
Diasporic Workers, New Global Economy

According to the most recent data compiled by the United Nations Population Division, almost 3 percent of the global population, totaling approximately 200 million people worldwide, are immigrants – living and working outside the country of birth. International migration has rapidly escalated over the last quarter century with the number of immigrants today twice that of 1980. And while distinctions must necessarily be made between asylees, refugees, trafficked persons, and economic migrants, or diasporic workers – as demarcated in the Introduction to this book – all international migrants have impacted the global economy, as well as the national economies of home and host countries. The Global Commission on International Migration reports that economic migrants add \$240 billion annually to the economies of their home countries, while spending “more than \$2 trillion in their host nation[s]” (Leopold 2005). Economic migration, one of the earliest and longest-sustained patterns of international migration, has proliferated over the last few decades, particularly in the years following the oil crises of 1973 (a result of the Arab oil embargo) and 1979 (in part a consequence of the Iranian Revolution), and the subsequent global economic recession of the early 1980s. Diasporic workers in the “New Global Economy,” as it has been called, are part of this defining moment of late capitalism: its transnationalization of finance, its international division of production, its “outsourcing” (of labor and services), its “offshoring” (of banking and informational technologies), its commodification of exported (and exploited) labor, its global trade in goods and services, and its capital-monetary flows in remitted salaries, transferred funds, and inflationary-deflationary currency exchanges. While international economic migration has always been part of the extensive and intensive flows of capitalism, diasporic workers in the new global economy are unique in that they contribute not only to their personal livelihood, or even to that of their nuclear and extended families, but more expansively to their hometowns (its infrastructure and public services: roads, bridges, wells, supplies of drinking water, schools, textbooks) and even the

modernization or “development” of their native countries, particularly developing countries.

Diasporic workers, or economic migrants, are as diverse as the countries they emigrate from and the countries they migrate to: dominant patterns of international economic migration include Mexican and Central American farm workers or field hands, car-washers, nursing assistants, janitors, cooks, dishwashers, carpenters, and construction workers in the United States; Filipina maids in Hong Kong, Italy, and the US; Filipina and Filipino nurses registered and practicing in Canada, the US, countries in the European Union, Australia, and New Zealand;¹ Chinese working in textile factories outside Los Angeles; Ghanaians driving lorries or working the “Tube,” and Mauritian waitresses serving coffee in hotel restaurants off Tavistock Square in London, England; Pakistani construction workers in the Middle East, especially since the 1980s; Sri Lankan domestic workers in the Gulf States, again since the OPEC oil boom; Cameroonians manning explosives to extract oil in the Ogoni Delta region of Nigeria; Trinidadians drilling for oil offshore in Venezuela; Maghrebis, particularly Algerians, working on car-manufacturing assembly lines or as automobile mechanics in France’s Renault; Turks and Kurds waiting tables in Germany; Dominicans *buscando mejor vida*, “seeking a better life,” while working retail, answering telephones, or building houses in Puerto Rico;² Puerto Ricans working in the “garment district” of New York City, picking apples in western Massachusetts, or cleaning hotel rooms in Miami or the Bahamas; Haitian cane laborers in the DR, *und so weiter*, and so on.

Working to sustain self, family, friends, local villages, and developing nations, diasporas (or diasporic communities) employed overseas also contribute to political campaigns and national candidates back home, as is the case in Haiti and the Philippines,³ but also civil unrest, funding of revolutionary militant groups, arming of military coups, or supplying weapons, as is the case for Sri Lankans in Canada, and elsewhere, supporting the “Tamil Tigers” (officially the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Ealam [LTTE]), sometimes through forced remittances (discussed more extensively below).⁴ Developing countries – from the Dominican Republic and Haiti in the Caribbean, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in South Asia, and the Philippines in the Asian Pacific – have frequently based their own strategic plans for development on exported labor and imported free trade zones and multinational corporations. In this opening chapter, “Diasporic Workers, New Global Economy,” we will probe the interlocking issues of labor, immigration, legal documentation, illegal (or undocumented) workers, and economically driven migration patterns, such as agricultural migrant labor, housing or construction work, and other service-sector forms of employment (particularly in hotels and restaurants). The chapter thus allows readers to understand the push-pull of economic or financial patterns that are directly related to migration influxes-outflows within a country, as well as the relation of economic migration, recession, and the frequently atavistic eruptions of anti-immigrant sentiments that accompany periods of economic decline. It will also address two related issues: the huge impact that diasporic remittances have had and continue to have on small developing economies worldwide; and the global resurgent phenomenon of human trafficking and forced labor.

Taking economic migration and North American worker diasporas as our case study, we will examine the long historical patterns of economic migration across the US-Mexican “border,” or *La Frontera* and *La Linea* as it is called in Spanish. Contested territory at least since 1846 when the United States first sent federal troops to the land surrounding the Rio Grande, and acquired “legally” – or as Mexicans might counter-dispute, illegally – by the US at the end of the Mexican-American War two years later in 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadeloupe Hidalgo (which allowed for the official US annexation of Mexican land now comprising the states of Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas, Utah, Nevada, and California), the border region, or *La Frontera*, between the United States and Mexico remains a violent and liminal zone of economic, material, political, militaristic, judicial, legal, and extra-legal transnational negotiation between the two countries.

This opening chapter thus focuses extensively, in the final case study, on Mexican and Central American economic migration to the United States and examines the often polemical and even violent transnational “border politics” that have accompanied this migration. The case study discusses the multiple series of Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) “operations” – from the pejoratively named “Operation Wetback” of 1954 to “Operation Secure the Border” proposed in 2006 – implemented in order to control and restrict transborder migration, as well as restrictive state legislative acts like California’s Proposition 187, and labor strikes among undocumented workers (for example, the hotel workers’ strikes in Chicago, Minneapolis, San Francisco, Las Vegas, and elsewhere in the US). Moving into the contemporary historical moment, the case study also addresses President George W. Bush’s deployment of National Guardsmen to work beside border patrol agents in summer 2006, concomitant congressional proposals in the Senate and the House of Representatives to build a fence along the already heavily “patrolled,” though still-porous border, and the unsettling and invidious upsurges in transborder violence as vigilante citizen groups such as the Minute Men take up arms and also attempt to “police” the border.

Diasporic Remittances, Small Developing Economies

Throughout the 1990s, diasporic remittances exceeded international developmental aid to many developing countries (Stilwell et al. 2004, 597; cited in Kingma 2006). In 2001, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development estimated that the annual total for officially transferred diasporic remittances worldwide was \$117 billion (cited in Kingma 2006, 194). According to the Report of the Global Commission on International Migration commissioned by the United Nations for 2005, the amount of global economic remittances – US\$150 billion annually – exceeded (by three times!) the amount of international developmental aid extended to developing countries for that year.⁵ Diasporic dollars remitted to family members and friends in the home country through official channels – money wiring agencies, post offices, banks, or other financial

institutions – often comprise a substantial portion of the receiving country’s gross domestic product: “for example, 4.5 percent in Benin, 5.8 percent in Burkina Faso, 16.2 percent in Nicaragua, and 26.5 percent in Lesotho” (Kingma 2006, 6). Other countries have benefited even more radically from influxes of diasporic remittances, or what Appadurai refers to as *financescapes*: during 2000 alone, “remittances sent by the diaspora to El Salvador, Eritrea, Jamaica, Nicaragua and Yemen enabled these countries to augment their respective GDP by more than 10 percent” (IOM 2003a, 17, 229; cited in Kingma 2006, 193); and in Tonga, “remittances account for as much as 39 percent of their GDP” (ibid). Moreover, in African countries that are not oil-rich (as are Nigeria and Cameroon), diasporic remittances exceed dollar-for-dollar the amount of foreign capital investment in the country, thus making “an essential contribution to the national economy” (ibid). Other countries with strategic programs designed to export human labor, encouraging massive outflows of economic laborers, like the Philippines and the Dominican Republic, also have incredibly large capital inflows of diasporic remittances, totaling in the billions annually for both countries. Despite the obvious decisive economic boon to developing countries through circulating diasporic remittances and inflows of hard cash, the actual benefit is exceptionally difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain, since data on global diasporic remittances is based on “official” flows of capital and thus does not, and cannot, account for “remittances channeled through unofficial routes, which in some cases, as for the Arab countries, reach huge proportions,” as Glytsos explains (2001, 262). Unofficial diasporic remittances form part of what Choucri (1986) refers to as a “hidden economy” within some national economies (cited in Glytsos 2001, 262).

Not only directly benefiting friends and family, diasporic remittances also stimulate local national economies through increased income and consumer spending, though some scholars believe that this influx of cash-capital may also stimulate inflation, though the evidence is, at this point, “inconclusive” (Glytsos 2001, 263). Diasporic remittances received by family and friends are often used to purchase food, clothing, electronic appliances (refrigerators, stoves, televisions, videocassette recorders), and houses or housing-construction materials; in fact, 73 percent of diasporic remittances to Egypt “went into housing construction” (Glytsos 2001, 263). Diasporic dollars, however, also flow toward infrastructural development projects: helping to build roads, staff local schools, and generously contribute to other “hometown” projects (particularly in countries like Haiti with very few public resources or tax revenues). Diasporic incomes are frequently earned in hard currencies – like dollars, euros, marks, or pounds – and increasingly financial institutions are collaborating with migrant workers to transfer funds internationally without first exchanging the currency into softer ones that are subject to devaluation and erratic deflationary fluxes (Kingma 2006; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2005). Other banks and financial institutions have reduced the transfer fees charged for remitting funds internationally, and this reduction in percentage of commission fees has dramatically increased the remittances actually reaching friends and family members in the home countries:

Following a negotiation with the Mexican government and as part of a marketing campaign targeting Latin American workers in the United States, a group of banks agreed to lower the transfer commission rate to 5 percent. As a result a further \$1–2 million per year reaches relatives and investment projects in Latin America. Similarly, three banks in Paris offer a special transfer scheme to Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Senegal; in 1999 they officially transferred \$24 million to Senegal alone.

In countries with high (even staggering) levels of unemployment, diasporic remittances can alleviate national poverty and economic hardship: according to the International Labor Organization, diasporic remittances sent to the country of Senegal “constitute the principal source of household income – almost 90 percent – for those households that receive them.” (Kingma 2006, 109, 193)

Developing countries have become, perhaps, so financially dependent upon diasporic remittances sent home by overseas migrant workers annually that national (or global) efforts to reduce international economic migration may have severe and deleterious consequences for the economic sustainability of those countries. Case in point: both Houses of the United States Congress, Senate and the House of Representatives, are amidst ongoing debate in proposed 2006 immigration reform bills currently under legislative consideration; if passed, these bills (S. 2611 and HR 4437) will almost certainly have a negative economic impact on migrants workers (“legal” and “illegal,” authorized and undocumented) in the US, their families back home, and sending countries, such as Mexico and Guatemala. In countries sending highly skilled, well-trained, or professionally educated workers (like nurses, physicians, engineers, physicists, professors, and so on), the loss of human capital and potential tax revenues *may* actually exceed the diasporic remittances sent back home, even though migrant professionals with higher salaries tend to remit at higher rates; the data on migrant professionals is inconclusive and a point of scholarly debate among international migration scholars; in countries sending low-skilled, uneducated workers (such as agricultural farmhands, janitors, dishwashers, or maids, though many of these individuals are also admittedly skilled, educated, underemployed at home and abroad, and thus overqualified for their low-paying migrant jobs), however, the diasporic remittances more than amply compensate for or substantially offset the loss in human capital and potential income tax revenues.

Gendered differences are also traceable in patterns of economic diasporic remittances, as María José Alcalá demonstrates in a recent study entitled “A Passage to Hope: Women and International Migration.” According to Alcalá, women migrant workers, who on average earn less than their male counterparts, still send a higher percentage of their earnings home each year to support family, especially children and aging parents, who remain behind. Of the estimated 95 million women immigrants working outside of their home countries, a significant proportion remit, on average, “up to three-quarters of their income home” (Barbassa 2006). In the year 2000, “Bangladeshi women working in the Middle East . . . sent home 72 percent of their earnings, on average” (Barbassa 2006). Funds remitted by women economic migrants also typically comprise the majority of total remittances received by their home countries each year. For example,

in 1999 Sri Lankan women working abroad (many as domestic workers in the Middle East) remitted approximately 62 percent of “the more than \$1 billion the country received in remittances” (Barbassa 2006). According to statistics compiled by the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) for 2003, an estimated 680,000 Sri Lankan women were outside of the country, with “over 80 percent of them [working] as housemaids in the Middle East” (SLBFE 2003; cited in Gamburd 2004). Sri Lankan diasporic workers and their financial contributions to the South Asian island country’s economy are discussed at greater length below.

Filipino diasporic remittances have powerfully shaped the Philippine economy over the last few decades. Remittance dollars, in effect, constitute *the* push-pull of the Filipino diaspora: in 1989, annual remittances equaled US\$973 million (Hawthorne 2001, 214n2); dollars remitted to the Philippines for 1993 totaled “3.4 percent of the Gross Domestic Product, which is the equivalent of 30 percent of the trade deficit or entire interest payments on the country’s foreign debt” (Chang 2000, 130). And according to the Central Bank of the Philippines, the remittances returned to the country by overseas migrant workers from 1974 to 1994 totaled US\$18.196 billion (Ceniza Choy 2003, 188). Filipino remittances in dollars and other hard currencies (pounds and euros) have peaked in the early years of the twenty-first century: in 2004, remittances equaled US\$8.5 billion (Kingma 2006, 24); and in 2005, US\$10.7 billion (Mannes 2006). Rhacel Salazar Parreñas contends it is “impossible to overlook the significance of migrant labor to the Philippine economy. Some 34 to 54 percent of the Filipino population is sustained by remittances from migrant workers” (2005, 39). And the decades-old Philippine historical pattern of migratory outflows and capital inflows is likely to continue unabated, “given the country’s massive \$46 billion debt to the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and other lending institutions based in North America,” and especially since “overseas workers’ remittances have been the country’s largest source of foreign exchange” (Ceniza Choy 2003, 188).

Haitian diasporic remittances have similarly impacted the country’s developing economy over the last few decades, beginning in the late Duvalier period. Throughout the late Duvalier period, the late 1970s through the mid-1980s, the import-export equation escalated, as Haiti continued to import far more than it exported; and by 1985, Haiti was deep within its economic crisis. According to Hooper, “by that year, the balance of payments deficit reached \$25 million, while total debt was estimated at between \$519 million and \$833 million by August 1987” (1995, 135). Debt coincided with state despotism, the Duvalier dictatorship in the country, and a noose’s hold on public political expression, as well as out-migration. Throughout the Duvalier era, in fact, Haitian exiles or diasporic subjects who fled political persecution, brutality, and economic hardship in Haiti for a better life outside of Haiti’s borders (whether in Santo Domingo, the Bahamas, Dakar, Paris, New York, Boston, Miami, or Montréal) were regarded as national traitors. Haitians who transferred their citizenship to other countries were considered *apatrid*, or without a country (Glick Schiller and Fouron 1999, 139). In 1990 the relationship between Haiti and its diaspora was radically

altered, and it had profound effects on the trans-American reconfigurations of nation-states and diasporas, as well as the country's economic development strategies. (One other consequence is that Haitian diasporic communities more openly expressed concern and engaged in forms of nonviolent political activism to denounce the treatment of Haitian refugees detained both at Guantánamo Bay and at Miami's Krome Detention Center.) As socialist, grassroots candidate in the 1990 Haitian presidential election, Jean-Bertrand Aristide reincorporated the diaspora into the national, if not territorial body of Haiti, referring to the diaspora as the country's administrative "Tenth Department." Aristide directly appealed to the nationalist sentiments of the diaspora, calling for their reinvestment in the homeland in *Pwojè Lavalas* (Project Lavalas), a paper published during his presidential campaign, and promising an important place for all Haitians living in diaspora. The publication proclaimed that "the LAVALAS MOUVMAN, which has adopted a good project of government, supposes the participation of all citizens from all social classes," adding that "a special place will be reserved for peasants, women, all patriotic movements, and all Haitians in diaspora" (quoted in Glick Schiller and Fouron 1999, 135). This appeal to Haitians living in diaspora echoed Aristide's earlier calls for the diaspora to return home in *In the Parish of the Poor* (published in 1987), writing: "My generation is running away from Haiti, with its dark corners and byways. I want to call them back before they begin their fruitless travels. . . . I say to them come back and make a new Haiti" (quoted in Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001, 119). Aristide reconsidered this "politics of return" in 1990, once he realized the positive financial impact of the diaspora (with its constant remittances to family members, its generous campaign contributions, and its fundraising within hometown associations); diasporic dollars were key to rebuilding Haiti, and Aristide even referred to the diaspora, or "Tenth Department," as a "bank" (Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001, 120; cf. Richman 196). In fact, two-thirds of the \$300,000 raised for Aristide's 1990 presidential campaign was raised from diasporic contributions (Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001, 120; Jean-Pierre 1995, 202). After his election in April 1991, Aristide raised an additional \$600,000 from Haitians living in diaspora to fund development projects under the Lavalas Administration (Jean-Pierre 1995, 202). Remittances (estimated at US\$125 million annually) sent by Haitian diasporic communities and family members living in the United States and Canada, however, partially offset the country's trade imbalance (Hooper 1995; Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001). Diasporic remittances also directly impact the foreign policy decisions of host country as well as facilitate (and fund) changes in homeland politics for the developing Caribbean country of Haiti.

Sri Lankan diasporic workers have also impacted the country's economy and political structure through financial remittances. Sri Lanka's postcolonial history, vexed by civil warfare and ongoing violence, is crucial to understanding its migratory outflows of both political refugees and economic migrants. Civil unrest erupted in the South Asian island country in the early 1980s: warring factions and nationalist, separatist divisions broke down along ethnic and religious lines with the Sri Lankan Sinhalese Buddhist and Muslim majority first repressing – politically and economically – the Tamil Hindu minority, and then opposing the

militant factions and insurrectionist forces within the Tamil minority. Amidst race riots and inter-ethnic strife in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the country's Sinhalese majority (approximately 14.25 million people) persecuted the Tamil minority (approximately 3.2 million people). In July 1983 the Sri Lankan government instituted an "anti-Tamil pogrom," which "left up to 3,000 Tamils dead" (Sriskandarajah 2002, 289, 290). The conflict, though erupting in 1983, was decades in the making:

Since Sri Lanka's independence from the British in 1948, the Sinhalese majority has systematically cut down Tamil rights. The Sinhalese-dominated state passed the Sinhala Only Act in 1956, which made Sinhala Sri Lanka's official language. Next, the state attacked Tamil dominance in Sri Lanka's educational system by lowering university acceptance standards for Sinhalese students. Horrific riots in 1977, 1981, and 1983 increasingly polarized the community. (La 2004, 381)

Yet it was undeniably "the events of 1983 [which] mark[ed] the start of the widespread refugee flows from Sri Lanka to India and the rest of the world" (Sriskandarajah 2002, 290). To counter ethnic and religious intimidation by the dominant majority who controlled the Sri Lankan government, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), or the "Tamil Tigers," was founded in 1983. Consequently, the Tamil Tigers entered a revolutionary struggle to secede from Sri Lanka, claiming Jaffna (in northeast Sri Lanka) as a separate, national homeland. According to Sriskandarajah, "the north-east of the island, traditionally home to the island's Sri Lankan Tamil population and base of the largest militant group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), has undergone widespread devastation" (2002, 289). From 1983 until the ceasefire negotiated by Denmark and Norway in 2002, almost 65,000 Sri Lankans died during the bloody civil warfare.

During this same period, the country also experienced massive migratory outflows – the Sinhalese economically migrating to the Middle East, and the Tamils seeking political refuge in India, North America (primarily Canada), Europe, and Australia. Thus, out-migratory flows from Sri Lanka may be subdivided into labor and political migrations. While immigration scholar Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah concedes that "the total migration from Sri Lanka, estimated to be between 1.5–2 million over roughly 20 years, is not particularly large or intense by global standards[,] [w]hat is notable . . . is the scale of this migration relative to population size, its sustained nature, and the notoriety achieved by migration flows from Sri Lanka" (2002, 288). Sriskandarajah distinguishes the "basic characteristics" of the two dominant out-migratory flows in the following ways: the first pattern is defined as a labor migration, predominantly of Sinhalese Muslims, voluntarily, for "economic reasons" and through "formal channels" (or governmentally negotiated international labor contracts) to the Middle East; the second pattern is defined as a "forced" political migration of Tamils due to "conflict-driven" causes and through "informal channels" to India and to the developed countries of the West (2002, 288). Human costs of the armed civil conflict and out-migration have been profound: as Sriskandarajah writes,

the conflict has had high direct and indirect costs island-wide in terms of lives, livelihoods, and slower economic growth. Not surprisingly, the largest increases in both migration flows have occurred since 1983. While the majority of political migrants have been Tamils directly affected by the conflict in the north-east, the conflict has also indirectly fueled the increased flows of predominantly Sinhalese labour migration from the south-west. (Sriskandarajah 2002, 289)

To date, approximately 1.5–2 million Sri Lankans live off the island.

Following the national success of the Philippine economic development plan based on exported (yet too often exploited) human labor, the Sri Lankan government followed suit in creating the Sri Lankan Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) to “promote the country’s ‘main resource’, namely ‘its highly industrial and literate people’” (Sriskandarajah 2002, 291). From a national development perspective, the active exportation of labor “eased unemployment problems,” resulted in monetary capital inflows to compensate for human capital outflows: the diasporic workers’ remittances “contributed to the national income and eased foreign exchange needs at a time when military expenditures and government borrowing were increasing” (Sriskandarajah 2002, 291). Diasporic remittances exceeded US\$1 billion by the late twentieth century, representing a significant portion of Sri Lanka’s “total annual GDP of less than US\$20 billion” (Sriskandarajah 2002, 294). Based on data collected by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Sri Lankan diasporic workers remitted only US\$9 million in 1975, but the amount has increased dramatically since 1980 with a rapid proliferation seen during the 1990s: in 1980, diasporic workers remitted US\$152 million; in 1985, US\$292 million; in 1990, US\$401 million; in 1995, US\$790 million; and in 1999, over US\$1.05 billion. As Michele Ruth Gamburd affirms, “the Sri Lankan government has grown increasingly dependent on labor migration to relieve local unemployment and bring in much-needed foreign exchange” (2004, 167). While substantial and impressive contributions to Sri Lanka’s developing economy, these estimates only include formal remittances sent through official channels (banking institutions, financial centers, post offices, corporate money-wiring agencies) and not those informal remittances sent through unofficial channels (third-party transfers or covert wiring mechanisms).

While Sinhalese diasporic workers have remitted funds to stabilize the Sri Lankan developing economy, Tamil diasporic remittances have often worked to destabilize the country. For example, TamilNet has fostered diasporic remittances intended to further the revolutionary cause of the Tamil Tigers. Diasporic politics have thus continued to influence homeland politics. In posing a tentative answer to his own titular question, “Can Remittances Spur Development?,” economist Stuart S. Brown conjectures “yes,” affirming that diasporic communities can indeed “influence home country politics as well as host country foreign policy” (2006, 64). In the case of the Tamil Tigers, however, the influence on host countries has diminished as it has resorted to internationally shunned violent tactics (like suicide bombings) in its revolutionary struggle. Or as Sriskandarajah explains, “Tamil diasporic organizations have been actively engaged in shaping Tamil politics, and, generally, in legitimizing Tamil nationalism” (2002, 298),

though that effort has been marred in developed countries of the West since the destructive bombing attacks on the World Trade Center Twin Towers, first in 1993 and then again in 2001.

According to UNHCR statistics published in June 2001, an estimated 817,000 Tamil refugees (or asylum seekers) were “internationally displaced” (Sriskandarajah 2002, 293). The majority of diasporic Tamils reside in Canada, Europe, India, the US, and Australia: 400,000 Tamils are in Canada; 200,000 in Europe; 67,000 in India; 40,000 in the US; and 30,000 in Australia. The same UNHCR report ranked Sri Lanka in “the top ten of asylum seeker sending countries” for the year 2000 (Sriskandarajah 2002, 293). According to political scientist and peace and conflict studies scholar John La, “Canada currently hosts the world’s largest Sri Lankan diaspora,” and most are Tamils living in “ethnic enclaves” in Toronto and Vancouver and who sought and gained political asylum in the North American country following the events of 1983. La documents that Tamil diasporic remittances are not always “voluntary.” In fact, La charges that the LTTE – “notorious,” he writes, “for using tactics such as political assassination, suicide bombing, and the recruitment of child soldiers” – compels Tamil Sri Lankan Canadians to support its cause by developing “a system to extract remittances from Tamil refugees in Canada by exploiting transnational social ties,” and by threatening the refugees, their families, and “the security of relatives or property still in Sri Lanka” (2004, 379). La illustrates how the LTTE exerts control over the Tamil diaspora, detailing how Tamil Tigers “have infiltrated Tamil enclaves in Canada” in order to forcibly “extract” remittances from the diasporic community: these funds “are normally collected by front businesses and charities” such as the Federation of Associations of Canadian Tamils (FACT), an organization alleged to have “raised” and then diverted (or “laundered”) an estimated sum “between US\$12 million and US\$22 million annually for the LTTE” (La 2004, 381). Refusals to remit are often met with veiled threats toward family members back home or worse: “tragic losses of life or destruction of property in the refugee’s sending state” (La 2004, 381). Tamil diasporic remittances, thus, often flow through third-party or informal channels, particularly since the designation of the LTTE as a “terrorist organization” by the US State Department in 1997 and FACT as a terrorist organization since September 11, 2001. Consequently, Tamil diasporic remittances are “often funneled through foreign bank accounts or other intermediary institutions that help to cloak these capital flows”; or, at times, the group has actually smuggled money (cash, not virtual) into the country (La 2004, 382).

Economic and infrastructural devastation has also been one impact of the extended armed conflict in Sri Lanka. And “the challenge in [and for] Sri Lanka will be to move from a vicious cycle of conflict, underdevelopment and migration to a more virtuous one” (Sriskandarajah 2002, 283). Writing the case study on Sri Lanka for the International Organization of Migration (published in *International Migration* in 2002), Sriskandarajah remarked in an endnote that “positive signs [were] emerging from Sri Lanka that the main protagonists in the conflict were willing to enter negotiations toward an interim political solution”; and while a ceasefire was agreed to by both groups in 2002, only four years later,

violence – allegedly committed by Tamil Tigers armed, supplied, and financially supported by the Tamil diaspora – erupted once more in April 2006. By early autumn 2006, though still ostensibly under ceasefire, almost 700 Sri Lankans had been killed by gunfire, hand grenades, and suicide bombings as the fighting appears to have actively resumed despite the ceasefire. High unemployment in the northeast Tamil populated part of the island, combined with insurrectionist fervor, has made the area “a fertile recruitment ground for Tamil militant groups” and continues to lure Tamil youth into militancy. As La explains, Sri Lanka has been (and continues to be) wounded by a “civil war that has, over the past twenty years, instilled deep-rooted hostilities between Tamils and Sinhalese, destroyed Sri Lanka’s national infrastructure, and claimed over 65,000 lives” (2004, 382). The point is this: diasporas may have a profound impact on their homelands through remitted funds earned abroad and transferred home; yet at times, those funds may serve destructive ends or aims nationally, politically, and materially. And the forced extraction of remittances, as in the case of Tamil refugees in Canada, further violates the human rights of persecuted individuals who fled their homeland seeking refuge from violence and exploitation. Diasporic remittances, then, are powerful tools to sway homeland politics, but that influence may not always be a beneficial one. As Anita Mannur and I asked several years ago in our editors’ introduction to the edited volume *Theorizing Diaspora* (2002):

In theorizing future trajectories of diaspora and diaspora studies, it will be crucial to schematically analyze the role of cyber-technology and the world wide web within such ideological and capitalistic formations: how, for example, do supporters of specific organizations such as the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) and LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam), who are committed to positing a different version of the homeland, use cyber-space to promote alternative visions of the home and the homeland, while also moving capital across such divides? How does their presence on the Internet allow for faster or easier transnational flows of money?

Having addressed the impact that diasporic workers in the “new global economy” may have on homeland politics and on host country foreign policy through remittances, generally, let’s now consider the specific historical, material, cultural, labor, and geopolitical space of the US-Mexico border as a catalytic site for transborder economic migration and even the multinational, third-space of the “borderzone” itself as an important site for global capitalist expansion, production, and diasporic transmigration.

Case Study: “La Frontera”: Transborder Migrations, Mexican-American Diasporic Workers

The illegal immigrant is the bravest among us. The most modern among us.

Richard Rodriguez, author of *Brown*

Fences don't work.

Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Massachusetts

It's impossible to deport a population the size of Ohio.

Senator Tim Johnson, South Dakota

There are many Mexicos; there are also many Mexican borders.

Luis Alberto Urrea, author of *Across the Wire*

Given its geographical proximity – indeed land-mass contiguity – with the continental United States (the “border,” though porous, only officially delineated in 1853), and given the long and sustained patterns of economic migration south to north, and less frequently north to south, across the border, the US-Mexican capitalist interdependence and patterns of historical economic migration constitute a unique case study. Economic migrants – seasonal farm workers, cattle drivers, ranch hands, and more recently, hotel and restaurant workers and construction workers – have been crossing the border (legally and illegally, documented and undocumented) as long as it has existed; and of course, the indigenous traversing of river, desert, and sparsely settled land in the region that eventually became *La Frontera* predates the actual border itself. According to Haines and Rosen (1999), half of all “illegal aliens” in the United States are from Mexico, and approximately 15 percent are from Central America. Other statistics are equally salient: according to *World Development Indicators*, published by the World Bank in 2003, annual remittances to Mexico totaled an estimated US\$4.2 billion in 1996, and US\$8.9 billion in 2001; in 2002, “20 million Mexican workers . . . sent home nearly \$10 billion” (Kapur and McHale 2003, 50); most impressively, data published in *Balance of Payments Statistics Yearbook* and compiled by the IMF, as well as estimated figures presented by the World Bank for 2004, estimate that Mexican migrants remitted a whopping US\$18.1 billion back home to family and friends in Mexico!⁶ And as economist Stuart S. Brown reports, the majority of these remittances flow from the US to Mexico, further noting that “the largest single group of remitters has been US-residing Latin Americans, with a disproportionate share of US remittances flowing to Mexico” (2006, 60).

In this case study, then, we will focus on US-Mexico economic migration, placing contemporary transborder movement of workers across *La Frontera*, or the “border,” in the historical context of Anglo- and Spanish colonialism in North America from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, forcible land acquisitions and westward expansionist movement by the United States throughout the nineteenth century, the Mexican-American War (1846–8), the consequent establishing of the border and demarcation (or cartographic divisions) of North American into US and Mexican territories in 1848 and 1853, the creation of the US Border Patrol, and historical patterns of economic migration across the border in the late nineteenth, twentieth, and early twenty-first centuries.

North America, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was defined by British, French, and Spanish colonial territorial acquisition, expropriation of native or indigenous lands, and boundary disputes. By 1800, the British colonies had both declared (in 1776) and won (in 1783) independence from King George's Britain; and Charles IV of Spain had ceded "Louisiana" to France under coercion by Napoleon Bonaparte. Three years later in 1803, fighting a losing battle against the "Black Jacobins" revolting against slavery and French colonial rule in the Antillean island of Saint-Domingue, Napoleon sold the Louisiana territory to the United States of America during the administration of President Thomas Jefferson, who orchestrated the "Purchase," for a monumental \$15 million, money sorely needed to subdue slave revolutionaries declaring their own independence under the political and military leadership of Toussaint Louverture (in 1791, two years after the storming of the Bastille that started the French Revolution in 1789). Despite the dispossession of France from its second largest North American colony (after Québec in the northeastern continental territories) and the massive monetary acquisition, the French colonial empire still lost its most wealth-producing and profitable colony, Saint-Domingue, as the revolutionary soldiers declared the independence of the République d'Haïti (Republic of Haiti) one year later in 1804. Annexationist and expansionist in nationalist fervor, President Jefferson claimed that the Louisiana territory "included all lands north and east of the Rio Grande, thus laying claim to Spanish settlements such as San Antonio and Santa Fe" (Nevins 2002, 16). The young United States of America thus entered early nineteenth-century negotiations with imperial Spain and the Spanish colonial empire in North America to establish the "exact location of the boundary between Spanish Texas and the Louisiana territory" (Nevins 2002, 17). Battles and border disputes raged in the early nineteenth century – Napoleon invading Spain in 1808, and the USA invading western Florida in 1810 and eastern Florida, both regions under Spanish colonial rule, in 1818. In 1819, the US and Spain signed the Adams-Onís Treaty authorizing the US to acquire all of Spanish Florida in exchange for the country's "recognition of an international boundary between Texas and Louisiana," which extended US territory to the 42nd parallel but allowed Spain to retain control over Texas. According to Joseph Nevins, the treaty not only established the precursive historical ground for the Mexican-American War, but also established "a US pattern of seizing territory by force" (2002, 17). The United States of America thus pressed southward and westward, pursuing what many believed to be its "Manifest Destiny" – a term coined and popularized by *Democratic Review* editor John Sullivan – and that "combined the ideas of Anglo-Saxon superiority with capitalist territorial expansionism" (Nevins 2002, 17). Winning independence from Spain in 1821, Mexico also "acquired the challenge of protecting its northern border" from US "barnstorming" incursions and from "transboundary Indian raids," native battles to hold onto indigenous lands desired by both countries – Mexico to the south, the USA to the north (Nevins 2002, 17, 23).

1823: another historically momentous year: in January, the USA officially recognized Mexico's independence and sovereignty, although reluctantly and only under

pressure from anti-colonialist sympathizers in the country; in March, the newly-born Mexico faltered as “both Central America and Chiapas,” still a rebellious region, seceded from the republic; in October, a newly-consolidated “United States of Mexico” was created; and in December, designed to foil and prevent Spanish colonial efforts to re-establish control of Mexico, but also to establish the dominance militaristically, politically, economically in the western hemisphere, the United States Congress passed the Monroe Doctrine under the presidential administration of James Monroe, “pronouncing that the Americas were off limits to European intervention and colonization and that the United States would not tolerate such activity. (Nevins 2002, 18)

By the 1820s, Anglo-American settlers (many “proslavery southerners” and cotton planters) were a well-established presence in Mexico’s Texas (Nevins 2002, 18). In 1830, the Republic of Mexico illegalized and abolished slavery in the country, which led to tensions between the Mexican government, Anglo-American slaveholding settlers in the territory, and wealthy Tejanos who were sympathetic to both slavery and US capital inflows. Tensions arose during the decade of the 1830s, and in 1837, secessionists supported by US capital, or “dollar diplomacy,” Anglo slaveowners and separatist Tejanos were able to win independence from Mexico. Although the Republic of Texas asked the US to annex the territory, President Andrew Jackson, swayed by northern abolitionists, refused; however, Texas was later annexed by the US in 1845 under the proslavery administration of President John Tyler (Nevins 2002, 18–19).

Geopolitical shifts in North America during the 1830s and 1840s exacerbated boundary disputes and territorial tensions between the United States of Mexico and the United States of America, leading up to the onset of the Mexican-American War in 1846. Aggravating the situation, President James Polk deployed federal troops to the Rio Grande in early 1846: tempers flared; “skirmishes . . . ensued”; “full-scale war” was waged (Nevins 2002, 19). Following two years of military battles between the countries, US troops seized Mexico City, forcing the Mexican government to concede defeat. With the bi-national signing of the Treaty of Guadeloupe-Hidalgo in February 1848, Mexico “ceded half of its territory to the United States” – a vast expanse of land covering “one million square miles” and stretching across the current boundaries of ten states – from Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico in the south, to California in the west, and as far north as Utah, Colorado, and Wyoming (Nevins 2002, 19). Additionally, the United States “absorbed 100,000 Mexican citizens and 200,000 Native Americans living in the annexed territory” (Nevins 2002, 19). After the end of the war and the discovery of gold in California in 1848, boundary tensions, particularly between the ore-rich areas of New Mexico, Sonora, and Chihuahua, continued to mar US-Mexican relations. Political and geographical expansionists in the US sought Mesilla (in contemporary southern New Mexico) as US territory. In 1853, the US government sent representative James Gadsden to Mexico to diplomatically (or if necessary, under threat of force) resolve tensions and normalize “trade relations” between the two countries. At the threat of a second US military invasion, Mexico ultimately agreed to sell Mesilla to the US for \$10 million (Nevins 2002, 21).

In 1864, the US government passed the Act to Encourage Immigration, establishing the first US Immigration Bureau to increase immigration so that US industries would have a sufficient labor supply during the Civil War (Nevins 2002, 193); rendering “official” and legislatively codified what had already been historically actual (that is: US-Mexico transborder economic migration), the act operated according to the economic principles that international migration scholars refer to as *push-pull* – in periods of economic hardship, decline, or recession, citizens and immigrants are “pushed” out; and, conversely, in periods of economic upturn or boom, resulting in higher employment levels and an increased demand for laborers, migrants are “pulled” toward vacant jobs and supply that needed national labor. Thus began what some migration and diaspora scholars refer to as the “revolving door” located at the border or *La Frontera*, one constantly moving or revolving, yet one which opens or shuts at political will “depending on the needs of domestic economic interests” (Nevins 2002, 35).

Although battles had been fought and lives lost to acquire land and to firmly demarcate the US-Mexico border (as far south as possible in the North American continent), the border remained a porous, well-traversed, high “traffic” zone – by citizens (of both the USA and Mexico); Native Americans, Chinese laborers (pejoratively referred to as “coolies”), and European economic migrants; black-market bootleggers; and even cattle (one of the sorest points of contention between the two countries and the first *raison d’être*, in fact, for “border patrol”) – throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century. The late nineteenth century was not, despite frequent and largely unregulated border traversals, a peaceful or free century; rather, it remained a cultural “contact zone” (Pratt 1992) that was often brutally, if unofficially, a site marked by violence, southern Texas being the “site of the bloodiest fights” between Anglo-Americans, Tejanos, Mexican border-crossers, and Native Americans. David Chapman, in fact, historically documents the brutal lynching by vigilantes of 24 Mexicans in Texas between 1889 and the 1920s (cited in Rosales 1999, 119); and Francisco Rosales documents white and black civilian violence against Mexicans in the southwestern United States from 1900 to 1935 (1999, Appendix A, 203–211). Violence escalated during the early years of the twentieth century as the border, or *La Frontera*, became the site for transborder crime (smuggling, rustling, raids, gang violence, and vigilantes).⁷ Volatility further increased during the Mexican Revolution from 1910 to 1920, as well as in the failed revolutionary attempt, which was fomented in the “Plan de San Diego” uprising of 1915 to “liberate” the oppressed African, Mexican, and Native populations of southern Texas and which called for the vengeful killing of all white adult males over the age of 16; given the failures of the “Plan,” however, what actually transpired was a “reign of terror” waged against Mexican Americans in southern Texas; and while 21 white men were killed during raids, over 300 Mexicans were killed in retaliation (see Acuña 2000, 177).⁸ Smuggling posed a particularly troubling transborder activity, with everything from “diamonds, watches, textiles, opium, booze, Chinese ‘coolies,’ garlic and just about anything that could be transported” being moved across the US-Mexican border (Nevins 2002). In fact, initial

efforts by the US to control and restrict human movement across the border was a response to immigrant smuggling of Chinese and Europeans across *La Frontera*: the former being racially and strategically excluded from immigrating to the US following a series of Anti-Asian Exclusion Laws (or Chinese Exclusive Acts) beginning in 1882, which “barred all Chinese laborers from entering the country for ten years and prohibited Chinese immigrants from becoming naturalized citizens” (Lee 2003, 2); and the latter arrested for entering the country illegally. It was not until the early twentieth century that US “controls over the transboundary flow of immigrants coming from Mexico began to emerge,” and even then, laws restricting immigration were not legislated in response to Mexican transborder migration, but in response to Chinese and European transborder migration (Nevins 2002, 25). “With the exception of the Alien Acts of 1798,” Nevins explains, “there was no federal legislation restricting immigration into the country until 1875” (2002, 25). Post-1875 (and especially following the 1882 “exclusion” acts that were racially, ethnically, and nationally discriminatory), the concept of “illegal alien” – one to be excluded through controlled, regulated, enforced legal means and methods – was born in the United States. But “as legislative prohibitions against certain types of immigrants increased, so did the efforts of would-be immigrants to enter the United States without authorization, thus the origins of the ‘illegal’ immigrant” (Nevins 2002, 26). Ken Ellingwood, writing in *Hard Line: Life and Death on the US-Mexico Border*, affirms: “It was Chinese immigrants, not Mexicans, who were the main targets of US efforts to mind the borders, following passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882” (2004, 19–20). A failed act of anti-immigrant legislation, the Exclusion Act “failed to end Chinese immigration” into the US, and from “1882 to 1943, an estimated 300,955 Chinese successfully gained admission into the United States” (Lee 2003, 12).

Contradictions abound, of course: even as Chinese laborers were being smuggled across the US-Mexican border in the 1880s and 1890s, having first arrived in the West in the 1830s, or when they were landing ashore in Florida or the Gulf Coast from Cuba, where “more than 30,000 unemployed Chinese immigrants on the island” awaited their chance at illegally entering the US in the 1920s, Chinese Americans were contributing and had already contributed their blood, sweat, tears, and labor to building the gold-mining economies of the West Coast in the 1840s-1850s and working for Union Pacific to construct the transcontinental railroad, completed in 1869 (Nevins 2002, 28; see the entire section, pages 25–28). Similar contradictions held true for the US industrial capitalist economy and Mexican migrant laborers: although in direct violation of the Alien Contract Labor Law, passed in 1885, US railroad companies actively recruited and hired Mexican migrants. As Balderrama and Rodríguez explain, “Agricultural expansion stimulated extensive railroad construction in the Southwest[; and b]y 1909 there were six railroad companies servicing the region,” which “employed more than six thousand Mexicans to lay track and to maintain the right-of-way” (1995, 16).

The Mexican Revolution (1910–20) was a period of chaos, violence, and anarchy; and consequently, many Mexicans fled violence by crossing the border

north into the United States. It was also a period of anti-Mexican backlash and retaliatory, anti-immigrationist violence by Anglo-Americans against their migrant neighbors, popularly known as the “Brown Scare”:

Because the part of the upheaval that took place on the northern border had anti-American overtones, often manifested by threats against American property, border raids, and angry anti-“Gringo” rhetoric, many Americans took out their frustrations on immigrant workers who were not involved in any of this activity in a hysteria that historian Ricardo Romo has dubbed the “Brown Scare” (fear of Mexicans during the Mexican Revolution) (Rosales 1999, 3)

From 1911 to 1915, “tens of thousands of Mexicans” were legally admitted to the United States to work and contribute to the US economy (Nevins 2002, 32). With the onset of World War I, border patrolling guardsmen were deployed not only to prevent illegal entry and transborder migration, but also, and more pressingly, to ensure wartime border security. But, as Rosales explains, “World War I-induced xenophobia increased the fear of Mexicans and caused more doubt about the loyalty of those living in the United States” (1999, 20). At the time, as previously mentioned, most illegal immigrants – Chinese and European – entered from Mexico, Canada, or Cuba. US immigration legislation passed in 1917 mandated literacy tests and a head tax (to the amount of \$8 per person); as a result, entry was “denied to 5,745 Mexican immigrants” in the first year. Yet, transborder migrants simply found other (covert and illegal) modes of entry: “After the 1917 Immigration Act,” Rosales writes, “ferrying [immigrants] . . . a cross the Rio Grande illegally became a lucrative trade” (1999, 69). Postwar economic recession from 1920–1 led to fierce anti-immigration hostility and bureaucratic efforts to “repatriate” Mexican economic migrants who had arrived during the war (Balderrama and Rodríguez 1995, 98). Still, Mexican economic migrants continued to pour across the porous border, and “by the 1920s, Mexicans could be found harvesting sugar beets in Minnesota, laying railroad tracks in Kansas, packing meat in Chicago, mining coal in Oklahoma, assembling cars in Detroit, canning fish in Alaska, and sharecropping in Louisiana” (Nevins 2002, 32). In fact, during the “roaring” 1920s that witnessed an economic bounce, Mexican economic migration to the US was at a record high level; and according to Balderrama and Rodríguez, “at least half a million Mexicans entered the United States legally between 1899 and 1928” (1995, 7). The Quota Act of 1921, however, curtailed international migration to the US, restricting entry of new immigrants based on national-origin groups already present in the country and limiting the number to 3 percent of that immigrant’s population based on the 1910 US Census. The Johnson-Reed Immigration Act, passed in 1924, allocated \$1 million for “additional land-border patrol,” and administratively created the US Border Patrol “out of the previous boundary policing unit” (Nevins 2002, 29). The Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 placed the US Border Patrol under the jurisdiction of the Department of Labor Appropriations Act (Nevins 2002, Appendix, 194). It also made the 1921 quota system a permanent part of immigration law, utilizing the 1890 US Census as the basis for restrictive and

restricting national quotas. “In theory,” according to law professor and legal immigration scholar Leti Volpp, “the 1924 act left immigrants from the Western Hemisphere free to immigrate. But, while not subject to numerical quotas or restriction on naturalization, Mexicans were profoundly affected by other restrictive measures enacted in the 1920s, including deportation policy, the creation of the border patrol, and the criminalization of unlawful entry” (2003, 259). Yet economic considerations often swayed political opinion and local enforcement, and during periods of agricultural labor demands (growing and harvesting season), border patrol agents, sympathetic to local farmers, simply did not apprehend transmigrant Mexican field hands or farm workers (see Balderrama and Rodríguez 1995, 9).

Other legislative measures passed during World War I and the interim postwar years also attempted to restrict legal points of entry. Having designated official ports of entry in 1917, requiring passports for entry in 1918, and illegalizing (as a misdemeanor) all other ports or points of border crossings into the country in 1929, making reentry after deportation a felony, the US government thus criminalized “illegal aliens” and controlled entry of legal migrants. Initially legislated as wartime efforts to secure the territorial borders of the United States during World War I, the measures ultimately impacted the rural cattle hands, tenant farmers, and migrant field workers who seasonally crisscrossed, recrossed, and then cyclically crossed again the border each year from early spring to autumn harvest.

Migrating legally and illegally to the United States during the entire decade of the 1920s, despite a rise in anti-immigrant sentiments during the post-WWI years of economic recession, which “deepened hostility toward Mexicans” (Rosales 1999, 120), and despite periods of deportation and coercive or forcible “repatriation” during the decade, Mexican economic migrants continued to arrive, to seek and find employment, and, when and as long as possible, to stay; and “by 1930, more than 10 percent of Mexico’s population was living in the United States” (Nevins 2002, 32). Census records for 1930, as Balderrama and Rodríguez write, “calculated that approximately 1,422,533 Mexican Nationals and Mexican Americans lived in the United States” (1995, 7). With the 1929 stock market crash and the onset of the Great Depression (or *La Crisis*),⁹ however, the fates of Mexican diasporic workers took a radical turn for the worse: following the October 1929 “crash” and the rapid descent of the US economy, which had worldwide ramifications, in the 1930s, both Mexican immigrants and Chicanos, or Mexican Americans who were US citizens, suffered mass deportation, racially charged anti-immigration hatred, discrimination, and even brutal violence during the six-year period from 1929 to 1935. During the “mass deportations” of the 1930s, “an estimated 415,000 Mexicans” were forced to leave and an additional 85,000 voluntarily departed under fear of coercion and violence (Nevins 2002, 33). According to Nevins, “some estimates of the deportations run as high as one million including tens of thousands of US citizens of Mexican descent” (2002, 33). Deportation “sweeps,” referred to as *levas* or *razzias* in Spanish, often resulted in the arrest, detention, interrogation, and ultimately, deportation of all people of Mexican background, whether undocumented workers, or “illegal

aliens,” documented legal migrants, or US citizens, as Balderrama and Rodríguez (1995, 55) clarify. During the 1930s, in fact, Mexicans “constituted 46.3 percent of all the people deported” by the US (1995, 53). Half of all expelled Mexicans and Mexican Americans were those residing and working in Texas, where cotton farmers and the planter economies of the state were devastated by *La Crisis*, or the Depression (Acuña 2000, 221). Mexican migrant farmers were also targeted because of the growing popularity of the Communist Party and immigrant labor organizations among this group of migrant workers (see Acuña 2000, 228–248). In 1933, President Hoover formed the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) by merging the Bureau of Immigration and the Bureau of Naturalization; still under the jurisdiction of the Department of Labor, anti-immigrationist efforts were fueled by nationalist fervor, patriotism, economic depression, competition for jobs, and supported by war veterans, including members of the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, as well as by “native” labor activists, including members of the American Federation of Labor (Balderrama and Rodríguez 1995, 53). In 1940, the INS was moved from the Department of Labor and placed under the jurisdiction of the Department of Justice (Nevins 2002, Appendix, 195).

Efforts to regularize and control the movement of transborder economic migrants, or diasporic workers, came in 1942 with the Bracero Program, a “guestworker program” or “contract labor program” legislated and inaugurated during World War II. From an immigration control perspective, the Bracero Program had merit; from a labor perspective, however, it was flawed legislation: “given the great shortage of farm labor during World War II, the Bracero Program was [essentially] created to import hundreds of thousands of Mexicans without labor protections” (Volpp 2003, 259). Overall, the Bracero Program, most vibrant from 1942 until 1947, “provided more than 219,000 workers to agricultural employers,” with California farms employing “63 percent of the braceros during the regular growing season and 90 percent of the braceros in the offseason (January–April)” (Nevins 2002, 205n90; citing Calavita 1992, 20–21). Due to several factors (higher labor cost, fees, filing of papers for legal guestworkers with authorized contracts), however, the program dramatically failed to prevent illegal transborder entry and to prohibit undocumented “aliens” from working in the US. The 1940s thus saw massive deportations of illegal Mexican immigrants – 57,000 in the first half of the decade, but “almost 856,000 in the second half” (Nevins 2002, 33).

In 1952, the McCarran-Walter Immigration and Nationality Act was passed by US Congress: the law was overdetermined by Cold War ideology and anti-immigration *ressentiment* that regarded immigrants as “indigestible blocks” which could not assimilate,” “featured a provision that barred from entry those who had ever written or published or circulated writings advocating certain political views, including communism, anarchy, or overthrowing the US government, or all government” (Volpp 2003, 260), and as “an expression of the Cold War era, legislated strict quotas, created an area called the ‘Asia-Pacific triangle’ based on a strategically territorial mapping, and contained language delineating the exclusion of and right to deport any alien who has engaged or has had

purpose to engage in activities ‘prejudicial to the public interest’ or ‘subversive to national security’” (Lowe 1996, 9). Two years later, in 1954, under President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the US Congress also authorized “Operation Wetback,” an Immigration and Naturalization Services program not only bearing a racist name, but also implementing racially charged policies of massive detention and deportation of “illegal” Mexican migrant workers in the US, particularly in the border states, the very ones once comprising part of the territories claimed by both the United States of America and Mexico. Although the government tried to compensate agricultural losses of illegal farm workers with an increase in braceros admitted post-1954, the late 1950s saw a decline in “bracero contracts” from 1959 until the program was administratively discontinued in 1964 (Nevins 2002, 35). “The recession of the early 1950s,” as Volpp explains, thus resulted in the massive “deportation of more than one million Mexicans, many without hearings,” through the racist and discriminatory policies of Operation Wetback (2003, 259).

Throughout the United States, the 1960s was a period of violent cultural clashes, civil rights movements, student activism, anti-war protests, immigration legislation, and changing demographics in the country. Governmentally, the 1960s was a period of political concession, expressed in a willingness to tackle social inequities (through civil rights legislation, for example) and other big problems (the “war on poverty”), and even of optimism expressed in LBJ’s envisioning of the “Great Society.” Not since FDR’s New Deal to rejuvenate the US economy and end the hardships of the Great Depression had (big) government acted on behalf of so many common citizens; and yet it was also a period of tragedy and persistent discrimination – rising casualties and mounting losses in the Vietnam War, as well as human rights atrocities committed against Vietnamese civilians during the war (notably, the March 1968 massacres at Mai Lai, *thảm sát Mỹ Lai*, in which 504 Vietnamese were brutally beaten and murdered by US soldiers); continued segregationist politics and racial violence in the South; institutional discrimination and race riots in the Northeast and Midwest; the political assassinations of JFK (1963), Malcolm X (1965), MLK (1968), and presidential candidate Bobby Kennedy (1968); and the exploitation of Mexican migrant farm workers in the San Joaquin Valley and elsewhere in agricultural fields across the rural heartland of the country.

The Hart-Cellar Immigration Act, passed in 1965, has had a profound impact on the changing demographics of the United States over the last few decades, as well as on the newer diasporic communities (Asian, Latin American, Caribbean) arriving, settling, and working in the US. The Hart-Cellar Act eliminated immigration quotas based on “national origins” and legislated by the 1952 McCarran-Walter Immigration and Nationality Act, establishing new criteria for admitting immigrants to the US. It established “an overall ceiling of approximately 300,000 immigrant visas, which were divided between the Eastern Hemisphere, set at 180,000, with a maximum of 20,000 per country, and 120,000 for the Western Hemisphere” (Volpp 2003, 261). Specifically, the 1965 Immigration Act established seven preferential categories for admitting immigrants to the US:

(1) unmarried adult sons and daughters of citizens; (2) spouses and unmarried sons and daughters of permanent residents; (3) professionals, scientists, and artists of “exceptional ability”; (4) married adult sons and daughters of US citizens; (5) siblings of adult citizens; (6) workers, skilled and unskilled, in occupations for which labor was in short supply in the United States; and (7) refugees from Communist-dominated countries or those uprooted by natural catastrophe. (Lowe 1996, 181–182n16)

The seventh and last category was inflected by Cold War politics and remained a powerful ideological commitment by the US government to anti-communist rhetoric and political foreign policy up until 1989. As proved to be the case, the seventh category was often used to ideologically determine which asylees of those applying for political refuge in the US would be admitted as a refugee and which would be denied asylum. As Volpp explains, “In 1965 Congress created a new immigrant category, for aliens fleeing persecution in a ‘Communist-dominated’ country, or a country ‘within the general area of the Middle East,’ or for those ‘uprooted by catastrophic natural calamity.’ Those fleeing repressive non-Communist governments outside the Middle East received no protection” (2003, 264).

1965 was also a momentous year for migrant labor activism in the United States. In September 1965, César Chávez called for and organized a strike among grape workers in Delano, California. After years of striking against grape growers in the San Joaquin Valley, the United Farm Workers (UFW) called for a total “boycott of table grapes” in 1968 (Vargas 2005, 377). By 1970, five years after the strike was initiated by Chávez, “grape growers recognized and negotiated contacts with the union” (2005, 377). A period of labor agitation and worker rights organization, the 1960s was also a period of social unrest and activist mobilization for Mexican American students and anti-war protesters.

Influenced by the African American civil rights movement, the Chicano Liberation Movement emerged, demanding equality, equal access to education, housing, and employment, and espousing an identity politics grounded in the pursuit of social justice. Disproportionately impacted by the Vietnam War – in fact, Chicanos were heavily drafted into the war effort, and from 1961 to 1967, “over 19 percent of US Army casualties and 23 percent of Marine Corps casualties had Spanish surnames” (Vargas 2005, 377) – Chicano student and anti-war protests also embraced a collective political identity defined by *Chicanismo*. In 1969, Corky González organized the Chicano Youth Liberation Conference held in Denver, Colorado. At the conference, González introduced the political ideal of “Atzlán” as a Chicano “homeland” (one in which Chicanos both dwelled and yet had been removed from geopolitically): the concept of Atzlán was thus a Chicano reterritorialization of what had been “occupied territory” – taken by the US from Mexico and dispossessed from indigenous peoples in the Southwest. By the early 1970s, the impact of the Chicano movements and the concept of Atzlán had “spread throughout the barrios” (Vargas 2005, 377). Inspired by the Black Power Movement, the 1970s also witnessed the emergence of the Brown Power Movement that denounced the war and demanded social, ethnic, political,

and labor justice for Mexican Americans. The Brown Berets, modeled on the Black Panthers, organized in East Los Angeles to protest police violence and discrimination against Chicano youth and Chicano communities in the city. In August 1970, the Chicano Anti-War Moratorium brought together “more than 30,000 Chicanos gathered in Los Angeles” (Vargas 2005, 377); riots ensued; and three protesters were killed, including “prize-winning Chicano journalist Rubén Salazar” (Vargas 2005, 378). Mobilizing politically, not only as alternative social justice grassroots organizations, but also as political parties, Chicanos rallied behind *La Raza Unida* Party, a Chicano political party, created in Texas in 1970 by José Angel Gutiérrez. *¡Ya basta!*, or “Enough,” became the resounding cry of the movement. Influenced by these movements, the period of the mid-to-late-1970s was one of growing political enfranchisement, civil rights, and increasing political power as a minority in the United States.

By the 1980s, Chicanos were “the country’s fastest growing minority, compris[ing] two-thirds of the more than 27 million Latinos in the United States” (Vargas 2005, 440). Following a period of increased political clout, minority representation, and economic gains in the US, the Reagan years saw Chicano setbacks in the US. The 1980s may be alternately defined as “Reaganism,” which politically witnessed a period of social conservatism marked by “white backlash” against civil rights gains by American ethnic minorities during the 1960s and 1970s and a “suspension of affirmative action efforts” (Vargas 2005, 440); or as “Reagonomics,” a period of conservative fiscal policies marked by reductions in corporate and personal income taxes, increases in military deficit spending, and infrastructural cuts to human welfare programs). The period thus saw the political-economic hegemony of the “New Right,” its growing cultural conservatism, a reversal of hard-won civil rights, and the coining of reactionary concepts like “reverse racism” and “political correctness” – or “PC,” as it became known in common parlance. In 1986, the US Congress brokered major immigration reform legislation passing the Simpson-Mazzoli bill into law as the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). Although the IRCA “cracked-down” on employers who hired “illegal aliens” or undocumented workers and required the completion and submission of I-9 forms verifying legal status through a passport, social security card, or driver’s license for all employees, the act also permitted all illegal immigrants who had resided in the country since 1982 to apply for and obtain “legal” status. In effect, and at end, the IRCA became a sort of “amnesty” legislative act – lauded by proponents of amnesty, excoriated by opponents – and ultimately granting legal status to approximately 2.5 million immigrants previously considered illegal.

During the 1980s, the US government also diminished both the man-size and economic allocation of the Border Patrol, and the number of illegal Mexican and Central American immigrants, or undocumented workers, also, unsurprisingly, increased during this period. By 1989, the estimated number of “illegal aliens” or undocumented workers totaled 2.5 million, approximately 50 percent from Mexico alone. Border populations also increased in these decades, as did the number of *maquiladoras* (Mexican-located, but US-financially centered multinational textile corporations) located in border towns like Tijuana and Ciudad

Juárez. In 1992, Canada, Mexico, and the United States signed the North American Free Trade Agreement. Intended to open economic (trade, production, and financial) borders, while closing geopolitical boundaries for illegal transborder migration, NAFTA was an intracontinental pact designed to facilitate the transnational buying and selling of goods and services, the multinational scattering of production sites (reversing the historical flows of economic migration in which workers relocate for jobs), and the international fiduciary and financial exchanges between the three countries. NAFTA, because of its emphasis on the free movement of capital, not people, set a chilly tone for immigrants in the “get tough” years of the Clinton administration that fueled global capitalism, while eroding the progressive (if expansive) social policies of the Post-New Deal/Post-Great Society Democratic Party of FDR and LBJ. The Clinton rallying cry: open the borders to “free trade,” reform (or end) the welfare state, usher in neoliberal economics. Truly, it was almost as calculatingly pro-capital and pro-business, if administratively less brutal, than its Republican counterpart and successor: George W. Bush’s so-called “compassionate conservatism.”

NAFTA was implemented in 1994, the same year that California voters passed ballot initiative Proposition 187 to end all public assistance and welfare benefits (including food stamps, medicare, Medicaid, and public education) to “illegal aliens” residing in the state; Californians also subsequently voted to “abolish bilingual education” (Vargas 2005, 440). Under the Clinton administration, the INS and the US Border Patrol also massively expanded border security efforts along the US-Mexico boundary. The INS unleashed a series of “operations” to prevent illegal entry and human smuggling across the border. Anti-immigrant state “propositions” and INS “operations,” in fact, defined the early 1990s or post-NAFTA period; and by 1996, the US Congress was once again passing major immigration reform legislation, answering the call of growing anti-immigration sentiments among the US citizenry and in the “crackdown” wake of the 1995 bombing of the Mura federal building in Oklahoma City by Timothy McVeigh, falsely but widely and preemptively assumed by media and public alike to be the act of foreign terrorists. Three major bills were passed by Congress: the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996; the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PWORA) of 1996; and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996. The first act expanded the legal ground for the “deportation” of immigrants who broke the law and were convicted in court (Volpp 2003, 265). PWORA, following California’s Proposition 187, “made even permanent resident aliens ineligible for most federal means-tested benefits, like food stamps and Supplemental Security Income” (Volpp 2003, 265–266). It also required that “prospective immigrants” document that they had the financial resources to be self-sustaining if admitted to the country (Volpp 2003, 265–266). IIRIRA focused on tackling the issue of “undocumented” or “illegal” immigrants: it further expanded the legal ground for deporting immigrants and permanent residents, including those guilty of misdemeanor offenses; it “instituted mandatory detention for many classes of immigrants seeking admission – including potential asylum seekers – through ‘expedited removal’ if they had no papers or had papers that seemed fraudulent”

(Volpp 2003, 266). It also “immunized many administrative decisions from review by a federal judge, since immigrants were thought to be clogging the courts with meritless appeals with the collaboration of attorneys and progressive judges” (Volpp 2003, 266). And finally, the IIRIRA authorized the INS and the US Border Patrol to construct a fence along the Tijuana-San Diego part of the border, a high-traffic point for illegal entries. Consequently, traffic and smuggling simply moved farther eastward into the arid Arizona desert. Transborder economic migration thus continued unabated throughout the 1990s, and into the twenty-first century, despite a series of other failed INS programs – both “Operation Blockade” and “Operation Hold-the-Line” (El Paso) implemented in 1993; “Operation Gatekeeper” (San Diego) in 1994; “Operation Safeguard” (Arizona) in 1995; and “Operation Rio Grande” (Brownsville) in 1997 – to prevent the “illegal entry” of Mexican migrant workers; however, points of entry moved further eastward away from the metropolitan borderzone of Tijuana-San Diego and into small, rural towns and arid, perilous, and literally deserted parts of the desert.

US President George W. Bush and former Mexican President Vicente Fox, considered by many to be strong hemispheric allies and political collaborators, first began negotiations for a guestworker program to allow Mexican immigrants to cross the southwestern US border and legally work in *el Norte* on temporary contracts in 2000, and though many in Senate supported Bush’s call for the program, it remains unclear whether an immigrant work program will be authorized by both houses of Congress. Following a decade-long cycle for immigration reform, US Congress yet again took up the issue in 2006, as it did in both 1986 and ten years later in 1996. The US House of Representatives passed an immigration reform bill H.R. 4437 in December 2005: the bill included punitive anti-immigration measures, including detention and deportation for all illegal entries, making illegal entry itself a felony criminal offense and a bar against ever being admitted to the US as a legal or documented immigrant, and calling for the construction of a 1,200-mile fence along the 1,900+-mile US-Mexican border. A few months later, on March 28, 2006, at midnight (considered by many a surreptitious move), an immigration reform bill passed through the Senate Judiciary Committee. Over the next three days – from the morning of March 28 until the last day of the month – debate of the bill on the floor of the US Senate ensued while nationwide protests by immigrants, concerned citizens, and student activists erupted in major cities – Los Angeles, New York, DC, Chicago, Boston – as well as in smaller cities – Des Moines, Atlanta, Birmingham, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Minneapolis – and even in more remote, rural locales across the country, taking to the streets to demand legal status, fair treatment, minimum wages and benefits, and equitable immigration policies in the country. Protests and Senate debate filled the media-waves of the US alongside news from the North American Summit, held in Cancun, Mexico on March 30–31, 2006, and bringing together US President George W. Bush, then Mexican President Vicente Fox, and newly elected (and conservative) Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper. Rallies, marches, and other organized acts of nonviolent protest continued throughout spring 2006; and on May 25, 2006, the Senate passed S. 2611,

a comprehensive immigration reform bill that included measures to regulate immigration flows across the US-Mexico border, create a guestworker program (which both Presidents Bush and Fox supported and promoted binationally), and to establish a path toward “legal” status for undocumented workers – an estimated 11–12 million – who had already been residing, working, and mostly law-abiding in the US for an extended period of time.

As US Congress recessed at the end of spring 2006, the House of Representatives deferred a final vote and delivery to Senate on H.R. 4437 until the next congressional term began in autumn and planned a series of summer “town-hall meetings” and citizen “talk-back-live” sessions in border towns in the southwest from Brownsville through Nogales all the way westward to San Diego. Believing that Congress would fail to achieve consensus on a “comprehensive” immigration bill and that the more punitive measures within the H.R. bill would fail to win support and thus be approved by the Senate before the November midterm elections, the House decided to break up H.R. 4437 and deliver it piecemeal to the US Senate for legislative approval. According to Joel Havemann, staff writer for the *LA Times*, the “fence bill” (as it has been dubbed by the press) is a strategic effort by the House of Representatives to get their legislative act (H.R. 4437) approved by Senate: “The House, unable to win Senate support for its relatively punitive legislation, plans to break its bill into pieces and to send them to the Senate either as free-standing bills or as riders to spending bills.”¹⁰ On September 13, 2006, Representative Peter T. King of New York introduced the first of these piecemeal bills to the House: H.R. 6061, or the “Secure Fence Act of 2006,” intended to establish operational control over the international land and maritime borders of the United States, was passed the next day on September 14, 2006 by a 283–138 vote.

H.R. 6061 calls for the construction of a 730-mile, two-layer reinforced fence along the southern land border of the United States, the “systematic surveillance” of the border through “personnel and technology,” including “unmanned aerial vehicles, ground-based sensors, radar coverage, and cameras” in order to prevent “all unlawful entries into the United States, including entries by terrorists, other unlawful aliens, instruments of terrorism, and other contraband.”¹¹ The Secure Fence Act of 2006 also amends IIRIRA of 1996 (Public Law 104–208, 8 USC. 1103 note), which authorized the construction of a fence along the US-Mexico border near Tijuana-San Diego, expanding the geographical points of construction from Tecate and Calexico, California to Douglas, Arizona and from Columbus, New Mexico to El Paso, Del Rio, and Eagle Pass, Texas and further east from Laredo to Brownsville. It calls for a “virtual fence,” or “interlocking surveillance camera system,” to be fully installed by May 30, 2007 and for the physical barrier or actual “fence construction” to be completed 12 months later on May 30, 2008. Additionally, the bill allows border patrol agents the authority not only to “stop vehicles” attempting to cross the line, but also to “review the equipment and technology available to United States Customs and Border Protection personnel to stop vehicles” through technology designed to arrest vehicular movement. H.R. 6061 also grants the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) the authority to “achieve and maintain operational control over the entire border”

and “requiring DHS to provide all necessary authority to border personnel to disable fleeing vehicles, similar to the authority held by the United States Coast Guard for maritime vessels.”¹² Finally, the bill also authorizes “a study on the feasibility of a state-of-the-art infrastructure security system along the northern international land and maritime border of the United States” with Canada, including surveillance of the Great Lakes. While the fence will be constructed at “high traffic” points along the border, other measures – lights, cameras, motion sensors, road blocks – will also be built or installed in other less traversed points along the border.

On the same day that the House of Representatives passed H.R. 6061, it delivered the bill to Senate where it was “received and read the first time”; on the following day, September 15, 2006, the Senate “read the second time and placed on the calendar”; two weeks later on September 29, 2006, the Senate, following a file for cloture by Senator Bill Frist of Tennessee to limit debate and prevent a filibuster (particularly by Senators who opposed the bill outright or who strongly favored more comprehensive legislation on immigration issues), passed the bill “without amendment by Yea-Nay Vote” of 80–19 (Library of Congress: Record Vote number 262). In effect, despite widespread Senate support for comprehensive immigration reform (passed as Senate bill S. 2611 in May 2006), the Congress ultimately capitulated to anti-immigrationist sentiments in passing a “fence”-only bill instead of a broader act (including plans for a guest-worker program and a potential path toward obtaining legal status, permanent residence, or citizenship) designed to address the economic, political, and social problems created by having high levels of undocumented workers in the US. As Rachel L. Swarns writes in the *New York Times*, even “the Republican architects of the Senate bill – including Senators John McCain of Arizona, Lindsay Graham of South Carolina, Mel Martinez of Florida, and Chuck Hagel of Nebraska – supported the decision to bring the fencing measure to a final vote,” despite many Senators favoring “the legalization of illegal immigrants” and a guestworker program to support sectors of the US economy (agriculture, construction, cattle ranching, chicken processing, and hotel and restaurant management).¹³

Dissenters such as Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts denounced the bill as “‘a good-feel, bumper-sticker vote’ designed to energize conservative voters before the midterm elections.”¹⁴ Further criticizing the fence bill as wasteful spending, Kennedy “noted that nearly half of the illegal immigrants in the country entered the country legally, without sneaking across the Mexican border, and overstayed their visas.”¹⁵ While H.R. 6061 authorized construction of the fence, it does not include the requisite funding (an estimated \$7+ billion)¹⁶ to actually build it: however, funds were authorized in a separate homeland security spending bill (totaling \$35 billion) that allocates \$1.2 billion to begin fence construction along the border. The Secure Fence Act and the homeland security spending bill, both passed before the fall 2006 recess, also authorized and allocated “money to hire 1,500 new Border Patrol agents, increasing the force to 14,800, and to add 6,700 detention beds” along the border (Swarns, “Senate Moves”). In an article written by Carl Hulse and Rachel L. Swarns for the *Times* on September 30, the journalists further explain that “the fence legislation was one of the chief elements to

survive the broader comprehensive bill that President Bush and a Senate coalition had hoped would tighten border security, grant legal status to most illegal immigrants and create a vast guestworker program to supply the nation's industries."¹⁷ Despite passing H.R. 6061, which authorizes the construction of a 730-mile fence, Congress appropriated "only enough money to complete about 370 miles of it."¹⁸ Critics of the bill maintain that "the failure to agree on a guestworker program" would lead to a "severe shortage of agricultural workers."¹⁹ Harry Reid, Minority Leader of the Senate, decried the bill as a "clear repudiation of President Bush's call for comprehensive legislation."²⁰ Other Senators derided even the very idea of a "fence" as yet another international "wall" – to add to China's and Berlin's historically isolationist and lockdown attempts against citizens and foreigners to wall in the former and keep out the latter – and this one planned as a high-tech, highly surveyed "virtual" boundary with a highly militarized and physically wired border. Mexican officials were also angered by the so-called fence bill; advocates of the bill, however, believed that a fence was necessary to secure "the porous border," which "could be used," they aver, "by terrorists who want to sneak into the US undetected."²¹ Although promoted as a "security" bill, specifically to promote "homeland security," the rhetoric usually revolves around and returns to immigration and "widespread panic" about "illegals": describing the line as "inexcusably porous," Senator Frist wrote on his political blog that "one of the most effective ways that we can stop illegal immigration is through the construction and proper maintenance of physical fences along the highest trafficked, most commonly violated sections of our border with Mexico." Speaking with prophetic zeal, and patriotic, isolationist fervor, Frist proclaimed: "A nation that can't 'secure' its borders can't secure its destiny or administer its laws."

Thus, in 2006, the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, under the aegis of the Department of Homeland Security, was also working hard to pass and implement "Operation Secure the Border," or "Operation Jump-Start" as border patrol agents have dubbed it. While Senate bill S. 2611 initially called for the construction of a 370-mile fence along the US-Mexico border, and while the House of Representatives bill H.R. 4437 hoped for the eventual construction of a 1,200-mile fence along the 1,950 mile *linea*, or line, both houses of Congress have compromised in authorizing a 730-mile fence. Already in late spring 2006, President George W. Bush had called for funds to construct a "virtual fence" utilizing surveillance technologies, motion detectors, and unmanned aerial vehicles to patrol the border, as well as to hire an additional 6,000 border patrol agents – supported and supplemented by 6,000 National Guardsmen to be deployed along the border (2,500 to have been deployed by June 2006, though the numbers fall short of that figure) in what is tantamount and will be (materially, politically, technologically, and legally) a massively militarized borderzone. Not surprisingly, the very same US-based energy, aerial technology, and weapons-manufacturing corporations – Boeing, Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, and Northrop Grumman – that have received bids for postwar "nation-building" and post-bombing-strikes reconstruction efforts, as in Iraq and Afghanistan, have also submitted bids for the "multibillion dollar federal contract to build what the

administration calls a ‘virtual fence’.”²² By October 2006, Boeing had already received “a three-year, \$67 million contract to implement the first part of a plan to reduce illegal entry along thousands of miles of border with Canada and Mexico using better technology, including cameras, sensors and even unmanned airplanes.”²³

For future generations along the border, in both neighboring North American countries, and for diasporic workers in the new global economy, the most pressing question that remains may well be this one: where and how to locate doors and windows that mitigate against and allow movement across the erected boundaries of fences, the apparent closures of walls?

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- What do diasporic workers contribute (materially, financially, politically) to a country?
- What are the costs of guestworkers or economic migrants for a host country?
- How do diasporic workers support families, hometowns, and national development projects through financial remittances?
- What are the economic structural relations of global capitalism, international migrations, and contemporary diasporic formations?
- Should host countries allow economic migrants who support national economies to fully participate in the country’s political process? Why or why not?

Additional Research

Thinking through debating

Working in small groups, students will debate the “affirmative” and “negative” sides of one of the following topics related to current US immigration reform (still underway in 2006–7): begin by outlining ideas “for” and “against” a stance on the issue. Compile “evidence” (data, statistics, testimony) to support your argumentative points. For each argumentative point, outline potential critiques. Additionally, student collaborative groups should anticipate “alternative perspectives” or “counter-arguments” to their own stance and formulate potential rebuttals for those arguments.

If useful to do so, imagine that your group is (a) writing a letter to the editorial board of the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *LA Times*, the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, the *Chicago Tribune*, or an international newspaper such as the *Guardian*, *Le Monde*, or *Der Spiegel*; or (b) giving a speech at a local organization (the Rotary Club, the College Republicans, the Young Democrats, or some other group); or (c) participating in a televised political debate for a local office (mayor, city council, school board).

1 Guestworker program

President Bush supports “guestworker programs” (an H2A visa already exists for migrant farm workers) to allow immigrants to temporarily enter the country as “guestworkers” in order to fill employment positions that are either in shortage, in high demand, or that other US citizens and legal immigrants do not typically fill. Do you support such a program? Why or why not? What impact would the program have on the US economy?

2 “Border”

US Congress has legislatively supported President Bush’s call for US Reservists to guard the US-Mexico border and for the construction of a “wall” along the border to prevent individuals from Mexico, Central America, and other countries from entering the country illegally. Do you agree that the United States should build a wall along the border? Why or why not?

3 Amnesty

As of 2006–7, approximately 11.5 million “illegal aliens” – or undocumented workers – work and reside in the US. In 1986, President Reagan supported and the US Congress passed legislation that granted “amnesty” to those law-abiding workers in order to alter their status from “illegal” to “legal” and that allowed them to remain in the country, work, and contribute to the US economy. Should “illegal aliens” be granted “amnesty” in 2006–7 as they were in 1986 under the Reagan administration? Why or why not?