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*I confini della ricchezza e della povertà: idee emergenti dalla comparazione tra i confini nel Mediterraneo e Stati Uniti-Messico*

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# Borders of Wealth and Poverty: Ideas Stimulated by Comparing the Mediterranean and U.S.-Mexico Borders

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## 1. Introduction

- 1 The goal of this article is to bring together some important tendencies in the study of the U.S.-Mexican and Mediterranean borders. The Mediterranean literature offers notable insights for some conceptual points, while for others, the insight comes from the U.S.-Mexico border region. We are not directly comparing the two borders – although we do note that the proximity of cities along the U.S.-Mexico land border does effect its conceptual treatment – but rather we identify a core list of themes drawn from each region. In most cases, we point out the general category encompassing work that is already done, in order to systematize it, rather than claiming completely new approaches. Our listing thus provides a productive framework for on-going studies of highly unequal border regions. Much work is already done on what we discuss, and nothing is completely new. Our aim, then, is to offer a key framework, which necessarily is schematic<sup>1</sup>.
- 2 We start with the perspective that the U.S.-Mexico border and the Mediterranean Sea are key places engaged in the fraught relationship between global wealth and global poverty (Besteman 2019; Heyman 2012a; Nevins 2010; Spener 2009; Van Houtum 2010). Our framework lists three main topics, with some additional modifications.

- 3 (1) Militarized barriers (combined natural and human-made) prevent the entry of peasant-workers and middle classes from the global south. This includes both entry of unauthorized workers and asylum-seekers attempting (who are not always so distinguishable) to arrive to the global north where the legal process of asylum-request can begin. The interdiction of such entries responds to strong political impulses in wealthy polities of fear and loathing based on combined racism and distaste for laboring classes. But mixed with rejection is humanitarianism of various kinds, including both state management of migrant bodies to avoid bad publicity, and resistant humanitarianism from below by activists and organizations. (1a) Yet some people make it through those strong borders, which then illegalize them. They are exploitable and subject to individual and mass removal. They are both present and potentially absent inside the delimited space.
- 4 (2) A permeable membrane (a system of entry inspections) allows a range of other people to enter the space of relative wealth, including elites, tourists and shoppers, non-immigrant temporary laborers, some family members, etc. Entry is thus a matter of privilege, in complex ways. Some privileged entrants later become present-but-removable outsider workers (e.g., via overstaying visas) similar to those discussed (in point 1a). Others remain secure, and are crucial to global alliances of economic, political, and intellectual elites.
- 5 (3) Not all labor crosses the border; indeed most does not. A global division of labor often places low wage production sites in the global south and prosperous consumption sites mostly in the north. This spatial division of labor extends to other privilege/suffering combinations, such as the criminal work involved in the assembly and transportation of illegalized drugs, the provision of pleasure/exotic experience sites for tourism, and so forth. As these brief examples show, borders need to be examined in terms of capitalist processes of immobilization and value extraction alongside racism, xenophobia, and other political processes aimed against mobile people.
- 6 (4) Border people construct their lives amid the processes just listed. As Hastings Donnan and Thomas Wilson (1999: 12) argue, borders exist at two levels, geopolitics and particularistic locality/regionalism. To this we can add the effects of capitalism, the concentration of settlement around border sites of global production and exchange. Such settlements make for an important tradition of border ethnography. For reasons that we explore below, the U.S.-Mexico border has a more extensive tradition of border community ethnography, but there is good work on the Mediterranean also. By identifying the category of border community ethnography in a formal framework, alongside macro-categories like capital and state, we advocate for the value of close observation in a geographic setting where the main literature is dominated by state and anti-state discourses.

## 2. Political borders

- 7 Migration and asylum-seeking, the suffering and risks involved, the ideology of state sovereignty and its critique, and the struggle of state enforcers, humanitarians, and direct activists are much studied at borders (Brambilla 2015a). At the core is a debated political idea of borders as the absolute, sovereign division (Agamben 1998) between global wealth and poverty. First, danger is found outside borders and the source of threat is the outside penetrating in. Second, this concept of dangerous exterior and safe

but threatened interior represents global inequality, with the threats being non-white, poor people. This symbolic representation (exterior dangerous people) is transferred to the domains of crime, terrorism, and illegalized drugs. This externalizes the guilt and anxiety about possession of privilege and wealth. Third, borders aspire to be perfect forms of protection (Heyman 2012b). This is symbolic thinking that is materialized at the U.S.-Mexico border in the construction of walls and in the Mediterranean in sea blockades and enforcement.

- 8 This has been the recent focus of important work on the Mediterranean. In the past, attention was paid to classical sites of geopolitical conflict of the 1990s, such as the Strait of Gibraltar or the Otranto Channel. Today, the list of sites closer reflects the tensions of migration across boundaries of wealth and poverty: Lesvos; Malta; Lampedusa (especially after the 2013 tragedy); the Sicilian Channel and other borders of Southern Italy; Calais-Dover (with a Schengen border); the borders of the East, etc. Even if it is highly media-focused and over-researched in the last years (compared to the 1990s), the Mediterranean model needs to be understood in a *long durée* perspective of policies in the construction of “Fortress Europe”.
- 9 The Mediterranean setting is constructed (Cuttitta 2014) by a scenario which takes into account changes in Southern European countries, changes impacted by the Arab Spring, shipwrecks, emergency policies, push backs, externalization of borders towards the South, towards Sub-Saharan Africa, especially from 2011 to 2015 matching with the crisis of externalization and a new phase of turbulence at the maritime frontier. In the aftermath of a major shipwreck involving a migrant boat on the Central Mediterranean Route (April 2015), a decision by the Council of the European Union launched the so-called Operation Sophia, aimed at including systematic efforts to identify, capture and dispose of vessels as well as enabling assets used or suspected of being used by migrant smugglers or traffickers, in order to contribute to wider EU efforts to block south-north migration. Its justification was to disrupt the business model of human smuggling and trafficking networks in the Southern Central Mediterranean and prevent the further loss of life at sea. Later, in 2016, Forensic Oceanography (2018) has named it as *Mare Clausum*: re-imposing externalization in Libya and the closing off the central Mediterranean by driving rescue NGOs out of the Central Mediterranean and expanding Libyan coast guard interceptions under EU coordination, and “refoulement” southward. Such policies include the implementation by the EU, via Italy, of migration deterrence across the central Mediterranean as a multi-level policy with the strategy of delegitimizing and criminalizing rescue operations by NGOs.
- 10 Global work has begun to consider the multiplication of migrant and refugee camps around the world, which has important consequences on the construction of migration routes that contemporary migrants and refugees undertake. Indeed, camps of all sorts are becoming a central step in refugees’ journeys, as they structure their mobility and drastically limit their access to human and social rights (see the concept of “encampment of the world” in Agier 2014; Lagarde 2016). A case in point is the case of the “migrants trapped in Libya” where UN institutions, European actors, national actors, multiple militias, NGOs, hegemonic media and independent media, all play an important role in understanding a complex situation revealing a difficult articulation of violence -- and particularly sexual gender-based violence - in the politics of compassion (Bornstein, Redfield 2011) and mobilities in the Mediterranean (Ribas-Mateos 2019).

- 11 The U.S.-Mexico border region has received many fine ethnographies of the experience and meaning of the journey, and the risks involved, for long-distance peasant-worker migrants, many but not all of them unauthorized and seeking to pass the border without detection (e.g., Chavez 1998; Holmes 2014). Asylum seekers, who may enter covertly but then who present themselves upon arrival, have long been studied, both at this border (coming from Central America) and across the Caribbean to Florida (from Haiti and Cuba). Nonetheless, in recent years, the volume and quality of work on asylum-seekers and migrants (now mostly conceptualized as mixed flows) crossing the Mediterranean, be they from the Eastern, Central or Western Routes, but particularly, from the most deadly one – the Central route, has surpassed that of the U.S.-Mexico border. An excellent study is that by Albahari (2016). Such a proliferation of studies goes in hand with the strong media focus on the so-called “human rights crisis” in the Mediterranean.
- 12 As Ruben Andersson (2014) points out, there is an entire migration industry around these subordinate migrant flows. The U.S.-Mexico border has seen excellent field studies of “migration facilitators” (human smugglers), including culturally specific attention to the Mexican *coyote* broker-trickster (Spener 2009). In this same vein, scholars working at the U.S.-Mexico border pioneered ethnographic “studying up” of border enforcement officers, operations, and infrastructure. An important finding is that close attention to their everyday activities and attitudes uncovers publicly mystified features of stratifying and coercive border policy (many works by Heyman, such as 1995, 2000; and concerning the Mediterranean, Feldman 2019). They discuss and practice the moral ambiguities of global inequalities. Border and interior immigration enforcement also profit state agencies, border officers and their unions, and private prison and surveillance contractors.
- 13 A topic demanding attention is racial inequality of what is considered to be threatening migration and what is invisible movement in both the EU and North America. While media, activism, and to some extent scholarship in the EU has focused on sub-Saharan and southwest Asian (mainly Muslim) migration; there are specific valuable studies of Latin-American migrations and studies on eastern Europeans who have swept west across Europe, but little critical conceptualization of racism in marking some but not all as focal “migrants”. Likewise, the Mediterranean receives extensive migration of white northern Europeans. The same thing happens across the U.S.-Mexico border. Yet these “expatriates” (southbound immigrants, as with the past colonial settlers in the Mediterranean) are almost entirely unstudied, marking immigration only as northward, “brown-skin”, and peasant-worker or marginalized middle class.
- 14 While asylum-seekers and unauthorized migrants receive the most attention from media, activists, and scholars, it is important to examine borders in terms of diverse and unequal mobilities (Pallitto, Heyman 2008; Celata, Coletti 2019 have recently made this important point for the Mediterranean). Border studies in both regions are dominated by racialized migrants, and there are only a few ethnographies of privileged crossers and the kinds of visas they hold (managers, shoppers, students, legal border commuting laborers, etc.); rarely, scholars have looked at the sorting processes in border inspections. We are beginning to understand borders as differentiating filters linking and managing stratified components of the world system. For this task, we need ethnography of privilege and normalization as well as reduction to bare life and humanitarian action at borders.

- 15 Ethnography discloses notably unequal mobilities at the U.S.-Mexico border (Heyman 2004, 2009a). Programs open to prosperous Mexicans and North Americans provide special border crossing lanes, with low intensity inspection and high speed passage through an otherwise crowded border. Such radio-transmitting visas for vehicles require U.S. visas for Mexicans (involving high incomes, businesses, or professional jobs) or U.S. citizenship, U.S. government intelligence clearance in advance, and high fees. That is, fast mobility and low scrutiny is a transnational privilege of class. U.S. border officers likewise embody mobility privilege in decisions to allow entrants to proceed or not proceed at ports of entry (moving from the global south to the global north). Evidence such as stylish clothes and accessories are taken as signs of legitimate entry. As an officer told Josiah Heyman, explaining an entrance decision, “a credit card means you are legit[imate]”. Near borders, likewise, dark skin and working class clothing are taken as signs of unauthorized migrants moving north away from the border, thus targeted for Border Patrol stops, while new model cars and middle and upper class clothing are treated mainly as exempt (unless other clues, such as nervous actions, shift the balance of police decision-making).
- 16 Sensitive ethnography by Rihan Yeh (2018) in the large border city of Tijuana, Mexico, shows how access to visas to cross into the United States constitutes a meaningful and material basis of stratification among Mexicans. This is interesting, since the lines of inequality by citizenship (United States versus the much poorer Mexico) are openly obvious, but access to U.S. border crossing cards and other visas also constitute an important access to higher status in Mexico. The presence of status, in turn, is important as a resource in social maneuvering and networking, then contributing to the overall process of social inequality production and reproduction in the Mexican border city. Heyman (2009b, 2010) and Castañeda (2019) likewise show how immigration (il)legality is practiced in urban mobility in U.S. border cities, as different kinds of drivers and public transportation riders are unequally inspected and subject to immigration arrests when moving around the landscape. They carefully trace how this affects access to worksites, consumer goods, medical care, and in limited ways education. It is not just unauthorized migrants and unauthorized or mixed status families who are negatively affected, but whiter, richer, and more likely citizen/legal resident/visa-holding visitors who are largely exempted from inspection and enforcement. This results in major inequalities in life chances by mobility inequality.
- 17 The huge resonance of borders as symbols of sovereign power against dehumanized racial others, and the extreme phenomena it stimulates, overrides borders’ messy, fluid reality. Against this absolutist thinking, critical social scientists have advocated for observing and building relationships that span borders of wealth and poverty. This is not an easy task, given the marked inequalities and racism-classism of the world system, but it is one we can approach through the study of diverse and unequal mobilities.

### 3. Capitalist processes

- 18 Border studies often focus on the political relationship of migrants to the state, while overlooking multiple relationships involved in capitalist processes at and through borders. This is exemplified by the recent interest in applying Giorgio Agamben’s (1998) political theory to borders: unquestionably important, but deliberately one-

dimensional. The relationships involved in capitalism also need attention at or through borders. Arguably, dominant power today is two dimensional, involving capital as well as states, in complex coexistence, interaction, and contradiction. This provides a necessary agenda for all border studies.

- 19 Borders produce many kinds of economies: formal, informal, legal, illegal, large scale and small. We propose that many of them occur precisely because of the division between global north and global south, their separation but also connection. We delineate a series of kinds of economic relations across borders within the current conditions of capitalism. We begin by extending one topic from above, migration across borders, to point out that such migration is an important phenomenon of labor supply in capitalism, as well as a matter of state sovereignty and its defiance. We then turn to note the important presence of low-wage, export-oriented manufacturing at the U.S.-Mexico border and point out that there is more to learn about border separation's role in capitalism in comparative contexts. In addition to manufacturing, we note the understudied presence of cross-border tourism and the role of symbolism of exotic pleasure on "other" side of the border. Illegalized drugs are an important covert flow crossing borders. We close with a brief ethnographic view of border trade in used goods (notably clothing) brought from the global north to the global south.
- 20 Borders (of the kind we study) are involved in two kinds of crossing between wealth and poverty. One is the entry of labor and materials for production inside wealthy zones. The other is the movement of production and consumption outward across borders, and inward as products come back in. The latter will attract most of our attention here – borders and extensions as sites of low wage production – but since we began with migration, we will continue that topic here briefly. Unauthorized migration and non-authorized asylum seeking are, in important ways, acts of defiance of state power, and likewise defiance of ideologies of global hierarchy and racism. However, in a multidimensional view of power, migration is the self-supply of exploitable labor to employers (Heyman 2012a).
- 21 Specifically, how do borders contribute to exploitability of immigrants at their destinations, above and beyond deportability throughout the national interior. The money (e.g., borrowed) used to pay smugglers and guides to surpass border barriers needs to be repaid. Other favors in the migratory process provide similar leverage over workers. The crossing itself may be internalized via a sense of caution and fear. Borders divide locations of costly socialization and retirement from sites of maximum productivity. Borders keep millions of poor people out of national spaces that have modest programs of health, education and social welfare. And border enforcement may tighten and relax according to labor demand, although the recent rise of racism and the "border idea" may have shot way beyond a fine-tuned managerialist policy. Borders are not simple devices of labor and social reproduction policy, but in a world of vast disparities of wealth, these processes of inequality cannot be ignored.
- 22 The U.S.-Mexico border has provided the starkest example of this in sociology and anthropology, the *maquiladora* export assembly plants concentrated in Mexico's northern border zone (the classic is Fernández-Kelly 1983). Contemporary Mexican border cities today are vast assemblages of working class people, modern Manchesters, important places for learning about working class lives. The *maquiladoras* combine low wages/high productivity in Mexico with high purchasing power of consumers in the United States. An added advantage is that engineers and managers can live in the

United States and commute easily across the border (in recent years, more managerial staff come from Mexico). Important works of ethnography have identified the intersectional exploitability of the factory workers, disproportionately women and mainly youthful. The question suggested by this notable literature is what and where are there *maquiladora*-equivalents for the Mediterranean? While early period *maquiladoras* included very cheap goods (garments, toys), the main products today are low value auto parts, appliances, medical supplies, consumer electronics (final assembly only), and so forth. Apart from *maquiladoras* in Tunisia by French companies, or in Rumania by Italian companies, we can see the development of new models in the development of the Tangier Med port and the creation of new industrial cities by companies that already have auto parts plants in places like Ciudad Juárez. As we mentioned above, it is a challenge to connect border regions but it is complex to avoid the ethnocentrism of the U.S.-Mexico border. Industrial models and thus working class people have both resemblances and differences that need much more attention.

- 23 However, the uneven combination of global north and south go beyond simple wage materialism. The “other side of the border” signifies to consumers exotic locales, sun, interesting cultures, inexpensive pleasures, brown-skinned people (in a sexualized sense), and absence of normal controls. The Mexican side of the U.S. border has long had these qualities in the U.S. imagination. A similar process can be seen from North to Southern Europe or from Europe to the “orientalized South”. Questions on globalization, gender and Orientalism are central to anthropological and sociological concerns and to the contemporary ethnography of Mediterranean cultural studies. Edward Said identified related apparatuses of knowledge production to systems of imperial rule in ways that took culture, race, and ideas seriously. We still need a good account of border tourism that draws on the critical foundation of *Orientalism* (that of Said 1978).
- 24 The unequal exchange across borders includes illegalized drugs and other pleasures, as well as legal ones (Campbell 2010). Both Europe and the United States are huge markets for drugs. Crossing borders often gains a significant increment of value for illegalized drugs. At the same time, this places the worst concentrations of violence and suffering from drugs in locations south of the border where criminal organizations operate in order to sell drugs locally and to smuggle drugs north across the border. A similar pattern can be seen with the arms trade and Libya. There are uneven and combined exchanges across the border, such as drugs moving north and weapons moving south, especially in the US case, far beyond the European one concerning the use of weapons. Because these commodities are illegal, business enforcement cannot use formal legal channels and requires violence, both practical and in gruesome symbolic forms. Risk and suffering thus concentrates in the global south, especially at borders, while the global north – just as involved in these illegal businesses – appears to be clean and safe (Heyman 2017).
- 25 Many of the goods manufactured in export assembly plants in the global south eventually return back to that south, but only after a period inside the global north as fully priced, purchased, used, and circulated new goods. They are then assembled by a network of for-profit and charitable used goods stores, and shipped to large commercial firms on the northern side of global borders. These brokers sell to a large sector of small-scale vendor/smugglers who bring used consumer goods to market in the global south, where customers who have similar needs for material culture but

fewer resources purchase them (sometimes via several steps). The single most important component of this cross-border economy seems to be used clothing, but many goods are transferred this way.

- 26 The key transaction often is having the used goods selected and routed across borders. This requires diverse cultural and linguistic border skills and social relations (of the kind outlined in the next section of this paper). Several ethnographers have identified these processes for used clothing at the U.S.-Mexico border (Gauthier 2007, 2010; Sandoval-Hernández 2013, 2015, 2017). Roles – which are notably gendered – include U.S. goods dealers, mostly but not only male, many of Lebanese and Jewish origin; Mexican women used-clothing entrepreneurs, who select marketable goods and arrange to have them transported (mostly smuggled) into Mexico<sup>2</sup>; Mexican male smugglers, who bring goods via cars through Mexican ports of entry; and Mexican marketers, predominantly female, who reassemble the goods and route them to and sell them at markets all over Mexico. While shopping in the United States and bringing the goods to Mexico officially is legal, the volumes are narrowly restricted and controlled by difficult to obtain import licenses. Therefore, much of this business is covert, and depends on relations of interpersonal confidence. The Mexican ethnographer Efrén Sandoval-Hernández (2018a) has recently examined similar phenomena at the French Mediterranean, connected to many world sites, including North Africa.
- 27 Capitalism and contested state sovereignty together form much of the context within which borderlanders live. These forces are more geographically concentrated in one zone at the U.S.-Mexico border and more spatially dispersed on the peripheries of Europe. Border cultures and local social relations are not simply determined by political economy, but understanding of border lives must begin with those considerations.

#### 4. Borderlanders and Border Communities

- 28 Complex inequalities meet and interact at borders. Each side of the border is itself highly unequal, in part through the historical relationship with the other side. Then, these two class (race, etc.) societies are unequal relative to the other, the site where the global north and global south meet. Border relationships and communities emerge from everyday interactions in such sites, which are both connective but also unequal. This key point derives from the geographic fact that the U.S.-Mexico region is a large land border with vast numbers of people living around it and people and commodities passing through it on local and long-distance itineraries. The well-known paradox of this land border is that paired cities are both highly unequal but in intense interaction. This situation differs from the Mediterranean separation imposed by the sea, though there are important land exceptions (Ceuta, Melilla, Greek-Turkish borders, the Balkans etc.). The land border gives rise to a concentrated border settlement zone, while the sea renders a partial disarticulation, but border interactions also occur across the sea (Celata, Coletti 2019). Economics, social relations, and open, legal movement extend across this space, as well as migration attempts and enforcement. Illustrative of this, two of the three Mediterranean chapters in an excellent recent anthropological volume about European borders work within the hegemonic regional focus of migration enforcement (Albahari 2013; Lauth Bacas 2013), and one addresses

interactions across a border dominated by conflictive state closure (Dikomitis 2013). We need more study of interactions across the Mediterranean that go beyond the sovereignty/resistance nexus.

- 29 Grounded field research at the U.S.-Mexico border, by anthropologists and others, often identifies multiple simultaneous processes in paired communities, as opposed to spatial disarticulation that leads to such processes being studied separately. As we have just seen, while the global division of manufacturing labor often disarticulates production sites far from consumption sites, say between Europe and southern China, at the U.S.-Mexico border urban concentrations host millions of workers. This is not at all to say that scholarship about the U.S.-Mexico border is better or somehow more privileged; but reviewing work at this unusually concentrated and ethnographically well-studied border does help us identify relations that cross longer distances and may initially be bypassed (Heyman 2017).
- 30 In such a setting, novel connections and hybrids occur, such as friendships, marriages, and alliances between prosperous elites of both sides, facilitated by bilingualism and biculturalism, for example of the Arab Elites who are bicultural with English in the Middle East or with French in North Africa (“using the colonial language”). From below, working class kinship and friendships also cross-borders, though unequal mobility across political borders limits this more (Sandoval-Hernández 2012; Brambilla 2015b).
- 31 Economic exchanges across borders require skills at bridging languages and cultures. We discussed the ways that borders sit at the center of major capitalist relations. These are not just structural, but require human mediation. There are mid-scale trades passing through borders, such as fruits and vegetables that likewise encourage cultural mixing. And finally, there are widespread micro trades, such as those in used clothing and other second-hand goods. Land borders make these exchanges quicker, but of course, they also occur in the Mediterranean, as the multiple commercial trades that were part of its history continue to be present today with the force of new actors like China, the EU, and Turkey. Such trade follows on one side the hegemonic trade of European influence and on the other, migrants from the South get involved in transnational entrepreneurship by reactivating or boosting marked capitalism in the region.
- 32 This, however, makes social exchange and cultural combination seem too material. Complex cultural repertoires at borders emerge from diverse life histories – and the frequency of border crossing is greater in the interactive zones of borders, especially the intimately close land border. Sensitively analyzing life histories, Laura Velasco Ortiz and Oscar Contreras (2011) propose that border frameworks affect even those people who do not directly cross boundaries. People come together, marry, have children, separate, migrate, and so forth, in each instance creating possibilities in particular life histories for learning and using cultures and languages across borders. This of course happens outside border regions, but the density of such interactions is greater at borders, especially at land borders but also across maritime connections that are part of the historical and contemporary human and capital fluidity of circularity in the Mediterranean.
- 33 The Mediterranean setting is revealing because it exceeds rigid, established area studies and spills over into examining the interrelations between the EU, Southern Europe, North Africa, the Arab/Berber North Africa, the Middle East, Turkey (and Kurdistan), the Balkans, etc. (Ribas Mateos 2005). The “living together of communities”

research often refers to the cosmopolitan attribute of some cities in the Mediterranean, for example Tangiers, Oran, Alexandria, or Istanbul. Tangiers is still a good case to show heterogeneity of populations and diversity of communities. This heterogeneity is obviously the result of a history of internal and external migration. Those who remember so many past anecdotes, covered in a sweet and sour nostalgia, allude to the beautiful time of international Tangiers and remember it as a time that was defined by a cosmopolitan nature. Today the town attracts other Moroccan and sub-Saharan populations; in the past they were Spaniards, British and Sephardic Jews (among others).

- 34 While borders have unusual concentrations of practical and personal hybridity (indeed they are famous for this) border cultural repertoires are complex and the hybrid character of borders can easily be overestimated. Oscar Martínez (1998) offers a somewhat simple, but still useful typology of borderlanders, contrasting nationalists and transnationalists among three ethno-national groups, Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, and Anglo-Americans (whites). Heyman (2012c) suggests that these attitudes and repertoires emerge from historical processes and are used in social relationships. Nor are such people and their cultural repertoires static; as Chiara Brambilla (2009) points out, border settings with multiple cultural alternatives and resources are especially suited for creativity. Related sorts of cultural connections, hybrids, and code-switching are very present in cultural and linguistic registers, as for example in the different North African Arabic dialects mixed with French, Spanish or Italian words.
- 35 However, as Alejandro Grimson (2008) points out, cultural repertoires are not the same as identities. The latter use contrasts of self with various others, so they are narrower and more definitive even when cultures are fluid. Pablo Vila (2000) offers a deep and impressive ethnography of narrative identities at the U.S.-Mexico border, particularly in El Paso. For example, northern Mexicans contrast their identities with central and southern Mexicans, as backward (with tinges of racism), with the borderlanders identifying this proximity to the United States as a source of modernity. At the same time, they contrast themselves as Mexicans, with richer culture and social relations, more relaxed and enjoying life, than North Americans. Vila provides a series of such analyses of narrative identities across the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.
- 36 In Vila's analysis, a key theme emerges: an overarching concept that "all poverty is Mexican" (stronger in the United States, but found in both countries). In a complicated field of identities and cultural elements, we can think of this as a hegemonic formation, organizing thought into a system that creates and justifies inequality, though it is contested. Notably, the "all poverty is Mexican" frame fits clearly within the broader problematic of the meeting of global north and global south. We can note here, similarly, Islamophobic hegemonic concepts in the whole of the European Union, with important border effects at the Mediterranean, that all Islam is backward and repressive.
- 37 This is a frontier for border ethnography: contending ideas about relationship and polarization within and across borders. Vila argues strenuously that borderlanders are in their politics at least as nationalistic as anti-nationalistic, that borderlanders are often as much border reinforcers as they are border crossers<sup>3</sup>. His is a vital reminder in a field where the intellectual sympathy of activist-scholars is with building bridges, not

walls; we need to be loyal to our border ethnography, and neither under- nor overestimate border resistance to nationalism and other hierarchies.

- 38 Yet in the aftermath of Vila's challenge, we still have few deep ethnographies of border narratives, identifications, and political movements that speak to resistance and reinforcement as this is also happening in Mediterranean research. As an example, Chiara Denaro (2016) focuses on ethnographies of resistance in refugee routes, as an interesting standpoint from which to observe certain acts of agency and resistance, put in place by refugees in order to "choose the country where to live": the refusal to provide fingerprints during identification, the organization of hunger strikes, the secondary mobility *per se*. Moreover, she focuses on the construction of relationships with activists and volunteers, and the (explicit and tacit) processes of negotiation that refugees conducted with police authorities and other stakeholders. Related work on resistance in border and near-border settings includes Cabot (2016) and Rozakou (2017, 2018). Without at all criticizing this important work, again we note the predominance of the migration enforcement/resistance focus in the Mediterranean.

## 5. Conclusion

- 39 The problematic of state sovereignty and defiance precisely against that sovereignty, illustrated by work on autonomous migration and state enforcement against it, is an important phenomenon that deserves the critical research it has received in the Mediterranean and the U.S.-Mexico borders. However, while making a critical move against the ideologies and practices of state bordering, this perhaps accepts the overall frame of borders as being mainly geopolitical. Borderland ethnographies can go beyond the reduction of borders to migration-enforcement icons, without neglecting those vital phenomena. We propose our multi-part framework as a helpful way to accomplish this task.
- 40 We remind scholars that borders have had an important role in production and exchange in capitalist history, and especially today in the global system of low-wage production separated by borders (close by or distant) from prosperous consumption. Likewise, we emphasize the need for attentive ethnography of borderlanders and borderlands. The U.S.-Mexico land border, with over twenty million residents between the two sides, has produced numerous grounded ethnographies and local histories of great merit. The Mediterranean has as many millions of people also involved in border interactions – and there are indeed numerous instances of such borderland society and culture in this interconnected region. It is less studied, however, with a few exceptions (e.g., Ceuta and Melilla, see Driessen 1992). More on cross-Mediterranean interactions as border interchanges, perhaps focused on ports (Driessen 2005), needs to be done.
- 41 We also need more about the interactions between the categories in our framework. To present it initially and efficiently, in a short article, we have listed categories as separate pieces. But they are related, interacting in important ways. The external border security system provides a vast economy to private sector and public bureaucratic/labor interests. Likewise, illegal border trade and politics are closely related. We can move forward in important ways, building on the insights of these two major world border regions, the Mediterranean and the U.S.-Mexico boundary.

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## NOTES

1. The challenge, then, for the Mediterranean, as well as for other regions in the world, is that border regions are often represented or contrasted with paradigmatic ones, such as the U.S.-Mexico case (Ribas-Mateos 2011, 2015): the “new ethnocentrism” of the Mexico-U.S. border.
2. In recent years, Mexican organized crime, grounded in the smuggling of drugs and arms, is charging the transporters and dealers in used clothing for the right of passage (a protection racket), adding a second layer of border contraband to the process (Sandoval-Hernández 2018b).
3. It is important to note that at borders national institutions and workforces such as border enforcement officers and nationalism-reinforcing activities are commonplace. A fine ethnography of schools in the Mexico and United States border region, for example, is titled

*Pledging Allegiance: Learning Nationalism at the El Paso-Juárez Border* (Rippberger, Staudt 2003). However, transnational commuting students have long cut across this sort of ideology, and more recently the dual language (education in both Spanish and English) movement in U.S. schools works against such nationalisms.

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## ABSTRACTS

How can anthropologists and sociologists share ideas and knowledge on the Mediterranean and U.S.-Mexico borders to deepen insight and understanding? The best-known comparison is militarized border enforcement, plus humanitarianism, posed against asylum seeking and irregular migration. But, more complex mobility occurs at these borders, including privileged and other differentiated and sorted mobilities. Interwoven with these mobilities, commerce of many scales and degrees of legality occurs, supporting complicated cultural worlds of informality and exchange. Borders require not just a political analysis, but also attention to capital. Importantly, borders (immediate and extended) have become increasingly important sites of export-oriented production in the world economy. The processes of interchange at borders, in turn, support important urban zones and other communities that merit close ethnographic study for their social and cultural complexity.

Come possono, antropologi e sociologi, condividere idee sui confini nel Mediterraneo e tra Stati Uniti e Messico per approfondirne la conoscenza? Il confronto più noto riguarda il rafforzamento, la militarizzazione dei confini e l'umanitarismo, in risposta alla ricerca d'asilo e alle migrazioni irregolari. Tuttavia, questi confini sono interessati da una mobilità più complessa, "differenziata" e anche privilegiata. Un commercio di diverse scale e gradi di legalità avviene nell'intreccio con queste mobilità, contribuendo al configurarsi di mondi culturali complicati, di informalità e scambi. I confini non necessitano solo di un'analisi politica, ma occorre considerare anche il capitale. Significativamente, i confini ("immediati" o "estesi") diventano sempre più siti importanti di produzione per l'esportazione nell'economia mondiale. D'altro canto, i processi di scambio ai confini generano zone urbane e comunità che, per la loro complessità sociale e culturale, richiedono un attento studio etnografico.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** borders, Mediterranean, U.S.-Mexico border, mobilities, capitalism

**Parole chiave:** confini, Mediterraneo, confine Stati Uniti-Messico, mobilità, capitalismo

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