The Social Production of Latin@ Visibilities and Invisibilities: Geographies of Power in Small Town America

Adela C. Licona
Department of English, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ, USA; aclicona@email.arizona.edu

Marta Maria Maldonado
Department of Sociology, Iowa State University, Ames, IA, USA; mmaldona@iastate.edu

Abstract: This paper explores the sociospatial dynamics unfolding in Perry, a rural Iowa town that has been facing rapid change since the 1990s due to growing Latin@ settlement. We focus on what we call the social production of Latin@ visibilities and invisibilities: spatialized practices by individuals, families, communities, and institutions that render different Latin@ groups visible or invisible, with repercussions for survival, community integration, and political praxis. We discuss the border within as an extension of border politics and borderlands rhetorics to the US “heartland”, and how the entrainment of a regime of deportability creates racialized and gendered conditions for the in/visibility of Latin@ immigrants and Latin@s more broadly. We conclude by considering some of the theoretical and political implications of our analysis for such geographies of power and the social relations, locations, and discourses that constitute and are constituted by them.

Keywords: Latin@s, immigrants, visibility and invisibility, regime of deportability, border within, geographies of power

This paper examines the sociospatial dynamics associated with demographic change in Perry, a small Iowa town that has been a new gateway for Latin@s since the early 1990s. We focus on the social production of Latin@ visibilities and invisibilities...
—spatialized practices by individuals, families, communities, institutions, and the
state that render Latin@s (or through which Latin@s render themselves) visible or
invisible across contexts, with repercussions for survival, community integration,
and political praxis. We consider the regime of deportability—as developed by
Nicholas De Genova—and how it is implicated in the everyday production of these
visibilities/invisibilities.3 We posit that the material and symbolic spaces of such
productions, in the particularized location of a rural community in Iowa, function
as borders within, or borderlands spaces, which both produce and are produced
by borderlands rhetorics.4 By paying attention to such spaces and their produced
and productive discourses,5 we highlight social relations of power across race/
ethnicity, gender, class, and immigration statuses6 as well as the sociocultural,
political, and economic repercussions at play in particular geographies of power.
The concept of “geographies of power” allows us to carefully consider the inextric-
cable connections between social, symbolic, and spatial locations and the
controls that are implicitly and explicitly exercised, resisted, and potentially
reconfigured there.7

We draw from in-depth interviews and field observations generated between
2007 and 2008 to consider articulated, negotiated, and contested meanings of
place and community.8 Our case study and analysis are anchored in two central
premises. First, spaces shape and are shaped by social relations and discourses.
Second, spaces are always in the process of becoming (Massey 2005). With a focus
on Latin@s’ everyday accounts of their own experiences, we examine how
meanings of community are reproduced, transformed, and/or experienced by
new arrivals. We consider how a regime of deportability shapes and conditions
Latin@s’ lives and in/abilities to make connections to place in Perry. Our discussion
highlights visibility and invisibility as spatialized processes. Insofar as these
processes reveal practices of inclusion and exclusion, regulation, and differently
bound mobility, they function as instantiations of border making. Following Espiritu
(2003) and based on our observations and interviews, we address Perry and the
dynamics unfolding there as examples of the “border within”. Relations of power
are implicated in the lived production of such borderlands spaces and their related
discourses.

Our analysis focuses on the relationship between discourses about community
and change as articulated and lived by/through community institutions and
community officials and as articulated and lived by Latin@s. We frame our interpre-
tation of discourses and practices, and their implications within the broader context
of social relations of power in the US, by exploring them as they emerge, are em-
bodyed, and played out in particular spaces. We aim to foreground race/ethnicity,
class, gender, and immigration status as spatialized social relations of power, and
to empirically explore shifting geographies of power in the rural Midwest.

Study Site and Methodology

Perry is a small town of 7702 (Census of 2010) located along the North Raccoon
River, northwest of Des Moines, Iowa. Established as a railroad town in 1869,
Perry’s economy was initially based on the provision and/or production of fertilizers and farm implements to farmers in nearby towns. In the 1920s, development of regional railroads, consolidation of the hog and corn industries, and the invention of refrigerated cars enabled the expansion of meatpacking in Iowa, and contributed to the opening of Perry’s first meatpacking plant. While the plant has changed ownership, Perry’s meatpacking plant has remained its lead employer for decades. Up until the late 1980s, the plant’s labor force was comprised of local residents, the vast majority of whom were white people of European ancestry. Changes associated with industrial restructuring made meatpacking jobs unattractive to this local population. In the early 1990s the company, IBP, began aggressive recruitment of Latin@ workers (Gouveia 1992), resulting in a demographic transformation of Perry.

1990 census data show that there were 47 Latin@ residents in Perry. By 1996, the number increased to 1004. Presently, Latin@s constitute about 35% of the town’s population. Given the age structure of the Latin@ population, this demographic shift is even more apparent when one looks at Perry’s schools. As of 2012, 49% of elementary school students were Latin@ (National Center for Education Statistics).

Perry is one among many small towns in Iowa that have become new destinations for growing numbers of Latin@s since the 1990s. Similar transitions have unfolded and are ongoing throughout the Midwest and across regions of the US. Given that these demographic changes are relatively recent, and still unfolding, new gateways like Perry are ideal sites for exploring how spatialized meanings and practices get contested, negotiated, and re/defined as places, and how the socio-cultural relations that constitute them reconfigure and are reconfigured by such demographic change.

This paper is based on data from ethnographic observation and in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 55 Latin@s who reported living and/or working in Perry. Initial contact points for the interviews were Latin@s active in community organizations and service agencies there. Other contacts were accessed through the local Catholic church. The sample was expanded in snowball fashion. In an effort to be attentive to heterogeneity within the Latin@ population, the sample included 22 men and 33 women, different age groups, various national origins (including US and non-US-born Latin@s), different lengths of residence (in the US and in Perry), and varied English-language proficiencies. Although participants were never asked about immigration status, in the course of the interviews it became apparent that the sample also included different immigration and citizenship statuses. Participants were asked a range of questions about their day-to-day experiences within, and understandings of, community, their networks and relationships with Latin@s and non-Latin@s in Perry, and their involvement in different aspects of community life. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and participants were assigned a pseudonym. Data analysis entailed an initial phase of coding to identify data pertinent to the initial research questions and also emergent themes. A second phase of coding involved condensing themes into categories. The dynamics and practices of visibility and invisibility were one of the major categories that emerged in participants’ discussions about a range of experiences and perceptions.
Visibility and Invisibility

According to Doreen Massey, geography is a series of “erasures and overwritings that have transformed the world” and our understandings of it (Massey 2005:110). Del Casino and Hanna acknowledge that social spaces are also sites of identity construction that are based on “performances of social actors operating in and through spaces” (2000:43). Exploring how visibility and invisibility are produced and performed can inform our understanding of how power functions in spatialized community contexts with implications for understanding social relations across race/ethnicity, class, gender, and immigration status.

Within the context of spatialized social relations, how can we define visibility and invisibility? Massey’s critique of conceptualizations of space as *tabula rasa*, or as meaning-less emptiness and her elaboration of space as always contested and relational are relevant here (see Massey 2005). In the same way that the meanings of mobility extend beyond the idea of geographical movement to include the potential for undertaking movement, the meanings of visibility and invisibility extend beyond just presence or absence. Neither presence nor absence can be fully understood without taking into consideration how power functions to make meaning of what can be accomplished through visibility and invisibility for a multiplicity of social actors, locations, and relations. Visibility and invisibility can be positively or negatively coded. Particular meanings of codings can best be ascertained within particular historical and sociospatial contexts (see Cresswell 2006 on mobility and its codings).

There are various kinds of visibilities and invisibilities, and each has different consequences. Within dominant populations, visibility is often experienced as positively coded. To be visible in community spaces means to be included, to have a voice that gets heard, to have access to institutions and resources. By contrast, in the present context of entrenched anti-immigrant hostility and heightened immigration enforcement, for Latin@s (immigrants and non-immigrants), visibility is often negatively coded: it often entails standing out as an “unbelonging” presence, being the subject of surveillance and policeability, of criminalizing, pathologizing, and otherwise alienating discourses and practices.

Invisibility, too, can be made meaningful. Absences can become invisible presences. The immigrant parent who is sent to jail or deported and rhetorically represented as a criminalized alien leaves an absence, an imprint, that is shaped by and shapes public rhetorics, social imaginaries and relations, dynamics, and politics for the family that is left behind, and for the community. How are the lives of those for whom an absence is apparent (children, neighbors, co-workers, friends, business owners) affected or reshaped? How is absence framed rhetorically by social actors within various community contexts? Burman pointedly addresses the visible absences produced by the “removal” of immigrants from community spaces:

> When people are removed, their absence leaves an imprint; the intimates they have left behind restructure their everyday lives around that imprint. But how is the imprint of absence transposed into presence, and how does that presence affect the city as a site that lets flourish or prohibits radical difference and hybridization? (2006:281).
The imprint that Burman addresses is precisely where the meanings and repercussions of one kind of immigrant invisibility (produced by state practices of removal, detention, deportation, or its threat) are built day-to-day. Perceived invisibility and visible absences have consequences for constituting community and for the rhetorics and politics that circulate therein (Burman 2006).

“Illegality” and the Spatialized Politics of the Regime of Deportability: Visibility and Invisibility in Geographies of Power

To understand the spatialized experiences of Latin@ immigrants (and non-immigrants, whom through practices of US racialization, independently of nativity or citizenship, often become suspects of illegality) we consider the broader socio-political context that De Genova has called “the regime of deportability” (2006, 2007). For De Genova, it is the constant threat of detention and deportation, not “deportation per se, that renders undocumented migrant labor a distinctly disposable commodity” (De Genova 2002:438; see also Hernández 2008). Espiritu’s consideration of how immigrants can “live across, (unequal) borders” (2003:2) as well as her understanding of visibility and mobility in such spatialized contexts as bound “by force of law, economic and political power, and regulating and regularizing institutions” (2003:20) informs our understanding of the implications of the regime of deportability for the dynamics of visibility and invisibility as spatialized lived experiences. A regime of deportability, and its prevailing discourses, function as everyday disciplinary and disciplining mechanisms and as borderlands spaces for immigrant populations, with implications for visibility and invisibility.

A regime of deportability framework also calls attention to the everyday ways in which immigrants experience the threat and fear of deportability while they are simultaneously being called to employment and even aggressively recruited as ideal laborers (see Maldonado 2009; Rodriguez 2004; Romero 2006). We suggest that the regime of deportability is implicated in the production of hyper/visibilities and hyper/invisibilities as it, at once, calls migrants out from the shadows (in a spectacle of detention practices and raids) and forces them back into the shadows by entrenching notions of illegality and practices of surveillance and policeability while society continues to rely heavily on (unauthorized) immigrant labor. Raids demonstrate the power of the state to offer seemingly necessary protection to non-immigrant, non-criminal, and normative populations (see related analyses by Hernández 2008; Romero 2006; Rosas 2006). Hypervisibility and hyperinvisibility are produced in order for business as usual to be conducted, for immigrants to continue to survive in their day-to-day contexts, and for capital to continue to be produced, accumulated, and consumed. The regime of deportability, understood thusly, functions to produce *borders within.*

Spatially and socially, the regime of deportability functions differently for different populations. It functions to create an illusion of secure space for those populations for whom detention and deportation are constructed as safety
measures. For populations criminalized through the racialized rhetorics of il/legal-
ity, however, the regime of deportability creates a material threat of detention and
departure; it works to make seemingly threatening bodies visible in order to
surveil and contain them. In the raids undertaken in Iowa and other parts of the
US, together with accompanying rhetorics of looming menaces and threats of
terrorism and terrorists, laboring brown bodies were temporarily visibilized. Here
we recall the 2008 raid of the kosher meatpacking plant in Postville, Iowa, the
largest in the history of US immigration. Hypervisibilizing reports about the raid
appeared in national media outlets, and in the heartland.

The threat of deportability affects more than undocumented immigrants.
Latin@ families are often of “mixed status”, including both documented and
undocumented members. For those related to undocumented immigrants
through kin or community, the threat of deportability is the threat of family
separation. US-born Latin@s are also affected. Given the racialization of Latin@s
as foreigners and immigrants, being read as Latin@ renders one “reasonably
suspicious” and therefore potentially criminal. Within the context of the
regime of deportability, a sub-context of policeability is produced, whereby
practices of surveillance and tactics of resistance can be identified (Rosas
2006). Invisibility and restricted mobility are produced as functions of the
(perceived) need for containment and policeability of immigrants and immi-
grant communities as borderlands inhabitants of the border within (Hernández
2008; Romero 2006). A focus on practices of surveillance and policeability helps
us understand how visibility and invisibility are produced, imposed, and/or
enacted on a day-to-day basis in particular spaces.

Heightened immigration controls and concentrated enforcement practices—what
Romero calls “immigration policing”—impose conditions of restricted mobility and
surveillance (2006:461). It is in these contexts of concentrated immigration enforce-
ment that a differentiation of mobility and visibility is revealed across distinct groups
within communities as borderlands spaces.

Ideas about place and belonging together with ideologies of citizenship have re-
emerged in new gateways like “small town America” to render immigrants suspect
by their inability to claim being “sons of the soil” (Appadurai 2006:57). This
inability can give rise to what Massey characterizes as “outright antagonism to
newcomers and ‘outsiders’” (1991:24). It also has implications for tactics and
strategies of invisibility both on behalf of the state as well as on behalf of immigrant
populations. As Appadurai notes, “global migrations across and within national
boundaries constantly unsettle the glue that attaches persons to ideologies of soil
and territory” (2006:83). Rosas’ discussions of populations as “explicitly political
problems” and of the managed violences of the borderlands are helpful here (Rosas
2006:403; see also Abu-Laban and Garber 2005). For Rosas, being subjected to
policeability as a spatialized practice constitutes a “coercive inauguration to the
protracted subjection of life as an immigrant laborer” (2006:404). As examples
from Perry will show, new gateways are produced as complex borderlands spaces
in their material divisions, rhetorical productions, cultural clashes, differently
restricted mobilities, produced in/visibilities, and in the routine distinctions between
receiving and immigrant communities.
The Case Study: Spatialized Consequences of the Threat of Deportability in Perry

The stories told by Latin@s in Perry illustrate how threats produced by the regime of deportability are salient and even exacerbated in/by the rural context. They also illustrate the spatialized ways in which Latin@s distinctly experience and manage these everyday threats. There was an undertone of fear in many of our respondents’ narratives about their day-to-day navigations of Perry. Several alluded to raids in Iowa and throughout the US and how they produce fear. This fear compels and imposes new practices and tactics for them in the community. Pedro shared: “Here so far, there hasn’t been much [raid] movement, thank God. But with all this pressure in other places, people are afraid.” José, a young immigrant and legal resident, told us of one way in which the threat of deportability affects his life and his friends’ lives: “I have a friend of mine ... he does not want to go to Des Moines, to the stores or nothing, because (Hispanics) have the belief [that] someone is going to ask them for documents ...”

The threat of deportability impels José’s undocumented friend to practice invisibility and experience a degree of social isolation. For José, the consequence is also isolation as well as an expressed boredom: he does not get to share the activities that young people typically enjoy. This is especially problematic because such activities are seldom available to Latin@ youth in the small town of Perry. In fact, Latin@ youth (immigrants and those who are US born) characterized their lives in Perry as spatially restricted and boring. Jessi, a young Latina, told us: “There’s nothing to do ... there’s nothing interesting.” Manny and Cruz, two young Latino males, also commented on the lack of options for socializing in Perry: “For those that don’t have sports, there’s not really much else ... hanging with your friends, running around in your car, going to a friend’s house. But there’s not much else to do. That’s the only fun thing to do here, just go to school.”

The boredom that Latin@ youth allude to when describing their experiences in Perry also highlights disconnections from place. One obvious direction for community development and integration efforts, especially since youth constitute the largest and fastest growing segment of the Latin@ population in Perry, is to work to create opportunities for youth for meaningful social interaction and connection. The lack of options available to youth has consequences for how and where they become visible in community contexts and with what consequences. Young Latino males report being regularly watched and approached by police when they circulate in public spaces. Bored US-born Latin@ youth, who “hang out” in public spaces because “there is nothing to do”, become hypervisible and, as became apparent in our interviews, are experienced by many residents as a threat. Some Latin@ adults expressed a concern (which several said is shared by other non-Latin@ adults in Perry) that the increase in the Latin@ youth population could possibly result in the emergence of gang activity. Latin@ youth expressed awareness of this fear. We found that a regime of deportability also affects intra-Latin@ dynamics. Consider the following quote from Rosa: “Many of us Latinos are fearful of talking with strangers because you never know. These days with all the things one is seeing, that even Latinos are turning in other Latinos—their own brothers and sisters—to immigration ...”
Rosa’s comment suggests that the regime of deportability creates conditions of distrust among Latin@s, which affect the willingness and ability of undocumented Latin@s to pursue, establish, and develop relationships with non-immigrant Latin@s and with Latin@s who have an established presence in the community. Such an atmosphere not only limits the potential for community integration in new gateways, but also disables immigrants from accessing the types of networks that can serve as valuable and needed support, information, and resources.

Several respondents mentioned the radio as an important source of information that helps immigrants (and Latin@s) manage the fear and threat of deportability. Tino noted:

[T]he majority live with fear and without information, but we have the radio, which is an excellent source of communication ... The woman who manages the Spanish radio programming ... she keeps us up to date, keeps us informed about raids, everything that’s happening with immigration, and there’s even an attorney who is on TV ... [O]n Mondays he would answer phone calls for an hour and a half, responding to any questions people had.

Margarita recounted a similar event:

A couple of days ago, last weekend, they said on the radio that there were going to be police all along highway 141, but they didn’t know exactly at which points or for how long. What they knew was that it was going to be that way until 3 in the morning. So then we communicated, nobody go out—if we have to buy food, do so right here, even though it’s more expensive. But that way we avoid the police.

These examples illustrate the ways in which the threat of deportability leads immigrants to undertake invisibility as a tactic and to craft alternate routes for their daily movements in Perry. These stories are expressions of the lived knowledges that inform invisibilizing tactics performed by Latin@s in everyday contexts. Insofar as they reveal differently regulated mobilities and differentiated productions of the condition for invisibility, they reflect geographies of uneven power that function as borderlands spaces. Fears associated with the threat of deportability also affected Latin@ immigrants’ access to healthcare. Injuries were commonly reported by respondents who worked at the local meat processing plant and by those who were subcontracted to do janitorial work there. Some reported being put in an uncomfortably cold room to do nothing and to recuperate, or even as a punishment for speaking up about particular labor conditions such as not being able to take breaks to use the restroom. Others addressed the uneven social relations of power that can determine their degrees of visibility and invisibility in and outside of the workplace. They reported being asked by supervisors to surveil their co-workers while recuperating from injuries in the cold room. The examples that follow demonstrate how isolation is both implicitly and explicitly experienced in the context of a regime of deportability. Berta explained:

Many people just don’t complain about their injuries because I think the company doesn’t want to pay for so many people who are getting injured. And many who get injured get assigned to light duty or to do nothing. Sometimes they have them watch that no one go into the bathrooms wearing their work coats or with work equipment. Other times they send people who are injured to a room that is very cold. People just return to work so they don’t have to sit there in that cold room.
Other respondents spoke about getting the “run-around” by company doctors. Several were eventually referred to doctors in Des Moines. Respondents explained that fear of being seen and stopped by police, compounded by a lack of public transportation, discouraged them from traveling to obtain needed medical treatment.

These examples illustrate not only how mobility mediates access to services, but also how the hypervisibility of Latin@s in new gateways, negatively coded within a regime of deportability, has direct negative impacts on the health and well-being of Latin@ immigrants. The kind of invisibility produced by the threat of deportability renders immigrants vulnerable in limiting their ability to access support, business transactions, social interaction, entertainment, and healthcare.

Latin@ narratives also reveal how the threat of deportability and sometimes the experience of racial profiling affects Latin@ relations with local law enforcement. When we asked Latin@s what changes, if any, they would like to see in Perry, one of the most common responses was “the police”. Milagros explained:

[S]ome times the police go too far with people who don’t have their papers or their driver’s licenses ... Why don’t they change, why are they like that with Hispanics, why don’t they give Hispanics an opportunity? We [Hispanics] can do [good], we don’t all do bad things. They should have a little trust in us. We all pay for the bad things that a few do. Many [Hispanic] people who come here complain that this is a problem with the police, that they’re always accusing them and call them wetbacks and offensive things like that ... And many people don’t know they have rights even if they don’t have papers, so they just take it.

This expressed fear of law enforcement, along with the experienced suspicion of illegality and the related need to always be ready to show documentation, are functions of both a regime of deportability and also of the border within.

**Generational and Gendered In/Visibilities in Perry**

Stories told by Latin@s point to how visibilities and invisibilities are not only racialized, but also gendered and generational. Latin@ men and women, and Latin@ youth, make themselves invisible and are invisibilized and immobilized in distinct, though related, ways. Consider the following examples of how in/visibilities get enacted, are interpreted, and affect social relations in Perry.

The pervasive association of Latino youth with delinquency and gang activity became apparent in our field observations, our interviews with Latin@ residents, and in several informal conversations with non-Latino residents of Perry. The hypervisibility that young Latino males experience triggers increased surveillance, which in turn produces conditions for the imposition as well as the pursuit of invisibility.

Maria, the mother of a high-school student, told us that after the Virginia Tech shootings, surveillance increased at the local high school. Reactionary practices of increased surveillance become normalized in the regime of deportability. Another woman spoke about the ways in which her sons are continuously surveilled. She explained how her youngest son, who is too young to work, was “pushed out”
of school (see Tuck 2011). Since her son would apparently not be able to achieve enough points to graduate, school counselors advised her that he should stop attending high school. Left with nothing to do, her son spends his time “hanging out” in public spaces, which renders him especially visible and vulnerable to the surveillance practices we relate here.

Manny, a young man who was nearing high-school graduation, mentioned that he wanted to leave Perry because there are no attractive jobs—no work he wants to pursue there: “There are just, like two main jobs here in Perry, which is picking corn and Tyson.” Similarly, Luisa, a mother, told us that her eldest son refused to get a job through the subcontracting agency that many Latinos use to get jobs when they first arrive in Perry:

He wants to go to college ... He says “I’m not going to work at Tyson, I’m going to apply somewhere else ... I’m going to be able to look for work elsewhere.” He has his ideas, his dream is to become a police officer, but he doesn’t have papers. He graduated [high school], and he can’t continue his studies because we don’t have the means to pay so he can go on to college.

Young men move and are visible in negatively coded ways that elicit suspicion and trigger surveillance, which we see as responses to the criminalizing discourses that prevail in these borderlands contexts. It may seem as though they are mobile, free to move about, but in fact, they report that they experience restricted movement and increased surveillance that calls them to invisibilizing tactics but that simultaneously and contradictorily renders them hypervisible. Some Latin@s we interviewed condoned this heightened monitoring of young Latino males, attributing the low incidence of gang activity in town to police vigilance. The hypervisibility of young Latino males and the heightened surveillance they experience in Perry reveal a relationship between visibility, policeability, and instrumentalization. Several young men related an understanding that there is no belonging possible for them in Perry unless they conform to expectations of them as always only laborers who should effectively disappear after work. In this way, the regime of deportability plays a role in the reproduction of constricting stereotypes in socio-spatial contexts.

In Perry, recently arrived (often undocumented) Latino males report—and are reported—to be specifically targeted and recruited by DCS, a subcontracting company, to do janitorial work at the local meat processing plant. In our conversations with Latin@s, it became apparent that most people knew about this subcontracting company, which serves as an entry point for undocumented males. Our interviews reveal that Latino men pursue this work, despite reportedly deplorable working conditions, in part because it allows them to keep a low profile and remain invisible. In the face of public raids, threats of deportation, and criminalizing discourses, they can remain invisible there because work is done between 5:00 pm and 6:00 am. Interviewees reported that everyone knows that the subcontracting company routinely “looks away” when it comes to workers’ legal status. One interviewee noted: “There [in DCS] they accept people without papers, just with whatever ID they present to get their paycheck.” Another interviewee who works at the Tyson plant told us:
What I know about the place is that it’s the only place where they accept people who are not here legally, they don’t do much checking of people’s documents. I have heard that it’s one of the most abusive, worst paying companies, and that they mistreat their workers, for the very reason that most people who work there are undocumented...
People have told me that [the company] does not give them the obligatory break, the lunch break, and that they have to go to some other place to get their paycheck, or else they don’t get paid. It’s very tough work they do, they’re wet all the time, their clothes dry out while they’re wearing them, and they have to deal with the grease [on the machines] and the dampness. The people I’ve known who’ve worked there don’t last very long; I think they just use it as a transition until they can get other jobs elsewhere.

Because the work is subcontracted, the meat processing plant can also undertake a practice of “looking away” in order to claim that they do not “see” or know what workers actually perform at work, or under what conditions. By using subcontractors, employers at the meat packing plant invisibilize their reliance on a primarily undocumented workforce, and disassociate themselves from the exploitative work conditions. Subcontracting also allows for the invisibilization of injuries and inadequate health and safety conditions. The work is not only low wage, it is also dangerous, involving the use of heavy machinery and chemical cleaning agents. Workers report being locked into the plant during night shifts. As part of the underground economy, these practices are known, but invisibilized. Travel to and from work at night is invisibilized and employees are immobilized through practices of containment at the workplace.

In/visibilizing practices hold distinct gendered consequences for Latin@s. Latina women who move to Perry immediately begin working in meat processing or other local industries. Others, however, especially those who are undocumented and those who arrive following relatives or partners, do not immediately find work or choose not to take jobs outside their homes. There is evidence of a prevailing distrust that informs significant social isolation for new arrivals even if they are joining already established households. Women, regardless of their immigrant status, often expressed fear of local officials. Prevailing rhetorics of criminality in a regime of deportability can be considered, in part, also responsible for some women’s fear that led them to remain isolated and thereby effectively invisibilized and immobilized.15 Women who remain outside of the paid labor force spend a great deal of time at home alone or with small children. Some provide in-home daycare services. They rarely leave their homes, either on foot or by car. For those with cars, there is a fear of getting stopped by police. While the more daring carefully plan their daily movements to stay “below the radar” by using alternate routes (eg back roads), others choose to leave home only with their husbands. These invisibilizing practices constitute survival strategies with the deleterious consequence of significant social isolation. Indeed, recently arrived and undocumented Latinas in Perry speak of having few, if any, friends or support networks. They report no meaningfully developed relationships in the context of everyday life in their neighborhoods. The following quote by Alma exemplifies the level of isolation recounted by many of our female respondents: “I take care of [a] baby and with this work, I help pay the bills. It’s not a lot, but it’s something. The truth is, I know no one here. I haven’t really met people.”
This isolation produces conditions that can further invisibilize domestic, sexual, and child abuse. Under such conditions, these serious issues go unaddressed with what can only be deleterious short- and long-term consequences for Latinas, their families, and the broader community. Within the regime of deportability, underground economies flourish, producing precarious positions for laboring immigrants. They cannot pursue formal options of work because legal status and knowledge of English are set as pre-requisites for obtaining permits, training, and credentials. While the strategic practice of providing unauthorized daycare services in their homes offers some economic independence for these women, giving them an alternative to working in meat processing, it further reproduces their invisibility and their restricted mobility. As informal (and illegalized) caregivers, they cannot turn to neighbors in times of need putting them and the children they care for at significant risk. Again, a sense of instrumentalization (the social processes by which certain populations are thought of and treated as instruments or tools) is revealed as particularly related to processes of invisibilization. Latin@ immigrants in Perry spoke of their understanding that informal daycare supports the meatpacking industry, as it serves as a kind of informal subsidizing practice that remains ostensibly obscure while apparently freeing more men and women to work in the meat processing plants. As Berta noted:

The people who work at Tyson have Latin@ people take care of their children. There are people who care for 6 or 8 children—I know of one person who cares for fewer children, and I know she is a good person, and that she is good with children, so I’ll take my kid there ...

The social production of immigrant visibilities, invisibilities, and im/mobilities is the spatialized manifestation of gendered power dynamics in home and community spaces. In the following section we consider ethnoracial dynamics in community contexts.

“Ways of Looking” and Ethnoracial Dynamics in Perry, Iowa

Criminalizing borderlands rhetorics of illegality and deportability invite or discourage certain ways of looking and not looking with consequences for whether and how immigrant populations are able to be seen, to make connections and relations to place, and for their ability to develop a sense of belonging. Latin@s in Perry often spoke of their relationship and interaction with their White American neighbors in terms of the ways in which such neighbors “look” or “do not look” at them. Many spoke about being looked at with what they understood to be suspicion.

Rosa spoke of uncomfortable experiences of being “looked at” by White Americans with what she felt was scorn. Such experiences compelled her to undertake invisibilizing strategies as she felt particularly vulnerable. Whether it happens to her or to other Latinas, she reports that it affects her all the same:
When we go to the stores older people, adults, give us the stink-eye [laughs]. That’s how it is, and it’s something that—for example, I feel bad when they do it to me, but I also feel bad when they do it to someone else who could have been me.

Latin@s told stories about a range of day-to-day tactics to remain invisible (and unheard), in order to live peacefully, without trouble, and to defy pathologizing and criminalizing discourses of immigrants. For many, being a good neighbor entails a sort of tip-toeing around community space, so as not to bother or cause distress or discomfort to “Americans”. Some noted that they are, after all, not in their country, but in the “Americans’” country. Described strategies of invisibilization were undertaken, in part, as a demonstration of their worthiness of being in the community. As an acknowledgment of the uneven social relations, these strategies were also undertaken for purposes of continued employment. When one is in someone else’s home, they explained, one should behave well. This sentiment signaled for us a real material consequence to the prevailing social order in Perry. Benito’s comments illustrate this point of view:

Sometimes we [Latin@s] bring [to the US], we could say, misbehaving, lack of respect for others, and this implies annoying the neighbor, the American community ... We are in their house and we don’t know how to behave.

[Interviewer: Do you feel that it is your house too?] ... It’s more theirs ... I feel like I’m a visitor, and as such, I should behave well. This is their country and you’re not going to come here to cause them discomfort.

Others expressed resentment of discourses and practices that gave them a sense of unbelonging. This resentment was often expressed in response to the ways in which immigrants are often criminalized or otherwise represented as problems, and it was contextualized in relation to Latin@s’ role in the economic vitality of the community and the larger US economy. Recalling an anti-immigrant radio talk show discussion in which the caller argued that immigrants only come to take away jobs, Maria said:

They give us the jobs they don’t want to do because they don’t like to work as much as we do. They need our labor and that is something good that one brings. If no Latinos/as were here in Perry, I don’t believe IBP or what is now Tyson would be here. The same is true for construction work ... Hispanics are always the ones who do the hardest labor and I believe that in one way or another, we always contribute more to this community.

Likewise, Jorge noted how Latin@s have helped the economy: “The store Hyvee was small and they made it big.” Latin@ stories display an awareness of the ways in which dominant discourses as well as “the American gaze” marginalize them as raced and as classed subjects, with material consequences for everyday community life. Such rhetorical framings were sometimes subverted in interviews to reveal a sense of self as hard-working, worthy, and as valuable. Many participants expressed resistance to discursive practices and practices of looking that produce Latin@s as always only laborers. This was evident in their discussions about being “more than just laborers”, about a desire to be accepted and engaged by the community beyond their capacity...
as laborers. These rhetorics reveal a both/and borderlands understanding of the self as both laborer and neighbor and therefore community member. Talking about the need for more integration in Perry, Berta stated:

[We need for] them [Americans] to see us ... not like we’re invading this country, not like strangers, but like neighbors ... and maybe for both cultures [Americans and Latin@s] to get more involved with each other ... I would like to see more minorities working in different types of businesses—not just low-end businesses—I would like to see, more [Latin@] teachers and administrators.

Attending to visibilities and invisibilities as embodied processes entails recognizing the distinct ways in which bodies are discursively represented and visually marked by race, gender, and class, and how they, in turn, make themselves and/or are made visible or invisible. Whites remain a numerical majority (and continue to occupy the majority of positions of power and decision-making) in town thereby making Latin@s visible in their difference. Latin@ bodies “stand out” from the established ethnoracial norm. Arguably, as their numbers have grown in recent decades, more Latin@s circulate in community spaces than did several decades ago. Their presence is also increasingly visible in other ways that are changing the visual landscape of the community and that can be considered positively coded for many Latin@ residents. Local supermarkets have incorporated products aimed at Latin@ consumers. Latin@ business establishments have opened up. Some non-Latin@ owned businesses have begun incorporating Latin@ (or at least Spanish-speaking) personnel. The presence of Latin@ iconographies (use of Spanish in signs, newspapers, and in materials produced by schools and other local institutions) and of generally recognizable sites of Latin@ cultures also helps produce Latin@ visibilities in Perry.

The Sonic Dimension: Soundscapes as an Aspect of Visibilities and Invisibilities

The contest for community space entails the (re)mapping of a sonic landscape (Boland 2010; Matless 2005). In Perry, Latin@ visibilities are produced by the sights and sounds of Spanish, often coded negatively, and managed through linguistic surveillance as a spatialized everyday practice of policing of language boundaries.

Doris noted that speaking Spanish made her feel more vulnerable to that gaze of her “American” neighbors: “Wherever we went, I was a bit scared of not knowing English because the Americans would laugh at us, and when you’d go some place to eat they’d keep staring at you, and that would make me mad ...”

Notably, Doris connects this unwanted attention for speaking Spanish to a continual surveillance of her presence at restaurants and stores. She emphasized how the comfort with which she circulated as a “Spanish-speaking immigrant” in California, where she used to live, has turned into visibilizing discomfort in Perry. She noted a great deal of fear associated with being the object of unwanted attention due to her lack of English skills. Doris’ experience highlights one of the ways in which long-established and new gateways constitute different experiences of reception with important repercussions for immigrants’ day-to-day interactions.
Latin@s in Perry spoke to us of the ways in which Spanish was prohibited and English-only was regularly practiced particularly in the workplace. Such everyday practices constitute an act of policing and also a kind of mundane violence that can render immigrants inaudible and therefore effectively silent. Interestingly, Latin@s often related linguistic policing to their sense of being instrumentalized. Several Latin@s spoke about the ways they and other Latin@ employees have been admonished at work for speaking Spanish. These women specifically expressed resentment about how Latin@s are denied a right to speak Spanish, while also being actively sought out and recruited for the most labor-intensive and lowest-skilled jobs. They consistently expressed an understanding that their labor was valued while their presences were devalued, which have implications for their sense of belonging.

Jacinta shared:

[I]n both of the places where I’ve worked here there was a lot of racism ... In the free classes [training] that were offered most of us were Hispanic, and [the personnel] didn’t want us there, they forbade us from speaking Spanish [when we were] working and also in class we were not allowed to speak Spanish ... One person was scolded for speaking Spanish.

Jacinta also experienced linguistic discrimination practiced at her place of employment; a context where there was a majority of Latin@s.

Another example of how demographic and cultural change in Perry entails a contest over the town’s sonic landscape is in distinct perceptions of music and “noise”. Some Latin@s spoke of practicing a kind of noise regulation or even muteness at home, in their cars, and in public spaces as a way not to get into trouble with their “American” neighbors.

Josefina noted: “I’ve lived next door to Americans, and I’ve never had problems with them because ... everyone lives their life ... This is their country and you’re not gonna come here to make them uncomfortable with all that music ...” Similarly, Lupe spoke about how she tries to be a good neighbor:

You just have to not mess with them, simply don’t be playing music ... It’s true, each one is in their property, but you’re not going to make other people who don’t like your music uncomfortable. And more as a Hispanic, where we play music so loud that ... it’s deafening [laughs].

Others were less concerned with disrupting their “American” neighbors. Hector noted: “If we’re neighbors and you don’t like loud music, sorry, this is who we are, if you don’t like it, move elsewhere.” Likewise, Luisa commented: “40% of Anglos don’t know us very well and they prefer to keep their distance ... Many don’t like noise, but for us it’s not noise, it’s happiness.” These discussions instantiate what Nelson and Hiemstra (2008) have called “parallel worlds”. Revealing border-like divisions, Latin@s and non-Latin@s in Perry live divided lives with little sustained interaction across ethnoracial lines. Latin@s’ own accounts and our observations show little interaction between Latin@ and non-Latin@s. They work in different jobs, church communities are separated by language, and Latin@s and White Americans tend to practice civic engagement in different ways. As such, different ethnoracial segments of community, with their unique concerns, needs...
and experiences as well as their ways of contributing to community, remain invisible to each other. When we asked Latin@s about their connections to community they often interpreted this to mean their connections to other Latin@s in Perry, as if Latin@s and non-Latin@s belonged to distinct communities.

One specific instantiation of parallel worlds is evident in segregated labor practices that are spatialized, racialized, and configured around immigrant status. Visiting the meatpacking plant during one of the lunch shifts, we were immediately struck by the spatialized configurations of laborers at lunch tables. Seating was segregated according to ethnoracial group and language. From our conversations with Latin@s it is apparent that management of the meatpacking plant generally reflects the established White power structure of the community. Several Latin@s we interviewed who worked at the plant suggested that a given job’s level of risk and strenuousness correlates with what kind of worker performs that job. The most dangerous jobs are undertaken during the night shift and are often performed by those without authorized documentation. The day-to-day production of parallel worlds hinges, in part, upon different timing and visible circulation for daily activities in community spaces. Further evidence of parallel worlds in Perry was revealed in Latin@s’ descriptions of leisure activities. Latin@s (especially immigrants, but also those with family members who are undocumented) spoke of going fishing or picnicking in isolated places, where they were not likely to encounter others, call attention to themselves, or get into trouble. We understand such practices as a tactical response to the powerful borderlands divisions imposed by the regime of deportability.

**Theoretical and Political Implications**

Our research context is both a translocal and a transnational social formation that exemplifies “transnational practices, while connecting collectivities located in more than one national territory ... embodied in specific social relations established between specific people, situated in ... localities, at historically determined times” (Guarnizo and Smith 1998:11). We agree with scholars who see globalizations as extensions of particular localisms (see Massey 1991; Naples and Desai 2002). Perry offers a context of a particular localism that is implicated in globalizations, and translocal and transnational connections that take place in uneven geographies of power, shaped by unequal possibilities for visibility, audibility, and mobility.

The regime of deportability functioning in Perry is not just a policy/political legal context, but also an ideology that is imbued with the racialized production of the US nation. The regime allows the policing of national and cultural boundaries, and is implicated in the social production of communities, shaped by inclusions and exclusions, visibilities and invisibilities, as well as presences and absences. The rhetorics of illegality and deportability and their material manifestation through the toughening of immigration controls and highly visible raids produced (or exacerbated) the conditions of both invisibility and hypervisibility for Latin@ immigrants, and Latin@s generally, in Perry with consequences ranging from increased isolation to engagement in unsafe labor practices with no redress.
One question of theoretical and political importance that emerges for us is that of the extent to which the surveilling and disciplining apparatuses of the state are, much like immigrants, increasingly connected transnationally. For example, in recent years, delegations of Perry residents, including city (police and school) officials and representatives from the local meat processing plant, have traveled to the state of Michoacán, the communities of origin for the majority of Mexicans in Perry. Town officials described this practice as aimed at increasing Perry’s repertoire of cultural competencies. Other rural new gateway communities have adopted practices of sending community-wide delegations to immigrant sending communities in Mexico and Central America as cultural immersion programs (see Crane, Norris and Barry 2010). Future attempts to theorize and empirically examine visibility and invisibility and the conditions of their production should take into account both the translocal dimensions of immigrants’ lives and also the potential and/or actual articulation of authorities and hegemonic institutional apparatuses across national borders. As Espiritu notes, immigrants who face restricted mobility sometimes “return home through imagination” (2003:2). It is this understanding of bound mobility that gives us pause and moves us to consider the visibility and relatively unbound mobility, or what Massey refers to as “differentiated mobility”, of those in power as a possible instantiation and extension of relationships of surveillance and control. Following Massey’s discussion regarding “a politics of mobility and access”, we are called to consider how “the mobility and control of some groups [might] actively weaken other people” (1991:26). The pairing of hegemonic social forces in receiving communities with leadership in sending communities potentially serves the regime of deportability as well as the notion of the border within in multiple ways, and is worthy of further study (see De Genova 2002; Espiritu 2003). Inquiry could identify what other gateway communities have similar practices or programs that support the travel of local authorities to sending communities and to what ends. Such inquiry might also serve projects like ours that seek to understand spatialized experiences of un/belonging and practices of inclusion and exclusion, and how social relations and rhetorics of power are implicated in such practices.

Our aim is to put our work in conversation with the “many academics and policy-oriented international groups [who] work together with NGOs around the world to contextualize the oppressive features of global economic restructuring” in order to begin to address the material concerns, social relations, and myriad issues present in these globalized localities” (Desai 2002:18–19). Policies and practices that police and contain immigrant populations through the production of the visibilities, invisibilities, and differentiated mobilities have significant implications for humane labor practices, social justice, and meaningful integration that can be pursued, practiced, and informed by immigrant experiences, needs, and also contributions.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the anonymous reviewers, editors, and editorial staff at Antipode, whose insights and thoughtful suggestions strengthened this article and aided our cross-disciplinary collaboration. Also, our thanks to all of those in Perry who shared their stories with us. Their voices and visions inform our efforts and inspire us toward public scholarship.
The presence of immigrant day laborers in public spaces within particular communities is a politicized collectivity (2010:2). While we do not suggest that participants we interviewed necessarily view themselves as a politicized collective, we make this move as one that both suggests the possibility and also intervenes in the discursive divisions that haunt the writing of Latin@ as always divided: Latino/Latina; Latinos/as; etc.

The terms “new gateways” and “new destinations” denote spaces that have not been traditional areas of settlement for Latin@s, but where Latin@ presence has grown significantly since the 1990s. These spaces include small and mid-size cities, suburbs, and rural areas throughout the US (Singer 2004).

By regime of deportability we mean a set of ideas and practices, often linked to particular institutions such as agencies of the nation-state charged with enforcing immigration policies, local law enforcement agencies, and media and also at the ground level of community and “micro” interactions that (re)produce a real and/or perceived threat of deportability in everyday contexts.

For extensive discussion of the concept of borderlands rhetorics, see Adela C. Licona’s (2005; 2012) Zines in Third Space: Radical Cooperation and Borderlands Rhetorics.

By “discourses” we mean formal and informal language practices that circulate within the public sphere and also those that appear in official texts and representations (e.g. city government’s documents). We also use the term to refer to the everyday accounts of everyday life articulated by Latin@s in their interviews.

For an extensive discussion regarding the erosion of public space, the increasing spatialized forces of surveillance and control, and the urgency of public space for purposes of cultural and political participation across race, class, and gender, see Setha Low and Neil Smith’s 2005) The Politics of Public Space.

For a thorough and thought-provoking engagement with the concept of “geographies of power” from a gendered perspective, see Sarah J. Mahler and Patricia Pessar (2010). See also Doreen Massey’s (1991) related discussion of “power-geometry”.

“Communities” have been studied and theorized from many disciplinary perspectives. The sociological literature alone reveals more than 90 definitions (see Chavez 2005; Hillery 1955). Individuals and groups construct and invoke their own definitions of community on a quotidian basis. The research we report here seeks to understand community as articulated by those we interviewed. We were interested in what our participants understood “community” to be and how community is represented in institutional and cultural productions. For an excellent critique of the term and concept of community, see Miranda Joseph’s 2002) Against the Romance of Community.

We use the terms “White” and “White American” interchangeably to refer to those populations the US Census identifies as non-Hispanic White. In the context of our interviews Latin@s used the Spanish word “Americanos” (Americans), and sometimes the word “Anglo” to refer to non-Latin@s in receiving communities. Perry has been historically a predominantly White town, and it continues to be so. According to the 2010 Census, 79.14% of the total population of Perry reported their race as “White alone”, 34.95% reported being of Hispanic origin, 1.83% identified as Black or African American alone, and 0.83% identified as Asian alone.

We learned that many Latin@s in Perry are affiliated with non-Catholic churches.

State rhetorics of terrorist and terrorizing immigrant were revived in Arizona on 16 June 2010, when in a televised interview with Fox correspondent Greta Van Susteran, Arizona Governor Jan Brewer declared that Arizonans could no longer “afford all this illegal immigration and everything that comes with it, everything from the crime to the drugs and the kidnappings and the extortion and the beheadings and the fact that people can’t feel safe in their community”. Brewer repeated this false assertion until September 2010 when she stated that she may have misspoken.

The presence of immigrant day laborers in public spaces within particular communities is sometimes seen/constructed by local White residents as a threat to the safety of women and children, as shown, for example, in video documentaries Farmingville (2003), and Los Trabajadores/The Workers (2003).
Though passed after we concluded our study, Arizona Senate Bill (SB) 1070, among the most regressive anti-immigrant measures in the US, produced and was produced by a national panic that was growing and gaining legitimacy at the time of our study and which was itself fueled by the ideological construction of Latin@ as always already “reasonably-suspicious”.

While her work focuses more on citizenship, marketization, and resistance, we find Alexandra Dobrowolsky’s (2008) use of invisibilization and instrumentalization helpful to our analysis. It allows us to consider the “highly contradictory” experiences immigrants in our research context face and the ways in which the state, the locality, and local businesses call on certain labor practices or “instrumentalization” while also producing conditions of “invisibilization” on the laboring population. Immigrants (often those who are most vulnerable economically and politically by virtue of being undocumented) are at once wanted—even recruited—for their labor in particular contexts, and unwanted—even rejected or invisibilized—in other contexts.

Our research suggests a relationship between in/visibility and im/mobility. We plan to further explore this relationship in a future paper. See Uteng and Cresswell, 2008, for an extensive discussion of gendered mobility particularly as it is connected to social justice.

Jacinta’s discussion of linguistic discrimination relates directly to Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1999) linguistic terrorism as intentional silencing and intimidation. These silencing practices are related for us to the threats produced in the contexts informed by the regime of deportability.

References


Soto S K (2010) Reading Chicano@ Like a Queer. Austin: University of Texas Press
