

Migrants and Migration Policies: Insights for a Comparative Study of Media Coverage in Mexico and the United States

Magalí Muria

The Media, Immigration and U.S.-Mexican relations

The Focus on the Media

A Binational Public Sphere?

Some Facts about Migrants and Migration Policies in Mexico and the United States

Mexico

United States

The Crossroads

Migration Coverage from a Comparative Perspective

The Media, Immigration and U.S.-Mexican relations

In the extensive literature about the relations between Mexico and the United States, there have been numerous pieces of work that address the perceptions the two countries have of each other (Coatsworth and Rico, 1989, and Aguayo 1998.). These works acknowledge that images and stereotypes matter in foreign policy making, because they exert a powerful effect upon policy decisions. Although the emphasis of these works mostly focuses on the perceptions of policy-making elites, there is a recognition that images are culturally formed and that the mass media are probably the most significant source of information that influence such images.

Mexico and the United States are bound geographically and historically, but divided by unequal economic conditions, power and culture. Throughout history, the relation between the two countries has experienced periods of friction and of relative harmony, in which, according to historian John Bailey, “the mass media of both countries reflect and reinforce the strains in the bilateral relation” (Bailey in Coatsworth and Rico). Despite the widespread recognition of the importance of images, and of the mass media as conveyors and builders of such images, most of the studies that address the issue stay at a general level of understanding of the perceptions each country has of “the other”, without seeking further detail in terms of the many issues that set the pace and tensions of the bilateral relationship as a whole.

For this reason, I consider necessary to work at a micro level, and flesh out in detail the way in which both societies articulate their discourse and common knowledge about “the other” in particular items of the bilateral agenda. Along these lines, undocumented migration of Mexican nationals to the United States has been an inevitable source of conflict between the two countries for several decades, and has a strong destabilizing power in the management of the bilateral agenda. For a variety of reasons that go from the increasing number of deaths in the

border area, to the growing importance of migrant-remittances in the Mexican economy, the issue of immigration has gained visibility in both societies.

Furthermore, the way immigrants are seen, and immigration policies formulated, illustrate in interesting ways the impact of an ongoing process of global integration and interdependence that affect nations, societies and citizens. Regardless of the decisions and policies implemented by policy-making elites, if there is an issue that connects the people of the two societies in intense and explosive ways, that issue is immigration. In this matter, some scholars have even called migration as a process of “globalization from below” (Kennedy). Undocumented migration reminds political elites that there are issues out of the control of the enforcing power of the State, which occur beyond its institutional framework. Indeed, migration waves throughout the planet have produced “diasporic identities” and transnational citizenships that are forcing a redefinition of the State in terms of its exclusive sovereign license over physical territory and a reconsideration of the notion of community into a revised concept that is not necessarily territory-bound¹.

Immigration is an “intermestic” issue *par excellence*, in which the boundaries of the domestic and the international are blurred and difficult if not impossible to define. It makes us aware of the many divisions that stay between Mexico and the United States, and at the same time it reminds us constantly of the inevitable bonds between the two nations. Perhaps because of this ambivalent role, Mexican migrants in the United States have been historically seen with distrust in the two countries. Migrants have often been seen as a threat to both national identities, and the two societies traditionally have rejected them. Their hybrid character as a group, as well as the impossibility to classify them according to any national or linguistic

¹ For more detailed discussions in the discussions about the States see Papademetriou and Waller, in the issue of community see Amit, and for the construction of transnational citizenship, see Fitzgerald.

category, have led the two national identities to perceive them as threatening for the survival of the two imaginary communities.

The Focus on the Media

In the cultural representations each society articulates about migrants, as well as in the ways public opinion perceives immigration policies, the mass media has a crucial role. The role of the media in this matter can be emphasized from three non-mutually exclusive perspectives that connect the media with their cultural and institutional contexts respectively, as well as with the audiences that receive their messages. The first approach understands the role of the media as cultural actors. The second perspective focuses on their political performance in policy making, as institutional sites in which different actors of society negotiate messages and meanings. Finally, the third interpretation sees the media in terms of the narratives and discourses they produce and in the various ways people negotiate those messages individually.

According to Michael Schudson, the news can be seen as cultural actors that work as messengers that convey meanings and symbols², with a great power to legitimize and amplify issues that concern a society. This makes them crucial in the construction of political democracies, because they act as a bridge between the public and the political elites. In his view, the news are produced within a cultural system that establishes patterns of work, of assumptions and meanings: “The news, thus, is produced by people who operate, often unwittingly, within a cultural system, a reservoir of stored cultural meanings and patterns of discourse”. It is organized, says Schudson, by conventions of sourcing –who is a legitimate source or speaker or conveyor of information to a journalist (Schudson, pp.13-14).

² See Schudson, pp.18-19.

In Schudson's view, although the news does not necessarily have a measurable "effect" in political attitudes, they are embedded in the cultural system in the form of "public knowledge". Since journalists are the transmitters of this public knowledge, an analysis of immigration coverage based on Schudson's premises would lead us to focus on issues like the political views of journalists on the matter, and also their views of immigration. In terms of the connections of journalism with society, we would have to ask ourselves what are the sources used by the press when covering immigration issues? What would the editor's perception of the audience be in these matters? What would the perception of public opinion be? And finally, do journalists see themselves as detached professionals or belonging to a political group?

Timothy Cook bases his analysis of the media from an institutional perspective. He understands the media not as cultural actors but as political actors or institutions, because they are "the site of systematized principles of action across time and governing a central area of social life" (Cook). This perspective views the news as the result of recurring negotiations between sources, newsmen, and public officials. Although he recognizes that the news interpret and present local action by means of agreed-upon production values (Cook, p.87), Cook focuses on the tension that results from organizational interests and rationalities that occur within a given institutional frame. The result of this tension is publicity, understood as public policy (Cook, p.124). News, in this view, is the result of a negotiation process.

In Cook's view, understanding the rationality and organization of media institutions, as well as their connections with the political context in which they develop. Journalists, in this context, are political actors. An analysis on immigration coverage based on these premises, would lead us to focus on the internal structure of news organizations, the development and

behavior of press offices in the different branches of government, the relations of journalists to office holders and the different ways in which federal policies and practices subsidize the news.

According to William Gamson, each policy issue has a relevant public discourse or “a particular set of ideas and symbols that are used in various public forums to construct meaning about it” (Gamson, p.24). In his view, the wide variety of media messages can act as teachers of values, and provide images for interpreting the world. Communications scholars often call these images *frames*. Along these lines, Gamson argues that journalists have an important role to play as producers of discourse. They contribute with their own frames and invent their own clever catch phrases and metaphors that draw from a popular culture that they share with their audience. In this context, the understanding of media content as narratives become relevant, as well as the ways in which individuals negotiate with those narratives and incorporate them into their views of the world.

According to Gamson, we “walk around with hyperreal images from movies to television and use them to code our own experiences”(Gamson, p.125). In these processes, a condition like the proximity of issues to people’s daily lives matter in the type of resonance they have in public discourse. Thus, another guideline to understand the formation of frames in immigration issues would be to evaluate the impact of immigration policies in peoples everyday lives. Upon the premises of this type of view, an analysis of immigration coverage would lead us to ask ourselves the following questions: How are media slogans incorporated? How are arguments commonly used? What is the emphasis of the story? What are the catch phrases?

A Binational Public Sphere?

Focusing on the news may provide an encompassing interpretation of immigration policies, that in the past has been addressed separately from the perspectives of labor markets, demographic flows, economic imperatives or diplomatic negotiations. Despite the fact that these approaches offer good quantifiable indicators, they have failed to provide us with a framework to achieve a comprehensive appreciation of the incongruence, complexities and contradictions inherent in public policies on migrants and the way they have been received by public opinion on the two countries.

To have a better grasp on these issues, the Habermasian notion of the *public sphere*³ and its posterior revisions can represent a useful category of analysis to assemble a comparative study on immigration coverage in Mexico and the United States. Despite the problems and controversy of this concept, scholars agree that the notion of the public sphere continues to be a useful conceptual category to figure out the role of the media in a particular social setting. In the case of our study on immigration coverage, the concept of public sphere can become a valuable tool where the three dimensions to analyze the media we have mentioned below converge.

The public sphere can be recognized as the site in which public knowledge regarding immigrants and immigration policies is constructed, as well as the institutional location where opposing factions within government and society compete to impose their views on the issue. Also, this category can also provide us with a frame of reference to identify the construction of frames, according to which citizens from both countries represent and negotiate the image and discourses of migrants and immigration policies.

³ The public sphere is understood by Habermas as the all domain of our social life in which public opinion can be formed (p.398). A sphere mediating between state and society (Habermas, p.399).

Daniel Hallin, discusses the relevance of Habermas' idea of the public sphere, and it explains that part of its importance lays in the fact that it envisions some sense of responsibility to transcend particular interests in search of a common good, instead of a mere balance between private interests. Concurrently, he questions whether there is or should be a single, unitary, public sphere, or many different ones. Hallin considers the idea of developing a universal public sphere not only at the national but also at the global level (Hallin, 1994, pp.7-8). In his study of the Reagan-Gorvatchev summits that took place in the last years of the Cold War, Hallin argues that a summit is a truly international event that "pushes toward international integration, toward a sense of common identity that transcends the nation state" (Hallin, p.154).

The summit, says Hallin, can be seen as an "integrating event" because it pushes in certain ways in the direction of some form of global integration, with a consequent expansion of global communication flow, a symbolic constitution of a global community and a tendency to humanize the Other. At a much more limited scale than a Reagan-Gorvatchev summit, I think that focusing on the category of the public sphere from a binational perspective may lead to interesting questions regarding the development of public spheres within international regimes. Because the public sphere as understood by Hallin, entails the existence of shared values and codes, exploring the dynamics of public spheres may be a good tool to analyze such regimes, and to assess in which ways negotiations conducted at the level of the elites land into the societies that conform them.

In the case of the United States and Mexico, an interesting question would be if after NAFTA we are witnessing the emergence of a binational public sphere, or if, instead, we are increasingly experiencing the overlapping of our two different public spheres. Which public sphere prevails over which, can also be an interesting indicator of the complex relationship

between the two countries. In the case of migration, the Mexican government often appeals to universal discourses of “human rights” to define its position regarding this matter. This frame opposes to the calls for national-based values such as “border control” that is used by U.S. policy makers. It seems that here, the premises that define the two different public spheres are being contested and the resulting scenario clearly promises interesting insights.

I believe that the ways in which these two different frames are articulated and conveyed in the two national contexts does not totally correspond with the great asymmetry of power between the two countries. Despite the enormous imbalance of power in the matter, I do not believe we can necessarily expect a linear correspondence to the ways in which the two public spheres overlap. Despite the asymmetry of power in both countries, I believe that Mexico has increased its leverage overtime, introducing its frames in the United States public debate, through lobbying, diplomatic negotiations, and the celebration of summits.

In the construction and negotiation of frames, Gamson argues that it is possible to detect some discursive moments in which topical events provide an opportunity for broader, more long-term coverage and commentary. Gamson then observes that “pegs” help identify those time periods in which efforts at framing issues are specially likely to occur (Gamson, p.26). If for instance, we were to use his premises in the study of immigration coverage, we would be directed to identify particular moments in history where representation building of immigrants and immigration policies is more intense. Based on Hallin’s analysis on summits, I tentatively conclude that summits present good conditions for the construction of frames.

Some Facts about Migrants and Migration Policies in Mexico and the United States

The representation of migrants in the United States and Mexico is been subject to drastic changes in the last years. On the Mexican side, the government has shifted its traditional politics of no politics regarding Mexican-Americans into political alliances. Mexicans in the United States are now considered an attractive political market for political parties and elected officials. At the same time, their presence in the public sphere is now visible in television shows, media coverage and cultural industries, as opposed to ten years ago. In the U.S. side, there are some indications that certain public debates are slowly opening include topics as the benefits that undocumented laborers bring to the economy and even sectors that were traditionally anti-immigrant, like the labor unions, are changing their stance towards undocumented migrants. On the other hand, the Mexican-American community has also become an attractive electoral market, and Mexican culture is gradually being integrated into the mainstream of American culture and Media industries.

Mexico

In the Mexican case, the relationship between Mexico and Mexicans in the United States was mostly of distrust and despise during most of the XX Century. According to Martín Barbero, “No other Latin American country has marked a sense of nationalism as Mexico” (Barbero, p.136). Because of their hybrid cultural features, Mexican migrants where perceived as a threat to the national cultural project of post-revolutionary Mexico. Despitefully called “pochos”, Mexican migrants were often seen as traitors, who had given up their identity to incorporate to American culture. There was not much room for them in a nationalistic discourse, which, coincidentally, also involved a strong ingredient of anti-American sentiments.

Despite some earlier indications of change, it was not until the early 1990s, that with the process of negotiation and lobbying of the North American Free Trade Agreement Mexican officials saw in the Mexican-American community and a political ally and this community started gaining recognition and visibility in the Mexican public sphere. This recognition has been more visible in recent years, due to the dramatic increases of deaths among the migrants who venture in the deserts and dangerous areas in their intent to cross the border. Also, there is growing recognition of the positive impact of remittances sent by Mexican migrants in the Mexican Economy⁴. Also, more and more Mexican families have now relatives or acquaintances that have moved to the United States, making the issue more relevant in terms of proximity to Mexican public opinion (Gamson).

Between 1992 and 2000 the number of households in Mexico that received remittances from relatives in the United States went from 660 thousand to 1.25 million. In 2002, remittances contributed to reduce the current account deficit in the balance of payments by almost a third, which in terms of figures, means that in 2001, more than 8.895 million dollars were sent to Mexico from migrants in the United States (CONAPO). Mexicans who have moved their residence from Mexico to the United States with or without U.S. authorization has increased steadily since the 1960s, most dramatically during the last two decades, when it grew from roughly 200,000 a year in the 1980s to 300,000 in the 1990s (Alba). Nowadays, it is estimated that more than 9 million Mexican-born immigrants live currently in the United States, and more than half are undocumented. Yet, if we considered that migration flows have a direct effect on the numbers of Mexican-American populations, we can appreciate the demographic importance

⁴ See for instance “Crece 43% remesas de mexicanos en EU”, In *Reforma*, June 6, 2001. The article provides the estimates of the Presidency’s Office of Mexicans abroad. Overall, there has been an increasing in recent years of the money sent by Mexican migrants to their families in Mexico.

of this group. There are currently 35.3 million Mexican-Americans in the United States, which represent 13 percent of population in this country (U.S. Bureau of the Census). This number also represents around one third of the entire population of Mexico (INEGI).

Indeed, the growing numbers Mexican citizens residing in the United States have turned this group into an increasingly attractive political market. One of the first policy oriented decisions taken by the Mexican government to provide attention and recognition to Mexicans living in the United States, was the Paisano Program, which had the objective of protecting and orienting returning migrants in their trips to Mexico. Equally important was the creation in 1990 of the Program for Attention to Mexican Communities Abroad (PCME). Since its foundation, PCME plays an active role in intervening in U.S. public affairs, with the mission of advancing the interests of Mexican nationals in the United States. Also, in 1997, Congress passed an amendment to the Mexican Constitution that established the principle of “no pérdida de la nacionalidad mexicana” (right to keep the Mexican nationality). According to this law, Mexican citizens are now entitled to hold dual nationality. The passing of this law had serious implications, particularly because it contemplated the eventual possibility of voting. Indeed another issue that has been subject to open discussion is the granting of voting rights to Mexican nationals living abroad⁵.

In his presidential campaign Vicente Fox included the issue of immigration as a critical part of his agenda. In a statement that became critically resonant in the Mexican public sphere, he referred to Mexican migrants as “true heroes”, because of the difficulties that they faced in order to work in the United States and for their contribution to the national economy. In a

⁵ In 1998, Congress mandated a Commission of Specialists to evaluate the possibilities of granting voting right to Mexicans living abroad. The report, that was made available to the public, provided with an overview and assessment about the costs and implications of potential programs that would make it possible to vote for Mexicans residing beyond the national borders (See *Informe*)

campaign promise, Fox stated that migrants would be a priority in his political agenda⁶ (Campy Vera). Undeniably, Fox recognized the importance of Mexican migrants in the United States as a critical source of income for the country's economy, and a potential electoral clout. He had not been the first. Already in the late 1980s, opposition candidate to Carlos Salinas, Cuauhtemoc Cárdenas, had inaugurated the practice of campaigning in the United States, among Mexican American communities. Another campaign promise made by Fox, was to move forward making the vote possible for Mexicans living abroad. In his relation with Mexican American businessmen, he was, in fact, accused of receiving illegal campaign funds from Mexican American actors. This accusation was formulated by representatives of the oppositional Democratic Revolution Party (PRD) in the states of California and Texas⁷.

Once elected President of Mexico, Fox founded an office that would act as a branch of the office of the Presidency, directed to cultivate the relation with Mexicans abroad. This office was replaced in August 6 of 2002 by the creation of an Institute of Mexicans Abroad (Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior, IME). Interestingly, the founding head of the recently created INE, Cándido Morales, is a Mexican-American Mixteco migrant. In addition, the government of Fox created Advisory Council for IME, that incorporates leaders and representatives of the Mexican- American Community. These leaders were elected democratically, in a nationally held election that took place in Mexican Consulates' facilities. In this process, the system of consular circumscriptions played the role of "electoral districts".

⁶ In this article issued by a publication in San Antonio, Tx, Fox is criticized for budget cuts to Mexican Consular representations in the United States, which had serious consequences in the protection services provided by these instances.

⁷ The story appeared in a publication of the State of Guanajuato. See in *Correo*, " Fox Recibió ..." . The fact that foreign-based representatives of political parties are engaged in these types of debates, could be used to illustrate the expansion or overlapping of the public spheres of the two countries.

As a result of this process, one hundred representatives of the Mexican community abroad were elected to conform the Advisory Council of the IME, in addition to others that will belong to this council by invitation. This election was not transparent because it was not properly publicized (Mercado). However the concept of a national election that would be organized according to consular circumscriptions indicates interesting trends for the exercise of extra-territorial citizenship in the future.

United States

In the United States, views on immigration represent, says Leo Chavez, a “double helix of negative and positive attitudes” (Chavez, 2001p.3). On the one hand, says Chavez, immigrants are reminders of how Americans, as a people came to be. Yet, immigrants are also new comers whose difference and “otherness” do not go unquestioned. In his work about covering immigration, Chavez provides a historical overview of immigration discourses and policies, and the way they are expressed in basic visual strategies, symbols, icons and metaphors of magazine covers. Chavez finds that discourses around immigration project the anxiety of a nation that is perceived to be under threat. The “new” immigrants, says Chavez, are perceived as a threat to the “nation” that is conceived of as a singular, predominantly Euro-American, English-speaking culture (Chá vez, 1998, p.190). Other scholars, like Rita Simon, also find, through content analysis of public opinion polls and magazine articles, strong ambivalences and negative attitudes toward immigration throughout history (Simon and Alexander).

Since the 1960, approximately 200 thousand “illegal” migrants have entered the United States each year. In terms of narrative, the term illegal indicates to great extent the hostile collective attitudes and negative cultural representations of the groups of foreign citizens that

fixed their residence in U.S. territory without government authorization. Speaking of “illegal aliens” makes us think of an “invasion” and this frame corresponds to the government of United States treating the issue as “national security”. Towards the 1980s, the U.S. government was being perceived by the media to loose control over its own borders, so the resulting policies to deterring illegal immigration acted as a “symbolic representation of state authority”, says Peter Andreas, in his book about policing the U.S.-Mexico border (Andreas).

After the end of the Bracero Agreement, and the radical revision of immigration law in 1965 that established quotas favoring European immigration (Chavez), debate over immigration concluded in the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) as one of the first steps to deter undocumented immigration. IRCA incorporated employer’s sanctions for those who knowingly hired unauthorized workers. The anti-immigrant climate reached a peak later in 1994, when Californians voted Proposition 187, in favor of measures that denied undocumented migrants from basic services, among other things. One year before, in 1993 Washington had launched *Operation Blockade*- in El Paso, Texas in an effort to place physical barriers to the flow of people accross the common border. At the end of the same year, in 1993, the name was changed to *Operation Hold the Line*, and similar operations were implemented in other points of the U.S.-Mexico Border. This is the case of *Operation Gatekeeper* in San Diego. Finally, in 1996, another important piece of legislation, the IIRIRA, increased civil penalties for illegal entry, and expanded the attributions and funding of Law Enforcement Agencies in the border, like the U.S. Border Patrol. At the same time, IIRIRA prohibits federally financed legal services to bring class action suits against the INS on behalf of illegal immigrants (De Laet, p.127).

During the year of 2000, more voices finally raised to recognized migrant labor hand its contributions to the economic prosperity the United States enjoyed during the last half of the

nineties. Relevant in this context, are the declarations made by Alan Greenspan on the economic benefits of immigration. Greenspan's statement that immigration helped hold down inflationary pressures and his assertions that the U.S. economy needs and will continue to need migrants, and that they should come legally rather than illegally, had great resonance (Gamson) on both public spheres, and was taken in Mexico as a recognition that there needed to be changes in the way undocumented migration to the United States was handled (See Migration News, 2000).

Another turning point was marked by the declarations of the AFL-CIO, against employer sanctions and for a new amnesty for the undocumented, as well as a broad new program to educate immigrant workers about their rights. This statements reversed a traditional nativist position held by the AFL-CIO and marked a remarkable shift in the position of this Union, which, in 1986, had pronounced in favor of IRCA. According to political analysts, “Republicans were split between pro-business supporters of migration and social conservatives, and the burgeoning (socially conservative) Latino community may have tipped the balance” (Rosemblum). Along these lines, the interest to court Latino voters is widely known, since by 2000, 5.5 million Latinos participated in the electoral process, doubling the turn out in comparison to 1984 (De la Garza et.al). In sum, towards the end of the Clinton Administration there were some indications of change in the U.S. public sphere, directed towards a more favorable discourse regarding Mexican undocumented migrants.

The Crossroads

After the termination of the Bracero program in 1964, Mexico retrenched into a “policy of no policy”, letting migration flows to run loose and unmanaged. Mexico’s rhetoric then concentrated on the discourse about Human Rights, and the protection of Mexican nationals in

U.S. territory. The resulting paralysis in the negotiations between the two governments was aggravated by the two radically different views to approach the issue: While the U.S. government's frame of national security, saw immigration as a *problem* that needed to be *controlled*, the Mexican government's view regarded it as a *phenomena* that needed to be *administrated*. Yet, the scandals provoked by the deaths at the border, and the growing economic and demographic importance of the Mexican American population in both countries, along with other contextual factors some of which I have mentioned above, have increased the pressure for both governments to sit down in the negotiation table and tackle the issue in a bilateral fashion.

Talks to explore a change in direction began towards the end of the 1990, in some of the forums the two governments established to discuss the issue, such as the Working Group on Immigration and Consular Affairs, that was established in the framework of the Binational Commission⁸ as well as the works of binational groups of experts that had started discussions months before Vicente Fox and George Bush won their respective electoral contests⁹. A relevant step regarding migration was the signature in 1995 of the Zacatecas Agreement, that establishes standards for the "orderly and secure repatriation of migrants" and the 1996 Memorandum of Understanding on Consular Protection. Both documents emphasize the bilateral character of migration, and the need of approaching it from a corresponding bilateral approach, making it a top priority of protecting migrants human rights, regardless of their legal status (Rosemblum). Another relevant step was the completion of the Binational Study of Migration, that was carried out with the collaboration of academics from both countries (Binational Study).

⁸ The Binational Commission was founded in 1981 in order to build institutional channels of communication. The Commission works at a Cabinet level and meets annually to maintain dialogue in issues of common interest. Nowadays, it is composed by 16 working groups, that work under the coordination of Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, and the State Department.

⁹ For further detail in this process see Fernández de Castro and Rosemblum.

Three weeks after being elected, George Bush had paid a visit to President Fox in his Ranch in Guanajuato. In this meeting, it was announced that Bush had been receptive to the proposal of negotiating a possible agreement with Mexico regarding immigration and both governments started diplomatic talks in mid 2001. By April 2001, in the first negotiation's meeting, Mexico imposed its five priorities in the agenda, or what Mexican Foreign Minister Jorge Castañeda called "the whole enchilada" and other members of the Mexican negotiation team preferred to name "the grand bargain" (Papademetriou, 2002, pp.1-3): earned regularization that would create opportunities for undocumented population to move to the status of "lawful permanent resident", a temporary worker program for new Mexican workers, rooted in the recognition of U.S. labor market's demand for such workers, and finally, border management and security arrangements, that would represent an extension of the Smart Borders Agreement that was signed with Canada.

During an official visit President Fox made to President Bush in September 5, 2001, the two presidents issued a joint communiqué in which they confirmed "their commitment to seek realistic and innovative approaches regarding the issue of immigration with the purpose that migration takes place in a framework of security, order, respect to international law and dignity". Their statement made reference to the

Efforts to seek correspondence between the needs and interests of the workers and the employers, as well as to address social and economic requirements in both countries, respect human dignity of all migrants regardless their legal status and acknowledge their contributions to the economic development of both societies, as well as to emphasize shared responsibility so that migration takes place through secure and legal channels" (U.S. Embassy).

In this summit, both governments seemed to finally take steps to put an end of "the policy of no policy" to a negotiated response to perhaps one of the most difficult and explosive issues of the bilateral agenda. Important in terms of the production of discourse, was the acknowledgment

on the U.S. side of the contributions undocumented migrants have made to economic development, which provides a radically different cultural representation of the negative image often implied by the invasive “illegal alien”. According to Marc Roseblum, Mexico succeeded at this point in “changing the terms of the policy-making debate, forcing U.S.-policy makers to recognize that immigration policy is not made in a vacuum, and that its effects are not only felt within the United States” (Roseblum)¹⁰. During his visit to Washington, in an interview that Fox sustained with 24 legislature leaders, including the leaders of the two Chambers, Senator Jeff Sessions, from Alabama, even discussed the phrasing of the contents of the agreement. His intervention went along the lines that the word “amnesty” would not be easy to sell politically to U.S. public opinion, and he suggested to use the word “earned adjustment” (Fernández de Castro, p.126).

According to some scholars, the terrorist attacks of September 11 seriously reversed the negotiations that may have led to an agreement in migration between Mexico and the United States. Washington re-focused its priorities upon “internal security” (Fernández de Castro) and put the expectations on a migration agreement on the back burner. In this context, the government of Fox has been placed under attack for “openly cooperating with the US anti-terrorist campaign through strengthened border control, greater U.S. intelligence presence, and increased information sharing on visa applications” (Alba, p.5). As Mexican scholar Francisco Alba puts it, “the media interpreted the Smart Border Agreements signed by the Fox administration in March 2002 as a gratuitous concession to the United States” (Alba, p.5).

Post-September 11 negotiations between the two governments continue, although the priorities have changed on the American side. According to some analysts, as the electoral

¹⁰ This view illustrates my thesis that the great asymmetries in power between Mexico and the United States, do not linearly connect to the relation between the two public spheres.

calendar moves forward, the possibilities of buying “the whole enchilada” are less and less viable. However, a few days before the annual meeting of the Binational Commission, the new U.S. Ambassador in Mexico City, Antonio Garza, declared to the national media that the migratory agenda “continues to be important for both nations and confirmed the interest of his country in seeking a solution to this issue” (Ruiz). In the recent meetings of the Binational Commission that took place on November 26, 27 and 28, 2002, George W. Bush asked Mexico in a videotaped message to be “patient” in the solution of migratory problems, at the time that Fox urged him to return to negotiations “in order to reach real agreements” (El Informador).

The press has not been cheerful in the post-September 11 period. As the relationship between Bush and Fox visibly cooled, the great expectation created by campaign promises is now firing back. In terms of narrative, some newspapers denounced a defeat in the Binational Summit. One of the headlines “U.S. imposes its agenda in the Binational” (Reforma), denotes resentment towards the fact that nothing concrete regarding immigration came out from the meeting, but instead, placed more importance on security related issues. However, during the visit to Mexico City, Colin Powell made repeated statements that the migratory issue is still in the agenda of the White House. The appeal to patience was also presented in the United States, “Mexico Agrees to Be Patient in Talks” (Los Angeles Times).

Important in regards to security discourse was the headline of Associated Press, “Mexican Migrants pose no threat”, focusing on a part of the President’s inaugural speech where he pointed that Mexicans in the United States pose no terror threat, and calling to give a legal status to 4 million undocumented Mexicans living north the border (Associated Press). Powell, the story said, acknowledged Fox's impatience with the slow progress of negotiations regarding migration and promised, "to work as hard and as fast as we can." (AP).

Other stories in the United States were not so friendly or focused on conciliation: “Mexico wants to strike Migration Deal on U.S.”, said Reuters’ headline. In another story by AP, the reporter quoted an expert in migration studies that attributed Mexico’s impatience to Fox’s inability to build consensus at home: “Steven Camarota, director of research for the Center of Migration Studies, says Fox has had no luck getting his domestic initiatives approved by the Mexican Congress and sees an immigration agreement with his northern neighbor as his best hope for a political breakthrough”. (AP, November 25). According to the Washington Post, “Powell's trip here, like a one-day visit to Canada two weeks ago, was designed largely to mend fences with a neighbor that has felt ignored since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Many Mexicans, like many Canadians, believe that Washington has lost interest in bilateral relations as it focuses on fighting terrorism.” (Washington Post). Still, public support for Fox’s approaches to the United States is visibly eroding. As the same story says

Mexicans are increasingly disappointed that warm ties between Bush and Fox have yielded few concrete results, especially on changes to U.S. immigration policy, which is Mexico's number one foreign policy priority. Despite heightened security in the past year, Mexican immigrants continue to flow illegally into the United States and deaths in remote desert border areas have increased sharply (Washington Post)

It is worth mentioning that during the recent summit of Mexico City, Mexican diplomats in the United States overtly pushed to influence public debate in favor of returning to the discussion of an agreement. In an article he signed in The Baltimore Sun, Mexican Ambassador in Washington, Juan José Bremer, urged the U.S. government to “give a concrete meaning and content” to the binational alliance by re-launching the negotiations regarding migration” (Reforma). Along with the Ambassador, the Mexican Consuls in Chicago, Miami and San Francisco, published similar articles in local newspapers.

Migration Coverage from a Comparative Perspective

The manner in which the issue of migration is addressed, represented and discussed in the public debates of Mexico and the United States, need to be further explored in a comparative perspective. It is also important to analyze the different ways in which these two debates meet, cross and overlap. In the first section of this paper, I have addressed the multi-directional relationship of the media with the culture, institutional framework and society in which they are embedded. This multi-directionality allows us to project a great number of interrogations with regards the various roles of the news as cultural, political and discourse-producing actors. As bridges between government and people, they are useful indicators to understand how public policies on migration are formulated and received.

I have provided here an overview of a period in history when it may be relevant to search the connections between the two public spheres. Indeed, the negotiations toward a possible agreement on migration may lead to new bilateral practices in the relation between Mexico and the United States, and may set some new standards in how the Other is perceived at home. Even if there is no agreement, if this process progresses overtime, it may have implications for the ways in which the issue of migration is seen, represented and addressed in the two countries.

According to Dan Hallin, summits are moments in history which, regardless the undeniable national character of the media and the public sphere, act as integrating events that push in certain ways to the direction of some form of global interaction (Hallin, p.154). They also allow us to see politics as a theatre and a producer of narratives. I am interested to find out if summits between the United States and Mexico produce some kind of integration, common goals, standards and values in regards the groups of population that connect the two societies. How is the connection, if there is such, between the discourses and narratives produced in the top

level negotiations and summits, with the frames that public opinion share in each country? In which moments and under which circumstances are these encounters bound to have a relevant impact in the formation of interpretative frames on undocumented migration? What is the role of the media, as creators of public knowledge, in this process?

According to Michael Schudson, the media, as cultural actors, have great power to legitimize and amplify issues that concern a society. They in a sense, perform as bridges between the governing elite and the people. My question would be, in the process I've addressed above, how is it that meanings and symbols about migration are conveyed by the media of the two countries? How is this observed during the meetings at a cabinet level or presidential summits? What message do the media convey, the elite's or the people's? How is it that these two interact?

Going back to the guidelines and premises on Schudson's work, I am interested to see which are the sources that are more present in immigration stories, with and without the occurrence of a summit. When are public officials the prevailing sources? When does attention re-direct to other non-governmental sources, like anti-immigrant or civil rights organizations? What are the journalists' from the two countries' views on migration? Are they personally connected to the issue? In the Mexican case: how closely are they personally exposed to migration? In the United States: Are they migrants themselves? What are their views of the Other? How do newspapers editors perceive public opinion?

The media, says Cook, can also be seen as institutions where different rationalities converge, and where the connections between sources, newsmen, and public officials occur. In this case, I am interested to see the media as institutional sites where the different actors within government and society negotiate and impose their views on migrants and migration policies. What is the logic behind the visibility in the media, of the different factions that contend

in the migration debate? How is the issue used as an electoral bargain? Do the media push political agendas? Which? What is the role of the press offices of public institutions like Embassies, Departments of State and Law Enforcement Agencies? Is there some kind of coordination in each country between these different press offices? What is the role of joint-communicés? Do media institutional arrangements and the structure of the two communications systems influence coverage on immigration? What is the organizational logic behind this?

According to Gamson, individuals use the images from movies and television to code our own experiences. My question would be, what ideas and symbols are used to frame the migration debate? Leo Chavez, for instance, elaborates on the use of the Statue of Liberty and other resources like the flag, the borders, water-flood imagery and so on in the construction of frames in the U.S. side. Which imagery is used in Mexico? What are the in-depth connotations of headlines like “U.S. Imposes its agenda in the Binational”? Which are the ways in which these ideas and symbols are received and negotiated by public opinion? And on a cross-national basis: To which extent the narratives produced in each of the two societies cross and overlap? How can we explain the differences in coverage intensity in the two countries? In the case of the recent binational summit, what are the implications of emphasizing the stories on the terror threat or no terror threat posed by migrants, or on whether Mexico “strikes” an agreement upon the United States? In Mexico, what is the symbolic meaning of the word “patience”?

Practices are inherently linked to cultures. Gamson argues that every policy issue has a culture, an ongoing discourse that changes over time, providing interpretation and meaning for relevant events. As both U.S. and Mexican societies are increasingly exposed to the greater visibility of Mexican-American culture, the economic effect on migrant labor and the growing electoral power of this group in both scenes, the cultural representations and discourses

constructed around migrants and migration policy is bound to change. If the intensity, direction and pace of this change is not for us to determine, I believe that we can still make interesting hypothesis and inquiries, regarding the features and possible directions these shift may follow at a micro level. In this paper, I have tried to provide a broad picture that opens up many windows of opportunity to study immigration coverage in Mexico and the United States. Needles to say that this idea is still at a very early stage and that future works will need to re-address the issue on a more focused way, and eventually select one of those windows for a more through study.

Bibliography

- Aguayo, Sergio, *Myths and Misperceptions . Changing U.S. Elite Visions of Mexico*, Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies-El Colegio de México, 1998.
- Alba, Francisco, “Mexico, a Crucial Crossroads”, *Migration Information Sources*, Migration Policy Institute, July, 2002.
- Amit, Vered, *Realizing Community. Concepts, and Sentiments*, Routledge, 2002.
- Andreas, Peter, *Border Games. Policing the U.S.-Mexico Divide*, Cornell University Press, 2000.
- Barbero, Jesús, Latin America: Cultures in the Communication Media, *Journal of Communication*, 43 (1993).
- Estudio Binacional de Migración, Comisión Binacional México-Estados Unidos, 1997.
- Chavez, Leo, *Covering Immigration. Popular Images and the Politics of the Nation*, University of California Press, 2001.
-*Shadowed Lives. Undocumented Migrants in American Society*, Harcourt Brace, 1998.
- Coatsworth, John, and Carlos Rico, *Images of Mexico in the United States*, Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, UCSD, 1989.
- Cook, Timothy, *Governing with News*, The University of Chicago, 1998.
- De Laet, Debra, *U.S. Immigration Policy in an Age of Rights*, Praeger, 2000.
- De la Garza, Rodolfo, (et.al), *Latino Voter Mobilization in 2000*, The Tomás Rivera Center, 2000.
- Fernández de Castro, Rafael, “La migración sobre la mesa de negociación”, in *Cambio y Continuidad en la Política Exterior de México*, Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México, 2002.
- Fitzgerald, David, *Negotiation extra-territorial citizenship: Mexican migration and the transnational politics of community*, Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, UCSD, 2000.
- Gamson, William, *Talking Politics*, Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Habermas, Jurgen The Public Sphere, in *Jurgen Habermas on Society and Politics: A reader*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1989.
- Kennedy, Paul, and Victor Roudemetof (eds), *Communities across Borders. New Immigrants and Transnational Cultures*, Routledge, 2002.

Mercado, Antonieta, "Mexicanos en el Exterior: Consejo consultivo por invitación" in *La Opinión*, December 1st, 2002.

Millán, Daniel, "Impone EU su agenda en la Binacional", *Reforma*, November 27, 2002.

Mohammed, Arshad, "Mexico Wants to Strike Migration Deal with U.S.", *Reuters*, November 26, 2002.

Papademetriou, Demetrios and Deborah Waller Meyers (eds), *Caught in the Middle. Border Communities in an Era of Globalization*, Carnegie Endowment for Peace, 2001.

Roseblum, Marc, "Moving Beyond the Policy of No Policy: Emigration from Mexico and Central America", U.S. Mexican Studies Center, *Draft*.

Ruiz, Sara, "Confirma Tony Garza agenda migratoria", *Reforma*, November 23, 2002.

Simon Rita, and Susan Alexander, *The Ambivalent Welcome*, Praeger, 1993.

Schudson, Michael, *The Power of News*, Harvard University Press, 1995.

Press Coverage

Associated Press, "Fox: Mexican Migrants Pose No Threat", November 26, 2002.

..."Powel: Mexican Officials to Meet", November 25, 2002.

"Fox Says It's Time to Reopen Talks on Immigration Concerns Senior U.S. Delegation Gives Mexico No Signal of Action Soon", *The Washington Post*, November 27, 2002.

"Impulsan diplomáticos acuerdo migratorio", *Reforma*, December 2, 2002.

"Mexico y EE.UU. retoman el tema de migración", *El Informador*, November 27, 2002.

"Mexico Agree to Be Patient in Talks", *Los Angeles Times*, November 28, 2002

WebSites

Bacon, David, "The AFL-CIO calls for a new immigration policy", *Ncmonline*, February 21, 2000, New California Media Online, <http://www.ncmonline.com/commentary/2000-02-25/afl.html>

Campa y Vera, "Los Héroes de Fox, abandonados a su suerte", in *Nueva Opinión*, San Antonio TX, Enero, 2002, <http://www.nuevaopinion.com/Reportaje/Heroes/heroes.htm>

Consejo Nacional de Población, *La Emigración hacia Estados Unidos*, Press Release, http://www.conapo.gob.mx/prensa/carpeta2002_15.htm.

“Fox Recibió fondos de migrantes para campaña”, *Correo*, <http://www.correo-gto.com.mx/2002/agosto/110802/elpais1.html>

Greenspan, Alan, Testimony before the Senate Banking Committee, February 2000, <http://www.sistersonline.org/Justice/Immigrants/index.cfm?Dept=65>

Informe Final de la Comisión de Especialistas que Estudia las Modalidades del Voto de los Mexicanos en el Extranjero, *Instituto Federal Electoral*, <http://www.ife.org.mx/>

“Mexico:Guest workers?”, *Migration News*, November 2000, v.7, n.11. http://migration.ucdavis.edu/mn/archive_mn/nov_2000-03mn.html

Papademetriou, Demetrios, “Converging Realities of the U.S.-Mexico Relationship”, *Migration Information Source*, Migration Policy Institute, July 1, 2002.

Programa para la Atención de Comunidades Mexicanas en el Extranjero, *Datos Estadísticos de los Mexicanos en Estados Unidos*, http://www.gob.mx/wb2/egobierno/egob_Programa_de_Comunidades_Mexicanas_en_el_Exter

United States Embassy in Bolivia, *Vocero Comercial*, Julio-Septiembre 2001, v. 1. n.3. <http://bolivia.usembassy.gov/Publish/vocero/julysept2001.pdf>