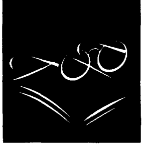

SUSAN BIBLER COUTIN

# Being En Route

**ABSTRACT** Through an ethnography of unauthorized migration from El Salvador to the United States, I explore "clandestinity" as a hidden, yet known, dimension of social reality. Unauthorized migrants who are en route to the United States have to make themselves absent from the spaces they occupy. When they become clandestine, such migrants embody illegality; in some cases, they literally "go underground" should they die and be buried en route. Because their presence is prohibited, unauthorized migrants do not fully arrive even when they reach their destinations. There are parallels between the ways that migrants are present in yet absent from nations, and the ways that ethnographers are present in yet absent from the field. This ethnography of migrants en route therefore suggests how anthropological knowledge practices also produce realities that are hidden, yet known. [Keywords: knowledge, clandestinity, immigration, El Salvador, the United States]

> Movement between fields is only part of the flexibility of the ethnographic method—the paradox is that flexibility of a kind lies also in the very state of immersement, in the totalising as well as the partial nature of commitment.
>
> —Marilyn Strathern, 1999

RECENT WORK IN THE anthropology of knowledge has pointed out that, as a form of technocratic knowledge, ethnography shares features of other bureaucratic forms such as law (Jean-Klein 2003; Maurer 2002; Riles 2000, 2004; Strathern 1999). One such feature is how certain fictions that make knowledge efficacious are simultaneously hidden, yet known (Crook 1999). For example, legal anthropologists have described ways that legal formalisms are belied by the very practices of legal institutions (Collier et al. 1995; Hirsch 1998; Maurer 1997; Merry 1990; Yngvesson 1993). Legal practitioners are also aware of these disjunctures. To take a classic example, Los Angeles–based attorneys who gave public presentations on immigration law frequently described "exclusion" as a "legal fiction" (Coutin 2000). According to pre-1996 immigration law, these attorneys explained, unauthorized immigrants who were allowed to enter the United States but were told to subsequently present themselves to immigration officials for inspection were deemed to be outside of the country "knocking at the door," even if these immigrants failed to comply and actually lived in the United States for years. The fictitious nature of exclusion, although widely known, was hidden in that legal constructions of entry were efficacious. Immigrants who were apprehended and placed in exclusion proceedings were (somewhat retroactively) situated outside of the United States in a legal sense all along and were, therefore, made ineligible for certain forms of legalization. The "fiction" of their nonentry was determinative of subsequent legal reality.

This example suggests that, as legal and other accounts produce truth, they simultaneously produce concealed realities. Exclusion, to continue this example, was linked to "territorial integrity," the same notion that permits cartographers to divide territories into mutually exclusive spatial jurisdictions (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). In practice, however, exclusion created territorial gaps—the space occupied by the person deemed to be legally outside of the United States. Thus, for territories to have integrity, territorial disruptions were required.

The movement between legal formalism and the concealed realities that formalism produces is not unlike a movement that occurs in the production of knowledge more generally. Drawing on the work of Marilyn Strathern (1991, 1999), Annelise Riles describes "the late modern conception that all phenomena are infinitely complex and that all perspectives are only partial because the same information can be seen differently from another point of view" (2000:18; see also Maurer 2002). Like the notion of "territorial integrity," this conception of knowledge presumes that perspectives are out there to be adopted and that it is analysts who move between them. Riles also notes that "the possibility of always moving the analysis to another level of scale" enables new knowledge to be produced (2000:18). In that it critiques the authoritativeness of any single account,

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such a "perspectival" approach (Strathern 1999:251) is consistent with the reflexive turn in anthropology. In fact, this conception of knowledge incites additional knowledge production, as ethnographers strive for complete knowledge, although aware that this whole will never be realized. Yet, it is possible that the perspectival form of knowledge production creates hidden, yet known, realities in which (1) knowledge is complete yet multiple and (2) ethnographers remain still while realities shift around them, much like the excluded migrant who fails to arrive. As in the case of migrants who are present in, yet absent from, national spaces, ethnographers may be present in, yet absent from, the field. Moreover, like attorneys who understand that law can be fictitious, ethnographers are aware of certain fictions (e.g., that it is possible to simultaneously participate and observe) on which their production of knowledge depends.

I examine hidden, yet known, realities through an ethnography of unauthorized migration from El Salvador to the United States. Migration from El Salvador to the United States increased dramatically with the onset of the 1980–92 Salvadoran civil war. Because of economic difficulties, family separations, and natural disasters, this exodus has continued during the postwar period (Andrade-Eekhoff 2003; Menjívar 2000). Although some 30,000 Salvadorans now migrate legally to the United States each year (Office of Immigration Statistics 2002), it is estimated that more than twice that number enter the United States without permission—typically by hiring alien smugglers who transport them from El Salvador, through Guatemala and Mexico, and into the United States. To avoid deportation, such migrants must hide their presence even as they depart, travel, and, with luck, arrive. In recent years, immigrants' rights advocates, who used to seek refugee status for Salvadorans who were fleeing political violence, have come to focus their human rights work on migrants in transit. The term *transit* denotes the time and space when migrants are most bereft of state protection and, therefore, most vulnerable to crime, exploitation, injury, and death. Transit also redefines the territories through which migrants pass—Mexico and Guatemala, for example, are characterized as "countries of transit" in relation to Salvadoran migration. Transit is a liminal state that positions migrants simultaneously outside (in transition, not yet arrived), yet inside (traveling through), national spaces (Chavez 1992). In transit, migrants are absent yet there.

My ethnography of migrants in transit derives from 1987–88 fieldwork among religious activists who provided "sanctuary" for Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees, 1995–97 research regarding Central Americans' legalization strategies, and interviews conducted from 2000 to 2002 with some 130 U.S. and Salvadoran policy makers, immigrants' rights advocates, and migrants with pending immigration cases. Here, I draw particularly on accounts of unauthorized migration, illicit border crossings, and clandestine presence that arose in the 2000–02 interviews.

I begin by discussing "clandestinity" as a hidden, yet known, dimension of social reality. I then analyze how those who occupy clandestine spaces come to embody both law and illegality. The next section examines how illegality erases presence and suspends time. The final section considers this ethnography's implications for the production of anthropological knowledge.

## CLANDESTINITY

For the legal space of the nation to be populated solely by legal subjects, states must prohibit both unauthorized entry and illegal presence (Ngai 2004).[1] Prohibiting takes the form of absenting those who enter illegally or who stay beyond the expiration dates of their visas. Unauthorized migrants are absented physically by being detained or deported, and socially by being denied particular rights and services. The prohibition on arriving at their destinations shapes unauthorized migrants' journeys, causing these migrants to hide even before they appear (cf. Strathern 1995). Of course, absenting is often partial in that, alongside those who are legally present, unauthorized migrants travel, work, take up residence, shop, and so forth. There is, therefore, a sense in which the "underground," occupied by the unauthorized, is a dimension of social reality rather than a separate place.[2] As the unauthorized are both absent and not, this dimension is both totalizing and partial, hidden and visible. Moreover, it is precisely this ambiguity or movement that makes the presence of absented people particularly valuable. Legal vulnerability makes unauthorized migrants a source of cheap labor (Calavita 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Jenkins 1978; Mountz et al. 2002), illicit economies grow up around prohibited practices (Andreas 2000; Lees 1986; Mahler 1995), and countries such as El Salvador depend on the remittances that migrant workers send home to family members (Andrade-Eekhoff 2003; García 1994; Itzigsohn 1995; Massey and Parrado 1994). Prohibited or hidden practices and persons allow the "above board" to assume its unmarked status as the dominant version of social reality (Jean-Klein 2003; Lees 1986).

Unauthorized migrants' erasures of presence often begin by hiring an alien smuggler. Relatives in the United States "send for" migrants by giving them money for their trip, and migrants may also sell property or borrow money locally. Often these loans must be repaid after a migrant reaches his or her destination. If the trip is unsuccessful, these expenses can be overwhelming. An advocate in San Salvador told me of a deportee

> who was 28 years old, but he said that he felt like he was 40. I asked him if he had been to his house yet, and he said, "What house?" He didn't feel like going there. He said that one and a half months ago he had sold his mother's land, and he had sold four cows in order to get the money to come. He hadn't told his family that he was back. "They think I am there," he said. "How am I going to tell them? What will they think if they see me return

> empty-handed? I have five kids." [interview with author, March 9, 2001][3]

Loans often finance alien smuggling, which, although illegal in El Salvador and the United States, has become a common practice. There are standard fees for particular services, smugglers commonly offer up to three attempts at entry for a single fee, and clients often pay half of the fee up front and half on arrival.[4] Alien smugglers, known as *coyotes,* acquire their clients through word of mouth; some may even advertise in the newspaper.[5] Such standard practices do not mean that coyotes treat their clients well. On the contrary, coyotes have been known to rape clients (some suggest that this is part of the price that coyotes charge), hold clients hostage, abandon clients, force clients to carry illicit goods, and otherwise endanger clients' lives. While visiting a migrant shelter in Tijuana, I observed an advocate warn two women whose smuggler had abandoned them in a locked car trunk, "That's a lot of money that you spent, and you should get better service for your money. Don't go with someone who is going to tell you to get in the trunk of a car. Find an easier way" (interview with author, May 18, 2001). This advocate's use of the term *service* draws attention to the seeming normalcy of these illicit practices.

Even though it is not illegal for a Salvadoran to travel within El Salvador, unauthorized migrants may become clandestine while still in their country. An immigrants' rights advocate in San Salvador explained, "From the moment that this guy [a would-be migrant] speaks with the coyote, he is immersed in a world of clandestinity. Why? Because the coyote doesn't go around publicly offering his services. And the guy has to do it in a hidden fashion because one goes, generally, without any documents, right? So they live this problem of clandestinity throughout their travels" (interview with author, August 18, 2000). The mystery of departure absents migrants before they actually leave. It is as though their unauthorized destination passes over them, like a tunnel or walkway, shaping their journey. This idea was captured by the film, "Del Sur al Norte" (From the south to the north), shown by one immigrants' rights organization during the 2004 observation of "Immigrant Week" in El Salvador. This film, which mixes a fictional account of a Salvadoran woman embarking on her journey north with clips from interviews with actual migrants, anticipates danger, deprivation, and becoming a fugitive from the moment that the main character leaves home. As the film opens, the main character states ominously (in Spanish), "Many Salvadorans immigrate to the United States every year, in search of the American dream. Today, it's my turn." While on a bus in El Salvador, watching the landscape pass by, she states, "I wonder when I'll ever see my volcanoes again. Or my family. But I have no alternative." Although still in El Salvador, she is already displaced, in anticipation of later displacements, including boarding the potentially deadly train that will carry her through Mexico.

The illicit nature of their journey can position migrants outside of established or authorized routes. Migrants travel on top of trains, in sewer pipes, through mountains and deserts, alongside highways, and hidden in compartments that are usually used for cargo. Miguel López Herrera had many of these experiences. After making his way to Tijuana by bus, he arrived at the U.S.–Mexico border:

> That day, we decided to cross at like one in the morning, taking advantage of the darkness. And, well, there you go blindly, because you stumble on rocks, in water, on branches, but you can't see. So it is more the desperation of wanting [to be on] the other side that [makes this] not matter, right? So we had to cross like where there were houses, always running.
>
> Once we arrived at the edge of the freeway.... I think it is San Diego, there we had to be on the edge, where the rainwater passes through. For like three hours. Then a van appeared, right? So into the van went a quantity of people that you can't imagine, thirty, thirty-five people in a minivan, there you had to fit any which way, right? So you get in, that time we got in, and they had taken us to like an abandoned place, like a hillside. There we spent like eight hours waiting for them to decide when it would be good to pass through, because we were going to pass through San Clemente.
>
> And from there we once again got into the van and we crossed through San Clemente....The *migra* [immigration officials] is there. On the freeway, on the [interstate] 5...where they have lots of equipment, and they are in the middle of the freeway and everything. We were about a mile away, and the *migra* hadn't left. So it was at that moment that you realize that the vehicle that you are going in is stolen. That is, part of the crime of having crossed the border is that you take the risk of traveling in a stolen car. And those who were driving the van among themselves said that if they [immigration officials] didn't leave, they would have to leave the van here in the freeway and open the doors, and everyone would have to go wherever they could. But then one thanks God, because we were almost there when suddenly they left and gave us free passage. [interview with author, April 10, 2001]

The hidden route that López Herrera travels situates him in another dimension. López Herrera journeys by dark, on foot, hiding in drainage pipes and in abandoned places, running where there seemingly is no path. He and some 30 to 35 passengers (if this indeed is physically possible) were stored in a van as though they were cargo. As they travel a hidden route, migrants may disappear. An immigrant rights advocate in San Salvador described a typical situation: "The relative comes to the office—the relative here [in El Salvador], right—and tells us, 'Look, my son or my daughter left for the United States a year ago, but she didn't arrive in that country, but neither did she return. So I don't know what happened to her. The last time that she called me, she was in Tapachula. From there, I had no more contact with her" (interview with author, August 16, 2000). When erasure is realized in death, absence can become permanent.

In addition to traveling on hidden routes, unauthorized migrants travel through established corridors, but as people other than themselves (Martínez 2001). Alicia Montalvo, who came to the United States from El Salvador in 1987 at age nine, had this experience. She recalled that her trip

> was easy 'cause I wasn't really thinking about it. I was just doing what my dad [who was traveling with me] told me to do. We traveled by plane from El Salvador to Tijuana. And from Tijuana, we crossed the border. I crossed the border by car because they just gave me a piece of paper to memorize and I memorized it [to be prepared] if they asked me any questions.... I guess I was traveling with somebody else's identification. Like somebody else's daughter, or something. And I just had to remember their names, and where I was born and the town that I lived in, my address, my phone number and stuff. [interview with author, October 5, 2001]

Crossing the border did not frighten Montalvo: "It was just a car ride. Because they told me to pretend like I was sleeping" (interview with author, October 5, 2001). However, Montalvo had to leave her father while crossing: "I was with total strangers and I didn't know where I was going. I didn't even know if I was ever going to see him. I didn't have any phone numbers or anything. And I was only 9 years old! When you're 9 years old, you're still dependent on them for everything" (interview with author, October 5, 2001). Unauthorized migrants who do not obtain false documents also try to hide their identities. Felix Dubin, who came to the United States from El Salvador in 1989, recalled: "One thing was that in Mexico, one's accent and way of speaking are a problem. I would try not to speak in public, but when I went to the store to buy something, I had to speak" (interview with author, April 3, 2001). Other migrants throw away Salvadoran documents, so that they can pretend to be Mexican; such migrants are then left without any documentation.

Assuming false identities or traveling outside of established routes positions migrants in a quasi-lawless realm. In addition to traveling in a stolen vehicle, López Herrera had to bribe authorities in Guatemala; subsequent to that experience, he was assaulted and robbed in southern Mexico. Carmen Nieto, who traveled to the United States from Honduras in 1989 when she was in her mid-thirties, was, like many female migrants, threatened with forced prostitution. Carlos Piñeda, who came to the United States in 1982 when he was eleven, was held hostage while smugglers attempted to extract more money from his relatives. Estela Romero, who emigrated to the United States from El Salvador in 1985, had to bribe Mexican officials, who nonetheless tried to deport her and her companions:

> There in the airport in Mexico, they put us in like a cage, I don't know, like with bars.... We had already paid like 50, 60, 100 [dollars], which was typical during that period, and they didn't want us to leave. We had to push the... policeman and... among all of us, we did it and we had to leave. That is, they had already taken as they call it, the *mordida* ["bite" or bribe]. [interview with author, April 6, 2001]

The disjuncture between their self-images as upstanding people and the lawlessness of unauthorized migration bothered many migrants. Luis Portillo, who came to the United States from Mexico with his family at age four, recalled being shocked to see his parents act like fugitives: "My parents never did anything wrong, and they were running" (interview with author, August 8, 2001).

Although the route traveled by unauthorized migrants is hidden and, in a sense, outside law, this route is also known. Criminals, including smugglers, prey on unauthorized migrants. Authorities can point out houses and areas where coyotes and migrants congregate. According to Mexican immigration officials, street vendors in Tijuana frequented typical crossing points on the Mexican side of the U.S.–Mexico border, selling migrants food and drinks. Some corrupt authorities seemingly collaborate with coyotes, accepting bribes in exchange for allowing migrants to pass.[6] Advocates are also familiar with unauthorized routes and, in fact, have established a network of shelters that parallels these routes. Thus, "hidden" migration is simultaneously a visible facet and feature of social landscapes.[7] Just as irrigation project officials studied by Susan Lees claim to not know about pervasive "informal adjustments that allow participants to conduct themselves as if in sufficient conformity to the rules" (1986:610),[8] so, too, is the unofficial visibility of clandestine practices the counterpart of the official invisibility or absenting of unauthorized migration (cf. Crook 1999).

Hidden or not, migrants en route are, for certain practical purposes, without government protection. Regional governmental conferences, such as the Proceso Puebla Regional Conference on Migration, seek to guarantee the rights of migrants in transit and, particularly, to combat alien smuggling (Mahler 2000). Advocates also emphasize the importance of ensuring that migrants know their rights, so that they can report any abuses that they experience. These measures, although helpful, do not address the source of unauthorized migrants' vulnerability—namely, the fact that certain people are not permitted to cross international borders. When migrants travel without authorization, their legal citizenship is, in a sense, left behind in their countries of origin. In foreign territories, their legal alienage reconstitutes them as illegal beings. As the reality that unauthorized migrants occupy shifts from the above board to the clandestine, migrants undergo a physical transformation.

## EMBODIMENT

When they are clandestine, migrants embody both law and illegality. Absented from the jurisdictions that prohibit their presence, migrants disappear—whether by hiding, assuming false identities, or dying. By disappearing, migrants become both other (alien) and thinglike (capable of being transported). As Mae Ngai notes, "The illegal alien is thus

an 'impossible subject,' a person who cannot be and a problem that cannot be solved" (2004:5). Although they "cannot be," migrants continue to occupy physical space. Their bodies therefore become a sort of absent space or vacancy, surrounded by law. The vacancies created by illegal presence make it possible for jurisdictions to remain whole (the "illegals" are positioned "elsewhere"). Of course, given that they interact with others whose presence is not clandestine, migrants are never fully outside of the jurisdictions through which they travel. Present yet absent, unauthorized migrants may literally be torn apart, their legs cut off by passing trains, their bodies buried in unmarked graves.[9] Death can be the moment of greatest social exclusion, as migrants' very identities are vacated. Paradoxically, however, death can also be the moment when migrants are most strongly identified, both by name and as members of a particular nation.

The danger of unauthorized migration has intensified in recent years. In 1994, the United States launched Operation Gatekeeper, which sought to close sections of the U.S.–Mexico border where illicit crossings were most prevalent (Nevins 2002). Since Operation Gatekeeper began, the number of border patrol agents has more than doubled, military technology—such as infrared motion detectors—has been deployed along the border, and additional fences have been constructed. Because of these tactics, unauthorized migrants have moved into less heavily policed mountains and deserts, where increasing numbers have died of thirst, heat exhaustion, or freezing temperatures. Border enforcement tactics have also extended beyond the frontiers of the United States. A program called "Global Reach" posts U.S. immigration officials in selected countries worldwide. Immigrants' rights advocates confirmed that these enforcement tactics had made passing through Guatemala and Mexico more difficult. One advocate commented, "It is rumored that U.S. immigration authorities are giving money to Guatemalan immigration authorities so that once people cross from here, the pressure begins. That is, the border is no longer in Rio Bravo. They lowered the border to Mexico, and because they couldn't contain [migration] there, they lowered it to Guatemala" (interview with author, August 18, 2000).

Unauthorized migrants' accounts of their journeys to the United States emphasize the physicality of border crossings. Javier López, for example, recalled, "I came dying from running. I spent from 8:00 at night to 2:00 in the morning running. Without stopping. And running fast, not slowly. Because walking slowly, that is possible. But running? One's mouth gets dry, and one feels that one is going to die" (interview with author, January 29, 2001). Carlos Piñeda, who was smuggled into the United States in a station wagon with 15 to 20 other people, recounted: "I was hardly breathing. I had somebody else's legs right on top of my nose. I was hardly, not breathing in there" (interview with author, April 5, 2001). Nonetheless, he said, the worst part of his journey was "all that running and jumping on the fences in order to get over the side" (interview with author, April 5, 2001). Estela Romero entered the United States in a cargo car, where she hid underneath debris from alfalfa plants. Luis Portillo, who migrated to the United States with his family at age four, said that his most vivid memory was running. Unauthorized migrants also spoke of tripping over rocks, traveling in the dark, withstanding hunger, and fearing that they would be bitten by snakes or animals.

Migrants' accounts of running, not breathing, and being transported like cargo indicate how migrants are made to embody illegality. Like prey, migrants must run. In fact, according to an immigrants' rights advocate in San Diego, U.S. immigration authorities use hollow bullets, originally designed for hunting wild game, against migrants who present a threat. A slang term for migrants—*pollos* (chickens)—also suggests that these individuals are animal-like. Migrants are defined by their mobility: They are "boat people" or "feet people" who lack roots, are unfixed, and are without clear social locations. It is noteworthy that, in an era in which innovations in communication have been heralded, feet and boats are relatively primitive means of transportation. Like cargo, migrants become objects to be smuggled. As they cross borders without authorization, it is as though a border forms around them, alienating them from their social surroundings and making their very humanity questionable. Speaking of unauthorized migrants within El Salvador, one immigrants' rights advocate found it necessary to point out, "The constitution of El Salvador is being violated, but this doesn't mean that they aren't hungry, that they aren't people. They love as strongly as you do" (interview with author, March 9, 2001).

As they inhabit incompatible realities, migrants are sometimes literally torn apart. Traveling as humans, but outside established channels, unauthorized migrants risk losing limbs. Migrants who attempt to hop trains are sometimes sucked underneath, where their legs are cut off (Nazario 2002). Mexican immigration authorities claim to have found fingers that were caught in U.S.–Mexico border fences when migrants jumped. But the ultimate embodiment of illegality is death. In death, migrants are at once more human than ever and more realized as an object. News accounts of migrants' deaths emphasize migrants' humanity, their unrealized hopes, and their relatives' grief. Death grounds migrants. During a meeting with university students who were touring the U.S.–Mexico border, Mexican immigration officials told of finding the bloated bodies of migrants who had died of thirst. These individuals, officials related, sometimes placed their identity documents on their chests as they died, so that their relatives would be notified. Other migrants disappeared and, therefore, turned into bodies that lack identification and that are buried in unmarked graves. Such migrants literally go underground and are incorporated into national territories.

Advocacy groups seek to counter the erasures caused by prohibitions on unauthorized migration. Generally, U.S., Mexican, and Central American officials blame migrants' deaths largely on smugglers and on migrants' decisions to

travel without authorization. In contrast migrants' advocates, such as the American Friends Service Committee's (AFSC) border monitoring project, attribute all migrants' deaths, whether caused by criminals, the elements, transit accidents, or immigration authorities themselves, to immigration policies (AFSC 2000). Through imagery such as a memorial listing the names of those who have died along the border, billboards listing the number of dead, and crosses marking anonymous graves, advocates seek to make death visible. Along sections of the U.S.–Mexico border fence, crosses, coffins, and other reminders of death—particularly, those marked with the ghostly phrase *no identificado* ("unidentified")—allow the erasures that absent migrants to interrupt the above board. A logo posted on the website of the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation's (2004) Border Project features the figures of a man, woman, and child, appearing as darkened silhouettes riddled by tiny crosses. This logo also appears on a billboard announcing numbers of migrants' deaths. These figures seem to mark both death and the absent space occupied by the unauthorized. Another image posted on this site is a series of crosses posted along the border fence. On each cross, "no identificado" is written horizontally, and the victim's nationality (Peruvian, Ecuadoran, Honduran, etc.) is written vertically. These crosses convey the way that death can vacate migrants' identities while simultaneously stamping migrants with national (and foreign) essences.

Unauthorized migrants' clandestine status continues even after they enter the United States, positioning them, in certain respects, as outside of the territory that they occupy. Their arrival in the United States can therefore be delayed indefinitely.

## STASIS

Even when unauthorized migrants successfully cross the U.S.–Mexico border, they still remain in some ways outside U.S. territory. As legal interlopers, unauthorized migrants cannot complete their journeys by acquiring U.S. identity documents, securing work authorization, and being recognized as permanent members of the U.S. polity. Their legal selves remain at least partially behind, in their countries of origin, while their physical presence in U.S. territories marks a legal absence, a pocket of alienage. Through such pockets of foreign presence, one nation seeps into another (cf. Coutin et al. 2002). Thus, in contrast to standard accounts of migration—in which migrants travel from point A to point B, from the local to the global, and from an uncertain present to an improved future (Ngai 2004)—there are senses in which migration moves territories, reconfigures scale, and multiplies temporalities. Thus, when migrants move, scale and place can be reconfigured such that seemingly local spaces become part of foreign territories and vice versa (Marston 2000; Smith 1995; Swyngedouw 1997, 2004; Tsing 2000). Migrants, who may experience themselves as being in multiple places simultaneously (Mountz and Wright 1996), move across as well as through time. Time takes on a planar (as well as linear) character, making it possible to move not only from past to future but also from one present to another (see also Yngvesson and Coutin n.d.). As they exist in multiple places, migrants may be unable to be fully present anywhere. As a result, much like a picture with a low resolution, migrants may come in and out of focus.

Unauthorized migrants who reach U.S. territory remain, in key senses, legally outside. As Ngai points out, "The illegal alien crosses a territorial boundary, but, once inside the nation, he or she stands at another juridical boundary" (2004:6). For many interviewees, the relief of arriving was coupled with a fear that made them invisible (cf. Bailey et al. 2002). Felix Dubin, for example, explained that he was "afraid to go out in public, I was afraid to talk" (interview with author, April 3, 2001). Dolores Magaña also worried about being deported: "When I went somewhere... when I saw the police and everything, I thought that they were Immigration... I would say, 'Immigration is going to take me away and is going to deport me'" (interview with author, April 12, 2001). When Alicia Montalvo's family moved from one Los Angeles neighborhood to another, her parents were afraid to register her for school. She recounted, "I ended up staying home for six months. And then my transcripts, you can see, it's from elementary, it shows that I went to 5th and 6th grade and then when it was time for me to go to 7th grade, it says, 'Unknown origin. Nothing known. Not known where she was at, or anything [*sic*]' " (interview with author, October 5, 2001). Walter Guevara, who immigrated to the United States from El Salvador as a young child, was instructed to hide his arrival from the neighbors: "My sister said, 'Don't go out the door. Don't be peeking out the door.' Because, you know, I imagine, you know, you're living in a place maybe a few months, or even a year, and all of a sudden, there's three kids running around, you know? Fairy godmother didn't bring 'em, you know?" (interview with author, April 12, 2001). By hiding, migrants avoided fully arriving.

Unauthorized migrants were also absented from the United States through the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act's requirement that all employees demonstrate that they are authorized to work. Although employers who hire the undocumented are rarely sanctioned (Calavita 1990), lack of work authorization makes it difficult for migrants to find work and furthermore confines them to particular occupations. In search of a factory job, Estela Romero purchased false documents, an action that, she said, made her feel like a criminal. When she applied for a job at a meat factory,

> The lady told me, "So, you say you have a green card." I said, "Yes." "Oh, wait a minute while I turn on the verification machine and then I'll let you know." Then, I was frightened and I told her, "You know what? I think I

> forgot that I left it at home." "Okay," she says, "Go get it." She knew that I didn't have papers.

Romero eventually found work as a housecleaner but had to abandon her goal of becoming a nurse: "All that remained under the ground, that is to say, buried" (interview with author, April 6, 2001). Soledad Martínez, who had been a secretary and accountant at an engineering and architectural firm in El Salvador, was deeply humiliated when, in the United States, she had to work at a Pioneer Chicken restaurant: "I cried at night when I returned [home] because after having been at a desk, after having had some authority in an office.... It was a drastic change" (interview with author, September 30, 2001). Downward mobility made Roxanna Abrego's mother, who went from being a teacher in El Salvador to a housecleaner in the United States, physically ill. Abrego related, "She went through a depression at that time because of just adjustment coming from over there and really being like a self-made woman over there, like owning her own house and taking care of her three kids herself, coming to over here and cleaning other people's houses, when in El Salvador she had somebody to clean her house.... She was very sick" (interview with author, December 20, 2000).

As they were positioned elsewhere through laws that prohibited their presence and denied them work authorization, unauthorized migrants were also, in certain senses, temporally suspended (cf. Mountz et al. 2002). Unable to continue their studies or advance their careers, unauthorized migrants were placed in a temporal limbo, even as their desire to be reunited with relatives made them all too aware of the passage of time. The temporal ambiguity of unauthorized presence was formalized in 1996, with the passage of Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA). Undocumented immigrants now accumulate "illegal time," which can trigger bars on legal entry. Yet, those who accumulate ten years of "time," whether legal or otherwise, become eligible to apply for cancellation of removal (which is very difficult to obtain). Some migrants are permanently barred from legalizing. Dolores Magaña told me that her daughter had failed to attend a court hearing and had been ordered deported in absentia. Although she had subsequently married a U.S. citizen, Magaña's daughter was unable to legalize. The very condition of being undocumented may also make it difficult for migrants, who may transact in cash, live with relatives, and attempt to hide their presence, to document the amount of time they have lived in the United States. Time that cannot be documented may be equivalent to absence (Coutin 2000).

Over time, many Salvadorans who had entered the United States without authorization acquired temporary legal status, either through a pending asylum application, an award of Temporary Protected Status (TPS), or a pending application for legal permanent residency under the Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act (NACARA). Temporary legal statuses position migrants between statuses, neither fully legal nor fully illegal (Bailey et al. 2002). Previously invisible, temporary migrants become "hypervisible" in that they are required to continually report their addresses, places of employment, family members, and other personal information to immigration officials (Bailey et al. 2002; Mountz et al. 2002). U.S. officials involved in crafting such statuses see visibility as enabling migrants to "set down roots." During an interview, one official explained:

> They were protected. They didn't have to fear that they were going to be deported. That allowed them to become more established, to set down more roots in the community. And they had employment authorization, which meant that they could work... versus someone who has the seven years but who has been living in the United States as an undocumented immigrant, working under the table, living with the threat of deportation. [interview with author, January 19, 2001]

Many migrants, in contrast, interpreted the temporary nature of their legal documents as a sign that they could be deported at any time (see also Mountz et al. 2002, 2003). Javier López, who had been waiting seven months for his work permit, worried that there was a "conspiracy on the part of Immigration so that people become illegal and they can deport them" (interview with author, January 29, 2001). Migrants also worried that changes in immigration law would be arbitrary and to migrants' detriment. While chatting with me in a McDonald's restaurant, one interviewee's brother-in-law pointed out, "In the U.S., law can change retroactively. You could be eating french fries and that could be acceptable, and then one day it could become illegal and you could be placed in deportation proceedings" (interview with author, December 1, 2001).

Physically present but legally absent or unresolved, unauthorized migrants existed in multiple places and yet nowhere. Katarina Martiñez described the effects of having citizenship in El Salvador, a country that she could not remember, but lacking permanent legal status in the United States, the country where she was raised:

> I'm neither a resident nor an alien.... Like, going to university, looking at the applications. Well, I can't say that I'm a resident, and I can't say that I'm not a resident. And then, I have no memory [of El Salvador].... Talking to people, I have no—it's like, for a minute you have no identity outside of your house. That's what it feels like sometimes. You're just walking around, and you're just, you're like invisible to everything else. Everybody else is solid but you're not. [interview with author, November 25, 2001]

Feeling invisible or not solid may be the physical expression of absence. Even migrants who have acquired U.S. citizenship may feel that they exist in multiple places.[10] Roxanna Abrego, who immigrated to the United States without authorization but subsequently became a U.S. citizen, stated:

> I kinda know where I stand in the U.S. I don't know where I stand in El Salvador.... My home was like an isolated little island of culture, thus different from the Western culture out here.... If I go over there, what was isolated to my home, it's gonna be now part of everybody, you know.... Even though I wasn't there, at the time, I still have so much of El Salvador influencing me.... And then, just the fact that like, my childhood was there too, you know, the part of my childhood that grew up in El Salvador. I wanna go see like the neighborhood where I was, where I grew up for a little bit. There's also family there, it's family I've never met before. So, there's a large part of me that is still there, it's still you know, living. [interview with author, December 20, 2000]

This passage suggests that alongside Abrego's life in the United States is almost a parallel universe, consisting of the part of her that is still living, in some sense, in El Salvador. If she traveled to El Salvador, Abrego would presumably move from one present (her life in the United States) to another (her existence in El Salvador).

Migrants who exist in multiple places become conduits through which territories can move or be reconfigured (Duany 2000; Mountz and Wright 1996; Rouse 1991). At a conference in San Salvador in 2000, for example, Salvadoran authorities and academics argued publicly that through migration "the nation of El Salvador surpasses its borders" and that "the second most important city of El Salvador, in number of inhabitants, is that of Los Angeles" (lecture, August 10, 2000). Through migrants' presence, "El Salvador" enters U.S. territory. A Salvadoran immigrants' rights advocate gave an example of such territorial reconfiguration:

> Today in Hempstead there are thousands of people from Chirilagua. There was a street called, what was it? Smith Street? No. It had a name in English. Let's suppose that it was called "Morgan Street."... So, those from Chirilagua came and alongside the "Morgan Street" sign they put "Chirilagua Street." Then came a moment when they took down the Morgan Street sign and they just put up Chirilagua Street. Now... the mayor had to accept that the street was no longer called "Morgan Street" but was called "Chirilagua Street." [interview with author, August 18, 2000][11]

Salvadoran authorities have also claimed migrants to depict El Salvador as a nation with global reach (cf. Swyngedouw 1997). For example, a website created by a Salvadoran government agency enumerated the Salvadoran population in particular cities, countries, and regions (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de El Salvador n.d.). The 250 Salvadorans living in Israel made it possible to claim Africa as a region that has a Salvadoran population.

As migrants, in a sense, moved territory, they practiced a form of practical nostalgia that made the past present. According to Debbora Battaglia (1995:77–78), "practical or active" nostalgia enables individuals to detach themselves from disempowering present conditions. Strathern notes further that practical nostalgia "is a way of making explicit the fact of origin, an attachment to a past that is and can only be realized in the present. The origin of the act does not, as it were, exist till the act is done" (1995:111–112). Many Salvadoran migrants were deeply nostalgic for relatives, homes, and familiar surroundings. Carmen Nieto commented, "When one has first arrived, one's heart within is very sad. You don't know how to find work, you don't know how to locate people, and there is a terrible fear" (interview with author, September 26, 2001). In addition to mourning losses, some migrants practiced nostalgia by forming hometown associations. Such associations sponsored parties to raise funding for development projects in their hometowns, crowned "queens" and "princesses," participated in their hometowns' celebrations of patron saints' days, and re-created relationships and practices that, to them, constituted their "origins" (Mountz and Wright 1996; Popkin 1999; Smith 1998). Through such practices, migrants produced "El Salvador" as a homeland (cf. Axel 2004).

The territorial movements and temporal reconfigurations associated with migration have implications for the production of anthropological knowledge.

## ETHNOGRAPHIC KNOWLEDGE

Standard accounts of ethnography are not unlike standard accounts of migration.[12] Ethnographers enter the field, adopt natives' point of view, produce a fresh account of a social order, and, thus, add to existing knowledge. As Clifford Geertz put it, "Another country heard from" (1973:23). Like unauthorized migration, however, such knowledge practices may give rise to hidden realities. For example, there is a sense in which ethnographers enter the field by becoming absent. Strathern describes this process as "immersement." According to Strathern, ethnographic practice has a "double location"—in the "field" and "at the desk." She writes further, "It is a moment of immersement that is simultaneously total and partial" (1999:1). Moreover, these two locations are interpenetrating. As Strathern notes, "Each [field] is an order of engagement which partly inhabits or touches upon but does not encompass the other.... The fieldworker has to manage and thus inhabit both fields at the same time" (1999:2). Like clandestinity, which positions migrants both within and outside of legal jurisdictions, immersement locates ethnographers both in and outside of the field. Ethnographers' absence is accomplished by always anticipating the seemingly subsequent moment of writing. Because the ethnographer does not know what will turn out to be valuable, data must be collected in an anticipatory fashion (Strathern 1999). The moment of writing thus becomes part of the moment of fieldwork. Data collection makes the field (as object of ethnographic knowledge practices) materialize around the ethnographer, much as clandestinity can materialize around an unauthorized migrant.

The anticipatory nature of fieldwork means that ethnographers also must be open to being collected by the data, much as migrants are reconstituted by clandestinity. As they embark on their first fieldwork experience, graduate students are frequently admonished that things could be

completely different from what they anticipate and if so, they should be prepared to change their projects accordingly. Ethnographers must therefore be prepared to give some of their own agency over to that which they collect. In fact, the validity of an ethnographic account can be bolstered by a description of how ethnographers' preconceptions were challenged once they were in the field. In this sense, there is some connection between an anthropological problem (the impossibility of fully knowing the other) and what is presumed to be a religious problem (the inaccessibility of supernatural beings). The solution to these problems of inaccessibility is an act of faith: the suspension of the practitioner's authority. Hirokazu Miyazaki points out, "For Fijians, the abeyance of agency entails a three-step process—that is, ritual participants' efforts to conform to an ideal model, the problematization of their efforts, and the presentation of the same ideal model as a solution.... Fijian ritual participants experience the fulfillment of their faith as the capacity repeatedly to place their own agency in abeyance" (2000:43). Like unauthorized immigrants, who are made to embody realities that documents authenticate, ethnographers may find that, in suspending their own authority and in allowing themselves to be collected, their data bring them into being (Yngvesson and Coutin n.d.).

Just as the gaps created by illegal presence permit territories to move, data permit ethnographers to return to the field. Strathern comments, "Field immersement is repeated in the subsequent study away from the field. Ethnographers set themselves the task not just of comprehending the effect that certain practices and artefacts have in people's lives, but of re-creating some of those effects in the context of writing about them" (1999:5). The data stand in for the field through a series of substitutions (Latour 1999). A particular subset of informants is made to stand in for a society, a particular informant is made to stand in for this subset, an interview with this informant is made to stand in for the informant, a transcript or notes are made to stand in for the interview, and a quote from these notes is made to stand in for the entire interview. Like the "movement of substitution by which the real soil becomes the soil known to pedology" (Latour 1999:49), these substitutions permit the field to become the society known to anthropology. Movements of substitution entail cutting off through connecting. Moments, words, and experiences are "excerpted" but always with reference to their prior location (Latour 1999). Like the foreign essences that position migrants elsewhere, excerpts create gaps through which the prior seeps into the present, or through which one field can enter another. Through these gaps, ethnographers can return to the field—or make the field rematerialize around them.

Such temporal and spatial reconfigurations create an alternative to the perspectival form. There are senses in which, instead of continually moving to different locations, ethnographers remain still while the field forms around them. Ethnographers thus become subjects of the field; instead of adopting new perspectives, they are redefined or reconstituted as the field shifts. The field that materializes is totalizing (at least momentarily) rather than incomplete. Further, in that the field is made to materialize repeatedly, knowledge production is replicative rather than additive. The field, however, is never only a field—that is, never only an object of knowledge. In an anticipatory fashion, the field contains stuff that is not yet data, stuff that can "dazzle" (Strathern 1999)—and thus collect—the ethnographer.

Ethnographic desire for "the before" (Axel 2004), for the field as it could appear without the ethnographer, gives rise to concealment. The movements of substitution entailed in excerpting make portions of data and, thus, the field invisible. Ethnographers' access to their data is privileged (cf. Gusterson 1998); for example, ethnographers commonly use pseudonyms and invent fictitious place names. Such pretenses permit the field to remain officially hidden (cf. Lees 1986), even when readers see through the ruse. Through concealment, the field appears in ethnographic form. Speaking of Trobrianders' ritual practices, Strathern writes, "Through insisting on a distinction between the moments of revelation and concealment, men literally tell themselves that the visible points to the invisible.... Revelation is thus 'the same as' concealment—but each occurs (and must occur) at its own moment.... The one is an earlier or later form of the other" (1999:211). Similarly, the bits of data that appear within ethnographies point to the hidden field that materializes around the ethnographer. Like unauthorized migration, ethnographic knowledge practices create absences through which other moments, fields, and territories can appear. Thus, in the case of both migration and ethnography, movements—whether to a new location or a new perspective—simultaneously (and in a known but hidden fashion) make migrants and ethnographers subjects of the shifting fields that they bring into being.

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## NOTES

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1. There are other disruptions of national space, such as the international space of airports or the national space accorded to consulates. States also deliberately locate particular activities outside

of national jurisdictions. I thank Alison Mountz for this point (see Mountz n.d.).

2. I mean *dimension* in almost a science fiction sense, as in entering another dimension.

3. All translations of Spanish quotations are the author's. Pseudonyms have been used for interviewees throughout.

4. As of 2001, it cost, I was told, $3,500–$4,000 to be "guided" from El Salvador to the United States. By 2004, after U.S. border enforcement stiffened in the post–September 11 climate, the cost had risen to $5,000–$7,000. See Andreas 2000 on the relationship between border enforcement and smuggling costs.

5. The classified sections of Salvadoran newspapers advertised trips to the United States "with arrival guaranteed" within a specified period of time. Although I cannot verify that smugglers placed these ads, it does not seem likely that travel agencies catering to tourists would find it necessary to "guarantee" arrival. Moreover, Salvadorans told me that smugglers publicized their services in local papers.

6. As one reviewer noted, it would be interesting to consider how authorities conceptualize these spaces, and whether there is complicity between migrants and corrupt authorities. Speculating a bit, I would offer that the issue is not "corrupt" authorities but, rather, the fact that clandestine realities are part of authorities' experiences as well. There is probably a sense in which authorities and migrants share certain experiences of the prohibited, although they are positioned differently vis-à-vis this phenomenon. For further discussion of this issue, see Coutin 2000, Katz 1988, and Marx 1981.

7. In fact, some have argued that officials tacitly tolerate some degree of illegal immigration (Harwood 1985).

8. Interestingly, in one of the cases described by Lees, illegal commerce takes place on unofficial roads, in sort of a "backside." These unofficial roads may be similar to the hidden routes traversed by unauthorized migrants.

9. As a reviewer noted, this ethnography raises questions about how to analyze violence ethnographically (see Daniel 1996; Das et al. 1997; Greenhouse et al. 2002; Jean-Klein 2000; Scheper-Hughes 1995). In the case of unauthorized migration, this question is intensified by the nonagentive nature of much of the violence. Migrants' deaths are often caused by the elements, mishaps, or migrants' mode of travel rather than by a deliberate action. It is, therefore, sometimes difficult to establish blame for their deaths or even to convincingly characterize these deaths as violent. For an analysis of limitations of legal definitions of violence, see Coutin 2001; for a discussion of dilemmas experienced by ethnographers of violence, see Coutin and Hirsch 1998.

10. Of course, legal immigrants and members of racial and ethnic minority groups may also be regarded as "not belonging" or as belonging "elsewhere," even though they have legal status, as critical race theorists and others have pointed out (see, e.g., Flores and Benmayor 1997; Gilroy 1987; Williams 1991).

11. This interviewee may have been confusing two situations. There is a large Salvadoran community in Hempstead, New York, but the Arlandria section of Arlington, Virginia, has become known as "Chirilagua" because of the large number of residents from Chirilagua, El Salvador.

12. My thinking in this section has benefited immensely from conversations with Barbara Yngvesson. Discussions with Bill Maurer have also been extremely helpful.

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