Book Review: B. Garrick Harden (ed.), *Imagined Borders/Lived Ambiguity: Intersections of Repression and Resistance.* Lanham, MD: Lexington Books. 2019. ISBN: 978-149858099-1 (Hardcover). 230 Pages. $95.00.

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Imagined Borders/Lived Ambiguity: Intersections of Repression and Resistance is a collective attempt to explore the socially constructed borders that are being invoked so malevolently by the Trump administration. Pursuant of this goal, it draws upon an array of theoretical and methodological approaches to probe those imagined geographical, racial, ethnic, sexual, and legal borders. The essays included in this volume, while uniformly wide-ranging, lend themselves to the following thematic ordering.

THE PRODUCTION OF IMAGINED BORDERS

In "A Note on How Historical Patterns of American Ideology Led to President Icarus," B. Garrick Harden (the editor of this volume) suggests that the tendency to categorize is deeply rooted in Western thought and that the divisive borders produced by such categorization in contemporary political discourse have been shaped by a legal system that has been classist from its inception, an abandoned attempt at reconstruction following the Civil War, and the wanton incivility of the Nixon administration. He goes on to posit that generational conflict, a widespread inability to distinguish between fact and fiction, and our two-party political system all contribute to the perpetuation of these borders.

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Despite these obstacles, Harden does see a ray of hope. That hope lies in the likelihood that the actions of the Trump administration will ultimately undermine its very foundations, providing us an opportunity to rebuild our society sans existing imagined borders.

In "A Queer Marxian Analysis of the Construction of Race in the United States," G. Dillon Nicholson and B. Garrick Harden follow the production of race as a socially meaningful category in the United States from its beginnings as a justification for slavery to its legal codification in the form of anti-miscegenation laws to its scientific legitimation – a history driven by a desire on the part of economic elites to create and maintain a cheap and divided labor force. Nicholson and Harden draw upon this history to suggest that despite the unquestionable contemporary significance of race in the United States, we need to recognize the role of economic interests in its production before we can hope to abolish it as one of our most pernicious imagined borders. Hence, they argue, the importance of intersectional analysis.

THE MAINTENANCE OF IMAGINED BORDERS

In "US Immigration Enforcement by Proxy: The Making of a New South-to-South Border between Mexico and Central America," Juan José Bustamante examines the Mexican government's recent policy changes regarding the treatment of Central American migrants traversing Mexico on their way to the United States. Specifically, he examines the shift from human rights oriented polices to policies that promote the interests of the United States and effectively expand its border southward. Bustamante attributes these policy changes to the geopolitical imperative that the Mexican government align itself with the agenda of its more powerful northern counterpart. He then proceeds to depict the plight of Central American migrants in Mexico through accounts of their treatment by Mexican authorities, noting that such treatment does not differ significantly from what they will experience upon crossing into the United States should they successfully complete their journey. Last but not least, Bustamante provides a number of photographs that document the aggressive surveillance of Central American migrants – especially those of color – that results from this expansionist attempt to maintain an imagined border.

In "Alie(N)ation: A Qualitative Multi-Method Approach to Language, Domination, and Unauthorized Immigration," Hilario Molina II and Robert F. Carley demonstrate how popular culture reinforces the otherness of unauthorized immigrants. They do so by establishing that

entertainment industry depictions of aliens as nonhuman invasive creatures influence the images evoked by the term "illegal alien" which, in turn, influence political discourse regarding those to whom the label is attached. These scholars establish the former by inferring the connotations of the term "alien" from 140 drawings produced by their research participants, a process which indicated that the term evokes images of beings with extraterrestrial and animalistic qualities. They establish the latter through analysis of online postings related to unauthorized immigrants, postings that contain frequent references to invasion, contamination, and warfare. Their findings lead these authors to suggest that we need to pay greater attention to the importance of contextualized rhetoric as a means for maintaining imagined borders and their attendant systems of domination.

In "Incest Rhetorics and Queerphobic Sex Panics," Ian Barnard addresses the role of incest panics in bolstering heteronormativity. Through analysis of a number of films depicting heterosexual and homosexual incest, Barnard demonstrates that such films and the concerns they raise contribute to both the normalization of heterosexuality and the demonization of homosexuality. In doing so, they expose the integral role that the incest taboo and its real or imagined violation plays in maintaining the hegemony of heteronormativity in the face of increasing challenges from outside its imagined borders.

THE IMPACT OF IMAGINED BORDERS

In "Unauthorized Latino/a Migration in an Era of Global Displacement: A Mixed Methods and World-Systems Perspective," Hilario Molina II depicts the impact of border crossings on both the countries whose borders are crossed and the border crossers themselves. With regard to the former, Molina notes that the recipient country (in this case the United States) benefits from such crossings in terms of access to cheap labor and that it does so at the expense of the country of origin (in this case Mexico) which loses some of its more educated and industrious citizens. With regard to the latter, he describes the range of sacrifices they make, from risking death to enduring economic exploitation and social isolation in the United States. Molina documents that such is the case on both fronts with data collected from thirty-one unauthorized male immigrants from rural Mexico and in the process both politicizes and personalizes the impact of imagined border crossings.

In "Assessing Assimilation in the Borderlands: How Rapidly Do Mexican Americans Assimilate?" Jesús A. Garcia, Chad Richardson,

Rogelio Saenz, and Dejun Su explore the impact of immigration on the lifestyles of Mexican immigrants to the United States. Using survey data collected from 404 Mexican-ethnic adults residing in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, these scholars document that such ethnics show a marked propensity to assimilate (in terms of language, interaction with Anglos, and cultural preferences) while maintaining their ethnic identity through the practice of various rituals associated with their culture of origin. In doing so, these authors not only demonstrate the impact of exposure to a foreign culture on generations of imagined border crossers, they give lie to the contrived notion that Mexican immigrants refuse to integrate.

In "US-Mexico Border Control: The Use of Deportation Threats as a Method of Enforcing Control on Residents of South Texas," Eric Gamino examines the impact of living in an imagined borderland on the worldviews of Mexican Americans and its implications. Drawing upon field notes that he took while serving as a police officer for the Del Monte County Sheriff's Office in South Texas, Gamino provides accounts of incidents in which such Americans attempted to use deportation threats as a way to resolve disputes with suspected unauthorized immigrants of Latin American origin. These accounts are laced with the kinds of anti-immigrant invectives one would expect to hear from the most xenophobic of Anglos, leading Gamino to conclude that the Mexican Americans in question have adopted what he refers to as a "white racial frame". They adopt this frame, he suggests, in an attempt to distance themselves from co-ethnics who have been deemed problematic and thereby prove their worthiness as citizens of the United States. Unfortunately, he concludes, one impact of adopting such a frame and its attendant imagined borders is that these immigrants become complicit in the ongoing disparagement of people of color.

SURVIVING IMAGINED BORDERS

In "The Keys for Locks: Border Queers/Queer Borders or *Community and Possibilities for Identity*," Ryan Ashley Caldwell provides an account of her journey to self-acceptance in the face of a host of cultural narratives that define her as unworthy. This account focuses on her experiences with the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, a non-profit organization created to challenge the stigmatization of LGBTQ identities. Specifically, it focuses on the role of this organization in providing a community in which individuals can safely challenge imposed valuations and their bases while exploring the endless possibilities of selfhood. Caldwell's account of her transformative

journey as a member of this organization – coming to embrace her body despite its culturally maligned queerness, shape, and age – attests to the importance of community for surviving and challenging imagined borders.

In "Refusing to Decompose: How *Cyber-ojo* Makes Indigenous Rituals Palatable to Modern Society," Hilario Molina II illustrates the ways in which Chicanos maintain ties to their Mexican roots despite their physical and cultural displacement. Molina, who resides in the northeastern United States, does so through an account of his relatives seeking to counter *el mal ojo* – a process that traditionally requires physical contact – from thousands of miles away using Skype. He suggests that this technological improvisation is a contemporary example of a non-threatening (to the dominant society) cultural adaptation to living in a foreign context. That is, a cultural adaptation deemed by that society to be noble rather than subversive, something akin to the Day of the Dead. As such, Molina concludes, *cyber-ojo* is but another example of cultural survival across imagined borders through creative negotiation of the challenges and possibilities of displacement; a creative process that for his people began with the arrival of the conquistadors.

The preceding thematic ordering, while just one of many possibilities, hopefully captures pertinent similarities between various explorations included in this volume – explorations that differ greatly in terms of theory, methods, and subject matter – while also revealing their collective scope. While its comprehensive and multifaceted querying of imagined borders is a major strength of this work, it has a number of other merits as well.

One additional merit of this collection is that its contributors follow (whether intentionally or not) C. Wright Mills (1959) directive that social science should focus on the intersection of history and biography. Thus, whether the subject matter is how imagined borders are produced, maintained, succumbed to, or resisted, the emphasis is on how social context influences the experiences and actions of individuals, be they acting alone or as part of a collective body. As a result, this volume is nearly devoid of the simplistic moral reductionism that is so common (however implicit) in accounts of marginalization and its consequences. Therefore, no matter how much the authors lament the current state of affairs, they avoid attributing that state to unmitigated ill-will on the part of the actors under consideration. Instead, they focus on history, economics, politics, and instilled cultural narratives as social forces that impact the choices of those subject to them; oftentimes for the worse. Consequently, while I found myself joining these authors in lamenting

the current state of affairs, I was able to do so with my ultimate faith in humanity intact. I found this quite refreshing.

Another additional merit of this work is its focus on resilience. As would be expected in a collection of this nature, a great deal of attention is paid to the mistreatment and suffering experienced by those who find themselves on the wrong side of imagined borders. What sets this volume apart from most accounts of marginalization and its consequences is that many of its explorations pay equal attention to the ability of marginalized people to triumph over their circumstances. Thus, we frequently encounter individuals and groups who maintain their dignity and agency despite having been diminished for their ascribed identities, whether those identities are based on nationality, ethnicity, immigration status, or sexuality. While I understand the need for scholars to vividly portray the devastating impacts of marginalization, I think it is important that we not reduce its victims to mere products of what has been done to them; something that I find disturbingly common in treatments of the dispossessed. Hence, I found the fact that many of the works included in this collection spotlight the resiliency of outsiders to be praiseworthy.

A further additional merit of this work is its questioning of a number of common assumptions regarding imagined borders; assumptions that are rife in popular political discourse and all too common in academic discourses in my view. Harden, for instance, in his chronicling of the ascendency of imagined borders and their malevolent use in contemporary politics questions both the assumption that racism is concentrated on one side of our North-South border and that our two major political parties are qualitatively different. Nicholson and Harden, for their part, in their account of the production of race as a socially meaningful category question the assumption that liberation from imposed identities can be achieved through the very identities (racial or otherwise) they seek to challenge. Additionally, Garcia in his exploration of Mexican American assimilation questions the assumption that such Americans are somehow changed by exposure to life in their new environment while having no impact on that environment and goes on to suggest that acculturation is a two-way street and warrants further investigation as such. These insights, while perhaps not unprecedented, are important nonetheless. All too often in my experience we tend to overstate differences across imagined borders, reproduce imagined borders in an attempt to eliminate them, and exaggerate the sovereignty of one side of an imaged border over its less powerful counterpart. Thus, I found the contextualized exposure of these fallacies to be edifying.

   While the foregoing treatment of the merits of *Imagined Borders/Lived Ambiguity: Intersections of Repression and Resistance* is certainly not exhaustive, it hopefully provides a sense of what distinguishes this work from other interrogations of its subject matter. Despite these many merits, however, I did find two aspects of this volume to be somewhat lamentable. Those aspects are as follows.

   First, I found it lamentable that many of the explorations included in this volume are more akin to intellectual dispatches than to mainstream scholarly works. That is, many of these explorations lack the documentative and methodological rigor that mainstream scholars have come to expect. I have nothing against intellectual dispatches in general, or these dispatches in particular, despite their lack of such rigor. Nor do I overly esteem mainstream scholarship with its astounding lack of moral engagement. However, I think that if morally and politically engaged scholars want to influence their disciplinary discourses – and I hope that they do – they may need to make more of an effort to speak the language of those discourses. This is not to belittle the explorations under consideration, for I am fine with the language they speak. Rather, it is simply to express my concern that the significance of many of these works may be lost on what should perhaps be their target audience.

   Second, I found it lamentable that a few of the explorations included in this volume espouse a monolithic and at times unflattering view of people of Mexican descent residing in the United States. The explorations in question begin with the assumption that these folks should naturally exhibit intragroup solidarity with their co-ethnics and go on to suggest that individuals among them who fail to do so are guilty of some sort of betrayal: of adopting a "white racial frame". I, on the other hand, see no reason to expect solidarity among people who, while similar in terms of race or ethnicity, are no doubt dissimilar in other aspects of their lives including age, gender, class, religion, and political ideology. In fact, I do not know of a single scholarly exploration of a racial or ethnic group that found evidence of anything close to blanket solidarity. I do, however, know of many highly acclaimed such explorations that found entrenched intragroup animosities – from the pioneering work of Du Bois (1899/1967) to a recent exploration of Mexican American communities in the Southwest by Duran (2018). I also know that both Linger (2002) and Martes (2002) have been convincingly critical of monolithic approaches to people of Mexican descent. In light of both the documented ubiquity of intragroup animosities and the availability of alternative explanations for their existence, I found the characterization of people as traitorous just because they do not adhere to a presumed

ethnic connection to be both unwarranted and uncircumspect. I don't want to be overly critical of these authors at this point, however, since both of the foregoing assumptions seem to be firmly entrenched in studies of marginalization and therefore should not be summarily dismissed. However, I do want to express my concern that theses contributors may be inadvertently contributing to the oft propagandized perception of Mexican immigrants and their descendants as an undifferentiated and opportunistic mass.

Given its many merits, and despite the concerns just mentioned, *Imagined Borders/Lived Ambiguity: Intersections of Repression and Resistance* should be of interest to academics from a range of disciplines including cultural studies, history, political science, psychology, and sociology. There is much to be learned from this volume and even readers who are firmly committed to business as usual in the social and behavioral sciences will benefit from giving it a look. Such readers may come away perplexed, but I suspect that they (and all readers) will also come away with a better understanding of the tenuousness, destructiveness, complexity, and negotiability of our imagined borders.

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