, justify those conditions all for the sake of fulfilling the masculinist script of family provider.

Taking inspiration from Chicana feminist theory in the flesh, I attempt to complicate this narrative that has been prominent among masculinity studies by unpacking the flesh and bone experiences that are implicated in the common workplace expression, *querías norte ahora te chingas* [you wanted to come north now your fucked]. While this work needs further theorizing, especially as it pertains to connections to a politics of care, as outlined by autonomy of migration scholars, the expression itself becomes an entry point to complicate an understanding of men's masculinity in the workplace. It is a common expression that symbolizes workers concerns with social domination from power structures from above in both Mexico and the United States. It is migrant men's attempt to grapple with what it means to work in the United States—*el Norte*. The expression captures the reality that there is no life or future beyond labor in the United States. The only future in the U.S. is hard work. I argue that the narrative opens up a critical space from which migrant men begin to critique a global economy that drives men north for employment, while forcing them south for retirement—inhibiting a future that is neither entirely in the U.S. or Mexico.

Ultimately, the expression pushes back on much of the masculinity work on men in the construction field that only interpret men's masculine expressions to danger as compliance and embrace. I am not denying that men engage in life threatening work; nor that masculinity does not perpetuate risky behavior at the workplace. What I am arguing, especially as it pertains to the work of Saucedo and Morales' (2010) study on Las Vegas migrant construction workers, is that these authors are taking men's narratives out of context, while at the same time not presenting and examining its contradictions. The border does not end at the U.S./Mexico border, especially with the emergence of an

internal border, meaning that the migration trail has been extended to internal borders and into the workplace. The same cross-border dangers that migrants face at the international border are being replicated inside nation-state boundaries within checkpoints, anti-gang injunctions, DUI checkpoints that emphasize the complexity of border narratives.

More specifically to the expression *querías norte ahora te chingas* [you wanted to come north now your fucked], I am offering that men's migration narratives change as they experience and work in the construction industry and organize to navigate their mobile borders and create communities of care. Thus, the expression can be viewed as a manner to create a space to critique the circumstances for the dangerous border-crossing that revisits men's migration experience. It is knowledge that is being passed, in short-narrative form, that revisits and connects the dangerous conditions they face at work and their migration experience that often includes several crossings.

### **Note on methods and border studies**

The dissertation is an ethnographic account of workers mobilization efforts to navigate two primary borders: the international San Diego/Tijuana Border and a line of permanent and temporary checkpoints and roving patrol operations that regulate entry and exit of San Diego County. Methodologically, the project uses "drifts" from the feminist collective Precarias a la Deriva and takes inspiration from the Zapatistas *caminar preguntando* [walk together asking questions], to gather and analyze data as part of drywall work crew in transit. A process that I have termed *trabajar preguntando* [work together asking questions], in which the border was mapped and remapped through the collective movement and struggle of the *cuadrilla* [work crew] to plan, strategize, and escape borders.

The research is informed by a convivial research design. Convivial research draws from Participatory Action Research's (PAR's) emerging action-based design but diverts from its traditional social justice principle to "giving back" (see Fine et al., 2003; Openjuru et al., 2015) by promoting strategies that situate struggle in the process of becoming to provoke new ways of understanding resistance, autonomy, and movement building against and beyond the state (Callahan, 2015).

The intention of this dissertation is not to make migrant men as complete victims to oppressive forces enacted by nation-states and global capitalism nor as pure non-contradictory beings, but engage the complexity that is their migratory experience and our interconnectedness as former and current coworkers in which our precarious struggles as drywallers continue to overlap. I enter this project as a drywaller/ethnographer who is already engaged in the strategies, processes, and organizing that predate this project. It is a struggle that I have been embedded at least since the mid-1990s and have continued to take part throughout my graduate studies employed as a drywaller to cover subsistence needs during lapses in my university funding. Thus, the knowledge gathered by workers about the border, roving patrol operations, internal immigration checkpoints, and local immigration enforcement initiatives is information that continues to exist to the extent that people on the move share it amongst each other across construction sites, on the way to work, and in the return home. It is knowledge that lies underneath formal institutional processes for collective action that is constantly regenerated, circulated, and developed among workers as border enforcement operations shift, move, and react to workers mobility across San Diego, California. As a result, this dissertation project departs from traditional disciplinary approaches to social science

research that rather than reveal the strategies and methods by which migrant workers escape borders to claim them as findings, this work is intended to better inform us about state policing and its borders. Put differently, rather than use the movement of the *cuadrilla* [work crew] to reveal migrant worker's strategies to escape borders, the mobilization of the *cuadrilla* is used to better understand and reveal the technologies of borders, border enforcement, and the nation-state. Therefore, I want to offer, methodologically the dissertation is offering a way to study borders and migration differently that is not invested in the revelation of how migrants escape but rather reveal the technologies of confinement, separation, and differential inclusion that has so violently imposed on people's lives.

### **Chapter outline**

The central premise of this project is to engage construction workers' existing methods of collective organizing for subsistence, survival, and community regeneration in the border region. This dissertation is an investment in understanding how the border functions in order to assist migrants in their strategies for escape, especially for those migrant workers involved in this project, of which I am one, as well as family members, and friends. The emergence of the internal border has considerably changed migrant's mobility within the interior of the U.S. by creating multiple overlapping boundaries that are legal, political, and physical. Each day migrant workers must cross walls of police, immigration policy, checkpoints, and border enforcement actions at considerable distances from the international boundary that has made everyday activities such as running errands, traveling to work, grocery shopping, and attending church significantly challenging without the risk of apprehension. These conditions have challenged workers

mobility, labor power, and understanding of the border and northbound migration to *el Norte*.

The chapters for this dissertation proceed as follows. Chapter Two outlines the main research design. The project is based on a convivial methodological processes of knowledge production, as part of a drywall *cuadrilla* engaged in the everyday process of drywall work. Taking inspiration from the Zapatistas process of knowledge production through action *caminar preguntando* [walk together asking questions], I have titled the methodological process of this project *trabajar preguntando* [work together asking questions]. In this section, I also draw on feminist methodology to interrogate the complexities of my positionality as a drywaller/ethnographer, the conditions that gave rise to this collective study, and the use of the work crew as a methodological tool for data gathering and analysis. I also make connections to the *cuadrilla* in its collective reiterations as having a genealogy that can be traced back to *sociedades mutualistas* [mutual aid societies] that have circulated across the U.S./Mexico border since at least the late-1800s (Gómez, 2016; Gómez-Quiñones, 1994; Zamora, 2000). My argument is that the *cuadrilla* is part of an organizational heritage that Mexican immigrants have brought with them to the United States across the border that have historically given rise to some of the first mutual aid societies along the southwest (Gómez, 2016; Gómez-Quiñones, 1994; Zamora 2000), which is influencing workers cross border mobilization.

Chapter Three examines the ‘differential mobility’ of migrant construction workers across the stretch of territory between the San Diego/Tijuana border and a line of interior immigration checkpoints that enclose San Diego County, known as the “100-mile border zone.” This chapter is informed by the construction of maps and practice of

mapping. Migrant workers have historically (re)tooled the map to chart the location of interior immigration checkpoints and border enforcement ‘hotspots’ that are riddled with high activity of policing operations. Specifically, I examine the history of workers mobilization efforts to evade and resist interior border enforcement operations to move between job projects inside and outside the country. The chapter historicizes workers first confrontation with internal immigration checkpoints and Border Patrols changing strategies from workplace immigration enforcement to the road, highway and public space. I highlight strategies of enforcement of the U.S. Border Patrol that are in reaction to migrant strategies to increase their freedom of movement and options for survival.

Chapter Four examines migrant workers reconceptualization of expressions of body penetration through the word *chingar* [fuck], to symbolize concerns with social domination from power structures from above. I historicized this word/phrase both in its oppressive uses and how the term has been reconceptualized by indigenous groups, Chicana women, and working-class Mexican men across its various derivatives to critique power. Specifically, this chapter examines the common workplace expression *querías norte ahora te chingas* [you wanted to come north now your fucked], to open up a critical space from which migrant men can begin to critique a global economy that drives men northbound for employment and southbound for retirement—inhibiting a future that is neither entirely in the U.S. or Mexico.

Chapter Five concludes this dissertation. It discusses future directions and identifies five findings that are used to intervene in the following literature: Border Studies, Migration Studies, Labor Studies, and Masculinity Studies. The first is the differential movement of the border. Borders do not just filter and hierarchize people but

move and react to migration. The unauthorized movement of workers across the U.S. interior was met with a network of internal immigration checkpoints, DUI checkpoints, and policing operations that were influx to regulate migrant movement. Second, is a mapping and materialization of a counter-border apparatus. In the process of mapping the border, strategies emerge to evade capture, which in turn reveal an alternative geography to resist border enforcement across the region. Third, the project demonstrates a different way to understand labor organizing through the *cuadrilla*. In its collective reiterations, the *cuadrilla* has been a continuation of the struggle against the border within the interior. It is an organization of struggle that has been influenced by *sociedades mutualistas* (mutual aid societies) that have circulated across the U.S./Mexico border since at least the late-1800s (Gómez, 2016; Gómez-Quiñones, 1994; Zamora, 2000). Fourth, the project demonstrates that border research does not need to reveal migrant's clandestine border-crossing strategies, or any other collective strategies for survival, to understand the border and migrant's mobilization across borders. Border Studies scholars continue to reveal migrant's strategies for clandestine crossings that potentially compromise migrant's ability to cross. Fifth, this study is a reconceptualization of migrant men's border narrative. Previous masculinity research on migrant men in the construction field has interpreted the use of their border narratives as a masculine expression to embrace danger and compliance to denigrated wages (Chávez & Altman, 2017; Saucedo & Morales, 2010). I found that men's narratives about hard work and migration with the common workplace expression *querías norte ahora te chingas*, [you wanted to come north now your fucked] demonstrate that men are not the willing subjects that are portrayed by the literature. The common expression has been how men have created space to critique

exploitative workplace and migration experiences. Furthermore, men's organizing efforts against border enforcement measures, outlined in chapter three, demonstrates a politics of care among men that has been overlooked by masculinity scholars. Finally, the project demonstrates how collective maps are created collectively in struggle, providing a counter mapping as research methodology that is based on survival and thriving—beyond conditions created by the nation-state.

### **Theoretical reflections on the U.S./Mexico border**

The remapping of the border in this project, especially one that includes internal borders, involves a theoretical understanding of the U.S./Mexico border and its connection to internal borders. Scholarship on immigration checkpoints tend to understand these divisions as legal boundaries that have extended border policing internally and suspended equal protection laws (Chacón, 2010; Ewing, 2014; García Hernández, 2009; Huddleston, 2016; Mirandé, 2003; Motomura, 1999). In this project immigration checkpoints are contextualized as a border, an internal border, that is distinct but interconnected to the designated U.S./Mexico border. Therefore, I use Foucault's (1977) concept of apparatus, or *dispositif*, and Mezzadra and Neilson's (2013) approach to border as method to contextualize how these divisions operate in tandem to obstruct, divide, and act as technologies for differential inclusion. It is an approach that facilitates an understanding that borders worker in a fundamentally different way that is not designed to impede the flow of migrants but construct differentiated labor subjects and spaces.

The border is not just a dividing line but an interconnected ensemble. An apparatus, or *dispositif*, that connects, separates, and filters, while it constructs differentiated spaces and subjectivities. Foucault (1977) describes a *dispositif* as,

A thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements. (p. 194)

As a *dispositif*, the border highlights the critical elements that are institutional, administrative, and physical mechanisms that serve as control devices to surveille, hinder, regulate, and filter the mobility of people across a differentiated geography that is not limited nation-state building. The dominant strategic function of an apparatus is that of responding to an *urgent need* (emphasis the author's) (Foucault, 1977). In the 21st century the *urgent need* has been how to institutionalize the unauthorized streams of people into governable forms to control its “speed and magnitude” that respond to the needs of local labor markets (De Genova & Peutz, 2010). Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) treat the border as a method to reveal the “technologies of differential inclusion” that “draw parallels between more and less disciplinary ways of filtering and governing labor mobilities” (p. 23). By treating the border as method, Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) are able to highlight the border as a “world-configuring function” that is not meant to “block or obstruct global passages of people, money, or objects” but create differentiated laboring subjects that maintain crucial divisions between workers as a means of control that has been critical to capitalism's geographic scales (p. ix).

In border studies, the concept of the ‘borderlands’ and ‘border’ are not synonymous. Gloria Anzaldúa, a pioneer in border theorizing, explains that a borderland is “in a constant state of transition” (2012, p. 25). It is a “vague and undetermined space that is created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 25). In contrast, a border is “a dividing line” (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 25); an imposed nation-state boundary that is sanctioned by government policy and enforced by border agents (Doty, 2011; Dunn, 1996; Nevins, 2010). Borders exist within a capitalist and colonial logic in which the concept of nation is based on the control and ownership of land demarcated by political-geographical boundaries. The organization “along nation-state lines, the interstate system and its concomitant national-territorial boundaries have become two of the most defining and taken-for-granted features of the contemporary modern/colonial world” (Hernández, 2018, p. 3). These political-geographical boundaries are part of a socio-historical process with roots in the colonialization of the Americas; a logic from which nation-states continue to draw on for its continued permanence (Hernández, 2018; Walia, 2013). State boundaries are commonly understood as lines that demarcate territory, the “prototypical margins of the state... where law and order are simultaneously rigorously enforced and elided” (Doty, 2011, p. 599). Borders mark the extremities of nation-state’s power and territoriality against the constructed dichotomy of an inside versus outside and us versus them (Carpenter, 2006; Yildiz, 2016). Non-sanctioned state migration across state boundaries is interpreted as a challenge to the sovereignty of nation-states ability to control its territorial boundaries (Rodríguez, 1996; Wheatley & Gomberg-Muñoz, 2016; Yildiz, 2016). Yet, as the border *thickens* (emphasis my own) (Rosas, 2012), borders are increasingly governed through co-bordering

practices (Longo, 2017) in time and space. Legal jurisdictions project surveillance far from the actual border in both directions, as a demonstration of the infrastructure of law enforcement and military capabilities (Miller, 2017; Walia, 2013). This destabilizes the classic conception of nation-state sovereignty to one “that is heterogeneous, with joint or overlapping domains over a single territory” (Longo, 2017, p. 760). Scholars suggest this has created a series of interconnected and yet disparate heterotopias (Low, 2008; Yildiz, 2016) and militarized zones that demonstrate differentiated enforcement practices across the U.S./Mexico borderlands and the Americas (Miller, 2017; Slack et al., 2016).

Todd Miller (2017) suggests that one of the fundamental elements of the U.S./Mexico “21<sup>st</sup>-century border” is that it is not defined by an international boundary but consists of a multilayered enforcement apparatus defined by political and economic power. Central American migrants, for example, when traveling to the United States find that Mexico that has become a border.<sup>4</sup> Central Americans must travel across an enforcement corridor that consists of the national guard, a series of checkpoints, blockades, and surveillance technology such as x-ray machines that have been supplied by the United States (Miller, 2017). These border enforcement measures have made the migration through the interior of Mexico ‘a trail of death’ that deters many undocumented Central American travelers off the roads into the most dangerous areas of the country where rape, assault, and death for migrants moving through have been common (Martínez et al., 2014; Miller, 2017). Similarly, seventy miles north of the U.S./Mexico border, a checkpoint that sits on U.S. Route 281 in Brooks County, Texas

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<sup>4</sup> Latino USA. (2020, May 27). The Moving Border: Part Two, The South. <https://www.npr.org/2020/05/26/862844123/the-moving-border-part-2-the-south>.

has claimed the lives of at least 572 people who have died of heat exposure attempting to circumvent the checkpoint after crossing the U.S./Mexico border (Maddux, 2017). The twenty-five-mile section of territory across desert in which coyotes drop off undocumented migrants along the highway a few miles south of the checkpoint with plans to reunite with the coyote north of the checkpoint station is known as the ‘corridor of death.’ In other words, while the long trails of human destruction that span from the Mexico/Guatemala border to interior U.S. Border Patrol immigration checkpoints forms part of a larger geographical strategy since 1994 of ‘prevention through deterrence’ that uses the open desert as a weapon (Dunn, 1996; Falcón, 2001; Nevins, 2010; Smith, 2017; Vargas, 2001), it also signals how the border is interconnect and creates differentiated spaces and subjectivities that go beyond the designated nation-state border.

### **San Diego metropolitan region**

San Diego County is located in the southwestern corner of California bordered by Tijuana, Mexico to the south, Riverside County and Orange County to the north, the Pacific Ocean to the west, and Imperial County to the east. The metropolitan region is roughly 4,206 square miles that consists of urban and rural communities across a varied topography of coastal strip, mesas, canyons, low mountain ranges, and a desert to the east. With a population size of 3.3 million people, it is the second most populated county in California, behind Los Angeles County.<sup>5</sup> San Diego County is divided by fairly accepted county regions. Central San Diego includes the city of San Diego, while South

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<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. 2019. San Diego County, California. <https://www.census.gov/content/census/en/search-results.html?stateGeo=none&q=population%20san%20diego%20&searchtype=web&page=2>

County includes cities such as National City, San Ysidro, Otay Mesa, and Chula Vista. South County is the region of San Diego that borders Tijuana. East County includes a backcountry and several unincorporated cities such as Alpine, Lakeside, Pine Valley, and Jamul. While its incorporated cities include Lemon Grove, Santee, La Mesa, and El Cajon. North County is known for its political conservatism and affluence. Cities such as Encinitas, Del Mar, Rancho Santa Fe, and Solana Beach have houses that range well over the million-dollar mark. The region incorporates two prominent types of topography coastal and inland that includes mountain communities in Valley Center and Ramona. The North County region is surrounded by undeveloped canyons and rolling hills that have historically served as labor encampments for its migrant agriculture workforce. A large proportion of San Diego's agricultural and nursery sector is located in the North County region. But with the suburbanization of the area, farms and its migrant workforce living in these encampments are being pushed out and across the region as farms are forced to relocate.

San Diego County is branded as a "military friendly" region with seven military bases. Cities, towns, and counties are known to cater to its large military community.<sup>6</sup> It has the biggest concentration of military personnel and third-highest veteran residents nationwide.<sup>7</sup> Two of its military bases are the largest Naval and Marine Corps bases in the west coast region of the United States.<sup>8</sup> Naval Base San Diego located in the city of

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<sup>6</sup> See Military Bases in San Diego County for Relocating Military, in Military Friendly San Diego, California <https://sandiegan.com/san-diego-everyones-favorite-duty-station-also-favorite-place-veterans-retire/>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

San Diego consisting of 13 piers that stretch over 977 acres of land 326 acres of water and Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton in the city of Oceanside in North County with over 125,000 acres of land. San Diego's strong military presence and growing group of senior retirees has been the basis of a conservative Republican-dominated politics across the county (Del Castillo, 2007).

Although San Diego County borders Tijuana, its residents, politicians, and local leaders do not regard the region as a border city (Del Castillo, 2007). Tijuana provides San Diego with ties to Mexico that reinforce a 'Mexicanidad' in its barrios and *colonias* through immigration, tourism, media, and binational friendship and family ties (Del Castillo, 2007, p. 4). Known as "*la ciudad de los migrantes* [the city of migrants]" or "*la ciudad del brinco* [jumping-point city]," Tijuana is characterized for its migration and border commuting practices to San Diego (Chávez, 2016). Many Mexicans migrate to Tijuana with the intention of "jumping" to the other side, while others are lured to Tijuana's employment opportunities and higher wages comparatively to the interior of Mexico (Chávez, 2016; Orraca-Romano, 2017). Tijuana has been a major crossing point for authorized and unauthorized border crossings. Prior to Operation Gatekeeper, Tijuana was the principal crossing point for unauthorized migration into California (Durand & Massey, 2003). But as it has become increasingly more difficult and expensive to cross the border unauthorized migration was redirected to authorized streams of entry with an increase of Border Crossing Cards (Chávez, 2016; Durand & Massey, 2003). Today, Tijuana has the largest population of border commuters, people that reside in Mexico but cross the international border to work in the United States (Chávez, 2016).

## **Border *within*: (Re)mapping the desert as a weapon**

The first piece of fence between San Diego and Tijuana was constructed from air force landing mats used during the Vietnam War. The project began in 1990 and was completed by 1993 (Brown, 2010). In 1994, the same year that NAFTA went into effect, and the Zapatistas declared war on the Mexican government, Operation Gatekeeper further extending the San Diego/Tijuana border by increasing the number of Border Patrol agents and technology to stymie the flow of unauthorized crossings at the international line (Nevins, 2010). Operation Gatekeeper was the initial phase of the national southwest border strategic plan of “prevention through deterrence” to strengthen control of the border (Akers, 2001; Dunn, 1996; Nevins, 2010; Smith, 2017). Prevention through deterrence was formulated by military planning experts from the U.S. Department of Defense’s Center for Low Intensity Conflict, and chief Border Patrol agents that used the open desert as a weapon, by building up technology and walls in urban areas to deflect the migration trail “over more hostile terrain” where migrants would “find themselves in mortal danger” by being cut off from resources and rescue in the backcountry (Dunn, 1996; Falcón, 2001; Nevins, 2010; Smith, 2017; Vargas, 2001).<sup>9</sup> The result has been the massive loss and destruction to human life that has left a ‘trail of death’ across arid desert. Since the 1990s, more than six thousand people have been recovered across the U.S.-Mexico Border; the majority of whom died of heat and dehydration (Smith, 2017). These border patrol strategies have also exacerbated migrant women’s risk to gender-based violence that includes rape and sexual assault (Wheatley &

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<sup>9</sup> See Border Patrol Strategic Plan 1994 and Beyond. July (1994)

Gomberg-Muñoz, 2016). According to Falcón (2001), border rapes are not random or isolated but the gendered effects of the militarization of the border that is ideology “embedded with issues of hyper-masculinity, patriarchy, and threats to national security” (p. 35).

The national border strategy, prevention through deterrence, has dramatically transformed the landscape of the borderlands. The plan was based on the premise that “absolute sealing of the [U.S.- Mexico] border is unrealistic.”<sup>10</sup> Drafters of the plan had reason to “believe that the border can be brought under control” through a coordinated effort that included “employer sanctions, back-up enforcement in the interior of the United States, reducing document fraud, providing detention and deportation for eligible illegal aliens and expeditious removal of criminal alien.”<sup>11</sup> The plan included the operation of interior immigration checkpoints as a “back-up border effort and improve control [of the border].”<sup>12</sup> Since Operation Gatekeeper in 1994, immigration checkpoints have been part of a “defense-in-depth, layered strategy,” to border enforcement in which checkpoints “act as a backstop to operations at the border.”<sup>13</sup> These checkpoints have created an extra layer of internal borders that have been described as “second borders” (Davis, 2000), or “little borders” (Gurman, 2017) around southwestern cities and communities that are changing the legal geography of the region.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Customs and Border Protection. (2020). *Border Patrol: 2020 Border Patrol strategy*. <https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2019-Sep/2020-USBP-Strategy.pdf>

The result of these accumulating and thickening borders is a line of interior U.S. Border Patrol immigration checkpoints across U.S. Southwestern states that are located roughly 100-miles from the U.S./Mexico border. Border studies describe the strip of territory between checkpoints and the border as “anomalous zones” (Neuman, 1996), “border zones” (Huddleston, 2016; Maddux, 2017, Osete, 2016), or a “Constitution-Free Zone”<sup>14</sup> where fourth amendment and equal protection doctrines have been suspended (Chacón, 2010; García Hernández, 2009; Mirandé, 2003; Motomura, 1999). The majority of research on immigration checkpoints has drawn attention to the legal implications that checkpoint operations have on federal search and seizures standards (Chacón, 2010; Ewing, 2014; García Hernández, 2009; Huddleston, 2016; Mirandé, 2003; Motomura, 1999) but less often highlight how checkpoint operations have been fundamental instruments to regulate migrant labor across the U.S. southwest during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Historically, the U.S Border Patrol has used checkpoint operations as a layered strategy to regulate the circulation of migrant labor into the country through a combination of neighborhood patrols, deportation raids, or roadblocks to curb workers migration internally (García Hernández, 2009; Gurman, 2017; Ngai, 2014). During the Great Depression of the 1930s, immigration enforcement officers and local authorities would set-up “bum blockades,” border region checkpoints, and deportation sweeps to restrict Mexican migrants’ movement in various cities and states (Giczy, 2018; Ngai, 2014). During World War II, as thousands of Mexican workers crossed the border to meet U.S. labor demands, the government set up a network of fixed checkpoints and

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<sup>14</sup> See “The Problem with the Constitution-Free Zone” accessed on April 4, 2020 at: [https://www.acluaz.org/sites/default/files/field\\_documents/constitution-free\\_zone.pdf](https://www.acluaz.org/sites/default/files/field_documents/constitution-free_zone.pdf)

roving patrol operations in the border region to regulate the influx of unauthorized workers (Gurman, 2017). It was not until 1946, a period that was marked by dramatic labor strikes in the Bracero Program, that congress had approved the attorney general's request to extend immigration officers the legal authority to set up checkpoint operations to conduct searches within a "reasonable distance" of the border (Gurman, 2017). In 1953, with no public input or explanation, the Department of Justice published a rule that defined "reasonable distance" to not to exceed "within 100 air miles from any external boundary of the United States" (Ewing, 2014; Maddux, 2017).

Border legal scholars largely stress the function of checkpoints as barriers that construct differentiated legal zones as legal boundaries within the nation-state but not beyond these spaces. Not as actual borders that connect, converge, and overlap with the designated border and the divisions that it creates, but as exceptional legal spaces that have created a sense of "lawlessness" across the region. In this project, interior immigration borders are borders, internal borders, that are distinct but interconnected to the designated U.S./Mexico border. Thus, I use Mezzadra and Neilson's (2008) concept of the multiplication of labor, through the term "differential mobility" to highlight how nation-state borders and its attendant enforcement actions have created differential mobilities and hierarchies among a mix status of noncitizen migrant workers as a form of "differential inclusion" in the region. Differential mobility is a concept that has been used to examine the differentiated cross-border experiences of mix status families (Chan & Ngan, 2018), and differential treatment of travelers as they move through emerging forms of state security and "border-like inspections" that spread from the border to the interior of society (Pallitto & Heyman, 2008). With the use of differential mobility, in place of

Mezzadra and Neilson's (2013) term differential inclusion, it is an attempt to highlight state imposed (im)mobility, even within the category of 'illegal' that is being constructed as a function of the border. It is precisely this relation of borders as "technologies of differential inclusion" in thinking of about the regulation of labor power as it traverses walls, checkpoints, barricades, enclosures, legal frameworks, and surveillance systems that I think through the concept of "differential mobility" to try to make sense of the role that borders simultaneously "play in the production of the deeply heterogeneous space and time of global capitalism," while enacting variations in human mobility that create unequal opportunities of movement (Chan & Ngan, 2018; Heyman, 2012; Pallitto & Heyman, 2008).

State imposed unequal opportunities in movement affect workers ability to move freely to meet employment demands between job projects as construction workers. Construction projects unrestrained by borders, travel across the region and beyond without restrictions while migrant workers must find strategies to continue their employment as individuals that are highly restricted and surveilled in the region. Although the restriction in movement does not just affect their ability to meet labor demands, it becomes how the local San Diego economy can take advantage of a flexible, precarious, sedentary workforce, especially during economic recessions. In times of economic recession, drywallers leave the county, state, and often country for employment opportunities elsewhere for higher wages and more stable employment opportunities. Through the 2007/2008 housing crisis it was common for drywallers to leave for Oregon, Washington, North Carolina, and Hawaii for more stable construction opportunities in those states. While cross border workers were able to return to Tijuana to "wait out the

recession,” or find opportunities in other labor markets, undocumented workers were confined to both borders and were hindered from leaving San Diego county to fill its depreciated labor demands as the local economy recovered.

### **Note from a drywaller/ethnographer**

My first recollection of the jobsite was when I was four-years old sifting through sawdust and dirt for carpenter nails. These nails had fallen from carpenter’s tool belts, saw tables, or slipped from their fingers as they assembled the major structural elements of wood-framed houses. While my father taped the interior of houses, I would walk the exterior of job projects collecting nails in an empty water gallon. Although my father claimed he needed the nails for home improvement projects, I always saw the task as busy work. By the age of seven/eight I had graduated to helper status cleaning worker’s tools, mixing material, and spotting nails as a taper. This progressed until the age of eighteen; the point I had decided to part ways with my father. By this age, I was considered a journeyman taper. The equivalent of completing an apprenticeship program. But, like many drywallers in the informal economy our qualifications do not come from a certificate. The resumes we carry with us do not count the years in the trade but its performance, the firms that have employed us, and the people we have worked alongside. Our resumes were collective, built by our bodies, and reflected knowledge learned through sharing and time.

My father was one of *los primeros*, the firsts, Mexican men to enter the drywall trade in the 1970s. In Southern California, this period of the drywall trade consisted of a majority white unionized workforce (Milkman & Wong, 2000). There is an expression in the workplace *que es tu descendencia* that has a literal translation, what is your descent,

origin, or lineage. In other words, who are the line of people that you have taught you the trade. It includes the firms employed and people you have worked with. For example, Rodrigo at a family function introduced his nephew to my father as “*mira este es uno de tus descendientes;*” translated as, look this is one of your decedents. It was Rodrigo’s manner of introducing his nephew as someone that has benefited from my father’s long genealogy of teaching people the trade. My father taught Rodrigo in the 1980s; in turn, Rodrigo has recently brought his nephew to work with him in the trade. Drywallers work genealogy carries weight. It also provides coworkers with a sense of a drywaller’s experience in the trade.

My origin story begins with my father and runs to today. Along the way I have worked for a number of firms and a gamut of construction projects that include hospitals, schools, factories, and apartment complexes, track homes, mobile homes, multi-million-dollar estates, and smaller remodel projects. Through grade school, construction was something I did on the weekends and during the summer break. High school is when I began to work in the evenings after school. But it was after high school graduation that construction became a full-time occupation while attending college. My course schedule revolved around my work schedule. Several semesters I would have to negotiate a day off or a shorter workday to attend classes. This often put me in a difficult position with the employer, having to work weekends to make up the hours. My work schedule prolonged my studies, as I was unable to take a full load of courses as full-time students.

Throughout the master’s program, I would take a shower at the university to make it to class on time. The only reason I decided to enter a graduate program was because we were in the middle of a recession. The economy had not fully recovered from the great

recession of 2008, so I again went to graduate school. Upon entering a doctoral program, I thought this would be the end of my drywall career. But, throughout my doctoral studies I continued to work in the drywall trade to supplement lapses in funding.

This project has always been part of my taken for granted reality. I was born into the trade and continued to work in the trade for economic subsistence. My persistence in the industry was for survival; to pay for school and supplement funding and periods when there was a lack of university funding. The research for this project follows that trajectory. It continues to be about survival: migrant men's survival against the regulatory measures of state security and my personal survival against the precarious conditions as a university student.

### **The kitchen table**

The project began with a focus group around the kitchen table with two male construction workers, and their spouses, at my cousin Roberto's home in Perris, California. Perris is a city in Riverside County roughly 30 miles north of the Temecula Border Patrol Station checkpoint in North County San Diego. Initially, I arranged to meet Roberto to brainstorm ideas and discuss my investigative approach to the study of internal borders. Upon arriving, I found that my cousin Sonia and her husband Jaime were also present. Jamie and Roberto are both seasoned drywallers with over 30 years of experience. Specifically, Roberto's experience spans several local construction industries in San Diego, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, and Riverside that includes union and nonunion drywall sectors.

It was at this initial stage that discussions began about worker's differentiated mobility across international and interior borders. Roberto and Jamie explained that

borders create scaled economic zones that are affecting workers wage across counties being separated from internal immigration checkpoints. Roberto explains, “Here is the issue with San Diego; over there we get paid less. If you get paid 20 dollars an hour here [Riverside County], you get 15 dollars over there [San Diego County]. Some guys don’t like that, but that’s how it is.” Roberto and Jamie suggest that the differential wage is due to the border and cross border workers entering for employment in San Diego from Tijuana.

This gathering set the stage for the work in this project, and how to work on this project. It was the work together, and the discussion about that work, that led to a conversation about migrant male drywallers collective efforts to construct an alternative geography of borders. But even in this moment while we discussed the possibilities for this project, Roberto’s wife Gloria had been cooking, heating tortillas, and serving us food. Therefore, even though this project is about men and their collective efforts to remap the border, it is important to note the centrality of women’s reproductive labor that has conditioned the possibilities for men to regenerate their bodies and strategize around the kitchen table. While this is the most obvious manifestation of reproductive social labor, the political imaginary of women, mothers, daughters, wives, partners, and sisters, and all the neighbors that are also community, is already always part of the work that is done to labor for wages, and the wageless work to labor for life.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See Federici, S. (2012). *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*. Oakland: PM Press; Dalla Costa, M. & Selma J. (1975). *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*. London: Falling Wall Press; Ahmen, S. (2006). *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham: Duke University Press; Cherríe, M., & Anzaldúa, G. (Eds.). (2015). *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. Albany: SUNY Press; Mies, M. (1998). *Patriarchy & Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labor*. London: Zed Books; Paradise, A. L. (2015). *Militarized policing and resistance in the social factory: The battle for community safety in the Silicon Valley*. [Doctoral Dissertation, California Institute of Integral Studies]. ProQuest

The reproductive labor that underlies this work means that a study about men does not mean an absence of women. The kitchen table is not only the site where interviews commonly occurred at participant's homes but represents women's reproductive labor that continues to make men's mobility across the industry possible. Thus, in this project, the recognition that the kitchen table is the "center of the home" that is a "grass roots operation, begun and kept alive by women" (Smith, 1989, p. 11), is an understanding that women's unpaid reproductive labor has conditioned the regeneration of the *cuadrilla* and this project on migrant men.

During the 1980s, several drywallers drifted through our two-bedroom apartment in Spring Valley, San Diego County. As my father brought migrant men into the trade, several drywallers would live in our home as they transitioned to their own place. The majority were my father's nephews. Others were migrant men that my father picked up at day labor sites and brought them under his tutelage. At any given day two-to-three drywallers lived in our small apartment. Roberto was one of several nephews my father brought into our home. Each morning my mother would pack these men a lunch and when these men returned in the evening, she would prepare them dinner. According to my mother, with the exception of Rigo, none of the men paid my mother or helped with the reproductive duties of the household. During this period, I was roughly 4 years old and had little recollection of the men that had lived in household. It was through my mother's recollections, sitting together around the kitchen table that I was able to begin to reclaim women's labor in this project. Women across this project had played formattable

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Dissertations Publishing; and Piepzna-Samarasinha, L. L. (2018). *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press.

roles in the regeneration of the family, especially in times of crisis. When husbands were deported or apprehended, women found ways to survive on a single wage, while communities and families, organized by women, came together to support each other. During the great recession of 2008, women were instrumental in surviving the difficult economic period, often becoming the primary breadwinners, and supplementing their own wages with side-jobs. Without the reproductive labor of women, this project and men's collective efforts as a *cuadrilla* would not have been possible, nor would the world.

### **Note on translations**

'Participant-observation' (Vargas, 2008) notes were written in English at the end of the workday, while interviews were transcribed in their original language by a transcription service. The majority of interviews were conducted in Spanish with the exception of two interviews. Fluent in Spanish and English, I personally conducted interviews for this project. Throughout the dissertation Spanish narratives or expressions were translated in English for non-Spanish speakers. In the spirit of transparency, the translations were juxtaposed next to the original narratives for readers' convenience and to demonstrate the decisions made over words, expressions, and idioms. Spanish narratives were originally translated into English by my partner who desires to remain anonymous for this project. My partner is a state certified court interpreter in Spanish that also understands the 'language of the border' (Anzaldúa, 2012) as a cross border resident having lived in Mexicali, Mexico and Calexico, California.

An important issue when translating language is the deeply rooted translation of context and culture (González y González & Lincoln, 2006). A literal word translation

will convey a meaning that does not often parallel across language and culture.

Translations involved a two-part process that included a linguistic translation coupled with a deep understanding of cultural context (González y González & Lincoln, 2006).

Consequently, many of the narratives consisted of long discussions over language and words in an attempt to capture the cultural meaning within the linguistic translations of migrant workers narratives. Yet, it is important to note, that in some ways the narratives are still in process and may change as this dissertation cycles through migrant workers reading of the manuscript.

## CHAPTER 2

### LA CUADRILLA AND CONVIVIALITY

*Tú no eres indispensable; tú simplemente eres una mano- Albañil Anónimo*

*You are not irreplaceable; you are just a hand- Anonymous Drywaller*

The border is not just a transient zone but a region where many people reside and work, and through collective action have been able to transform the conditions of their lives as a community of struggle (Télez, 2008). In San Diego, California, drywallers that work and reside in the strip of territory between the U.S./Mexico border and a line of U.S. interior immigration checkpoints several miles north of the international border, known as the 100-mile border zone, must navigate a space that is replete with checkpoints, roving border patrols, and border surveillance simply to go to work and return home safely. These hostile conditions affect workers ability to travel from jobsite-to-jobsite to earn a living wage to support their family, pay rent, food, and send money to family in Mexico. At the workplace, these construction workers face unstable precarious labor conditions as a largely undocumented workforce that is eminently deportable and easily expendable to building firms.

In earlier work, I have highlighted how groups of drywallers, which I term collective *cuadrillas*, or work crews, have adopted horizontal modes for the organization of their labor power (see Avalos, 2019). *La cuadrilla* has been at the center of my understanding of labor, mobility, capital production, and community regeneration among construction workers since I began my career as a drywaller in the mid-1990s. It consists of a group of associated workers that are interconnected as family, friends, share the same town of origin, or a common vision about the organization of their labor power, or have

no relationship whatsoever but are lumped together forcefully by employers to complete job projects collectively. Across the border region, hundreds of drywall *cuadrillas* move across and between international and internal borders to work in the construction industry, traveling collectively from jobsite-to-jobsite completing building projects. The work crew is increasingly the common organization for capital production in the construction industry. Specialty firms, also known as subcontracting firms, have attempted to capitalize on these work teams through labor subcontracting arrangements that outsource labor to the labor baron (i.e. labor (sub)subcontractors), also known as the labor broker, *encargados*, and foremen (Cranford, 2005; Durand & Massey, 2003; Hagan, 1998; Milkman & Wong, 2000; Morales, 2016), that head these work crews and generate a profit by retaining a share of the group's collective wages.

Several of these *cuadrillas*, however, have reorganized, retooled, the *cuadrilla* as a mode for collective expression by cutting out middlemen labor barons and organizing around principles of mutual aid and cooperation among members. In practice, workers exercise equal remuneration, job rotation, and share the responsibility of completing the most undesired drywall operations. The *cuadrilla* has also been how workers have found stable work collectively, especially in times of economic crisis (Avalos, 2019), and how workers have come together to strategize their movement across internal borders and border enforcement zones to evade apprehension from the border patrol. In San Diego, California the drywall *cuadrilla* is comprised of an overwhelmingly male, Mexican, noncitizen workforce. Its members are of mix status (i.e. permanent resident, undocumented, visitor visa, DACA student, worker visa, and less so U.S. citizen) that mark these groups with differentiated mobilities between and across nation-state borders.

The research for this study is a convivial ethnographic account of workers mobilization against the border and capital as part of a drywall *cuadrilla*. Thus, observations, informal and often formal interviews, and photographs were recorded adrift the *cuadrilla* on the way to work, returning home at the end of the workday, between job projects, on lunch break, evading internal borders, and in the context of everyday drywall operations. Likewise, at the center of the analysis are the workers themselves who are its members and have had an active involvement in the direction, discussion, and interpretation of the study through the creation of maps, charting borders, strategizing movement, and the circulation of emerging concepts that were generated as part of the ongoing practices for the *cuadrilla*'s mobilization and regeneration.

I argue that the *cuadrilla* is part of a larger genealogy of labor struggles that have circulated in the United States and Mexico. Before a more in-depth description of the convivial methods of this study, the next section is an attempt to reclaim the transborder genealogy of the *cuadrilla*. A history that does not begin at the U.S./Mexico border nor in reaction to exploitative U.S. labor conditions, rather the 'something' that migrants have brought with them, generated along the way on the migration trail, 'retooled' in multiple crossings, and cultivated at the jobsite, as part of the struggle against global capital. I argue that the collective organization of these work crews is a struggle for the freedom of movement and escape that other scholars have titled the mobile commons, or collective agency, to cross borders and create new lives elsewhere (Wheatley & Gomberg-Muñoz, 2016; Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013). It is a collective organization for mobility that has been influenced by *sociedades mutualistas* (mutual aid societies) that have circulated

across the border since at least the late-1800s (Gómez, 2016; Gómez-Quiñones, 1994; Zamora, 2000).

### **Background: A brief labor genealogy**

Construction workers face the exploitation of their labor power from a pyramid-like tier of labor subcontracting arrangements from investors to building contractors to subcontractors down to labor barons that are one-tier removed from the actual workers. Labor scholars have condemned labor barons for exploiting their own ethnic group (Cranford, 2005; Milkman, 2006; Milkman & Wong, 2000) with little acknowledgement of the labor subcontracting arrangements that “sustain a capitalist system of exploitation that disperses the economic and political costs of production” (Avalos, 2019, p. 4). Under a subcontracting arrangement, labor contractors not only act as legal buffers to labor law compliance but liberate firms from the responsibility to recruit and train workers (Durand & Massey, 2003; Massey et al., 2002; Zolniski, 2006). This assures U.S. firms continued access to undocumented labor without incurring any of the legal liabilities under the law nor any of the risks and costs associated with the reproduction of labor (Zolniski, 2006). As a result, in sectors of the economy that are characterized with a high turnover rate and where many immigrants work such as construction, agricultural and gardening, labor subcontracting quickly became the standard practice (Durand & Massey, 2003; Massey et al., 2002). This restructured entire industries to make migrant employment through labor subcontractors the standard employment practice amongst migrant workers; a structure that is increasingly imposed on all workers regardless of U.S. citizenship status (Durand & Massey, 2003).

This labor system of professional middlemen that recruit and employ migrant workers to fill U.S. industry labor demands can be traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, known as the *padrone* system (Peck, 2000). During the 1900's, the *padrone* system was composed of a network of *enganchadores*,<sup>16</sup> or labor subcontractors, that recruited workers abroad and domestically to fill U.S. industries low-wage labor shortages (Massey et al., 2002). The period between 1900 to 1929 came to be known as the “era of the *enganche*;” but with the advent of the Bracero Program in 1942 the U.S. government had absorbed the *padrone* system by taking control of labor networks previously controlled by commissary companies and labor agencies (Peck, 2000; Massey et al., 2002). The end of the Bracero Program, however, did not change the conditions for the demand and supply of Mexican workers in the United States (Massey et al., 2016). By the mid-1960s employment connections between Mexican workers and U.S. employers were well-established and Mexican workers continued to fill U.S. labor demands through direct employment to employers (Massey et al., 2016). Many of these contacts led migrants into new employment opportunities in urban areas such as construction and other labor sectors (Boehm, 2008). But in 1986, with the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), employers reverted back to the indirect hiring of undocumented workers through labor barons (i.e. labor subcontractors) (Durand & Massey, 2003; Milkman & Wong, 2000; Morales, 2016). IRCA for the first time in U.S. history sought to penalize employers who “knowingly” hired undocumented workers. Employers were required to fill out an Employment Eligibility Verification Form (I-9

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<sup>16</sup> *Enganchadores* comes from the word *el enganche*, meaning “the hook.” The *enganchadores* were those who “hooked” workers through coercive measures such as predatory loans, travel to the U.S., and guaranteed work upon U.S. arrival (Massey et al., 2002).

form) that listed authorization documents presented by prospective employees to determine their eligibility for employment in the United States (Aldana, 2008; Chishti et al., 2018; Durand & Massey, 2003). The I-9 form offered a huge loophole that liberated employers from any liability of hiring undocumented workers. Under the law, the employer was responsible for the inspection of documents presented and the completion of the I-9 form, but IRCA did not hold employers responsible for the verification of documents presented (De Genova, 2005; Durand & Massey, 2003). This secured employer's immunity from the law while imposing larger expenses and liabilities on the migrant workers (De Genova, 2005).

In the construction industry, the labor baron trails a long line of labor subcontracting arrangements and represents undocumented workers only option for job mobility. Labor barons are seasoned construction workers that have formed several *cuadrillas* to exploit newcomers breaking into the industry (Cranford, 2005; Durand & Massey, 2003; Hagan, 1998; Milkman & Wong, 2000; Morales, 2016). They are effectively labor (sub)subcontractors that contract migrant labor to specialty firms (also known as subcontracting firms) to complete specialized job tasks (i.e. drywall, plumbing, paint, tile, carpentry, roofing, plaster) that specialty firms themselves have been contracted to complete by building firms. Labor barons, as labor subcontractors, contractually agree with the specialty firm to provide a number of workers that will undertake the completion of job projects at a piece work rate, or fixed hourly rate per worker.<sup>17</sup> They are also tasked with making certain that undocumented workers meet

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<sup>17</sup> Labor barons and other labor subcontractors generate income by retaining a portion of workers' wages through wage restructuring tactics such as paying workers by the day rate or retaining a percentage of worker's hourly rate. Paid by the day, is a common pay structure by labor barons in the construction

IRCA employment authorization standards by finding employees valid social security numbers and counterfeit authorization documents. As a result, the labor baron is an important entry point and filter for employment. This arrangement of labor is how workers are maintained at the lower rungs of the industry where at most they can become gatekeepers for other fellow coworkers by building their own *cuadrilla*.

Groups of drywallers, which I term collective *cuadrillas*, have adopted an alternative vision to the organization of their labor power that is breaking the rules of capitalist production and competition. Rather than adopt the labor baron model, these *cuadrillas* have organized around ideologies of mutual aid and cooperation that in practice translate to equal remuneration among workers, job rotation, and cooperative performance of the least desired tasks at the workplace (Avalos, 2019). In the previous three decades, unions campaigns have capitalized on *cuadrillas* sense of trust, reciprocity, cooperation, and patronage that workers had cultivated at the workplace. The collaborative relationships that interconnect *cuadrillas* as they move and build social ties with other workers has been an important source of solidarity among migrant workers that has eased the communication and recruitment process for union-building (Avalos, 2019). In other words, worker's social ties to each other as friends, family, or from the same town of origin has been leveraged by unions to pass along information, recruit, and

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industry that is being absorbed by several formal subcontracting firms. In this context, the day is an estimate in time that can range from dusk to dawn or an approximation of the 8-hour workday that is stretched to 9-to-10 hours. Meaning that the pay structure is not based on “what is completed,” rather “what should get completed” in an 8-hour workday, according to employers. An employer can say when you finish these duties you can go home. Workers are given duties that cannot be completed within an 8-hour workday unless workers exponentially increase bodily exertion for greater production, shortening or skip lunch breaks, do drink water as to not frequently using the restroom or urinate in water bottles to save a trip to the restroom, and/or work extra hours to complete the days/weeks task. It is how employers are able to structure unpaid labor into the workday to increase their profits and flexibility of workers labor power to the demands of capital production.

build solidarity for union-building. For example, the success of the 1992 Justice for Drywallers campaign was credited to the “bottom-up organizing” that was based on workers’ preexisting social ties to the small Mexican village of El Maguey that became the core organizing source of solidarity among workers (Milkman & Wong, 2000). Likewise, organizers of the Justice for Roofers campaign in Phoenix, Arizona, noted the significance of workers’ ties two towns in Guatemala as a key source of solidarity by claiming, “If a worker from a crew of five convinced themselves of the need to organize, it was easy for them to communicate this information and recruit others” (Roca-Servat, 2010, p. 354). While in Netherlands, migrant construction workers have used the *cuadrilla* as a technique to increase occupational mobility by moving between job projects as a work team to increase their bargaining power within the power imbalances of employment relations: “as it is more difficult to fire a group of workers than an individual worker” (Berntsen, 2016, p. 484).

These ideals are not new; they have circulated among Mexican workers since the late-1800s that have formed part of several trade unions, community forums, and social and political associations among the working-class in Mexico and the United States. Labor advocacy concerned with mutualism, socialism, anarchism, and cooperativism dates back to at least 1870 when the first workingman central was formed in Mexico, the Gran Círculo de Obreros (Gómez-Quiñones, 1994). In 1876 the Congreso Nacional de Obreros that affiliated with the anarchist international in 1880, had fifty thousand members (Gómez-Quiñones, 1994). The various labor associations and strikes that began in Mexico in the late-1800s is part of the organizational heritage that Mexican immigrants have brought with them to the United States across the border that have given

rise to some of the first mutual aid societies along the southwest (Gómez, 2016; Gómez-Quiñones, 1994; Zamora, 2000). *Sociedades mutualistas* (mutual aid societies) is part of a larger Mexican genealogy for survival and community against conditions of poverty, discrimination, inequality (Gómez, 2016). Mutual aid societies reinforced collectivist values and egalitarian principles around a Mexicanist identity in which people came together to meet the material and financial needs of its members through emergency loans, pooling of money for medical emergencies and death, and organize cultural events (Zamora, 2000). *Mutualistas* have historically given rise to trade unions and sparked local and regional political struggles across border regions (Gómez, 2016).

Although many of the drywall *cuadrillas* that engage collaboratively do not conceptualize themselves within the tradition of *sociedades mutualistas*, their actions for community regeneration, collectivity, and egalitarian principals at the worksite and beyond continue to circulate that genealogy of struggle. These workers not only explicitly denounce hierarchal labor structures and see the division of their labor and wages as patently unfair but outside the workplace drywallers continue to support fellow coworkers during medical emergencies, organize social and cultural events, and loan workers money to pay for the coyote in (re)crossing the border. For example, in March of 2018, drywallers from two small towns separated by a river in Oaxaca—Guegovela and Guegovelda—formed part of the core group to organize and attend a fundraiser held in San Marcos, California to raise money for the treatment of one of their community members fight against lymphoma cancer. In that same month, just a few days following the fundraiser, that same spirit of mutual aid was extended to me by a fellow coworker when I got injured at a residential home project in Rancho Santa Fe, California.

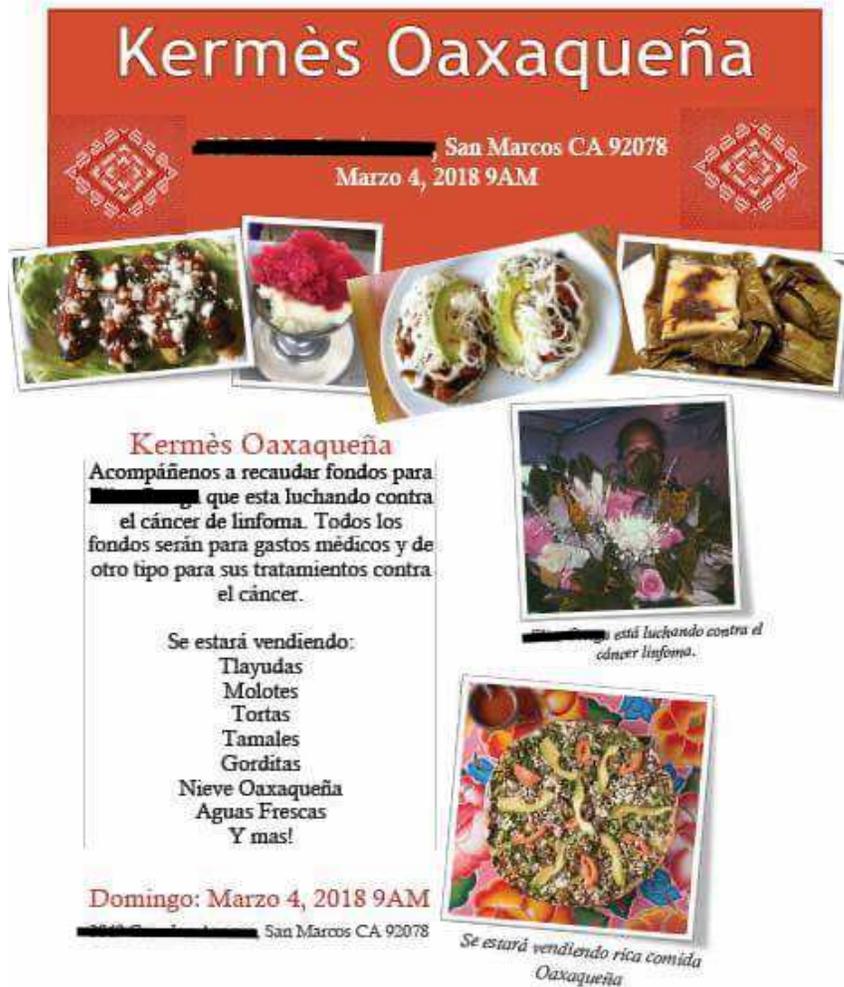


Figure 1: Fundraiser flyer distributed among drywallers to raise money for a community member's medical treatment of lymphoma cancer.

Benito had asked me to help him complete the hand-texturing and sanding operations. After a week of work, my forearm unexpectedly swelled considerably from what I reasoned was fatigue due to repeated use. I would continue to work and treat my forearm at home by icing, resting, and wrapping. The pain got so unbearable that I had to quit the job just a few days before completion. Benito, after receiving payment for completing the project, handed me over half the earnings despite having worked less days and produced

less due to injury. The following is a conversation in which I attempted to convince Benito that I do not deserve more than half of the earnings.

No me parece que me des tanto dinero. Tú hiciste la mayoría del trabajo y yo trabaje menos días.” Benito respondió, “No, no, ésta bien. Mira, yo saque buen dinero en la teipeada [sic] [una manualidad de drywall antes de la aplicación de la textura]. Y al cabo [sic] estabas trabajando herido.” En desacuerdo le contesté, “Pero este dinero no es por la teipeada [sic], es por la textura. Y pues, como estaba herido, hice menos trabajo.

I don’t think you should give me so much money. You did most of the job and I worked less days”. Benito replied, “No, no, that’s fine. Look, I got good money from the taping [drywall craft preformed before texture application]. [And also] you were working, and you were injured”. I disagreed and then replied, “but this money is not for the taping [sic], it’s for the texture. And since I was injured, I did less work.

Benito repeatedly refused to take a larger share of the earnings. It demonstrates workers active renegotiation of the job contract. One that is based on workplace relationships that go beyond a value system based on capital. Often termed as the institution of “commons,” to describe the processes and strategies for building alternatives to communities being prematurely dispatched by capitalist development and empire (Bollier & Helfrich, 2012), the commons is recognized as a strategy and way of being for many marginalized communities attempting to regenerate conditions of existence beyond dispossession from socioeconomic development models (Esteva, 1987). Thus, I offer that the *cuadrilla* in its cooperative modes is part of, adds, and intersects this history of

struggle that continues to circulate across nation-state borders that fosters and sustains processes of collective reproduction beyond capital.

***Trabajar preguntando: Convivial methodology adrift the cuadrilla***

The central premise of this project is to engage construction workers' existing methods of collective organizing for subsistence, survival, and community regeneration in the border region. With me, I carry theoretical and methodological tools that I had sharpened as a second generation drywaller engaged in political organizing as part of a *cuadrilla* and the political work that I was involved with during my graduate studies inside a women's prison in Arizona organized around a convivial research design. In the tradition of feminist scholars of color, my aim for the project was not to strive toward objectivity because I understand that to be immoral (Morales, 2019), but grapple with the many contradictions that I inhabit as an inside/outsider (Zinn, 1979; Zavella, 1993), colonizer/colonized (Villenas, 1996), outsider within (Collins, 1986), and researcher/ethnographer that engages these seemingly contradictory identities to *crear puentes* [create bridges] (emphasis the authors) that "link research to community concerns and social change" (Télez, 2005, p. 49).

Throughout my graduate studies, I have been part of a convivial research network based in San Jose, California, the Center for Convivial Research and Autonomy (CCRA); a grassroots collective of university-affiliated professors dedicated to a research strategy of open research spaces and collaborative projects across the greater San Francisco Bay area, and in Oaxaca, Mexico.<sup>18</sup> As the Arizona CCRA, we have organized workshops and

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<sup>18</sup> Convivial methods draws from practices of popular education in Latin America, the research strategies of the Universidad de la Tierra in Chiapas, the knowledge production at the Center for Intercultural Dialogue

seminars inside a women's prison in collaboration with incarcerated women, students, artist, poets, and teachers to discuss pedagogical strategies for conducting grassroots investigations and community-based research projects. Our methodology for directed



*Figure 2: Photograph of author (2018) after a day of smooth sanding at a custom residential home remodel in Rancho Bernardo, California. Photograph taken by coworker.*

action was based on the convivial research praxis of deliberate refusals and collective agreements for directed action: the refusal to objectify a community of struggle, the obligation to include the community at every step of the processes, the claiming of our own process of knowledge production that adopts a process that is modular (i.e. transparent, accessible, and accountable), and the agreement of organizing ourselves in

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(CIDOC) in Cuernavaca organized by Ivan Illich, the theoretical intervention of the Latina Feminist Testimonios Project, and the Center for Convivial Research and Autonomy (CCRA) in San Jose.

community around horizontal spaces of decision-making, communication, reflection, and action (Callahan, 2015).

Inside the prison, we forged relationships on mutual agreements that directed action as “forms of mutual accountability that seek to halt and redirect flows of apparent and invisible power from divesting from the collective subject.”<sup>19</sup> The agreements: *try on the process, propose not impose*, among others, that also included the Zapatista teachings such as *we walk together asking questions*, was what “organized us, our relationships, and our work. This process is messy. We failed often. But we also made something beautiful.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, it was through the messy, often failed, and the creation of something beautiful inside a women’s prison that we connected with other struggles around convivial methods in San Francisco such as community safety (Paradise, 2015) and Uni Tierra Califas in Oakland and San Jose and Uni Tierra Oaxaca, among others,<sup>21</sup> that has informed this research and its commitment to a convivial research design.

A convivial research design is a trans-disciplinary approach that does not restrict the use of other research designs but rather a way to convene space, the conditions and processes by which knowledge is produced, and to make transparent the already existing infrastructures of survival and thriving (Callahan, 2015; Cooper, 2020; Paradise, 2015). It draws from action research’s commitment to a collective process of knowledge production through action. Action research that includes participatory action research

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<sup>19</sup> For a deeper analysis and description of our convivial research methodology inside the prison in Arizona, see Cooper, A. (2020). Collective collateral. *Praxis Center Arcus Center for Social Justice Leadership*. accessed on June 10, 2020 at: [https://www.kzoo.edu/praxis/collective-collateral/#\\_ftnref3](https://www.kzoo.edu/praxis/collective-collateral/#_ftnref3)

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> see link at the CCRA website for description and lists of ongoing community projects at <http://cril.mitotodigital.org/projects>

(PAR), community-based action research, collaborative research that has traces to collaborative research methods in the global south (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Freire, 2000; Santos, 1992), which has been “anti-colonial in intent and pro-democracy in practice” (Openjuru et al., 2015, p. 483). Actively seeking to disrupt western European epistemological commitments through the naming of power relations and countering the power relation in favor for horizontal knowledge production (Openjuru et al., 2015). Although convivial methods draws from PAR’s emerging action-based design, it diverts from its traditional social justice principle to “giving back” (see Fine et al., 2003; Openjuru et al., 2015) by promoting strategies that situate struggle in the process of becoming to provoke new ways of understanding resistance, autonomy, and movement building against and beyond the state (Callahan, 2015). Specifically, convivial methods emphasize the construction of new convivial tools and the retooling of old ones to create new knowledges, relations, and the emergence of new obligations in service of community mobilization. Thus, a convivial research design draws heavily from Ivan Illich’s (1973) argument that convivial tools are central to a community’s efforts to sustain their own regeneration. Illich calls for a convivial reconstruction of the devices, objects, or ‘tools’ that have mediated social relations under capitalism.<sup>22</sup> Illich insists that tools have been “intrinsic to social relations. An individual relates himself in action to his society through the use of tools that he actively masters, or by which he is passively acted upon” (1973, p. 22). Therefore, Illich (1973) calls for an inversion in the deep structure of

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<sup>22</sup> Ivan Illich (1973) refers to tools broadly, “to include not only simple hardware such as drills, pots, syringes, brooms, building elements, or motors, and not just large machines like cars or power stations; I also include among tools productive institutions such as factories that produce tangible commodities like corn flakes or electric current, and productive systems for intangible commodities such as those which produce “education,” “health,” “knowledge,” or “decisions” (p. 22).

industrial tools that have isolated people from their desires and undermined their relationship to their environment and other people. Thus, in this context, research always serves a strategic purpose, which is a tool in itself, that is socially organized, constructed, and executed by agents in situated contexts for a community's ongoing efforts for regeneration (Callahan, 2015; Paradise, 2015).

### **The drift**

For this project, la *cuadrilla* serves as a methodological tool to collect, analyze data, and circulate emerging concepts as we drift collectively across borders, work, home, and job projects. In searching for a method that would capture the *cuadrilla*'s mobile and open-ended organization, I found inspiration in the Precarias a la Deriva (translated roughly as Precarious Women Adrift) technique of “drifting,” and from the Zapatistas’ teachings, *caminar preguntando*, or walk together asking questions: a drift of collective knowledge production through action. Thus, *trabajar preguntando*, or work together asking questions, draws from the Zapatistas’ and the Precarias as a theoretical and analytical intervention in the *cuadrilla*'s everyday mobilization strategies for community regeneration.

The drift is a method of data collection that was used by situationist researchers that “wander in the city allowing for encounters, conversations, interaction, and micro-events to be the guide of their urban itineraries. The result was a psychogeography based on hap-hazard coincidences” (Casas-Cortes & Cobarrubias, 2007, p. 114). While this version was viewed appropriate “to the bourgeois male subject with nothing pressing to do” (Precarias a la Deriva, 2006, p. 34), the Precarias ‘retooled’ the drift,

[By exchanging] the arbitrary wandering of the flaneur... for a situated drift

which would move through the daily spaces of each one of us, while maintaining the tactic's multisensorial and open character. Thus the drift is converted into a moving interview, crossed through by the collective perception of the environment. (Precarias a la Deriva, 2006, p. 34)

In June of 2002, in response to a general strike in Spain, the Precarias used the drift to organize women that did not fit the ideal-type male union worker that had organized the strike. The Precarias a la Deriva (2004) elaborate:

Faced with a mobilization which did not represent the kind of fragmented, informal, invisible work that we do – our jobs were neither taken into consideration by the unions that called the strike nor effected by the legislation that provoked it – a group of women decided to spend the day of the strike wandering the city together, transforming the classic picket line into a picket survey: talking to women about their work and their days. Are you striking? Why? Under what conditions do you work? What kind of tools do you have to confront situations that seem unjust to you? (p. 157)

This innovative research methodology has allowed the project to link the collective interventions of workers' everyday lives whose precarious trajectories overlap across fragmented spaces. As a method and theoretical framework to conceptualize space, the drift has facilitated a (re)mapping of the border from within the collective struggle of the *cuadrilla*. The result is a participatory cartography of workers' collective itineraries among members that reflect radically different positions within intersecting systems of power. To this end, like the Precarias drift in Spain, the project is “about searching for commonalities and at the same time fostering singularities while maintaining this

tension” (Casas-Cortes & Cobarrubias, 2007, p. 115).

The Zapatistas’ methodological approach, *caminar preguntando*, walk together asking questions, can be used to make an important intervention in the drift from the global south. The drift, *caminar preguntando*, for the Zapatistas is not just an organization for survival and regeneration but a process for an alternative— “a world where many worlds fit.” In addition, the Zapatistas’ also highlight the importance of the collective subject in the generation of knowledge for an alternative. A process in which “neither theory without practice nor practice without theory”<sup>23</sup> is acceptable, for “if it’s only thought, it doesn’t manage to be critical. On the other hand, those who are working on that practice should be reflecting on that practice.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, instead of being organized around more traditional research strategies between an anthropological “object” and research “subject,” that reinforce domination and an authoritative voice (hooks, 1989), it is about an alternative organization for knowledge production that thinks about moving forward through questions rather than answers; “because if one depends on a theorist to explain things to you and tell you what to do, then you end up, well, how should I say it... you end up anxious about whether or not you should vote.”<sup>25</sup> If no one has the answers, a western hierarchal structure of leadership in knowledge production must be

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<sup>23</sup> Sixth Commission of the EZLN. (2016). *Critical Thoughts in the Face of the Capitalist Hydra I*. Durham: PaperBoat Press. Also, see Gordon, A. (2004). *Keeping Good Time: Reflections on Knowledge, Power, and People*. New York: Routledge. According to Gordon, theory and social justice are intertwined, not just in informing one another but to determine (not overdetermine) the direction toward social justice.

<sup>24</sup> Sixth Commission of the EZLN. (2016). *Critical Thoughts in the Face of the Capitalist Hydra I*. Durham: PaperBoat Press.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

rethought.<sup>26</sup> The Zapatistas methodological intervention into the drift urges for a horizontal structure that prioritizes the collective subject where everyone can participate and there is a dual focus on process and destination rather than an overemphasis on a predetermined destination. It is about trusting a collective process in which we walk together, not run, because the journey is long and the timeline for struggle is not defined.<sup>27</sup> It is also a matter of methodology and bibliography—how we organize, who we are walking with, and how the we emerges/changes/change while walking.

### **Notes on *trabajar preguntando***

Research for this project took place between August of 2017 through April of 2018. Through ‘observant-participation,’ inverting the traditional passive “participant-observation” model (Vargas, 2008), I charted the day-to-day activities of workers as an ‘active participant’ in the performance of craft operations as a member of a drywall *cuadrilla*. Field notes in this context can have multiple functions beyond recording routine activities and self-reflexive notetaking (Vargas, 2008). Each day I would spend my evenings writing down notes on the workday’s events and reflect upon worker’s strategies to resist border enforcement actions and unstable employment. Notes not only served as a record of daily activities but its content was circulated across *cuadrillas* that served as a means to reassess and get a renewed sense of the changing enforcement patterns among multiple groups of drywallers across the industry. Throughout this project

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<sup>26</sup> See, Robinson, C. J. (2016). *The terms of order: Political science and the myth of leadership*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press; for a thorough analysis on the illusion of political order that has been prescribed by western ideas on leadership and organization.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. at supra note 9

I was part of several drywall *cuadrillas* that completed twenty-five different drywall projects across San Diego County cities and towns that included: Escondido, Vista, Lakeside, Pine Valley, Alpine, San Marcos, Carlsbad, Rancho Bernardo, Santee, Chula Vista, Valley Center, El Cajon, Encinitas, and Otay Ranch.<sup>28</sup> The border was charted via the movement of the *cuadrilla* through maps and testimonios around worker's experience with border encounters across its various iterations at internal immigration checkpoints, sobriety checkpoints, and border enforcement actions.

Twenty-two interviews supplement the ethnographic account. The interview process included drifting along with drywallers during and after the workday. Interviews were audio recorded, mainly taking place at worker's place of residence. Other interview sites included the laundromat, coffee shops, the drive to work, and during our lunch break. Two of the interview sessions were organized as a two-person panels for the simple fact that these participants were most comfortable with that organization. Fernando and Neto, inseparable brothers-in-law from Guerrero, Mexico, asked that I interview them collectively at Fernando's home. Fernando in his late 30s is married to Neto's sister. Neto came to the United States after his older sister married Fernando. Ignacio and Isaias, both in their late 30s from Tenancingo, Mexico, also decided that they wanted to be interviewed together. They came to my mother's home for the interview. Over a meal that I had prepared; we had the interview around the kitchen table. Ignacio and Isaias came to the U.S. in their teens. Ignacio first worked as a day laborer, often employed by the same homeowner as a groundskeeper. His duties were feeding animals,

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<sup>28</sup> The Otay Ranch jobsite being the nearest project to the San Diego-Tijuana border, located less than six miles from the international boundary.

weeding, and cleaning the large estate. Isaias, on the other hand worked in the avocado fields of Fallbrook.

Interview sessions comprised of several minutes of reminiscing about previous jobs, social events, family, and friends. Drywallers would ask me about my parents, the university, show me pictures of their children, and provide a general update of their lives. I knew these men intimately, and these interviews provided that space to reconnect. For example, Matias in his early 40s from Tequila, Jalisco had just returned from a job in North Carolina. With no clean clothes, he asked that I conduct the interview at a laundromat in Chula Vista. Before the interview, we met at the restaurant next door where we discussed his recent divorce, dating, work, his children, and the recent passing of a mutual coworker. These men not only knew my family intimately but each other. As I drifted through workers, I would be asked to send along messages to coworkers and provide updated phone numbers. Salvador from Oaxaca, Mexico in his early 50s asked that I send along his condolences to my cousin Roberto, a union drywaller, for his sons passing. He saw Roberto at a jobsite but never found the words to express his condolences. With the exception of two interviewees, I have known all the participants for at least 20 years. Marcos and Manuel were the only two participants that I had met at the jobsite through the course of this project. Marcos from Sinaloa was 40 years old and Manuel, the youngest of the interviewees at 27 years old was born in Tecate, Baja California Norte. I interviewed Manuel during his lunch break at a Del Mar job, while Marcos' interview took place at his home in City Heights. Initially the interview began between Marcos and I but ended as small get together that included six of his neighbors. The interview began at five in the evening but as the interview progressed Marcos would

invite neighbors to his home to join the discussion. Although I turned off the tape recorder at 7pm, the evening ended at midnight after a few trips to the corner liquor store, discussions over music, and karaoke.

Interviews began with demographic questions (i.e. age, years in the trade, and town of origin). Participant's age ranged from 27 to 67 years old. The majority of interviewees were under the age of forty-five. All interviewees migrated from rural communities in Oaxaca, Jalisco, Sinaloa, Tecate, Guerrero, and the State of Mexico. With the exception of three interviewees, all had children. Participants had migrated to the U.S. as teens and started a family in the United States. All participants were of mix status: work permit, visitor visas, undocumented, permanent residency, and less so U.S. citizenship status. Workers' status fluctuated over their tenure in the United States. Most with legal documentation status entered the country unauthorized but through marriage or parents had been able to gain legal documentation. Older participants had gained legal status through the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. Before entering the drywall trade, most worked as agricultural workers and day laborers. Experience in the trade ranged from 10 to 40 years. Except for two unionized drywallers, all participants worked between the formal and informal economy of the trade.

Notwithstanding the demographic information, interviews were highly unstructured. Interviews were conversational following workers stream of thought and interests. The interviews were not meant to extract data but reconnect and engage our collective experiences navigating the region. Interview narratives included discussions about collective struggle, entry into the trade, crossing the border, and strategies to survive precarious employment. While I understand that the location and structure of the

interview had an effect on the content, it did not affect discussions about collective struggle, labor, and the border because those are the bonds over struggle that continues to forge our relationships. Interviews are conceptualized as testimonios about our situated experiences of struggle that serve as a form of “collective bear witness” in which “narratives speak not for the individual but for the experience of a community” (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 20). Testimonios have been a critical methodological tool to create knowledge and theory among women engaging in discussion around situated experiences of struggle and for liberation movements in Latin America (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Thus, testimonios have a multidisciplinary legacy that is a “complex genre that has multiple antecedents and uses” (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 17). In this project, testimonios functioned as a research tool to draw attention to a collective act of reclaiming and sharing as a group of people that share a common struggle against the border.

Like years prior, reentry into the trade began with a series of phone calls to former coworkers. On my phone, archived are numbers of coworkers that I have met over my drywall career. Some that I met recently, others that I have known since I was a child. For example, one of the participants in the project baby-sat me at the age of three as my parents ran errands in Tijuana. I decided to reenter the trade through former coworkers rather than submit a job application directly to a firm because that is how seasoned drywallers navigate the trade. Seasoned drywallers often gain entry into a *cuadrilla* through former coworkers that can vouch for their experience to an employer. Entry through the *cuadrilla* often translates into greater initial negotiating power, rather than having to “prove your worth” through a trial period that requires taking a lower wage

rate. I had decided to enter the industry via a drywall *cuadrilla* that I have worked with previously. The preceding summer I had a bad experience going through a “trial period” having to prove myself to an employer and coworkers that I had never met. The employer upon my first day of work explicitly expressed, “I didn’t know if students can cut it in this line of work,” after finding out that I was college student only interested in employment over the summer. Besides, this research is not about “gaining entry” or the “ins and outs” of construction work, and less so about “unionizing” construction workers. The aim of this project is to engage the already existing collective struggles from below that only become transparent after several years of employment and organizing with fellow coworkers.

In my return to the trade, I had made several assumptions about my position as an ethnographer/drywaller and the interpretation coworkers would give to this work. I had received a grant to conduct the research project and reasoned that my free labor power in exchange for participation would be reasonable. However, former coworkers refused to accept unpaid labor in exchange for “participation” in a field that they thought I was already a member. Several of my former coworkers found it to be unfair to work unpaid and reasoned the university was behind my decision. For example, Ismael expressed that my return to construction for research was not worth my time. Thus, offered to take pictures of the job and send them to me as proof that I had conducted observations.

Ismael elaborates,

No entiendo, ¿para que tienes que trabajar? Mira, si quieres te mando unas fotos del trabajo, di que tú las tomaste, y así no tienes que trabajar de gratis. Lo que no

entiendo es por que tienes que trabajar cuando tú ya sabes todo de este trabajo. Ya tienes mucho tiempo haciendo esto.

I don't understand why you have to come back to work. Look, if you want, I can send you pictures of the job, just say you took them, and that way, you don't have to work for free. I just don't understand why you have to come back to work, when you already know everything about this job. You have been doing this for a long time.

Similarly, Joel refused to accept my offer of unpaid labor after a few days of employment.

Look Diego, an organization may have given you money to do this research, but what does that have to do with us. That is between you and them; not me and you. Let's be just. You can't be working with me without pay, or for gas money. You help me, I help you. The other thing is that I cannot offer you work every day. You do clean work, but I also need to be fair to my employees. I have to secure work for them first, then I can offer you work.

Joel and I have known each other since I was fifteen years old. He is the only former coworker that owns a small drywall company that employs three-to-five workers on any given day. Throughout this research project, I was employed by Joel for the next several months five-to-six days a week. On several occasions, especially in the last month of this research, I would break off to do side work with other coworkers and *cuadrillas*. I would also get paid throughout and work consistently to the end of the research period.

After the first few weeks of returning to the trade, I was grateful that no one had taken me up on my offer. Drywall is tough work. My hands, fingers, and feet would swell for the

first two weeks. On especially tough days, my back and feet would go numb from fatigue and would have to elevate my feet for at least an hour at the end of the workday to recover. It had become strikingly clear that among the tightknit group of former coworkers my suggestion for unpaid labor in exchange for “participation” did not sit well with members. As a group we have invested many years of collective organization around horizontal modes of production and equal remuneration that was based on mutual aid. Thus, throughout these discussions what was emerging was the renegotiated contract among members. Indeed, in earlier work (see Avalos, 2019) I demonstrated that when agreements for cooperation and equal remuneration were broken, coworkers would break off and find fellow workmates that would agree to collaborative terms.

In spite of my ‘professional privilege’ (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001), it had become clear that my position was complex, messy, and being negotiated through the already existing relationships that I had cultivated with these workers and others in San Diego County. For example, during this research project I was residing at my mother’s house in Escondido. I decided to give a portion of my wages to mother while I was living in her home for the duration of the project, which would ease the tough economic period that she was going through as a domestic worker. Within the first month of returning to the trade I was met with a disconcerting incident that involved my mother that further complicated my position as a drywaller/ethnographer. At one of the houses she cleans, the university aged children of her client decided to organize a large college party while their parents were away. One of the teens attended California State University, San Marcos, a school I attended formerly for my bachelor’s and master’s degree. That same student would transfer to Arizona State University the following year, the institution I

attend for my doctorate degree. Upon arriving to clean the home, one of the children came downstairs and instructed my mother to “not forget to clean the bathrooms.” These college teens had vomited all over the floor, sink, and toilet area of the restroom and left the entire house in an utter mess. My mother diligently cleaned the bathroom and other areas of the home removing all traces of these obviously white privileged teen’s party. The parents never found out that their children had put together a party in their absence. My mother never said a word. I was deeply distressed and irate by the situation. I did not know what to make of what transpired, especially the real possibility that the same teens that so exploitatively abused mother’s humility, could take one of my undergraduate courses at Arizona State University.

My mother was an integral part of the study that served as the project’s historian, especially in the years that predated the 1990s as I was too young to recollect several of the incidents referenced from older participants. On most days, after an interview, my mother and I would sit around the kitchen table to discuss some of the incidents discussed in the interview, and as a practice of Blackwell’s ‘retrofitted memory’ (2011) by using fragments of narratives and testimonios from participants we would collectively attempt to reclaim histories and piece together erasures of her political involvement in the regeneration of the *cuadrilla* that would provide a ‘new structure of remembrance’ for women’s involvement in the regeneration of drywallers labor power. For instance, in the early years after our family moved from Tijuana to San Diego, several drywallers, all men that consisted of my father’s nephews and coworkers, lived in our small apartment during their initial entry into the trade. Our home served as a waystation after crossing, living in *el cerro* [mountain/hills] (Chavez, 1992), or gaining entry into the trade. At the

time I was three years old with little recollection of this period. My mother would have to cook and clean after these drywallers, which typically consisted of two-to-three workers aside from me and my father in a two-bedroom apartment. Sergio during an interview, had mentioned that he would give money to my father for my mother's cooking. Upon returning home I would ask my mother,

¿Es cierto que Sergio te dio dinero porque les cocinabas? Mi madre contestó, “No, pura madre [sic] (no recibí nada). Bueno, sí le daban el dinero a tu padre, a mí nunca me lo dio.” Le pregunte, “¿Entonces de todos los que se quedaron en nuestra casa ninguno te dio dinero por hacerles de comer?” Mi madre me respondió, “No, ninguno. Pues tu primo Rigo sí. El era el único. Siempre fue muy acomedido. Me decía, ‘Tía déjeme ayudarle, aquí tiene tía por la comida. Pero los demás, nunca’. Yo pregunte, “¿Y tampoco mi primo Romario?” Mi madre explica, “Tampoco él. El único era Rigo. Y luego Romario comía mucho. Se comía hasta doce tortillas cada vez que comía.

Is it true that Sergio would give you money because you would cook for them?” My mother replied, “No, I wouldn't get shit. Well, if they give the money to your father, he never gave me anything. I asked, “So, from everyone that stayed at our home, none of them gave you money for cooking for them?” My mother replied, “No, none. Well, your cousin Rigo did. He was the only one. He was always very helpful. He would say, “Let me help you, aunt. Here you go, aunt. This is for the food. But the others, never”. I asked, “What about my cousin, Romario?” My mother elaborated, “He didn't either. The only one was Rigo. And then Romario

would eat a lot. He would eat at least twelve tortillas every time he sat to down to eat.

Through my mother's recollections I was able to recover many of the women's labor that has been integral to drywallers regeneration as workers. During interviews, there were several instances when drywallers wives were present and I was able to invite them into the discussion. Women often discussed the difficult periods experienced when men were deported or apprehended by border patrol. For example, when Moises was apprehended by border patrol and held in a detention facility for over two-years, his wife Roberta was forced to move in with family members and get another job to survive. The great recession of 2008 was especially a difficult period for several families. As men were laid off, women became primary breadwinners in household. Toño explained that during the recession his family had to reconfigure their finances and contributions to the household. Without employment, his wife Gloria had become the primary breadwinner and Toño assisted in her childcare business, as there were no employment opportunities in the construction industry. While many of these women's stories do not appear in the following sections, their labor, and the collective sense of work the *cuadrilla* conditions, connects my fellow coworkers with their families, spouses, children, homes, and the reproductive labor that makes their work possible. This is a project that I have discussed with my mother and plan as a future research commitment for this project. For the purpose of this dissertation project, my mother's testimonios have helped me situate myself within the research process and interrogate my subjectivity as a drywaller/ethnographer.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE BATTLE AGAINST AN ENSEMBLE OF BORDERS

*The border is designed to kill people. The system is not broken: it works*  
*-Arizona Desert-Aid-Worker, author of No Wall They Can Build*

Noon, it is lunchtime. I dust myself off and head to the garage where everyone has gathered to eat. As I approach the garage, I hear someone yell in the distance, “Hey Diego, come to eat! Leave that for later!” When I arrive to the garage, the chairs have been positioned in a circle and everyone is eating and engaged in conversation. As I unpack my lunch and sit down to eat, Marcos without hesitation asks, “I heard you are coming from Arizona. You lived there? I respond, “I do. I live in Phoenix, Arizona.” Marcos quickly follows, “So how many checkpoints do you pass on your way to Arizona?” Before answering, I briefly hesitate to recollect the number of checkpoints, “It depends which freeway you plan to take: the 8 [Interstate Highway] or the 10 [Interstate Highway]. If you take the eight you encounter a checkpoint leaving San Diego County, close to El Centro, that appears to be abandoned and out of operation. I have not seen the checkpoint in operation for the previous five years now. There is another checkpoint leaving Yuma, Arizona that has been in operation on a consistent basis for at least the previous six years. But if you take the ten, it will depend which freeway you take to leave San Diego. If you take the 15 [Interstate Highway] you got the checkpoint in Temecula; if you take the 5 [Interstate Highway] you got the one in San Clemente. Regardless, of which freeway you take, once you get on the ten, three hours before arriving to Phoenix, there is construction of what looks like a station of some sort but not sure if it is an immigration checkpoint. It remains under construction the times I have passed...”

Before I can finish, Marcos interjects, “There is never anyone at the Temecula one.” I nod in agreement and respond, “That checkpoint has not been in operation for a long time, a decade even. But even though agents do not set up the checkpoint, there is always a number of border patrol cars parked on the side of the freeway surveilling traffic leading to the checkpoint and several miles after. In that area there are also a network of temporary checkpoints on sideroads.” Marcos adds, “It is worse if you get caught in one of those [temporary checkpoints]. There is nowhere to go. You’re trapped.”

Having grown up in the trade, I recollect numerous maps being drawn on floors and walls with repurposed surplus material to pass on information about the locations and strategies to evade interior U.S. immigration checkpoints and border enforcement initiatives. These maps have since been covered by finished surfaces such as paint, tile, and carpet. Underneath, however, beyond the surface, lies a record of maps that have been archived under multiple layers of building material across San Diego County homes, churches, universities, dorms, stores, and offices that document workers’ struggle against the border. Like the archive of these maps, information about border crossings, escape routes, policing and surveillance, lie underneath and continues to exist to the extent that people on the move share it amongst each another. It illustrates a living archive that documents a collective agency of mobility that is constantly regenerated, circulated, and developed among workers in transit from jobsite-to-jobsite and across political boundaries.



*Figure 3: Map of San Diego County and its attendant interior immigration checkpoints drawn on a piece of drywall as worker explains the enforcement operations of each of the San Diego immigration checkpoints. Photograph taken by author.*

Knowledge about navigating border enforcement operations at, near, and around immigration checkpoints is circulated and shared among workers in transit. In reaction to migrant's mobility, immigration officers alter policing strategies such as the location of temporary checkpoints, time and frequency of checkpoint operations, and roving patrol strategies. Akin to international borders, immigration checkpoints are marked by tensions between crossings and enforcement in what Néstor Rodríguez has described as the “battle for the border.” In this context, Rodríguez frames the border as a reaction to a “worker-led transnational sociospatial reconfiguration” that challenges the “established stratified sociospatial global order” (1996, p. 23). Interior immigration checkpoints have

historically served as a strategy to regulate the circulation labor and workers' freedom of movement as they attempt to settle and work in regions where wages tend to be higher, and in search for more stable employment opportunities (Gurman, 2017; Hernández, 2010; Ngai, 2014). As a result, these checkpoints are an attempt to regain "control" of ungovernable borders that have been put into crisis by migrants that refuse to remain immobile in the context of global capitalism. In this context, internal immigration checkpoints form part of an interconnected institution of borders that attempt to regulate the cross-border movement of migrant's labor power from Mexico's southern border into the U.S. interior. The line of borders, armies, and roadblocks that stretch across Mexico and the United States are marked by a heterogeneity of economic zones and regions that as migrants travel from the interior of Mexico to the interior of the United States, workers gain a significant differential increase in their wages (Chávez, 2016; Dávila et al., 2009; Orraca-Romano, 2017; Villarreal, 2009).

Generally, workers in the southern U.S. border region earn lower wages than those in the U.S. interior (Dávila et al., 2009), while those that work in the border region of northern Mexico typically earn higher wages than those employed in the interior of Mexico (Orrenius et al., 2009). Variations and exceptions exist that are based on gender, education, industry, documentation status, and region (Chávez, 2016; Dávila, et al., 2009; Mora & Dávila, 2009; Orraca-Romano, 2017; Orrenius, et al., 2009; Villarreal, 2009); especially in San Diego, where average unemployment rates and per-capita income have maintained pace with national figures—an aberration from other U.S. border counties and cities (Fullerton et al., 2009; Mollick, 2009). But when examining the U.S. construction industry in southern California, drywall installers in Los Angeles and Riverside earn a

higher hourly wage than drywallers in San Diego, while drywall tapers<sup>29</sup> in Riverside earn a larger hourly wage than San Diego tapers.<sup>30</sup> Although these figures capture the general incremental increase of wages for drywallers as they migrate to cities north of San Diego County, it does not capture the significance of mobility to minimize social reproduction costs. The inability to move freely across cities, states, and the international border into Tijuana, affect worker's choices for economic stability and capacity to remain steadily employed. Immobility not only renders workers vulnerable to local labor markets but is especially devastating to construction workers whose job requires movement for employment and to adapt to changing local economic conditions. These movements are calculated and a direct result of an organized mobilization by migrants that have refused to remain constrained by borders that alter workers possibilities for economic stability and subsistence.

In the pages that follow, described is the collective efforts enacted by construction workers to remain mobile across a geography of differentiated border enforcement zones. The various noncitizen statuses of migrant workers (e.g. permanent resident, undocumented, DACA, worker visa, visitor visa, or business visa) indicate the different registers of inclusion for 'differential mobility' through state borders, roadblocks, and surveillance operations that directly impact workers access to various local building

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<sup>29</sup> The drywall trade is comprised of two crafts: (1) drywall installers (hangers) that install wallboard on the interior sections of structures and (2) drywall tapers that that tape and apply compound joint material over wallboard joints and fastener screw heads to create an even and smooth or textured surface over installed wallboard.

<sup>30</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019) Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Area Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates for San Diego-Carlsbad, CA access at: [https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes\\_41740.htm#47-0000](https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_41740.htm#47-0000); for Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA access at: [https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes\\_31080.htm](https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_31080.htm); for Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA access at: [https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes\\_40140.htm](https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_40140.htm)

sectors in San Diego, Los Angeles, Temecula, and out-of-state construction. As workers' labor power traverses, covers, crosses, hides, and escapes borders, its mobility is shaped by violent processes of containment, blocking, and filtering that reveal processes of differential inclusion. Not revealed in this manuscript, however, will be the direct strategies of evasion and escape; for this will be highly unethical and could possibly sabotage workers efforts for survival—a practice too common among scholars whose foremost commitment to research is discovery for academic consumption rather than engaging and mobilizing with participants. Rather, this manuscript is intended to be a map, a note, an alternative cartography, to be built upon by other respective border crosses, specifically construction workers part of this project, to learn about the state and its borders, to better hide, duck, and escape detection so they can get to work and return home safely.

### **The border *within***

San Diego County, California is circumscribed by two borders. The international San Diego-Tijuana border and a line of U.S. Border Patrol interior immigration checkpoints that are located seventy to twenty miles north of the border.<sup>31</sup> Mainly located in southwestern states, U.S. interior immigration checkpoints have created an extra layer of border enforcement that draw “second borders” (Davis, 2000), or “little borders” (Gurman, 2017) around southwestern cities and communities that are setting them apart from the rest of the United States. Border Patrol operates thirty-five permanent checkpoints, an unknown number of temporary checkpoints, and an ever-shifting number

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<sup>31</sup> In Southern California, interior immigration checkpoints have been in operation since the 1920s (Gonzales, 2016; Huddleston, 2016).

of roving patrols on major highways and secondary roads nationwide (Ewing, 2014; Maddux, 2017).<sup>32</sup> Federal law authorizes immigration officers to set up traffic checkpoints and conduct border enforcement operations “within a reasonable distance from any external boundary of the United States to board and search for aliens any vessel within the territorial waters of the United States and any railway car, aircraft, conveyance, or vehicle... for the purpose of patrolling the border to prevent the illegal entry of aliens into the United States.”<sup>33</sup> In 1953, the Department of Justice determined “reasonable distance,” to mean “within 100 air miles from any external boundary of the United States.”<sup>34</sup> Motorist traveling inland from the international boundary are confronted by a network of immigration checkpoints that detain vehicles to inquire its occupants “a response to a brief question or two and possibly the production of a document evidencing a right to be in the United States.”<sup>35</sup> At immigration checkpoints, federal agents, have a “wide discretion” to refer motorist selectively to a secondary inspection for further questioning as to occupant’s legal status in the United States.<sup>36</sup> “The issue of how far a federal officer may search in determining the citizenship of passengers remains unresolved;” but, if the officer determines there is probable cause,

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<sup>32</sup> Reports suggest 32 permanent and 39 temporary checkpoints were operational across the southwest in 2008. Checkpoints can also be found in northern New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington—among other states. According to some estimates, as many as 170 checkpoints exist across the country. see Border Security Myth accessed on April 10, 2020 at: <https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/civil-rights/230096-the-border-security-myth>; also see United States Government Accountability Office. (2009). *Checkpoints contribute to Border Patrol’s mission, but more consistent data collection and performance measurement could improve effectiveness.* <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-09-824>

<sup>33</sup> 8 U.S.C. § 1357 (a)(3)

<sup>34</sup> 8 CFR § 287.1 (a)(2)

<sup>35</sup> *United States v. Martinez-Fuerte*, 428 U.S. 543, 550. (1976).

<sup>36</sup> *United States v. Martinez-Fuerte*, 428 U.S. 563-564. (1976).

federal law permits individuals to be detained, searched, and, possibly, charged with a crime or enter immigration removal proceedings.<sup>37</sup>

San Diego County is home to four permanent and roughly eleven temporary checkpoints that are positioned on highways and side roads that mark the territorial boundaries of the county.<sup>38</sup> Permanent checkpoints have physical structures that are equipped with electronic sensors, remote-surveillance capabilities, vehicle lifts, and computers that are connected to national law enforcement databases (Ewing, 2014; Huddleston, 2016; Maddux, 2017; Osete, 2016). Some checkpoints also include detection canines and “nonintrusive” technology such as backscatter x-ray machines to detect hidden people and concealed drugs.<sup>39</sup> Whereas temporary checkpoints, also known as tactical checkpoints, lack a permanent physical structure and generally consist of a mobile trailer, traffic cones, and signs (Maddux, 2017; Osete, 2016). Immigration checkpoints are positioned on major highways or where roads join, so that anyone intending to exit the border region into the interior of the country must transit through them. These checkpoints “act as a backstop to operations at the border” that have played a vital role in border patrol’s “defense-in-depth, layered strategy,” to detect migrants and

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<sup>37</sup> United States v. Martinez-Fuerte, 428 U.S. 567. (1976). also see In search of the border: Searches conducted by federal customs and immigration officers. (1972). *New York University Journal of International Law and Politics*, 5(1), 93-116.

<sup>38</sup> United States Government Accountability Office. (2005). *Available data on interior checkpoints suggest differences in sector performance*. <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-05-435>

<sup>39</sup> United States Government Accountability Office. (2005). *Available data on interior checkpoints suggest differences in sector performance*. <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-05-435>; also see, United States Government Accountability Office. (2009). *Checkpoints contribute to Border Patrol’s mission, but more consistent data collection and performance measurement could improve effectiveness*. <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-09-824>; and see, United States Government Accountability Office. (2017). *Issues related to agent deployment strategy and immigration checkpoints*. <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-18-50>

smugglers that have crossed the border unauthorized and seek to reach large population centers such as Los Angeles, California and Phoenix, Arizona.<sup>40</sup> Evidence of immigration checkpoints' deterrent effect was reported in a 1995 U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) study which found that unauthorized migration routes adjust to checkpoint operations: when the checkpoint on Interstate 5 Highway was closed there was a fifty-percent drop in apprehensions at a nearby checkpoint on Interstate 15.<sup>41</sup> According to the study, the decline in apprehensions resulted from migrants choosing to travel through the closed checkpoint on Interstate 5 instead of the operational checkpoint on Interstate 15. Like the "prevention through deterrence" strategy at the international border,<sup>42</sup> the strategic intention of permanent checkpoints is to deter unauthorized migrants from going through permanent immigration checkpoints and "push them into rural areas that are more difficult to transit and where they are more easily identifiable among a lower volume of traffic."<sup>43</sup> The diverted flow of unauthorized migration into rural regions is then met by temporary checkpoints that are set up on side roads that open and close based on changing unauthorized migration patterns, and where the lower volume of traffic permits a higher rate of vehicle stops to question occupants (Ewing, 2014; Maddux,

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<sup>40</sup> U.S. Customs and Border Protection. (2020). *Border Patrol: 2020 Border Patrol strategy*. <https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2019-Sep/2020-USBP-Strategy.pdf>; also see, United States Government Accountability Office. (2017). *Issues related to agent deployment strategy and immigration checkpoints*. <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-18-50>

<sup>41</sup> United States Government Accountability Office. (2009). *Checkpoints contribute to Border Patrol's mission, but more consistent data collection and performance measurement could improve effectiveness*. <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-09-824>

<sup>42</sup> U.S. Border Patrol. (1994). *Border Patrol strategic plan 1994 and beyond: National strategy*. <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=721845>

<sup>43</sup> United States Government Accountability Office. (2005). *Available data on interior checkpoints suggest differences in sector performance*. <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-05-435>

2017; Osete, 2016). The presence of effective checkpoints, according to Border Patrol debriefings, is also said to contribute to an increase in smuggling costs, which could possibly serve as a deterrent.<sup>44</sup>

Undocumented individuals that reside between the U.S./Mexico Border and interior immigration checkpoints—a strip of territory known as the “100-mile border zone”—find their social worlds bounded by two borders where the travel north or south is met with a confrontation with federal immigration agents (Ewing, 2014; Huddleston, 2016; Maddux, 2017; Osete, 2016). Unable to cross immigration checkpoints without risking apprehension, undocumented workers’ labor power is largely constrained to the territorial boundaries of San Diego County. This stems migrant’s mobility across labor markets near or beyond immigration checkpoints, which severely impacts worker’s economic stability to remain consistently employed and earning potential. But as workers attempt different routes and repeated crossings through and between immigration checkpoints, migrants accumulate knowledge of checkpoint operations, information that is circulated, updated, and shared amongst coworkers along the way. This knowledge is vital for workers ability to remain mobile and meet the construction industry’s labor demands. In the following sections, outlined is how workers begin to unravel the border and its operations, and mount an understanding that is based on worker collective efforts for mobility.

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<sup>44</sup> United States Government Accountability Office. (2005). *Available data on interior checkpoints suggest differences in sector performance*. <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-05-435>; also see, United States Government Accountability Office. (2009). *Checkpoints contribute to Border Patrol’s mission, but more consistent data collection and performance measurement could improve effectiveness*. <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-09-824>



*Figure 4: Tactical Checkpoint at Sandia Creek Road, near Temecula, California. Image taken from Government Accountability Office report (2005), *Border Patrol: Available Data on Interior Checkpoints Suggest Differences in Sector Performance**



*Figure 5: U.S. Border Patrol vehicle parked on the side of the highway northbound on Interstate 15 Highway in route to Temecula. Photograph taken by author.*

## **A Day in Differential Mobility**

I arrive to the Escondido Del Lago Transit Center at 6:30am to meet Joel. Today, we will be driving to Pine Valley, California to complete a manufactured home project. Last Thursday, we patched, textured, and wet sand all the cracks and joints where the house was pieced together, and today we will be returning to paint those areas. Thirty minutes late, Joel enters the parking center in his black Toyota Tundra. He pulls the vehicle next to mine. I open my trunk and begin to load my tools into his vehicle. “Good morning Diego. You tired? You look tired” [laughter]. I respond, “Good morning Joel. I am. I was up late grading.” In addition to drywall work, I have been teaching an online course as part of my graduate studies. The additional work has kept awake late through the week. As I load my tools, I ask, “What should I bring today?” Joel replies, “You won’t need your hanging tools, we are painting today. But bring your taping tools just in case.” I finish loading my tools and climb into the truck.

On our way to Pine Valley, Joel explains that we will be stopping at Manuel’s house in Spring Valley to pick up an airless paint sprayer. I quickly inquire, “Is Manuel working today?” Joel replies, “Today he will be working in Encinitas. He should be there by now. That’s why I was late this morning, I was picking up material for him.” As Joel and I head southeast, Manuel is driving northwest to Encinitas: each traveling in opposing directions from our homes. It is common for work crews to break off into smaller groups throughout the week to cover the demands of multiple job projects. This is the essential function of the work crew: maintain consistent employment across several job projects, firms, and sectors for an associated group of workers that work in severely precarious conditions (see Avalos, 2019). However, amongst the work members, the

coordination of which workers head to what job projects is primarily dictated by the worker's citizenship status, and job's proximity to an immigration checkpoint or the San Diego-Tijuana border.

In Pine Valley, California, the U.S. Border Patrol operates a checkpoint at the Campo Border Patrol Station on Interstate 8 highway; a thoroughfare that runs parallel to the U.S.-Mexican border from the Pacific Ocean to Casa Grande, Arizona. The job project's proximity to an immigration checkpoint make the area a hot spot for roving patrol stops and surveillance activities. Manuel entered the U.S. on a visitor visa. The visitor visa provides Manuel legal authorization to temporarily enter the country for tourism and shopping but not for employment purposes nor permanent residence.<sup>45</sup> Thus, traveling to Pine Valley would severely heighten his risk for apprehension, and possible deportation. The reason why, Manuel will be heading to the job project in Encinitas; a much larger city with a denser population that would make it easier for him to "blend in" with the population. It is also a city comparably further removed from an immigration checkpoint. The nearest checkpoint is twenty-six miles north in San Clemente. Pine Valley, on the other hand, is a small, rural, and mostly white community in the outskirts of San Diego County. The sparse traffic and demographic make-up of the community, coupled with Border Patrol's legal authority to use "Mexican appearance" as a "relevant factor" for pretextual stops, make Pine Valley a severely hostile region for brown-skinned undocumented workers attempting to evade detection.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> The visitor visa is categorized as a nonimmigration visa for temporary stay in the United States for business (visa category B-1), tourism (visa category B-2), or a combination of both (B-1/B-2)

<sup>46</sup> *United States v. Brignoni-Ponce*, 422 U.S. at 882-887. (1975).

Once we arrived at Manuel's home, we loaded the airless sprayer and get back on road. On the way to the jobsite, thinking about the checkpoint ahead, I asked Joel, "When you had the tourist visa, were you ever worried that you would get caught working?" Joel affirmatively replied, "No, never. I didn't give a fuck. Well, back then it was different. Growing up, [in Tecate, Mexico] I knew a kid that would crawl through a hole on the border wall to play arcades in the United States. After he was done, he would crawl back through the hole into Mexico. One day, I asked him, why don't you cross back [into Mexico] through the entrance [port of entry]. He told me, I don't know, I am used to this way." Confused, I asked, "Wait, so this kid had papers [legal documentation for authorized entry] and would cross the border through a hole in the fence?" Joel replied, "No, he didn't have papers. Like, I said it was different back then."

I met Joel when I was fifteen years old in the mid-1990s. At the time, he was twenty-two years old and had just entered the United States to work as a drywaller. Like his nephew, Joel first entered the country on a visitor visa and since that time has gained U.S. citizenship status. Although it may be true, during the several years Joel was undocumented, he may not have been concerned about the threat of apprehension from immigration officers that does not mean he did not take precautions. In the years Joel and I worked together, other coworkers often drove Joel to work, especially to jobs in the vicinity of immigration checkpoints. On occasion, when Joel drove to work, he would change into a clean pair of clothes at the end of the workday, while coworkers would carry the work tools separately in their vehicle. Joel's strategy was invisibility, "hide in

plain sight,”<sup>47</sup> using his visitor visa as leverage. He did not want to draw attention to his vehicle nor physical appearance. If stopped by immigration agents or police, he sought to convincingly appear to the officer that he was using his visa for tourism purposes.

Joel and I completed the Pine Valley job by 1:00pm. Today was a short workday. Typically, our day begins at 7:30/8:00am and ends by 4:00/4:30pm. In route to Escondido we stop in Ramona to bid on a bathroom remodel. Ramona is a small rural town that marks roughly the midpoint between Pine Valley and Escondido. As we travel northbound on California State Route 67 towards Ramona, I spot a U.S. Border Patrol jeep pass us on the freeway as we travel through Santee. Located thirty miles north of the international San Diego-Tijuana, Santee is a small suburban city considered to be part of East County San Diego. This is not the first instance I have seen immigration officers on the open road. It had been common to see border patrol on freeways, side roads, unincorporated city streets, public parking lots, and traveling through private neighborhoods many miles from the actual border. As someone that has grown up in Escondido and has returned periodically for employment in the construction industry during the summer months of my graduate studies, I have observed clear changes in border enforcement actions on the twenty-four mile stretch of highway from Escondido to the Temecula Border Station checkpoint on Interstate 15. Across this stretch of highway, I have witnessed a general pattern in the locations border patrol position their vehicles on the side of freeway hiding behind brush and trees, the section of highway

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<sup>47</sup> According to several immigration scholars, undocumented San Diego County residents go to great lengths to “hide in plain sight” in public spaces. Undocumented people commonly alter their appearance, speaking English in public, or driving newer vehicles to avoid suspicion from police and immigration officials (García, 2014; García & Keyes, 2012).

where federal agents conduct vehicle pullovers, and the time of day. There has been a high concentration of border enforcement activity that takes place between 10:00am and 3:00pm—after the morning rush hour and before evening traffic. Thus, those undocumented people that would be especially susceptible to apprehension during this period would be individuals whose work requires travel through this stretch of freeway to different locations such as domestic workers, gardeners, and construction workers.<sup>48</sup>

Construction is a mobile enterprise; an apparatus and developmental project that consists of transborder movements of capital, commodities, and labor for capitalist production. It is an industry that heavily relies on a transnational migrant male labor force nationwide. Specifically, the drywall trade employs the largest percentage of documented and undocumented Latinx of any occupation nationwide (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020; Passel & Cohn, 2015). In 2019, sixty-seven percent of the drywall workforce was comprised of Latinx workers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Of those jobholders in 2012, thirty-four percent were estimated to be undocumented (Passel & Cohn, 2015). These nationwide percentages are an underestimate to the concentration of Latinx construction workers employed in San Diego, California. Latinx workers in the southwest region make up 2.5 million, which accounts for eighty-six percent of the total 2.9 million Latinx construction labor force in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2007). In addition to its large migrant workforce, the Construction Industry consists of an extensive ensemble of investors, engineers, architects, building supply stores such as Home Depot, Ace Hardware, and Lowe's, tool manufacturing corporations, labor centers and informal

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<sup>48</sup> The city of Escondido is situated twenty-five miles south of the Temecula Border Patrol checkpoint and forty-five miles north of the San Diego-Tijuana border.

day labor corner sites, multinational corporations, real estate agencies, specialty firms, building firms, trade schools, among many other institutions that are involved in building, demolition, and renovating the infrastructure of society. Construction work demands considerable movement across its many projects and production needs that are spatially located across major roads, highways, state lines, labor markets, and international boundaries that are regulated by an apparatus of border initiatives and agencies. Thus, Construction and Borders are a kind of technology that play a major part in capitalist development projects to control and dominate land, raw material, and peoples labor power across differentiated spaces.

In this context, interior immigration checkpoints and roving patrol operations have considerably changed the geography for construction workers' movement and labor power. Thus, unable to cross immigration checkpoints without risking apprehension, undocumented workers' labor power is largely contained to the territorial boundaries of San Diego County. But, as stated previously by Joel, these workers do not "give a fuck" about the political authority of boundaries and its surveyors; and as noted by other scholars, while migrants see their migration as extralegal, it is not viewed as criminal (Rodríguez, 1996). Therefore, workers find ways to work at, near, or across these boundaries to remain gainfully employed while minimizing the risks of apprehension. The struggle to maintain undocumented workers mobile is a collaborative and organized effort to escape the violent grasps of both the state and capital subordination. For this project, mobility will be used as a category of analysis to highlight workers' strategies and the accumulated knowledge gathered from navigating an institution of borders. As construction workers travel through roads and highways, they become familiar with the

frequent sightings of immigration officers across the county and their patterns of operation. This information is noted and circulated back to coworkers, which becomes useful for navigating the region to decide which workers travel to which jobsites. Joel's affirmation that "back then it was different" (comparably to today), is indicative of workers methodologies of experimentation and knowledge production. The statement acknowledges immigration officers changing enforcement strategies that react to migration patterns and mobilization efforts to escape borders. As immigration agents gather information about workers' strategies, mobilities change and tactics to navigate border enforcement operations. It is through this process of information gathering, sharing, and accumulated knowledge that workers begin to mount a strategy for collective mobility.



*Figure 6: Campo Border Patrol Station located northbound on Interstate 8 Highway in Pine Valley, California. Photograph taken by author*

### **Differential (im)mobility**

Differential mobility is a concept that has been used to examine the differentiated cross-border experiences of mix status families (Chan & Ngan, 2018), and differential

treatment of travelers as they move through emerging forms of state security and “border-like inspections” that spread from the border to the interior of society (Pallitto & Heyman, 2008). Thus, thinking of differential mobility as a process of differential inclusion, I am attempting to describe the different modalities of inclusion for migrants and other noncitizens that proceed differently across state security but remain vulnerable to deportation and immigration restrictions that have created a tiered and uneven movement between and across internal and international borders. In this sense, borders differentiate, sort, and rank between those excluded and those to be included even if it is as ‘illegal’ migrants (De Genova, 2013, p. 1188). This enables some people to move through these boundaries more freely while others are slowed, impeded, and blocked, which has a direct impact on people’s access to resources, economic stability, and ability to work in various labor markets for subsistence and social reproduction. This type of sorting, I argue, is an attempt to regulate the speed and magnitude of labor power into local and global economies that is critical for meeting the demands of capitalism’s different geographic scales.

The use of the differential mobility as a category of analysis to shift our attention to the primacy of migrants’ mobility. A migration perspective in line with an autonomy migration thesis that attempts to see migration not as a response to economic and political control, but an organized political mobilization by families, workers, and communities that is independent of state regulation and authorization to resist and survive a capitalist global economy (Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013; Rodríguez, 1996; Yildiz, 2016). Migration within this framework “reads capitalism through migration and to understand sovereignty through mobility, rather than the other way round” (Papadopoulos &

Tsianos, 2013, p. 184). This does not mean that migration operates independently of control, for it is often subjected to a violent state (Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013), rather migration as autonomous is understood as an organized political strategy with its own logics and strategies for escape and survival that provide migrants with better control over their income and labor to support their family, buy land, or build a home for future retirement.

Nation-states need immigration controls that respond to economic swings, with greater or lesser restrictions related to the demand for labor. The greater the control is over the movement of labor the better positioned the nation-state is to address its demand for workers during periods of economic growth. But as thousands of Central Americans and Mexicans migrate each year, refusing to be exploited by an inequitable global system, the location and meaning of the actual border is being manipulated by nation-states. Borders are become mobile that are shifting the sites of migration control through a series of 'quasi borders' and 'smart borders' that are being internally circulated and enforced far from the actual border (Sharma, 2006; Shirk, 2003; Weber, 2006). This does not mean that the designated border is declining in significance but being internally dispersed due to the ungovernability of international borders ability to cease unauthorized migration (Weber, 2006). While the function of borders in the past several decades has been how to suppress and immobilize migrants, this situation has been rendered obsolete because people continue to refuse to be constrained by nation-state boundaries. Borders are dominated by a new situation that is not intended to block migration but concerned with "how to codify mobility, how to make it productive and sustainable, and how to combine it with a new political order and the decline of sovereignty" (Papadopoulos &

Tsianos, 2013, p. 179). Instead of stopping mobility, borders have become part of an organized economic global landscape to regulate people's movement, inside and outside nation-states.

Borders perform a “world-configuring function,” that are creating differentiated laboring subjects that maintain crucial divisions between workers as a means of control (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013). Mezzadra and Neilson introduce the concept of the multiplication of labor to understand the role of the border in shaping labor markets and its process of filtering and differentiation in and across varied spaces. The concept is an attempt to rethink the frame of the international division of labor and “relation of labor to power... in relation to the striation and heterogeneity of space in the current transition of global capital.”<sup>49</sup> The border, especially with the emergence of an internal border, means that division works in a fundamentally different way that is not designed to impede the flow of migrants but rather construct differentiated laboring subjects. According to Mezzadra and Neilson (2008),

[The border] tends itself to function through a continuous multiplication of control devices that correspond to the multiplication of labor regimes and the subjectivities implied by them *within* each single space constructed as separate within models of the international division of labor. Corollary to this is the presence of particular kinds of labor regimes across different global and local spaces. This leads to a situation where the division of labor must be considered

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<sup>49</sup> Mezzadra, S., & Nielson, B. (2008, March). *Border as method, or, the multiplication of labor*. Transversal. <https://translate.cipcp.net/transversal/0608/mezzadraneilson/en.html>

within a multiplicity of overlapping sites that are themselves internally heterogeneous.<sup>50</sup>

The multiplication of labor, is a concept that facilitates an understanding that borders are not entirely based on keeping differentiated people apart but instead on organizing multiple legal regimes, differentiated categories of foreignness, and laboring subjects, across global and local geographies that “serve not simply as devices of exclusion but as technologies of differential inclusion.”<sup>51</sup> It is precisely this relation of borders as “technologies of differential inclusion” in thinking of about the regulation of labor power as it traverses walls, checkpoints, barricades, enclosures, legal frameworks, and surveillance systems that I think through the concept of “differential mobility” to try to make sense of the role that borders simultaneously “play in the production of the deeply heterogeneous space and time of global capitalism,”<sup>52</sup> while enacting variations in human mobility that create unequal opportunities of movement (Chan & Ngan, 2018; Heyman, 2012; Pallitto & Heyman, 2008).

### **Territorial trap: Worksite to public highway**

During 1990s, there was a refocus on immigration enforcement near the border and at checkpoints (Aldana, 2008; Durand & Massey, 2003). In San Diego County, construction workers witnessed a decrease in worksite raids and the transformation of roads and highways into prime spaces of immigration enforcement. With the passage of the 1986 Immigration Reform Control Act (IRCA), there was a shift in border

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

enforcement strategies from worksite raids across construction sites to so-called “desktop audits” that seek employer’s compliance to immigration laws by verifying employee’s eligibility to work in the United States. In addition, IRCA had authorized a legalization program for migrant farmers, the Special Agricultural Worker (SAW), and undocumented migrants who could prove five years of continuous residence in the United States (Durand & Massey, 2003; Meissner et al., 2013). Many undocumented drywallers legalized their citizenship status through both legalization programs. Those drywallers who were unable to meet the five-year continuous residence requirement, purchased letters and verification documents from farmers and agricultural employers to gain legalization. There were also several cases in which construction firm owners that also operated a farm, would provide agricultural work verification documents to employees so they can gain legalization through the Special Agricultural Worker (SAW) program.

The legalization of many formerly undocumented workers changed the landscape for immigration enforcement in San Diego County. Pre-IRCA, it was common for border patrol to chase migrants across construction sites, agricultural fields, and migrant encampments in the hill and mountain regions of North County San Diego. Before entering the drywall trade, Rogelio was employed in the agricultural fields of Carlsbad and described this period of immigration enforcement activity as,

Estaba bien dura la migra. Nos correteaban un chingo en los campos de tomate. A medio día llegaban diez, once, patrullas y nos rodeaban en los campos, y a correr. Pero a mí nunca me agarraron, estaba chamaco y corría como venado.

Border Patrol was tough out there. They would chase us a hell of a lot, at the tomato fields. Ten, eleven [border] patrol cars would come at noon, surround the

fields, and [you had to] run. But they never caught me, I was young, I used to run like a deer.

Rogelio also claims that immigration officers would routinely target workers' living quarters and encampments in the mountainous regions of North County San Diego. Not counting other encampments in the region, he estimates that over 300 migrants lived in the unincorporated hills of Carlsbad. Rogelio elaborates:

Cuando llegue la primera vez [a Estados Unidos] me acuerdo de que tenía un miedo. Porque en primer lugar no sabía ni por donde estaba, llegue como a otro planeta. Segundo, no conocía a nadie... Ya después nos ponían unas corretisas [sic] [la migra en el monte. El lugar donde vivíamos]. En el cerro, [la migra] llegaban en la madrugada a buscarte como a las 4:00 de la mañana... Cada vez que llegaba la migra agarraban de 100 a 50 [emigrantes]... lo que hacíamos era atar muchas latas con un pinche hilo y los colgábamos alrededor de donde nos dormíamos; eso era nuestra alarma. Nos acostábamos a dormir en unas casitas [improvisadas] entre un montón de arbusto. Cuando escuchábamos las pinches latas sonar, hijo de la chingada, a correr... Había mucha gente que te enseñaba como sobrevivir.

I remember being scared the first time I arrived to [the United States]. First of all, I did not know where I was, it seemed as if I was in another planet. Second, I didn't know anyone... Later on, they [Border Patrol] would chase us a lot [up in the mountains where we lived]. [Border Patrol] would arrive early at the crack of dawn, at 4:00 in the morning... Every time that [Border Patrol] would arrive [to the mountains] they would apprehend 100 to 50 [immigrants]... What we would

do is tie a lot of cans with a shitty piece of thread and hang them around the place where we slept; that was our alarm. We would go to sleep in makeshift houses amongst the bushes. When we would hear the cans make fucking noise, son of a bitch, [you had to run] ... There were a lot of people that would teach you how to survive.

Rogelio credits the help of other migrants for being able to survive the mountainous regions without ever being apprehended. But, according to Rogelio, after 1986 construction site raids essentially ceased. In the construction industry, several drywaller's last recollection of a jobsite raid in San Diego pre-dated IRCA. He claims that the final time he heard about a jobsite raid was in 1986 when the border patrol entered an apartment construction site asking workers for their citizenship status. His brother escaped apprehension by jumping through a window, while another coworker was apprehended as he was working in one of the units. Aside from this incident, Rogelio has not heard of another incident,

De allí para adelante [después de IRCA] se empezó a bajar un chingo la migración... porque ya no sabían quien tenía papeles [documentación] y quien no tenía. Por eso, como que su trabajo de ellos [la migra] se calmo.”

From then on [after IRCA], border enforcement started to die down a hell of a lot... because they didn't know who had papers [documentation] and who didn't.

Because of that, it seemed like their job [border patrol] started to slow down.

Thus, behind appeared to be the days immigration officers chased migrant workers on foot across construction sites. This is not to say that raids completely ceased; rather during this period of immigration enforcement, border patrol agents were forced to

change their tactics because many drywallers had found ways to legalize their status despite being unqualified according to standards outlined in IRCA.

Ten years later, the passage of Illegal Immigration Reform and Responsibility Act (IIRRA) sought to “improve on” IRCA’s worker eligibility program by launching a three-pilot program; one of programs, the Basic Pilot, would later come to be known as E-Verify (Harper, 2012).<sup>53</sup> In addition, IIRRA increased collaboration between federal and subnational entities that not only sought the compliance of employers but police officers, renters, jails, cities, and towns, to name a few, in immigration policing (Chacón, 2010; Motomura, 1999). In San Diego County, aside from checkpoints located at the boundaries of the county, within the territorial interior the collaboration between federal and local entities on initiatives such as, driving-under the-influence (DUI) checkpoints, driver’s license checkpoints, city ordinances targeting immigrant neighborhoods, and other forms of cooperation among federal immigration agencies and subnational actors expanded the “geographies of deportation” (Valdivia, 2019). Many police officers had immediate access to Department of Homeland Security immigration databases or had ICE on standby to run information and background checks on individuals who cannot produce state-issued drivers’ licenses and other forms of U.S. government identification (Buiza & Yusufi, 2012; Kalhan, 2013; Valdivia, 2019). State and local law enforcement officials were enabled to enter agreements with ICE to transfer unauthorized migrants apprehended through traffic enforcement to immigration authorities. Due to the increase in data sharing and collaboration between local police departments and immigration

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<sup>53</sup> E-Verify is an internet-based system run by the Department of Homeland Security that compares information from employment forms with government records to determine the eligibility of employees to work in the United States (Harper, 2012).

officials, initial contact with police has been associated as the first stage of deportation proceedings (Buiza & Yusufi, 2012; Valdivia, 2019; Varsanyi et al., 2012). Within the county, this virtually created all highways and public roads as sites to trap and apprehend undocumented migrants. At the exterior boundaries, lay a network of immigration checkpoints that strategically functioned as extension of the international San Diego-Tijuana border.

### **Convivial planning and escaping the border *within***

The last three decades has witnessed a transformation in border and interior policing that has resulted in the use of traffic patrols that involve both federal and local entities as a strategy to detect undocumented migrants. The late-1990s was the year I entered the trade and in the roughly twenty years employed as a drywaller, it is tough to recollect an incident when workers were apprehended at the jobsite. Apprehensions commonly took place as drywallers traveled on highways, side roads, border patrol roving patrol operations, waiting for public transit, at convenience stores, and in an attempt to cross interior immigration checkpoints. In the years following the attacks on September 2001, there was a discernable proliferation in border enforcement activity at and near immigration checkpoint operations. In 2004, the U.S. Border Patrol unveiled the National Border Patrol Strategy that “builds upon many elements of Operations Gatekeeper and Hold the Line.”<sup>54</sup> The new goal of the U.S. Border Patrol was “operational control” over the border. One of the core components outlined in the strategy was “deploying defense-in-depth that makes full use of interior checkpoints and

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<sup>54</sup> U.S. Customs and Border Protection. (2004). *National border patrol strategy*. <http://cw.routledge.com/textbooks/9780415996945/gov-docs/2004.pdf>

enforcement operations calculated to deny successful migration.”<sup>55</sup> This intensification of border enforcement activities severely impeded on workers ability to meet the demands of an industry that was exceedingly mobile. Yet, during this period of intensified traffic enforcement, little was actually known about checkpoint operations, much less about temporary checkpoints. Undocumented drywallers typically stayed clear of jobs near the U.S./Mexico border, but often looked for ways to cross immigration checkpoints.

These were the years before smart phones, google maps, and travel apps. Construction workers would locate jobsites across San Diego County with a Thomas Guide. The paperback spiral atlas was a staple for every construction worker. Employers would provide an address, and it was up to employees to find the jobsite via their Thomas Guide. The map provided a detailed account of streets, side roads, and highways across the San Diego Metropolitan area. In an attempt to perform jobs on the other side of immigration checkpoints, drywallers began to strategize an alternative geography of escape; highlighted side streets and roads clear from interstate highway (permanent) checkpoint operations. But as aforementioned, workers did not know that temporary checkpoints existed. Many workers were apprehended has they attempted multiple crossings and different routes across temporary checkpoints that operated sporadically, days, even weeks, in between operations. They were also strategically positioned around bends and valleys that made them difficult to detect until travelers drove right up to them.

Adan, Benito, and Ignacio, separately recollect an incident when they were stopped at a temporary checkpoint near the Pala Indian Reservation on California State

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid. also see, supra note 25, GAO government reports on immigration checkpoints has defined “successful migration:” as migrants reaching large population centers, such as Los Angeles, California and Phoenix, Arizona.

Route 76. On their way to work, Ignacio and Adan followed Benito and another coworker in separate vehicles. They took the 76 State Route to avoid the Temecula Border Station checkpoint on Interstate 15 Highway. Benito recollects the incident:

Nos fuimos por el 15 [carretera interestatal], y nos salimos en el 76 [ruta estatal de California]. Adelante esa calle daba vuelta. Era ahí, a media vuelta que estaba un retén. Nosotros no sabíamos que había una revision [retén] ahí. Cuando nos pararon, yo estaba como a dos, tres, carros adelante de Ignacio. Me acuerdo que estuvo bien curioso [la situación]. Nos paró la migra, “Hey, what’s up.” Conteste, “Hey.” Le dio vuelta al carrito, se asomó adentro del carro, y dice, “Okay, go.” No me pregunto nada. Nos dejó ir. Pero como Ignacio iba a dos, tres, carros atrás de nosotros. Cuando vio el retén, él le dio vuelta al carro en “u” y se regresó. Es cuando se les pego la migra, se llevaron a Adán, y se peló [sic] Ignacio para el cerro.

We took the 15 [Interstate Highway] and exited on the 76 [California State Route]. Ahead, on that street, there was a large turn. The checkpoint was located in the middle of that turn. We did not know there was a checkpoint there. I remember the situation being strange. The Border Patrol agent stopped us [and said], “Hey, what’s up?”. I replied “Hey”. The agent circled the car, checked inside the car, and then said, “Okay, go”. He didn’t ask me anything, he let us go. But Ignacio was about two or three cars behinds us. When he saw the checkpoint, he did a U-Turn and went back. That’s when Border Patrol following him, they apprehended Adan, and Ignacio ran off to the mountains.

At the checkpoint, two-to-three car lengths down, Adan recalls the incident.

Era por la mañana, íbamos a trabajar. Nos salimos en el 76 [ruta estatal de California] porque en el 15 [carretera interestatal] la migra pone una revision [retén]. Pero ahí por el 76 también estaba un retén. Cuando Ignacio vio el retén, le dio vuelta al carro en “u.” Se quiso pelar [sic] en el carro, pero se nos pegaron las patrullas. Nos salimos corriendo, pero yo me tropecé y me pegué. Cuando me fui levantando, ya los tenía [la migra] encima. Ignacio se escapó.

It was early in the morning; we were on our way to work. We exited on the 76 [California State Route] because on the 15 [Interstate Highway] Border Patrol sets up a checkpoint. But there was a check point on the 76. When Ignacio saw the checkpoint, he did a “U-Turn”. He tried to speed off, but the border patrol tailed us. We got off the car running, but tripped. When I got up, I had [Border Patrol] on top of me. Ignacio got away.

Adan was apprehended and deported to Mexico, only to return six months later. Ignacio on the other hand, was able to escape on foot, being pursued by border patrol agents, canines, and the sound of a helicopter overhead. Terrified at the prospect of apprehension, Ignacio ran the entire sixteen-mile trek home to Escondido through tough mountainous terrain and valleys. This period was especially marked by high immigration enforcement activity on Interstate 15 and Interstate 5, at and near the Temecula and San Clemente checkpoints respectively. Several drywallers were apprehended by roving patrol stops several miles from the Temecula checkpoint station, or in route to work at a temporary checkpoint.

It was not until workers found that it was too difficult to predict the patterns of operation of temporary checkpoints, along with the apprehension of several workers, that

many workers began to actively refuse to go to jobsites near or across these checkpoints. This put construction firms in a difficult position, given that drywall companies heavily relied on an undocumented workforce. There were several instances that workers would rather take days off than work near what had been identified as a high-risk region for apprehension. The collective refusal of many workers to travel beyond or near these checkpoints forced several drywall firms to reorganize their workforce and production. Workers did not organize their refusal as a group, but as workers saw coworkers being apprehended at and near internal checkpoints word spread amongst the workforce leading to greater numbers of workers individually deciding not work beyond San Diego County. This did not mean that workers never crossed immigration checkpoints for employment, rather did so strategically taking into consideration employment opportunities within San Diego County. This placed drywall firms in a difficult position. As subcontractors, drywall firms are easily replaceable. The unreliability of even a few employees beyond San Diego could jeopardize drywall companies' ability to meet production demands outside San Diego County. Many firms began to rely on employees with legal documentation status to complete jobs beyond, or in the vicinity of immigration checkpoint operations. Among the few drywallers that possessed legal documentation, my father and I were often tasked with completing job projects on the other side of these enforcement boundaries. For example, I remember when we were pulled from a job project in North County San Diego to complete a large construction project in San Clemente. It was a project large enough for four-to-five workers, but there was no one else available nor willing to cross the San Clemente Station checkpoint. The supervisor at the jobsite each day in frustration would ask, "Just you guys today?" My father each day

would try to diffuse the tension, “Yeah, just us. But don’t worry we are fast. We don’t need anyone else.” Eventually the construction firm had to hire workers from Los Angeles to help complete the job project on schedule.

The inability to meet production demands would frustrate employers. In desperation, employers sometimes would propose to personally drive ahead to make sure the checkpoint was not in operation to convince undocumented employees to take jobs across these checkpoints. But even then, most workers refused. These checkpoints are not merely blockades, but open and close without warning and are part of a border enforcement infrastructure that includes surveillance and roving patrol operations that make the trek risky even with a guide ahead. This does not mean that workers never crossed checkpoints. Workers often coordinated crossings, assessed risks, with other coworkers for side job opportunities and for family trips to Los Angeles. Other times, workers risked the cross without any coordination. As Benito says, “*Aunque a veces nos aventamos así* [although sometimes we would just go for it].” But when work in San Diego slowed, many companies provided their employees with the option to work outside the region. Rather than remain unemployed, many workers would have to travel outside San Diego to complete job projects. Ignacio elaborates,

La compañía tiene dos oficinas [fuera de San Diego], en Los Ángeles y otra en Irvine. Yo no mas hago trabajos en San Diego. Aunque a veces [sic] nos mandan para allá [fuera de San Diego]. Cuando esta muy lento el trabajo aquí, nos mandan para allá. Te pagan 43 dólares extra por día, lo que es para el gas, o te pagan el hotel para quedarte allá. Te pagan el mismo sueldo, la diferencia es que te dan

para la gasolina o el hotel. Yo me iba toda la semana y regresaba el sábado o el viernes en la tarde.

The company has two offices [outside of San Diego], one in Los Angeles and the other in Irvine. I only do jobs in San Diego. Even though, sometimes they send us over there [outside San Diego]. When work is slow here, they send us over there.

They pay you an extra \$43 dollars per day for gas [money] or pay for hotel [expenses] to stay over there. They would pay you the same wage, the difference is that they would pay for your gas or hotel expenses. I would stay there the whole week and return on Saturday or Friday in the afternoon.

This was Ignacio's only second job project outside San Diego in the last three years. For undocumented drywallers, travel outside San Diego for employment was not routinely common, rather an exception that accounted for two-to-four job projects over the period of several years. Frequent crossings were risky, and workers were rarely compensated with higher wages. Narratives about checkpoint crossing for employment were actually more common for side jobs; under-the-table jobs that accounted for significantly higher wages because workers were employed directly by the general contractor or homeowner, cutting out specialty drywall firms. Ultimately, firms depend on an unfettered access to noncitizen migrant labor to meet production demands. But with an unreliable, or rather an unwilling, workforce to consistently meet those demands beyond San Diego had forced many firms to restructure and relegate the majority of their production to San Diego County. Other companies, with a strong foothold in local building economies in cities such as Los Angeles, Irvine, Orange County, and Temecula, created sister companies

with a completely separate office, staff, and workforce on the other side of these checkpoints.

The dangers of apprehension, however, were not entirely consigned to checkpoint operations at the boundaries of the county. The territory between immigration checkpoints and the San Diego-Tijuana border, known as the 100-mile border zone, intensified in border enforcement operations across cities and towns with the passage of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Responsibility Act (IIRRA) of 1996, which increased collaboration between federal immigration agents and subnational entities such as police, cities, and towns. Initiatives that were further strengthened and accelerated in response to the September 2001 attacks with the creation of the Department of Homeland Security. For example, Benito in anticipation of a trip to Los Angeles with friends and family had coordinated the crossing of the Temecula Border Station checkpoint with a neighbor. They did not even make it out of Escondido—the city where his family resides—before being pulled over by border patrol agents. Benito recollects asking the border patrol why they pulled them over,

Ahorita, a ustedes los paramos porque veníamos correteando a dos camionetas desde la frontera. Y una [camioneta], que venia cerca de la salida de Hidden Meadows se paró, y toda la gente se echó a correr al cerro." Y ellos [la migra] sabían que tenían que regresar por toda esa gente que se echó a correr, porque es dinero para ellos [los traficantes]. Cuando miraron nuestra camioneta que traía bastante gente, porque veníamos tres familias, se les hizo sospechoso. Entonces por eso nos paró. Esa vez nos íbamos de compras a Los Ángeles.

We pulled you over because we have been following two SUV's from the border. One [SUV], near the Hidden Meadows exit pulled over and all of the people ran towards the mountain." And they [Border Patrol] knew they had to come back for all of those people that started running, because that's money for them [the traffickers]. When they saw our SUV had a lot of people, because we were three families [all together], they thought it was suspicious. That was why they stopped us. That day were on our way to go shopping to Los Angeles.

The transformation of public roads and highways into spaces for border enforcement has created a heavily policed border zone in which undocumented drywallers' exposure to immigration enforcement and its attendant potential to deportation have largely been in spaces for travel such as public transit, sidewalks, and roads rather than the jobsite. While the territorial edges of San Diego County are aggressively policed by border patrol agents at and near checkpoints, these policing enforcement tactics have infiltrated across several cities, towns, and migrant neighborhoods. Thus, drywallers must not only learn how to navigate immigration checkpoints, but also a differentiated geography of immigration enforcement that spans across San Diego County that include license checkpoints, DUI checkpoints, and a gamut of local ordinances and initiatives that target migrant communities (e.g. parking, renting, and day labor ordinances). Initiatives that also vary across cities and towns. Thus, in what follows is an attempt to remap the border as an apparatus that is spread across the county. It is a collective mapping that not only maps the border but workers everyday struggle for mobility.

## **Collective (re)mapping: People’s map to San Diego borders**

A major task for this project was to chart the movement of the border as encountered by drywallers in transit.<sup>56</sup> The border is sedentary and mobile, contorting differentially to the various migrations of capital, commodities, and people. Political demographer Coleman (2008) has described the shifting geography in border enforcement actions from the edge of state territoriality to the interior as the “deterritorialized tangle of law enforcement practices” that have collapsed the lines between interior immigration enforcement and border enforcement. Several border-area legal scholars have examined the implication the of the shift from federal to subnational entities on immigration law and equal protection rights (Huddleston, 2016 Motomura, 1999; Varsanyi, 2010; Varsanyi et al., 2012). These implications have been described as a “multilayered patchwork of immigration enforcement” (Provine et al., 2016; Varsanyi, 2010), which refers to the “emerging, confusing, and often contradictory geography of immigration enforcement in the United States” (Varsanyi et al., 2012, p. 139). Immigration scholar Carolina Valdivia (2019) describes the shift from federal to the subnational immigration enforcement as broadening the “geographies of deportability” to “nontraditional sites” such as public parks, highways, roads, grocery stores, sidewalks, and public transportation. While legal scholar Kate Huddleston (2016) describes the 100-mile border region as a site of “overlapping sovereigns:” where the confluence of regulatory state laws and federal immigration enforcement has a spatially disparate effect on the fundamental rights of individuals by inverting federal protections for

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<sup>56</sup> Pulido, L., Barraclough, L., & Cheng, W. (2012). *A People’s Guide to Los Angeles*. University of California Press. The manuscript charts a geography of struggle that is an alternative mapping to Los Angeles’ typical tourist destinations.

undocumented residents unable to exercise exit from the border zone. In each case, scholars are attempting to grapple with an emerging geography of borders and its implication across time, space, law, and people in transit. In an attempt to map our own version of the border, collectively we discussed and added to the emerging sites of border enforcement that drywallers encounter in the processes of worker's movement jobsite-to-jobsite and in returning home each day. The map that follows is the direct result of construction workers political mobilization in its multiple attempts to cross interior checkpoints, various border enforcement initiatives, and the international border. This map has been drawn and redrawn a hundred times over that speaks to the coordinated actions of mobile people that contribute to its making.

The network of internal immigration checkpoints around San Diego County has created a "caging effect" in which residents are circumscribed by strategically located immigration checkpoints, roving patrols, and surveillance operations on major highways and side streets regulating entry and exit in the region. Each checkpoint with its own profile of enforcement patterns has created regional variations in workers strategies to evade detection. Workers take note of enforcement patterns such as positioning of border patrol vehicles on highways behind brush and trees to surveille traffic and the frequency of checkpoint operations on interstate highways and side streets. These observations constitute a series of mundane data notes that make it possible for drywallers to safely travel from jobsite-to-jobsite and return home safely.

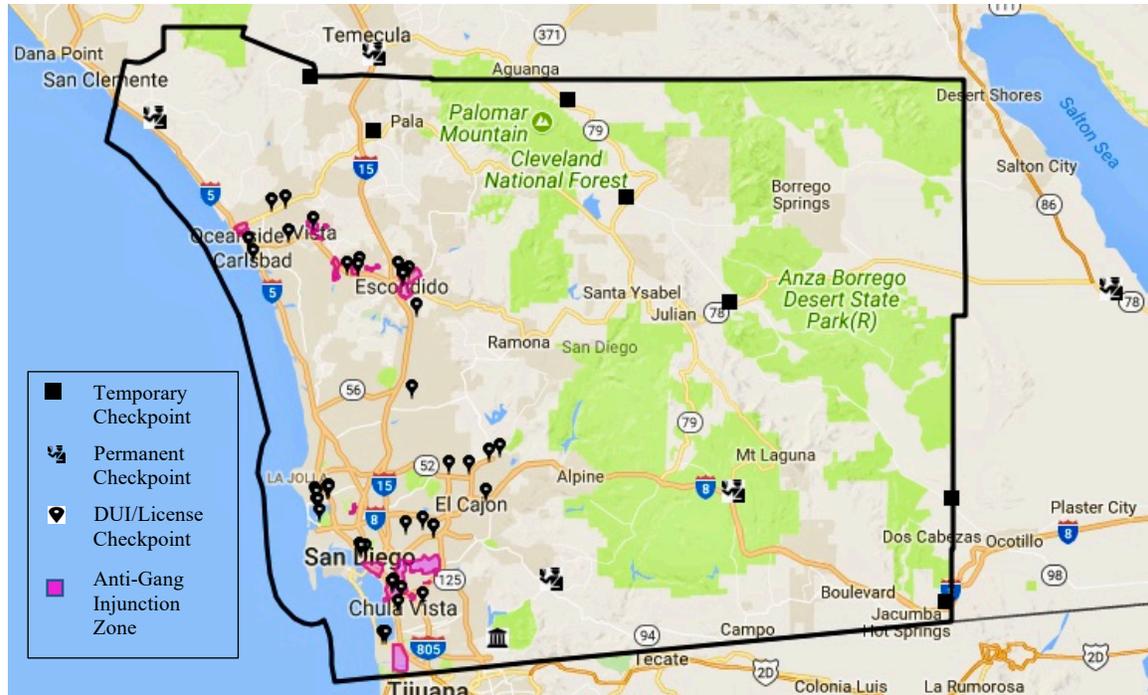


Figure 7: Collective map of border policing operations in San Diego County, California

In addition to checkpoints being located at the boundaries of the county, as migrant drywallers returned home, migrants are confronted with a web of sobriety and license checkpoints located across San Diego County that are routine policing operations in North County cities like Escondido, Vista, San Marcos, and Oceanside. These checkpoints are setup by the city police in the evening 5:00pm/6:00pm, during heavy traffic, as people return home from work (Buiza & Yusufi, 2012; García, 2014; García & Keyes, 2012; Tarrant, 2017; Valdivia, 2019).<sup>57</sup> Over the eight-month period of this project (August 2017-April 2018), there were a total of sixty-four DUI/license checkpoints in operation across the county (the location of these checkpoints is highlighted on figure). In San Diego, DUI and license checkpoint operations have been

<sup>57</sup> These checkpoints also operate in the morning, according to some participants. see, Escondido Police Under Fire (2012). Accessed June 2, 2020 at: <https://www.kpbs.org/news/2012/mar/12/escondido-police-under-fire/>

heavily criticized by civil right groups that claimed that these checks subjected unlicensed immigrants to automobile impoundment and the potential for deportation (Tarrant, 2017). An ACLU investigation in 2012, “Wrong Turn: Escondido’s Checkpoints and Impound Practices Examined,” found that from 2004-2012 the Escondido Police Department had used local checkpoint operations to generate significant income for the city through vehicle impound fees and to apprehend and deport undocumented immigrants (Buiza & Yusufi, 2012). These checkpoints disproportionately affected low income immigrant families, producing about 10 unlicensed drivers for every drunk driver—the majority of unlicensed drivers being undocumented migrants (Buiza & Yusufi, 2012; García, 2015). Furthermore, the report claims that

Escondido are seizing the vehicles of sober drivers, many of whom are from low-income families... Some community members are susceptible to deportation as a result of these encounters; losing a loved one who is also a wage earner or caregiver can wreak havoc on a family and destabilize not only a home, but the entire fabric of the community. (Buiza & Yusufi, 2012, p. 2)

While the passage of Assembly Bill 60 (AB-60 2013) permitted undocumented migrants to obtain driver’s licenses in California as of 2015, the bill did not relieve undocumented motorist’s tensions at checkpoints. Many undocumented people still felt uninformed about their rights at checkpoints and that this was just another tactic to potentially detect undocumented motorist—since the license is marked by “federal limits apply” (Tarrant, 2017; Valdivia, 2019). A mark that is nonstandard on new federally compliant licenses under the REAL ID Act, which is being issued by the Department of Motor Vehicles. Undocumented motorists fear that the subtle differentiation could potentially reveal

motorists undocumented status to the police (Tarrant, 2017; Valdivia, 2019). For example, Adan, despite attaining an AB-60 driver's license, avoids sobriety checkpoints. He has trepidation over the legitimacy of license in the state of California, especially amongst an institution of racist police.

Es que no sabes, también son racistas los cabrones [la policía] y te pueden echar la migra. Porque estas licencias no son como las de ustedes [de ciudadanos estadounidenses]. Tienen otra marca diferente.

You just never know... Those fuckers are also racists [the police] and they can call border patrol. Because these licenses are not like yours [U.S. citizens]. They are marked differently.

Adan continues by recalling an incident, just last week, when he was suddenly caught in a sobriety checkpoint on his way to work. He explains that he felt fortunate to be flushed through the checkpoint but questions whether this is just another ploy to apprehend undocumented motorist, given that checkpoint was in operation at 7:00am in the morning a few blocks from his residence. Adan's feelings are not unwarranted. There continues to be increasing collaboration between federal immigration agents and the local police. In the city of Escondido for example, the police department has a special agreement with ICE titled Operation Joint Effort in which immigration agents are physically present at the Escondido Police Department (EPD) to assist police officers. Each time the EPD operates sobriety checkpoints, ICE agents are on call to run background checks on suspected undocumented drivers (Buiza & Yusufi, 2012). This is in addition to the statewide data sharing among the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Despite the Real ID Act establishing

limitations on the information the DMV can provide to DHS, it has not prevented ICE from using the state driver's license databases to scan through millions of photos without people's knowledge or consent for facial recognition scans.<sup>58</sup>

The neighborhoods in which many migrant drywallers reside are hubs of hyper immigration enforcement and policing. The majority of migrant interviewees for this project, nineteen out of twenty-two, reside in a gang injunction zone, or less than a mile from one. As of 2018, there are twelve anti-gang injunctions in San Diego County:<sup>59</sup> all of which target working-class neighborhoods of color. These neighborhoods are heavily targeted by ICE and police taskforces. For example, Operation Joint Effort, a program between the Escondido Police Department and ICE, was built from anti-gang enforcement sweeps that date back to the 1990s. Immigration agents would accompany police officers during gang sweeps and other policing operations across these neighborhoods (García, 2014). These taskforces are not particular to Escondido. Anti-gang taskforces like Operation Community Shield are part of a multi-agency initiative that is part of DHS to apprehend suspected gang members globally. Established in 2005, the program arrested 123 suspected gang members in San Diego in 2007 and more recently, in 2017, the multi-agency initiative in collaboration with the U.S. Marshals, San

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<sup>58</sup> How California Driver's License Records Are Shared with the Department of Homeland Security. (2018). Accessed June 2, 2020 at: <https://www.nilc.org/issues/immigration-enforcement/how-calif-dl-records-shared-with-dhs/>; also see FBI, ICE find state driver's license photos are a gold mine for facial-recognition searches. (2019). Accessed June 2, 2020 at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2019/07/07/fbi-ice-find-state-drivers-license-photos-are-gold-mine-facial-recognition-searches/>

<sup>59</sup> Gang injunctions are civil court orders that make otherwise legal activities illegal for people identified as gang members. Law enforcement use gang injunctions as a policing apparatus (i.e. increased surveillance, special task forces, sanctions) to profile and control residents within a defined area. The injunction attempts to reduce crime from identified members, but the deployment of gang injunctions lowers the legal standard by which law enforcement can violate targeted communities' civil liberties.

Diego Police Department, Chula Vista Police Department, Drug Enforcement Administration, and Bureau of Prisons, arrested 23 suspected gang members and associates.<sup>60</sup>

The result of workers collective mapping of various border enforcement actions makes transparent why studies have found that undocumented people residing in San Diego County have associated public roads and transportation with the highest risks for deportation (García, 2014; García & Keyes, 2012; Valdivia, 2019). Interior immigration enforcement have effectively transferred workplace enforcement to public roads and thoroughfares, neighborhoods, and public streets in which people traveling to work or returning home, driving to the store, picking up their children from school, or running everyday errands, are met with patrols, DUI and license checkpoints, and pretextual stops that act as initial contacts for deportation proceedings.

In San Diego, construction worker's migration is regulated via two borders and interior border enforcement actions that condition workers legal access to various labor markets across the county and beyond. As I will discuss in the next section, in greater detail, these border enforcement actions are regulating the speed of migrant workers entry and exit. It is an attempt to regulate the ungovernable flows of migration to the demands of the capital production in San Diego through a series of border barriers, blockades, and filters. For example, it is these enforcement actions in which the local San Diego economy is able to fill ongoing labor demands in times of economic downturns and

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<sup>60</sup> ICE-led gang surge nets 1,378 arrests nationwide. (2017). Accessed June 2, 2020 at: <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/ice-led-gang-surge-nets-1378-arrests-nationwide#wcm-survey-target-id>; also see, Operation Targets Gang Members. (2007). Accessed June 2, 2020 at: <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2007-oct-10-na-gangs10-story.html>

growth while maintaining migrant's labor power eminently vulnerable. As it has become exponentially more difficult and expensive to cross the border unauthorized, migratory flows have been diverted to authorized streams of entry with an increase in Border Crossing Cards and visitor's visas (Chávez, 2016; Durand & Massey, 2003). Workers with a visitor's visa enter as authorized migrants via the official ports of entry to join the ranks of an unauthorized labor force. That is, while these workers gain legal entry, they are not legally authorized to work. The effect of workers differentiated mobility across the local economy is especially revealed during economic crisis and downturns when drywallers with legal citizenship status travel out of the state for employment opportunities while those most vulnerable to apprehension such as visitor visa holders and undocumented workers often remain in San Diego. Those that remain have less economic choices due to their limited legal access to various geographic zones across city, state, and international boundaries—often facing the most severe economic hardships.

### **(Im)mobility in times of crisis**

The San Diego construction industry relies on a noncitizen migrant workforce for construction projects. These workers often have differentiated citizenship statuses and mobilities (i.e. drivers' license, Real ID, permanent resident, visitor visa) that facilitate or hinder workers ability to move across the San Diego County and beyond. Workers often mount innovative strategies to have access and move across a heterogeneous geography of borders and immigration enforcement measures to sustain consistent employment for subsistence. For example, during the great recession of 2007/2008 many drywallers had to travel out-of-state to Washington, North Carolina, and Hawaii to pursue more stable

employment opportunities. Pablo who had recently acquired a green card, with scant employment opportunities in San Diego traveled to Hawaii in 2007 to build a multi-story beachfront resort. Pablo received a substantial wage increase from 25 to 37 dollars an hour in Hawaii, with food and hotel included, and Saturday's being paid at time and half regular pay. While Pablo's cousin, Adan who was undocumented, was largely confined to San Diego and its surrounding local labor market. Adan elaborates,

En ese tiempo [durante la recesión], es cuando casi no trabajábamos. Tuve que vender mi carro para poder pagar la renta, y lo poco que tenía ahorrado para las emergencias, se me acabó...me puse a buscar trabajo por otros lados porque en drywall no había mucho. Iba a las fábricas, a las tiendas grandes, a los supermercados, a meter mi solicitud y nada.

During that period [the recession] we hardly worked at all. I had to sell my car to pay the rent and the few savings set aside for emergencies, I spent... I started search for work elsewhere because there wasn't much work in drywall. I would submit job applications at factories, big stores, supermarkets, and nothing.

Adan claims employment was incredibly sporadic, working half days and weeks—with one entire month completely without employment. Wages had also plummeted considerably. These were tough times for Adan and his family. As an undocumented worker, he also did not receive unemployment benefits. Other undocumented drywallers faced similar struggles, having to find other jobs in agriculture or day labor work while they “waited out” the recessionary period. My father, a U.S. Permanent Resident, during this period went to work in the agricultural fields picking strawberries. At the time, I was invited to work in Hawaii with Pablo, in addition to another job project in North Carolina

with another coworker but was unable to join either of my coworkers due to my commitment to my graduate studies. I survived the period with a combination of sporadic work, unemployment, and student loans.

During this recessionary period, many of the cross-border drywallers that resided in Tijuana and worked in San Diego county, appeared to be in a considerably better position to absorb the impact of the recession by earning dollars in the United States and living in Mexico where there is a lower cost for subsistence. According to Pablo, most of the drywallers that flew domestically from San Diego to Hawaii were U.S. Permanent Residents that resided in Tijuana. The construction industry is comprised of a large cross border workforce from Tijuana. In fact, many drywallers blame the lower substandard wage in San Diego, comparatively to surrounding labor markets such as Riverside, Los Angeles, and Orange County, due to the overabundance of cross border workers from Tijuana. Roberto, a union drywaller from Riverside who had to work nonunion during the recession to survive, claims that when he does a job in San Diego, regardless if it is union or nonunion job, he gets paid less. He elaborates,

It's everywhere. For example, if you get paid 20 [dollars per hour] here, you would get paid 15 there. Some guys don't like that; but that's how it is. Think about it. If you got workers coming from Tijuana that get paid in dollars; they live like kings in TJ [Tijuana]. The border is right there. The market gets saturated. Undocumented workers have little choices for employment. They take what they can get. It is not their fault. But it affects us all.

Mauricio, a U.S. Permanent Resident, formerly living in Tijuana, commuting each day to work in San Diego, discusses how he decides between living in San Diego or in Tijuana, as follows:

Mira, los números [el dinero] son los que hablan. Si yo tengo un número, en el cual no me alcanza para mantenerme aquí [en San Diego], tengo que irme a México. Pero si el número alcanza para un lugarcito [para donde vivir], yo me quedo aquí [en San Diego]. Pero no se me hace justo estar aquí [en San Diego], porque si no me ajusta el número, ¿qué voy a hacer? Entonces eso es la cosa. Sí, está duro [difícil la situación].

Look, the numbers [money] do the talking. If I have a number [money], and it's not enough to live here [in San Diego], I have to leave for Mexico. But if the number [money] is enough for a small place, I can stay here [in San Diego]. But I don't think it would be right to stay here [San Diego], if the number [money] is not enough. What am I going to do? That's the issue. Yes, [the situation] is hard.

Maricio claims that by living in Tijuana and working in San Diego, “se hace mucho dinero. Lo suficiente para poder vivir bien [you make good money. Enough to live well].” But since the recession, Maricio decided to rent out a small room in San Diego during the week, while returning to Tijuana on the weekend due to the incredible spike in border wait times to cross. After September 2001, wait times exponentially increased for Tijuana border crossers (Bustamante, 2013). Those times were exacerbated further during the recession according to Mauricio.

Cuando llegó eso de la recesión, haz de cuenta que se puso bien difícil la línea para cruzar. Esperamos hasta tres horas [haciendo línea]. Y yo preferí descansar

esas tres horas aquí [en San Diego]. Mira, las personas que se van para allá [a San Diego y viven en Tijuana], y si de alguna manera tienen su jale cerca, sí pueden hacer feria [sic] [dinero].

When the whole recession thing started, there was a long line to get across the border. The wait times [to cross the border] went up to three hours. Instead, I decided to rest for those three hours here [in San Diego]. Look, the people who go over there [to San Diego and live in Tijuana], and somehow have their job close by, they can make money.

Consequently, what we get in San Diego is a convergence of a differentiated workforce of noncitizen migrants that are regulated by flexible borders that do not serve to curb the number of migrant workers. Rather these restrictive measures regulate how people are included and able to cross borders—not whether they are able to cross or not.

Undocumented and visitor visa holders are restricted in their ability to leave San Diego. Migrants that have attained a visitor visa are permitted to enter the United States within a 25-mile radius of the international boundary to shop and visit family and friends for a temporary period but not for employment nor residency. Drywallers that use these visas to work in the U.S. risk apprehension and their only access to the U.S. economy is revoked if apprehended at immigration checkpoints or within the U.S. interior beyond the allotted radius without a special permit. In times of economic recession, these are the workers that remain within the 100-mile border zone to fill local labor demands at a depreciated rate as workers “wait out” the recession. Those workers with legal U.S. Citizenship and permanent resident status are the ones that can more easily leave San Diego across the country in search of employment opportunities. While cross border

workers, with a few days of work are often in a better position to survive economic downturns with the lower costs of living in Tijuana. The differentiated mobility of workers forms part of how labor is secured and circulated locally in San Diego between two borders while taking advantage of a transnational labor force. Yet, as described in previous observational notes, workers collaborate with one another to make sure workers are able to cross various border enforcement initiatives to secure stable economic livelihoods. Like the drywall workforce, many drywall crews are made up of drywallers with various noncitizen status. Many of these drywall work crews are collective entities that are politically mobilized, responding to labor demands and the safety of its members. They organize movement amongst its members and gather information about immigration and border enforcement operations. These groups of workers coordinate crossing across checkpoints for a side job, or a few extra days of work that go a long way for survival in times of economic instability. During the recession despite scant employment opportunities it was “*camaradas*” (i.e. comrades/friends), in drywallers words, that led to employment opportunities and connected workers to jobs during slowdowns and unemployment. These collective work crews are how workers meet the challenges of precarious and unstable employment in the construction industry.

## CHAPTER 4

### QUERÍAS NORTE; AHORA TE CHINGAS

*Querías norte; allí esta tu norte en la pared cabrón -Anonymous Drywaller*

The pressures of economic instability and piece work wages in the construction industry places a high degree of stress on workers. Wages depend on workers productivity. Therefore, in an effort to maximize earnings, it is common for workers to deny pain and self-care as an adaptation strategy to survive workplace conditions (Chávez & Altman, 2017). Construction workers often skip breaks, meals, safety standards, urinate into empty water bottles, hold their bodily waste throughout the workday, and refrain from drinking water to prevent multiple trips to the restroom to increase productivity. In the late-1990s, at the age of 18, I recall an incident in which I decided to secretly urinate outside a track home construction project to save the ten-to-twelve-minute roundtrip. The portable restrooms had been positioned far from the house we were working on. I was unaware that the tile installer had seen me urinate outside. Upon my returned, I overheard him tell the general contractor what he had witnessed. The general contractor shrugged it off by responding, “What do you expect, he’s Mexican. They’re all savages. You can’t blame them. They just don’t know any better.” The worksite consisted of fifty new mass-produced homes just east of Fairbanks Ranch. The houses were priced well over the million-dollar mark, but our wages were based on cents to the square foot of drywall installed and taped. After listening to the tile installer and the general contractor, I thought: what is savage?<sup>61</sup> The wages you are paying us, or

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<sup>61</sup> see, Quan, H. L. T. (2012). *Growth against democracy: Savage developmentalism in the modern world*. New York: Lexington Books, for a discussion on savage developmentalism.

me urinating outside? I began to think about the construction worker that had died in the staircase area of the house just a week prior to our arrival. Each day at the jobsite, I felt the a strange, haunting, feeling of a missing presence that had so easily been replaced by a line of disposable workers. The feeling was all too familiar. It was the same feeling I got when a roofer had fallen to his death at a Camp Pendleton job, just a few years prior. After the incident, all the construction workers left the jobsite early. I recall, staying inside, refusing to bear witness to the scene of the incident outside. The following week, work continued as scheduled.

Construction is a high-hazard industry with some of the highest rates of workplace fatalities and non-fatality injuries among Latinx workers in the nation (Arcury et al., 2012; Arcury et al., 2014; Escamilla et al., 2017; Menzel et al., 2010). It is common for workers to compromise their safety in an effort to increase productivity by “cutting corners” in safety training and equipment usage due to strict production deadlines and being paid by piecework (Arcury et al., 2012; Arcury et al., 2014; Escamilla et al., 2017; Menzel et al., 2010). Latinx workers, especially those that are foreign-born, are overrepresented in the toughest trades that provide the lowest wages and benefits (Menzel et al., 2010). Fearing job loss, undocumented workers especially feel pressured to take greater risks and argue that they face inhuman treatment from their supervisors; arguing, “They [supervisors] don’t care what happens to you—even the most dangerous work, it doesn’t matter to them” (Menzel et al., 2010, p. 183).

Masculinity and occupational health and safety scholarship contend that the combination of dangerous job tasks, economic insecurity, and masculine roles as family providers and risk-takers heighten migrant men’s risks to workplace injuries (Arcury et

al., 2012; Arcury et al., 2014; Chávez & Altman, 2017; Escamilla et al., 2017; Menzel et al., 2010; Saucedo & Morales, 2010). Migrant men's high injury and workplace fatality rates in the construction industry has been in large part due to the normalization of risky behavior in masculinity formations (Arcury et al. 2012; Arcury et al. 2014; Chávez & Altman, 2017; Furman et al, 2013; Menzel et al., 2010; Saucedo & Morales, 2010). Masculinity scholars contend that migrant men embrace difficult, dirty, and dangerous workplace conditions as an expression of their masculinity (Chávez & Altman, 2017; Ramirez, 2011; Saucedo & Morales, 2010). Many of these studies have read migrant men's bodies for what they represent at the workplace (i.e. tough, callous, muscular, large, 'surviving the border crossing') (see Chávez & Altman, 2017; Saucedo & Morales, 2010), but neglect to capture the often-contradictory stories of bodies working under states of crisis for survival. Worker's journeys begin from the economic peril that necessitates them to leave their home country and families for dangerous and undervalued occupations in the United States (Furman et al., 2013). These experiences are not separate from the dangerous border trek across hostile environmental terrain that has been claiming migrant lives at an unprecedented rate—the result of state sanctioned murdered by way of diverting the migration trail into the desert (Smith, 2017; Warren, 2017). A dangerous trek across at the border in which migrants must rely on smugglers to cross the border safely. Thus, global capitalism, health, safety, and the police state tie together to inform the conditions for migrant workers masculinity formations in the workplace.

Using the Chicana feminist approach to theory in the flesh, in this chapter I attempt to bridge men's contradictory experience in the workplace as bodies that embrace

tough and dangerous workplace conditions under structural conditions of exploitation that is representative of a larger global crisis. The flesh is an archive, “one where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity” (Cherríe & Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 19).<sup>62</sup> It is an approach that refuses “an easy explanation to the conditions that we live in” but interested in the pursuit of a society that uses flesh and bone experiences “to concretize a vision” that can begin to heal our wounds (Cherríe & Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 19). In using theory in the flesh as a theoretical paradigm, I attempt unravel workers common workplace expression, “*querías norte ahora te chingas*” [you wanted to come north now your fucked], and its common derivatives such as, *querías norte ahora chigale* [you wanted to come north now get to fucking work] as a narrative that is at the core of worker’s understanding of unjust workplace conditions, including horrific violence, that is beyond worker’s control in El Norte. The common expression highlights worker’s understanding of their own contradictory experience in northward migration. Men that leave their hometown for survival and to fulfill a gendered script as responsible family providers and for male independence but once in the United States, migrant men face wage theft, low-wage work, and dangerous workplace conditions that have been characteristic of migrant-dominate occupations (Dong & Platner, 2004; Vazquez & Stalnaker, 2004). This situation can incapacitate workers from meeting their gendered script, causing workers great shame and psychological strain (Furman et al., 2013). More importantly, I argue that the expression is symbolic of workers’ concerns with social

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<sup>62</sup> see also, Cofer, J. O. (2000). The Story of My Body. In. D. McQuade, & C. McQuade (Eds.), *Sing and Writing* (208-214). Bedford/St Martin’s.

domination from power structures, from above, in Mexico and the United States, that is intertwined with their experiences beyond their control. Thus, when workers pass on the expression to other workers, they are offering a critique of global capitalism.

### **Background: Migration, construction, and masculinity**

Northbound migration for Mexican migrant men has increasingly become an absolute necessity, especially for rural migrants to meet subsistence needs in light of debilitating local economies due to the imposition of neoliberal reforms in Mexico since 1986, most notably the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) (Boehm, 2008; Broughton, 2008; Darder, 2007). The increase in northbound migration is in large part due to neoliberal agrarian reforms that have displaced farmers from their homes and plunged millions into poverty (Broughton, 2008; Weisbrot et al., 2014). Neoliberal policies concentrated foreign investment and manufacturing growth at the border at the expense of Mexico's rural interior that made changes to the Mexican Constitution that guaranteed land distribution to the dispossessed. For example, collective land holdings or ejidos, which provided a basis for security among small farmers and indigenous groups, could be sold to private buyers (Darder, 2007). In addition, technical assistance and subsidies to farmers were dismantled, while U.S. farm subsidies remained in place (Broughton, 2008). This had a predictable result on small farmers in Mexico that could not compete with the import of lower priced staple crops such as corn (Broughton, 2008; Darder, 2007). In 2014, a report funded by the Center for Policy Research found that after twenty years under NAFTA nearly five million Mexican farmers were displaced and 14 million more Mexicans were living in poverty in 2012 than in 1994 (Weisbrot et al., 2014). Displaced by neoliberal

reforms that had taken away poor urban dwellers only means for self-sufficiency and faced with maquila wages well below subsistence levels, migration from rural-to-urban areas in Mexico and across the international border has become a survival strategy (Mize, 2008; Walia, 2013).

Migrants that enter the U.S. construction industry continue to face similar precarious and dangerous conditions that had sparked their northward migration. The construction industry accounts for the second highest number of Latinx fatalities behind mining and the greatest number of nonfatality injuries than any other industry (Arcury et al., 2012; Arcury et al., 2014; Escamilla et al., 2017; Menzel et al., 2010; Vázquez & Stalnaker, 2004). Between 1992 and 2001, the construction industry experienced an overall drop in fatalities by almost 40%, yet among the Latinx population fatalities rose by 67% during that same period (Vázquez & Stalnaker, 2004). With the fear of deportation or job loss, undocumented construction workers are especially at risk of bodily harm in the workplace by often assuming job tasks that are unsafe (Ahonen et al., 2007; Menzel et al., 2010; Vázquez & Stalnaker, 2004). Undocumented worker's job risks are further heightened with the limited access to care due to contractors circumventing compensation regulations and are afraid that they will lose their jobs if employers pay their medical bills (Arcury et al., 2014). With no access to workers compensation insurance, workers do not receive wages while injured; forcing many workers to work while injured. Research conducted on the medical records of construction workers suggests that Latinx workers are 30% more likely to develop medical conditions due to workplace injuries compared to white workers (Dong et al.,

2010) and receive lower medical compensation rates due to injury (Escamilla et al., 2017).

Masculinity and occupational health and safety research claims that injuries and fatalities at the workplace are in large part due to men's masculine identities at the jobsite around dangerous work conditions (Arcury et al., 2012; Arcury et al., 2014; Chávez & Altman, 2017; Furman et al., 2013; Menzel et al., 2010; Paap, 2006; Saucedo & Morales, 2010). The confrontation of difficult and dangerous manual tasks in the construction industry has been interpreted as a heroic manly exercise among men, which not all, particularly women and middle- and upper-class men, are held capable of achieving (Papp, 2006; Saucedo & Morales, 2010; Willis, 1979). Considerable research highlights how men "man up" to harsh job tasks that provide them with a physiological wage of not only looking manly and contextually dominant but made to feel naturally right in the physical, heterosexual, and market-bound ideals of the industry (Papp, 2006; Saucedo & Morales, 2010). Chávez and Altman (2017) contend that migrant men employed in roofing,

Do gender when they skirt safety practices, police each other's masculinity, withhold their emotions, experience heightened stress, and engage in poor health behaviors in an attempt to live up to masculine standards. (p. 539)

Likewise, Saucedo and Morales (2010) argue that migrant men develop masculinity narratives around precarious and dangerous labor structures in the construction industry that motivate men to accept dangerous work while women complain about it. Like white male construction workers (Papp, 2006), Saucedo and Morales (2010) contend that migrant men's masculinity narratives in the workplace have established a culture of "no

complaints” that police migrant men’s behaviors and act as a gatekeeping mechanism against women and “non-manly” men. Migrant men actually re-appropriated white masculinities narratives, interpreted as dominant and hegemonic, to revalue work that historically has been paid well to white men, but is now highly undervalued (Saucedo & Morales, 2010). The authors argue that migrant men actively validate their assignment into low-wage and dangerous labor conditions by recasting their cross-border narratives at the workplace that bolster their claims that they can handle whatever dangers faced in the workplace (Saucedo & Morales, 2010). Because “If they could endure the dangers of the border crossing, they could endure tough working conditions including, if need be, limited workplace rights, all for the sake of supporting their families” (Saucedo & Morales, 2010, p. 649).

Thus, masculinity research on migrant men commonly highlight how migrant men justify and revalue dangerous and undervalued jobs (Chávez & Altman, 2017; Ramirez, 2011; Saucedo & Morales, 2010), while homogenizing migrant men into subordinate masculinity formations vis-à-vis hegemonic white male masculinities. Considerable scholarship has called for a more nuanced and situated study of Latinx men that do not subordinate their masculinities to hegemonic white masculinities formations but rather explore the experiential variations that exist within the category of “men” (Gutmann, 1996; Hurtado & Shinha, 2016; Rudolph, 2012; Zavala, 2016), and an understanding of gender that is more than cultural but one that constitutes potent structural mechanisms (Zinn, 1982; Cantú, 2009; Fernández-Kelly, 2005).

In the following pages, I attempt to unravel the complex experience of men’s northbound migration for survival and economic stability. I use worker’s expression,

*querías norte ahora te chingas*, to unpack worker's own understanding of workplace conditions and the situated dangerous that they face as workers that are part of larger struggle against dispossession and global capitalism. An effort to understand men's agency, resistance, and oppositional consciousness even within often-contradictory gender formations that are justifiably toxic on the one hand, enhancing workplace danger, and on the other hand an attempt to survive and in reaction to larger power structures that is recast across their migration experience.

### **Ahora te chingas**

In an effort to mount an alternative reformulation of the expression *querías norte, ahora te chingas*, I begin by examining the sexual symbolization of the term and bodily gesture to *chingar*, or fuck, that is at the heart of the expression. The obvious and clear expression of the word would certainly seem to be consistent with male sexual dominance over women and other men that has been observed behavior among Mexican working-class men at the workplace in which the penis has become a phallic obsession to symbolize masculine force through speech that “redeems macho pride, which is embodied in the symbol of male prowess” (Peña, 1991, p. 35). Kris Paap's (2009) work on white male construction workers, finds that references to penetration have been associated as appropriate masculine responses to “doing” construction work that is evident by common expressions such as “get her done” and “fuck the job.” Heterosexual references to masculine dominance, men as the dominators not the dominated, according to Saucedo and Morales (2010), are narratives that are used to dignify undervalued work at the expense of women. The aggression expressed through anal expressions and themes of male sexual violation through humor and speech is undeniably present and perpetuated

among men across working-class worksites (Papp, 2009; Peña, 1991; Saucedo & Morales, 2010). However, as argued by several authors, the word *chingar* is a multivocal expression that possess numerous meanings not reducible to any single one of them (Castellanos, 2011; Limón, 1994; Paz, 2002).

Octavio Paz (2002) suggests that the word *chingar* has origins that lie in the Nahuatl language spoken by the Aztecs. The word possesses “innumerable meanings” that with “a change of tone, a change of inflection, is enough to change its meaning” (Paz, 2002, p. 21). According to Castellanos (2011),

[Use the word] with a flirtatiously tone, and *chingar* means to tease, to make merry, to be great, to be manly, to defy. Use it soberly, and it implies failure, neglect, and frustration. Use it aggressively, and it has a deadly and violent ring; to be deceptive, to contradict, to sexually penetrate, to rape, to destroy.” (p. 278)

“When something breaks, we say: “Se chingó.” When someone behaves rashly, in defiance of the rules, we say: “Hizo una chingadera” (Paz, 2002, p. 21). But even in its “plurality of meanings the ultimate meaning always contains the idea of aggression... The verb denotes violence, an emergence from oneself to penetrate another by force. It also means to injure, to lacerate, to violate—bodies, souls, objects—and to destroy.” (Paz, 2002, p. 21).

*La Chingada*, the fucked one, the noun form of *chingar*, refers to Malinalli, Malintzin, or La Malinche, the Aztec noble woman that served as Cortés translator, lover, and tactical advisor. Malintzin is a controversial figure in the conquest of Mexico; “her legend and subsequent mythic dimensions as evil goddess and creator of a new race—the mestizo race, embroils her in a family quarrel, where many male members often prefer to

see her as the mother-whore, bearer of illegitimate children, responsible for the foreign Spanish invasion” (Alarcón, 2015, p. 181). Gloria Anzaldúa (2012) suggests “She has become the bad word that passes a dozen times a day from the lips of Chicanos. Whore, prostitute, the women who sold out her people to the Spaniards are epithets Chicanos spit out with contempt” (p. 44). The term *chingar*, thus, cannot not escape its sexualized and gendered connotations that “make us believe that the Indian women in us is the betrayer” (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 44).

In contrast, “the chingón is the macho, the male; he rips open the chingada, the female, who is pure passivity, defenseless against the exterior world” (Paz, 2002, p. 21). Its essential attribute is power, which “sums up the aggressiveness, insensitivity, invulnerability, and other attributes of the macho” (Paz, 2002, p. 23). The macho is the *chingón*, and its meaning is no different than the verb *chingar* (Paz, 2002). That is, the macho, or *chingón*, is the one that fucks others, before getting fucked over. This creates two possibilities in life, “either he inflicts the actions implied by *chingar* on others, or else he suffers them himself” (Paz, 2002, p. 22). A heteropatriarchal attitude that if you are not trying to be the *chingón*, then you’re a *pendejo*, a dumbass, because you do not know the rules of life. As in the expression, *a tí te van a chingar*, you’re going to get fucked over.

Castellanos’ (2011) ethnographic work examines how Mayan communities in Yucatán, Mexico have used the term *chingar* to critique their subordinated status and conditions within the tourist economy along Mexico’s Caribbean coastline. As a condition to successfully participate in the new global economy, Mayan migrants are asked to “transform themselves from Indian (conceived as backward and primitive) to

mestizo (conceived as modern and urban and thus envisaged as non-Indian)” (Castellanos, 2011, p. 271). Thus, to survive in the new economy with a sense of dignity and agency, Castellanos argues (2011) that some Mayan communities have appropriated the Mexican discourse of being a *chingón*; teaching their children to be *despiertos*, astute, assertive, and alert, to prevent from being fucked by the new global economy. In this context, the “word *chingón* retains a masculine sense of power because it is a reference of power, a concept that continues to be rooted in masculinity” but according to Castellanos (2011), “that is what makes being a *chingón* an attractive positionality” for Mayan men and women (p. 281). Castellanos (2011) argues that,

the internal contradictory nature of the term *chingar* allows it to be used as a critical space for expressions of power by other subjugated groups, in particular women and indigenous groups. More than just play, this speech becomes part of an active refashioning of people’s subjectivities in actual life. (p. 280)

Mayan men and women appropriate the term equally and, according to Castellanos (2011), the use of *chingón* in Mayan migrant speech is not just a gesture toward power but a gendered and racialized critique of the tourist economy.

Like Chicanas in the United States, Mayan women reclaim the term *chingón* through its feminine derivative *chingona*. While *chingón* is traditionally reserved for a masculine actor (Alarcón, 1989), specifically referring to a white male conqueror (Cuevas, 2004), Chicanas have widely reclaimed the term as an oppositional identity and response to androcentric nationalism.<sup>63</sup> The appropriation of the word has come to

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<sup>63</sup> Haro, C. O. (2019). *Cultivating chingona power: A study on the chingona identity*. [Master’s Thesis, Humboldt State University]. Digital Commons @ Humboldt State University. <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/etd/297>; How I Define My Chingona Fire. (2017). Accessed June 26,

challenge the heteropatriarchal mythic narrative from Chicano and Mexican male writers such as Octavio Paz that continue to portray Malintzin's act of treason as '*la vendida*,' the sellout or traitor, beginning with the mother who sold her into slavery that re-inscribes the narrative of a "long line of *vendidas*" (Moraga, 1983) and "hijas de la chingada" (Anzaldúa, 2012) that has come to portray women as unreliable, treacherous, and open to sexual exploitation (Alarcón, 2015; Alcalá, 2001). Malintzin's mythic existence, over a half century, has "turned her into a handy reference point not only for controlling, interpreting, or visualizing women, but also to wage a domestic battle of stifling proportions" (Alarcón, 2015, p. 181). Thus, many critical Chicana writers have invoked Malintzin alternatively to respond to a patriarchal, nationalistic, ideology, and "claim a gendered oppositional identity and history" (Pratt, 1993, p. 861) to break free from the "colonial imaginary" that continues to be behind a patriarchal Chicano and Mexican nationalism (Pérez, 1999).<sup>64</sup>

Recently, scholars have traced the word *chingar* back to northern India that has proceeded with the Romani people, originally meaning to fight or battle, through Spain (Grimes, 1978; Jakobsen, 2012) that has challenged the origins of the word but not its white ethnocentric lineage. Marco Polo Hernández Cuevas (2004), however, contends

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2020, available at: [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/how-i-define-my-chingona-fire\\_b\\_5887de69e4b0a53ed60c6a35](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/how-i-define-my-chingona-fire_b_5887de69e4b0a53ed60c6a35); and see, Chingona Definition: Reclaiming What It Means To Be A Fearless Latina. (2018). Accessed June 26, 2020, available at: <https://medium.com/@CoachellaUninc/chingona-definition-reclaiming-what-it-means-to-be-a-fearless-latina-ce904efa4be2>

<sup>64</sup> For an alternative revision of Malintzin, see, Alarcón, N. (2015). Chicana feminist literature: A re-vision through Malintzin/or Malintzin putting flesh back into object. In C. Moraga & G. Anzaldúa (Eds.), *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color* (181-191). SUNY Press. Also see, Moraga, C. (1983). A long line of *vendidas*. In *loving in the war years: Lo que nunca paso por sus labios* (90-144). Boston: South End Press; and see, Alcalá, R. C. (2001). From chingada to chingona: La Malinche redefined, a long line of hermanas. *Azlán*, 22(2), 33-61.

that word itself was actually created by African Mexicans. The word has an African legacy of Kimbundu origin that can be traced to Afro-Mexicanos in Veracruz to all other parts of Latin American where African people were present (Fernández, 1997).

According to Cuevas (2004), from the perspective of African Mexicans the word narrates colonial conquest;

Chingar narrates the white led rape, pillage and plunder of Amerindians, Africans and Asians, among others, during the Spanish enterprise. *Chingar* is at the center of the occurrence; it brings back the memory and continues to narrate the image of subjugated women being taken by brutal force. (p. 48)

Cuevas (2004) suggests that the word “chingar becomes la chingada, the raped women” that is also a “metaphor for the subjugated nation” (p. 48). In this context the *chingón* is the conqueror to be emulated and respected by all those under him that include, los *hijos de la chingada*, his bastard sons and daughters, the “mestizos and the mezclas (emphasis the authors) all are one, whose character makeup or ethnicity includes the African element” (Cuevas, 2004, p. 48).

### **El Norte: Lugar donde se chinga**

The workplace is a site in which the word *chingar* often takes on different meanings vis-à-vis labor. It is common to refer to work as un *chinga*, a beating, that workers characterize as part of the difficult and arduous activity of construction work. *Andar en chinga*, literally translation to walk swiftly, in the workplace means is to work quickly without rest. Whereas *chingale* is a command that indicates urgency to complete an unpleasant task (Torres, 2013), *te chingas*, you’re fucked, is a locution that expresses a

situation so dire that there is no other solution but to actually do what needs to be done (Jakobsen, 2012).

In his ethnography of working-class Mexican American men in South Texas, José Limón (1994) describes themes of bodily penetration as symbolic expressions of social domination that helps us understand the relation of the body to society. According to Limón (1994),

The themes of anality, pollution, and bodily penetration may also be symbolic expressions of an essentially political and economic concern with social domination, not from below... but from above—from the upper levels of the structure of power in both countries [Mexico and the United States]. The marginalized working and unemployed classes where these expressions abound constitute a body politic symbolically conscious of its socially penetrable status. (p. 131)

The expression *querías norte ahora te chingas* [you wanted to come north now you're fucked], and its common derivative *querías norte ahora chigale* [you wanted to come north now get to fucking work], are expressions symbolic of workers understanding of hierarchies of power within a global economy. The expression has a tongue-and-cheek affect about the imaginaries of transborder movement that like Camacho's (2008) work on migrant's labor struggles narrates an alternative experience that

challenge the official imaginary of the nation, because the experience of displacement and exploitation have often endowed transborder communities with vernaculars, ideologies, and values that set them in a category apart from sedentary communities of citizens. (p. 6)

It is through these expressions that workers have created space to critique their oppressive and subordinate positions in dangerous and undervalued jobs in the United States that workers understand is connected to global processes of transborder exploitation and struggles for a livable life. Although migrant drywallers, on the one hand, have actively refused certain workplace conditions, such as collectively refusing jobs on the other side of immigration checkpoints, drywallers' experiences are complex and overlap with local and national capitalist production needs in which these workers are embedded.

The expression imbued in sarcasm implies that workers “decided” to migrate to the United States. Among workers, migration to El Norte is viewed as an absolute necessity that is the result of dispossession. For example, Rodrigo, previously working in the tobacco fields of Guegovela, Oaxaca for a Nayarit based cigar company expressed why he came to the United States at the age of 17:

Era la única salida de allá. Ahí estaba cabrón en ese tiempo. Imagínate nomas... Ponte a pensar como un morro, supongamos en ese tiempo de 16, 17, 15 años. Quieres ir a los bailes, quieres vestirme más o menos, y allá ¿de donde? Todo lo que tienes son puros guaraches rotos, pantalones rotos, camisas rotas, no tienes de dónde, ni de dónde agarrar. Y a tus papas no les alcanza para darte nada de eso. La única solución era venirse para acá.

That was my only way out from there. Back then it was fucking rough. Just imagine... Think like a young kid, let's say around 16, 17, 15 years old. You want to go out, you want to dress nice, and, over there, where are you going to get that from? All you got are ripped sandals, ripped pants, ripped shirts, you don't have

the means, nor where to get [the money for] those things. Your parents don't have enough to give you for any of that. The only solution was to come over here.

Many of the participants in this project migrated to the United States at a very young age, between 14-to-17 years old. The majority came from modest agrarian backgrounds in search for economic stability and subsistence. El Norte not only became woven into the fabric of Mexican rural life for participants, but it was “on everyone’s mind and in every young person’s plans” (Cerullo & Valiño, 2014, p. 3). Within masculinity scholarship, northbound migration has been deemed as a prominent path to manhood that has implications on the men that remain and men that migrate (Boehm, 2017; Broughton, 2008; Donaldson et al., 2009). Indeed, migration is a central feature of men’s masculine social construction as responsible breadwinners that must either migrate to the United States to fulfill their gendered script as family providers or remain in their hometowns to work in debilitated economies that compromise migrants ability to meet their subsistence needs (Boehm, 2017; Broughton, 2008; Gutmann, 2003; Ramirez, 2011).

Effectively, within the expression, the butt of the joke is the harsh reality that El Norte is a place, a site, where the future is an endless *chinga*; a beating (as in Flores & Escalante’s provocative book title, *Chingalistlán: Lugar Donde Se Chinga*) that articulates the costs that the border has inflicted on lives of migrant workers. For example, Chávez, et al. (2016) has found that prolong separation from families can cause great emotional pain that spurs some men to return to Mexico to fulfill their roles as fathers and partners despite returning to low-wage, temporary, and low status jobs. Similarly, for many migrant men, despite years of economic hardship and uncertainty in construction, their commitment to their children’s future as U.S. citizens is what prevents

men from leaving the United States. For instance, Ignacio first migrated to the United States at the age of fifteen. He has since married and built a life in San Diego with his spouse and five-year-old son. As an undocumented father, he does not see a future for himself in the U.S. but plans to stay longer than anticipated in support of his child's future as a U.S. citizen.

Mi idea es criar mi hijo aquí [en Estados Unidos], saque [sic] sus estudios aquí, y una profesión. Yo, la verdad, me voy a regresar para México. Estoy haciendo una casa allá [en México] porque no veo futuro para mí aquí. Y cuando uno ya este mayor, ¿quién va a querer cuidar de ti?... Y si no tienes trabajo, ¿como te vas a poder mantener? Es una de las cosas que me pongo a pensar: el como va a ser ya de mayor. Tú sabes que uno no se puede jubilar aquí en Estados Unidos.

My hope is that my son is raised here in the United States; get his studies here, and a career. Honestly, I am going back to Mexico. I'm building a house over there [in Mexico], because I don't see a future for me here. When you're older, who's going to want to take care of you?... If you don't have a job, how are you going to support yourself? That's the thing that I always think about; how's it going to be when I'm older. You know that you can't retire here United States.

Although Ignacio does not see a future for himself in the United States, he views it as a necessary waystation towards a more stable future in Mexico, “para no batallar después de que uno ya pueda encontrar trabajo [so I don't struggle when I am unable to get a job anymore],” and for his child's future as a U.S. citizen. He continues,

Por lo pronto ya tengo un plan de cómo resolver esto [el problema de como mantenerme cuando me jubile] en unos años tal vez. Porque tampoco quiero

llevar mi hijo ahorita para allá [a México], aparte de que la situación en México es difícil. No le quiero quitar la oportunidad a mi hijo siendo que es ciudadano de aquí. No le quiero quitar la oportunidad de que agarre un buen trabajo aquí, de que estudie... Mientras que yo le pueda ayudar pues allí voy a estar. Es una de las cosas mas que nada; la familia es lo que detiene a uno aquí en Estados Unidos también.

In the meantime, I have a plan on how to resolve this, [the problem as to how I will support myself once I retire], in a couple of years. Because I also don't want to take my son over there [to Mexico]. Besides, the situation is hard in Mexico. I don't want to take away my son's opportunities as a citizen from here. I don't want to take away his opportunity of getting a good job here, going to school here... As long as I can help him, I'll be there for him. It's one of the things more than anything; family also keeps you from leaving the United States.

Migrant men see no possibility for life beyond endless work in the United States. There will be a point in which the body will be physically unable to meet the demands of drywall work—losing their only means for subsistence. Therefore, many have begun to plan a life in Mexico after construction work by purchasing a plot of land, livestock, and building a home in Mexico. Without 401Ks or retirement funds, and not being able to collect social security benefits, there is no future in the U.S. for these workers beyond construction. The construction industry is also an increasingly informal and under-the-table (i.e. wages paid in cash) enterprise in which even those that have access to social security benefits, little is actually invested into their coffers given that many have been

paid in cash over their careers. Workers also understand that drywall is a dangerous occupation that is accelerating the deterioration of their bodies. Gabriel elaborates:

Si pudiera encontrar otra forma de ganar dinero, yo digo que sería mejor [sic].

Que no sea con tu fisico, así como un robot, haciendo paredes y todo eso. Eso te acaba la vida. Hay mucha gente en la construcción que se ha caído de las escaleras. Y ya no están trabajando allí porque se quebraron discos de la espina, se quebraron las manos, y la cabeza.

I think, I would be better off if I could find another way to earn a living. That does not involve the physical exertion, as if you're a robot, making walls and all of that. That drains the life out of you. There are a lot of people in construction that have fallen off stairs. They're not working any longer because they broke disks on their spinal cord, they broke their hands and heads.

Similarly, Timoteo describes life in the United States akin to being trapped “en una hoya [stuck in a hole]” that consists of a life of endless work and omnipresent threat of deportation. He explains,

Es una situación muy estresante. Es bien estresante estar en un solo lugar sin poder hacer nada. No mas trabaje y trabaje. Te sientes como en una hoya, metido allí no mas en el mismo lugar. Y como que tu mente no crece. Como que no tiene caso el dinero o trabajar. Uno siempre tiene que trabajar, pero no mas estas allí, esperando que un día te agarren y te deporten. Porque si no tienes papeles un día te van a deportar.

It's a very stressful situation. It's very stressful to be in just one place without being able to do anything. Just working and working. You feel like you're in a

hole, stuck in the same place. It's as if your mind doesn't grow. It's like, money or working do not matter anymore. You always have to work, but you're just hanging in there, waiting to be caught and be deported. Because, if you don't have papers, one day you'll get deported.

In a similar fashion, Marcos describes the life of the undocumented worker in the United States akin to a sponge being wringed. “Ser indocumentado [en Estados Unidos], es ser como una esponja, donde exprimen todo lo que tienes hasta que ya no tienes nada más [Being undocumented [in the United States], is like being a sponge, they wring everything out of you, until you have nothing more].”

Workers would smirk and laugh at the absurd suggestion of retirement with similarly absurd responses such as, “Voy a trabajar hasta que el cuerpo ya no pueda [I'm going to keep working until my body give out]” or “cuando me muera me van a enterrar con mis herramientas, [when I die, I will get buried with my tools].” The expression *querías norte ahora te chingas* is an expression that highlights not just the seemingly bleak conditions and futures of migrant men in the U.S. but how workers begin to imagine an alternative beyond the United States. One that defies strict conventions of national citizenship to either Mexico or United States because their lives have been dispossessed by both countries, thus must carve out a transnational space between/across both countries to secure a future for themselves and their family.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### **What was learned**

In an effort to move away from the category of findings, I am proposing what has been learned and gathered from this project can serve as an intervention in the scholarship. While this project engaged in the collective movement of workers through, around, and across borders, there were several lessons that we have learned about the border, ourselves and our communities. First, the mutual and collective recognition of the overlapping differential movement of multiple borders across bodies, communities and political jurisdictions. In other words, borders not only create, reproduce and capture differential spaces, but borders are moving differently to impede differentially positioned people in transit, thus effecting bodies differentially. There are material aspects of the apparatus that are sedimentary and others that move along migratory flows. For instance, temporary checkpoints and permanent checkpoints move differently to create the conditions of confinement, separations, and porosity. Temporary checkpoints are incredibly mobile across side roads and streets at different hours of the day that make them difficult to profile. If we can conceptualize “in operation” and “off operation” as movement, paradoxically, permanent checkpoints are more sedimentary as they move. Thus, the border itself has various overlapping substructures, discourses, places of retention and places of enclosure, thickening and thinning, that are responding to the complexity and creativity of people’s mobility.

Second, in documenting the function and content of the many borders of the San Diego area, differential counter-borders emerged. These counter-borders, the means,

mechanisms and imaginary to circumvent, evade and break through these enclosing structures of capital, exist as living representations of creative survival, and continue to exist in collective struggles that are reproducing the conditions for an alternative movements, choices and possibilities. In evading capture, countering the border also created new lines of movement and new borders of safety. This dynamic emphasizes that borders react to and are reproduced by organized struggle to circumvent and undo those same borders. In chapter three, I discuss how workplace enforcement transitioned to public highways and roadways since the early-1990s. Workers collective efforts against immigration enforcement at the workplace led to this transition, as capital needed to reorganize the political economy by deploying the border in new and extended ways. Similar to how capital reacted to worker's collective refusal to labor on the other side of these checkpoints, these actions forced construction companies to create a separate company at the other side of these checkpoints with a separate office and workforce. These lessons have important implications for understanding the politics, and everyday possibilities, of workplace struggles to redefine labor, mobility and dignity, while revealing the violence and enclosing function of overlapping and roving border deterrents. While scholars who write on the autonomy of migration thesis have long made the argument that borders react organized crossings, what has not been addressed is how these mobilizations played out in the workplace and the U.S. interior, particularly with regards to mobility and the conditions to impact the terms of contract and payment, work conditions, and the distribution of labor among the cuadrilla.

Third, the project demonstrates a different way to understand organizing, specifically labor organizing. Labor research makes reference to groups of workers and

network ties interconnecting workers that has facilitated union organization. But the *cuadrilla* as the center of analysis engaged in struggle and mobilization is a perspective on labor organization that has not been discussed in the literature. Especially as it relates to workers collective struggle across the border. Given the circumstances of the multiple borders in San Diego, the *cuadrilla* can be viewed as an extension of the mobile commons. Autonomy of migration scholars suggest the mobile commons is an organizational practice of mobile people for the freedom of movement across international borders. Mobilization that is based on the politics of care: the mutual cooperation and caring for others along the migration trail. But, as I outline in chapter two, the *cuadrilla* is an organization that has been influenced by *sociedades mutualistas* [mutual aid societies] that have circulated across the U.S./Mexico border since at least the late-1800s (Gómez, 2016; Gómez-Quiñones, 1994; Zamora, 2000). *Sociedades mutualistas* have historically given rise to trade unions and sparked local and regional political struggles across border regions (Gómez 2016). They have reinforced collectivist values and egalitarian principles to meet the material and financial needs of its members through emergency loans, pooling of money for medical emergencies and death, and organize cultural events (Zamora 2000). These are all functions that the *cuadrilla* has and continues to serve in its collective and cooperative modes.

Fourth, methodologically, the dissertation project demonstrates that researchers can map the border, understand the border, and theorize about the border along with migrants without having to divulge the specific strategies and secrets about migrant's

clandestine crossing.<sup>65</sup> Several Border Studies scholars have continued the unethical practice of revealing migrant's specific strategies to cross the border unauthorized. These researchers in turn claim these strategies as findings for university consumption.

The Fifth lesson is a reconceptualization of migrant men's border narratives. Masculinity research on migrant construction workers continues to interpret men's border narratives as a masculine expression to embrace danger and denigrated labor conditions in the workplace. Specifically, I found that men's narratives about hard work and migration with the common workplace expression *querías norte ahora te chingas* [you wanted to come north now your fucked], demonstrates that men are not the willing subjects that are portrayed by the literature. The common expression reveals that men create spaces to critique exploitative workplace and migration experiences.

Finally, the project demonstrates how collective maps are created collectively in struggle. The process of counter mapping as a methodology for research that is based on survival. It is an approach to research that attempts to move beyond research for observation and discovery of people's social worlds. But how can research engage existing forms of surviving and thriving that is part of the methodological process of peoples struggle to create an alternative.

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<sup>65</sup> See the following scholarship on alternative mappings; Casas-Cortés, M., Cobarrubias, S., Heller, C., & Pezzani, L. (2017). Clashing Cartographies, Migrating Maps: The Politics of Mobility at the External Borders of E.U. rope. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 16 (1), 1-33. <https://www.acmejournal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/1094>; Dalton, C. M. & Stallmann, T. (2018). Counter-mapping data science. *The Canadian Geographer / Le Géographe canadien*, 62(1), 93-101. DOI: 10.1111/cag.12398; and, Precarias a la Deriva. (2006). A very careful strike—four hypotheses. *The Commoner*, 11, 33-45.

## **Future directions**

This dissertation does not mark the end of the project. Its calendar is not based on institutional deadlines, nor the universities use value, but on our collective imaginings as a group of workers collectively in struggle. Therefore, the research project is ongoing. After the defense, I plan to translate the sections of the project into Spanish and circulate it among its participants. The next phase of the project will encompass follow up interviews, focus groups, and meetings with project participants. It is also important to note, that the “purpose” of this ethnography remains an ongoing discussion circulated among workers. It is a conversation that was sparked during an interview with Martin who commented, “So what is the story you are trying to tell? Is this project going to change my situation, change policy?” At the time, I responded honestly, “No. This project is not going to change anything. It will probably not change your life significantly, if at all. But collectively we can decide what purpose it does serve us.” It was this conversation that began a series of other conversations with participants about the ‘tools’ that may come from this project. While several possibilities have emerged, none had an interest for affecting public policy or immigration law.

There are several projects that center legal challenges to border enforcement practices and the constitutionality of immigration checkpoints. This is necessary because relatively little is known about the operations of immigration checkpoints within the border zone (Maddux 2017). Each year Border Patrol sends Congress a performance report on interior checkpoints that include the amount and type of contraband seized and number of apprehensions (Maddux 2017). Not included in the report is information about individuals that are stopped, searched, and released (Maddux 2017; Osete 2016). Perhaps

because that information, if ever, is rarely documented. But even the data that is systematically collected by U.S. Border Patrol is riddled with management and collection concerns that, according to several government reports, contain “long-standing data issues” that make it difficult to decipher immigration operations at or around immigration checkpoints.<sup>66</sup>

The rampant abuse by U.S. Border Patrol led the ACLU to initiate the Border Litigation Project from which the organization has organized lawsuits against Border Patrol’s abusive actions at checkpoints and roving patrols.<sup>67</sup> In 2014, the San Diego ACLU Border Litigation Project, along with the ACLU Foundation of Southern California and the University of California, Irvine School of Law’s Immigrant Rights Clinic, submitted a Freedom of Information Act to the Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Customs and Border Protection that sought records related to roving patrol operations in San Diego and El Centro. More recently, in 2018, the CATO Institute, a public policy research think tank, launched an interactive online initiative—Checkpoint America: Monitoring the Constitution-Free Zone—designed to map and monitor Department of Homeland Security Custom and Border Protection (CBP) internal

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<sup>66</sup> see GAO (2009) report, “Checkpoints Contribute to Border Patrol’s Mission, but More Consistent Data Collection and Performance Measurement Could Improve Effectiveness.”

<sup>67</sup> see “ACLU Wins Suit Over Individuals’ Right to Protest and Monitor Border Patrol Checkpoint Operations.” February 2018. accessed April 2, 2020 at: <https://www.aclusandiego.org/aclu-wins-suit-individuals-right-protest-monitor-border-patrol-checkpoint-operations/>; also see ACLU v. Department of Homeland Security lawsuit filed in February 2015, accessed April 2, 2020 at: <https://www.aclusandiego.org/aclu-v-department-of-homeland-security/>; also see “ACLU sues Border Patrol for records on 'roving patrols.'” February 2015. Accessed April 2, 2020 at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-immigration-lawsuit-idUSKBN0LF0KC20150211>

checkpoint operations.<sup>68</sup> The initiative is intended to provide the public with information about the operations of checkpoints and improve the understanding of its activities.

While there is precedent and interest to gather information on the operations of checkpoints to affect policy change, this was not the main interest of the people who were part of, and participated in, this study. For example, in discussions with participants what also emerged was how could this project assist their children in their university studies. Several participants were part of construction projects that built San Diego State University, California State University-San Marcos, and Palomar College, institutions that their children currently attend or will attend in the near future. Participants have suggested that the project serve as a tool for mentorship and research opportunities for their children as they enter the university. They discussed the possibility that I collaborate with their children to assist them in navigating higher education.

The importance of the collective knowledge that was produced and circulated cannot be understated. The next step is to recirculate the collected knowledge among workers, and gather further information on workers reactions, recollections, and amendments to the project. This research/life is an ongoing process, that continues to organize my workdays. For instance, in May of 2020 I received a message from a former coworker, Manuel, asking if I can help with a side job opportunity in Los Angeles, where I currently reside. While I was unavailable to assist him with the job, we had a conversation about the changing patterns of immigration checkpoint operations. Manuel is undocumented and would face substantial risk at the crossing of immigration

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<sup>68</sup> see *Checkpoint America: Monitoring the Constitution-Free Zone*, accessed April 2, 2020 at: <https://www.cato.org/checkpoint-america>

checkpoints in San Diego. I was able to send him information about that changing patterns of checkpoint operations due to the COVID-19 crisis. The decrease in traffic, operations have spiked border enforcement actions at several checkpoint sites that have been in non-operation. For this larger project, while I am open to the possibility for policy implications in the future as they may emerge, the commitments are not overdetermined by orientations to change policy or reform laws. From the beginning this project, and my participation, has been committed to circulating more knowledge and information about how best to escape borders, how to continue to be a part of the already existing infrastructure, imaginary and material actions for the freedom of movement.

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