

Local Television News and Undocumented Migration: a historical and moral geography perspective of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands

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Abstract: This article expands the conceptual framework of moral geography to analyze local television news portrayals of undocumented migrants and migration during the 1970s and 1980s in the Arizona-Sonora section of the 2000-mile long U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Using archival research and qualitative content analysis as methodologies, findings revealed the presence of three dominant themes in news reports related to undocumented immigration: 1) reporters portrayed undocumented migrants in stereotypical and negative ways, using terms such as “poor” and “criminal”; 2) reporters discussed the issue of undocumented migration through a nativist and anti-immigrant lenses; 3) reporters highlighted the presence of community activists involved in helping undocumented migrants. The distinct themes identified provide evidence of competing moral geographies that were being constructed on the ground and on-screen.

Keywords: Borders; Migrants; Moral Geography; Television Journalism; US-Mexico Border.

Resumo: Este artigo estende o quadro conceitual da geografia moral para analisar reportagens locais sobre imigrantes não documentados e a imigração durante as décadas de 1970 e 1980 na faixa Arizona-Sonora, de 2.000 milhas, na fronteira dos EUA com o México. Utilizando pesquisa arquivística e análise de conteúdo qualitativa como metodologias, os resultados revelaram a presença de três temas dominantes nos noticiários relacionados à imigração indocumentada: 1) repórteres retrataram imigrantes não documentados de maneira estereotipada e negativa, usando termos como “pobre” e “criminoso”; 2) os repórteres discutiram a questão da imigração indocumentada com lentes nativistas e anti-imigrantes; 3) repórteres destacaram a presença de ativistas comunitários em ações de ajuda a imigrantes sem documentos. Os temas identificados evidenciam geografias morais concorrentes sendo construídas no chão e na tela.

Palavras-chave: Fronteiras; Imigrantes; Geografia Moral; Jornalismo de TV; Fronteira Estados Unidos-México.

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Introduction

On October 29, 1977, Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard David Duke paid a visit to Tucson, Arizona. In an interview televised on the local CBS affiliate KOLD-TV, Duke announced the Klan's plans to patrol the American side of the U.S.-Mexico border. Lee Joslyn reported that Klansmen:

Intend to detain the illegal aliens until authorities can be notified to their whereabouts. It is believed that at least three or maybe even four dozen members will be concentrating on the state's southeastern border. And word is Douglas, Arizona, is where they plan to start (JOSLYN, 1977).

A year later on the same station, community activist Margo Cowan refuted claims that undocumented workers were taking jobs away from Americans stating:

I would challenge you to find young American Blacks, young Chicanos and heads of house holds that would work in laundries, work in fields, work in hotels, work in hospitals for a buck ninety-five an hour, or 50 or 60 hours a week (COWMAN, 1978).

Duke's and Cowan's diverging comments on local television news illuminated long-standing social and ethnic tensions along the Arizona-Sonora borderlands [1], and signaled that the issue of undocumented immigration was again becoming a growing concern for the public (FERNÁNDEZ; PEDROZA, 1981). Their statements also brought into sharp relief distinct ways members of different social and ethnic groups sought to define the region.

During the second half of the twentieth century, as television became the primary source of information, residents in border communities such as Tucson, Arizona, learned about a myriad of controversial issues, including undocumented migration, through local TV news. An investigation of how various border actors were portrayed on television can deepen understanding about areas of historical conflict such as the U.S.-Mexico borderlands where conflictive social groups have struggled over how a region is defined and who gets to define it (DAVIDSON, 2000; LOREY, 2005; MARTÍNEZ, 1988; MILLER, 1981; GONZÁLEZ DE BUSTAMANTE, 2012). Examining which and how select members of society construct meaning in a particular region can help explain the state of power dynamics, ethnic relations, and an area's moral geography, which can be defined as a contested space where ethical choices are made about "a particular people and place, and...also an 'internal logic' that belongs to a particular people and place" (OPIE, 1998, p. 242). As Taylor (2010) argues, the U.S.-Mexico borderlands was a place where "competing moral geographies" were play at the "edge of America" and Mexico's northern frontier.

Using moral geography as a conceptual framework and qualitative content analysis of TV news stories as a methodology (ALTHEIDE; SCHNEIDER, 2013; STRAUSS and CORBIN, 1998), this article focuses on news coverage about undocumented migration to examine how local television news reports helped to both shape and reflect contested moral geographies of the Arizona-Sonora borderlands in the 1970s and 1980s – the post-civil rights and Chicano movement era (NAVARRO, 1997), as well as a period of economic downturn and growing public concern about undocumented migration.

Through archival research at the Tucson location of the Arizona Historical Society, the author sought to identify consistent discourses in local television news reports about undocumented migration from 1977-1981 (ALTHEIDE; SCHNEIDER, 2013). These years represent key moments in the U.S. immigration debate, beginning first with President Jimmy Carter's 1977 request of Congress to come up with a comprehensive immigration reform plan, and the March 1981 release of a report by the Carter Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy, which included the three major elements that Carter recommended: 1. sanctions on employers who hired undocumented workers; 2. an increase in U.S. Border Patrol resources; 3. and an amnesty plan for undocumented immigrants already in the country (GRISWOLD DEL CASTILLO, 1992-1993). The article answers the following questions: 1. Who did news reporters allow to describe "the morality and logic" of the region as relates to undocumented migration?; And, 2. How did those who were given public voice describe the issue of undocumented migration and migrants? In answering these questions, the article pushes the theoretical boundaries regarding local television news journalists' role in disseminating, shaping and reflecting dominant ideologies about the U.S.-Mexico border region and those who worked, lived, and crossed the region during a specific period of time.

After providing a historical background of Tucson and the Arizona-Sonora border region during the 1970s and 1980s, the article explains why moral geography provides a useful construct and concept for this subject. It then turns to analysis and discussion of TV news reports.

Historiography and Geography of Tucson and Southern Arizona

An hour's drive from the United States border with Mexico, Tucson residents have grappled with issues associated with transnational migration since U.S. officials drew the international boundary, following the U.S.-Mexico War (1846-1848) and the 1853 Gadsden Purchase, which included southern Arizona. Concerns about migration

northward into the United States ebbed and flowed as social, political, and economic conditions in the region shifted. During the second half of the twentieth century, change was driven primarily by post-World War II industrialization and population booms on both sides of the border.

Tucson's and Arizona's past have been marked by two important political phenomena that have resulted in detrimental consequences for non-White residents. First, the signing of the Gadsden Purchase unleashed a tendency toward a politics of exclusion aimed at members of specific ethnic groups including peoples of Mexican-origin, Chinese and Native Americans. Anglo and White settlers who moved into the region in the mid-nineteenth century began to assert power and reduce political, economic, and educational influence and opportunities for non-Whites as part of a process Sheridan calls "institutionalized subordination" (1986, p. 4). The second major historical force that has been in place since the late nineteenth century is the public's and politicians' recurring propensity to blame immigrants for the nation's economic and social ills. In the American southwest, Mexican immigrants have been the primary target of anti-immigrant policies and sentiments (BALDERRAMA ; RODRÍGUEZ, 1995; GARCIA, 1980; GUTIÉRREZ, 1995; GRISWOLD DEL CASTILLO, 1992-1993; MARTÍNEZ, 2001). As part of public discourse, journalism provided an outlet for nativist sentiments as well as served to reinforce the policies of the White hegemony (STREITMATTER, 1999). The 1970s and 1980s provided a similar environment for neonativists to blame immigrants for the country's economic problems (GARCIA, 1980; WILCOX, 2005). In 1976, with the country in the midst of an economic recession, the issue of undocumented migration took on special significance in states such as Arizona where residents perceived to a greater extent than other people around the country that the number of undocumented people was increasing (FERNÁNDEZ ; PEDROZA, 1981).

The Power of Moral Geography and History

From politicians and activists to Border Patrol agents and undocumented migrants, all "border actors" had ideas about what the Arizona-Sonora borderlands was and ought to be. During the course of the twentieth century, the first century of mass media, newspapers, film, radio, and television played an important role in shaping and reflecting conflicting moral geographies that were debated. In the Arizona-Sonora region of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, the concept of moral geography can be thought of as a seismic zone; a place ridden with a system of fault lines with the most prominent being at the international ports of entry. Fault lines are physical as well as ideological lines that shift during key episodes (GONZÁLEZ de BUSTAMANTE, 2012;

LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1966). Some of the major “events” that have caused shifts in moral geography include the 1930s economic depression, “Operation Wetback” in 1954, and the 1970s -1980s. Recent key moments include the signing of Arizona’s Senate Bill 1070 in 2010, which required local police to ask for an individual’s proof of legal immigration status, and racist language employed by U.S. President Donald Trump who consistently has portrayed immigrants from Mexico and other parts of Latin America as part of an “invasion.”

Although anthropologists and historians have written about documented as well as undocumented migrants along the U.S.-Mexico border, they have failed to embrace the important role that mass news media played during the second half of the twentieth century in constructing and disseminating notions about the region (BALDERRAMA, 1995). John Coward (2010) provides ample evidence to show that “wild west” images of Indians as “savages” emerged in post-bellum America through the work of magazine illustrators such as Theodore Davis. Yet, despite the growing significance of mass media on society after the Second World War, there is little known from a historical perspective about how news media shaped identities and images of the Arizona-Sonora region of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Fernández and Pedroza provided some of the early studies in this area (1981).

This study concentrates on KOLD-TV, the CBS affiliate in this market, because this station’s news reports are housed and accessible to the public at the Arizona Historical Society (AHS) library in Tucson. Using KOLD-TV’s handwritten master videotape logs, which listed each report on the tape, the author identified more than 50 videotapes that included news reports about immigration. From the 50 videotapes, 38 news reports were selected for analysis based on their length and their focus on undocumented immigration. Twelve shorter immigration related stories were eliminated from the study to include only those that were at least one minute in length. Longer reports allowed reporters to better develop the story and potentially include more sources, and therefore “packages” are more suitable for analysis. Reports were coded for the following attributes: 1. Surname of reporters; 2. Language and terminology used to describe undocumented immigration and migrants; 3. Sources that were included/excluded; and 4. Story focus. Coding of attributes enabled dominant themes to emerge.

The U.S.-Mexico border has provided fertile ground for scholars interested in contemporary media’s constructions of images of Latinos (GUTIÉRREZ, 1995; GUTIÉRREZ ; SCHEMENT, 1977; IGLESIAS, 1999). Through entertainment as well as news media, the region developed a reputation and image of being a place of danger, vice and violence, none of which was socially desirable or helpful in terms

of building the area's moral character (BOWMAN, 2005). Domínguez-Ruvalcaba and Corona analyzed media representations of violence at the beginning of the twenty-first century along the U.S.-Mexico border from gendered perspective (2010). This article expands upon the literature about the Arizona-Sonora segment of the U.S.-Mexico border, which, in general, concentrates on the California-Baja California and Texas-Chihuahua regions. The article builds upon the work of scholars such as (CAMBRIDGE, 2005; CHAVEZ, 2008; SANTA ANA, 2002; SUBERVI 2008) whose focus has been more contemporary connections among immigration, television, and public opinion.

Negative Stereotyping of Undocumented Immigrants

In the 1970s and early 1980s, television, magazines, newspapers and even casual conversations fomented similar negative stereotypes to describe Mexican immigrants who entered the country “without papers” (MARÍN, 1997). Tucson TV journalists followed this trend and stereotyped undocumented immigrants in two ways. First, reporters frequently portrayed Mexican nationals as “criminals” who circumvented the law to cross the U.S.-Mexico border, and intended to “steal jobs from American workers.” In visual terms, these “job stealers” were seen as poor and male.

Beyond blaming undocumented immigrants for the country's economic problems, reporters often labeled them as “social service sappers” by including statements (soundbites) that aired without critique or opposition. “Social service sappers” were characterized in one-dimensional ways as uneducated men and women on welfare who did little more than reproduce children. These stereotypes contradicted the research of the time that demonstrated undocumented immigrants did not usurp American jobs and immigrants contributed more to the economy than they received (SIERRA, 1987). The following news reports illustrate how journalists constructed negative stereotypes about undocumented people through images and text.

“Illegal Aliens” and Carter's Amnesty Plan [2]

On August 11, 1977, KOLD-TV aired a news report by Martha Vásquez on Carter's proposed immigration reform plan. Vásquez's report focused on two families; one that would be granted amnesty under the plan, and another that would not, because its members arrived in the United States after 1970. Standing in front of a United States seal at an unidentified location, Vásquez states that “Carter's Illegal Alien Amnesty Proposal means different things to different people.” Through a translator, Vásquez

interviewed Mrs. Hernández, who arrived in the United States in 1968. Vásquez pointed out that Mrs. Hernández, the mother of two children, “is currently unmarried and receiving public assistance.” According to Vásquez, “because she [Mrs. Hernández] can neither read nor write, she did not know how it [the plan] affects her.” Despite the woman’s lack of knowledge about the proposal, Vásquez elicited an opinion from Mrs. Hernández, who stated through an interpreter, “She’s very happy about the program because the children will be given an opportunity to stay here and go to school and receive the benefits that she didn’t receive in Mexico” (1977).

The interview with Mrs. Hernández occurred in a small living room. She, her two young children, Vásquez, and the interpreter all sat on a couch. Shots in the report included close-ups of the children, such as one shot at the end of the report, which focused on the young boy’s face looking down at the floor.

The second interview subjects in the report – a woman and man – asked that their names be withheld because they did not fall into the category of residents who would be granted amnesty under the Carter plan because they arrived in the United States after 1970. The interview was shot in silhouette to protect the identities of the couple, who presumably could face deportation if immigration officials saw them in a news report. Vásquez makes no reference to the economic situation or job status of either the man or woman, or whether they collected government assistance. In the report, the unidentified woman called the Carter plan unfair because she and her husband had established roots in the United States. Vásquez summarized her story by saying, “These are only two of thousands of families who find themselves in the same situation, all interested in remaining in the land of opportunity, that to them represents a better life” (1977).

Although this report demonstrated a departure from stories that included U.S. Border Patrol agents as the only on-camera source, stereotypical language and images surfaced in Vásquez’s report. First, viewers learned little about Mrs. Hernández and her family, except that she was illiterate, unmarried with two children, and living off government subsidies. This superficial and negative depiction of the Hernández family coincides with the stereotypical image of undocumented immigrants as a drain on social services. Second, the reason behind not identifying the second family might have been for the couple’s protection, but the silhouetted shot resulted in creating a negative image of the two because it focused on their undocumented status. In this case, the couple circumvented the law to get into the United States, and the silhouetted interview served to further the image of Mexican migrants as “criminals.”

Out of the 38 television news stories analyzed, Vásquez’s October 1977 report

appears to be the only report filed by a Latino/a journalist. Fernández and Pedroza found that Spanish-surnamed reporters authored less than twenty percent of the 949 articles they analyzed (FERNÁNDEZ; PEDROZA, 1981). Like most newspapers during the 1970s, few ethnic minorities worked in television newsrooms. Increasing the number of Spanish-speakers on a newsroom staff would possibly result in a greater diversity in opinions in a given newscast. Although a Spanish surname does not guarantee fluency in Spanish. In Vásquez's case, she used an interpreter to conduct interviews with Spanish speakers.

Aliens Folo Pkg

On July 10, 1981, Dan Feller filed a report about a tragedy involving a “Mexican man who died after trekking 30 miles across the desert. His 12 companions barely survived.” Fellner's report teemed with generalized views of undocumented migrants and stereotypical explanations about the issue. As in the previous story, Fellner depicted the coyote as a mere criminal without any regard for human life, “who treat them [undocumented persons] more like commodities than people” (1981). File video of bodies of immigrants' and U.S. Border Patrol agents wearing gloves and face-masks as they searched for more bodies supplied the bulk of images for this report. The file images came from a story aired the year before about a dozen Salvadorans who died in the desert in Ajo, Arizona. Fellner continued that more than “25,000 illegal aliens pour into southern Arizona every month. Only one-third of them are caught” (1981). Fellner claimed “Border Patrol officials say there's virtually no way to stem the tide of aliens crossing the border.” U.S. Border Patrol statements and data provided the only source of information for the report (1981).

Fellner's report provided an example of the propensity of reporters to use dramatic language to describe a situation. Stating that immigrants “pour” into the country and that agents could do nothing to “stem the tide” of “aliens,” the journalist painted a stereotypical image of a “wave” of people flowing into the United States. The historical and repeated use of these metaphors to refer to immigrants dehumanized the migrant population. Beyond the use of negative metaphors, the report included information that could not be verified independently.

As in other reports, only official sources were included. Out of the 38 reports analyzed, 11 included U.S. Border Patrol spokesmen as the only on-camera source. The U.S. Border Patrol had a vested interest in reporting a surge in undocumented migration because the statements such as a “growing tide of immigrants” could and often did result in increases in resources for the agency (FERNÁNDEZ ; PEDROZA,

1981) [3].

Nativist and Anti-Immigrant Sentiments

As the economy dipped in the late 1970s, nativist and anti-immigrant sentiments increased. Television news reports illuminated nativist and anti-immigrant attitudes in Tucson. Concerns over jobs and/or the U.S. economy surfaced in 14 out of 38 of the stories included in the analysis.

David Duke/KKK Activities

Lee Joslyn's report began with archival video of a group of unnamed field workers (presumably undocumented) walking through an unnamed orchard. His opening line provided "visual justification" for nativist fears about immigrants:

The Ku Klux Klan contends that the illegal alien flow is destroying the American way of life – taking away jobs, and causing the crime rate to increase dramatically. They are demanding the United States government do everything short of strong-arm tactics to stop that flow (JOSLYN, 1977). In a soundbite, Grand Wizard David Duke stated his demands:

I want the government, first of all, to pass a national law to make it illegal for employers to hire illegal aliens. I also want the government to back and vastly increase the strength of the Border Patrol in this country (JOSLYN, 1977).

Duke was the only on-camera source in this report. While Duke talked, viewers saw file video of young and impoverished looking men being loaded up into a U.S. Border Patrol van. These particular archival images appeared in several reports between 1977 and 1981. The report concluded with file video shots of young field workers. The use of this video resulted in painting all farm workers as undocumented persons.

Aside from equating farm workers with being undocumented, Joslyn's report called attention to nativist concerns of the 1970s. His opening statement mentioned three fundamental fears; immigrants took American jobs, caused an increase in crime, and threatened the "the American way of life." Duke's demands represented a nativist and popular political solution to the problem of immigration – increased law enforcement. In addition, the use of archival footage of unnamed undocumented workers, while the reporter made accusatory statements regarding immigrants, in effect portrayed them as "job stealers," possible criminals, and threats to "American culture," even though reporters never verified whether these individuals entered the

country illegally.

The KKK's plan to "observe" the border occurred as a highly publicized human rights trial involving three undocumented migrants unfolded in Cochise County Superior Court, the legal jurisdiction that included the City of Douglas. In the summer of 1976, Mexican nationals Manuel García Loya, Bernabe Herrera Mata, and Eleazar Ruelas charged three Douglas ranchers with kidnapping and torture. The men claimed that Patrick and Thomas Hanigan and their father George tied up the migrants, branded their feet with a hot cattle iron, stripped them of their clothes, and shot at them as they ran into the desert (MARÍN, 1997). In October 1977, the Hanigans were acquitted of all criminal charges including kidnapping, assault and robbery (MARÍN, 1997). After intense public pressure from groups such as the Manzo Area Council, led by Margo Cowan and Antonio Bustamante, and a federal investigation, prosecutors brought a civil case to the court and the Hanigans faced two federal trials. In the meantime, local ranchers rallied behind the Hanigans. The first federal trial ended in a mistrial. The second trial which ended on February 24, 1981 acquitted Thomas Hanigan, while his brother was found guilty of violating interstate commerce laws. The father, George Hanigan died before the first federal trial began.

Hanigan Brothers Fund

Douglas residents established two trust funds for the Hanigan brothers. The first fund provided the brothers money to pay for legal fees, while the second helped the family pay for living expenses, including the purchase of cattle. In October of 1980, Deborah St. George reported on the status of the second fund, which grew to a substantial sum. In the report, a resident, who was referred to as Stevens, handed Mildred Hanigan (the mother of Patrick and Thomas) a bank book. A close-up of the bank book revealed a sum of \$8,800.00. St. George did not mention the men who accused the Hanigans of torture, only referring to them as "three Mexicans" (ST. GEORGE, 1980). While Mrs. Hanigan's image beamed on television, St. George stated that as the mother of the Hanigan brothers, she had received "reams of letters from other concerned citizens." In a soundbite, Mrs. Hanigan continued:

And what the people are saying, they're speaking for America and how concerned they are about what is happening to our justice system and this complete, just casting aside the citizen in favor of, (pause) uh, uh, people that we don't even know (ST. GEORGE, 1980).

Mrs. Hanigan's statements revealed her nativist and anti-immigrant attitudes. Her description of undocumented immigrants, as "people we don't even know" reduced them to an "other" and therefore, inferior status. Her words were similar to

Duke's in that they created a distance between those people who have a right and just purpose for being in the United States and those who do not.

Community Activism

The Hanigan case polarized the Douglas community (MARÍN, 1997, p. 116). While pro-Hanigan groups worked to gather financial support for the Hanigan family, community activist groups such as the Manzo Area Council rallied behind the three torture victims. During the mid-1970s, community activists made important contributions to the public debate over undocumented immigration. Activists served as interview subjects in 16 out of the 38 reports analyzed. Their presence in television newscasts allowed Tucson viewers to hear and see differing and opposing perspectives that contradicted the official and often stereotypical portrayals of undocumented immigrants.

In the 1960s, leaders of the Chicano movement tended to focus on the rights of Mexican Americans (GUTIÉRREZ, 1995, p. 180). Questions over immigration divided many Latino groups, with some favoring more open immigration policies and others supporting more restrictive laws to limit the number of immigrants. By the mid-1970s, Latino organizations began to unite, especially when it came to the rights of undocumented immigrants. They began to see undocumented workers' rights as civil rights. During the Carter administration, activists protested the plight of Mexican nationals working in the United States (SIERRA, 1987, p. 51). Beyond taking their concerns to the streets, activists increasingly added the courts to their arsenal of resistance in an effort to provoke change (GRISWOLD DEL CASTILLO, 1992-1993). News reports that included on-camera interviews with Latino activists demonstrated that in addition to the judicial system, activists began to use the media (in this case, television) to make their voices heard. In addition, these reports helped illustrate the presence of distinct moral geographies in the Arizona-Sonora borderlands.

Douglas Boycott

On October 22, 1977, Bob Cooper filed a report focusing on a boycott of Douglas businesses organized by pro-immigrant rights groups. The October 7, 1977, acquittal of the Hanigan brothers enraged many citizens and this was their way of showing it. The boycott sought to persuade federal officials to begin to investigate the Hanigan case. Visually, the report began with shots of the Mexican side of the border, near the Douglas port of entry. Young children handed out informational fliers to drivers as, Cooper stated, "a sound truck delivered a bilingual message demanding justice

and asking for support” (COOPER, 1977). Margo Cowan, Director of the Manzo Area Council stated the boycott was working, and:

The point is that there’s one section of the civil rights code that applies to people without papers, it applies to undocumented people. We want to make sure that the Justice Department in Washington knows that this is an issue that has struck very deep here in the Southwest and that that section should be applied (COOPER, 1977).

Under Cowan’s voice, viewers could hear protestors shouting in support of undocumented people. Cooper summarized his report by stating that boycotters planned to protest at inspection stations every Saturday all along the Arizona-Sonora border until the federal government acted. In June of 1979, two years after the boycott ended, federal officials announced they would bring the case to trial (MARÍN, 1997, p. 115). Called off nine days after it began, Marín argues that the boycott failed. Examining the effectiveness of the effort reaches beyond the scope of this article, but news reports that focused on the boycott increased the presence of community activists in television news.

Hanigan Case Protest

Reporters also included community activists’ voices in coverage of the Hanigan’s first civil trial in federal court. Roger Young’s news report in July of 1980 in front of the U.S. District Court in Tucson focused on protests outside the federal building. Video for the story included shots of a multi-ethnic group of people carrying picket signs that demanded justice. Young explained that “the National Coalition for the Hanigan Case is upset with the prosecution. They feel they’re not doing their job” (YOUNG, 1980).

The National Coalition for the Hanigan Case formed in November of 1977 to push for a federal investigation of the torture incident. With a line of protestors behind him, a spokesman for the coalition, who is only referred to on videotape as “Delgado” stated:

The defense attorneys have been badgering the witnesses. They’ve been harassing the witnesses, right there on the stand, in front of the court, in front of the prosecution and they’ve sat on their tails (YOUNG, 1980).

Reports that highlighted the role of community activists offered evidence to support Marín’s suggestion that activists (what Marín called “interpreters”) began to play an increasingly important role as participants in the discourse regarding immigration. In addition, in contrast to file video of unnamed undocumented persons

in news reports, stories that included activists' opinions and statements provided a space for those who sought to speak on behalf of the undocumented.

Conclusion

Despite the inclusion of community activists in news coverage about undocumented immigration, TV news reporters tended to rely on the U.S. Border Patrol for information, rarely voiced the opinions or statements of undocumented immigrants, and generally portrayed immigrants in a negative light. By emphasizing the “illegal” status of immigrants and consistently portraying migrants as destitute, reporters contributed to a dominant moral geography that deemed migrants as “dangerous” and “immoral” vis-à-vis other Tucson residents. Through uncontested sound-bites from people such as David Duke, the public heard that migrants posed a threat to the “American way of life.” These statements carried with them elements of racism and ethnic discrimination, given that most migrants who crossed into the United States from Mexico looked differently than the majority White population. At the same time Chicano activists increasingly began to juxtapose their counter moral geography of migrants as hard-working people who contributed to society.

This qualitative content analysis revealed the presence of three dominant themes in news reports related to undocumented immigration. 1) reporters portrayed undocumented migrants in stereotypical and negative ways, using terms such as “poor” and “criminal”; 2) reporters discussed the issue of undocumented migration through a nativist and anti-immigrant lens; 3) TV journalists highlighted the presence of community activists involved in helping undocumented migrants. The three themes identified provide evidence of competing moral geographies that were being constructed on the ground and on-screen.

The tendency of reporters to portray undocumented people and the issue of undocumented immigration in stereotypical terms reduced migrants to a voiceless and anonymous mass, and frequently depicted them as a drain on the economy (SANTA ANA, 2002). In addition, reporters chose to write their stories focusing on nativist and anti-immigrant attitudes without critical analyses of the statements fomented by nativists. Community activists offered contrasting opinions to those of nativists and officials. Further, activists statements about migrants tended to highlight positive aspects of undocumented residents as hardworking contributors to the economy.

Results of this research suggest that TV news coverage during the 1970s and 1980s, broadcast a dominant version of reality, one that privileged Anglo points of view, and diminished the voices of migrants, who mainly were coming from Mexico

at this period in time. Analysis of local TV television news reports reveals a complex picture of the Arizona-Sonora borderlands and its distinct moral geographies during a time of economic, social and cultural change. Beyond Arizona-Sonora and other parts of the U.S.-Mexico border, this study's approach could be useful for scholars interested in the relationship among media, history and inter-cultural conflict. In this study, reporter-generated themes about undocumented immigrants illuminated conflicting ideas about how the region should be defined, and who was allowed to define it – namely the Anglo majority, but not exclusively, given the presence of civil rights and Chicano activists. As a result of its ability to reach thousands of viewers at a time, television became a vehicle through which the moral geographies could be constructed, reflected, and contested on the air.

Notes

[1]The term borderlands is used instead of border to connote a broader concept of the border region; one that goes beyond the point of crossing from one nation to another. The word refers to both the physical as well as ideological meaning of the region.

[2]The title of the report, “Illegal Aliens and Carter’s Amnesty Plan,” represents the same title that appeared on the videotape. The slugs (titles) for all reports analyzed reflect those used by KOLD-TV staff. Quotations were added by the author.

[3] The author recognizes that an individual’s surname, especially in the borderlands, is not the only indicator of a person’s ethnicity.

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