Rethinking generational categories at the border for Latino immigrants

R. Tina Catania

Abstract: In studies of immigration, generation is typically considered a static categorical system. I argue, however, that generation is a fluid construct and must be understood as place-based. Drawing on fieldwork conducted among Latino/as along the Texas–Mexico border, I seek to explore what current framings of generation leave out. Many in Laredo, Texas, see this border as allowing or preventing movement; these perceptions impact the constructions of generational categories. Cross-border travel, conceptualizations of place and immigration, and mixed-generational unions shape immigrant experiences, and in turn, affect concepts of generation. I conclude by offering ideas and inviting discussion on how the concept of generation can be re-worked to move beyond blunt categories and be re-conceptualized from the perspective of immigrants.

Keywords: generation, identity, immigration, Latino/as, place, U.S.–Mexico Border

Introduction

Leticia is in her mid-thirties and works in a Mexican grocery store in Laredo, Texas. Born in Laredo, she is a U.S. citizen with foreign-born parents. Both her parents were born in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, though her father worked in Laredo while living in Nuevo Laredo. Although born in the United States, Leticia lived for the first fifteen years of her life in Nuevo Laredo. She describes her move to Laredo as quite traumatic; she had difficulty with English and the U.S. academic system. She understands and speaks some English but overwhelmingly prefers Spanish. Leticia’s parents used her citizenship as a way to migrate themselves and become legal residents of the United States. Having spent about half her life in each country, she feels more Mexican than American and married a man from Nuevo Laredo who immigrated to Laredo as an adult.
The census would consider Leticia a member of the second generation, due to her birth status; but she actually immigrated as a young adult with her parents, putting her also in the 1.5 generation. Does her age at the time of immigration make her a first-generation immigrant? Having married a Mexican citizen, what should her children be considered? Leticia’s story of migration is but one example of the complexities associated with determining immigrant generation at the border, and it raises significant questions for how social scientists conceptualize the category of generation.

Generation has been a foundational category for social scientists studying immigration for at least two decades. It is used as a measure in population growth (e.g., Suro & Passel, 2003), as a comparative variable in longitudinal studies (e.g., Lopez & Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Portes, Fernández-Kelly, & Haller, 2009), and as a marker of economic trajectories (e.g., Card, DiNardo, & Estes, 2000; Fry & Lowell, 2006; Goodwin-White, 2009; Kirszbaum, Brinbaum, Simon, & Gezer, 2009). Scholars who explore various aspects of assimilation and incorporation also utilize generation. Some operationalize it to understand language acquisition and educational attainment (e.g., Alba, Logan, Lutz, & Stults, 2002; Grayson, 2009; Oropesa & Landale, 2004). Others use generation as a measure to describe types of assimilation, arguing that generation influences marital assimilation (e.g., Qian & Lichter, 2001), segmented assimilation (e.g., Landale, Oropesa, & Llanes, 1998; Perlmann & Waldinger, 1997; Zhou, 1997), transnational assimilation (Levitt, 2009), or educational and economic assimilation (Gratton, Gutmann, & Skop, 2007; Mollenkopf & Champeny, 2009; Oropesa & Landale, 1997). Common to all these scholars, however, is their use of generation as a categorical tool of analysis, without engaging the potential complexities of defining it.

Generation is also important to consider in relation to other aspects of immigrant identity, such as race. For example, scholars often break down immigrant racial or ethnic identity by generation (e.g., Portes & MacLeod, 1996; Rodriguez, 2000; Saenz, Hwang, Aguirre & Anderson, 1995; Tovar & Feliciano, 2009; Xie & Goyette, 1997). Aspects of assimilative trajectories, such as language, education, residential location, and marital choice, are additional important components of individual and discursive identity formation and construction, also frequently broken down by generation (e.g., Bedolla, 2003; Feliciano, 2009; Lopez, 2002; Macias, 2004; Massey & Denton, 1992; Okamoto, 2007; South, Crowder, & Chavez, 2005; Tovar & Feliciano, 2009). Across such works, generation is treated as a fixed variable against which other factors, such as language or education, can be measured (e.g., Cohen & Haberfield, 2003; Fry & Lowell, 2006; Grayson, 2009; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). In this article, how-
ever, I suggest that generation must be understood in terms of its role in
identity construction from the perspective of immigrants themselves, not
simply as a way to gauge differences between immigrants. Scholars’ use
of generation in migration research implicates it as outside the realm of
identity construction as fluid and inside the realm of data classification as
fixed. Through a discussion of how generation has been conceptualized
and employed unproblematically in social science literature, I seek to link
immigrant generation and identity and show the value of understanding
generation as a lived experience influenced by geographic place.

In this article, I am not interested in if or how scholars should classify
immigrant generation but in what current practices leave out about genera-
tion. The concept of generation, as currently understood by many migra-
tion scholars, is restrictively static in terms of definition and geography.
Scholars should instead consider generation in a more nuanced and shift-
ing manner, taking into account its place-based nature. The relationship
between generation and place cannot, I suggest, be explained by current
research. Therefore, I use Laredo, Texas, as a case study to shed light on
what a more geographically sensitive approach to generation might look
like. In this border space, understandings and experiences of immigrant
generation are multiple; and this heterogeneity helps lay out a new way of
thinking about and analyzing generation.

To develop this argument, I first explain my methods, situate my
study site, and provide an explanation of how the U.S. Census Bureau,
the source of much data in migration studies, collects and classifies im-
migrants generationally. Then, I consider the use of generational catego-
ries in scholarly literatures that consider generation in relation to identity
and assimilation theory. Subsequently, I review the literature that seeks to
problematize the concept of generation while arguing that further prob-
lematization and reworking are needed. Focusing on Laredo’s geographical
context as a border city, I also present a brief overview of literature
on the borderlands and the relationship between the contested nature of
this space and immigrant identities. Next, my analysis of the experiences
of participants in Laredo, Texas, critiques a static deployment of genera-
tion in three ways. First, as currently theorized, generation often assumes
that immigration is a one-time event; my research in Laredo demonstrates
that this assumption does not always hold at the border. Second, how one
understands place, specifically the border, challenges dominant modes
of classification vis-à-vis generation. Finally, I document a disconnect be-
tween generation as a category and a lived experience, as generation may
not apply to individuals who do not see their movement as immigration.
I conclude this manuscript with thoughts on how scholars can question
the fixity of generational categories in both quantitative and qualitative
research through a focus on generation as contextualized by location. Exploring generation at the border, I argue, demonstrates the importance of geographic context.

**Methodology**

This research is based on work conducted in Laredo, Texas, between 2002 and 2010 as part of a larger, mixed-methods project exploring racial identification for Latinos that included both GIS to conduct spatial analysis and ethnographic methods—interviews, focus groups, and participant observation. I made three trips to Laredo, each spanning between two weeks and one month. Data for this article is drawn from semi-structured interviews with over 70 Latino individuals conducted in both English and Spanish. Interviews focused on racial identity in negotiation with census categories and in the context of cultural events. I located participants though religious communities, at cultural events, and using chain and snowball methods. Although I did not directly ask participants what they considered their generation to be and, instead, solicited information on immigration history, generation became a salient, and complex, feature of these discussions. I subsequently analyzed interview data for dominant themes and explore one of those, the messiness associated with generational classifications, here.

**Categories in flux**

Recognition of generation’s complexity is absent in much social-science research, which treats generation as a static category (e.g., Foner, 1997; Perlmann & Waldinger, 1997; Qian & Lichter, 2001; Reynolds, 2008). Suro and Passel (2003), for example, define parameters for who comprises various generational categories but use generation itself as a static concept to compare and break down Latino population growth. Similarly, Lopez & Stanton-Salazar (2001) define segments of the second generation (i.e., 1.25, 1.5) but then employ the “second generation” as an implicitly cohesive population that can vary based on education. Kirszbaum et al. (2009) likewise employ generation statically to compare multiple immigrant ethnic groups living in France. An equally fixed framing is found in Card et al.’s work (2000), which utilizes the term “second generation” to compare economic characteristics in relation to immigrants and the native born, while Logan, Oh, & Darrah (2009) employ generation to break down Latino population growth by political involvement. Grayson (2009) also uses generation, which he links with language spoken at home, as a static category to classify migrants and understand their educational at-
tainment. Likewise, Alba et al. (2002) operationalize generation to break down linguistic assimilation.

Across these works, authors treat generation as a category to classify and compare immigrants without attention to its intricacies. While I do not advocate the disbandment of identity labels and classificatory systems altogether, one must be cognizant of the politics and problems of categorization, especially when dealing with labels that individuals or groups do not necessarily place upon themselves. As this article will demonstrate, when generation is thought of as more than a static categorical tool, its complexity, with consideration to geographic place, becomes evident. Generation, as currently understood, does not always match immigrants’ lived experiences.

Due to the potential disconnect between categories and lived experiences, attention must be paid to the meanings and politics of categories like generation at all research stages. Just as terms like “feminism” or “women” have been interrogated (e.g., Butler, 1990, 1995; Fuss, 1989; Harding, 1986, 1990), migration scholars must do so with generational categories. Though perhaps not materially important to all immigrants in the everyday, generation as a category is still used by scholars to classify and understand immigrant life. While generation may not seem as salient a category as race or “il/legality,” for some immigrants it is a powerful, politicized, identity category (e.g., Sirin & Fine, 2008). For Japanese-Americans who use Japanese words like Issei and Nisei to refer to first- and second-generation experiences and identities, generation has been an important part of identity construction (Tamura, 1994; Yoo, 2000). Furthermore, in Italy, politicians Khalid Chaouki and Cécile Kyenge, who consider themselves part of the second generation, or “new Italians,” have made the second generation’s plight for birthright citizenship a cornerstone of their politics (e.g., Chaouki, 2014; Intonti, 2011). Recently elected, their politics reflect the self-identification of immigrants themselves in local community and activist groups—which abound on social media like Facebook. Immigrant generation, therefore, could and should become an axis of power/difference that is considered together with categories of race, nationality, and gender. As such, scholars should critically consider the historicity, politics, and use of the term as it is employed from both outside and inside immigrant experiences.

Picturing Laredo

Laredo is a city with a population of 236,091, approximately 96% of which are of Hispanic/Latino origin (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010b). Signs are in Spanish, street names are mostly in Spanish, and those in English
are translated to Spanish in everyday conversation. Stores make announcements over the loudspeaker in Spanish, waiters in the Chinese restaurant speak only Spanish, and I was addressed in Spanish most of the time, even if my questions were in English. Some residents of Laredo, as well as people visiting the city, see it as an extension of Mexico, as my interview data demonstrate. Mexican and U.S. license plates mingle together and the Mexican flag often flies alongside the American.

Patterning the movement of goods across the U.S.–Mexico border, many individuals constantly move from one side to the other. Many Mexican nationals go from Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, to Laredo, Texas, to shop at places like Wal-Mart and find things they cannot in their city. Conversely, residents of Laredo do the same by going to el otro lado (the other side) for groceries, doctor visits, and cheaper prescriptions. Thus, los dos Laredos (the two Laredos) share an economy, a population, and for a period, even a baseball team (Klein, 1997). The Laredo border remains open to commerce and its power, though not to immigration, as millions of Department of Homeland Security dollars continue to be spent “securing” the border (Nevins, 2002; Perry, 2005). Thanks in part to NAFTA, the Laredo-Nuevo Laredo crossing is one of the largest inland ports (Lorey, 1999, p. 173).

The proximity of the two cities—one can see Nuevo Laredo from Laredo—lends itself to frequent movement and travel that is not referred to as “going to Mexico” or “going to the United States” but as going to “el otro lado” (see Figure 1). Residents constantly recognize and simultaneously ignore the boundary. Going to the other side does not always seem like changing nations, because Mexico’s resources are easily accessible and only ten to twenty minutes away, depending on bridge traffic. On the other hand, moving between the two Laredos is not as easy as traveling within Laredo itself; and there is a stark wealth disparity between the two cities. The per capita income in 1999 for Latinos in Laredo was $10,500 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). The median yearly income in 2000 for employed residents of Nuevo Laredo was between 13,844 and 27,667 pesos (INEGI,
These values are equivalent to $940.45 and $1,880.90 in 2000 U.S. dollars (Officer & Williamson, 2010). The bridge and ever-present border patrol, thus, are reminders of the socio-economic differences between Laredo and Nuevo Laredo, where the streets are not so nice and the people are poorer. Laredo itself, however, is not racially or economically homogenous and has marked differences between its northern and southern parts. Interviewed residents consider southern Laredo more Mexican because it is a poorer area with more recent immigrants.

**Considering generation and assimilation**

The decennial census does not collect information on immigrant generation at the 100% level. However, nativity data are collected for the 100% sample. In other words, there is a delineation between the native and foreign born in the census (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002a, 2002b); and scholars can use these data to infer generation in one of two, sometimes three, categories: first, 1.5, and second. The American Community Survey (ACS), which is administered every year, collects data from three million addresses in all places with a population of at least 65,000 and aggregates data every three years in places with a population of at least 20,000. Resulting data on nativity are used to break down the first and second generation by year of entry/birth. Individuals are classified into the following generational categories for the ACS: first generation if foreign born, second generation if they have at least one foreign-born parent, third generation and higher for those with two native-born parents. In all cases with data collected by the Census Bureau, immigrant generation is not specifically collected but is often inferred or calculated from other questions by both the census and scholars alike (e.g., Alba, Logan, Lutz, & Stults, 2002; Fry & Lowell, 2006; Goodwin-White, 2009; Oropesa & Landale, 1997).

Studies related to immigrant assimilation, incorporation, and/or acculturation see generation (oftentimes in conjunction with other variables, such as economic status or race) as a foundational category that influences, if not determines, assimilation outcomes (e.g., Alba, Massey, & Rumbaut, 1999; Cohen & Haberfeld, 2003; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Villanueva, 2002). In educational-attainment studies, for example, generation is utilized as a category of comparison for understanding immigrant assimilation (e.g., Abrego, 2006; Buriel, 1990; Cammarota, 2004; Ceballo, 2004; Lopez, 2002a, 2002b; Saunders & Serna, 2004; Ryken, 2006). Social scientists who deal with issues of ethnicity, race, and/or identity also use generation to compare ethnic groups across time, within groups, and to understand the variables affecting identity in their study, be it language,
race, or religion (e.g., Bedolla, 2000, 2003; Flores-Gonzalez, 1999; Hunt, 1999). For example, Hunt (1999) breaks down Latino religious affiliation by generation, while Flores-Gonzalez (1999) explores racial-ethnic self-identification by generation.

Sociological studies set in particular geographic locations continue this trend and do not deconstruct or explore the role of geography in the construction of generational identities (e.g., Bedolla, 2003; Flores-Gonzalez, 1999; Ryken, 2006). Macias’ (2004) research on Mexican-American identity in San Jose, California and Phoenix, Arizona, for example, looks specifically at the third-plus generation. No definition of this category is offered, however, and there is no mention of potential differences between how generation is construed at the two research sites.

Along the same lines, King and Christou’s (2010) research on second-generation return migrants to Greece problematizes the use of the term “second generation” specifically. They point to the problem of categorizing young migrants as part of the first generation when they are more similar, in terms of education, to the second. However, they maintain that “this wrangling over definitions misses the point” (2010, p. 106), citing it as relevant in only comparative, quantitative studies and not qualitative studies like their own. I suggest that while the relevance may seem clearer in quantitative studies where generation is used as a category for comparison, qualitative studies must also deal with the nuances of defining and using generation. King and Christou are not concerned with defining the second generation but rather with “variations in the population of second-generation ‘returnees’” (2010, p. 106). Yet they characterize interviewees as second generation and, thus, potentially miss the nuances that could have emerged with differentiation. For example, did those with one immigrant parent and those with two immigrant parents differ in their experiences and views of return? They mention that many participants traveled to Greece as children. Did any returnees not experience this travel; and, if so, how might this travel have shaped their return migration? King and Christou “question the existing literature on the second generation” because “it is nearly always framed with reference to an expected trajectory of assimilation into the host society” (2010, p. 106). While assimilation theory can be problematic, even when it recognizes multiple outcomes (e.g., Portes & Rumbaut, 2001), continuing to use the term second generation to structure research without recognizing its multiple meanings does not itself destabilize assimilation theory.

Those scholars who study immigrant assimilation specifically represent a significant segment of the scholarship that deals with immigrant generation. Scholars in this field often rely on generational categories for comparison and as determiners or descriptors of assimilative outcomes.
Though I do not have space here to pay attention to all instances of research on immigrant assimilation that utilize generation, I focus on a few exemplary pieces to demonstrate trends in using generational categories in assimilation research. Research in migration studies on processes of immigrant incorporation has produced important understandings. For example, Alba et al.’s (2002) work on linguistic assimilation in the United States has demonstrated that Anglicization is occurring for “new” migrants from Asia and Latin America at rates similar to those for previous European migrants. Zhou’s (1997) review of segmented assimilation research, on the other hand, points to the diversity of experience for second-generation immigrants influenced by class, race, ethnicity, and structural constraints. Similarly, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) reveal that assimilation is not linear but multiple and contextual, showing that assimilation occurs over several generations, thus significantly altering prior theories of immigrant assimilation. Working on spatial assimilation, Ellis and Goodwin-White (2006) examine how state out-migration varies by education and immigrant spatial concentration between the 1.5 generation and native-born populations in U.S. states with large populations and high percentages of immigrants. Likewise, Logan’s (2006) work on immigrant incorporation in Amsterdam measures spatial assimilation for various immigrant groups and finds that spatial assimilation for immigrants differs based on nativity and ethnicity.

The research reviewed above demonstrates new and important understandings of immigrant experiences of spatial and cultural assimilation. At the same time, these works also raise significant questions about immigrant generation. Though they all use generation as a categorical tool of comparison, they do not address the place-based nature of generation and the possibility that its meanings vary by location. As my research at the Texas–Mexico border demonstrates, understanding generation at this border city requires a more nuanced and contextual understanding of it as influenced by place.

**Problematizing the category generation**

While the previous section reviewed literature dealing with assimilation, this section focuses on work in migration studies. Before discussing the problems with current definitions and uses of generation, I briefly review how generation has, or has not, been problematized in migration studies. Current scholarship concerning generation can be divided into two types. Some initially recognize the difficulty in defining generation but then ignore this difficulty in their analysis. Others argue that the complexity of
generation can be clarified with increased specificity and narrower category delimitations.

Smith’s (2003) short paper on Latino economic assimilation across generations mentions the ambiguities of generation when aggregating data from multiple sources—in his case, decennial census data and yearly Current Population Survey (CPS) data. He defines the first and second generation but does not mention how these were determined. Measuring and understanding the third generation poses more of a problem for Smith. First, data for the third generation include all those past the second generation, due to a lack of specific data collection. Second, he notes the problem of comparing data from different time periods under varying census generational definitions (Smith, 2003, p. 315). In the end, however, he analyzes his data as if these problems do not exist. Similarly, Fry and Lowell (2006) review the literature on wages for Latinos by generation but do not explain how the research they consider defines generation. Stating that “no generational definition is without issues” (2006, p. 152), they allude to the fraught nature of the term but unproblematically use it to analyze their data and compare between and among ethnic groups.

A few scholars have moved toward deconstructing generation by highlighting the need for increased specificity. Peña, Wyman, Brown, Matthieu, Olivares, & Hartel’s (2008, p. 300) work with Latinos and psychological conditions, for example, links generational status with attempted suicide. They see immigrant generation as “a useful and readily measured variable related to acculturation,” while recognizing that definitions may vary, especially in the case of “mixed parentage” and the 1.5 generation. Although acknowledging this messiness, the authors use rigid definitions, outlining the first generation as foreign born and the second as a natural, sequential category. As their data come from a nationally representative, longitudinal survey of adolescents, geographic variability is lost and they draw comparisons and conclusions among individuals whom they classify as members of a particular generation but whose lived experiences may vary significantly.

Some scholars who have argued for increased specificity of generational categories note that, when generational categories are made more specific, data analysis reveals new patterns and results (e.g., Mendez, 2009; Oropesa & Landale, 1997; Ramakrishnan, 2004; Rumbaut, 2004). In a study addressing children’s language acquisition, for instance, Oropesa and Landale (1997) recognize that determining membership in the second generation varies greatly among scholars. Using 1990 IPUMS Census data, they analyze whether different operational criteria for determining generation affects results, concluding that in the case of 1.5- and second-generation children, collapsing the two into one category changes outcomes. Accordingly, they advocate for the use of the 1.5 generation to pre-
serve diversity of experience. Similarly, Ramakrishnan (2004) argues for further specificity of the second generation in social-science research. He postulates the need for the “2.5 generation,” which includes individuals with one foreign-born parent and one native-born parent, in addition to the second generation, which should include only those whose parents are both foreign born. Using CPS data, Ramakrishnan finds that the 2.5 generation is a significant portion of the second generation and is characterized by diverse demographics and economics. As such, he determines that the 2.5 generation is distinct from the second or third generation and should, therefore, be considered on its own.

Rumbaut (2004) has further differentiated both the first and the second generation when used as tools for comparison or as categories that influence acculturation or assimilation. He calls those who migrated as young children (ages 0–5) the 1.75 generation (as their experiences are closer to the second generation). Children who arrive between the ages of six and 12 are the 1.5 generation, and those who migrate during adolescence (ages 13–17) are the 1.25 generation (as their experiences are closer to the first generation) (Rumbaut, 2004, p. 1167). Rumbaut also breaks down the second generation by nativity of both parents, calling those with only one foreign-born parent the 2.5 generation and those with two foreign-born parents the second generation (2004, p. 1185). His quantitative analysis found that the second and 2.5 generations differ in terms of racial and ethnic identification, as do the first, 1.25, 1.5, and 1.75 generations. Mendez (2009), who analyzed Canadian census data, also found that differentiating among the first, 1.25, and 1.5 generations revealed new patterns: in this case regarding immigrant home ownership, which combining these categories obscured. He sees a problem with the lack of agreed-upon “operational definitions of distinctive generation groups” (2009, p. 21). This lack of uniform definitions is especially important when studying immigrant assimilation, as putting members of the 1.5 and first generation together ignores their different migration and assimilative experiences (Brubaker, 2001; Mendez, 2009). These authors argue for increased specificity through decimal categories and demonstrate that using more specific categories impacts results and analysis. Their problematization of generation stops here, however, and does not consider geographical specificity.

While many works conceptualize generation statically, promising research exists in the subfield of transnationalism and the second generation. For example, contributors to Levitt and Waters (2002) collection provide important insight into how life as part of the second generation varies by ethnic group, geographical location, and country of origin. In fact, when Fouron and Glick-Schiller (2002, p. 176–177) explore the lives and identities of Haitian youth in the United States through a transna-
ional perspective, they conclude that migration is an ongoing process and, thus, generation should be redefined. Specifically, they advocate for a concept of generation that includes individuals in the home and new countries (2002, p. 193). In responding to transnational research on the second generation, Eckstein (2002) notes that generation is understood through an assimilationist lens, as biologically based within families. She argues that generational experiences must also be understood politically, through “the historical context in which parents and children live” (2002, p. 212). These questionings of generational categories provide the foundation for my argument that scholars must continue the quest for clarity in immigrant data vis-à-vis generation, whether they are analyzing qualitatively or quantitatively. Contextualizing generation, I argue, must include more than decimal delineations and increased categories of generation, especially since not all quantitative datasets allow for the specificity employed by those who can use these decimal categories (i.e., Mendez, 2009; Oropesa & Landale, 1997; Rumbaut, 2004). Instead, we must continue to rethink generation itself as Fouron and Glick-Schiller (2002) and Eckstein (2002) suggest. Here, I demonstrate through a case study of the border city Laredo, Texas, what static framings of generation exclude. I propose reworking and reconsidering generation as place-based, as everyday immigrant experiences vary by location.

**Picturing the border**

The borderlands between Mexico and the United States are a contested place of constant movement where physical boundaries are imposed upon bodies and identities. A large literature exists on the U.S.–Mexico border (e.g., Fox, 1999; Gutiérrez-Jones, 1995; Paredes & Bauman, 1993; Richardson, 1999; Rodríguez & Vincent, 1997; Suárez-Orozco, 1998; Vélez-Ibáñez, 1996), and the role borders play in identity formation (e.g., Anzaldúa, 1987/2007; Fregoso, 2003; Friedman, 1998; Vila, 2000). Scholars whose work is situated in this fraught zone have found that notions of race, identity, and spirituality often travel with migrants to their new homes (McGuinness, 2003; Vila, 1996). At once in two places and no place (Byrd, 2003, p. 14), residents of the borderlands are not entirely Mexican or American.

As an addendum to the third edition of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa was interviewed by Karin Ikas. When questioned on her ties with Mexico, Anzaldúa responded thusly:

I am a seventh generation American and so I don’t have any real “original Mexican” roots. So this is what happened to someone living at the border like me: My ancestors have always lived with the land here in Texas. My
indigenous ancestors go back twenty to twenty-five thousand years. ... Texas was part of a Mexican state called Tamaulipas. ... It was almost half of Mexico that the U.S. cheated Mexico out of when they bought it by the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. By doing so, they created the borderlands. The Anzaldúas lived right up at the border. Therefore the ones of our family who ended up north of the border, in the U.S., were the Anzaldúas with an accent, whereas the ones that still lived in Mexico dropped their accent after a while. As the generations then went by, we lost contact with each other. Nowadays the Anzaldúas in the United States no longer know the Anzaldúas in Mexico. The border split my family, so to speak. (1987/2007, p. 234–235)

Anzaldúa’s family experiences aptly describe life on the border for many who have family on both sides. Oftentimes, generation is difficult to ascertain when families have lived and owned land in the same region for multiple familial generations; pinpointing a pivotal moment of immigration is difficult, if not impossible. The governmental creation of the boundary divided land that many consider(ed) unified (e.g. Anzaldúa, 1987/2007; Arrizón, 2000; Navarro, 2005; Vélez-Ibáñez, 1996). Through the border’s increased policing and securitization, a line on a map that did not always affect individual life has created a new set of material effects in the lives of those living in the borderlands (e.g. Nevins, 2002). According to the census, Anzaldúa’s generation would not be collected or considered a relevant topic of study or inquiry. She is merely another member of the native-born group. Yet she felt a close connection with Mexico and her indigenous and mestiza roots, as evidenced in much of her writing (e.g., Anzaldúa, 1987/2007; Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002). Is the discounting of her immigrant generational affiliation by the census acceptable? Or by scholars who study immigrants yet do not look past the third generation and would, hence, ignore individuals like Anzaldúa? At which generation does “immigration” end, and who can make that judgment? Though Anzaldúa’s words cannot be paralleled to my participants’ responses, nor can her experience be used to interpret my participants’ experiences, as she studied and critiqued the border as part of her work, she is a good example of an individual whose generational status was contingent on local understandings of place at the border. Just as the border split Anzaldúa’s family, so too does it split the experiences of some Laredo residents. Fieldwork revealed that many have family al otro lado, travel across frequently, and are uninhibited by, the international boundary. Thus, one must consider this movement, the borderlands’ historicity, and individual lived experiences in Laredo when seeking to understand immigrant generation and identities at the border.

In the case of Laredo, the differences between los dos Laredos seemed miniscule to some participants. Almost all those I interviewed in Laredo
referred to Nuevo Laredo as “el otro lado” if we spoke in Spanish or “going across” and “the other side” if we conversed in English. One participant compared Laredo to “a part of Mexico on the U.S. side.” Considering Laredo as part of Mexico locates the border elsewhere, outside of Laredo itself. The location of the border and where it is experienced impacts how one views and experiences immigration, movement, and, subsequently, generation.

For some participants, Laredo was more similar to Nuevo Laredo than to other Texas cities. Gloria, for example, told me about living in San Antonio for a few years and her feeling that living there as a Latina was different from living in Laredo as a Latina. Even when she visited San Antonio, she noticed the differences:

Like sometimes, we’ll go to San Antonio. We’ll see these totally Mexican people, like you see them, like always, like dark, or … they don’t speak Spanish. And you’re like, “Wait a minute”; and they’ll have the last name, like from Mexico, or something.

In this part of the conversation, we were discussing her view of her children’s race. She answered that her children would be Latino because they are not “white wannabes.” When I questioned her about the definition of a “white wannabe,” she explained by discussing Latinos who lived in San Antonio. She saw San Antonio as a “whiter” place, a place where, contrary to Laredo, Latinos no longer speak Spanish. The differences between Laredo and San Antonio, two cities of the same country and state, were more salient for her than those between Laredo and Nuevo Laredo, separated by an international border.

Although those who live in Laredo might see themselves as almost part of Mexico, others also impose this view upon them. When Petra visited San Antonio for a family birthday, she was reminded of the differences between the two cities. I had asked her if she identified as more Mexican or more American. She replied by describing herself as Mexican and then followed with this story, where some of her Mexican-born friends and family in San Antonio made her feel inferior as a Laredo resident.

I felt like the people, to their friends...consider themselves superior. But like [my Laredoan friend] Yvette told me, “No, it's true. But what happens is that us, here, it’s like we are in Mexico. Once you cross to San Antonio, and you are already in the United States. Right.” Actually, yes, you feel it a little. Because I said to her, “I don’t know why people are like that.” I told her, “They are like really conceited. Like they think they’re the best. Like they feel superior.” And Yvette said, “It’s that there, it’s the United States. Here, we are still in Mexico.” And that’s true.

Petra viewed her Mexican identity in opposition to life in other parts of the United States, even in places as close as San Antonio. She ultimately
agreed that being in Laredo is like being in Mexico; and for her, it is one of the reasons she continues to feel Mexican. Traveling out of Laredo to other places in Texas represented more of a border crossing, culturally, than traveling to Mexico. Besides the physical reminders of the bridge and border patrol, going between the two Laredos did not seem like a change, whereas going to other Texas cities, even those with large Latino populations, presented a more palpable difference. Understanding how individuals view place in Laredo necessitates understanding the border.

Re-placing the border outside Laredo, while reinforcing perceived differences between Mexico and the United States, affects the identities and experiences of individuals living in Laredo, as does seeing the border as inconsequential. Similar to Wright’s (1998) findings in Juarez/El Paso, where the geopolitical border and the cultural identities associated with each side were reinforced or transgressed for political and economic gain, in Laredo, the border between the United States and Mexico is employed as either a clearly dividing line or an easily surmountable and fluid boundary. While migration scholars must concretely define and entrench the border for fixed generational categories to work, what happens to immigrant generation, and hence identity, when the border is movable, fluid, or deemed irrelevant? How are scholars to understand immigrant generation when the border is recognized as multiple and contextual? Current understandings of generation cannot address these questions since they are grounded in an understanding of the border as fixed. Paying attention to the border means paying attention to geographical place and recognizing that, just as the border space of Laredo is understood in different ways, so too is place everywhere (e.g., Massey, 1994, 2005). The following discussion of Laredoan experiences highlights the importance of examining geographical context on the border when considering generation.

**Generation at the border**

The subsequent glimpses into the lives of some Laredoans explore how dominant framings of generation are complicated when place, specifically the border, is considered. This section reveals that generation as currently understood cannot account for the fact that immigration is not always a one-time event (Fouron & Glick-Schiller, 2002). Moreover, dominant definitions of generation cannot account for mixed-generation unions or the disconnect between generation as category and lived experience. Diverse understandings of place, specifically the relationship between two border cities, challenge generational categories as well. For some, living in Laredo demonstrates how immigration is understood as simply moving from one
part of a city to another. To understand fully generation, how individuals understand the border—as dividing or uniting—should also be considered. Those studying migrants’ transnational practices have long recognized the role of place in identity formation (e.g., Richter, 2011; Smith, 2006). Jones-Correa (2002), for example, finds that experiences of the second generation vary in part based on the region of the United States in which they reside while Waite and Cook (2011) explore how understandings of place can vary between generations.

Adriana is an eighteen-year-old high school student. She lives with her mother in the northern, richer part of Laredo and attends the best public school in the city. Born in Laredo, Adriana lived there until age six, when she moved with her family to a ranch in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. The move was intended to be permanent; but her father passed away unexpectedly after two years, and her mother moved them back to Laredo. Despite living on the U.S. side and having frequented U.S. schools for the majority of her education, Adriana identifies as Mexican: “That’s where I come from, and that’s what I love.” She goes to Mexico quite often, at least once per month; and her family still has land near Nuevo Laredo. When asked how she would identify racially, within the constraints of census categories, she stated, “Other race, I guess. … But if I had a choice, I’d just say Mexican. I’m just so proud to be Mexican, I really am. Something to brag about.”

Not only does the census not contain the racial identity that Adriana considers herself, it also does not take into account her generation. Per census categories, she would be considered a native-born Hispanic of some other race with foreign-born parents—by accepted standards, a second-generation immigrant. Lost in these boxes, however, is her parents’ immigration history, as well as her own. These boxes assume that immigration is a one-time event; they do not take into account life on the border and the multiple international crossings, or migrations, individuals like Adriana make. Her parents were born in different parts of Mexico. While her father migrated as an adult to Laredo, her mother did so as child and grew up in a midwestern U.S. city. And what of Adriana’s grandparents? One set lived in Mexico, and the other migrated as adults to Laredo. Does this history make Adriana’s mother a 1.5-generation immigrant? Should Adriana be classified as a second-generation immigrant, or perhaps a member of the third generation, since one set of her grandparents migrated to the United States as well? While Adriana may not care about her generational status, scholars who work with census data will compare her to others presumed to be in the same category. Scholars like Fouron and Glick-Schiller (2002) and King and Christou (2010) recognize that migration is an ongoing process, often involving multiple returns.
Therefore, should Adriana’s racial identification, acculturation, or experiences be measured against someone who has not lived in Mexico and was born in the United States to parents who migrated as adults; especially when scholars recognize that how we categorize effects results (e.g., Mendez, 2009; Oropesa and Landale, 1997; Ramakrishnan, 2004; Rumbaut, 2004)? If we seek to draw empirically and theoretically robust conclusions from such data, we cannot collapse diverse immigration and lived experiences through a homogenizing generation category.

Joaquín works in a small business, and his everyday travels and movement’s best represent how life in Laredo can be comprised of transnational practices. His grandmother lives in Nuevo Laredo, and he takes her to and from church in Laredo twice a week. He also drives her across the border to obtain better groceries in Laredo, while he purchases certain Mexican items for himself in Nuevo Laredo. Joaquín was born in Nuevo Laredo, where he lived until age two. His mother was a U.S. citizen born in Laredo; his father was born in Guadalajara, Mexico. When he was two, his parents separated; and his father migrated to the United States, where he worked as a migrant farmworker. Living with his mother in Laredo until age fourteen, Joaquín moved to a midwestern U.S. city to work with his father for a few years. Upon finishing school at age seventeen, Joaquín moved to Nuevo Laredo, living with his grandmother for three years, and then moved to Laredo. In our conversation, Joaquín consistently referred to Laredo and Nuevo Laredo as one location, demonstrating how the continual cross-border movement between the two cities is often viewed not as immigration but as simply moving from one area of a city to another. Now a naturalized citizen, Joaquín would be characterized as a first-generation immigrant by census standards. Yet he left Nuevo Laredo at a young age. Does this fact make him a 1.5-generation immigrant, or is he an immigrant at all? Is the change of his physical address, which repeatedly crossed an international border, representative of his view of Laredo and his movements? He discussed how, when he first returned from the Midwest, he referred to Nuevo Laredo as Mexico:

I remember when I came from the north part of the [U.S.]. I came back to Laredo and I said it, and I see it now. … When I got here, I was like, okay, “I’m going to Mexico.” And people would whisper, “Where is he going?” “I’m going to Mexico.” “Oh, you’re going to Nuevo Laredo…” To them it was just, like going over the bridge. But to me, now, I just see it like, “Okay, I’m just going to Laredo, no big deal.”

Upon his return from the Midwest, Joaquín’s peers corrected his non-Laredoan view of the relationship between Laredo and Nuevo Laredo. While residing in the Midwest, Nuevo Laredo seemed like Mexico. Living
in Laredo, however, erased the international border in some senses; and the two cities seemed more like one. Though to those individuals who have not recently lived in, or are not from the area, Nuevo Laredo seems like Mexico, to some residents of Laredo, it is just an extension of their city. In these cases, what scholars might call immigration is experienced as simply moving from one area of a city to another.

Frequent cross-border travel does not automatically translate to a view of the Laredos as one and the same. Celeste and her husband, Agustín, were born and married in Chihuahua, Mexico. Agustín, however, only lived in Chihuahua until age three and then spent the next fifteen years in Nuevo Laredo. His family subsequently returned to Chihuahua, where he lived for four years, before he and his wife married and moved to Laredo, Texas, where they have lived for the past fifteen years. Despite continual cross-border travel, or perhaps because of it, Agustín did not view Nuevo Laredo as an extension of Laredo, as did other participants. Though Celeste and Agustín traveled frequently to Nuevo Laredo to visit friends and family, to shop, and to see doctors, the differences they viewed between the two nations reinforced the border between the two cities. When describing the difference between Mexico and the United States, Agustín related how children play. While he characterized children in America as “más encerrada” playing with computers, televisions, and electronics, in Nuevo Laredo most people do not possess such things; therefore, one sees children playing soccer outside: “No más cruzando el puente, no más cruzando para allá, es diferente el ambiente a los Estados Unidos.” Though some, like Joaquín, considered Nuevo Laredo as part of the United States or Laredo as part of Mexico, Agustín did not. For him, the international boundary demarcated two separate spaces. Joaquín may not have considered himself an immigrant because he saw the Laredos as one; and hence, the generation category may not apply to him. Similarly, Agustín’s generational status was contingent on his view of the relationship between los dos Laredos. The meaning of generation for someone like Agustín varies according to who is defining and using the category, and his or her view of the differences and similarities between the Laredos. If scholars see the two as quite distinct, then perhaps Agustín is a first-generation immigrant. If scholars see Nuevo Laredo as an extension of Laredo, perhaps Agustín better fits in the 1.5-generation category. And what of Agustín’s lived experience? Is it similar to that of Joaquín? Collapsing both individuals into the same category obfuscates their different understandings of Laredo as a place and its influence on their identities. Therefore, place—specifically local contexts, both place-based and historical—affects immigrant experiences, and thus, should be incorporated into conceptualizations of generation (e.g., Anzaldúa, 1987/2007; Eckstein, 2002; Ellis & Almgren, 2009).
Not all Laredoans engage in cross-border travel, and this fact should be considered in understanding immigrant generation in Laredo as well. Though the growing literature on mobilities (e.g., Cresswell, 2006; Hannam, Sheller, & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2010) points to an increasingly networked pattern of economic and social life affected by the movement of individuals and goods, the boundaries crossed in a mobile world are not equally permeable for all. Isabela is in her early twenties and has lived in Laredo for the past thirteen years. Born in Nuevo Laredo, she migrated with her parents to Laredo at age eight. Unlike Joaquín, she has stopped traveling to the Mexican side of the border in the past few years, citing fear of drugs and violence. Her mother, however, regularly crosses; and her car is registered in Mexico, where doing so is less expensive. Isabela considers herself American, not Mexican. She prefers to eat at non-Mexican restaurants; and her home contains no indication of her Mexican heritage, but many American flags and symbols. She could be classified as a 1.5-generation immigrant because of her age at immigration. Her preferences for American culture and disavowal of Mexican-ness indicate, according to Portes and Rumbaut (2001), though, that she has assimilated and resembles the second generation. When asked what she considered her generation, Isabela replied third generation and explained that, since her grandparents and parents were still alive, she represented the third generation in her family, and her daughter the fourth. Isabela’s primary notion of generation is based in family genealogy, not immigration. When I questioned what immigrant generation she belonged to, she replied that she did not know how to answer the question and asked me to explain the different immigrant generations. At this point, she chose what she felt she “had to,” according to the categories I explained. This misunderstanding between scholars’ notion of immigrant generation and an individual’s understanding of generation represents the gap between generation as a categorical tool for immigration scholars and the lived experiences of immigrant generation. It remains important, therefore, to recognize that the categories used for classification, comparison, and understanding do not always have the same meaning for immigrants as they do for scholars (Eckstein, 2002). Historically, the re-conceptualization and definition of identity terminology has been done with ethnic and racial terms, like Chicano and Latino (e.g., Hayes-Bautista & Chapa, 1987; Hurtado & Arce, 1986). Likewise, scholars should conceptualize generation from the multiple perspectives of immigrants themselves.

Mixed-generation unions, though not specific to Laredo or the border, also impact the concept of generation. Cristal is in her forties and was born in Houston, Texas. She currently works at a store selling Mexican iron-
works to tourists. She travels to Mexico at least twice a year to purchase items she later sells in Laredo. Cristal’s parents were also born in Houston; but her grandparents migrated from Guanajuato, Mexico. Her husband, on the other hand, was born in Mexico. He migrated alone at age twelve to work. Cristal and her husband have two children, both born in Houston. She and her family moved to Laredo two years prior to our interview. The census does not collect information on Cristal’s generation. To them, she is a native-born Hispanic. The ACS would likely place her as part of the third+ generation. Her husband would be classified as a first-generation immigrant, or perhaps in the 1.5 generation, as he came at age twelve. Where should a scholar place him—as an adult immigrant, since he came alone to support himself; or should his circumstances be discounted in favor of a quantitative measurement according to his age? Perhaps the greater question surrounds Cristal’s children. If generation is traced paternally, they might be second-generation immigrants. If we trace it maternally, they are part of the fourth generation. Should we meet in the middle and call them third generation for simplicity’s sake? When comparing the racial identities and experiences of Cristal’s children, what makes a valid comparison remains unclear. Examining them against the second or fourth generation would yield different results in terms of language, experience, and acculturation, as scholars like Ramakrishnan (2004), Rumbaut (2004), and Mendez (2009) recognize. Cristal and her family demonstrate that one does not necessarily marry or have children with someone of the same generation. Leyendecker, Schölmerich, & Citlak’s work (2006) on Turkish migrant mothers in Germany and their children’s acculturation delves into the complexities of defining generation for offspring of mixed-generation unions. More studies should consider these complexities. We recognize the intricacies that arise out of mixed-race unions for ideas of race and assimilation (e.g., Ellis, Holloway, Wright, & East, 2007; Holloway, Ellis, Wright, & Hudson, 2005; Qian, 1999; Qian & Lichter, 2001); we should do the same for mixed-generation unions.

The experiences of these individuals and families reflect the nuances of life and generation in particular places, specifically at the border. Immigration histories here are complicated with multiple border crossings and do not reflect a view of immigration as a one-time event. At the border, the opportunities for immigration make crossings easier, as Joaquín and Adriana demonstrated. Because of these multiple migrations, the possibilities for mixed-generation unions, like that of Cristal, abound. While the international border divides two countries, not all Laredo residents experience the border in the same way. Joaquín saw little difference between the two Laredos and crossed regularly. For him, the border does not divide two countries so much as it divides one city, which happens
to be split by a river. For others, like Agustín and Isabela, the border is a constant reminder of differences, whether positive (Agustín) or negative (Isabela), between the two Laredos. Their experiences of immigration and, hence, their generational affiliation are influenced by these views of the differences the border marks. Should the same act of border crossing that is viewed differently by individuals be collapsed into one static definition of immigration and hence generation?

**Border geographies matter**

In the case of generation, the border matters. Considering generation in places like the border can imply very different patterns of immigration, understandings of international boundaries, and border crossings than elsewhere. Butler states:

> To be hailed as a “woman” or “Jew” or “queer” or “Black” or “Chicana” may be heard or interpreted as an affirmation or an insult, depending on the context in which the hailing occurs (where context is the effective historicity and spatiality of the sign). (1997, p. 96)

Butler’s words implicitly recognize geographical difference. The implications of being hailed a Chicana vary, depending on one’s geographic location within the United States. Each location is imbued with contingent histories and politics that inform and influence the identifying label and its meaning(s). Important to note is the person doing the hailing and his or her power, not just “the context in which the hailing occurs.” Scholars cannot ignore that placing people into categories is a homogenizing act, especially when these categories are used to allocate resources or describe assimilative trajectories (e.g., Pennsylvania State Data Center, 2010; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010a).

Place, but especially life in the borderlands, must be considered when working with generational categories and identities. Continual movement across borders, and the location of Laredo in relation to other cities, influences individual identities. The case study in this article has revealed the messy and shifting nature of generation in a particular border city. Though it has demonstrated how generation is complex in one location, generation is arguably multiple and overdetermined at any number of locations. The border means different things in Laredo, where some individuals experience the two cities as one, than it does in larger border crossings, like the more securitized San Diego-Tijuana border. While in Laredo border landscapes influence how generation can be understood, racial and socio-economic landscapes and continual seasonal migration may matter more.
in other locations, like California’s Central Valley. As such, future research on the construction of generation should be conducted in other locales, and with attention paid to the complexity of migration—be it circular, internal, forced, or seasonal—to understand better the role of geographic place in conceptualization and practices of generation.

While I do not advocate the disbandment of categorical classifications altogether, scholars must use these categories critically. One must be especially attentive to the politics of census categories, as scholars have demonstrated that tools like the census often work to control and render bodies legible (Aretxaga, 2003, p. 399). Categories are fields of contestation, inscribed within discourses and material practices (Brah, 2001, p. 461). As such, scholars should be aware of how categories, such as generation, can unnecessarily fix people and bodies. Though classification is inherently problematic (e.g., Aretxaga, 2003; Brah, 2001), my goal is not to erase categories or argue for more specific, quantitative measures or definitions. The question to ask is not whether or how scholars classify. Instead, I ask, what is left out when we classify immigrants the way that the majority of literature reviewed does? Can problematizing generation by paying attention to what is left out, for example border geographies, change our analysis? We need to rethink why we classify—beyond the categories’ meanings to how those whom we classify experience, live, and understand these categories. For although categories are sometimes understood as fixed, they are also tools and processes of selecting, ordering, inclusion, exclusion, and of “positioning and making hierarchies” (Staunæs, 2003, p. 104). If categories are to be more than means of “ordering” people, we must recognize them as processes whose meanings can vary for individuals in their daily lives. In this way, I propose that scholars rethink how and why we classify immigrant generation through the lens of immigrant experiences in particular places. As the lives of participants in Laredo reveal, there is no simple answer for what generational category they should occupy. They can belong to many, all, or no current definition depending on how generation is conceptualized. Further research is required into how Latinos themselves understand their migration and generation to re-conceptualize the category from their embedded, embodied experiences.

Given the differences between geographic places, it is problematic to compare individuals seemingly of the same generation who live in different areas of the United States or elsewhere. Ellis and Almgren (2009) argue that in understanding second-generation integration in the United States, local contexts are as important as national contexts and that local, place-based processes affect assimilative paths in different ways. I build on their claim by stating that when we study immigrant “generations,” we must consider the local context. Specifically, examining generation
at this border location reveals that generation cannot be understood as contingent and complex based only on age of arrival, or when dealing with immigration of the second generation to their parents’ home country, as some scholars have argued (e.g., King & Christou, 2010; Oropesa and Landale, 1997; Rumbaut, 2004). Though these factors are at play along the border, the effects of geographic place and transnational practices are missing. The characteristics of life along the border, continual cross-border movement, and proximity to a border must also be taken into consideration when discussing generation. Using decimal generation categories (i.e., Rumbaut, 2004) brings attention to the messiness of deciphering generation. What decimal generation categories do not take into account is place. While those in Laredo whose movements do not neatly fit into existing categories may be part of a local “border generation” — individuals whose complex migration histories because of their border locations defy numerical classification — more research is required in other border cities to understand if this is merely a local or larger-scale phenomenon.

Generation is both a lived experience and an analytical tool; the discrepancies between these are evident in the context of Laredo. The lived experiences of immigrants, necessarily affected by transnational practices, histories, and geographical contexts like the border, should inform the construction of generation as a concept and analytical tool. As currently understood, generation does not map onto immigrant lives. I argue that particular lived experiences, like those of participants in Laredo, should inform how scholars use generation as a category of analysis. The reconceptualization of generation can only be accomplished through more research exploring how immigrants “live” and understand generation. The experiences of participants have demonstrated that generation is complicated because of their diverse experiences of immigration and life at the border. Their experiences illustrate that contextualized notions of the border should be taken into consideration when understanding immigrant generation and that scholars should seek to conceptualize generation through the lens of immigrants’ place-based experiences. This approach to generation can lead to richer analyses of immigrant life and assimilative patterns. Furthermore, future work should consider the effect of place on generation at other border locations, but also, the broader importance of place and geographical context for generation elsewhere. While many immigration scholars have shed light on generation and assimilation, their work raises questions about the geographic applicability of generation and whether it is as homogenous as it sometimes appears. This article represents a first step in exploring the geographic contingencies surrounding immigrant generation through a case study of generation in one border city. Opening up data to a multiplicity of meanings for generation in other
places will not only ensure that we do not erase immigrant experiences or identities, but also lead to greater understandings of these experiences themselves.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was generously supported by grants from the following entities at Dartmouth College: Department of Geography, Dean of Faculty, Dickey Center for International Understanding, and Rockefeller Center for Public Policy. The author gratefully acknowledges comments and support on this paper from Jamie Winders, Alison Mountz, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Tod Rutherford, and Richard Wright. Many thanks to Harlan Koff, co-editor for *Regions and Cohesion*, for his thoughtful comments and to the anonymous reviewers.

R. TINA CATANIA is a PhD student in Geography at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University, from where she has also obtained an MA in Geography and a Certificate of Advanced Studies in Women’s and Gender Studies. Her research interests lie at the intersections of immigration, identity, human rights, borders, and feminist theory and practice. She has conducted fieldwork in the United States in several locations—including California, Louisiana, and Texas—and in Italy—Lampedusa, Sicily, and Rome.

NOTES

1. All names and identifying details have been changed to preserve confidentiality.
2. It is almost impossible to compare statistical data between Nuevo Laredo and Laredo for many reasons: diverse methods of data collection, diverse census structures and category definitions often mean there is no equivalent between particular U.S. and Mexican data categories. With data related to income, specifically, I have used the only data available while recognizing that it may not reflect the entirety of the economic picture, as census data often does not adequately capture informal economies, undocumented immigrants, and other marginalized populations (e.g., Anderson & Fienberg, 2001).
3. *n.b.* Proximity to the border can influence migratory decisions. For example, moving between the Laredos requires traveling a few miles while moving between California and Mexico City involves traversing over a thousand.
4. For more on how circular migration literature has problematized this idea, see for example, Massey, Durand and Malone (2002); Hönekopp and Mattila (2008); Vadean and Piracha (2010).
5. Translation: more shut inside.
6. Translation: Just crossing the bridge, just crossing to the other side, the environment/lifestyle is different than in the United States.
7. Though Juarez is popularly known as the border city with high rates of femicide and violence against women (e.g., Staudt, 2008; Wright, 2001, 2004), according to available data (which is difficult to obtain and not necessarily representative), Nuevo Laredo has a similar percentage of femicide rates. The total number of femicides in Juarez, however, remains higher than Nuevo Laredo or the combined Tamaulipas’ numbers (Albuquerque & Vemala, 2008). For more on violence in Laredo/Nuevo Laredo and border enforcement as violence, see Garza (2009), Payan (2006), and Nevins (2005).

8. As Isabela was the only individual directly asked to identify her generation, it becomes the scope of future research to explore potential patterns of disidentification with the question, category, and if generation is a concept primarily of interest to social scientists.

REFERENCES

Abrego, L. J. (2006). I can’t go to college because I don’t have papers: Incorporation patterns of Latino undocumented youth. *Latino Studies, 4*, 212–231.


Jones-Correa, M. (2002). The study of transnationalism among the children of immigrants: Where we are and where we should be headed. In P. Levitt and M. C. Waters (Eds.), The changing face of home: The transnational lives of the second generation (pp. 221–241). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.


Richardson, C. (1999). *Batos, bolillos, pochos, and pelados: Class and culture on the south Texas border.* Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.


Repenser les catégories générationnelles à la frontière concernant les immigrants latinos

R. Tina Catania

Résumé: Dans les études portant sur l’immigration, la génération est généralement considérée comme un système rigide statique. Cependant, nous soutenons que la génération est une construction fluide et doit être comprise comme une initiative locale. Partant d’un travail de terrain réalisé auprès des Latino / le long de la frontière entre le Texas et le Mexique, je cherche à explorer les courants qui traversent cette génération lésée. Beaucoup à Laredo, au Texas voient cette frontière comme un facteur favorisant ou empêchant les déplacements; ces perceptions in-
fluent sur la construction des catégories générationnelles. La migration transfrontalière, les conceptualisations de l’espace et de l’immigration, et les mariages générationnels mixtes façonnent les expériences vécues par les migrants, qui à leur tour, influent sur les concepts de génération. Nous concluons en proposant des idées et invitant à la discussion sur la façon dont le concept de génération peut être retravaillé pour s’étendre au-delà des catégories franches et être re-conceptualisé du point de vue des immigrés.

Mots-clés: États-Unis, génération, identité, immigration, Latino, lieu, Mexique

Repensando las categorías generacionales en la frontera para los inmigrantes latinos

R. Tina Catania

Resumen: Usualmente los estudios sobre inmigración consideran la generación cómo un sistema categórico estático. Este artículo argumenta que es una construcción fluida que debe ser comprendida como una iniciativa local. Mediante un trabajo de campo realizado a latinos/as en la frontera entre Texas y México, el artículo explora qué corrientes actuales de generaciones están excluidas. Muchos en Laredo (Texas) ven esa frontera como un factor que permite o impide los desplazamientos, percepciones que influyen en las construcciones de categorías generacionales. Los viajes transfronterizos, las conceptualizaciones del lugar y de la inmigración y las uniones generacionales mixtas, dibujan las experiencias de los inmigrantes, lo que a su vez, influye en los conceptos de las generaciones. El autor concluye abriendo un espacio de discusión sobre la manera de cómo se debe de re-trabajar el concepto de generación para sobrepasar las categorías terminantes y para ser re-conceptualizadas desde la perspectiva de los inmigrantes.

Palabras claves: frontera Estados Unidos–Méjico, generación, identidad, inmigración, latinos, lugar