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Chapter 7

The Case of the Missing Mountain: Migration and the Power of Place

Lisa Sun-Hee Park and David Naguib Pellow

Introduction

A most amazing thing happened while conducting interviews for a research project on immigration and environmental politics in Aspen, Colorado. Mountains disappeared. These massive monuments that comprise the Rocky Mountains, which define much of the landscape, character, and history of the American West, ceased to exist.

In 2000, we entered this premier vacation spot to investigate the recent passage of an anti-immigration resolution by the city council of Aspen, Colorado, a town that sits more than 600 miles from the US–Mexico border. The resolution called on the federal government to implement greater restrictions on immigration in order to preserve the economic, cultural, and ecological integrity of the nation and this premier city. Aspen is an exclusive resort town with an international reputation for high-end service and a stunning landscape of pristine mountains, all configured to welcome wealthy skiers in the winter and wealthy hikers in the summer. And, like many communities, towns, and cities in the USA, Aspen depends upon cheap immigrant labor to fuel its local service economy. Ironically, what we found upon entering the field site was an invisibility, or disappearance, of immigrants as people, in direct relation to their hypervisibility as necessary workers.

We observed two different places called Aspen. The dominant, commercial Aspen was an idyllic, postindustrial refuge with stretch Range Rover limousines, toy poodles with diamond encrusted collars, world-class ski slopes, and film celebrities who live part of the year in multimillion dollar single-family homes. In this place, there are no ugly social problems like poverty, racism, and labor exploitation. Here, immigrants are ski instructors who are young and athletic with sport “charming” accents from Austria, Australia, or Nordic nations whose architecture is replicated in numerous “chalets” in town. The other Aspen is a place where foreign-born

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workers from Latin America drive 60–140 miles daily to work in low-status jobs for low wages with few benefits. Many of these workers live in deplorable housing conditions, including cars, campers, and even caves.

In the glossy, commercial version of Aspen, these immigrants do not exist. However, if you look in the back of any restaurant, hotel, or residential home, immigrants cook and clean kitchens and bathrooms, mow lawns, and pour concrete over outdoor heated driveways. Like so many communities, immigrants are made invisible in multiple ways. For example, the lack of affordable housing forces many to live “down valley” in trailer parks that are hidden along the highway and away from the commercial center. The increasing presence of federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in targeted sweeps at Wal-Mart (one of the only affordable stores in the area) and the building of a new immigrant detention center (i.e., jail) in a neighboring town also works to keep immigrants in hiding. But, perhaps the most persistent and commonplace acts of enforcing immigrant invisibility are the everyday indignities experienced at work, school, and home that remind them of their marginality as people despite, or in direct contradiction to their centrality within both the local and global economies.

When we interviewed Latino immigrants in Aspen and across the larger Roaring Fork Valley about their living and working experiences, we heard about a very different place. At the end of an hour-long interview, we asked what s/he thought about the natural beauty of Aspen’s mountains. This question consistently brought what was a fairly smooth conversation to an abrupt stop. In almost every case, one of two things happened. Some just broke out in laughter, dismissed the question, and asked if the interview was over. Others gave us a blank look and asked, “Mountain? What mountain?” In their cognitive geography, the massive Rocky Mountains of Aspen disappeared. People didn’t “enjoy” the mountains; one simply worked on them.

However, in our lengthy conversations, it was clear that Aspen did not disappear with its mountains. Rather, Aspen existed as a different place with an alternative set of meanings. In both literal and figurative ways, immigrants “made” Aspen in accordance with their own experiences – one that apparently has nothing to do with skiing down a mountain or taking in a show at the Aspen Music Festival. This kind of place-making is fundamental to “self-making.” Philosopher Jeff Malpas (1999:15) argues that place is not a mere by-product of humans; it is a necessity for being: “being and place are inextricably bound together in a way that does not allow one to be seen merely as an effect of the other; rather being merges only in and through place.” Meaning, a localized sense of place is necessary in defining personal identity and social belonging, particularly within a context that works so hard to make them disappear. It appears that this self-making is not derived purely from the transnational memories of “home” immigrants hold onto, but also requires a more immediate, material construction of place that makes their presence real and helps them to survive, if not thrive, in their new community.

This chapter investigates the power of place through the lens of transnational migration. We begin by arguing that within the growing political economy of globalization, the power and significance of place, and particularly of borders,

have intensified. We then discuss the ways in which immigrants construct another Aspen in contrast to efforts to “displace” them. Here, we briefly outline two of the more familiar strategies used by Aspenites and introduce a more novel approach (environmentalism) that has strong potential for widespread future adaptations. Following the creative direction of Thomas Gieryn (2000), our revisit to this research site using a “place-sensitive” lens provides new insights into the power of place and place-making in immigrant adaptation and alienation.

Migration, Globalization, and the Increasing Significance of Borders

As Saskia Sassen (1990) argues, transnational labor migration is an integral part of the global movement of capital, goods, and services (Sassen 1990). And despite efforts to limit the flow of migration, the establishment of global political, military, and economic linkages continues to foster large-scale emigration to particular nations, including the USA. In this way, migration patterns are not haphazard. Large-scale emigration is directly tied to foreign investment in export production. For instance, US trade with Mexico grew by a factor of eight from 1986 to 2004 (Sassen 2006). Despite this embedded connection between the movement of capital and the movement of people, national immigration policy remains almost entirely fixated on border control. This is a pivotal flaw in many countries. Sassen writes, “Yet with all these differences immigration policy and the attendant operational apparatus in all these countries reveal a fundamental convergence regarding immigration. The sovereignty of the state and border control, whether land borders or airports, lie at the heart of the regulatory effort” (Sassen 1999:150). The popular preoccupation with the literal US–Mexico border has been an easy scapegoat for multiple national anxieties, particularly with regard to the economy and terrorism. It provides big political gains while in reality doing little toward national “security” or economic stability (Massey 2003). Instead, we have witnessed continuous disintegration of civil rights and the social safety net for both citizens and noncitizens in the name of border control and national security.

Borders are demarcations of power. Whether of literal physical place or figurative abstract assumptions, borders are socially constructed entities. Geographer David Sibley (1997) explains that these social boundaries can provide both security and comfort as well as provoke risk and fear, depending upon where you stand and with what resources. Subsequently, the ability to cross such boundaries – or, to move from a familiar space to an alien space under the control of someone else – can be an anxious experience.¹ Borders are also liminal spaces. As such, they are

¹In some circumstances it can be fatal, as graphically illustrated by the 400+ deaths of Latin American women working in Maquila factories in Juarez.

messy spaces in which the contradictions and confusion of boundary maintenance are exposed. Legal scholar Robert Chang (1996) astutely observes, “The Border is everywhere” and yet can be rendered invisible. “It is through this invisibility that the border gains much of its power” (Chang 1996). Chang notes that because national borders are imperfect, supplementary mechanisms for exclusion are deployed.

The border took on even greater symbolic and cultural importance for US national identity during the 1990s. Certainly, anxiety regarding national security helped solidify the southern borderlands as a tangible front in the frequently intangible “global war on terror.” At the same time, the rapidly growing immigrant population began to settle in nontraditional destination states. Work opportunities in the Southeast, Midwest, and Rocky Mountain states attracted immigrants away from the usual coastal cities. The foreign-born population more than doubled in many of these new destinations between 1990 and 2000 (Urban Institute 2002). According to the Urban Institute, “The dispersal of our newest arrivals to regions that historically have attracted relatively few immigrants means that the integration issues previously confined to only a handful of states – issues such as access to language classes, health care, welfare benefits, and jobs – are now central concerns for most states” (Urban Institute 2002:1). In fits and starts, immigration has topped the agenda in many towns across the nation, from Aspen, Colorado to Durham, North Carolina to Nashville, Tennessee.² Similar to what Alex Kotlowitz found in his analysis of Carpentersville, a small town in Illinois with 37,000 residents, immigration politics is experienced in a very personal way with a strong tendency to turn nasty. Carpentersville is described as a town “without a center.” Longtime residents report a growing sense of alienation and isolation within a global economy that dramatically changed the racial demographics from 17% Latino in 1990 to 40% a decade later (Kotlowitz 2007). And, while Kitty Calavita, Ruth Milkman, and other scholars repeatedly note the historical fact that wage levels fell and income inequality grew as a result of deindustrialization, capital flight, economic restructuring, and the dismantling of labor unions in the 1970s and 1980s (all of which occurred *before* the current influx of immigrants into middle America), immigrants remain easy targets during these unsettling times (Calavita 2008). The US–Mexico border, then, is seen as necessary for regaining a sense of stability, particularly perhaps for those communities further away from the borderlands who see their lives in the “heartland” changing in ways that no longer center their experience (Kotlowitz 2007).

The underlying role of these border-making enforcement measures is what Nicholas DeGenova (2005) calls “deportability” (or, from a place-sensitive perspective, “displacement”). He writes, “The US nation-state’s enforcement of immigration law and policing along the US–Mexico border, notably, have long sustained the operation of a revolving-door policy – simultaneously implicated in *importation* as

²For discussion of Aspen, CO, see Park and Pellow (forthcoming) *The Slums of Aspen*. For Carpentersville, IL, see Alex Kotlowitz (2007). For Nashville, TN, see Pat Harris (2009).

much as (in fact, far more than) deportation” (DeGenova 2005:8). The border and its programs create its own legitimacy through the production of migrant “illegality” or criminality. At the same time, illegality and the possibility of deportation facilitates continued displacement, which serves to preserve immigrant labor’s vulnerable status.

Power and Place, Aspen Style

Public Emplacement

Given the heavy presence of the increasingly militarized border, immigrants in Aspen and the larger Roaring Fork Valley have devised multiple methods of emplacement. One method directly and publicly addressed a border-making facility: an INS detention center. With the organizational assistance of key local, nonprofit agencies, immigrants participated in a public march, a town hall forum, and petition drives in protest. Their efforts culminated in early November 1999 with hundreds of people descending on the town of Carbondale, the proposed site for the facility, for several hours of marching and speeches at a rally. Participants carried signs with messages such as “Permite vivir en paz” (Let us live in peace); “Respeto a los derechos humanos” (Respect human rights); “There goes the neighborhood”; “We want the Latinos to stay, the INS should go” (Stiny 1999); “Deport the INS”; and “Aliens=people” (Craig 1999). Each of these placards attests to the view that immigrants are whole human beings, beyond a disembodied labor force. In an unusual turn of events, Latino immigrants, in conjunction with Anglo allies, collectively established a public presence in an effort to legitimize their place within this locality. In doing this, the INS facility – itself a criminalizing social force – was rendered illegitimate, or “deportable.” And, in fact, it was “deported” (at least to the neighboring town of Glenwood Springs).

The successful “displacement” of the facility out of Carbondale required a multipronged approach. In addition to public actions like the rally, Latinos Unidos, Stepstone Center, and the Roaring Fork Legal Services, the main nonprofit organizations leading this effort, articulated three different place-based arguments. First, they framed their concern as one of a jail being located in a quiet neighborhood and how that would be hazardous because of the risk to the public associated with criminals being held there. Of course that framing explicitly accepted the INS’ own labeling of immigrants as criminals. Another frame was that the danger this public building posed to the community constituted a “taking” of property owners’ rights under the US Constitution – a classic conservative western populist argument. And still a third frame was built on a more critical social justice perspective that argued against the broader ripple effects of such a facility’s presence – that it would instill fear, terror, and lend itself to racial profiling of Latinos, whether documented or not. Felicia Trevor, former director of the Stepstone Center and a resident of Carbondale, filed an appeal of the building permit issued for the facility. Her letter read, “One of the primary uses of this facility would be as a detention point for dangerous

criminals, and the building would become a staging point for detaining and transporting these criminals... This will present a danger to many Carbondale residents, both in the kinds of persons that will be processed, as well as the danger of this office becoming a target from those outside." The letter also stated,

There is a highly populated residential neighborhood surrounding the site, and property owners in this area have not been provided adequate notice that this 'public building' would include a secure facility designed to harbor federal criminals. Permitting occupation of the site by the QRT [Quick Response Team] is an unjustified taking of these property owners' rights to quiet enjoyment of their homes in safety, and a violation of the residents' constitutional rights.

Daniels (1999)

Trevor and Roaring Fork Legal Services director Kathy Goudy appeared before the town board to express their concern that the presence of the INS facility would lead to more harassment of Latinos, causing many to leave the area. Activists deliberately combined these three seemingly contradictory frames to gain the widest possible support for opposition efforts directed at the facility. While contradictory, these frames are continuous in their place-based logic. Each exploits people's vulnerability to social change or disruptions to their sense of place. At issue is their sense of themselves – their identity and belonging that is so tied to the identity of their town. For Carbondale, a small town that lives and struggles under the shadows of Aspen's blinding glitter, even an outcome that is clearly pro-immigrant was achieved through arguments that adhere to normative constructions of "good" and "bad" immigrants. This has significant long-term limitations as illustrated by the fact that an INS facility was built in the region, just not in Carbondale. These place-based arguments, however, helped define a distinct political identity and boundary. In January 2000, the Carbondale Zoning Board of Adjustment voted to deny the INS its building permit (Daniels 2000). But to their credit, Latinos Unidos and Stepstone acknowledged these larger limitations and took proactive steps to propose new directions for the INS. In a letter to an area newspaper, they stated "We also believe the INS should restructure their present immigration procedures to include greater emphasis and resources on processing of immigration documents and the creation of temporary work visas, and to lessen the focus on the detention of undocumented workers" (Stroud 2000).

Everyday Emplacement

A second method of emplacement Latino immigrant residents utilized is of a more everyday variety in which they formulate a sense of stability despite the regular harassment of local police, federal immigration enforcement presence, and some very vocal white native-born residents. In addition to working long hours, immigrants develop a collective sense of community by volunteering at local charities, going to church, taking night classes at the community college, participating at

local primary schools, and, of course, caring for each other within and across families. Carla is one example. She told us: "I have been working in Snowmass at the hotel. I'm a housekeeper, for two years. I work five days there, and on my extra day, I clean houses. I get up at six I finish at seven [pm]. And every other Friday I volunteer at the Aspen thrift shop." Federico, a longtime resident of the Valley, leads a full life that integrates different opportunities in the area. He and his family have been able to enjoy an existence that is beyond the labor of survival. Federico proudly told us:

I'm a carpenter. I also work in Aspen. I remodel houses, very big houses. I work eight hours a day, 7-3. Tuesday and Thursday evenings, I go to the Colorado Mountain College in Carbondale for classes. I also help my kids with homework, to help them with their Spanish because they speak more English than Spanish and we want our kids to maintain both languages. Two of my youngest sons dance for the city of Aspen ballet. We go to church on Saturdays – the Spanish masses – because it's very important for us to maintain our religion, pass it on to our children. Another routine is that I referee soccer.

Carla and Federico are the lucky ones. Having lived in the USA for a number of years, they have established a sense of place. However, many others still struggle to do so. Lupe is one example:

It's been twelve years since I arrived in the US. I am from Honduras. I heard stories from people who used to come here for work. Financially, they were paid more here than other places. But when I arrived here, it was a different issue. I came here and I was having trouble finding a place to live, finding a job. For the reason of being undocumented, it's been difficult. They don't pay what they said sometimes. Instead, they would pay you how much they want to pay. I've been in Glenwood Springs for five years now. We have to do a lot of work and we don't get paid very well.

The increasing militarization of the border has made life increasingly difficult and consequently, the necessity of emplacement is greater than ever. Like many tourist towns, the nature and availability of work can change dramatically with the change in season. Juanita, a staff member at Catholic Charities, explained, "In winter it's very difficult to pay the bills and rent because a lot of people get laid off. In the winter it is only the people who work in the hotels or restaurants in Aspen that have work. Other than that, a lot of people are laid off. That's the worst part of the year." This flexibility of labor demand facilitated a transnational response in which migrants crossed the US–Mexico border multiple times each year in search of work. Julio's story is one illustration of this practice. He lives half the year in Mexico and the other half in a trailer park in the Roaring Fork Valley with his daughter, who is an adult. The trailer park manager knows he is undocumented and will not allow him to live there even though his daughter is a resident. Julio said,

I have to go in, sneaking in. The manager is always watching. But if the manager finds out that I'm there with my daughter, he will just tell her to move out of the park. I have to park like a mile away and just walk home, sneaking, you know. So that's why we don't even go out, we don't even enjoy the garden, we have to be in the house. My wife doesn't work, so she's in the house 24 hours a day. Even though we have good salaries out here, with the rent and things they have to pay, you don't get to enjoy, you don't get any extra time or money to go bowling, to do fun stuff with your family. We don't get to have fun stuff like most people do.

In effect, Julio finds himself under house arrest and immobile unless he is laboring for someone else. With increasing border security (this includes beyond the literal border), migrants like Julio are finding border crossing more difficult and dangerous. According to an Associated Press report published in 2004, border crossings by undocumented persons claimed one life every day (Pritchard 2004). And, once inside the country proper, transportation routes can also be fraught with danger. In February 2000, two vans transporting undocumented persons slid off an icy highway and into a snow bank in Wolf Creek Pass, Colorado. No one was hurt in that accident, but a month earlier (January 2000), fifteen people were injured and three killed in a similar accident near Walsenburg, Colorado. An INS supervisor in Alamosa, Colorado told reporters that these “smuggle vans... remind me of slave ships... They jam people into them just like the holds of slave ships. They are being exploited” (Hunter 2000). Once migrants reach their destinations, they are often working the most unrewarding, lowest paid, and high-risk jobs available, even if they arrive here legally through the federal H2-A visa program (Yeoman 2001). The job-related death rate in Colorado for a Mexican worker is four times greater than the average US-born worker (Pritchard 2004).

Seasonality also has specific gendered effects. Evita Salinas, a temporary labor contractor in the area said as follows:

Most of the guys here are doing construction labor – about 80% of them. It all depends on the season. During the summer time you can have like 60% working construction and the other 40% are landscaping. During the winter it's very tough and there's not a lot to do, so many people are getting out and working in hotels and restaurants. There is a little bit of construction. And snow shoveling. For women, during winter time there is the hotel. You can do piece rate and you do as many units as you can – they pay you per unit – or you can work on shifts at hotels. That's tough for women because there's not a lot, just cleaning and landscaping. Or on the golf course the girls are doing some restaurant work. And it's tough because most of the girls in this town have kids. There is no real childcare here. There is a lot of childcare for gringos, but you need to pay a lot of money and you cannot afford it. So what we do is to have one friend take care of ten kids, but it's awful, it's tough. It's like a system. Somebody will take care of the babies and they will get maybe \$10 per baby, but it's very difficult. That's why I don't have babies [laughter].

As with many tourist economies, services like affordable childcare for the manual workforce are nonexistent. The available choices for the care of children of immigrants are extremely limited. We interviewed Gustavo, a grandfather in his late 1960s, who, once again, crossed the treacherous Sonoran desert. He did so at the request of his daughter who asked him to come to the States in order to care for his ill young grandson. Like many immigrants, Gustavo had worked for much of his adult life in the USA sending his paychecks to his family in Mexico with the intent of building a house in Mexico and retiring there. After many years of hard labor, Gustavo achieved his goal only to find that his grown children needed his help while they struggled in Colorado. Now, he spends his days inside a trailer home that he shares with his daughter's family of four, looking after a grandchild with special needs who requires round-the-clock care, while his daughter and son-in-law work as janitors in Aspen. His deeply lined face, marked with years of labor in construction sites and agricultural fields, showed little emotion as he cracked a polite smile

and said with a shrug, “Of course I'm here. My grandson needs me. Who else is going to take care of him?”

Given that health care is often a struggle for native-born US citizens, 47 million of whom currently have little or no coverage (Appleby 2006), we found significant inconsistencies in the cost and quality of health care for migrants in Aspen and the Roaring Fork Valley. For low-income immigrants, whether they receive health care and how much it costs seems to be completely at the whim of clinic administrators, sheer luck, or divine intervention.

We spoke to one young couple – Josefa and Tomas – who had arrived from Mexico just a few months prior to our visit. Tomas had a chronic health condition related to a perforated liver, and Josefa was 7 months pregnant. She told us:

We are worried about the health care because everything here's pretty expensive. We tried to sign up for some services and couldn't get them here. They told us that we have to pay 400 dollars up front, and it's a cost between 7 and 8 thousand dollars to have the baby in the hospital.

Like everything else in this exclusive mountain resort, the cost of living is exorbitant, including health care.³ Given that labor and delivery are covered under emergency health care and therefore available for everyone – including undocumented immigrants – we asked if the clinic and hospitals Josefa visited had signed her up for public health insurance.⁴ She said, “I already went for one office visit and had an ultrasound and it was 800 dollars. And I haven't been able to pay, and now I have another appointment on the 29th, but if I don't bring 400 dollars they won't see me.” Already in her third trimester, Josefa had only had one prenatal care visit and did not expect to go back to the hospital until the labor.⁵ Another interviewee experienced similar treatment. She said, “I paid six thousand dollars for my birth. I gave four hundred the first visit, eight hundred the next, and now I'm making payments.” However, in an earlier focus group, we spoke with another Latina who had just given birth a few weeks ago at the same clinic that Josefa visited. She was determined to be an indigent case and was not charged for her delivery.

Other immigrants and advocates we spoke with related similar inconsistencies. Juanita, a staff member at Catholic Charities in Glenwood Springs, told us, “There's

³For a more detailed analysis of the politics of immigrant health care, see Lisa Sun-Hee Park's *Bearing the Burden* (forthcoming NYU Press).

⁴Emergency Medicaid, for which undocumented immigrants qualify, covers labor and delivery. Also, Colorado is one of 12 states that provide prenatal care coverage for “qualified” immigrants who have resided in the USA for less than 5 years (see Kaiser Family Foundation & Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2004. *Covering New Americans: A Review of Federal and State Policies Related to Immigrants' Eligibility and access to Publicly Funded Health Insurance*. Menlo Park, California, November).

⁵Prenatal care for undocumented pregnant immigrants can be serviced through presumptive eligibility programs in many states. Presumptive eligibility allows uninsured pregnant women to obtain immediate prenatal care while their Medicaid eligibility is processed (National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health, 2005. *Prenatal Care Access among Immigrant Latinas*. New York, December).

a clinic in Rifle, but we've been receiving a lot of complaints that they are being really racist – the people who work up there – they don't tell clients that there's a low-income service up there. So even people from Rifle are coming up here for services." Jasmine, another immigrant Valley resident, stated, "Health care is a huge issue. We don't have health care. I had to pay \$600 for \$100 worth of insurance. It's really bad here. There are programs to help Latinos for health care but I don't know which ones they are. There is Medicaid, but in order to qualify, you have to make *no* money. We don't get health insurance through the job."

The lack of such basic and relatively cheap reproductive care illustrates the "vagabond" nature of late capitalism. Cindy Katz (2001) writes as follows:

Globalized capitalism has changed the face of social reproduction worldwide over the past three decades, enabling intensification of capital accumulation and exacerbating differences in wealth and poverty. The demise of the social contract as a result of neoliberalism, privatization, and the fraying of the welfare state is a crucial aspect of this shift.

Katz (2001)

Here, Katz places the irresponsibility on capitalist production that extracts the profitable benefits of migrant labor but does not pay minimal costs. She adds, "A vagabond, as is well known, moves from place to place without a fixed home. However, vagabondage insinuates a little dissolution – an unsettled, irresponsible, and disreputable life, which indeed can be said of the globalization of capitalist production." Capitalism apparently has no place, no loyalties to specificity or the everyday material realities of workers. Instead, it moves across transnational borders in ways that not only delink social reproduction from production but also use the borders themselves to make migrants invisible.

The immigrants we spoke with counter this disembodiment in an everyday context by finding ways to develop friendships and build meaningful community connections. For example, José Cordova stated,

I go to church, you know? And usually we have mass and a little youth group. And I'm involved in that, in helping teenagers. On weekends, we have retreats and stuff like that. And we've become friends with the youth and we go sometimes to camping or we play football, soccer and stuff like that. Even just sitting around and talking about different topics, that's what we do usually.

Others find or make time to relax after work, in ways that would be familiar to most people. Javier said, "After work sometimes we have a beer and play soccer, here in Carbondale. Behind the middle school there's a basketball court and we organize there to play soccer in the field." Josefa is also involved in a church group and works hard to carve out a place for the Latino community. She explains, "We can't do skiing and other things that are expensive sports that the Aspen people do. We do baseball, though. The whole Latino community reads *La Mision* – that's our paper. And we also listen to radio." These actions are reminiscent of what bell hooks calls "homeplace" in the lives of African Americans: "Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outline in the public world (hooks 1990)."

Questioning Environmental Privilege

A third method of emplacement is in response to a more novel form of migrant displacement. On December 13, 1999, the City Council of Aspen unanimously passed a resolution petitioning the US Congress and the President to enact legislation that would stabilize the nation's population. The language of the resolution suggests that this goal could be achieved by enforcing existing laws regulating undocumented immigration and reducing authorized immigration. City Council member Terry Paulson, who is also a longtime immigration critic and self-avowed environmentalist, led this effort. He received support and guidance from nationally prominent immigration control organizations such as the Carrying Capacity Network and the Center for Immigration Studies, who reportedly told him, "other communities haven't had the courage to do so... Because many current immigrants are members of minority groups in the US, attempts to limit immigration may be seen as racist."

Paulson wasted no time in calling for an expansion of the resolution beyond the city of Aspen. He announced his intention to engage a statewide campaign to "promote overpopulation awareness" and declared, "If we address population and do something about it everything else will fall in line." Aspen, located in Pitkin County, Colorado, then successfully persuaded the county to follow the city's lead and in March of 2000, the County commissioners voiced unanimous approval for a "population stabilization" resolution. The Aspen city council document combines classic nativist language around immigration with ideas that many persons of a liberal or left political persuasion would embrace. For example, the document includes the following seemingly progressive statements regarding environmental and labor conditions:

The people of the United States and the City of Aspen, Colorado envision a country with... material and energy efficiency, a sustainable future, a healthy environment, clean air and water, ample open space, wilderness, abundant wildlife and social and civic cohesion in which the dignity of human life is enhanced and protected.

The goal for Aspen is to be a "city beautiful," a beacon of sustainability and social responsibility. Unfortunately, underpinning this goal is nativist ideology. Aspen Councilman Terry Paulson sponsored the resolution with the following opening statement:

Fellow Council Members. This resolution we will be considering for adoption tonight could be the most important consideration we will ever make as representatives of our constituents and their children. ... "We have agitated, confused and deluded ourselves with the illusion that we are being overwhelmed by many, many problems – when in fact we have primarily only one. But it is the one that terrifies us the most, and we handle that terror by chattering endlessly about everything else. Denying... and minimizing population growth in the 1990s is a *hate crime against future generations*, and it must end."⁶ Please, join me..., by passing this resolution as written, and thereby insuring a sustainable future for America and her children.

⁶Here, Paulson cites Jonette Christian from Mainers for Immigration Reform, who gave a presentation at the Aspen Institute in October 1999.

Following this logic, immigration becomes the major cause of our ecological crisis. Similar initiatives have been proposed in numerous states and cities across the West and Southwest and in other nations under the banner of “green” policy making. However, the city of Aspen experienced a momentary embarrassment when it was reported that its resolution was featured on American Patrol’s website – a California-based organization that the Southern Poverty Law Center characterizes as a “hate group.”

In response to this and other reports of concern about the resolution, the Aspen City Council took great pains to stress that the initiative “was not racially motivated.” The countywide resolution, passed 4 months later, contained the following statement: “Immigration is the leading cause of population growth in the United States. Population is the leading cause of environmental degradation.” Thus, by implication, immigration must be the leading cause of ecological degradation. Like the Aspen resolution, the county’s resolution underscores the longstanding link between nativism and environmentalism in the USA and elsewhere.

As Aspen Council member Tom McCabe cautioned, “The planet’s a finite resource... We can’t indefinitely welcome people and expect to maintain our quality of life.” And that is precisely the point: Aspenites and others in similarly privileged places across the USA want to protect *their* “quality of life,” which includes resources and wealth derived from the ecosystems that only they have access to and from the hard work of others.

The innocent claim that environmentalists in the Roaring Fork Valley only want to “preserve our way of life” is belied by the fact that such a lifestyle requires the domination of the environment and of certain groups of people (e.g., people of color, immigrants, and workers who make such privileges possible for the wealthy and mostly white elite). It also underscores an enduring belief that there are essential differences between people of different ethnic, racial, and national backgrounds. Aspen and the surrounding Roaring Fork Valley of Colorado is just one of many sites on the planet built as a refuge from undesirable people and where nature can be manipulated for the convenience and enjoyment of a handful of elites. Moreover, in the case of the nativist environmentalists of Aspen, these environmentally privileged communities are claiming victim status. A Roaring Fork Valley area progressive activist and educator told us: “Environmental racism is when people of color are dumped on. But here, especially in Aspen, we have rich white folks who are saying *we’re* getting dumped on! So it’s like the idea has been totally turned around and upside down.” In other words, Aspenites are essentially crying “reverse environmental racism” because they view immigrants not only as a cause of environmental harm, but as a kind of social contamination, a form of pollution. This strongly parallels much of the discourse on population control within the US environmental movement historically.

Geographer David Sibley argues bluntly that Western society is based on exclusion. The flipside of exclusion is inclusion, so every act that repels others sends a message of belonging to those who are “like us” (Sibley 1997). As Sibley writes “The human landscape can be read as a landscape of exclusion... Because power is expressed in the monopolization of space and the relegation of weaker groups in

society to less desirable environments.” He suggests that we take a closer look at the “curious practices” of the “majority” “who consider themselves to be normal or mainstream” in order to uncover “the oddness of the ordinary” (Sibley 1997). Herein lies the third method of emplacement: questioning environmental privilege.

Immigrant residents of the Valley may not always be visible and public with their politics, but this does not mean they do not have strong feelings about the way they are treated. We asked local resident, worker, and activist José Cordova what he thought about the claim that immigrants harm local ecosystems. He stated, “I think that’s a misperception because I’ve been working with construction companies and the mess that they do with that stuff! There’s no ecological preservation. They just throw away everything. I don’t think it’s the Latinos affecting the environment.” He reframed the social problem as one of privilege:

My position is that the concept of overpopulation is not that accurate. That’s one of the arguments of groups to justify policies, to say there is poverty because of overpopulation. But if we go into details about wealth and the lands that are available, we see that maybe we may all fit in the world. I don’t think the problem is overpopulation; the problem is redistribution of the wealth and the redistribution of knowledge.

With an advanced degree in environmental sciences from a university in Central America, Cordova offered a critique of the general orientation of environmental policy in this nation. He contends that the focus is never on the point of production, but rather on what to do *after* we’ve produced or consumed goods. Like the population–environment debate, the postproduction and postconsumer recycling fixation of US environmental policy and environmental movements benefits powerful institutions that remain unchallenged (Gould et al. 1996; Szasz 1994):

I understand all these programs of recycling, reuse, rethinking. It’s OK, it’s nice. But that’s not the problem. The problem is from the beginning – how you produce those goods. You can produce something and make something new out of this, but the problem is that they are producing it in the first place, so the problem is conceptual and ideological. The forest and all the resources will suffer because you have not changed the approach to nature. ...So we produce more and we are working in this [consumer] phase of the production cycle, so they say we can recycle and reuse, but the problem is the same. And from that perspective you cannot say or argue that the foreigners or immigrants are the cause of the environmental problems. The companies are drilling for oil right now, it’s right here, these companies need natural gas and money, so it’s not the foreigners. It’s how you use nature.

Finally, Cordova issues a criticism of the USA in its lack of commitment to global environmental agreements, implying that the immigration–environment debate not only benefits corporate polluters but also the federal government, which does not take seriously its environmental responsibilities within and beyond its national borders.

The US has not signed the Kyoto Protocol [on global warming] and all those agreements that are well accepted all over Europe, and other countries have accepted it. I understand that they say that it’s not economically sound to change all the production systems. But all these other countries are doing it. Germany has changed legislation to change the way the companies work.

Cordova's analysis and assessment of US environmental politics coincides with what progressive scholars, policy makers, business leaders, and activists here and in other nations have been arguing for years (Agyeman et al. 2003; Gould et al. 2008; Pellow 2007).

His appraisal of the population-environment debate speaks directly to the overarching quest for environmental privilege in the Roaring Fork Valley and elsewhere. Environmental privilege is not just about maintaining exclusive access to ecological amenities (mountains, rivers, lakes, beaches, parks, trails, etc.); it is also about maintaining access and belonging to the broader reality of social place, of which both ecological and nonecological amenities are a part.

Another resident offered her views on the subject:

The problem is when the Hispanic community are getting businesses and they're interacting more with the organizations, and they're getting more involved with the important issues in this valley. That is when it pops up as a problem. That is my experience. More than, "I don't like you because you're Mexican."

In other words, structural or institutional racism, not just interpersonal racism, is at the core of the struggle for white environmental privilege and is deployed strategically as immigrants form more permanent, material claims to place. Environmental privilege is ultimately an exertion of power that employs nativism and its racist logic to demarcate where particular people belong. Carlos Loya works as a laborer throughout the Valley and has had plenty of experience with racism. Sometimes when native-born whites yell epithets at him he responds in one of two ways. He might tell Anglos, "My ancestors were here in Aspen long before you got here. This land used to be our land." Or he poses a question: "You call me wetback because I crossed a river, so what can I call you? You crossed an ocean." Loya stated, "Without knowing it, they are making us tough and giving us patience and strength when they do this. We have a strong shell" (Aguilera 2004).

Loya's response to nativists is a quintessential example of this method of emplacement. He questions environmental privilege by evoking a new narrative of national origins. He asks, what demarcates belonging? Who got here first? And, if my migration makes me inferior, what does your migration across the Atlantic mean? How are you not an immigrant? Loya exerts his power by "flipping the script" and questioning their taken-for-granted entitlement of place.

Scholars working in the field of environmental justice studies have, for more than three decades, presented evidence that poor, working class, indigenous, and people of color communities face greater threats from pollution and industrial hazards than other groups. While these studies reveal the hardships and crimes associated with environmental inequality and environmental racism, fewer studies consider the flipside of that reality. Environmental privilege results from the exercise of economic, political, and cultural power that some groups enjoy, which enables them near exclusive access to coveted environmental amenities such as forests, parks, mountains, rivers, coastal property, open lands, and elite neighborhoods. Questioning environmental privilege identifies the wealthy Aspenites as the social problem, not the immigrants.

Place-Making in a Global World

Within the context of globalization, the ability to freely choose whether to stay in one place or to traverse multiple borders of nation-states appears to be increasingly limited to elites. The heightened militarization of national borders in conjunction with neoliberal trade policies imposes immobility on some while coercing migration on others. What appear consistent in this scenario are the persistent significance of place and the importance of place-making as an empowering act. Citing the importance of Doreen Massey's work on the multiple spatial scales in which people develop a "global sense of place," feminist geographer Linda McDowell (1999) argues, "Places are made through power relations which construct the rules which define boundaries." These boundaries are socially and spatially constructed to include some and exclude others. What emplacement methods employed by immigrants living in Aspen tells us is that place-making is a necessary part of their lives, in both ordinary (everyday) and extraordinary (public) ways. They use both local and global strategies to produce this sense of place (Isabel 2006; McLafferty and Chakrabarti 2009). And, while their experience of Aspen may not match the power behind the glittery, goliath rendition of Aspen splayed across glossy magazine covers, it is real and it is theirs. Evidently, a sense of place is a requisite for a sense of self, particularly for transnational migrants.

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