

The Incurrigible Subject: Mobilizing a Critical Geography of (Latin) America through the Autonomy of Migration

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Abstract

This article suggests the indispensable purchase of sustaining a critique of the conventional geography of “Latin America.” Any critical approach to (Latin) American geography must be organized in relation to the genealogy of concepts, discourses, and practices implicated in the historical and ongoing sociopolitical production of the space of (“Latin”) “America.” This article’s specific intervention toward a critical geography of Latin America adopts the vantage point of migration as a standpoint of critique, and thus posits a critical geographical perspective on Latin/America from the point of view of the experiences of Latino/a migrants in the United States. Situating its inquiry in relation to the pivotal role of anti-Mexican/anti-Latino racism in the political rhetoric of Donald Trump, this paper is ultimately interested in the relationship of Latin American and Latina/o Studies to the autonomy of migration, the subversion of the U.S.-Mexico border, and the politics of incorrigibility articulated through migrants’ struggles within the United States. This article also seeks thereby to revisit the perennially (but productively) problematic relationship between what comes to be known as “Latin American Studies” and the field of scholarly inquiry called “Latino Studies.”

Keywords: *Migration, Labor, U.S.-Mexico Border, Donald Trump, Americas*

Resumen

Este artículo sugiere la indispensabilidad de sostener una crítica de la geografía convencional de “América Latina.” Cualquier enfoque crítico de la geografía (latino-)americana tiene que ser organizado en relación con la genealogía de conceptos, discursos, y prácticas implicados en la historia y producción socio-política perpetua del espacio de “América” (“Latina”). La intervención específica de este artículo hacia una geografía crítica de América Latina utiliza la migración como punto de entrada de la crítica y, por lo tanto, plantea una perspectiva geográfica crítica sobre la América/Latina a partir del punto de vista de las experiencias de los migrantes latinos en los Estados Unidos. En relación con el papel fundamental del racismo anti-mexicano / anti-latino en la retórica política de Donald Trump, este trabajo está

en última instancia interesado en la relación entre estudios latinoamericanos y latinos con la autonomía de la migración, la subversión de la frontera entre México y los Estados Unidos, y la política de la incorregibilidad articulada a través de las luchas de los migrantes dentro de los Estados Unidos. Este artículo también busca revisar la relación (productivamente) problemática entre lo que se conoce como “Estudios Latinoamericanos” y el campo de la investigación académica llamado “Estudios Latinos.”

Palabras Clave: *Migración, Trabajo, Frontera entre Estados Unidos y México, Donald Trump, Américas*

Prelude: Toward a Critical Geography of (Latin) America

“In the beginning, all the World was *America*...”

— John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government* (Ch. 3; §49; 1690/1988:301)

“The discovery of America ... [is one of] the two greatest and most important events recorded in the history of mankind...one of the principal effects of those discoveries has been to raise the mercantile system to a degree of splendour and glory which it could never otherwise have attained to...in consequence of those discoveries, the commercial towns of Europe ... have now become the manufacturers ... for almost all the different nations of Asia, Africa, and America.”

— Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (Bk. IV, Ch. 7, Pt. 3; 1776/1976: 141-42)

“The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blackskins, are all things which characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation. Hard on their heels follows the commercial war of the European nations, which has the globe as its battlefield.”

— Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume I (1867[1976:915])

“*¡Aquí Estamos, y No Nos Vamos!* [Here we are, and we’re not leaving!].”

– Latino migrant mobilization chant

For both Adam Smith and Karl Marx – one, the iconic spokesman for what in his day was the new social science of Political Economy, and the other, its preeminent critic – the figure of “America” was monumental, and indeed fundamental for any adequate account of the modern world. The historical sociology and political economy of global capitalist modernity would be inconceivable, literally unthinkable, without the European encounter with this New World – “America” – indeed, the Americas, and first of all, that part of the Americas that José Martí would much later famously call *Nuestra América*. “The discovery of America ... [marks] the beginning of the modern era,” declares Tzvetan

Todorov, to which he adds, with a memorable (if Eurocentric) flourish, “We are all the direct descendants of Columbus, it is with him that our genealogy begins.... [Since 1492] men have discovered the totality of which they are a part” (1982/1984:5). Even as trenchant a critic of Eurocentrism as Enrique Dussel makes effectively the same declaration: “There was not a *world* history in an empirical sense before 1492” (2000:470; emphasis added). “Modernity really began in 1492: that is my thesis” (2000:474). Notably, these emphatic gestures toward the inscription of “America” (or more precisely, the Americas) within the global conceptual frames of “world history” and “modernity” situate Latin America at a pivotal juncture in *time*. Nonetheless, they evoke the elusive outlines of a kind of place, a geography defined above all by its relational status as the intersection in *space* of global forces in a sequence of events that come to be marked as “world historic.” In this respect, Latin America is eminently apprehensible as a geography of *encounter*. Modern time (“modernity”) and modern space (“the global”) arise from and are consolidated through the encounters that take place in the amorphous geography that we come to know as (Latin) American.¹

The radical alterity of this American frontier — this construction of the Americas as a veritable frontier space — was always the repository of a variety of fantasies, from the philosophical to the more crudely material and practical missions of sociopolitical domination and economic expansion. Hence, we have the remarkable irruption of *America* in the discourse of John Locke. Writing almost a century before Adam Smith, Locke was producing a version of the sort of social contract theory that supplied an origin myth for bourgeois (“civil”) society. For thinkers like Locke, a premier task of philosophical reflection was to account for the origins of private property and to narrate the emergence of modern property relations from an imagined pre-social and uncivilized condition, the proverbial “state of nature.” America, of course, provided a template for that wild, savage, “natural” condition: “In the beginning, all the World was *America*,” Locke proclaims, “... for no such thing as *Money* was any where known” (1690/1988:301; emphases in original). Thus, before there was a scholarly discipline of Political Economy as such, there was a forceful, new social and political theory predicated upon a notion of the *civilizing* force of private property, money economy, and generalized commodity exchange. Locke was a forthright and self-conscious spokesman for the specifically political project of an ascendant, increasingly entrenched and self-confident capitalist civilization, so to speak. And notably, from the very beginning, “America” and the indigenous Americans were central and constitutive figures of thought in the formation of what we now recognize to be the European or “Western” philosophical canon. The same comes to be true of enslaved Africans and African Americans (Chandler 2008). This is perhaps most palpably evident in the classic philosophical reflection upon the incurable subject of slave rebellions, Georg Hegel’s dialectic of lord and bondsman (see Buck-Morss 2009).

Furthermore, it is precisely in the historical era of the Haitian revolution, which successfully overthrew slavery and French colonial rule, that the most eminent minds of classical Political Economy were first pressed to elaborate a theory of value predicated upon “free” labor (Moulier-Boutang with Grelet 2001:229). Here, we must recall that the elusive and enchanting figure of America that so enticed European appetites following the so-called Discovery always represented a *career* (cf. Said 1978:5), a material and practical

endeavor of conquest and colonization to be enacted in and across a real geography, over and against the dead or enslaved bodies of Americans, both old and new. It is therefore crucial to note that Locke wrote the constitution of the English slave-plantation colony in the Carolinas (1669). That is to say, Locke did not only find food for thought in America: he was also an ambitious man of affairs, looking westward toward the worldly allure of new frontiers; America also provided him with a career.

Contrary to dominant accounts of the beginnings of modern world history that would more predictably locate the Americas at the imagined “periphery” of a dynamic and expansive “European” project characterized as its “age of discovery” – contrary, in other words, to the hegemonic commonsense whereby the vast regions of the globe that were variously conquered and colonized by Europeans are routinely relegated to a marginal status – conquest, colonialism, and slavery in the Americas were in fact preconditions for the very possibility of a capitalist world economy. The conquest and colonization of the Americas became an irresistible compulsion for the ascendant European powers.² The prospect of appropriating the natural resources of these continents, combined with an effective subordination of the productive labor of the American populations (whether indigenous, transplanted, or newly generated) – populations that were absolutely necessary and indispensable for transforming natural resources into commodifiable wealth – promised to satisfy the most elementary requirements for jump-starting the accumulation of capital on an ever-expanding scale. Without the products of American labor — first and foremost, indigenous and African/American labor throughout the Americas — there quite literally could never have been the Industrial Revolution. It is fair to say that all American trans-continental and national particularities, then, have taken shape historically only within a *global* context, as key, albeit contradictory, parts of this global dynamic.

If this is so, however, the same is also true of “Europe” itself. Europe as we know it, and all of the European nation-states, as such, are truly unthinkable except in this global context, as the product of these legacies of colonialism (De Genova 2016). Europe was, “literally the creation of the Third World,” in Frantz Fanon’s memorable formulation (1961/1963:102). Indeed, as Walter D. Mignolo argues, Eurocentrism was never merely the ideology of some pre-existing place called Europe; rather it was an ideology that made such a place in its own image. “Europe” was the invention of Eurocentrism, originating as a consequence of global capitalism (2003:61). Similarly, the very formation of Latin America as a geopolitical region (a region socio-politically distinguished from the English/British and Anglophone American colonial projects), as well as the historically specific relationships of distinct Latin American countries first to the European colonial powers, and subsequently to the imperial hegemony of the United States, have been inextricable from the continuous (centuries-old but still ongoing, ever-incomplete) struggle to consummate and consolidate capitalist social relations on a world scale.

An intellectual field of inquiry that may be apprehensible as “Latin American geography” therefore has never been reducible to the scholarly work of professional geographers, and indeed, an adequate genealogy of concepts pertinent to the study of “Latin American/geography” must necessarily be capacious enough to discern the problematic historicity of the very notion of “Latin America” within a much wider arena of Americanist discourses and practices, which themselves have always been intrinsically “modern”

in their historical temporality and effectively global in their spatial scope. Andrew Barry has incisively argued for an expanded geographical canon the scope of which ought to be, “organised not around the work of canonical authors, but in relation to specific concepts and practices ... which enter into the genealogy of geographical concepts” (2015:88). In this spirit, this essay is unapologetically interdisciplinary — if not frankly anti-disciplinary — in its contention that any critical approach to Latin American geography must likewise be organized not narrowly around the work of (Latin Americanist) geographers but in relation to the genealogy of concepts, discourses, and practices implicated in the historical and ongoing sociopolitical production of the space of (“Latin”) “America.” Furthermore, the ramifications of this argument inevitably extend to the complacencies of the wider multi-disciplinary or interdisciplinary field of institutionalized academic inquiry that we have come to know as “Latin American Studies.” In order to adequately comprehend “Latin America” in other words, we must have recourse to its configuration within a global ensemble of sociopolitical relations.

This contention brings me to the more precise focus of the present essay. As a contribution to this special issue addressing the theme of “Critical Geographies in Latin America,” I want to suggest the indispensable purchase of sustaining a critique of the conventional geography *of* Latin America. My specific intervention toward a critical geography *of* Latin America is one that adopts the vantage point of migration as a standpoint of critique, and thus posits a critical geographical perspective *on* Latin America from the point of view of the experiences of Latino/a migrants in the United States (see also De Genova 1998; 2005:95-146). This article also seeks thereby to revisit the perennially (but productively) problematic relationship between what comes to be known as “Latin American Studies” and the field of scholarly inquiry called “Latino Studies,” as it has been academically institutionalized in a manner that tends to be geographically delimited by a primary if not exclusive focus on the United States. The comparatively incipient projects of Latino Studies in Canada and Europe, which themselves emerge only as a consequence of the versatility of Latin American migrations, remind us that such a constitutive U.S.-centrism is similarly problematic and potentially imposes its own obfuscations and blindspots, not least the risk of recapitulating the hegemonic assimilationist commonsense of U.S. nationalism that has so fundamentally shaped the academic study of “immigration” in the U.S. context (see De Genova 2005:58-94). Nevertheless, Latin American-origin migrations to the United States supply an enduringly vibrant and crucial angle of critical vision for any critical geography in/of (Latin) America, which must of necessity be a geography that is as mobile, restless — indeed, incurrigible — as migration itself.

“Making America Great Again” and the Latin/American Partition

Let us now fast-forward a few hundred years from John Locke’s endeavors in “civilizing” the American wilderness to the contemporary U.S. scene. It is well known, and a resounding and well-deserved source of Donald Trump’s infamy, that he invoked a luridly criminalized and racialized specter of “illegal” migration, particularly from Mexico, as one of the defining centerpieces of his campaign for the U.S. presidency, when he delivered the speech on June 16, 2015 that officially announced his candidacy and launched

his campaign. It is instructive to examine the precise language that Trump deployed:

“When do we beat Mexico at the border? They’re laughing at us, at our stupidity. And now they are beating us economically. They are not our friend, believe me. But they’re killing us economically. The U.S. has become a dumping ground for everybody else’s problems.... When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending the best. They’re sending people that have lots of problems and they’re bringing those problems. They’re bringing drugs, they’re bringing crime. They’re rapists and some, I assume, are good people, but I speak to border guards and they’re telling us what we’re getting ... not the right people. It’s coming from more than Mexico. It’s coming from all over South and Latin America, and it’s coming probably – probably – from the Middle East. But we don’t know. Because we have no protection ...” (Washington Post 2015).

Trump then went on to rally his supporters with his infamous proposal for the construction of a border wall along the full extent of the nearly 2,000-mile U.S.-Mexico land border: “I would build a great wall, and nobody builds walls better than me, believe me, and I’ll build them very inexpensively, I will build a great, great wall on our southern border” (Washington Post 2015). In response to ensuing media furor, Trump was compelled to release a statement to address charges of racism. He wrote:

I don’t see how there is any room for misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the statement I made.... What can be simpler or more accurately stated? The Mexican Government is forcing their most unwanted people into the United States. They are, in many cases, criminals, drug dealers, rapists, etc.... The worst elements in Mexico are being pushed into the United States by the Mexican government. The largest suppliers of heroin, cocaine and other illicit drugs are Mexican cartels that arrange to have Mexican immigrants trying to cross the borders and smuggle in the drugs. The Border Patrol knows this. Likewise, tremendous infectious disease is pouring across the border. The United States has become a dumping ground for Mexico.... The issues I have addressed, and continue to address, are vital steps to Make America Great Again! (Walker 2015).

In this statement, not only was Trump recalcitrant about his allegations, but in fact amplified and extended them, now to insinuate that Mexican migrants are also carriers of infectious diseases, thus further figuring the Mexican menace as a multifarious threat of criminality, violence, sexual predation, and contagion. Anti-Mexican racism, in particular, and anti-Latino racism more generally, have thus been a potent and viral fermenting agent in the long saga of anti-immigration politics in the United States for the greater part of the last century, especially since the landmark reconfiguration of the legal infrastructure of immigration in 1965 which I have previously depicted in terms of the unprecedented

legal production of migrant “illegality” in ways that have been disproportionately deleterious for Mexicans in particular, and for Latin Americans more generally (De Genova 2004; 2005:213-49; cf. Nevins 2002/2010; Ngai 2004). In a dissimulation of the toxicity of his racist appeal, notably, Trump was careful to reinstate the divisive figure of migrant “illegality” as the real object of his animus: “Many fabulous people come in from Mexico and our country is better for it. But these people are here legally, and are severely hurt by those coming in illegally” (Walker 2015). In a concurrent interview Trump added, “The Latinos love Trump, and I love them” (Spodak 2015).

Literally from the very outset of his bid for the presidency, Trump’s political strategy has depended on castigating Mexican/migrant “illegality” and excoriating the phantasm of a purportedly “open” U.S.-Mexico border as pivotal elements in his rather crass mobilization of anti-Mexican racism, in particular, and anti-immigrant nativism, more generally. Notably, the call to refortify the U.S.-Mexico border was simultaneously affiliated with anti-Muslim racism by implicitly raising the securitarian spectacle of “terrorism” and invoking the specter of a porous border with Mexico that can be readily exploited by “enemies” from the Middle East (cf. De Genova 2007a; 2011; 2013b). Trump’s forlorn litany of how the United States has become the “dumping ground for everybody else’s problems,” particularly as embodied in the proverbial hordes of “unwanted” migrants, was conjoined (in the same speech) to the portentous contention that the United States is “becoming a third world country” (Washington Post 2015). Furthermore, what is particularly striking, for present purposes, is that the racialized figures of Mexican “rapists,” drug smugglers, disease, and criminality, in general, are amplified in Trump’s discourse to encompass all of Latin America. Thus, the mobility of Latino migrants itself is implicated in the spectacular discourse that conjures an image of migration as a destabilizing “unwelcome” intrusion and a corrosive “unwanted” presence. After all, much as the U.S.-Mexico border has long been conventionally understood to be the place where Latin America begins, so also was it ideologically figured as the place where the Third World begins (De Genova 1998; 2005:95-146). Hence, Trump’s bombastic project of “making America great again” has been inextricable from the injunction to “build a wall” that promises to insulate the United States from Latin America and keep the contagion of Latino migrants out. Recapitulating the legacy wherein (Latin) America conjured a frontier space where aggressive European colonial powers projected their fears, fantasies, and desires, this distinctly beleaguered articulation of U.S. nationalism similarly requires Latin America to supply a figure of alterity that is always dangerously close.

There is virtually nothing in Trump’s anti-Mexican/ anti-Latino racism that is new in any way. It is perhaps more brazen in its nativist vulgarity and more unabashed and unapologetic in its racism (post-hoc equivocations notwithstanding) than what has become customary during the Obama administration, and for this very reason, more appalling and repugnant to many who may have been comforted by the avowed (if disingenuous) post-racialism of the Obama era (De Genova 2010a). But like the man himself, there is woefully little in Trump’s political rhetoric that is original or creative. Moreover, the U.S.-Mexico border has long been a premier site for the deployment of increasingly militarized tactics and technologies of enforcement, including of course physical barricades (Dunn 1996; 2009; Nevins 2002/2010; cf. Burrige et al. 2012). The ceaseless fortification of

the U.S.-Mexico border — that infamous partition that was always supposed to be where “Latin America” ended — presents the epitome of what I have depicted as a spectacle of “exclusion” that mystifies its own obscene secret: the permanent subordinate “inclusion” of illegalized (predominantly Latin American) migration (De Genova 2012; 2013c). Such spectacles of border enforcement conceal the fact that even those migratory movements which are officially prohibited, branded as “illegal,” and supposed to be absolutely “unwanted” and rejected are in fact, objectively speaking, actively encouraged and enthusiastically facilitated. So-called “illegal” and officially unauthorized migrations are, to various extents, actively and deliberately imported, and welcomed by prospective employers as a highly prized variety of labor-power.

Consider, for example, the following description of the border fence that separates Nogales, Arizona from Nogales, Mexico:

“The border is sealed tighter than ever, the result of billions of dollars spent with the prospect of billions more if [new] immigration legislation passes Congress. The fence is new, the technology up-to-date, the military hardware — planes, drones, all-terrain vehicles — abundant” (Downes 2013).

This would seem to be a depiction of the ostensibly exclusionary border at its most spectacular, indeed. And yet, in the very same article, one encounters the following rather frank assessment:

“The fence ... is a see-through wall of vertical steel rods 15 to 18 feet high, set four inches apart in a deep bed of concrete. It is a rusty ribbon that runs up and down dusty hills and streets, cutting one city into two and jutting into the desert for a few miles east and west. An impenetrable barricade it is not. A climber with a rope can hop it in less than half a minute. Smugglers with jackhammers tunnel under it.... As a monument to futility and legislative malpractice, however, it achieves perfection.... There is unavoidable cruelty and death.... The fence shunts migrants miles out into the burning, freezing desert. There they die, trying to make their way ...” (Downes 2013).³

Of course, the appalling escalation in migrant deaths has been a very predictable consequence of the militarization and barricading of the border. Yet, the brute fact is that some die while many others survive and prevail in their illegalized migratory projects (De Genova 2015b). Thus, the increasing fortification of the U.S.-Mexico border, in its grand and ever-increasingly deadly performance of “exclusion,” is permanently accompanied nonetheless by the ever-expanding fact of illegalized migration.

In spite of the dominant discourse over the last decade or so that the U.S. immigration system and border enforcement regime are “broken,” and thus in spite of the perennial appearance of the U.S.-Mexico border’s inadequacy or dysfunction, this is a border (like most borders around the world) that has long served quite reliably, effectively,

and predictably as a *filter* for the unequal exchange of various forms of value (Kearney 2004; cf. Heyman 2004). This filtering character of borders is especially visible in those instances, such as the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border over the last few decades, where an intensified enforcement at the border crossings of easiest passage relegates illegalized migrant mobilities into zones of more severe hardship and potentially lethal passage (Dunn 2009; Nevins 2002/2010; Stephen 2008; cf. Andersson 2012; 2013; Bredeloup 2012; De Genova 2015b; 2017; Lecadet 2013; Weber and Pickering 2011). In a de facto process of artificial selection, these deadly obstacle courses serve to sort out the most able-bodied, disproportionately favoring the younger, stronger, and healthier among prospective (labor) migrants, and likewise inordinately favoring men over women. Hence, by converting “unauthorized” migration into a treacherous, death-defying endurance test, the autonomy and subjectivity of migration is subjected to what is merely the beginning of a long apprenticeship into a lifelong career of arduous exploitation.

The militarization and ostensible fortification of borders, as a result, prove to be much more reliable for enacting a strategy of *capture* than for functioning as mere technologies of “exclusion.” Once migrants have successfully navigated their ways across such borders – and this has been abundantly verified by the reinforcement of the U.S.-Mexico border – the onerous risks and costs of departing and later attempting to cross yet again become inordinately prohibitive (Durand and Massey 2004:12; Massey 2005:1, 9). Rather than keeping illegalized Latino (and other) migrants out, therefore, the militarization of the border simply tends to *trap* the great majority of those who succeed to get across, now caught – indefinitely – *inside* the space of the U.S. nation-state as a very prized kind of highly vulnerable migrant labor. Thus, in spite of the dominant discourse that the U.S. immigration system and border enforcement regime are broken, this perfect “monument to futility” (in the phrase of the article in the New York Times) is a border that has long served quite reliably and predictably as a filter for the subordinate (illegalized) inclusion of migrant labor from Latin America (and above all, from Mexico).

Migrant Insurgency, Anti-Immigrant Backlash

The subordination of undocumented migrant labor, however, has been inseparable from the sheer “disobedience” of autonomous border-crossing itself, as well as the outright insubordination of migrant struggles. We therefore cannot even begin to comprehend public discourse and political debate around immigration in the United States today without reflecting on the lasting repercussions of the mass migrant protest mobilizations of 2006, when migrants, their children, and their allies marched in the millions in cities and towns all across the United States to defeat what would have been the most punitive immigration law in U.S. history. “*¡Aquí Estamos, y No Nos Vamos!* [Here we are, and we’re not leaving!].” So rang out the resounding affirmation of Latino/migrant *presence* in the United States. Here indeed was a defiant and exuberant affirmation of the irrepressible and inextricable presence of *americanos* – which is to say, *latino-americanos* – within the space of the U.S. nation-state. Against the presumptuous usurpation of “American” identity as the exclusive preserve of U.S. nationalism, Latino migrants’ bold proclamation of their presence involved staking a claim to space within the United States that often has been explicit about those migrants’ own sense of entitlement as (Latin) Americans to

appropriate and inhabit a trans-continental American space of belonging. When migrants chanted this slogan during the unprecedented mass mobilizations of 2006, they repudiated the notion that, as migrants, they could be treated as “foreigners,” people “out of place” – displaced, disposable, deportable.

As we have seen in my brief preface on the specifically *American* history that literally made the very idea of “world history” possible, this contemporary migrant politics of presence reconfirms what has been one of the defining hallmarks of global modernity. The people of the Americas are not only “here” (in the United States), now, but have *always* been “here” – at the center of the political economy of global capital accumulation, a constitutive vital force in the production of the modern world. The production of a space that we have come to know as “Latin America” has been one of the profound and complex repercussions of these global socio-political and political-economic processes. Moreover, as scholars in Latin American and Latino Studies, when we engage in research or produce social theory, in the words of Edward Said, “we are ... *of* the connections, not outside and beyond them” (1989:217; emphasis in original; cf. De Genova 2013d). We are *of* the connections that situate Latin America centrally within a global history and geography; the connections that generate Latino migrations out of the larger interrelation between Latin America and the United States; the connections that situate Latin American migrants squarely at the center of the racial nativism of Donald Trump’s political career; and the connections that call upon us to analyze and theorize the wider cultural politics, social movements, and political struggles of Latino migrants and citizens in the United States. We are *of* the connections – as participants.

I have written previously about the ubiquity and emotive power of the *¡Aquí Estamos!* chant in the context of the 2006 migrant protest mobilizations, in terms of what I consider to be a *queer* politics of migration (De Genova 2010c). The assertion “Here we are, and we’re not leaving!” is quite consonant with the renowned chant of queer mobilization: “We’re here, we’re queer, get used to it!” Both, I argue, are defiant affirmations of *presence* that literally ask for nothing, petition for nothing, appeal for nothing, demand nothing. This comparison is especially illuminating when considered in light of the second half of the migrant struggle chant: “*¡Aquí estamos y no nos vamos, y si nos sacan, nos regresamos!*” [Here we are, and we’re not leaving! And if they throw us out, we’ll come right back!]. Here, we appreciate all the more clearly that what was at stake in 2006 was precisely the question of migrant “illegality” and undocumented migrants’ susceptibility for deportation. By implication the millions of migrant protesters proclaimed: “We’re here, we’re ‘illegal,’ catch us if you can!” In this spirit, migrants matched their affirmations of presence with the assurance that even if they were to be deported (made absent), they could never in fact be truly expelled and their presence could never be truly eradicated: they would come right back. Thus, this politics of presence in the United States was also a transnational politics of *mobility*, articulated from “here” (*¡Aquí Estamos!*) but also, simultaneously, from beyond the border, from outside the space of the nation-state, from the other side of the horizon of deportation (“We’ll come right back”). In this respect, we could say that they were speaking from the space that José David Saldívar has memorably called “our global Borderlands” (1991:xvii). Taking a cue from Frances Aparicio, who suggests that “the ‘border subject’ ... has been the most important concept

that Latino studies has contributed to cultural studies in the United States, Europe, and Latin America” (2003:13),⁴ we may recognize in the border subjectivities of migrants who articulate themselves from the global borderlands the expression of *a politics of space* that is always inherently incommensurable with anything resembling the positivistic cartographic segregation of ostensibly separate and discrete places or regions — such as the United States (“America”) and “Latin America” — enforced through ideological partitions and the material and practical tactics of border policing (De Genova 1998; 2005:95-146; cf. 2015a).

Both chants — “*¡Aquí Estamos!*” and “We’re here, we’re queer” — can be understood to be radically counter-normative and anti-assimilationist affirmations of the already established fact of presence. But they are likewise affirmations of a kind of defiant *incorrigibility*. They proclaim, in effect: Not only are we “here,” but also: we are different, we have no proper place within your normative or legal order, but there is nothing you can do about it — you can never get rid of us. Anticipating another slogan of the ensuing struggles over U.S. immigration politics, associated mainly with the struggles of the undocumented but U.S.-raised sons and daughters of migrants who brought them to the United States as small children (the so-called DREAMers), Latino migrants during the 2006 marches (in their millions) were boldly announcing that they were *Undocumented but Unafraid*, deportable but insurgent nonetheless. Hence, we must reflect a bit further upon the particular sort of subjectivity that is at work here — what we might consider to be *the incorrigible subject* of this politics of incorrigibility.

Not only was this an enunciation of the self-styled subject of the specifically Latino/migrant political protests in 2006 against the U.S. immigration regime and the antiterrorist pretensions of the Homeland Security State; this was also an articulation of the incorrigible subject of the capital-labor relation itself. Not only was this the audacious expression of specifically Latino political mobilization, in other words, but it was also, simultaneously, the articulation of the constitutive and inextricable presence of *labor* (migrant labor) — *within*, but also *against*, capital. How else to explain the designation of May 1st, International Workers’ Day, as the 2006 protests’ focal point for nation-wide mobilization, which was thereby reinvented as the “Day without an Immigrant” boycott and general strike? The autonomous subjectivity of migration here reveals itself to be always also the autonomy and subjectivity of migrant labor (cf. Mezzadra 2001; 2005; 2011; Mitropoulos 2006; Moulrier-Boutang 1998; 2001; Moulrier-Boutang and Grelet 2001; Rodríguez 1996; 1999). In effect, the incorrigible subjects of migrant labor were declaring (to capital): Here we are — there’s nothing you can do about your fundamental dependency upon us; you owe your very existence to our energies and vitality, so you could never get rid of us. This is, after all, the defining contradiction of the capital-labor relation — that living (human) labor is the source of all economic value, that labor is the creative subject producing all wealth. Labor within capitalist social relations is, in this sense, always simultaneously labor *for* capital and also *against* capital, leaving both labor and capital deeply ensnared in a contradictory, interdependent, and fraught condition. Always at least potentially an insubordinate force, however, the laboring subject under capitalism is precisely an incorrigible subject.

The unprecedented mass migrant mobilizations of 2006 achieved an astounding

victory within a very short period of time: over a period of about a month and a half, the marches soon succeeded to completely and decisively derail the proposed law that had instigated the protests, and which had already passed in the House of Representatives and was still being debated by the Senate.⁵ Furthermore, no comprehensive immigration legislation has been feasible since. In short, in the face of the incorrigible subjectivity of the migrant struggle in 2006 and its extended aftermath, the political establishment in the United States was profoundly crippled. The insurgency of migrants (disproportionately non-citizens with no voting rights, including literally millions who were – and largely remain – “illegal”) – and the politics of sheer incorrigibility so forcefully manifested in that mass movement – produced a political crisis around immigration policy, which has remained fundamentally irresolvable until now.

Of course, this unprecedented popular defeat of a particularly heinous anti-immigrant legislation was met by a protracted reactionary backlash, the conclusion of which we have yet to witness. Immediately, the insurgency of migrant labor in 2006 was met with an aggressive escalation in immigration policing in the interior of the United States, particularly in the form of workplace raids and subsequent deportations (De Genova 2009). Although these large-scale raids were subsequently discontinued under the administration of Barack Obama, the transformation of routine traffic stops by local police into occasions for immigration surveillance and apprehensions dramatically expanded. Furthermore, state legislatures responded to the Congressional stalemate with a new proliferation of state-level immigration laws. During 2007 alone, 1,562 state-level anti-immigrant bills were introduced, and 240 were enacted across 46 states. In the first quarter of 2008, another 1,100 bills were introduced across 44 states (Cave 2008). Accompanying such legislative tactics has been an unrelenting campaign of locally improvised forms of intensified state-, county-, and municipal-level immigration enforcement (cf. Coleman 2007; Núñez & Heyman 2007; Talavera et al., 2010; Varsanyi 2008a,b). Thus, between federal and more local enforcement efforts, a sweeping deportation dragnet was initiated under the administration of George W. Bush, but it subsequently became a disgraceful hallmark of the Obama presidency.

Obama diligently pursued the dubious distinction of having presided over radically more deportations than any other president in U.S. history, indeed, more than the sum of all deportations under all of the U.S. presidents of the 20th century, combined. During his two terms in office, Obama operated a ramped-up immigration enforcement machinery that deported more than 2.5 million migrants (a number that does not fully reflect his final year in office, and which notably does not include those migrants who were apprehended at the border and forcibly turned back without formal “removal” proceedings, or those who were otherwise refused entry at the border) (Marshall 2016; cf. Rosenblum and Meissner 2014). Hence, when Trump promises mass deportations, it is little more than a characteristically bombastic commitment to honor the legacy of Obama, however disingenuously. The decade since the 2006 protests has been indisputably a period of intense anti-immigrant reaction, of which the election of Donald Trump is a kind of crescendo and culmination, but for which Barack Obama was a remarkably duplicitous overseer. The ferocity and persistence of that backlash, nonetheless, has been a testament to the utterly unprecedented power and incorrigible defiance of the migrant

mobilizations.

In spite of Obama's deceptive claims that immigration enforcement has become "smarter," more targeted and selective, purportedly going after "criminals, gang bangers, people who are hurting the community," as he claimed, "not after students, not after folks who are here just because they're trying to figure out how to feed their families," the detention and deportation dragnet actually broadened substantially under his supervision – with only one-fifth of deportations involving convictions for serious criminal offenses, whereas roughly two-thirds had been charged with only minor infractions (frequently nothing more significant than a traffic violation), or none whatsoever (Thompson and Cohen 2014). Notably, a very significant proportion of those "removed" under Obama would historically have never been formally charged with any (non-criminal) immigration infraction. This group accounted for no more than one-quarter of those deported during the final year of the Bush administration, for instance. However, beginning under Obama, 90% of those deported are now officially charged with an immigration violation, thereby prohibiting them from returning to the United States for at least five years, and exposing anyone who might subsequently be caught returning "illegally" to a prison sentence (Thompson and Cohen 2014). Yet, remarkably, in a rather predictable reflex of the intransigent partisan politics in the United States, when the yearly figures for Obama's deportation record were made public toward the end of 2013 – showing a 10 percent decrease in deportations from the previous year – many prominent Republicans automatically responded with the allegation that Obama was actually deporting *too few* undocumented migrants. Robert Goodlatte, the chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, for instance, declared that the 2013 deportation figures were, "just more evidence that the Obama administration refuses to enforce our immigration laws" (Preston 2013). When the most vigorous enforcement of the deportation regime in U.S. history can be castigated as nothing less than a "refusal" to enforce immigration law, we are surely in the presence of a veritable stalemate in immigration lawmaking and legislative and policy debate.

The U.S. immigration stalemate has been evident, above all, in the utter incapacity of the U.S. Congress to pass any multifaceted (so-called "comprehensive") national-level legislation since the 2006 migrant protests.⁶ Notably, on November 20, 2014, Obama announced executive action to institute a reprieve from the immediate threat of deportation for select categories of undocumented migrants (notably, amounting to fewer than two-fifths of the total estimated population, and contingent upon numerous eligibility restrictions and compliance with various penalties). Indeed, on this occasion, he addressed himself emphatically to the legislative impasse: "To those members of Congress who question my authority to make our immigration system work better, or question the wisdom of me acting where Congress has failed, I have one answer: Pass a bill" (Shear 2014). Congratulating himself for heightened immigration enforcement yet simultaneously dissimulating about the fact of staggeringly unprecedented numbers of deportations during his presidency, moreover, Obama disingenuously asserted that deporting millions is "not who we are": "Mass deportation ... would be contrary to our character."⁷ Predictably, while de-emphasizing indiscriminate immigration enforcement in the interior and proposing modest relief for some undocumented migrants already resident, Obama's executive

action prescribed yet another expansion of policing at the U.S.-Mexico border aimed at the interdiction of new “illegal” arrivals (inevitably including countless returning migrants who would have been previously expelled by Obama’s prolonged deportation dragnet). As usual, even modest relief for select categories of deportable persons (most of whom had not even migrated of their own volition) was proposed with the seemingly obligatory legitimating justification that there would be a further expansion of the enforcement spectacle at the U.S.-Mexico border.

The sole exception to the national-level legislative impasse around immigration, revealingly, was the perfunctory Secure Fence Act of 2006 (Public Law 109-367), which was remarkably narrow in scope: it was singularly dedicated to providing for the further presumed fortification of the U.S.-Mexico border with hundreds of miles of new physical barriers to be added to the existing 125 miles of fence. Indeed, in the face of an utter political stalemate ensuing from the abortive debate over the bill derailed by the 2006 migrant protests, this law’s passage later that same year reconfirmed that the unrelenting reinforcement of the U.S.-Mexico border — as a presumptively legitimate response to the putative “problem” of “illegal” migration — has long been a standard fallback position for all U.S. immigration politics: when in doubt, further militarize, securitize, or simply barricade the intractable border with Mexico. Hence, when Trump incites his supporters with the utterly implausible notion of “building a wall,” it is little more than a hyperbolic expression of what has otherwise been a rather routine fixture of U.S. immigration policy.

The Autonomy of Migration: Mobilizing the Americas

The cross-border mobility of illegalized migrants is deeply inflected by migrants’ own diverse aspirations and heterogeneous projects. The human freedom of movement and its proclivity for circumventing or subverting borders around the world – the autonomy of migration that is everywhere in evidence, on an ever greater scale – confronts a horrifying panoply of material and practical impediments and obstructions. Nevertheless, these humble border crossers represent the incorrigible subject of nearly all contemporary border regimes. Even when borders are deployed to facilitate cross-border mobility (as in the recruitment of “legal” migrants), migrants remain autonomous subjects, with their own aspirations, needs, and desires, which necessarily exceed any regime of immigration and citizenship. Thus, migrants’ mobility projects and the differential spaces they generate enact an elementary freedom of movement to which borders are intrinsically a response, however brutal. But in spite of it all, human beings continue to prevail in their mobility projects, unceasingly and tirelessly establishing migration as a central and constitutive fact of our global postcolonial present. The disciplinary effect of these regimes of border policing and immigration law enforcement, consequently, is necessarily directed at “correcting” these obstreperous and incorrigible (migrant) subjects whose aspirations, desires, and elemental freedom always overflow the narrowly construed role as effectively subordinated labor to which migrant workers are routinely relegated. In other words, every immigration regime, replete with its attendant tactics of bordering (whether or not these assume the increasingly pervasive form of militarized or securitized spectacles of ostensibly exclusionary enforcement), inevitably arises from a complex dialectic of freedom and constraint, autonomy and control.

The movement of people around the world, and hence across border zones, came first. The various attempts to “manage” or control this autonomous mobility have come always as a response. Referring specifically to the U.S.-Mexico border and human mobility across the Americas, Néstor Rodríguez has incisively discussed what he calls “the battle for the border” as being thoroughly devoted to suppressing the autonomy of migration. He explains:

“The battle for the border, which will eventually be lost, is ... a reaction to ... worker-led transnational socio-spatial reconfiguration.... it is a struggle to resist attempts by working-class communities in peripheral countries to spatially reorganize their base of social reproduction in the global landscape.... Autonomous migration means that working-class communities ... have developed their own policies of international employment independent of [states, in] ... a process that decenters the state as the regulator of human movements across international boundaries” (1996:23).

Confronting the statist perspective of a global regime of ever increasingly militarized and securitized borders, then, the basic human freedom of movement could only ever seem to be perfectly incurrable.

Beginning in the 16th century in the aftermath of the conquest of America, capital has made and relentlessly remade the world in its own image, and according to its chaotic requirements, has sought to burst asunder every apparent barrier in the creation of an ever more unobstructed global arena for profit-making and the continuous reconsolidation of a global division of labor. Alongside this ever more intense mobility of capital on a planetary scale, there has also necessarily and inevitably been a concomitant escalation in the *mobility* of labor-power. Plainly, the history of modern slavery and other forms of bonded labor (in the Americas as elsewhere) confirm that the mobilization of labor has at times been purely coerced. Importantly, such strictly forced mobility necessarily required that such labor consequently be *immobilized* — its subordination being inextricable from its capture and confinement. But the history of such forms of subjugation has always been a history of labor’s insubordination, encompassing the full range of diverse forms of refusal, sabotage, and insurrection. Hence, even under conditions of the most violent and abject repression, the irrepressible subjectivity and autonomy of labor instigated a succession of reaction formations that historically secured the normalization and dominance of a global regime of capital accumulation predicated on “free” (wage-)labor. The hegemony of this “solution” to the incurrability of human labor, of course, is never coequal with its genuine universality. To the contrary, one or another form of bondage remains a permanent and irresistibly desirable recourse for capital. But the world-historic defeat of slavery and its supplanting by what was promptly decried as “wage slavery” (the more far-reaching generalization of the commodification of human productive powers and creative capacities as “labor-power”) were the result of labor’s insubordination, and remain a lasting testament to the incurrable autonomy of human labor-as-subjectivity (Moulier-Boutang 1998; cf. Moulier-Boutang with Grelet 2001).

As the source of all value, it is not unreasonable to say that labor-power is the premier commodity in the global circuitry of capitalist exchange. But the global movement of labor-power — homogenized, abstract labor — is embodied in the restless life and death of labor in a rather more concrete form: actual migrant working men and women. Capital can never extract from labor the abstract (eminently social) substance that is “value” except with recourse to the abstraction of labor-power, which however can only be derived from the palpable vital energies of living labor. As an operative, indeed decisive category of capital accumulation, labor-power never ceases to pertain to real flesh-and-blood working people. Under contemporary conditions, therefore, the accelerated transnational mobility of labor-power is inseparable from the migration of actual human beings.

The effectively global mobility of capital exudes a pronounced indifference toward the particular locations and forms of the labor process where it invests in favor of maximizing surplus value, and in this sense, capital tends to be exceedingly versatile. This willingness to seek a profit anywhere and everywhere, combined with a capacity to accommodate virtually any form of exploitation within the process of capital accumulation, has sometimes misled some commentators to imagine, falsely, that capital is truly cosmopolitan, averse to borders, and thus, “color-blind” or otherwise impervious to the various racial (or “ethnic”), national, linguistic, cultural, religious, sexual, or gendered differences among distinct formations of its workforce. But this is precisely where the politics of the capital-labor relation, and specifically the politics of the labor process, is to be located — in the social relations among the embodied, concrete particularities of actual working people (living labor). The actual diversity within what otherwise appears as (homogenized) “abstract labor,” therefore, is a crucial site where we may best appreciate the politics of labor subordination. The homogenized abstraction of labor-power, which is utterly necessary for the larger functioning of the capitalist production of (economic) value, can be generated in practice only under the aegis of the production of real heterogeneity and inequality in lived social relations. In other words, the *politics* of relations of economic production must always be understood in terms of the social and political production of *difference* (Roediger and Esch 2012). Thus, capital’s apparent indifference to the specificities of the terms of conditions for extracting the maximum surplus value is sustained only through the actual struggles that differentiate labor toward the end of maximizing its subordination and exploitation.

Once we begin to examine the historical specificity of particular nation-states and the migrations that cross their borders, moreover, we similarly can only account for the global inequalities of wealth and power at stake by also referring to the precisely postcolonial — and thus profoundly racialized — particularities at work in the historical production of the distinct “group” identities of various categories of migrants. Much of my work has been devoted to precisely this sort of problem — to account for the historical specificity of Mexican migration to the United States, and the historical production of the social and political particularities of Mexican/migrant labor within the legal and racial (political) economy of the U.S. nation-state, but in a manner that refuses to be subsumed within the assimilationist “immigration” narratives of U.S. nationalism. Hence, in my ethnographic, historical, and socio-legal work on Mexican migration, the particularity of “Mexican”-ness is shown to be a seemingly “national” name for what is in fact a racialized transnational formation that arises at the lived intersections where the incorrigible subjec-

tivity and autonomy of migration defies the border regime and produces new spaces and cross-border ensembles of social relations (De Genova 2005). Indeed, labor migration between Mexico and the United States and the dynamics of interconnection between these ostensibly separate and distinct nation-state spaces supply paramount examples through which we may critically understand the diverse formations of human mobility that undergird the wider relationships between the United States and Latin America, more generally.

The historical and ongoing constitution of the U.S. state formation and its national project are incomprehensible without an appreciation of the contradictory interrelation of the United States with the rest of the American hemisphere. If, as I have already suggested, the postcolonial condition means that “Europe” as a whole is unthinkable without a critical appreciation of the material and practical as well as ideological legacies of colonialism around the world, then we must likewise adopt a comparable postcolonial perspective on the United States (De Genova 2006; 2007b). Thus, we must have the intellectual audacity to conceive of the United States as inextricable from and, indeed, part of Latin America. Indeed, the United States’ imperial ambitions with regard to the imaginative geography that Martí invoked with the idea of *Nuestra América* were classically pronounced at the very moment historically when countries throughout Latin America were first liberating themselves from European colonial rule. As early as 1823, in the wake of anti-colonial struggles for national liberation throughout the Americas, the Monroe Doctrine declared that all of the newly independent nation-states of the Western Hemisphere would thenceforth be presumptively considered by the United States to comprise its own exclusive sphere of influence and interest, such that any intervention by the European imperial powers in the Americas would be taken as “an unfriendly disposition,” not toward the sovereignty and self-determination of those Latin American peoples, but rather toward the United States and its own “rights,” “peace,” “happiness,” “safety,” and “defense.” Throughout the rest of the nineteenth century as well as the twentieth, the United States repeatedly intervened militarily throughout Latin America. The sorrowful list is long and, for scholars of, from, and in Latin America, painfully familiar. The crucial point is that precisely these same countries that were the objects of U.S. military incursions and occupations tended to eventually become some of the most prominent sources of labor migrations to the United States (with Mexico and Puerto Rico foremost among them). Consequently, by the last quarter of the twentieth century, Latino migrations to the U.S. had become remarkably diverse – in Juan González’s felicitous phrase, a veritable “harvest of empire” (2000).

The Latin/American Partition, the Harvest of Empire, and Latino Studies

It is instructive to recall here that the very idea of *Nuestra América* so memorably associated with José Martí, the hero and intellectual pioneer of Cuban Independence, was in fact formulated during his long residence in the United States, where he spent the most formative years of his mature intellectual and political life. Indeed, with regard to the imperial ambitions of the United States, Martí wrote from the standpoint of a Latino migrant/exile: “I know the monster; I have lived in its entrails” (quoted, in translation, in Saldívar 1991:6). The very emergence of Latino Studies as a meaningful framework for

critical inquiry and scholarship is itself an effect of the colonial and migratory gatherings within the United States of the inheritors of diverse histories of struggle from across Latin America. Against the methodological U.S. nationalism and the so-called “American” exceptionalism of so much of what has traditionally been fashioned as “American” Studies (which is to say, scholarship focused on the United States), a genuinely transnational Latin American and Latino studies, in tandem with other critical Ethnic Studies scholarship, makes possible a genuinely *counter-*“American” Studies – or, in other words, a rigorously transnational and truly hemispheric American studies.

What has consistently distinguished the intellectual project of Latino Studies and the allied Ethnic Studies critiques in the U.S. context is that they have forcefully challenged the practitioners of more conventionally disciplinary social science to seriously and substantively engage the critical subjectivities of the people whom they presumed to make their objects of study. In the words of Angie Chabram-Dernersesian (2003), this means that Latino Studies must also be always a site of accountability. In short, the critical project of Latino Studies can be understood to be an academic expression of the irrepressible and incorrigible subjectivity of Latino communities. It comes as little surprise, therefore, that in his book on “remapping American cultural studies” *Border Matters*, José David Saldívar characterizes the collective Latina/o response to the racialized moral panic about “illegal aliens” with none other than that inveterate refrain: *¡Aquí Estamos, y No Nos Vamos!* (1997:x).

Without disregarding the numerous social inequalities and cultural hierarchies that cross-cut diverse Latina/o experiences in the United States, including of course the political economy of labor and class formation, Latino Studies (like the other allied Ethnic Studies modes of inquiry) has been fundamentally predicated on a searching interrogation of racial formation and subordination – as well as the specifically colonial dimensions of U.S. national formation and the enduring consequences of the imperial dimensions of U.S. global power. In this regard, Latino Studies provides crucial and necessary perspectives for the critical dissection of the United States as a whole – for the holistic examination of its racialized political economy, its racialized cultural politics, its nationalism and nativism, its border regime, and its imperial chauvinism. Simply put, Latinos have been, and will continue to be, centrally implicated in all of these manifestations and ramifications of U.S. power, both “domestically” (within the space of the U.S. nation-state), throughout the Americas, and on a global scale. This is why, in a kind of inverted image of John Locke chasing after his American career as a legal technician of slavery and colonial property rights, Juan Flores argues that “the issues at stake” for struggles to establish, defend, and expand Latino Studies are not reducible to narrowly academic disputes over university appointments, programs, or curricula, but rather, “food, shelter, and citizenship.... [its reason for being is] in the unresolved historical struggles over immigration, racism, and colonialism” (2003:192). Likewise, considering Rodríguez’s contention that the autonomy of migration represents a kind of alternative development project for working-class communities across Latin America, Latino Studies consequently emerges as an indispensable complement for the transnational problematization of scholarship in Latin American Studies, and a vital antidote to methodological nationalism.

The postcolonial condition in the United States is forcefully evident in the dis-

tinctly racial subjugation of migrants. The significance and consequentiality of race for these migrants gets activated and acquires such intensity only as a result of the enduring coloniality of the inequalities of wealth and power between the formerly colonized countries and the imperial metropolitan destinations of these migrations. The U.S.-Mexico border — much like the borders of the European Union (see De Genova 2016; 2017) — has the character not merely of an international (or inter-continental) boundary line but of a new reconfiguration of the proverbial color line. Indeed, the escalation of migrant deaths throughout the U.S.-Mexico border zone bears a striking resemblance to the parallel proliferation of migrant and refugee deaths instigated by the unprecedented extremities and severities of the European border regime, particularly through the Mediterranean Sea and externalized across the entire expanse of the Sahara Desert (see De Genova 2017). Thus, we should be reminded here of Ruth Gilmore's poignant proposition that racism is, "the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death" (2007:28).

The incorrigible subject of the autonomy of migrant labor is the premier target of this sort of border regime. Once migrants have made their way across the borders and deep into the "interior" of the destination country, however, this same border subject is crucially reconfigured, now resurfacing as so many incorrigible subjectivities inhabiting the complex cross-section of various postcolonial racial formations. The diverse racializations of these migrant groups demarcate the differential inscriptions of the border on their bodies (Khosravi 2010: 97-120). In effect, the migrants — but often, also their children and grandchildren — are made to carry the border on their backs, to wear the border on their faces, ever increasingly subjected to various degrees of border enforcement wherever they may go. The transnational spaces that comprise what I call *the migrant metropolis* thus become historically specific conjunctures of unresolved postcolonial tensions and conflicts, reconfigured as a special kind of urban sociopolitical fabric where the global relation of labor and capital acquires its substance and density as a tentative and tenuous configuration of the politics of class, race, and citizenship (De Genova 2015a). While these struggles have conventionally been subsumed within nationalist narratives of "immigrant" assimilation, however, their true radicality and dynamism extend the geography of Latin America across much of the space of the United States and beyond, in a manner that has profound implications for nothing less than the reinvention of Latin America. Thus, if we seek to elaborate critical geographies in and, moreover, *of* Latin America, it is incumbent upon us to adopt the critical angle of vision that is made possible by Latino Studies, engaging the incorrigible subjectivities of the autonomy of migration and the unrelenting subversion of the U.S.-Mexico border that has for so long served as the iconic epitome of the Latin/American partition.

Notes

¹ I adopt the specific usage — (Latin) American — in order to signal the epistemic instability and indistinction, historically, between what was more generally characterized as "American" (i.e. of the Americas) and what has subsequently come to be more specifically depicted as "Latin American," in a wider geopolitical context where "American"-ness has been usurped by the nationalist project of the United States.

²The same could plainly be said of Africa and Asia, but the pertinent point here is that a comprehensive European project of conquest and the thoroughgoing colonization of the Americas came earlier, historically.

³Nogales in particular is notorious for the underground tunnels that traverse the fenced border (Lacey 2010; Nixon 2016). Since the first cross-border tunnel was discovered in 1990 in Douglas, Arizona, U.S. border officials report that they have discovered nearly 200 more along the full length of the U.S.-Mexico border — approximately one per month (Nixon 2016).

⁴Juan Flores makes an analogous claim: the border “has been the guiding metaphor of Latino studies” (2003:198).

⁵The 2006 mobilizations were instigated by the passage in the U.S. House of Representatives of the Border Protection, Antiterrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act (HR4437, passed on December 16, 2005, also known as the Sensenbrenner bill), which would have criminalized all of an estimated 11 million undocumented migrants residing in the United States by summarily converting their “unlawful presence” into a felony and rendering them subject to mandatory detention upon apprehension, among numerous other draconian provisions (Mailman and Yale-Loehr 2005). The bill would unquestionably have been the most punitive immigration legislation in U.S. history.

⁶For a critique of the discourse of “comprehensive immigration reform” as the dominant articulation of a centrist consensus across the partisan divide in the U.S. policy arena, see De Genova (2013a).

⁷Video of speech available at: <<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/21/us/obama-immigration-speech.html>>.

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