
BOOK REVIEW

Susan Bibler Coutin*University of California, Irvine****Border Brokers: Children of Mexican Immigrants
Navigating U.S. Society, Laws, and Politics***

Christina M. Getrich (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2019)

In *Border Brokers*, Christina Getrich analyzes the effects of US immigration policies on the children of immigrants from Mexico. Many of these children are US citizens who ought not to face the impacts of immigration enforcement. Yet not only do these young people face harassment by immigration officials and fear for their relatives, in addition, they often take on responsibilities for navigating the borders that shape their families' lives. Moreover, these impacts are entrenched and long standing. Getrich's research began in 2005, long before the current intensification of border enforcement, and continues through 2014, when executive actions that promised a temporary relief had created a more hopeful outlook for these families. In the time since she concluded her project, fear, racialization, uncertainty, separation, and legal burdens have likely grown even more. Her valuable contribution to the literature on immigrant families troubles easy distinctions between legality and illegality, demonstrating intergenerational effects of legal violence. Yet, *Border Brokers* is not primarily an account of suffering. Getrich documents also the resilience shown by youth, the long-term mobilizing effects of participating in the 2006 marches for immigrant rights, and the many ways that young people play crucial roles not only within their families but also in community advocacy more broadly.

Border Brokers presents three theoretical interventions. First, Getrich engages with scholarship on the incorporation of second generation immigrants by stressing the "the deep imprint of the state" on her research participants' lives. Thus, instead of seeing the state primarily as part of the context of reception faced by new immigrants, she highlights the ways that state policies shape young people's long-term strategies, such as submitting family visa petitions for their parents when they turn twenty-one. Second, she emphasizes the illegality is not uniform. Location matters, as in border communities the children of Mexican immigrants may be racialized as "illegal," regardless of their citizenship status. Generation also matters, since these young people grew up in the hostile climate associated with enforcement initiatives such as

“Operation Gatekeeper,” which forced border crossers into deadly terrain. Third, instead of seeing these young people as being “caught between two worlds” (p. 23, internal citation removed), Getrich strives to present a more optimistic account of second generation immigrants. She stresses that having access to both the United States and their parents’ country of birth gives them the opportunity to straddle each, enriching their own lives and supporting their families. Getrich terms such work “brokering.”

Getrich’s analysis of brokering is based on a longitudinal research among Mexican immigrant families living in San Diego. From 2005-2006, she interviewed 54 young adults who whose parents were from Mexico, and in 2014, she conducted follow-up interviews with 13 of her original participants. She kept in touch with many interviewees during the intervening years, both in person and over social media. She recruited study participants through a nonprofit that featured a college-preparatory program for teenagers, and she conducted extensive fieldwork, participating in the nonprofit’s activities, socializing with study participants, and meeting their families. Appendices detail both the research process and participant characteristics.

Getrich’s long-term and in-depth connections to her research participants allow her to produce a rich account of their lives, challenges, and achievements. She puts this account in perspective through a historical chapter that helps to denaturalize current realities by pointing out that there was almost no undocumented immigration prior to 1965. This chapter also presents the stunning statistic that from 2005 to 2013, 1,582,711 children in mixed status families were impacted by the deportation of a family member. Clearly, the phenomenon that Getrich addresses through her research is widespread. A key contribution of her analysis is that she provides insight into these young people’s contradictory political and legal consciousness. On the one hand, they critiqued the illegalization to which their families and peers were subjected, yet on the other hand, they asserted their own status as US citizens.

Quotes from her interviewees could be used to launch class discussions. For instance, Getrich quotes one interviewee, Isabel, who describes her realization that a close friend was undocumented: “It hit us, you know? She’s one of us, someone that we hang out with” (p. 86). The phrase, “one of us” invites conversations about boundaries, othering, and inclusion. Getrich’s description of the strategies through which youth contend with family members’ illegalization and deportability demonstrate their creativity and show how their life circumstances differentiate them from peers. For instance, these young people take on tasks like driving for relatives without licenses, limit their social activities to those in which undocumented peers can participate, stay near home to support relatives, contribute to their families financially, and file immigration paperwork for family members. Some of their strategies transcend borders. As US citizens, they are able to visit relatives who remained in or were deported to Mexico, thus connecting their families across

distances. The longitudinal nature of Getrich's research makes it possible to analyze what happens when border brokers grow up and start families of their own. For instance, some take on careers where they can continue to advocate for immigrant communities.

In addition to producing a rich account, Getrich introduces and integrates theoretical concepts drawn from the wider literature regarding illegalization and immigration enforcement. Examples include policeability, referring to the practice of policing individuals who are presumed by government authorities to resemble those who are undocumented; *cotidianidad* (everydayness) as used by J.M. Heyman to describe to border residents' continual awareness of immigration enforcement agents' presence; and racialization, to describe the ways that border policing assigns border residents to racial categories. One topic that I felt deserved more treatment in *Border Brokers* was legal processes themselves. Getrich stresses that immigration law shapes her participants' lives, and that children of Mexican immigrants sometimes petitioned for parents after turning 21, but she does not detail the petition process. Given that this process is complex and not easily navigated, it would have been helpful to delve more fully into participants' legal strategies.

Be that as it may, *Border Brokers* advances the anthropology of immigration by tracing not only how "1.5" and second generation children are impacted by the intensification of US immigration enforcement in border communities, but also the creativity and resilience of these youth in advocating for their families and communities. It is well worth reading.