

# *Entrapment Processes and Immigrant Communities in a Time of Heightened Border Vigilance*

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In processes of entrapment, police and other state agencies impose significant risk to moving around, while people themselves exercise various forms of agency by both limiting themselves and covertly defying movement controls. Recent US immigration and border enforcement policy has entrapped undocumented immigrants, in particular on the United States side of the US-Mexico border region. We explore how to operationalize this “macro” pattern in ethnographic research, making the conceptually and methodologically significant point that political-legal forces are only one among many elements leading to entrapment and immobilization; other factors include transportation constraints, poor health, etc. The concept of “morality of risk” is also introduced to help us understand how and why trapped people would take severe risks to defy immigration policing. Three ethnographic cases are examined, noting the complex mix of movement and barriers found in them. We conclude with the significance of entrapment for applied and basic social science: first, for the analysis of spatial mobility, enclosure, and inequalities of movement; second, for public policy; and third, for the methods and ethics of researching trapped and hidden populations.

**Key words:** Migration, Mobility, Entrapment, Morality, Risk, Networks, US-Mexico Border, Colonias

## Introduction

United States immigration law enforcement policies are trapping increasingly large numbers of unauthorized or undocumented migrants and their families. This is especially pressing in the region near the US-Mexican border, where law enforcement is concentrated, and where people are not just enclosed inside the country as a whole but are also impeded from moving around locally to access vital resources and to join with loved ones. These people are “trapped” by government policing, but this phrase, while memorable, is too static. We conceive of the phenomenon more dynamically as “processes of entrapment,” in which police and other state agencies impose significant risk on movement of undocumented people, while these people exercise various forms of agency by both forgoing travel and covertly defying movement controls. In this perspective, people are not so much absolutely nailed to the ground as they are partially and complexly impacted by the movement control system.

We first consider the entrapping qualities of recent United States immigration and border enforcement policy. We then explore how to operationalize this “macro” pattern in ethnographic research, making the conceptually and methodologically significant point that political-legal forces are only one among many elements leading to entrapment and immobilization; other factors include transportation constraints, poor health, lack of geographic knowledge, gender roles, restrictions, etc. We encounter combinations of these diverse factors at the ethnographic level. The concept of “morality of risk” is introduced to help us understand how and why trapped people take severe risks to defy immigration policing. We also link our analysis to the study of recent Mexican-origin migration and population settlements, especially the informal, peri-urban settlements located on the US-Mexico border known as *colonias*.<sup>1</sup> Three ethnographic cases are presented, noting the complex mix of movement and barriers found in them. We conclude by exploring the significance of entrapment for applied and basic social science: first, for the study of spatial mobility, enclosure, and inequalities of movement (Cunningham and Heyman 2004); second, for public policy, such as improving access to healthcare; and third, for methods and ethics of researching trapped and hidden populations.

Our main source of ethnographic material is research is based on the US-Mexico borderlands, in particular from the lead author’s research on colonias in southern New Mexico, which focuses on issues of migration, farm work, and social and political processes of community formation (Núñez 2006). We also make brief mention of our more recent ethnographic work (2006–2007) being done on access and

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barriers to healthcare among uninsured immigrants in urban and rural areas of El Paso County, Texas: entrapment plays a significant role in that study.<sup>2</sup>

### Entrapment Processes: Broad Structures and Ethnographic Approaches

Advanced capitalist economies and transnational linkages drive vast flows of migration (Sassen 1998). At the same time, United States migration policy is divided, permitting both significant volumes of legal migration, and “illegalizing” other, equally large volumes of migration. Likewise, the politics of migration is contradictory, which results in the displacement of broader debates onto border enforcement “solutions.” The end result is a disproportionate concentration of immigration law enforcement efforts at and near the US-Mexico border (Andreas 2001; Heyman 1999; Nevins 2002); it is disproportionate in comparison to national origins, settlement areas, and modes of entry to United States territory. Indeed, this peaceful border has been gradually militarized (Dunn 1996). For undocumented migrants, the cost of crossing the border has risen and there are higher risks of death and injury, yet this enforcement effort has had little effect on the net migratory flow (Alonso 2003, 2005; Cornelius and Lewis 2007; Eschbach et al. 1999; Eschbach, Hagan, and Rodríguez 2003; Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002; Spener 2000). In summary, we are witnessing the intersection of powerful social drivers of migratory movements with rigid and punitive policy responses, entrapping human communities in between.

In response, undocumented migrants from Mexico and Central America are reducing the frequency of their trips back and forth, and are remaining for longer periods of time inside the United States (López, Oliphant, and Tejada 2007:79; Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002:128-133). This national-level entrapment likely plays an important role in the growth of the United States undocumented population and the formation of contemporary immigrant communities and enclaves. But the main impact for most interior populations is on relatively infrequent transnational trips, so that entrapment is not experienced on a daily basis.<sup>3</sup> However, for communities near the US-Mexico border, entrapment is an important feature of everyday life.

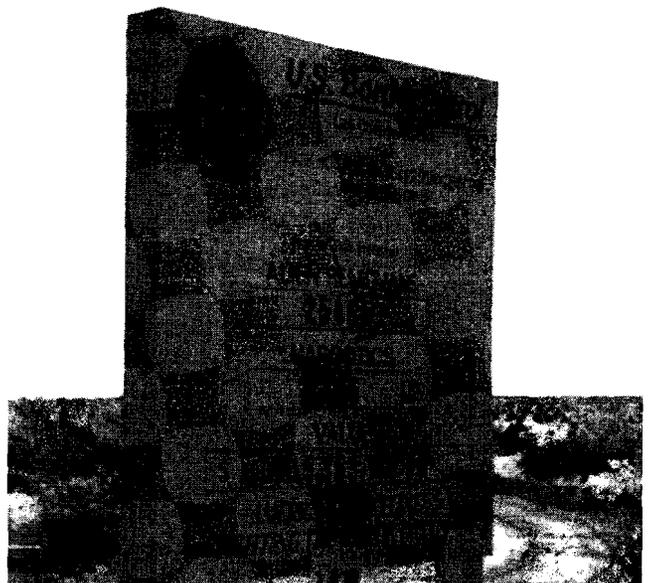
The specific geography of immigration and other law enforcement in the borderlands helps explain the regional intensity of trapping processes. First, federal immigration law enforcement (Border Patrol, military observation posts) concentrates along the Mexican boundary. This makes return from Mexico costly and difficult, discouraging voluntary trips south of the border (e.g., to see ill relatives) and making return from deportation harder. Second, fixed Border Patrol checkpoints on all the main highways leading away from the border, at a distance of 25 to 100 miles into the interior, impede travel into the interior of the United States. In addition, roving Patrols monitor smaller roads that might be used to bypass checkpoints. A presumably large popula-

tion (although of unknown size) is thus trapped between the boundary and the interior, in the cities and the small settlements along the borderlands. Also, there are particular areas of the country where undocumented people live on the north side of the Border Patrol checkpoint, which are also cut off from accessing their logical central places for commerce and public services. This situation includes the cases discussed here, where undocumented inhabitants living within small settlements around southern New Mexico are cut off by checkpoints located on the major Interstate arteries. These checkpoints contribute to the immigrants’ fear of not being able to pass through when seeking to return home.

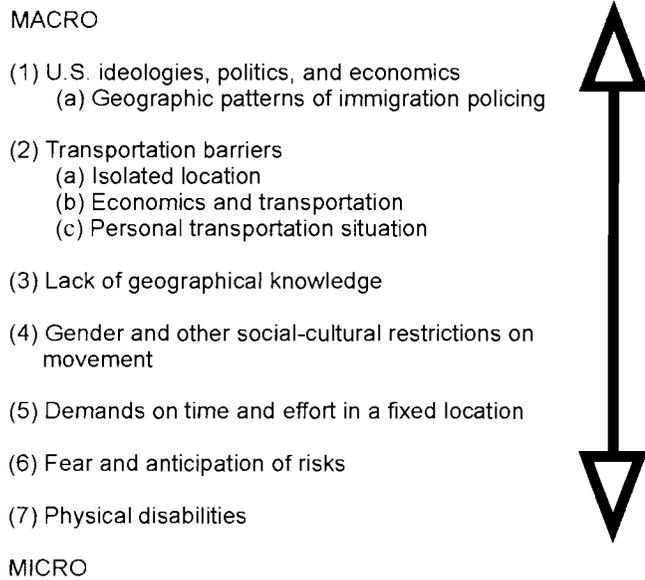
It is not just a matter of people being enclosed snugly between the border and the checkpoints. Rather, Border Patrol, Immigrations and Customs Enforcement, and local police (who are sometimes *de facto* immigration law enforcers, as discussed below) regularly patrol the streets and roads of these trapped zones, parking at key intersections, outside of houses, or along parks and other public spaces. Entrapment processes thus occur constantly in the zones we describe, although people also find ways to hide and avoid this policing.

This situation has worsened in recent years, as the military (largely pulled out of frontal border law enforcement in 1997) returned in the form of large-scale deployments of National Guard troops. The Border Patrol continues to grow in size and technology, and 700 miles of physical and virtual border walls are in planning stages, in addition to existing walls in settled areas of California and Arizona. During 2006

**Figure 1. Photograph of United States Border Patrol Checkpoint Sign on Interstate 25 in northern Doña Ana County, New Mexico. After protests by local community advocates, the numerical values on this sign were removed. Picture taken by G.G. Núñez in 2000.**



**Figure 2: Ethnographic Continuum: Entrapment Processes from Macro to Micro**



and 2007, attempts at comprehensive immigration reform failed in Congress; the aftermath was even greater border immigration enforcement and renewed interior immigration policing (e.g., worksite raids). In addition, the “Minutemen” and other armed civilian anti-immigration groups were particularly active during 2004–2006.

Recently, local law enforcement agencies have entered immigration enforcement (by law, a federal matter) in some parts of the borderlands. For example, the El Paso County Sheriff in 2005–2006 operated roving checkpoints on roads leading out of rural communities with predominantly Mexican-origin populations. Sheriff’s Deputies ostensibly checked for license, insurance, and other automotive violations, but the process was used to request identification from suspected undocumented immigrants and turn them over to federal authorities. Border residents refer to these activities in which people are cornered, detained, rounded-up and trapped like cattle as *redadas* (round-ups).

The enclosed border region is disproportionately populated by Mexican-origin people, including dense settlements of recent migrants of various legal statuses. Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez (2004) refers to this region, along with interior settlements such as Central Valley of California, as “regions of refuge” for the Mexican-origin population in the United States. This concept, first applied to indigenous peoples in Latin America by Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán (1979), focuses on how subordinate people cope with processes of domination by sheltering in marginal but protective geographies. The border region of refuge came about through people’s search for inexpensive land for homes, often self-built, as a means of protection in a low-wage and unpredictable United States labor market

(e.g., farming, construction), as well as a place where people, both legal and undocumented, could move back and forth to Mexico and interior sites in the United States (Núñez 2006, Ward 1999). It is ironic that such a heavily policed region is also a region of refuge, but as we shall see, this concept captures how people use their local geographies of small, hidden settlements and intimate networks to hold dominant forces, both state and market, at an arm’s length.

In the US-Mexico border region, recent migrants live in poorer neighborhoods and apartment complexes of the larger cities, and in settlements on the margins of cities and scattered in farm districts, including colonias. In urbanized areas, undocumented immigrants experience trapping processes, but have the advantage of having access to urban transportation, greater population densities, and the relative anonymity of the city. The smaller communities provide more seclusion, but the trapping processes are also exacerbated by the limited sources of transportation, limited options for commerce and services, and bottlenecks in the road system that are used as traps by federal and local law enforcement.

### **Entrapping Processes and Responses at the Ethnographic Level: Analytical Frameworks**

The summary above of entrapment processes emphasizes the impact of state activities, and large-scale or structural forces more generally, on mobility. However, when considering the individual’s experience, and when doing research on mobility at the ethnographic level, many different impediments and barriers to movement overlap and interact. Figure 2 lays out the factors by their scale of aggregation. The value of this diagram is that it draws methodological attention to the presence of multiple and simultaneous processes of entrapment, from personal-level phenomena (e.g., physical disabilities) to the regional and national-scale context (e.g., immigration and border policy).

However, this etic diagram does not fully represent the experience of several immobilizing factors hitting a person or household at once. For a more emic sense of entrapment, we offer a different diagram (Figure 3), with overlapping circles representing immobilizing forces, which will differ per individual case. Multiple processes of entrapment do not just coexist but often interact, reinforcing each other and reducing the person’s ability to escape the paralyzing web. We refer to this experience through an expressive if inelegant phrase, “multiple whammies.” When multiple trapping processes become tightly interlocked, people who might solve one of them alone cannot resolve all of them at once and, as a result, suffer high degrees of anxiety and discouragement.

However, entrapment is not an all-encompassing and singular condition, as not all undocumented people in these zones are completely trapped without recourse. For example, people find ways to signal each other about the presence of and hide from immigration law enforcement (and sometimes, unfortunately, all law enforcement). They choose in some circumstances to take risks to cross checkpoints and to hide

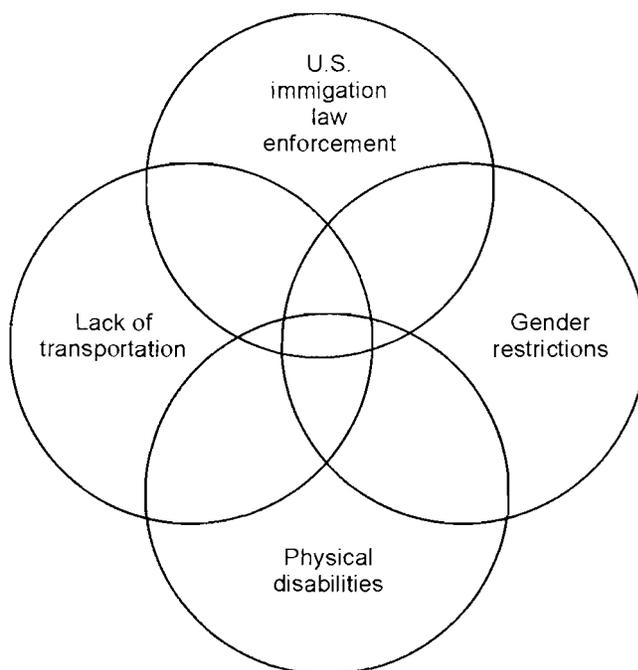
and shelter other sojourners. And trapping forces give rise to amateur and professional human smugglers who operate throughout the United States and not just at the boundary but also moving people in and out of trapped communities and across interior Border Patrol checkpoints. Instead of being a fixed condition, then, entrapment consists of a complex set of processes and social relationships in which people negotiate their presence and mobility within heavily patrolled communities. Even with the severity of multiple trapping processes, our ethnographic approach allows for incomplete control and complex outcomes and pays attention to the agency of trapped people. We raise the need to document and analyze exactly when and how people choose to defy law enforcement, according to a specific “morality of risk.”

Morality of risk refers to different socialcultural frameworks for evaluating courses of action amid serious risks.<sup>4</sup> In some cases, risks are taken (vis-à-vis entrapment processes) because of strong moral demands. A typical example is housing or transporting undocumented relatives and people from the same home town, both of which are against United States law and present substantial risks in the borderlands, yet which are undertaken because of a deep sense of obligation. Conversely, serious needs are sometimes not addressed because of the overwhelming risk of law enforcement and the lack of a moral imperative. An example we are currently studying is self-denial of preventative and chronic healthcare because of fear of immigration patrols and roadblocks. The particular choices of risk-taking and risk-avoiding acts—moving through checkpoints to obtain small incomes or visit family, but allowing fear of law enforcement to deter addressing serious health concerns—may seem paradoxical to prosperous, documented people, but the extreme dilemmas people face and the morality of risk that shapes their response merit sympathetic and careful documentation.

The morality of risk concept is linked to the large literature on immigrant networks, in particular support networks among kin and people from the same hometown or local area (e.g., Massey et al. 1987, Wilson 1998). Larissa Lomnitz (1977) has shown that relatively poor and powerless people use networks to counteract marginalization processes within the larger society. Miguel Moctezuma (2000), for example, delineates various ways undocumented Mexican migrants cross the US border, and highlights the role of networks, trust, and interpersonal obligations in obtaining effective and less risky modes of entry (such as personally known smugglers and nonprofessional helpers) under current border conditions. These forms of assistance are not just immediate and practical, but come to be part of a cultural framework, following Vélaz-Ibáñez’s (1983) understanding of how people learn, practice, and give meaning to strong interpersonal obligations required for effective networks.

Helping someone who is undocumented by providing transportation or room and board can be viewed from diverse views on morality. To friends and relatives sympathetic to the plight of immigrants, these acts are morally appropriate; while for some law enforcement officers and

**Figure 3: Overlapping Circles Illustrate Experience of Overlapping and Interacting Entrapment Processes**



others with immigration restrictionist attitudes and beliefs, these same acts are illegal and immoral. In a situation of unauthorized migration and residence, facing strong but imperfect enforcement, networked migration demands moral valuations that counter the dominant society’s values, at least as embodied in law and the operations of border policing, in a sense a developing an alternative moral economy (Scott 1976).

It is important, however, not to overstate the agency of trapped populations. To characterize the harshness of entrapment, we take notice of the constant experience of liminality. Leo Chavez (1998) analyzed the border crossing process in terms of rites of passage, from separation through the liminality of the border passage to incorporation in the new society. However, people who live inside the border zone never leave the area of crossing, even if in other regards they are settled and incorporated. In this specific way, we can say they experience a near-permanent sense of liminality, involving nearly constant presence of fear, anxiety, and stress.

Another constant presence in the borderlands as a heavily policed zone is the need for and lack of identification. In seeking to avoid bringing attention to their status or to stave off its consequences, undocumented immigrants hide in specific safe spaces (e.g., interior places within their personal networks), try to appear calm and “normal” when in public spaces, use stories that claim citizenship or legal residence, or carry paperwork that hopefully can stave off arrest and deportation (such as *arreglando*, or documents showing that

one is adjusting one's immigration status). As a result, there is strong attention both to official documentation and paperwork in the borderlands, and also to learning and conforming to specific, "legal" social appearances and identities (see Nathan 1991:34). We draw this pattern out in our ethnographic analysis, but there is much more to be done in linking it to various ideologies of race, class, and citizenship in this region and in the nation as a whole, and their specific performances and negotiations on the ground.

Border-region immigrants often exercise humor, cleverness, and resilience in their efforts to frustrate the authorities. The application of tactical knowledge and social organization to skirt arrest provides an example that speaks both to agency and its limits in the state of permanent liminality. Cellular and home phones enable people in networks to forewarn one another of the sporadic presence of Border Patrol and law enforcement agents. In smaller peri-urban settlements such as colonias, it is common that such officers target places of employment and use heavily trafficked streets to stop people in their vehicles to request proof of immigration and nationality status. When such *redadas* are in effect, residents efficiently call people advising them to stay inside their homes and avoid moving through heavily monitored spaces. Although this communication strategy provides a level of protection by lowering the probabilities of being identified, searched, detained, and deported, these actions ironically end up trapping immigrants within their homes and communities. This self-imposed reclusion in turn reifies the fear of movement while increasing the immigrants' spatial isolation and alienation. They remain invisible to the dominant society, while maintaining visibility (and audibility) within their small support circle.

It is thus important to envision research methods that recognize and explore compounded processes of entrapment as a whole. Applied and policy issues also require that we understand and address multiple, compounded barriers to movement, and complex and creative responses. Likewise, it is important to conceptualize intersecting barriers to movement and various forms of agency (with major risks entailed) in order to operationalize in field research the abstract concepts of mobility and enclosure.

### Three Ethnographic Narratives of Risk and Entrapment

The following three narratives were documented during Núñez's doctoral research conducted in southern New Mexico colonias in 2001 to 2004.<sup>5</sup> They illustrate how immigrants living along the US-Mexico border navigate processes of entrapment and the morality of risk. The first narrative, Tomás Martínez (this and all subsequent names are pseudonyms), a former undocumented immigrant, and now legal United States resident, describes the stress, anxiety, and hostility experienced in his various attempts to avoid detention and deportation during his undocumented years. The second case looks at the morality of risk in the case of Ida Sánchez, a single mother who feels compelled to host a family of undocumented

migrants on their northward journey. The third ethnographic vignette describes the complicated life of Manuel Torres, an elderly man who experiences a number of barriers and challenges to his mobility. These cases are indicative of the multiple forces of entrapment facing undocumented populations throughout the US-Mexico borderlands.

Tomás Martínez, a man in his fifties, originally from the state of Durango, began his narrative by describing his run-ins with immigration and employers who would often turn him in to avoid paying his wages. He also describes his many attempts trying to avoid the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to circumvent the humiliating experience of being tossed into vehicles, while being detained and held captive much like animals. He notes:

My brothers and I outran the INS in Texas many years ago (in the early 1980s). We used to struggle when we did not have papers in this country. Some of the bosses we have worked for have turned us into the INS; the *migra* (government entity or official that enforces immigration laws) was constantly looking for us. We would hide, often finding ourselves running from the immigration vehicles; we call these vehicles *perreras* (kennels) because they put you in them just like dogs.

Martínez and his family ultimately sought refuge in the US-Mexico border region's colonias as a strategy of solace from aggressive immigration enforcement practices in northern Texas and in Colorado, where he and his brothers were vulnerable to immigration raids and to employers who aimed to protect their own interests at the cost of their employees. He recalls:

We had been working in that area of northern Texas for a while. My brother's old boss had allowed us to live in an old trailer behind his property. He was a land holder who hired Mexican laborers for a while and knew the ins and outs of INS raids because two of his son-in-laws were police officers. Whenever they knew the INS was going to raid his property, they would call the father-in-law so he could alert the people working for him. Anyway, this one time when we arrived to the trailer home we were living in, the boss and property owner came out to tell us that the INS had already been there and that they were aware he was housing undocumented people. The owner told us that the INS had all the details in terms of the truck we were driving and how many of us there were. The man said he was afraid of having problems with the law since times had become more difficult for everyone. We thanked the man for his help, and my brothers and I quickly gathered the clothes we had and whatever food we could carry, which was just a bag of apples. We had just bought groceries for the entire week, and we had to leave everything behind. We did not have a clue where to run.

He had tried seeking work along with his brothers in Dallas and San Antonio to no avail. Tired of running, he eventually decided to settle in a colonia in southern New Mexico where he had previously worked as a seasonal farmworker.

There, he worked in onion and chile fields, while waiting for an immigration reform. In 1986, he was among the 2.2

million individuals who pursued his legal residency under the United States Immigration Reform and Control Act. Having established his legal residency in the United States, he purchased a lot and a mobile home in a colonia in southern New Mexico. He then brought his wife and children from the Mexican state of Durango to live with him.

Once settled in the United States, Martínez helped his siblings and one of his older children move and settle to live near him as a way of extending his own stability to his kin by offering a place of refuge and support. He narrates his family's recent relocation to southern New Mexico:

Now, my brothers and I all live here with our families. I brought my wife and children from Durango. I had grown tired of being apart for so long. Now, we all live here and we go to Durango only in *temporadas* (brief seasons) to see our family and keep an eye on the house we left behind. My wife and I even went out to south Texas where my oldest daughter was living with her husband and their children. We went there to help her pack her family and her belongings into a U-Haul. There is no work down there. We have helped her pack, move, and unpack; now we all live closer together. It was very hard having her so far away, especially because she and her husband are undocumented and we did not know what would happen to them. Now, we can at least help take care of their children, our grandchildren, in our home while she and her husband look for work around here.

By December of 2004, almost two decades since becoming a legal resident of the United States, Martínez had many nuclear and extended family members living within blocks of his home in a colonia in southern New Mexico. Notably, Martínez is now documented, but he also has enabled undocumented relatives to settle in the borderlands despite intensive labor enforcement. These strong points of nucleation have helped create trapped "refuge" communities with residents of similar ethnic, national, and economic backgrounds and circumstances. Martínez and his family now live in a colonia with such a high density of migrants from his home state that his community is now known as *Duranguito* (little Durango).

The next ethnographic vignette discusses the case of Ida Sánchez, a woman from Durango who exemplifies the social networking involved in struggling against entrapment. This case highlights the importance of knowing a person who is already established in the United States and in the border region specifically, who may offer a place of refuge for those interested in migrating into other regions of the country's interior. This case also exemplifies what the woman refers to as a moral duty to help her *paisanos* (friends) in seeking a better life for themselves. This concept, which we refer to as the "morality of risk," describes the moral imperatives that bring about risk-taking in defiance of entrapping processes; we commonly encountered such moral concepts narrated by informants who hosted undocumented immigrants who seek shelter and temporary assistance in their efforts to find more permanent work and shelter in the United States.

Sánchez is a single mother with four children. She works the night shift at a local dairy. During a follow-up household

visit, she was housing seven other people in her home who had just arrived from her hometown in Durango. She was worried because the *coyote* who was to take them up to Albuquerque, New Mexico had not been back to fulfill his commitment. The coyote was afraid there was too much immigration vigilance, and he could not guarantee getting all seven of them across the checkpoints and up north. The family of seven had grown restless, trapped inside the hot trailer home, hoping to go unnoticed by the local neighbors and authorities. The family of migrants needed money for food and to pay the cost of moving north. After a week of waiting for the coyote, one of the men among the group of migrants had gone out in search of work. He contacted a local contractor and got hired working in the fields picking chile. He had a social security card and was "legally" employable; whether his Social Security number was legitimate or not, we don't know. The accompanying family members who were physically able to work had decided to join the man out in the fields picking chile. The migrants were pooling their labor while working under one person's paycheck. Collectively, they were engaged in the immigrant experience as border crossers, temporarily living and working in the borderlands, while raising enough money to pay for their journeys up north.

In the meantime, these migrants had to rely on the assistance of a *conocida* (acquaintance) from their home state of Durango, who offered them *posada* (temporary housing or asylum) on their journey north. Sánchez managed to host people in her home while avoiding to call attention to her situation by being patient and thinking about the long run. She explained her commitment to her co-patriots as a moral duty to assist immigrants in need by noting:

They eat whatever I can provide for them, mainly beans and tortillas. I am getting worried about being able to afford feeding them all. I can't turn my paisanos away because they are all from my same hometown. If I turn them away, I will be ridiculed and criticized for turning my back on them. It's the right thing to do. I have to learn to be patient until they continue on their path.

As she lifted her hands and stroked her forehead, Sánchez described her moral obligation to assist her paisanos by using the verb "*tengo*" as in "*tengo que ayudarlos, no hay de otra*" (roughly this translates to "I must" or "I have to help them, there's no other way around it"). This emically expresses how her risk-taking behavior emerges from strong reciprocal obligations and moral duties that create and solidify social networks in her border community and her community of origin in Mexico. To her, the risk of aiding undocumented immigrants from her hometown is morally the right thing to do.

During Sánchez's narrative, she showed signs of stress and anxiety in her voice and in her non-verbal body movements. As she hosted this extended family in her home, she risked a felony charge for housing undocumented immigrants in her home. However, she not only viewed this action as a moral duty, but also described it as an investment in her and her family's social ties in Durango. She noted, "Turning my

back on my paisanos in need could cause problems for my family in my hometown of Durango. What if my parents or I were to need a favor in Mexico? Who would help us then?" Her choices were premised on and further promoted transnational linkages, assisting her compatriots on their voyage north in exchange for possible support in Mexico. The morality of risk concept helps us understand the historical development and continuing importance of networks under conditions of entrapment. Risk-taking acts against law enforcement are network forming and strengthening investments of a particularly compelling moral character, securing future favors or obligations from the individuals being assisted or from those individuals' family members or social allies.

The third ethnographic case study involves Manuel Torres, an elderly man living in a colonia in southern New Mexico, who describes a life complicated by his limited economic mobility, an inoperable vehicle, numerous family responsibilities, and a landlord that seeks to benefit from his financial needs by lending money at high interest rates. This case study clearly demonstrates the concepts of multiple levels and overlapping circles of entrapment, how several forces (limited economic mobility, personal/familial obligations, lack of transportation, etc.) all contributed to his dilemmas of mobility.

Torres was feeling trapped in a situation complicated by not knowing what to do about his future livelihood, his rocky relationship with his common-law wife, the familial obligations to his own biological son, and his family who had recently been left behind after his recent deportation to Mexico. At the time of this interview, he indicated he had been unable to sleep because he could not stop thinking about all his family's problems. He had limited means of movement and few options available to him. Prior to arriving in New Mexico, his ex-wife and children had kicked him out of his home in Mexico. Now that he was trying to continue in the United States, his problems and debts kept adding up.

At the time of this study, Torres' common-law wife, Sylvia, had gone to the state of Durango, Mexico in search of her own grandson. This little boy's father lived in a nearby colonia in southern New Mexico, and was currently employed in one of the local dairies. This man had asked his mother to go to Mexico to look for his son since his former spouse no longer wanted to or could care for the child. She could no longer cross the border because her permit to live and work in the United States had already expired, yet she had felt compelled to take this risk to search for and smuggle in her grandson because he had no one else to care for him in Mexico. At the risk of not being able to legally reenter the United States, she returned to Mexico accompanied by her daughter-in-law, who also had a US-born son. She intended to use the birth certificate of her US-born grandchild to get her Mexican-born grandchild across the border.

Trying to smuggle a child across the US-Mexico border carries many risks and harsh penalties, particularly during a time of heightened border security post September 11, 2001. The use of advanced technological equipment and personnel has been increasingly used in US ports of entry to detect the

fraudulent use of documents and to detain people trying to enter the United States without documentation. While narrating this predicament, Torres recognized that his wife and her grandchild faced many threats and repercussions in trying to enter the United States without papers. He hoped and prayed to see his wife safely back in his home. He had agreed with his wife that if she couldn't renew her permit legally or cross the border successfully with her grandson, she was to call on him so that he may start looking for someone (a professional human smuggler or coyote) to help them get home. At the time of this household interview, Torres had not yet received a phone call or news about Sylvia and her grandson's whereabouts.

Further complicating Torres' life was the recent deportation of his own biological son, Benjamin. Benjamin had been working at one of the largest dairies in southern New Mexico when he ventured out to buy groceries and was caught and subsequently deported by the Border Patrol. He had left behind his undocumented young wife and a child at home during the time of his deportation. Benjamin's family had now become Torres' responsibility, as the young family lived right next door on the same property Torres had been renting and had no one else to turn to. Benjamin's boss had already petitioned for him to get a work permit, so that his son was *arreglando* (in the process of becoming documented). As he spoke, Torres pulled out a large manila folder that had been folded in three containing a carbon copy of a money order and a green colored receipt, indicating that Benjamin had already sent in his documents and payments to the Department of Homeland Security requesting his work permit. During the time Benjamin had been picked up by the Border Patrol, Torres attempted to seek the help from Benjamin's boss—a person they hoped would corroborate his "in process" status—but his boss was not home at the time of the detention. Although Benjamin was in the process of becoming eligible to work legally in the United States, he was technically still considered to be undocumented and deportable.

Faced with economic uncertainty, Torres and his wife had been contemplating what to do with their lives and were trying to decide whether to stay and live in the southern New Mexican border region or move elsewhere. Although the region might serve as a refuge for thousands of immigrants, such as Tomas Martínez introduced earlier, Torres' circumstances seemed to have been exacerbated by his close proximity and obligations to family members living in the United States without documentation who heavily relied on his assistance. Torres was having problems with his wife because she wanted to live alone with him without having the daily intrusions of his son Benjamin and his family in their mobile home. He understood his wife wanted privacy, but it was difficult for him to tell his next-door neighbor and son that he and his family were no longer welcome in his home.

Torres' lack of transportation and physical mobility were also a problem, as he was unable to move his vehicle because he didn't have a current license plate registration. He had recently paid more than \$600 in fines to have his vehicle released after it had been impounded. He had raised this

money by borrowing \$500 from his landlord and by using his trailer home as collateral. His landlord was also his neighbor and owned the property on which Torres' small trailer home was parked. She had agreed to lend him the money at a 15 percent monthly interest rate or \$75 a month for the \$500 loan. He said he didn't know what to do and was considering whether or not he should try selling his old trailer home and moving back to the Valley in Texas where he had previously lived. Moving would be difficult because he owed money on his home and did not have a running vehicle to transport himself or his family. Although many of the circumstances Torres is facing involve other individuals, such as his spouse, his son, and their families, and his own familial obligations to these individuals, the problems are very much his own. In the case of Manuel Torres, the forces of entrapment are multiple (see Figures 2 and 3 above), representing what we refer to as "multiple whammies," a useful phrase apt for describing the many challenges and circumstances that individuals face that hinder their mobility.

However, these three ethnographic narratives together show how immigrants, in spite of experiencing processes of entrapment, continue to defy such forces at great legal, financial, psychological, and emotional costs. Throughout our ethnographic research, we have witnessed and documented many other instances of entrapment and decisions within the morality of risk (Núñez 2006, Talavera, Núñez, and Heyman n.d.). For example, while in northern Doña Ana County, Núñez witnessed a mother separated from her United States born son during a medical emergency. The mother was unable to go to accompany her son in an ambulance and to the hospital because of her fear of detention and deportation. Mother and son were separated by the Border Patrol checkpoint located between their community of residence and the nearest hospital in the city of Las Cruces.

Serious risk decisions are further complicated by the widespread existence of mixed status families (with citizen, legal resident, and undocumented members),<sup>6</sup> as well as people with ambiguous status in the process of legalization (referred to earlier as *arreglando*). Such close connections between documented and undocumented, in a situation of intensive law enforcement, force people to decide whether to favor some family members over others or to keep families with very different mobility rights as a unified moral unit. Tougher immigration enforcement efforts and policies often are not sufficient to suppress this moral decision-making and the subsequent defiance of the state. However, they do confront people with constant, terrible dilemmas, anxieties, and tensions. The personal cost of entrapment is enormous.

### Concluding Discussion

The study of entrapment processes has significant implications for applied social science in three regards: social analysis, public policy, and research methods and ethics. Studies of migration and mobility need to include in their analysis both the barriers and fears involved in defying

detention and deportation by state officials but also the ways people protect themselves and obtain mobility along with the consequences of such action. Applied social science and public policy aimed at increasing public participation and the subsequent delivery of useful and effective health and social services must take into account constraints on movement and means of getting around them.

### Implications for Social Analysis

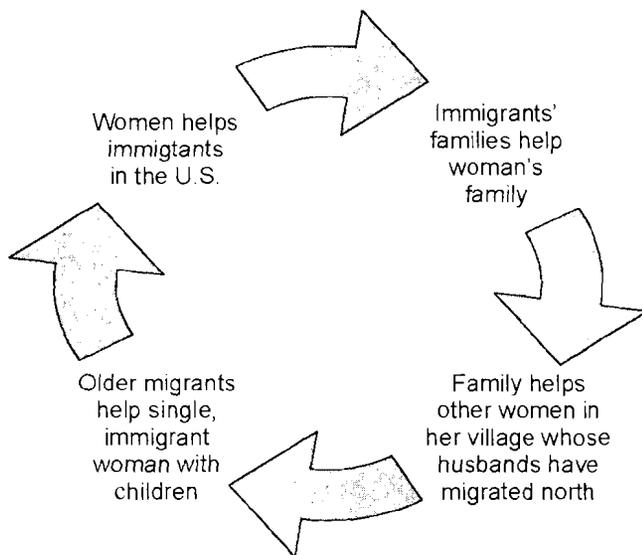
Mobility has been a central area of concern in recent social theory, often emphasizing unbounded movement and its social and cultural effects (Appadurai 1996, Hannerz 1996, Ong 1999). Many insights have come from this work, especially the concept of transnationalism and the shift away from viewing culture as having a singular and fixed place (Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Kearney 1996, 2004; Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992). We have come to understand that freedom and accessibility of movement is fundamental to people's well being in the contemporary world. Long distance, transnational travel receives the most attention, but even local mobility is fundamental. People move to receive education and health services, to vote and attend public meetings, to visit friends and family, to work, to shop, and so forth.

However, ease, volition, and freedom of movement have been overstated, especially for relatively powerless populations. Movement inequalities originate from and interact in complex ways with other inequalities, such as nationality/citizenship, race and ethnicity, age, gender, and class. Hilary Cunningham and Josiah Heyman (2004) propose that we pair the concept of mobility with enclosure, thus calling attention to the dual processes that enable and restrict movement of specific people at concrete places and times, rather than abstractly proclaiming a new era of unbounded mobility.

The modern state practices delineation of spaces through borders, identification of people through documents like passports, and surveillance of populations through inspections that require presentation and performance of identity documents (Giddens 1985, Torpey 2000). Surveillance, following Michel Foucault (1977), becomes a positive component of freedom, in this case the freedom to move openly near and across borders. It is a "normal" aspect of life for the documented. But there also is an "illegalized" population in the United States, lacking documentation acceptable to the US government. Such people move around the borderlands and across the international boundary deliberately avoiding surveillance,<sup>7</sup> or are locked into place by entrapment processes -- they are outside "normal" surveillance and freedom. In this sense, our discussion of entrapment processes and hidden populations is a spatial extension of Nicholas De Genova's analysis of illegality (2002, 2004, 2005).<sup>8</sup>

Inequalities of mobility are, in some respects, paradoxical. To be more privileged in movement is also to be more clearly identified and tracked across space; along with a certain capacity to defy identification and surveillance of the state come severe material penalties, such as having to take serious risks to obtain healthcare, work, and family visits. The

**Figure 4: Exchange of Favors Cutting Across Bordered National Spaces**



law enforcement concept of the border entrapment zone is that people cannot move into it from Mexico, cannot return from Mexico if they go south out of it, and cannot move north into the United States interior. Support networks, with their associated moralities of risk, break this geographic collar. The obligations and reciprocities described in our three ethnographic cases are thus counter-spatializations cutting across boundaries, resembling the Kula ring within a very different political and economic setting.

Although this idea may appear to celebrate mobility, our point is not to ignore unequal power and its effects at borders. Support networks sometimes enable people to move through and across the entrapment zone, but for what end? When people defy border law enforcement in search of major values, such as visiting sick family members in Mexico and then returning, they suffer considerable worry and expense, and they often forgo important goods and services, such as employment or preventative healthcare, by minimizing local mobility. Furthermore, their counter-spatial ability to move into the United States borderlands enables them to “supply” themselves to employers, landlords, and so forth. In such encounters, there is good reason to see undocumented status, fear of authorities, reliance on smugglers and other providers of illegal “help,” and restrictions on open movement to seek other homes and jobs as exacerbating vulnerabilities to exploitation (Heyman 1998). Nandita Sharma’s (2005) concept of global apartheid is useful in characterizing this situation. She argues that prosperous nation-states increasingly have created population segments and zones that are simultaneously present within the nation but are understood and treated as if they do not exist or are outside its boundaries—an excellent description of life within entrapment processes.

## Implications for Methods and Ethics

Undocumented immigrants’ fear of detection and deportation, which is exacerbated by law enforcement practices of entrapment, makes identifying and researching this population quite challenging. Identifying informants was difficult in the El Paso/southern New Mexico region where the Border Patrol is ubiquitous and where other law enforcement officers have been stopping people and turning them over to immigration authorities. It was reasonable for participants to be leery and skeptical of researchers asking about their immigration status and related issues. In conducting interviews, we needed to recognize and reduce people’s anxiety when they were already feeling trapped and overwhelmed because of their undocumented status. We used several strategies for reaching people and guarding sensitive data while minimizing risks and stresses in researching hidden populations (Schensul et al. 1999).

The ethnographic narratives used in this analysis were collected during Nuñez’s doctoral fieldwork in southern New Mexico. One key strategy she used in locating and interviewing undocumented informants was seeking the collaboration of agencies, schools, and nonprofit organizations working with large immigrant populations; this was also used by our interdisciplinary anthropology and public health team in the 2006-2007 project. Working out of “safe spaces” such as schools, healthcare clinics, and nongovernmental agencies specializing in immigration services provided us with access to a significant number of our participants who then welcomed us into the safety of their homes after having developed a certain level of *confianza* (trust).

Another key strategy was using informant recruiters from the immigrant networks. A number of the urban residents in the health project were identified through a key informant and her extensive network of domestic workers. A group of interviewees were recruited by a health promoter who is herself undocumented and was initially recruited at an immigrant rights office. Undocumented immigrants living in a rural colonia community were recruited with the assistance of a specialist and community advocate who works with migrant populations. Key informants were in turn compensated with “finder’s fees” for their aid and assistance in identifying, locating, and securing interviews with research participants.

In both research projects, we took standard protections of confidentiality, including using pseudonyms and not using full names and addresses in fieldnotes and publications. Special attention was directed to not carrying identifiable information on undocumented people when crossing through Border Patrol checkpoints. In the 2006-2007 health project, we obtained a Certificate of Confidentiality from the National Institute of Health (NIH), which protects our research informants’ personal data from other government agencies, as well as using codes for interviews rather than having traceable names.

As applied anthropologists, we are faced by the challenges of and possible approaches to ethical treatment of

hidden and trapped populations. We must carefully negotiate our presence and interactions with trapped populations living within already heavily monitored physical places by minimizing the possibility of bringing additional visibility to people aiming to remain hidden. Nonetheless, we are cognizant that one of the major aims of ethnographic research is to "give voice" to the populations we work with (Ragin 1994). In public policy and social service arenas, the voices and experiences of those facing processes of entrapment are often muted by dominant narratives of national security, border enforcement, and immigration reform. There is great need to reply to hierarchical and punitive views of human mobility. In working with hidden, undocumented populations, then, we seek always to envision the combination of risks, challenges, and benefits of using data and firsthand narratives from hidden, trapped populations.

The ethics of doing research on hidden and trapped populations, then, are not simple, and we have barely begun to explore them. They constitute a compelling case for the "do not harm" ethic vis-à-vis the researched community: we should not produce results that lead to identification and arrest of specific individuals or concrete tactics that can increase enforcement against specific communities. But beyond this basic rule, the issue is one of balancing costs of prying into hidden lives against the benefits of giving voice in public arenas, affecting public policy, and designing more adequate ways to reach hidden communities. No one answer can cover all cases.

### Implications for Public Policy

Processes of entrapment and limitations on mobility should be important considerations in program and policy designs aimed at undocumented populations, especially in heavily policed areas. First, trapping forces may cut populations off from normal central service provision points; mechanisms must be created to reach such people. Second, processes of entrapment are multiple, and programs and policies must take into account the compounded effects of physical immobility, limited geographic knowledge, limited transportation, immigration law enforcement, and so forth. Third, entrapment may have specific causes and manifestations and be more severe for particular segments of the undocumented population, such as women or children. Finally, the moralities of risk may differ from the dominant culture among entrapped populations, and understanding choices among options (such as traveling to help undocumented kin versus traveling to access healthcare) must be done on the basis of sensitive cultural and social understandings. Awareness of the issues that hinder the mobility and access to services is critical in shifting attitudes, perceptions, and procedures in the delivery of services-- factors which matter to the overall well-being of hidden and underserved immigrant populations.

Our research has already informed local health practitioners, as well as local, statewide, and national elected officials,

about the consequences of our current immigration policies. Our material on barriers to mobility has been incorporated in short, clear policy documents for a number of audiences, including housing and healthcare planners in New Mexico, school district officials in Texas, the El Paso County Attorney (who is working on placing limits on involvement of County Sheriffs in immigration law enforcement), and members and staff of the 2007-2008 Congress when they were looking at comprehensive immigration reform and border human rights. For example, we showed local school district officials in one town in Texas evidence that fear of traveling caused by El Paso Sheriffs' checkpoints had caused a dramatic decline in usage of a health clinic located in an elementary school, rather than an underlying decline in demand in the community. It is unclear if this will result in restored hours for the clinic, but the information cleared away misperceptions.

As scholars and as members of our own communities, we need to acknowledge the human rights of the people we work with. At times, this might take us to work with clinics, in advocating flexibility with their payment schedules and in allowing people to access care without fear of detection and deportation. At other times, we might be involved with addressing public and elected officials, questioning and being critical of immigration checkpoints that serve as barriers when people are seeking emergency medical care. As we look at the national public policy, such as the failed comprehensive immigration reform proposals of 2007, we advocate for legalization that would help many who are currently trapped. At the same time, we recognize the ambiguity of proposals for expanded guestworker programs that would generate a new situation of entrapment, although not illegalization. As David Griffith (2006) shows, the specifics of guestworker programs and the positions of workers and organizations matter, opening up a role for careful, grounded applied anthropology. It is fundamental that we recognize the particular challenges presented, in social analysis, research methods, applications, and ethics, by processes of entrapment.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>In the United States Southwest, the term "colonia" has several meanings and ascribed connotations that refer to the rural and peri-urban settlements that dot the border region. The word "colonia" literally translates to neighborhood or city district in the Spanish language. United States colonias are not necessarily rural or urban; they are best characterized as periurban population settlements engaged in processes of urbanization (Núñez 2006). Colonias are not homogenous population settlements, as they are often inhabited by a combination of Mexican immigrants, US-born *Hispanos*, and smaller numbers of Anglo-American, African-American, and Native-American families.

<sup>2</sup>"Health Behaviors and Access Barriers to Uninsured, Undocumented Immigrants in El Paso County: An Ethnographic Study," funded by the Paso del Norte Health Foundation. The PI was Nuria Homedes and other members of the research team were Carla Alvarado, Victor Talavera, Guillermina Gina Núñez, and Josiah Heyman. We thank the Foundation for its support; errors and misinterpretations in the present paper are the sole responsibility of the authors and not of the Foundation or other research team members.

<sup>3</sup>There has long been intensive interior immigration enforcement in some places, and it has increased substantially in the last two years (see Coleman 2007). Entrapment actions, for example, include Immigration and Customs Enforcement operations at strip malls, banks, and check-cashing businesses on payday. There is need for ethnographic research on entrapment processes and responses (such as moralities of risk) away from the borderlands.

<sup>4</sup>Olivia Ruiz (2001) offers comparable work to ours in discussing the routes of undocumented Central American migrants crossing into Mexico as a spatial distribution of risks. These are not to be understood just objectively but also according to the choices of migrants themselves, for example when they choose more physically dangerous, bandit-infested routes to avoid Mexican immigration authorities. There is much still to be learned about the subjective and objective spatial layout and experience of risk in the US-Mexico borderlands and the United States interior (see Marroni and Alonso 2006).

<sup>5</sup>At the time of this study, Núñez was also accompanied by Ada Vargas, a Masters in Social Work student at New Mexico State University, who was interested in providing services to immigrant and colonia populations.

<sup>6</sup>One measure of mixed status households in the United States as a whole is that 3.1 million children are United States citizens living in families with one or more unauthorized parents, constituting 67 percent of total children in those families (Passel, Capps, and Fix 2004).

<sup>7</sup>This is an overstatement for the purpose of clarity of analysis. The state is complex, and some branches of the state or related non-governmental organizations (such as public schools, some health clinics, etc.) "know" the undocumented and vice-versa, even as this population hides from other branches of the state. Moves to share knowledge and surveillance within the state (e.g., to share information from local service providers with immigration enforcement agencies) greatly strengthen entrapment.

<sup>8</sup>Bill Ong Hing (2004) discusses the phenomenon of "de-Americanization" in immigration law and enforcement, which in our analysis might be seen in the widening divide between "normal" rights to mobility and the illegalized mobility of undocumented people and their families.

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