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Available online: 05 Nov 2010

To cite this article: Susan Mains (2000): An anatomy of race and immigration politics in California, Social & Cultural Geography, 1:2, 143-154

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14649360020010167

Social & Cultural Geography

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rscg20

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An anatomy of race and immigration politics in California

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At the US–Mexico border specific community organizations have played an important role in reinforcing and challenging dominant ideas about race and immigration through a series of protest and media campaigns. In this paper I explore the ways in which key community organizations have relied upon specific and specified constructions of race and ethnicity to redefine notions of borders and identities. I argue that an examination of debates around immigration reveals the centrality (and marginalization) of the images and spaces of the racialized immigrant body. An exploration of the ways in which policy, media, national and individual identities are mapped on to particular spaces provides an opportunity to interrogate and challenge the ‘naturalness’ of representations of race and immigration and the ways in which power is strategically located yet hidden in discussions of the border(s).

Key words: immigration, race, identity, representation, activism, US–Mexico border.

Introduction

For many years conflicts concerning immigration over the US–Mexico border, US and Mexican identities, and the social and physical mobility of immigrants have been particularly volatile. These conflicts have encompassed not only nationalist sentiments but also tensions around multiculturalism and race. In southern California and northern Mexico specific community organizations have played an important role in reinforcing and challenging dominant ideas about race and immigration through a series of protest and media campaigns. In this paper I briefly explore the ways in which key community organizations have relied upon specific and specified constructions of race and ethnicity to redefine notions of borders and identities. Through an analysis of the racialized representations arising from these organizations I focus on links between conflicts about immigration and tensions surrounding images of the body. This examination is based on textual and institutional analyses drawn over several years from a series of in-depth interviews, as well as participant observation, undertaken as dissertation research on undocumented immigration and border identities. My aim is to illustrate the means by which an ‘anatomy’ of community organizations is intricately interwoven with efforts to define racialized immigrant and ‘alien’ bodies.

I begin by outlining my theoretical framework, which focuses on the intersections
between identity, space and representation, and by outlining the methodology employed during this study. I then provide a background to the main subjects of analysis in this paper—the US Border Patrol and Voices of Citizens Together. The following sections examine the strategies of these different community organizations in order to interrogate the role they have played in separating and incorporating immigrant bodies into their discursive practices.

**Theoretical concerns**

Post-structuralist and feminist approaches on identities and spaces stress that knowledge is always situated and that there are multiple perspectives through which research materials (e.g. interview and textual data) can be read. The research reported here focuses on discourses and texts because these mediate and (re)produce efforts to monitor borders and immigrants. Discourse analysis allows an understanding of the ways in which representations are deployed during discussions of race in order to comprehend who attempts to control discussions about immigration and how these discussions are linked to specific material practices (e.g. border fences, violent attacks, exclusion from hospitals). Moreover, the dominant discourses of immigration and racial identities that emerge from a number of community organizations offer the possibility of reconfiguring the meanings of representational and material spaces (see Mains forthcoming). An examination of discourses and texts then provides an opportunity to interrogate how power is embedded within the social construction of the border and racialized identities.

During the last decade in geography there has been an expanding definition of what is meant by the term representation, particularly in post-structuralist research. As Duncan and Ley (1993) explain, the term ‘text’ is also used to refer to representation and can be defined as various systems of signification most often associated with the written word. During recent years, however, this idea of representation has been expanded to include various modes of cultural production, such as maps and landscapes, as well as political and economic institutions. These various cultural productions can be approached as representations to be read, because, in a similar manner to written texts, they express the ways in which attitudes, discourses and behaviour can become concretized in the ‘built environment’ and are open to ongoing reinterpretation (Barnes and Duncan 1991; Duncan 1990). Seminal work in this field was conducted by Foucault (1979, 1980), who read the landscape of the prison as a representation of discourses of punishment, retribution and authority which, through their dialectical relation to systems/discourses of power, reproduced certain social relations. Similarly, the US–Mexico border and immigrant identities can be read as a series of representations that are often mapped on to specific spaces, and which are inscribed with specific notions of nationality, race and gender. Many of these representations are produced and negotiated by community organizations who are actively addressing immigration policy, and who seek to create their own specific cartographies of citizenship and ‘belonging’ by framing public debates in very particular ways.

**Organizing difference: methodology and context**

There is a broad range of community organizations addressing issues related to immigration in California which offer the opportunity to
examine the ways in which they are discursively reconstituting what immigrant and border identities mean, as well as illustrating the constantly shifting nature of Californian immigration politics. Particular groups were chosen because of their regular and active involvement in ongoing discussions about immigration and also to represent a diversity of political perspectives. These groups are: the American Friends Service Committee (San Diego/Tijuana); La Resistencia (San Diego/Tijuana); Casa Del Migrante (Tijuana); the US Border Patrol (at San Ysidro/Imperial Beach); and Voices of Citizens Together (VCT, Los Angeles). The American Friends Service Committee in San Diego is part of a national Quaker organization that adopts non-violent approaches towards dealing with issues such as poverty, injustice and war. Through a system of community outreach programmes and advocacy work, the San Diego branch is heavily involved in cross-border work, investigating human rights violations filed by undocumented migrants and has been a strong opponent of Proposition 187 (Prop. 187) and Operation Gatekeeper. La Resistencia is part of an organization with offices in Houston and Los Angeles; its main purpose is to address discrimination and violence against immigrants in the USA. This group organized several protests against Prop. 187 and Operation Gatekeeper, and has also organized educational Summer Border Projects, allowing participants (such as college and high school students from other areas in the USA) to meet with activists and immigrant rights activists in Tijuana. Casa Del Migrante is a centre provided by the Catholic Diocese that provides temporary shelter and counselling for migrants travelling through northern Mexico. Migrants can stay in the shelter for up to two weeks after which time they will try to find alternative housing or attempt to cross the border into the USA. The US Border Patrol is part of the federal system of patrol agents who monitor and control immigration to the USA. The main office in Southern San Diego County is involved in public relations activities, and is actively involved in the running and maintenance of Operation Gatekeeper. Finally, Voices of Citizens Together is a conservative community organization in Los Angeles that has been pushing for much stricter immigration controls. An outspoken advocate of Prop. 187 and Operation Gatekeeper, this latter group holds regular meetings, protests and maintains a web page to encourage participation of its members.

Given space restrictions and a desire to focus on specific discourses of race and immigration, in this paper I have limited my analysis to the US Border Patrol situated in Southern San Diego County and Voices of Citizens Together (VCT) based in Los Angeles. Established on 1 July 1924, after the implementation of the Immigration Act by Congress, the US Border Patrol is involved in a range of activities designed to monitor immigration and undocumented entries into the US: the primary mission of the Border Patrol has remained unchanged—to detect and prevent the smuggling and unlawful entry of undocumented aliens into the USA and to apprehend those persons found in the USA in violation of the immigration laws. With the increase in drug-smuggling operations, the Border Patrol is the primary drug-interdicting agency along the land border between all the US land ports of entry (US INS Web 8/9/99: 1). Since the Attorney General, Janet Reno, and the US INS Commissioner, Doris Meissner, announced a new ‘Southwest Border Strategy’ in 1994, aimed at reinforcing the border, the resources invested in the San Diego County sector have increased substantially. During the first phase of Operation Gatekeeper, from 1993 to 1995, the number of patrol agents increased from 992 to 1,434, while the number of support
staff grew from 135 to 202 (US INS 1995: 9). The San Diego Headquarters (which recently moved from Imperial Beach to a new station further inland) includes a Public Relations Office and co-ordinates the activities of agents throughout this western sector. Many of the activities undertaken by agents involve physically patrolling the border, which also includes, ‘farm and ranch check, traffic check, traffic observation, city patrol, transportation check, administrative, intelligence, and anti-smuggling activities’ (US INS Web 8/9/99: 1).

VCT was initiated in 1992 by Los Angeles resident, Glenn Spencer, after he had spent some time researching changes in arrests for crimes in the city and felt that these changes reflected an ‘obvious invasion’ of the USA by immigrants. Spencer is the co-ordinator for the organization and the main media contact and disseminator of information about VCT’s activities through the mass media and web-based activities. There are a few other members who help organize and encourage support for specific events, such as protests and meetings, but the majority of activities are organized from an office in the basement of Spencer’s home.

VCT has been involved in a range of activities designed to draw attention to the presence of immigrants within California and beyond. These activities have included: the production of a monthly newsletter, an extensive web page (which is regularly updated and has several links to other related sites), lobbying politicians, street protests, a weekly radio show hosted by Glenn called American Patrol on Kiev Radio, and video documentaries about immigration. More recently, members of VCT have been involved in a project during which they have travelled across the USA to create documentaries about increasing immigration focusing on the theme of Immigration: Threatening the Bonds of our Union (Spencer 2000).

In addition, meetings among members are held an average of once a month.

During 1996–98 I conducted in-depth interviews with members of various border and media institutions, as well as undertaking archival research. Through informal conversations prior to my interviews, I had already met with several key members of these organizations. I discussed future interviews with a selection of potential participants and through a ‘snowball’ method of establishing further contacts was able to expand (and diversify) my contacts within each group. I thus developed a process of inductive interviewing, whereby my subsequent interviewees were partially determined by the recommendations of my initial contacts.

The interviews allowed an exploration of the ways in which groups react to, and actively challenge, the construction and representation of immigrant identities. In addition, they explored the ways in which ‘space’ is conceptualized (e.g. in terms of what constitutes a ‘border’ region), and the processes through which community groups challenge or reinforce dominant identities in specific spaces by utilizing particular strategies (e.g. co-ordinating protests on both sides of the border).

These interviews were usually conducted at the organization’s main office or at a location chosen by the participant, and their lengths ranged from around forty minutes to two hours. With the participants’ permission the interviews were tape-recorded and, when possible, I wrote detailed notes. I combined these interviews with participant observation, which included attending meetings and protests, undertaking ride-along tours with the US Border Patrol, conversing with activists, accompanying activists shooting documentary footage and attending workshops. While this approach towards conducting research can vary in intensity, at a minimum, it requires participating, at
some level, in the activities that the research subjects are undertaking. In addition, I informed groups of my role as a researcher and the type of study that I was undertaking, while also attempting to be open about my research project. Such a combination of approaches was important for understanding the varied and nuanced ways in which organizations and individuals negotiate the border.

The body

When examining debates focusing on immigration, the parallels between the symbolism and physical presence of immigrant bodies and broader discussions of ‘the body’ in the biological and social sciences becomes increasingly apparent (Foucault 1973). In particular, the medical profession’s efforts to control the body and treat it as an abstract object has historically been closely linked to racialized and gendered bodies (DeRas and Grace 1997). In addition, efforts to categorize different racial groups through biological descriptions have often been utilized to justify racialized (and racist) representations of specific social groups. Representations of the body provide an important entryway into analysing contemporary debates about immigrant experiences because they offer an opportunity to unearth the ways in which immigrant bodies are racialized through particular processes and are required to negotiate specific practices of discipline, control and punishment (Foucault 1973). Drawing on the work of Foucault (1977) and Grosz (1994), discussions of immigration in southern California (as in many other places) can be viewed as akin to medical debates about conditions of the body. Efforts are made to dissect, recuperate and revive theories about appropriate care, discipline and control of the latter’s various intertwined components. In a similar manner, community organizations focusing their attention on immigration have attempted to categorize, monitor and mark different social groups and the places where they ‘belong’ in very specific (and often contradictory) ways (Coutin and Chock 1995).

The medicalized body symbolizes discussions of immigration in both a metaphorical and literal manner. Literally, the body can be seen as representing the physical presence of immigrants, their individual journeys and injuries. Metaphorically, the body symbolizes desires to map out a distinct territory within which certain areas are marked as belonging to certain social groups. As this latter charting takes place signposts are drawn to mark key hot spots (e.g. schools, hospitals, citizenship rights, the border fence) in order to highlight which areas need immediate attention and those that can be left ‘unattended’ (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Martinez 1996). Just as controversy has hovered around medical researchers’ moves to understand and diagnose numerous medical conditions, efforts to understand and generalize immigration have been heavily contested.

That immigration is such a contentious topic signifies the difficulty of understanding this movement of people that is at once personal and abstract. In the following sections of this paper I aim to explore the situated and metaphorical ways in which migration becomes embodied by, and sutured to, specific people and places.

Fluids and pulse

Movement enables a place and people to exist in space. It is impossible to live without some degree of movement, without the ability to move through, negotiate and reformulate space. By conceptualizing movement as an integral process in socio-spatial changes we can
also interrogate the relationality of different subject positions, bodies and contexts. The pace—or pulse—of movements is variable and often the momentum for movement comes from a range of different circumstances and events. In examining immigration, images of the body and discussions over the US–Mexico border, for example, movement and levels of mobility appear at the nexus of the most volatile conflicts (e.g. around human rights violations and cross-border protests). Groups such as VCT and the US Border Patrol attempt to limit dramatically Mexican migrants’ abilities to move (e.g. through increased legal restrictions, border fences and surveillance) in an effort to contain flows of people seen as inappropriate, ‘unnatural’ or excessive. Physical movement, therefore, becomes a signifier for political and social mobility, and thus, concerned organizations (e.g. US Border Patrol) attempt to keep their fingers placed closely on this pulse. A key pulse—or issue—frequently given attention, for example, is the growing visibility of immigrant bodies and the apparent ebbs and flows of their movements through southern California.

Discourses of reproduction and (literally) expanding immigrant bodies are an integral ingredient in VCT’s video, *The Invasion of the United States* (Spencer, 1994). In this video, concerns over a growing number of undocumented immigrants in the USA are particularly evident in representations of hospitals in California and in debates over who has been able to access medical services. In one specific segment the narrator, Spencer, states that: ‘[h]ospitals operate conduits to bring people into this country for expensive medical treatments’. He goes on to say that it is a ‘well-known fact’ that ‘two-thirds of the births in LA County hospitals are to women who are in the country illegally’. Here women’s bodies symbolize a literal and metaphorical time-bomb within anti-immigration rhetoric: female bodies have become the spaces that need to be kept separate and controlled. In order to do this (not dissimilar to strategies used in science fiction film, i.e. where ‘aliens’ are removed from their apparent source of nurturing), immigration control activists have sought to remove access to medical care, through, for example, measures such as Prop. 187 and the more recent efforts to revive immigration reform through ‘Son of Prop. 187’ (Canto 2000).

In addition to concerns about women’s bodies and reproduction, the VCT video raises concerns about immigrant bodies generally in relation to illegality, mobility and loss of sovereignty. As Spencer states, ‘[b]eing non-citizens apparently will not get in the way of those who are determined to retake California. They are now overwhelming the democratic process itself’. The ‘natural’ cycles of the individual immigrant body, therefore, are depicted as threatening the USA at a state and national scale. The film also states that the region is overrun by ‘illegal aliens’; the movement of immigrants into California is blamed for potentially turning southern California into ‘an annex of Mexico’.

This fear of immigrants’ increasing mobility stems from an anxiety that it will become more difficult to track and deport immigrants, and will also change the social geography of the USA (Mains, 1999). For example, in a segment of the film a map is shown depicting Mexico and the USA. In the southern section of the USA there is a strip called ‘Aztlan’ combined with arrows pointing north from this region towards the remaining areas that have the words ‘Manifest Destiny’ written across them. Accompanying this map is a narration that states:

If southern California is to become an annex of Mexico, if it becomes Aztlan, who will be the Gatekeeper? Who is to control immigration into the rest
of the US? Those in other states who think this is just a California problem will soon learn they are wrong. (Spencer 1994)

The loss of a dominant legal or national identity, therefore, is also represented as being intricately interwoven with the increased physical presence of immigrants, a potential loss of land and therefore, the nation. While this potential ‘disaster’ is not stated in racial terms—cultural difference and erasure of traditional values are used as reasons for why immigration should be a concern—the implicit message of fear and suspicion is one that is mapped on to Latino immigrants’ bodies. VCT discourses also suggest that in order to maintain social unity and stability it is necessary to monitor and control the biology and reproductive capacities of immigrant bodies, which—unlike white bodies—pose a potential national threat.

**Skin and vision**

The surface of the body, the skin, moreover provides the ground for the articulation of orifices, erogenous rims, cuts on the body’s surface, loci of exchange between the inside and the outside, points of conversion of the outside into the body, and of the inside out of the body (Grosz 1994: 36).

I suggest that the border and skin can be viewed as two different but interrelated ‘monuments’ that signify distinct meanings and power relations through space. As Pile states, such monumental spaces are ‘meant to be lived’ and ‘[m]onuments may embody and make visible power relations, but they do so in ways which also tend to mask and/or legitimate and/or naturalize those relationships’ (1996: 213). Representations of immigrant bodies and efforts to dissect, watch, control and erase their presence point to the ways in which specific notions of race and power are embedded in these dominant discourses and border ‘monuments’. As geographers, an interrogation of these various monuments—of the body, neighbourhoods and border fences—and the socio-spatial processes that function through and beyond them provides a unique opportunity to develop a critical framework for unearthing and understanding identities that have previously been marginalized or subsumed.

While mobility and access to social services have been important markers of difference and racialization for US citizens and Mexican immigrants, perhaps the most obvious—and most avoided (by immigration control advocates)—corporeal signifier has been that of skin colour. ‘Brownness’ and ‘whiteness’ remain key characteristics that are used to differentiate between ethnic and racialized groups in southern California. Moreover, the meanings attached to skin colour are dependent on the perspective of the viewer and the subject being viewed, making vision and skin intricately interwoven.

The subterranean text of race and racism that underlies many claims to ‘take back America’ and declare ‘America for Americans’ in California (VCT 1996) illustrates the ways in which loci on nationalism, patriotism and cultural cohesion have been utilized to repress direct discussions of race and depictions of immigrants’ bodies (Smith and Mains 1999). Conservative organizations state they are concerned about ‘losing their cultural identity’ and that their fear of a growing migrant population is unrelated to fears of increased racial diversity. Despite these latter claims, a closer examination of the US Border Patrol’s and VCT’s representations of immigrants (particularly in videos and newsletters) highlights the ways in which Latinos are depicted as a mass of brown, an expanding seamless conglomeration of skin that threatens to absorb whiteness. At the same time, white residents are usually depicted as
individuals, physically distinct from each other, but united through a sense of community (even if that unity is through the creation of vigilante organizations that patrol the north side of the border). Dominant discussions of immigration are dependent on antagonistic dualisms; whiteness becomes individuated, ordered and disciplined while brownness becomes generalized, undefinable and threatening (Anzaldúa 1987).

Such representations of immigrant bodies and such vocally asserted nativist sentiments seem somewhat out of place in the current climate of economic growth within the USA, especially when many immigrants are actively fueling this growth through their employment in a variety of industries throughout California. Reflecting on these sentiments, Muller (1997: 109) comments that ‘[t]he surge in nativist sentiment can only be explained by a rise in what can be broadly described as social discontent.’ He continues:

In the more ‘politically correct’ environment of the 1990s, few would admit that the ethnicity or appearance of new immigrants is the basis of their negative views regarding much of the foreign-born population ... Nonetheless, I would argue that the increased visibility of new immigrants, the sight of veiled women in suburban supermarkets, the proliferation of mosques in large cities, the prevalent sound of Spanish in the streets, and the proliferation of small businesses with Korean, Indian, Arabic, and other ethnic advertising have aroused middle-class resentment in the 1990s similar to that observed nearly a century earlier. (1997: 109)

The Los Angeles riots in the mid-1990s combined with the bombing of New York’s World Trade Center and the Oklahoma City bombing provided a series of events that brought anxieties about racial and ethnic conflicts squarely in the public eye (Muller 1997). In addition, I would suggest that such events combined with state efforts to support Prop. 187, the 1996 Republican Convention, and Operation Gatekeeper, have provided a means of assuaging nativist fears by locating immigrants and borders within a very specific spatial imaginary that attempts to allow little in the way of transgression. By developing narratives of immigration, such as those told by VCT, some US citizens—although stating their growing resentment at the increased visibility of immigrants—make immigration more public and visible. It is important to note, however, that at some moments by being more public these representations also provide a space in which they can be challenged by immigrant advocacy groups that can also strategically use these public forums. The power of the narrator(s), therefore, is always open to subversion and reinterpretation.

One impact of the racialized representations and images of immigrant bodies in dominant narratives is the monitoring and controlling of Latinos’ geographies within the USA (regardless of legal status). In turn, racial profiling by police and the US Border Patrol has come under growing scrutiny due to its necessarily discriminating nature (Blomley 1994). When asked about the contentious nature of profiling, a US Border Patrol agent stated, ‘... most people we apprehend are Mexican ... [t]here are criteria that Border Patrol use for approaching someone ... [if there’s] guilt, the behavior, the vehicles ...’ (interview fieldwork notes, Summer 1998). While it could be argued that the proximity of Mexico to the USA would explain the focus on Mexican migrants who cross the border, what is left unaddressed is the issue of an institutional gaze that filters out white residents as it scrutinizes Latinos with much greater frequency.

As Foucault (1977) notes, it is the institutionalization of such disciplinary practices that facilitates the creation of an increasingly circumscribed social and physical geography
for a specific social group and which is sutured on to immigrant bodies. However, just as the skin attempts to contain the various body parts, but is never completely closed off and always vulnerable to outside influences, the efforts of the US Border Patrol and VCT to control discussions about immigration and the border can never be completed, nor the sole premise of any one organization. Although some groups may attempt to close down discussions (and the border), there is always the potential for moments that rupture the surface and allow for alternative imaginings of these racialized border spaces. Such openings can be seen in the context of groups that work collaboratively across the border to address human rights violations (e.g. La Resistencia and the American Friends Service Committee) and in discussions where common interests cut across political divides (e.g. in relation to workshops about safety, outreach and neighbourhood space in Tijuana (Mains forthcoming).

Conclusion

I began this paper with a brief discussion of some theoretical concerns, namely the ways in which identity, space and representation are intertwined and integral components in a detailed understanding of race, immigration and the US–Mexico border. An examination of specific discourses produced by VCT and the US Border Patrol shows that borders are not only created by the construction of fences, walls and floodlights, but also through discourses that mark immigrant bodies and the places with which they are associated as separate, marginal and different. Discursive and material mappings of identity and space produce and mediate meaning, and these meanings are embedded within specific notions of power which rely on binary representations of ‘us’ and ‘them’, or ‘native’ and ‘immigrant’.

In the context of the US–Mexico border, part of the binary categorization frequently involves discursively and physically disciplining immigrants’ bodies: immigrants become exiles and by being discursively situated in relation to particular border spaces (e.g. hospitals, prisons, restaurant kitchens), they are also marked as out of place (Cresswell 1996). Immigrants are exiled by being represented as ‘outside’ at home (and abroad). They are also marked as outside through discourses and institutions that make the ‘inside’ public, i.e. immigrant bodies become a contested space that is viewed as representing conflicts over mobility, nationality, disease, morality and productivity (or value). In a similar manner to the treatment of female maquila workers, who, as Wright (1999) notes, are represented as sometimes valuable, but other times dispensable commodities, I would suggest that discourses of immigration control also construct immigrants as discardable. Immigrants’ value as agricultural or service workers is occasionally noted by US residents, but this is often a cyclical sentiment that gives way to representations of immigrants as wasteful, dangerous and replaceable. The body of the immigrant, therefore, is one that can always be re-substituted. Although this body is individually monitored (e.g. through extensive legal documentation and surveillance), it is also marked as a ‘general’ body that exists in a border or in-between space. At this point, Wright’s concept of bodies as refuse is particularly pertinent. Indeed, dominant representations of the undocumented immigrant body examined in this study depict these identities as waste and wasteful. Yet, there are still traces of usefulness apparent, and so they exist in discursive spaces that mark them as marginal, but which also recognize that they have not (yet) disappeared and may become a useful com-
modernity in political debates, in calls for greater border enforcement or as a cheap source of labour, and so their discursive construction is reproduced. These ‘traces’ of immigrant identities can be found in multiple spaces and identities in that they are situated in relation to places that immigrants cannot inhabit or where they have previously travelled. Immigrants, for example, always carry traces of the border with them, whether it is through their markings as Latinos, through documentation procedures or through media constructions of immigration. By implication of the construction of identities in relation to ‘others’, we are all struggling or deploying borders: borders, therefore, are an ongoing process of mapping and negotiation. To develop future geographic research that is critically engaged, therefore, it is imperative that we explore the possibilities of developing emancipatory maps that destabilize binary categories, and reflect the ongoing mobility of identities and borders.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this paper. I would also like to thank Linda Peake, Rich Schein, John Paul Jones and Vincent Del Casino for their advice and encouragement at various stages while writing up this research, in addition to the participants in the NSF-funded workshop on Race and Geography, for a lively and provocative discussion. This research was partly funded by an AAG Dissertation Grant and a University of Kentucky Dissertation Year Fellowship.

Notes

1 I discuss the goals, structure and strategies of each of these community organizations in greater depth through a series of case studies that is part of a larger dissertation project addressing the US–Mexico border and immigrant identities.

2 Proposition 187 included removing undocumented residents’ access to publicly funded services, such as schools, hospitals and welfare. It went to a statewide referendum in 1994, which it passed with 58 per cent of the vote, although its implementation was postponed until a November 1997 court ruling led to the motion being struck down as unconstitutional. It is now being re-examined in light of ongoing appeals (California State Government 1994, 1997). Initiated by the Clinton Administration, Operation Gatekeeper was introduced in 1994 and focuses on the San Diego County section of the US–Mexico border. Through increased surveillance and deportation the goal of this programme is to ‘reduce illegal immigration across the San Diego border by providing law enforcement with the tools that it needs to do the job’ (US INS 1996).

3 Key questions I addressed during the interviews included: What specific impacts have Prop. 187 and Operation Gatekeeper had in the border region? How are these groups’ reactions to Prop. 187 and Operation Gatekeeper underpinned by deeper notions of nationality, citizenship and political responsibility? How do these groups define and depict the border region? What organizational and spatial strategies have these groups used to address immigration issues and policies? What discourses and images of immigrants, e.g. ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’, have these groups utilized?

References


**Abstract translations**

**Anatomie de la race et politiques d’immigration en Californie**

À la frontière É.U.–Mexique, certains organismes communautaires ont joué un rôle important dans le renforcement et le questionnement d’idées dominantes sur la race et l’immigration à travers une série de protestations et campagnes médiatiques. J’explore dans ce travail comment des organismes communautaires clés se sont basés sur des constructions de race spécifiques et spécifiées afin de redéfinir les notions de frontières et identités. Je soutiens qu’une analyse des débats autour de l’immigration révèle la place centrale (et marginale) d’images et espaces du corps immigrant ‘racialisé.’ En explorant comment des identités politiques, médiatiques, nationales et individuelles sont associées à des espaces particuliers, l’opportunité se présente d’interroger et de remettre en question le naturel apparent des représentations de race et immigration et la manière dont le pouvoir est stratégiquement placé mais occulté dans les discussions de frontière(s).

**Mots clés:** immigration, race, identité, représentation, activisme, frontière É.U.–Mexique.

**Una anatomia de raza y la política de inmigración en California**

A la frontera entre los Estados Unidos y México específicas organizaciones comunitarias han jugado un papel importante en el reafirmar y cuestionar de las ideas dominantes sobre raza e inmigración por una serie de protestas y campañas realizadas a través de los medios de comunicación. En este trabajo examino las maneras en que importantes organiza-
ciones comunitarias se han basado en construcciones específicas y especificadas de raza e identidad étnica para redefinir ideas de lo que son fronteras e identidades. Sugiero que una investigación de los debates acerca de la inmigración revela la centralidad (y la marginación) de las imágenes y los espacios del cuerpo racializado del inmigrante. Una exploración de las maneras en que la política, los medios de comunicación e identidades nacionales e individuales están colocados en espacios particulares ofrece la oportunidad de interrogar y cuestionar la ‘naturaleza’ de representaciones de raza e inmigración y las maneras en que el poder está estratégicamente localizado y, sin embargo, ocultado en los debates sobre la(s) frontera(s).

Palabras claves: inmigración, raza, identidad, representación, activismo, frontera entre los Estados Unidos y México.