

Culturally constructed legitimacy; the push-pull model: Chavez Chapter 2

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- Chavez: Shadowed Lives: Chapter 2, Separation pp. 25-43
 - What does “Separation” refer to?
 - subject matter of the chapter
 - metaphor that structures the book
- Motivations for migrating to the US
 - p.25: key idea: “The idea of migrating to work in the United States is not something that just happens. It is socially and culturally constructed.”
 - what does this mean?
 - history
 - meaning
 - Ways in which the idea of migration is constructed in the minds of Mexicans
 - recruiting
 - family history
 - friends and kin
 - stories
 - music
 - Examples of construction of the idea of migrating:
 - Case of Enrique Valenzuela (a pseudonym, like almost all names in the book)
 - small rancho in Puebla: work is seasonal, 6 months per year if any
 - **Bracero Program** (already mentioned in the Introduction)
 - Father participated for 12 years, continued migrating after the program ended in 1964, but now without documents
 - discouraged his son from doing the same (a very common theme in stories like these)
 - why would he do that?
 - how did the Bracero program contribute to Enrique (the son) deciding to migrate?
 - pp.28-29: Case of Andrea Potrero
 - migrated to work while staying with an aunt who was a legal resident
 - five generations of her family have lived and worked in the US, over most of the 20th century: long historical connection
 - Another aspect of Mexican life that shapes the idea of migration (contributes to constructing it): p.28-29: **maquiladoras**
 - factories in Mexico operating under a special legal regime
 - usually foreign-owned; built and run with foreign capital
 - input: parts or materials brought in from outside Mexico
 - output: must be taken out of Mexico to be sold
 - the only Mexican thing about them is location and labor: Mexicans, working for low Mexican wages
 - add to the impression of a single labor market

- Mexicans can work for American employers, producing for the American market, in Mexico
- how different is it to cross the border and work for Americans there?
- are the laws prohibiting this realistic? legitimate? is breaking them really wrong?
- The constructed concept of migration involves a variety of reasons for doing it, known and shared by many individuals
 - that is, these are ways of thinking that people learn from others
 - they are cultural constructs in themselves
 - they are out there to be adopted; individuals don't all figure them out on their own
 - p.29: “Target earners”: seek to earn money for a specific purpose, like sending back to family
 - part of a family strategy
 - or to earn capital to start a specific business
 - or to earn money to continue education
 - an accepted way of acquiring capital, starting off in life
 - p.30: “Dissatisfaction with local economic opportunities”
 - Excellent point: immigrants are a specific, small subset of Mexicans. Most Mexicans do not immigrate; they figure out ways to get by in Mexico
 - constructed idea: if you are unhappy with opportunities in Mexico, one reasonable response is to migrate to work in the US
 - p.33: “The immigrant’s dream”
 - US as land of opportunity, especially for your kids
 - migrating is seen as a way to move up
 - this is not passive, fatalistic... it is an active strategy to work towards a better future
 - p.34-36: “Female immigrants”
 - have to come with husband
 - choose to migrate to escape a bad relationship or family problems
 - choose to migrate to escape low status and poverty when abandoned by a husband
 - must stay to earn enough to pay off debt to relatives who paid for the coyote to get her to the US...
 - p.37: “Adventure and curiosity”
 - would this be so common without the history of the Bracero Program, family history, relatives in the US, the “immigrant’s dream”?
 - do lots of adventurous and curious young US citizens think of going to work in Mexico (or China or Italy) as something he/she wants to try?
 - maybe a few, but this is not a shared cultural construct in most variants of US culture
- p.39- motivations are often different for Central Americans
 - generally lack the long history of contacts, family in the US, networks created by the Bracero Program, etc.
 - similar: the “immigrant’s dream” vs. poor economic options at home
 - but also: escaping the political violence and guerrilla warfare in politically unstable El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua...

- Salvadoran man who did his military service, then feared that the guerillas would track him down for revenge
- do you think this difference might be changing now?
 - (the book is based on research in the 1980s)
 - why? how?
- p42: history, social relationships, economics lead Mexicans to see the US as a legitimate place to work
 - as noted last time, many Mexicans see themselves as part of a larger world that includes both the US and Mexico, with the border as simply an inconvenience
 - a single labor market with a troublesome border through it
 - many US employers see it the same way...
 - as we discussed in a previous class, **legitimacy** is at least as important as legality
 - you know that some things are illegal (drinking outside the family before age 21, using a cell phone while driving, consuming certain recreational drugs, not stopping completely at every stop sign) but still do them
 - because those laws don't seem very legitimate to you
 - they are not realistic, lots of people violate them, no harm seems to be done...
 - so you don't feel like a criminal for breaking those laws, either
 - same for Mexicans coming to the US to work
 - employers clearly want them here, and look the other way about their documents
 - they are doing no harm, and helping their families – clearly a good thing
 - lots of people they know do it, and are fine, upstanding adults
 - even their own relatives have done it for generations
 - so crossing the border without papers is hard, but not really immoral
 - prohibitions against it do not seem realistic or morally valid – they are not legitimate
- p42: the **push-pull model**
 - a widely used, useful way of thinking about motivations for migration
 - for any case of population movements, not only in the case of Mexican immigration
 - push: the factors that drive people out of Mexico or Central America
 - violence
 - poverty and lack of opportunity
 - low status and few options for single women or single mothers
 - pull: the factors that attract people to migrate to the US
 - safety from civil war, guerillas, political violence
 - more and better-paying work, chance to make some decent money
 - potential to get ahead, especially for one's children
 - potential to accumulate capital for a project at home (starting a business, building a house for a new family, supporting aging parents)