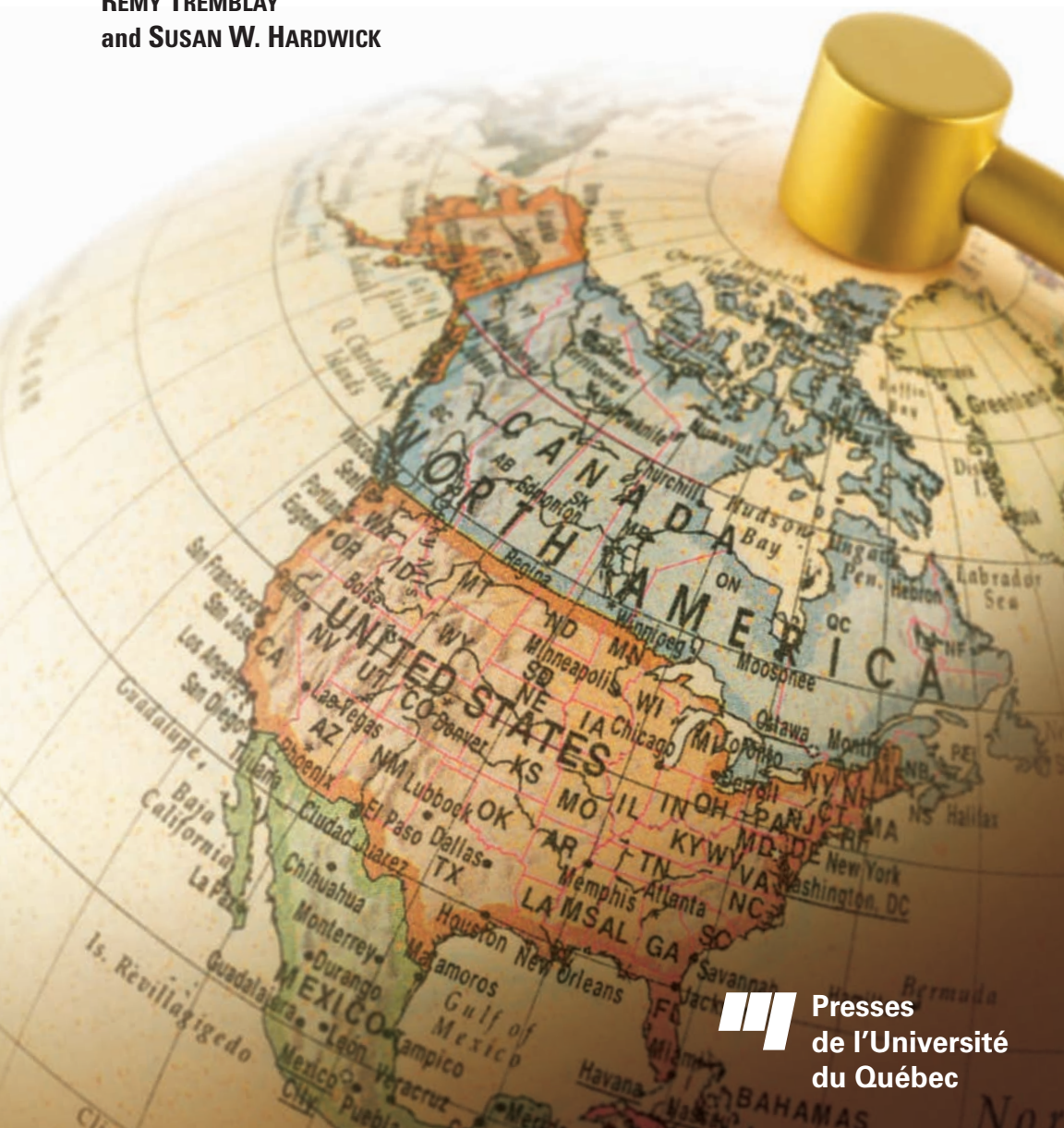


# TRANSNATIONAL BORDERS TRANSNATIONAL LIVES

## Academic Mobility at the Borderland

Edited by  
**RÉMY TREMBLAY**  
and **SUSAN W. HARDWICK**



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# **TRANSNATIONAL BORDERS**

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# INTRODUCTION

**Rémy Tremblay**

TÉLÉ-UNIVERSITÉ, UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC, MONTRÉAL,  
QUÉBEC, CANADA

**Susan W. Hardwick**

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON, EUGENE, OREGON, USA

*Chronicling the history of geography  
entails not only the literature emerging  
from geographers' pens and printers,  
but also the [lives of] geographers themselves.<sup>1</sup>*

Moss, 2002: 188–189.

*T*ransnational Borders, Transnational Lives tells the stories of a selected group of North American academic migrants. The autobiographical essays in this volume capture the migration experiences, decision-making, career choices, and adjustment challenges of Canadian geographers who currently reside

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1. P. Moss (2002). *Placing Autobiography in Geography*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

in the United States and American geographers who migrated to Canada.<sup>2</sup> Each of the autobiographical contributions in the pages that follow was written by university faculty who share the same disciplinary training and degree. Each contributor to the book also made the same life-changing decision to leave home for permanent residency on the other side of the Canada-US border.

The migration stories of the academic geographers presented in this volume are linked by a set of common themes, issues, and questions. These include (1) the push-pull factors influencing their migration decision-making; (2) the role of the department or university's reputation in their decision to relocate abroad; (3) the potential attraction of the physical/environmental characteristics of their new site of residence; (4) the career or personal impacts of relocation; (5) their attachment to place, sense of belonging, or feelings of "otherness" after relocation; and (6) other opportunities or challenges they may have faced living and teaching abroad. During their discussions of one or more of these themes, contributors write from a personal perspective. The often emotional testimonials of this group of cross-border geographers go a long way toward capturing the full range of feelings and experiences related to migration and settlement decision-making, especially as personal processes play out within the larger context of North American mobility.

The co-editors of this book have a great deal in common with the geographer-essayists who contributed the autobiographies that appear on the pages that follow. They are also academic geographers who have faced many similarly challenging and life-altering career decisions in their lives. Both have also studied, observed, and written about migration patterns and processes at the Canada-US borderland. Their experiences with migrants at the 49th parallel over the years have been shaped by the people they have interviewed, the survey questionnaires they have tabulated, and the maps they have created instead of by personal experience. Tremblay's many years of research on the travel behaviour and migration of Quebecers to *Floribec* — the Québécois enclave of migrants and

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2. The term "Americans" is used throughout this book to identify all migrants who have relocated to Canada from the United States. We are well aware that the term "Americans" actually includes all residents of North and South America, not only people from the United States. However, since migrants from the United States are referred to as "Americans" in Canada, this term is used to describe this group due to its appropriateness in this particular context.

tourists in the Hollywood, Florida metropolitan area — have appeared in print and in the media (including a number of popular documentaries). Hardwick similarly has been engaged in the study of the migration flows and the transnational identities of immigrants from the United States who currently reside in Canada for many years. But like her co-editor, all of the books and articles Hardwick has written about the migration experiences of cross-border migrants were created while she was firmly planted on her native soil.

Although neither of the co-editors of this book has lived the life of an academic migrant, doing research on Can-Am migration has helped clarify their understanding of the challenges newcomers face as they adjust to their new lives. They also have learned a great deal over the years from teaching courses on immigration in North America. As a whole, their research, teaching, and travel have all helped the co-editors learn more about the decision-making, perceptions, and settlement patterns of cross-border migrants. However, engaging with the stories collected in this book has made them even more curious about the lives and decisions of migrants at a personal level. We hope that you, too, are inspired by the migration stories that follow. As these various authors remind us, becoming a migrant is about much more than finding the right job or ending up in a particular locale. Mobility is also about seeking and finding pathways that lead to personal growth and a deepened trust in oneself and one's family.

Cross-border migration between Canada and the United States provides a compelling setting for the study of migration. There are currently more Canadians in the United States and more Americans in Canada than at any period of time since the Vietnam War era. Canada and the United States also share the same language and many of the same values and beliefs. These two nation states also are yoked together by their geographic proximity and long history of shared borders and economic linkages. Finally, the United States and Canada are both “immigrant receiving nations.” As a result, although both countries continue to share a predominantly white power base, the population of the United States and Canada has become increasingly diverse during the past five decades or so.

These many cultural, economic, and political similarities linking Canada and the United States, along with the ease of crossing the international boundary between them, make it relatively easy for migrants to relocate to the other side of the border. However, when we compiled information on the numbers and specializations of academic migrants in our field who are affiliated with colleges and universities on the other side of the Canada-US border in preparation for this book, we were surprised to discover just how few geographer-migrants there are in North America! Some of the primary reasons for these small numbers are presented in the following chapter.

As discussed on the pages that follow, while all of the contributors to this volume made the decision to leave home because of a job offer at a university located on the other side of the border, each one also was influenced to leave their homeland by other factors. For some of the American geographers, it was the attraction of Canada's more liberal political climate and supportive social service policies such as universal health care that drew them north. For other contributors, it was the attraction of better weather and the greater support for their subfield of the discipline at universities south of the border. Whatever their reasons, all of the contributors to this book found themselves facing unexpected challenges and opportunities on the other side of the border. However, despite these professional and personal challenges, each of the academic migrants featured in this book made the decision to stay wherever their career opportunity led them — at least for now.

Due to the rise of critical social theory and reflexivity and positionality in human geography during the past three decades, the time has come for the autobiographical method to move front and center in the discipline. This approach is particularly useful for migration scholars in the field who are interested in deepening their understanding of the migration experience and documenting the decision-making of migrants that lies behind census tabulations and the migration patterns shown on maps. The use of the autobiographical method to document and analyze the individual and collective experiences of migrants not only helps expand our understanding of the processes shaping the world we live in, it also opens the door to new interpretations of people, place, and mobility at the borderland.

Chapter 1 provides more information on the strengths of the autobiographical method for geographical analysis. The next chapter also briefly discusses the geographical and historical context of cross-border migration and settlement in North America to lay a foundation for the migration stories that follow. This overview of the spatial patterns and related processes of Canadian immigrants in the United States and Americans in Canada over the years provides important background for understanding the decision making and post-migration adjustment experiences of the academic migrants featured in the book.





# CANADIAN AND AMERICAN CROSS-BORDER MIGRATION, SETTLEMENT, AND BELONGING

**Susan W. Hardwick**

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*For geography, writing one's life might in many ways be able to augment the continued construction of geography as a discipline, especially with regard to the people who build it: scholars, researchers, teachers, students, practitioners; to tell us who we are in the context of our multiple environments; and to give some clues as to where our world comes from.*

Moss, 2002: 21.

Despite the uncertainties of shifting border crossing policies in North America in the post-9/11 era, many thousands of Canadians and Americans continue to cross the 49th parallel each day.<sup>1</sup> Among these borderland travelers are tourists, entrepreneurs, shoppers, and post-NAFTA truck drivers who return home after a temporary visit to the other side of the border. Others are immigrants seeking permanent residency in Canada or the United States.

The number of North American cross-border migrants has escalated dramatically in recent years. As a result, there are currently more Canadians residing in the United States and more Americans living in Canada than at any time in more than five decades (US Census Bureau; Statistics Canada).<sup>2</sup> As discussed in more detail later in this chapter, most of the Canadians who now live in the United States left their homeland for employment reasons or are snowbirds enjoying the sunshine and warm beaches of the Sunbelt states. The majority of Americans who now reside in Canada, in contrast, made the decision to leave their homeland and head north in search of the more liberal political climate, universal health care and other social service benefits, more supportive legislation for LGBT communities, and/or other social or environmental amenities in Canada. This cross-border migration stream in North America also includes a significantly large number of academic migrants who left their homeland to accept faculty positions at a college or university in Canada or the United States.

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## AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND GEOGRAPHY

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*Transnational Borders, Transnational Lives* builds on two prior publications in the field of geography that are also based on the autobiographical method — *Placing Autobiography in Geography* (2002) by Pamela Moss and Leslie J. King's edited volume, and *North American Explorations*:

- 
1. We predict that an even larger flow of migrants and other residents of Canada and the United States will continue to move north and south across the 49th parallel in the coming years due to passage of a new cross-border agreement signed by the US and Canadian governments in 2012. The goal of this "Action Plan on Perimeter Security and Economic Competitiveness" is to facilitate and encourage borderland mobility for people, goods, and services linking Canada and the United States in the years to come.
  2. For additional verification of this larger than expected flow of Americans into Canada and Canadians into the United States during the first decade of the twentieth century, see also Jack Jedwab (2008: 1–10) and Hardwick and Smith (2012: 288–311).

*Ten Memoirs of Geographers from Down Under* published in 2008. Despite the timeliness and relevance of these two important precursors to our work, surprisingly little has been published since then that directly builds on their important contributions.<sup>3</sup> *Transnational Borders, Transnational Lives* helps fill this gap in the literature by using the autobiographical method in geographical scholarship to learn more about the decision-making, migration flows, and adjustment experiences of Can-Am migrants at the borderland.<sup>4</sup>

The use of the autobiographical approach is of particular importance in delving more deeply into the borderland migration experience. As geographer Pamela Moss argues: “who better to recollect a life story than the main character of a daily journal, diary, or memoir? Authorization of the truth about one’s life is assumed through an ‘I,’ not a ‘she,’ ‘he,’ ‘we,’ or ‘they’” (2002: 12). Building on this perspective, we view autobiography as both the structural frame and the overarching goal of this book since an individual geographer’s life story as a piece of a larger story also helps chronicle the story of geography as a discipline. Comparing these life stories/life portrayals in two different places — Canada and the United States — with two different groups of migrants — Canadians and Americans — adds a particularly rich dimension to the use of the autobiographical approach. In addition, since all of the book’s contributors are academic geographers, the chapters that follow also provide new insights into the importance of the related themes of place, mobility, and

- 
3. A number of studies by human geographers and scholars in other related fields have used personal stories and life histories as key approaches and methods central to their work. This work initially built upon the foundation laid by earlier humanistic geographers such as Yi-Fu Tuan and Anne Buttimer in the 1980s and 1990s and more recent work published by feminist and postcolonial scholars such as Kim England, 1994; Melissa Gilbert, 1994; Liz Bondi, 1999; Mona Domosh, 1997; Cindi Katz and Janice Monk, 1994; Audrey Kobayashi, 1994; Linda McDowell, 1992; Janice Monk, 1997; Janice Monk, Joos Droogleever Fortuijn, and Clionadh Raleigh, 2004. Among this larger literature are several edited or co-edited books centered on the comparative life stories of a particular group of geographers that most directly relate to the book. These include Buttimer and Hagerstrand (1998); Mark Billinge, Derek Gregory, and Ron L. Martin (1984); and David Bennett (1984). Most recently, a newly published book on fieldwork in tourism studies edited by geographer C. Michael Hall (2011) focused attention on the importance of understanding the positionality and perceptions of researchers in this subfield of the discipline.
  4. The term “Can-Am” migrant is used in this book to refer to the combined group of US migrants who reside in Canada and Canadian migrants who live in the United States. The use of this composite term describing migrant flows both north and south at the Canada-US border was first used in a book chapter entitled “Crossing the 49th Parallel: American Immigrants in Canada and Canadians in the US” by Susan W. Hardwick and Heather Smith (2012: 288–311).

belonging (since these concepts are critically important to scholars in our discipline). Finally, as discussed in the Introduction, *Transnational Borders, Transnational Lives* geographic focus on Canada and the United States is especially useful for this comparative analysis of the cross-border migration experience in an international setting because of the linguistic, religious, and cultural foundations shared by the majority of the native-born residents of these two neighbouring nation-states.

Along with these many similarities shared by Americans and Anglophone Canadians, however, are the often dramatic differences in the experiences of academic migrants who relocated from or to Québec and other Francophone communities in Canada. There are many important political, linguistic, and cultural divides separating Anglophone and Francophone Canada. These differences provide rich opportunities for a more nuanced analysis of migration, place, and belonging in two parts of the world that are on the one hand, so very much the same, and on the other hand, so very different. Because of the many commonalities linking Anglo-Canada and the United States, for example, one might assume that the majority of our contributors will report that their post-settlement adjustment experiences have evolved in a relatively uncomplicated (or even simplistic) way. Likewise, it might also therefore be predicted that this easy and smooth adjustment to life on the other side of a so-called “invisible” international border may result in strong feelings of attachment of both Canadian and American migrants to their new places of residence.

Based on the findings of prior research on immigrant identities at the Canada-US borderland, however, we speculated at the outset that the autobiographical stories presented in this book would be more layered and nuanced than originally anticipated. Prior work documenting the identity construction of Canadians in the United States as compared to the surprisingly rapid *Canadianization* of Americans in Canada, provides preliminary evidence that academic migrants from the US who now reside in Canada may assume a Canadian identity and a strong sense of belonging to their new nation very rapidly following migration to Canada (see Hardwick, 2010; Hardwick and Mansfield, 2009). In contrast to earlier findings on the shifting identities of Canadian cross-border migrants as a whole, academic migrants from Canada who now live in the United States may be more likely to remain connected to their

“Canadianness” for a much longer period of time (or forever) following their relocation abroad (see Tremblay and Chicoine, 2011; Hardwick and Smith, 2012).

## **CANADIAN AND AMERICAN MIGRATION FLOWS AT THE BORDERLAND**

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Despite increases in the number of north-south borderland migrants in the early twenty-first century, little has been done until very recently that documents and analyzes the migration flows and settlement patterns and experiences of these two groups of migrants. Among the scant publications on this topic are several studies of transnational French Canadian tourists in Florida (Tremblay, 2003; Tremblay and Chicoine, 2011); an analysis of the spatial patterns and white-on-white privileged status of borderland migrants in both Canada and the United States (Hardwick and Smith, 2012); research on the identity construction of Americans who left their homeland for Canada primarily for political reasons (Hardwick, 2010; Hardwick and Mansfield, 2009); and a Migration Policy Institute study on the numbers and patterns of Americans in Canada after the re-election of ultra-conservative former US president George W. Bush (Ray and Kobayashi, 2005). Other earlier work, such as Jeffrey Simpson’s journalistic book, *Star-Spangled Canadians* (2000), Randy Widdis’s seminal research on the historical flows of Canadians to the United States (1997), and publications on American war resisters in Canada during the Vietnam War era (such as, for example, Hagan, 2001; Dickerson, 1999; and Jones, 2005) also provided important background for conceptualizing and structuring this book.

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## **CANADIANS IN THE UNITED STATES**

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Beginning with the forced out-migration of thousands of French-speaking Acadians from their homeland in today’s Nova Scotia to the American colonies in the mid-eighteenth century and the earliest northward counterflow of Loyalists emigrating to Canada from the New England colonies in opposition to the Revolutionary War, there has been a steady flow of migrants in both directions across the Canada-US border for centuries.

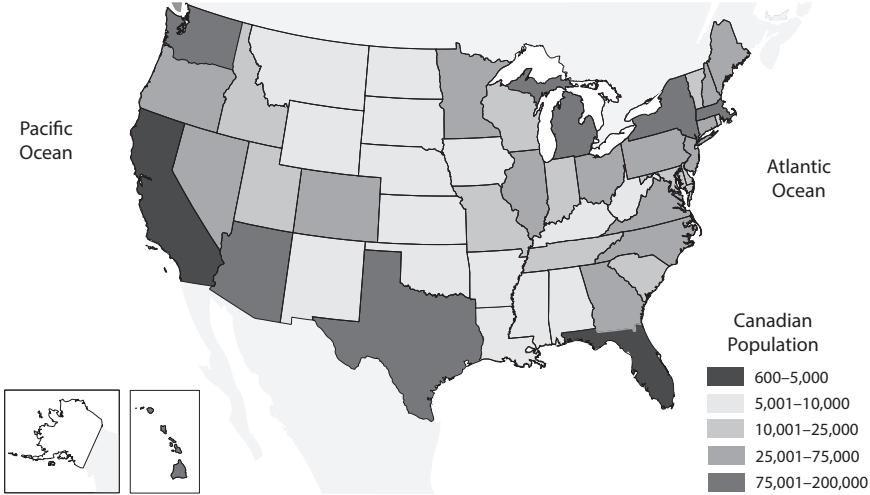
With the exception of the forced migration of Acadian refugees to the Gulf Coast and elsewhere in the colonies, by far most of the Canadians who moved to the United States over the years have been attracted by the lure of more lucrative employment opportunities. American migrants in Canada, on the other hand, more often have been drawn north for political, social, and environmental reasons. Over the years, the push-pull factors drawing Americans to Canada have included resistance to US wars abroad, frustration with what is perceived as overly conservative politics (such as the “Tea Party” movement) in the United States, Canada’s better funded social service policies, a sense of greater safety and security, and a search for wilderness and environmental amenities north of the border.

Perhaps the best documented Canadians in the United States are temporary “snowbird” migrants who head south to the warm beaches and deserts of the Sunbelt states for an extended period of time each winter (Simpson, 2000; Tremblay, 2003, 2006; Tremblay and Chicoine, 2011). These part-time residents of coastal Florida and other parts of the American South and Southwest, however, represent only one group among many other Canadians who reside south of the border at the present time. As shown on the two maps in Figure 1, in addition to the Sunbelt states, the largest numbers of Canadians in the US reside in states located in close proximity to the Canadian border such as New York, Michigan, and Washington.

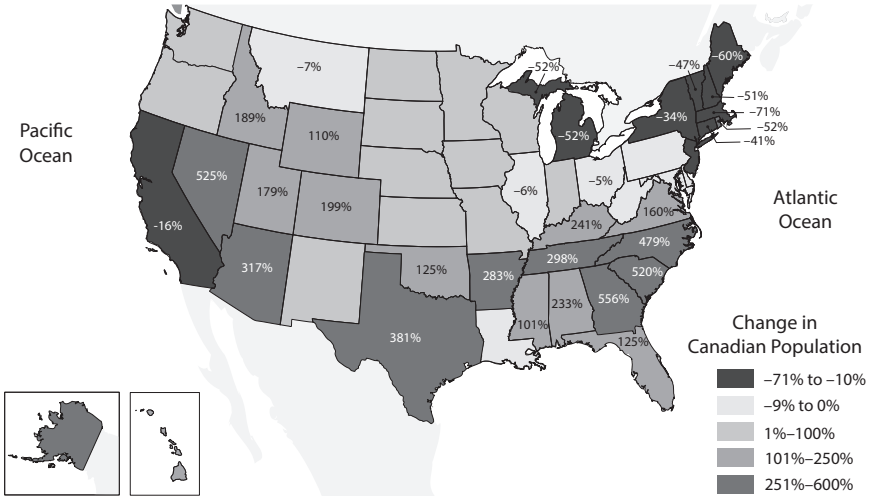
Following the passage of NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) in the mid-1990s, and the resulting proliferation of “Trade NAFTA visas” that eased border crossing restrictions for skilled workers from Canada and the United States who could verify their renewable working status, ever increasing numbers of Canadian migrants have been drawn to the United States for employment reasons (Michalowski and Tran, 2008; Bélanger and Bélanger, 1999). Largely because of these special visas, at least 28,000 Canadians migrated to the United States annually between 1990 and 2000 (Simpson, 2000). This employment-related post-NAFTA surge re-energized Canadian concerns about the negative economic impacts at home of a recurring “brain drain” of skilled workers to the United States. As a result the Canadian government has implemented a number of new programs in recent years aimed at encouraging Canadian workers who migrated to the United States for employment reasons to return home.

FIGURE 1

A – Canadian-born Population Distribution in the US, 2007



B – Percent Change in Canadian-born Population in the US, 1970–2007



Source: Hardwick and Smith, 2012. Original cartography: Laura Simmons and Thomas Ludden, University of North Carolina, Charlotte.

This NAFTA-related flow of Canadians into the United States was but one piece of an ongoing north-south flow that continued to ebb and flow throughout the twentieth century. In the 1950s and 1960s, an earlier wave of brain drain migrants from Canada were attracted to the United States by employment offers in fields such as education, health care, and engineering (Simpson, 2000). This southward flow was curbed in the mid-1960s by the passage of the US *Hart-Celler Immigration and Naturalization Act* that placed strict quotas on the total number of immigrants permitted entry into the United States from any one country (Simpson, 2000). As a result of this restrictive legislation, as well as concerns about the volatile social justice issues happening in the United States such as the Civil Rights movement and opposition to the Vietnam War, by the early 1970s, the number of Canadians leaving their homeland for the United States had decreased dramatically. From the mid-1990s to the present day, however, due to the ease of applying for the work-related visas discussed above, and the increasing availability and affordability of real estate in the Sunbelt states during and after the global recession, ever larger numbers of new Canadians are now residents of the United States.

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### AMERICANS IN CANADA

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The shifting tides of social and political change in Canada and the United States also have had an impact on the shifting dynamics of American migration to Canada over the years. From the earliest Loyalist war resisters during and after the American Revolution through the emigration of American political refugees leaving their homeland in opposition to other US wars in Vietnam in the 1960s and early 1970s and in Iraq and Afghanistan in more recent years, the northward flow of Americans has continued. The majority of these departing Americans have been white, educated, and privileged. However, other migrants from the United States, such as former African Americans slaves who headed north to Ontario and Nova Scotia in the mid-1800s with the help of the Underground Railroad added diversity to this south-north flow. At least 62,000 African Americans lived in Canada by 1860 (Winks, 1997).

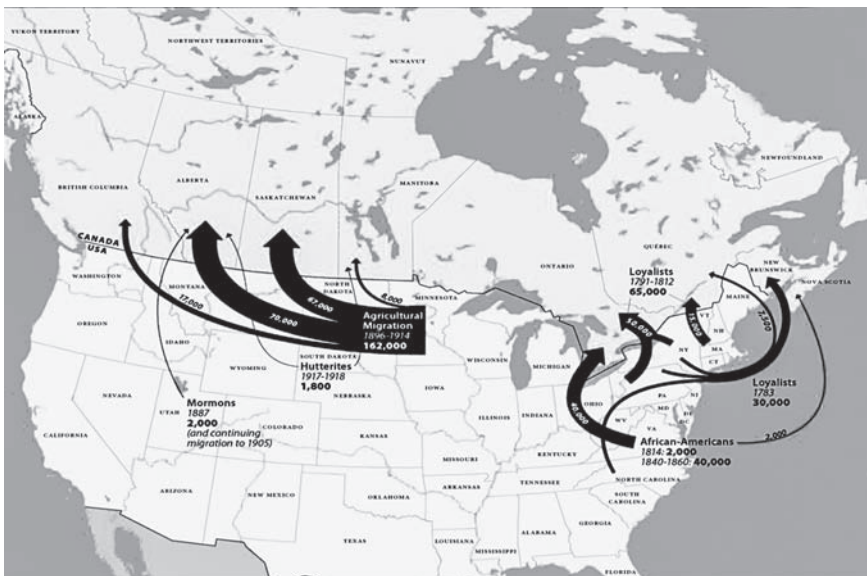


The number of Americans in Canada expanded exponentially in the first decade of the twentieth century after tens of thousands of farmers from the northern Great Plains and Interior Western states moved north. Most were seeking the fertile agricultural land of southeastern British Columbia and the Prairie Provinces during Canada's *Land Boom* years (Woodsworth, 1972). The map shown in Figure 2 provides additional information on the settlement of these agricultural migrants in Canada and the other pre-1920 flows from the United States to Canada discussed above.

A little over a half century later, the largest out-migration in US history resulted in more than 100,000 Vietnam War resisters and draft dodgers relocating to Canada from the United States. About half of these political refugees stayed on as landed immigrants in Canada at the end of the war (Hagan, 2001; Jones, 2005). Their departure from the United States for political reasons set the stage for the next large wave of American settlement north of the border that occurred during the first decade of the twenty-first century. Once again, Americans who were dissatisfied

FIGURE 2

*Pre-1920 American Migration to Canada*



Source: Adapted from Thompson and Randall, 1994: 18.

with the political situation in their US homeland made the decision to head north to Canada due, in large part, to their opposition to the election and re-election of conservative US president George W. Bush.

In more recent years, and despite the more liberal politics and policies of the Obama era, Americans have continued to relocate to Canada in ever larger numbers in recent years. Many emigrate from the US because of their opposition to “tea party” conservatism there. Other Americans move to Canada in search of greater economic opportunities north of the border due to the lesser impacts of the global recession in Canada than in the United States. In addition to these economic and political pull factors, Americans also are drawn to Canada’s more supportive social service policies (such as universal health care), greater tolerance and support for LGBT communities, strict gun control legislation, and/or to retire (Baram, 2007; Jedwab, 2008; Hardwick and Mansfield, 2009). As a result, Americans are now a significantly large minority group in many Canadian cities such as Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary, and Halifax and in small towns near the border such as Nelson in the remote Kootenay Mountains of British Columbia. The location patterns of US-born residents of Canada based on recent census data are shown on the two maps provided in Figure 3.

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### **CROSS-BORDER ACADEMIC FLOWS IN NORTH AMERICA**

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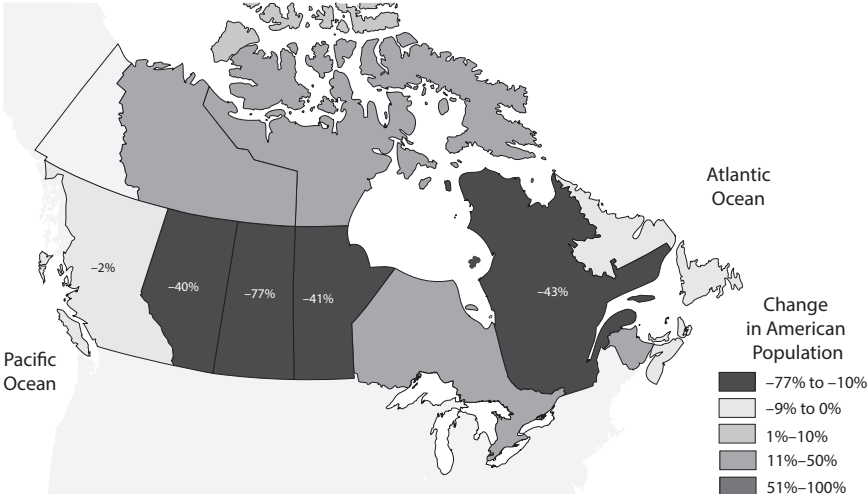
Newly hired college and university faculty migrants have formed a significant part of the larger Can-Am borderland flows discussed above, especially during the past five decades. Of particular note were the large numbers of newly minted PhDs who left the United States in the 1960s and 1970s for faculty positions in Canada. During this same time period, a small but significant counter flow of Canadian academics likewise left home to teach in a college or university in the United States. The migration experiences, settlement patterns, and post-relocation adjustments and challenges faced by the eight geographers featured in this book represent this important dimension of cross-border migration in North America. As with other groups of migrants in Canada and the United States, the larger context of political, social, and economic change in North America during various time periods has continued to shape the size, frequency, and intensity of the borderland flows of academic migrants. Key factors influencing

FIGURE 3

A – US-born Population in Canada, 2006



B – Percent Change in US-born Population in Canada, 1970–2006



Source: Hardwick and Smith, 2012.  
Original cartography: Laura Simmons and Thomas Ludden, University of North Carolina, Charlotte.

the migration flows, number, and location patterns of Canadian faculty in the United States and US faculty at Canadian universities during the past five decades or so are discussed below.

A period of unprecedented growth in higher education occurred in both Canada and the United States during the booming post-World War II years. This growth was precipitated by the demands of ever larger numbers of undergraduate students interested in earning college degrees. In Canada, these demands were especially challenging due to the small number of PhDs being produced at Canadian universities in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>5</sup> This meant that English-proficient faculty needed to be hired from abroad with new PhDs from the United States in ready supply.

New faculty at Canadian universities were needed in all subject areas by the early 1960s, especially in the Humanities and Social Sciences (Axelrod, 1982; Blumenthal, Goodwin, Smith, and Teighler, 1996). Research conducted by Canadian scholar David Brown (1967) documented that there were only 672 professors from the United States teaching at Canadian universities in 1964. Only one year later, this number had more than doubled with at least 1,000 additional new American academics hired at Canadian institutions each year throughout the next decade. By 1969, Americans made up at least 41 percent of all Humanities and Social Science faculty in Canada and 8 percent of Science faculty (Mathews and Steele, 1969).

The large number of Americans in Canadian classrooms led to concerns soon thereafter about their negative impacts on Canadian students—especially in the “culturally sensitive” disciplines. Fears that US faculty would inculcate Canadian youth with American values and American political attitudes continued throughout the 1970s. By the early 1980s, US faculty hires in Canada had become an issue of very serious concern to Canadian politicians, educators, and others north of the border (Cormier, 2003). A “Hire Canada!” movement soon ensued in an effort to slow down or stop the perceived invasion of US faculty based on fears that “Americans would take advantage of their numerical prominence in the culturally sensitive fields by teaching only the American texts, the American issues, the American way” (Mathews and Steele, 1969: 299).

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5. According to a study completed by H.E. Petch in 1969 (pp. 8–9), Canadian universities awarded PhDs to only 3,741 candidates in all fields between 1963 and 1968. This left about 7,500 other academic positions to be filled by outsiders like Americans.

These concerns led to the urgent passage of new legislation in Canada in 1982 that gave preference to hiring only Canadian citizens for faculty positions in higher education. Although it was possible to find a way around these new requirements in unusual cases, almost all Canadian universities subsequently limited their searches and job offers to insiders for the next two decades. The number of PhDs awarded to Canadians by Canadian universities also increased substantially during this same time period, assuring a larger pool of “insider” job candidates for teaching and research positions.

Following this era of limited opportunities for faculty hires from outside of Canada for university positions, the pendulum once again swung in the other way in the early twenty-first century. Responding to public and administrative pressure to hire faculty who would enhance the “excellence” and “internationalization” of Canadian institutions, new legislation was approved in Canada in 2003 that opened the door to a wider pool of applicants (Cormier, 2003). As discussed in the chapters that follow, this more open legislation made it possible for several of the American contributors to this book to be hired for faculty positions in geography departments at universities in Canada that only a few years earlier had been restricted to hiring only Canadian citizens.

At the same time, a small but more steady stream of Canadians was being hired for faculty positions at colleges and universities in the United States. However, due to the urgent and much greater need for new faculty in Canada in the 1950s and 1960s, and the restrictive “Hire Canada!” legislation discussed above that followed this era of growth in higher education, most academic job-seekers in Canada were able to find teaching positions at home and thus had little need to apply for teaching positions abroad. An exception to this general rule were faculty in the sciences and technology fields who were attracted to US universities and research centers by larger start-up packages at times, and higher salary offers at research institutions south of the border.

In the autobiographical chapters that follow, a set of overlapping and often interrelated factors are discussed that helped shape the decision-making of the Canadian and American academic migrants featured in this book. For most, it was the offer of a faculty position that met their needs, demands, and hopes for the future that most influenced their decision to relocate abroad. But as many of the autobiographical stories featured

in subsequent chapters illustrate, some of the other migration push-pull factors discussed earlier in this chapter also played a part in their decision to leave home.

Chapters 2 through 5 in Part I that follows detail the migration, settlement, and adjustment experiences of four selected academic migrants from Canada who now reside in the United States. Part II (Chapters 6 through 9) then features the autobiographical contributions of four academic geographers from the United States who live in Canada.

As the authors of each of these forthcoming chapters demonstrate, all were initially attracted to move to the other side of the Canada-US border by the draw of a university faculty position. However, a host of other economic, political, environmental, and socio-cultural push-pull factors also contributed to their decision to leave home to begin a new life. In one case, it was the attraction of exciting research possibilities in his dissertation study site near the Great Lakes and the attraction of living in a US region located in such close proximity to family and friends in Canada just across the border. For others, it was the lure of Canada's less non-homophobic society where the state "has nothing to do with bedrooms" (as former Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau once said). Other push-pull factors discussed in the following chapters include the attraction of larger salaries in Canadian universities as compared to the United States in the immediate post-recession era, along with the availability of extended paid maternity leaves for both parents north of the border. Another contributor mentions being attracted to the exciting "unknowns" and warmer weather in the United States — and a feeling that home is "wherever one ends up" (based on her earlier family history that had involved a dramatic escape from war-torn Asia in search of an unknown new life in Canada).

The following chapters also provide evidence that many of the geographer-authors of these autobiographical essays faced a number of unexpected challenges after their resettlement abroad. These include dealing with the unexpectedly poor quality of public education, the anti-immigrant attitudes of local residents, and deep concerns about the political conservatism that still dominates much of the United States despite changes in the presidential administration in the post-Bush years.

These borderland migrants clearly have a great deal of important and timely information to share about the cross-border resettlement experience. Their migration story begins with an “autoethnography” on the experiences of a Canadian geographer who now resides in Southern California.

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**CANADIAN  
GEOGRAPHERS IN  
THE UNITED STATES**



# WHERE IS HOME?

## An Autoethnography of Academic Migration

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**M**any years ago while living abroad, I wrote to a friend to tell her that I would be coming “home” soon. In her response she asked, “where is home?” I have thought about this question for many years, as I have moved from Canada, to Ecuador, to Scotland, and to the United States. Is home where the heart is, as embroidered sofa pillows sometimes declare? Is it where you store your personal belongings? Is it the place where you were born? Or is “home” perhaps a more portable or fluid concept and something that travels with us as we move. As Anzaldúa describes: “I am a turtle, wherever I go, I carry ‘home’ on my back” (1999: 43).

I note that my spatial imaginary of “home” continues to shift as I move from place to place. As I relocate, I carry my cultural baggage and package it to create a representation of “home,” imbued with personal emotions and feelings (see Blunt and Dowling, 2006). Throughout this process, I continue to wonder: when and how does a new place transform to become this ideal representation of “home”? In this chapter, I use the

autoethnographic approach suggested by Butz (2010) to reflect upon the concept of “home” and tease out some of my observations pertaining to life as a recently translocated Canadian in the United States. In what follows, I discuss my migration experiences and reflect on some of the differences that I have encountered especially how I perform my Canadian identity in America.

I was born and raised in Southern Ontario, Canada, and lived there for the majority of my life. The geography of my youth included rolling hills, expansive tobacco fields, maple-beech forests, and the meandering Grand River. Over the last decade, I have spent little time living in my nation of birth. In pursuit of academic opportunities, I have lived in four different countries and eight different residences. I spent a year and a half living in Quito, Ecuador, for my PhD research; I spent almost three years living Glasgow, Scotland, as a post-doctoral research fellow; and at the time of writing this, I have been living in San Diego, California, working as an Assistant Professor for almost four years. This final move has been the most surprising to me. Growing up in Canada, I never imagined that I would end up living in the United States. Even when my older brother, who is also an academic, secured a job at a private university in the US, it did not occur to me that this could be my path. If I am honest, I felt some sympathy for Canadians who were “forced” to take jobs outside of Canada, away from the oft-perceived land of milk and honey (more on this later). I recall watching Michael Moore’s *Sicko*, a vicious condemnation of America’s healthcare system, and demanding that my partner never allow me to apply for jobs in the United States. Yet, here I am.

In academia, we often have little control over where we end up living. For junior scholars, going on the job market is exciting and terrifying, and almost feels like playing roulette. For Canadian scholars, landing that elusive job at “home” can be especially difficult due to the limited number of academic positions available in Canada. For this reason, many end up relocating south of the US/Canada border to find opportunities in the United States, where colleges and universities vastly outnumber those found in Canada.

Now that I am becoming settled in the United States, however, I am surprised by how happy I am living in a place I never expected to end up in. Growing up in Canada, we are often raised to be prejudiced against the United States. I believe that some of these prejudices stem from the

fact that we are inundated with American media and culture north of the border and yet, conversely, Americans know little about Canadian life and culture. And this hurts. Perhaps to boost our national pride, we re-circulate stories about the “dumb Americans” who accepted Canadian Tire money in Alabama, or some other southern state in the US. We watch Rick Mercer’s satirical comedy *Talking to Americans* mock Americans and their ignorance of Canadian geography and culture. After moving to the US, I found it necessary to step back, reflect, and let go of some of this cultural baggage and try to re-interpret American culture more critically. As I discuss later, I believe I have made some progress in achieving this goal.

San Diego, California, was not a place that I knew very much about before I was offered a faculty position in this southern California metropolitan area. I imagined the city to be similar to Los Angeles, with endless traffic and thick smog. Due to my own ignorance, I did not realize it is often ranked as one of the best places to live in the US (and now that I live here, I can understand why). The main things that influenced my decision to accept the job offer in San Diego were the collegiality of the department, its location on the US/Mexico border (very convenient for my research, which focuses on urban geography, migration and marginality in Latin America), the Mediterranean climate, and the physical geography, with oceans, mountains and deserts nearby. Having lived abroad in Scotland for three years, I knew that I wanted to come back to North America so that I could be closer to family — or at least within driving distance. I had also been somewhat traumatized by the weather in the west of Scotland during my residency there. Glasgow is a wonderful city but, to say the least, suffers dire weather. It rains almost every day, the clouds appear to brush the tops of buildings and winter days are dark and dreary. I recall looking at weather charts measuring annual sunshine hours for Glasgow versus San Diego. Glasgow was in the range of 1,200 sunshine hours a year, whereas San Diego was in the range of 3,000. Given that my job offer arrived close to the shortest day of the year, when there are fewer than seven hours of daylight, diffused through low, thick, damp clouds, my decision was not difficult.

However, immigrating to the United States was still challenging, especially for my partner. I immigrated on an H-1B visa, which is designed for skilled professionals. When we moved to the United Kingdom, my visa allowed my partner to immediately acquire a work permit, and as

a software developer he was quickly able to find work. But this was not the case in the United States. Instead, he was granted an H4 visa, which categorized him as a “dependent spouse.” The result was that my spouse had few rights in the United States. He became entirely dependent upon me, both legally and financially. Not only was he unable to work, he also could not get a Social Security Number (SSN), a bank account, a car loan, a credit card, and we could not place anything under his name (the only exception was the cable company). Without a SSN, we discovered that life is very difficult in the United States. This experience gave us some insight into the struggles encountered by undocumented migrants who reside in the US. This is an issue of great concern to me since a central part of my research explores the lives of indigenous Ecuadorian migrants, many of whom have begun embarking upon the treacherous migration route to the United States. When they arrive in the United States, they face insurmountable bureaucratic and logistical obstacles, yet they continue to come, inspired by dreams of a better future for their children back home. The many challenges my partner faced also provided us with new insights into how the spouses of many documented migrants have been forced into a dependency situation for years. For instance, as I searched web forums for help on how to navigate the H-1B and H4 immigration process, I discovered many forums for educated Indian women who were forced into positions of domesticity while their husbands worked in California’s high tech industry. Within our first year of living here, an NPR program investigated the struggles faced by the wives of H-1B visa holders, and many women called in to explain their woes. Yet, there was no mention of how difficult it might also be for husbands, since the majority of H-1B visa holders are men, perhaps making our situation somewhat unique (see Banerjee, 2006). It would seem that the H-1B visa system is based upon the imaginary of a nuclear family with one breadwinner (generally male), an imaginary that is no longer viable.

In an interesting spin on domesticity, it turned out that I arrived for my new tenure-track job six months pregnant. The fact that my husband was unable to work in the United States ended up being a benefit to us (except financially), given the limited maternity leaves offered under federal and state laws. Due to his forced domesticity, my partner became a full-time stay-at-home dad. Technically, I was eligible for six weeks of leave, plus two additional weeks of accumulated sick leave. I recall quite



clearly that had I returned to work within eight weeks of my son's birth, I would have been going to work and teaching classes with a total of three hours of sleep a night. This is outrageous in a nation that prides itself as being one of the most advanced economies in the world. However, because my son was born at the end of the winter semester, I was able to combine the winter break with my maternity leave to extend it up to a slightly better twelve weeks. Due to a very supportive department chair, I was not required to return to the classroom at the end of my leave to teach what remained of the spring semester. This meant that in my first year as a tenure-track assistant professor, I was able to spend much of my spring and summer semesters working at home and taking care of my newborn child. Having my partner at home on top of this, allowed me to actually function, and complete my book manuscript revisions, continue to advise students, and keep up with my other responsibilities at work.

One of my closest friends in Canada had a baby the day after I had my son, which gave me a direct point of comparison regarding maternity leaves in Canada and in the United States. My friend in Canada was an elementary school teacher who was able to stay at home on partial pay for one year. She received 100 percent pay for the first six weeks, then \$468 per week from the federal government. She then chose to take an additional year of unpaid leave, with a guaranteed job upon her return. In comparison, another friend who resided in San Diego, was required to return to her classroom when her newborn child was only eight weeks old. She often went to work in tears and came close to quitting her job altogether, despite the years of education she had invested into her career. Another San Diego friend, also a highly-educated teacher, decided to quit her job after the birth of her second child because her meager teacher's salary would not cover the expense of two children in full-time daycare. An additional complication is that most daycares in the US do not accept infants until they are six months of age, yet many parents are forced to find caretakers for their children when their maternity leaves end after six to eight weeks. For academics, this can be particularly difficult given that many end up working far away from family and have little familial support. Most must hire nannies to care for their young infants or else quit their jobs altogether. Having a child in the United States as a professional woman is a different undertaking than having one in Canada, and therefore there can be no doubt that the US system can make it more

difficult for women to be as successful as their male counterparts. Of course, fathers have significant struggles as well (see Aitken, 2009), but the act of carrying and breastfeeding a child is a tremendous physical endeavour that saps many women of strength and energy, and can make it difficult to keep up. In order for the United States to prosper as an advanced economy and continue to attract (and retain) skilled professionals, they must reexamine their parental leave policies to accommodate the reality that both men and women must now work if families are to survive economically.

Which brings me to another topic of concern I have faced as a resident of the United States due to my career and my new role as a parent—the quality of K-12 education in the US. As a parent in the United States, I worry about the American public school system. I grew up in a city where I was able to walk to my local public school and was enrolled in an excellent French immersion program, which taught me to be bilingual. Access to high quality public education is more complicated in US cities than in my childhood “home” in southern Ontario. Given California’s ongoing budget crisis, education is on a downward spiral in the state. In fact, California’s public school system now ranks 44th out of 50 states in terms of K-12 spending per student and the state ranks 50th in the nation in terms of student-teacher ratios (Kaplan, 2010). Because our local public school is rated very poorly, we will be forced to try to find a better school for our son. Through a lottery system, we may have the opportunity to enroll our son in a decent public school or charter school located some distance from our house. Or, we may end up shuttling him across the city to a private school, as many other middle-class parents choose to do. Yet, to do so would cost us between \$11,000—\$24,000 per year for an elementary school education. This concerns me greatly. I am also worried about what this means in terms of my son’s exposure to diversity. Class and race continue to segregate schools in the United States, and private schools remain vanguards for the privileged. As Wise (2003) argues, white privilege in the United States is as invisible as water is to fish. By embedding my son within a private school system, I fear this will accentuate his class privilege, and render his white privilege invisible to him, too.

Since I am employed at a state university, I can also see how white privilege plays out in the United States at a more intense level than in Canada. San Diego State University (SDSU) is a state school, meaning

that the majority of our students come from regional public schools. As such, due to chronic underfunding, the quality of their education has often been poor, at least as compared to my experiences teaching undergraduates at publicly funded universities in Canada, namely the University of Toronto and the University of Guelph. Moreover, San Diego State University has one of the most diverse student body populations in the nation. By the latest count, the majority of our students are individuals who identify as people of colour. Forty percent of our students self-identify as white, approximately thirty percent identify as Mexican American or Hispanic, and the remaining thirty percent identify as Filipino, Asian, African American, among others. In addition, some of our students are from extremely impoverished households and are granted access to the university through the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), which funds students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Every semester I teach a large introductory Human Geography course with approximately 80–110 students enrolled and in this class there are always a handful of students funded through the EOP. The majority of these students are Afghani or Somali refugees, or first generation Mexican Americans. Some of our Mexican American students lead truly transnational lives, as they reside in Tijuana, Mexico, and commute across the border daily to attend university, subjecting their bodies to daily surveillance and inspections (see Bejarano, 2010). Commuting across the border for a better education is not uncommon in San Diego and some students have been doing this for their entire educated lives. A smaller percentage of our students are undocumented residents, meaning that they have no legal papers to be in the United States, even though many have lived in the US since they were very young children. Teaching in this environment has provided me with a host of new insights into some of the powerful emotions and lives that are deeply affected by immigration debates in the US.

Because of my current proximity to the Mexico-US border, my large introductory Human Geography course focuses intensely on migration, particularly undocumented migration from Latin America. I ask students to write papers tracing their families' migration paths, with instructions to tie into debates pertaining to undocumented migration to the United States. What I have learned is that ties to Mexico run deep in San Diego for many of my students. Some have grandparents or parents who regularly commuted across the border (with and without papers) to work in

California's agricultural sector. Those without papers crossed through the desert, and some came close to dying along the way. Some families have been torn apart by restrictive US immigration laws, as mothers and babies were left behind in Mexico for years. Others describe how it took their families up to twelve years to obtain legal permanent residency in this nation, due to a series of confusing, difficult and expensive bureaucratic hurdles. We talk about these issues at length in my class in an attempt to understand why people are willing to migrate to the United States illegally, and put themselves through elevated risk to do so. All of this makes me realize just how privileged I am to be a Canadian in the United States. While I described our immigration process as relatively difficult and quite expensive (with lawyer fees, paperwork fees, and premium processing fees, the entire process cost approximately \$7,500), we managed to get our permanent residency cards, commonly known as green cards, within less than a year and a half. I recognize that this is a privilege many Mexicans do not have, even though some live a mere twenty miles, or 32 kilometers, away from our campus on the other side of the US/Mexico border.

Teaching students from the US military is another significant difference I encounter as an educator in San Diego as compared to Canada. Currently there are over 1,200 war veterans studying at SDSU out of approximately 35,000 total students enrolled at the university. We also host a Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program, where students receive full scholarships or partial funding to attend university in exchange for a four-year period of military service post-graduation. Furthermore, a large number of our students are children of Vietnam War veterans or have parents who work for one of San Diego's three military bases. This means that the military presence on our campus is strong. In fact, once or twice a week, a number of my students come to class in uniform, as required by the ROTC program. On my bike ride across campus in the morning, I sometimes see military students training on the university green. This is not something I experienced in Canada, and was rather unnerving to begin with. My politics are left of centre and I became very self-conscious of how some of my classroom critiques, including critiques of the military, would be received by this type of student body. Yet, what I have learned is that my military students add a tremendous amount to the classroom. For one, they often bring a different perspective to the

classroom and allow us to have a more balanced discussion surrounding controversial issues. The war veterans in the classroom have also had life experiences that I cannot begin to fathom and have a level of maturity beyond their years. Last semester I had a student who spent 14 months in Iraq. His experiences, I think, allowed him to interpret the world more critically and he excelled in the class. Many of our students are in the ROTC program out of financial necessity; without this program, they would have no way to pay for college. I recently learned that my father, who was also from a low-income background, was in a similar University Reserve Training Program (URTP) when he was a student at McMaster in Hamilton, Ontario in the 1960s. Like many of our students, my father was the first person in his family to attend university and the URTP program helped him do so. Having soldiers in the classroom pushes me outside of my comfort zone but also allows me to provide these students with perspectives that differ from those that they might receive through their military training. They also push me to consider perspectives that I may not have considered otherwise.

As a Canadian in the classroom, I am very aware of my own identity. Admittedly, my knowledge of American history and politics remains limited and at times, I stumble through my own ignorance. But when it comes to global knowledge, it is my students who stumble. It is this lack of global knowledge among students in the US that feeds stereotypes pertaining to American ignorance. On the first day of my large introductory class, for example, I ask students to take out a blank sheet of paper and draw a map of the world in order to begin a discussion about global issues. Admittedly, this is a difficult exercise since getting the scale correct can be challenging. Some students perform this task spectacularly; however, many fail miserably. Part of this failure can be explained through the fact that the majority of publicly funded high school students do not take geography courses. This is quite different from my high school experience in Canada where geography was a core subject. American students have tremendous knowledge of American history and politics (with 1000-page plus textbooks), but they learn little about the rest of the world. Another explanation is that it is very difficult to learn about the rest of the world while living in the United States. The education system and the media are very insular and ethnocentric. For instance, I have lived in the US through two Canadian elections. After the first election, I went to the front page

of the *New York Times* to read their interpretation of the results, only to find nothing mentioned at all. Instead one of the main headlines read, “Nancy Reagan Breaks Hip.” During the second election, I surveyed my 80-student class the following day to ask how many had heard about Canadian events. Approximately five raised their hands, all of whom were sitting next to one another in the front row (questionable perhaps?). In my classroom, I turned this into an opportunity to discuss why it is so difficult to learn about the rest of the world while living in America. The reality is that you have to go out of your way to discover what is happening beyond US borders. You cannot simply turn on the news on the television or radio or read the headlines of your local newspaper. Instead, you have to dig to find alternative and international news sources. This oft-cited American ignorance also affects Mexico, the neighbour to the south. In the US we learn little about what is happening across the nation’s southern border, other than sensationalized reports concerning drug cartel-fueled beheadings that traumatize the American masses. This, of course, does nothing to help the anti-immigrant sentiments brewing in many parts of the United States. It seems to me that American ignorance of the world is perpetuated through an insular national focus and learning about global events and geography requires significant effort on the part of individuals. For this reason, I am no longer as quick to judge individual Americans for their lack of global knowledge, since after living here, I understand more clearly how this can happen. In fact, I fear that I too, am becoming more globally ignorant than I once was after only a few years as a resident of the United States.

Despite this lack of global knowledge — or perhaps because of it —, many of my students have a real passion for learning. Students at SDSU seem to be deeply engaged with the social and political issues we cover in class because these issues *matter* to their everyday lives. Many of them understand marginality, oppression, and poverty because they have experienced these issues first hand. Beyond refugees, undocumented migrants, and EOP students, in my three years at SDSU I have taught homeless students, former slum residents, and students terrorized by gang violence. My class material can delve into these difficult topics and pull from students’ experiences to create rich classroom discussions. Having such a diverse student body also helps foster critical thinking skills, since students must learn to discuss these issues across personal and political differences.

Living in the United States has also reinforced my national identity as a Canadian in unexpected ways, and I have become quite aware of how I perform this identity. I note that I am quick to announce to people that I am Canadian, particularly to other expats. This is likely because as a Canadian, I am often indistinguishable from Americans. Americans assume that I am from somewhere in the North, but they are never certain just how far north. Canadians struggle to put a finger on what defines us as being “Canadian,” and so we most often define ourselves in opposition to what it means to be an American to accentuate our subtle differences. For example, we spell certain English language words differently, but not consistently, mixing both British and American spelling. We call our mothers, “Mum” but spell it, “Mom.” We put more trust in our government than Americans, and for this reason, may be more willing to contribute tax dollars. We believe in universal healthcare and are, arguably, less individualistic than Americans. A key part of our identity is also tied to our prowess at hockey, perhaps one of the few sporting events we win international recognition for. These differences, however subtle, are used to define a sense of Canadianness that attempts to separate us from our American neighbours to the south.

Increasingly, I find myself drawing upon Canadian stereotypes to define myself, and my family members. For instance, on Halloween we quite ridiculously attempted to dress our two-year-old son as a “Canadian,” wearing a toque, flannel shirt and wielding a Team Canada hockey stick. Realizing that we were too far from the Canadian border for anyone to “get” his (seemingly hilarious) costume, we modified it to a “lumberjack,” and replaced his hockey stick with a chainsaw (a toy chainsaw, I might add). Upon seeing our son’s Halloween photos, an English friend asked me whether we might be going overboard to promote our Canadian identity in the United States. My response was something to the effect that when you are drowning in a sea of Americana, you wag your flag as much as possible. Could it be that the longer I spend away from “home,” the stronger my symbolic attachment to my homeland becomes? Or perhaps because I grew up trying to assert my differences from Americans, my desire to distinguish myself from all-that-is-American is accentuated now that we are living in the US? Although many of the differences are subtle, there are also very deep historical differences between Canada and the United

States that shape the texture of society, government and approaches to philanthropy and charity. I note that the longer I have lived in the United States, the more I have become aware of these differences.

In the introduction to this chapter, I speculated on when a new place becomes “home”? Now that I have lived in San Diego for three years, I do not think that this place has become “home” just yet, even though the quality of my day-to-day life is excellent. I continue to hold onto an imaginary of Canada as the “land of milk and honey,” even though I recognize that this is an imaginary that is deeply flawed. We are all indoctrinated by our nations and it can be difficult to see beyond this indoctrination to recognize the shortcomings of our own homelands. Like many transnational residents, I realize that I may be recasting and reimagining my homeland differently to accommodate my nostalgia for “home” (see Blunt and Dowling, 2006). I also recognize some of the ways I perform my Canadian identity to accentuate my difference from Americans, largely due to the cultural baggage of my upbringing. Yet, after only three years living in San Diego, I have already developed a deep attachment to this place, partly due to its beauty, but also due to the strong social connections and friendships that I have formed. As Massey (2001) notes, it is the crisscrossing of social relations and the spatialities of daily lives that help construct how we understand places, and perhaps how we then transform these places into “home.”



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# CROSSING THE LINE

## Reflections on a Transnational Lifeworld

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### PEERING ACROSS THE LINE

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“It’s funny that, out of all of us, it’s you that’s gonna be working in the US.” It was two weeks before I was to leave my home in Toronto for a new job at Western Washington University in Bellingham. I was at a good friend’s cabin north of the city for a few days of mountain biking before embarking upon this major life change. We were chatting about the move my partner, Sydney, and I were about to make, and that he noted irony in the situation struck me as both reasonable and disquieting. It was true that among the quite a-political group of friends we shared, I was consistently the opinionated outlier. And, it was clear to all that I was laying out there on the left. After spending five years in Vancouver, British Columbia, pursuing both a degree in Human Geography and time in the mountains, I had returned to the city where I grew up in order to attend graduate school. During this time back in Toronto, the horrific

attacks on the World Trade Center occurred, and the brand of “freedom” promoted by the United States gained a new discursive in an amorphous “terrorism.” In my reading(s), this new and shadowy threat, spatialized and made manifest through the “war on terror,” provided political and corporate leaders in the US and allied nations with a reason to feed and grow the military-security-industrial complex and at the same time undergird prevailing neo-liberal political-economic ideologies and topographies (see also Gregory, 2004). As far as I was concerned, these were hardly things to shut up about while hanging out with old high school friends. So, that the idea of me working in the country which I had come to critique so strongly would raise an eyebrow was not surprising. My view of the Bush Doctrine and the “new imperialism” (Harvey, 2003) that it helped along was no secret; now I was heading into the mouth of the beast.

And therein lay the source of my disquiet. What was I doing, hitching my wagon to the nation whose politics had come to so horrify me as I gazed south from my comfortable perch north of the 49th parallel? How was I going to adapt to life there? The quick and easy answers were that I had been offered and accepted a tenure-track position in “Canadian geography and resource management” at Western Washington University’s Huxley College of the Environment and Center for Canadian-American Studies and that the University’s location in “liberal” Bellingham was less than 50 km from the Canadian border. These features, I reasoned, blunted the force of my crossing over to the other side. From the perspective of an aspiring young academic, it was a good offer. When I visited in February 2005 for an interview, WWU struck me as a very nice mid-sized American regional public university: the campus was beautiful, students and faculty seemed friendly and engaged, and the parameters of the job were attractive (a nice balance between teaching and research). Here, then, was a chance to establish my teaching and scholarship, be connected with well-regarded undergraduate programs in both Environmental Studies and Canadian Studies, and be located in a place that seemed close to Vancouver, both physically and culturally. So, I responded to my friend’s chiding with these rationales. However, I privately wondered about my decision. I had turned down a post-doctoral fellowship to accept the job at WWU, and perhaps by throwing myself directly into teaching upon defending my dissertation I would not be able to sustain a program of research and thereby fail to

secure a position someday at a big Canadian research university. Thus, it seemed to me to be quite possible, if not likely, that the decision to accept the position would lead us down roads unknown . . . and we did not have a good map to consult. Would we be able to find our way back?

And so, we set about constructing our new worlds, and our lives dictated a complex mapping. Sydney had spent several years developing a career in human resources management in Toronto and was successful in moving her work to Vancouver. This, we reluctantly accepted, would necessitate some sort of cross-border lifestyle for one or both of us. It was a reluctance that stemmed from the uncertainty generated both by having to rely upon the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for daily mobility and by not knowing exactly where our place was, how we fit in, and what our future might be. So, I rented an apartment in Bellingham near the campus and, thinking that this would have to be my primary residence during the academic year, set myself up as an official resident of Washington State. We also rented an apartment in Vancouver where Sydney would live full-time; I would be there as much as possible — weekends, holidays, and the summer. And, she would come down to Bellingham occasionally, too. This plan would work pretty well, we thought.

After a few months, however, we realized that our map would need to be redrawn. Two apartments, one in each city, were unnecessary. Once I had secured access to expedited border-crossing through enrollment in the Nexus trusted-traveler program, the drive between home and office proved to be a bearable sixty minute journey on most days. When coupled with the flexibility of an academic's schedule, we realized, this commute was quite feasible. Thus, at the outset of my second year working at WWU, I gave up the apartment in Bellingham and made Vancouver my primary residence. After one year, then, we had already re-arranged some of the geographies of daily life.

This initial re-arrangement has largely stuck, five years on. Indeed, it has become more firmly rooted since, during this time, we have purchased a home in Vancouver and had two children. Stabilizing our cross-border lives has proven to be an eye-opening, enriching, and, at times, stressful experience that has forced me to think though relationships between identities, places, subjects, and states in ways that I would never have were Sydney, the kids, and I not living the geographies in

which we have come to find ourselves. This chapter relates this experience. My aim is to highlight the ways that migration has exploded the easily and smugly held assumptions that I initially brought to our cross-border life. Upon arriving at WWU, I understood the border and its separation of Washington State and British Columbia to be absolute; it seemed to me that to choose to root oneself in one place meant being distant, both physically and culturally, from the other. However, constructing a transnational life during the past six years has served to shatter the surface (Foucault, 2002) of this binary construct in my geographical imagination and to replace it with a much more nuanced sense of both connections and difference within and between the two sides of a crudely drawn, and yet important line.

### **IDENTITIES AND PLACES: WHERE DO I BELONG?**

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When I visited for my job interview, Bellingham and Western Washington University struck me as enmeshed in a sort of landscape, both physical and symbolic, that was attractive and familiar. These were places that seemed to “fit” me, given both my topical specialty (BC historical and resource geography) and my recreational interests in mountain sports. The physical geography of the region is shared with the Greater Vancouver area, with both Vancouver and Bellingham occupying the fertile and habitable Fraser Lowlands through which the Fraser River passes on its way to the Pacific Ocean after dropping down from the heights of the Coast and Cascade mountain ranges. The trees, topography, ocean, climate, and vistas all ticked boxes on my list of favorite geographical features. As an historical geographer, I also appreciated and understood the connected cultural geographies of BC and Washington State. And, to my mind, WWU’s campus site, layout, and built environment took full aesthetic advantage of this landscape. So, it is not like this was a strange new land for me. It was an attractive and familiar place and seemed like it would nicely support both work and play.

Yet, in many ways, Bellingham proved to be a strange new land. Of course, I very rapidly picked up on many of the stereotypical markers of difference that Canadians are wont to assign to Americans: drawling or twanging accents peppered with “y’all” and “soda pop,” perplexed stares at requests for directions to the “washroom,” gun culture celebrated on

bumper-stickers (in fact, *everything* celebrated on bumper-stickers), drive-thru banking, loud and divisive politics, and the list goes on. However, that initial take proved to be shallow at best. As my first year in Bellingham passed, I came to understand a more nuanced human geography in the US. For every right wing, reactionary bumper sticker I saw, I would also see the polar opposite championing some social or political position associated with the left. While the prevalence of cars and supporting infrastructure seemed ubiquitous at first glance, a second look made clear the love Bellinghamsters hold for travel by bicycle. Those accents that spoke of southern conservatism to presumptuous Canadian ears could be heard in the progressive and sustainable food cooperatives, farmers markets, and crafts stores around town. As these nuances revealed themselves to me, the loud and divisive politics that I had previously noted with disdain shifted into a different light. It occurred to me that they were an expression of the massive expansiveness of America's human geographies — political, cultural, and otherwise. I had landed in a small cove in an enormous ocean, my experience subject to the push and pull of the entire body and yet somewhat insulated and shaped by its contacting points at the shore's edge. Coming to recognize and understand this geographical complexity and my place within it has been central to integrating the strange new land into a stable and fulfilling lifeworld.

The academic place in which I found myself displayed the same mix of the familiar and the foreign as did the physical place. While my position was described in the call for applications as “Canadian Geographer with emphasis in natural resource management,” it is housed within the Department of Environmental Studies (the department offers degrees in Environmental Education, Environmental Policy, Environmental Studies, Geography, and Urban Planning). Thrilled to have landed a tenure-track job at a nice university in a nice part of the continent, I did not initially concern myself with questions about how I would fit into a community of scholars explicitly focused on the “environment.” This was a curious reaction given that, having focused upon theories of “society” and “nature” during my doctoral work, I was well aware of the messiness involved in defining what constituted “environmental” topics and how these might be approached. I will put it down to the aforementioned eagerness to gain stable employment. In any case, upon arrival at WWU, I quickly realized that I would have to negotiate a modified academic identity for myself if I was going to thrive

in my new professional home. Up to that point in my scholarly life, I had spent most of my time around historical and cultural geographers, only some of whom pursued “environmental” topics. Now, while I was joining a solid group of geographers (three physical and three human) within the department, it was clear from both colleagues’ research interests and the array of course offerings that I was in the Department of *Environmental Studies* (which pairs with the Department of Environmental Sciences to form Huxley College of the Environment at WWU). As a human geographer primarily concerned with the operation of power in, through, and over territories and resources, I certainly had something to contribute to a department and college focused upon “environmental” concerns. But the critical literatures in Marxist, feminist, and post-colonial thought that I had read in graduate school and my general immersion in post-structuralism made me somewhat of an outlier in a college where it seemed that the pursuit of “sound science” and “informed policy” in the service of “environmental management” constituted the dominant considerations of study and action.

Blessed with generous colleagues, however, I was able to develop my scholarly identity at WWU with the freedom to teach and conduct research in the manner that I saw fit. While it took some time to reconcile this freedom to pursue critical inquiry with the management discourses that seemed to dominate my college, after a few years I came to two connected realizations; I was no longer in graduate school and the world of post-secondary institutions is far larger and more heterogeneous than I was able to appreciate while devouring the finer points of Foucault and Lefebvre over a pint in the Graduate Lounge at York University. So, there was a decision to be made: brood over not being among a bunch of similarly (and, I might add, familiarly) trained scholars and hunt for a position that would allow me to recapture the intellectual aesthetics of my graduate school experience (read: go back to known comforts) or embrace the freedom afforded by my position and engage in an effort to highlight critical geographical approaches in my work with excellent students and colleagues in order to contribute to our collective aim of creating more livable futures (read: strive to grow as a scholar with an independent voice who contributes to a greater whole). In choosing the latter option, I have come to embrace the ongoing building of the department and college (a process that, of course, has its frustrations) by trying to take a



prominent role in constructively and collegially placing our traditionally modernist approaches to “science,” “policy,” and “management” into regular dialogue with more critical social science approaches.

As patience often does, playing this longer game has paid dividends. Between the time of my hiring and the onset of the recession of 2008 (and a university-wide freeze on tenure-track hiring), our department hired four new faculty members who, while hailing from different disciplinary backgrounds, shared my experience with major critical literatures within the social sciences. This has had the effect of raising the volume of the critical social science voices in the department. Partly in consequence, we are currently in the throes of a multi-year curriculum revision effort that reflects the changing composition and approaches of the faculty while at the same time building upon past successes. Thus, reconciling my academic training and interests with my institutional setting has involved bringing the two into productive dialogue and doing so in an environment that is undergoing change and is, hence, ripe with opportunity to both learn and contribute.

It is opportunity, as much as anything else, that has facilitated the place-identity nexus that I have been fortunate to forge at WWU, in Bellingham, and in the larger cross-border region in which I live my daily life. In addition to the opportunities presented by the nature of my home department and college, close affiliation with WWU’s Center for Canadian-American Studies (which is itself a product of geographical opportunity—it is the only Canadian Studies program in the United States where one can actually see Canada from the Director’s office) has afforded me the chance to tether my national (and sometimes nationalistic) identity to my professional one to a degree that I had not contemplated when I first decided to pursue an academic career. As a core faculty member in the program, I have the responsibility of teaching courses in Canadian geography. Often, my students and I address Canadian issues through comparison to the US. This, coupled with the dialectical department building efforts described above, has given me a chance to think about how Canada is presented to my American students and with what sets of assumptions. In many instances, this has forced me to confront an unwarranted sense of Canadian superiority: from endangered species legislation to energy and climate change policies, Canada is in many ways a global laggard on environmental issues. Indeed, upon the election of a majority Conservative

government in the Canadian federal election of May 2011, a number of my colleagues inquired in jest when I was going to be moving to “progressive” Bellingham from “conservative,” tar sands producing Canada. Thus, while I came to the US to teach American students about the Geography of Canada, an important effect of the experience has been the blurring in my mind of what was formerly a fairly easily defined moral line at the 49th parallel. Making new connections and attending to the calcification of simplistic binaries, then, has become central to the position and practice of my scholarly identity as it has emerged over the last several years; it is an identity shaped in no small part by the opportunities afforded by the place in which it has been forged.

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**SUBJECTS AND STATES:  
WILL THEY LET ME BELONG?**

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Pursuing a career and identity that crosses an international border has required that I think through more than just my place in academia. The process also has forced me to confront my relationship with the most powerful state the world has ever known. And, while it has been an eye-opening and educational experience, being subject to the power of the US state in order to do my work has proven to be a great source of anxiety. Even after six years of crossing the border regularly, and gaining familiarity with the procedures and requirements, my heart rate still rises as I approach the border officer’s booth. With Permanent Residency, commuter status, and thousands of quick and hassle-free entries to the US in my recent past, I continue to fret that “this will be the day I won’t get in.” Although I have had some success in blurring the line in my everyday work life, the border remains clearly demarcated in my role as a subject before the state.

Immediately upon accepting my position, I began to worry about immigration issues. Fortunately, staff at the International Programs office at WWU informed me that they would prepare the H-1B application (this status is temporary and meant to lead to application for Permanent Residency) and that I would simply have to supply the needed information and documentation. This was accomplished in fairly short order. After waiting a few weeks, my H-1B status was awarded and I was set to enter the US for work beginning early that September. This I did, and without

incident (except for the border officer who indicated that they weren't accepting H-1B status at the border that day; he was kidding, but my heart skipped a few beats before he let on). As I went about settling into Bellingham, staff from International Programs at WWU sent me all of the information needed to proceed toward Permanent Residency. Fortunately, WWU would take responsibility for filing for labor certification and the initial residency petitions; I was on my own for the final application. Things had gone smoothly to that point, and I had six years from the initial granting of my H-1B status before I needed to finalize Permanent Residency. Perhaps my worries were misplaced.

Thus, for the next several years I crossed back and forth over the border in H-1B status, living in Vancouver and working in Bellingham. This was largely facilitated through my acquisition of a NEXUS pass (allowing use of a dedicated commuter lane) after a several month application process that included an in-person interview with border officials. My H-1B status clearly indicated to border officers that I was a professional coming to the US for work and, as such, while usually waived on through, I was occasionally subjected to random inspections. This had the effect of keeping me on my toes about the contents of my car and the state of my documentation, even when far from the border in both space and time; an effect that caused me to meditate on the extension of border space away from actual boundary sites, and the implication of political economy and geopolitics on the construction of this space (Rossiter, 2011). As a properly documented foreign worker crossing into the US on a regular basis, the state required that I discipline my actions in order to gain passage. As long as I governed myself accordingly, I would be allowed to visit.

As the six year mark and the expiration of my H-1B eligibility drew nearer and the filing process for Permanent Residency status began, I was forced to confront my relationship with the US government in a more formal way than my temporary status had demanded. Rather than daily interactions with real people at the border, I was now entering into dialogue with a faceless bureaucracy. I hired an immigration lawyer in Bellingham and discussed my situation with him. I wanted to continue to work at WWU and live in Vancouver. However, Sydney and I also wanted to retain the option of moving to Bellingham in the future, should we so desire. He presented two options: take up TN status on a yearly basis (a status for temporary professional workers in the US that can be re-applied

for indefinitely) or continue with the Permanent Residency process and declare commuter status (something a Permanent Resident can do if they have ongoing employment). He suggested the latter option as it would mean that should we later decide to move to Bellingham, Sydney and our children (we had one, at this point) would be able to “follow” me and immigrate across the border without having to go through the whole Permanent Residency process themselves. I had never heard of commuter status before, and it seemed odd when applied to a Permanent Resident, but who was I to argue? It seemed like I had found the way toward a stable and long-term relationship with the world’s last remaining superpower.

And so began my long road toward permanent residency in commuter status. The journey was long in both duration and distance, taking some three years and touching down in places as varied as Vancouver, Montréal, Seattle, and Kansas City. The first eighteen months or so went smoothly. Forms were filed and I waited. With my labor certification approved and my record checked, I was summoned for an interview with a US consular official. This interview was to be at the US consulate in Montréal. Why, I asked my lawyer, could it not be done in Vancouver? He replied that it was because Montréal is the only place in Canada where US consular officials conduct interviews for Permanent Residency. And, the interview had to be in Canada because I was applying as a Canadian resident. Thus, I went to Montréal in the spring of 2010 to meet with US consular officials. After a long day of security screening, waiting, and a little bit of talking, I was given a visa stamp in my passport that would enable me to declare and obtain Permanent Residency the next time that I crossed into the US. My emotions as I walked back to my hotel were a mixture of happiness and relief. This was a large hurdle to have cleared. Once I crossed the border and my Green Card was produced, I thought, my relationship with the US would be secured. When I got to my room, I took a close look at the visa that had been put in my passport. My date of birth was wrong! I sprinted back to the consulate, explained myself, waited, and was informed that I’d have to wait until the next day for the correction to be made. Thus began a year-and-a-half long tragic-comedy starring various arms of the US federal government.

After presenting the corrected visa at the BC/WA border the Monday following my return from Montréal, I was given a stamp in my passport that would act as evidence of Permanent Residency until my Green Card

arrived after a few months of processing time. That summer, my card arrived. This was good news, except that it was not coded for commuter status. My lawyer cautioned that this needed to be fixed, and a vigilant border officer reinforced this one morning as I headed to work. I then filed the appropriate paperwork, attended a biometrics capture appointment in Seattle where I stressed that I needed to be in commuter status, and waited. That fall, my card arrived. It was still not coded for commuter status. Before filing another form, my lawyer contacted a manager at the Department of Human Services. He was told I would have to file again. Not wanting to waste time and money on the same result, he contacted the constituent aide for the local member of congress. With her help, after six months I finally received a correctly coded card (and, shockingly, a refund of one of the filing fees!), but not before receiving instructions to travel to Kansas City for yet another biometrics capture appointment (I went to the Seattle office instead) and having to surrender my existing card to the processing center before the new one would be issued, only to have it sent back to me in error by a mail clerk. Nonetheless, more than a year after I had anticipated, I had in my possession a Green Card coded for commuted status. This was an enormous relief.

The relief was at the prospect of not having to butt up against the deaf and immovable machinery of the US federal state again for a good long while. For, while I have some degree of control (self-disciplining effect of power though it may be) over the outcomes of my interactions at the border with DHS officers, the process of defining my relationship to the US proved to be far beyond my control. That lack of control has highlighted the one aspect of my transnational lifeworld where the line is still clearly demarcated and the act of crossing it is one of continual reinforcement of the binaries I have otherwise made efforts to banish.

## **CONCLUSION: BLURRED BUT PRESENT, ALWAYS**

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It is rare that one has the opportunity to reflect upon their place in the world in such an open and, perhaps, self-indulgent manner. I thank the editors of this volume for inviting me to do so for I have found it to be a useful exercise in compiling and synthesizing my thoughts and reactions to a transnational life that is now going on past six years. Happily, I have managed to completely vanquish the feeling of disquiet that my

friend's job had elicited all those summers ago. Rather than having been forced to choose one side of the line or the other, through personal and professional experience I have been able to somewhat blur what previously seemed to be a clear-cut boundary. Work, friendships, politics, and recreation, to name a few things, now span the border in my lifeworld. In this regard, this exercise in geographical self-reflection gives me pause to feel quite fortunate about the place in which I have landed and the ways in which that landing has modified my previously held ideas and identity.

Of course, dark clouds can always threaten even the clearest of days. The fairly quick border crossings to which I have become accustomed would be in serious jeopardy should there be another attack on the US on the scale of those of September 11, 2001. The commuter coded Green Card which was so hard won expires in ten years; at that point, who knows how difficult it will be to get the replacement issued correctly? These are just two examples of the ways in which the US state continues to bear down on me and serve as a constant reminder that the line is there, I am crossing it, and someone notices. While this situation does induce low levels of anxiety to this day, this is far outweighed by the perspective-broadening opportunities with which I have been presented. As I go forward living the transnational lifeworld that I have created with my family, then, my aim is to embrace the places and moments that clarify linkages and life across the line, while facing those that seek to reinforce its divisions with steady resolve and a smile.

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# A PATH ACROSS THE BORDER

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**T**he academic journey can take many diverse and unique paths along a career arc. This journey is often a very unique personal experience undertaken by every individual reflecting their professional background, interests and opportunities. However, the steps and events along a path that takes a geography faculty member across the border between Canada and the United States may also include common elements of a professional academic career and in some cases reflect the very nature and aspects of the discipline that is geography. In my case the move to secure a tenure-track appointment at the University of Toledo in 2000 involves both the personal and professional elements of an academic and geographic journey of taking the “steps” along a path across the border. The academic career climate that I faced as a recent PhD graduate in the 1990s in Canada was a difficult and challenging experience reflecting the constrained economic environment at many higher education institutions during that period. As a result the great majority of the interviews

that I was fortunate to participate in occurred within the United States at a range of departments in size and prestige, located mostly in the Great Lakes region or eastern United States due somewhat to a focused job search on my behalf. My areas of research interests in environmental geography, natural hazards and the Great Lakes certainly limited — as well as focused — the academic opportunities presented to me. Realistically the sheer size and diversity of geography departments in the United States also surely created a deeper and wider pool of potential appointments from which my opportunities for a tenure-track job could be made.

Although I am a Canadian by birth and have strong personal and professional ties to my homeland, the prospect of having to cross the border in order to secure an academic job and advance my professional career never appeared daunting or depressing. I felt comfortable and secure in the knowledge that regardless of my national location I could both maintain my heritage and further advance my career ambitions. I had the strong advantage of a research focus that included aspects of environmental planning that had already exposed me to a range of policy and governance issues unique to the United States, when compared to Canada, as well as academic interests and potential research projects that were of interest equally to American geographers and their academic departments including a focus on natural hazards and the Great Lakes. Also the local and community based aspects of my research, the applied tendencies, the use of GIS and remote sensing tools and techniques, and the growing interest in the field of environmental geography would all in turn eventually strengthen my case for an academic appointment in the United States.

In addition, the international nature of many geography departments in the US would lead to a higher comfort level by my American academic colleagues. At the time of my appointment at the University of Toledo, the Department of Geography and Planning consisted of a majority of foreign born faculty, including two Canadians. Surely the path was already set in many regards for my steps across the border. Throughout my twelve-year academic career as a Canadian at an American university, I have always viewed my professional and personal background as a real strength since my unique expertise and experiences carried into my teaching, service and research endeavors and as a welcomed addition to my academic Department.



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## PUSH-PULL FACTORS

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The forces that cause one to relocate for professional or personal reasons can be uniquely individual and often tied to a particular place and time in a life. As an academic studying geography, I have long had an interest in the concept and reality of a sense of place associated with my place of living, work and education. Reaching the point of completion of my PhD dissertation at the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada, in 1995, it was quite clear to me that change in my place was bound to occur. During the mid-1990s, the opportunities to secure an academic tenure-track position at major research and teaching university in Canada was going to be very limited as a result of a decline in the economy and a lack of interest and initiatives to support future growth in higher education within Ontario and Canada. So it was very apparent to me at that time that a major move was in my near future. This reality became even clearer upon my efforts to search for academic positions and the resulting submission of application letters and supporting materials to potential universities. The first — and perhaps the strongest — lesson learned was that such positions were clearly more available and more likely to secure in the United States in comparison to Canada. During the three years of a post-doc research position at the University of Waterloo, my efforts in sending out perhaps 20 or more applications revealed a dominance of opportunities located south of the Canadian border. This was not an intended focus of my search, which instead had been aimed at searching for positions located in potential academic homes located within the eastern regions of both countries where I believed my research interest and expertise in the areas of water resources, natural hazards, coastal management and the Great Lakes would best lie. Although I had a diverse and broad training in physical geography, environmental science, resource management, and GI Science, my main concern in conducting such a position search was that my experience to date in my young academic career would serve by attempting to match my skills to the needs of an academic department.

Throughout the process of my job search, I was successful in the identification of a number of potential institutions that I felt would be the right match and over a period of a few years was fortunate to obtain several interviews for such positions in both Canada and the United States. However, it was apparent with both the number of applications

and interviews that the United States was quickly shaping up as the likely country of my ultimate academic career destination. In no way was I ruling out any potential opportunities to stay in Canada and not intending to limit my choices in any way. I had lived in and spent my entire education in southern Ontario, where an interest and exposure to the environment, politics, news, society, and overall culture of the United States was certainly not foreign to me. A long interest in public issues and travel opportunities over my life up to that point had provided many opportunities to learn about the United States and visit many states and major cities. In addition, numerous aspects of my research had strong links to the United States especially in the studies of parks and protected areas, natural hazards, coastal management, and the Great Lakes. I had examined and written on many important elements of my research that involved an important understanding of the related contributions of American society, public policy, science, and resource management. I also became aware of the involvement of many major research universities, funding agencies, and other important research contacts located in the United States. In many respects, although unknown to me at the time, my personal and professional life had both prepared me for the possibility of—and provided a certain comfort level with—the prospect of living and working in the United States.

At no time did I consider leaving Canada due to any “push” factor beyond the reality that academic tenure-track career opportunities were limited. My primary “pull” factor was simply the chance to pursue such a career and the stronger and more common likelihood that it would need to take place in the United States. I knew that both professionally and personally such a decision would be very significant and have many impacts beyond a career. Among those was the prospect of moving a family (including a young child), dealing with issues such as visa and work eligibility, creating a greater distance from family and friends, and the uncertainty associated with having to move from a comfort level in both personal life and academic endeavors to in many ways start anew.

I should note that with my particular research interests and experience one strong aspect is the application of my research efforts toward local and regional scale planning and management, including a strong connection to community based decision-making. In addition to the wealth of information and experience I had with various aspects of my

research, such as the historical and cultural context, political situations, familiarity with the long standing issues and concerns, and background understanding, I also had an interest and expertise built up over many years of experiences within Ontario and Canada. As much as I would have liked to be able to maintain and build upon that basis as the research foci of my academic career, I was very aware that such a move to the United States would in many ways result in starting in a new direction. Although such a prospect had appeal, it was also very disconcerting and daunting to a young academic who would be building a career with the start of any tenure-track position. Throughout this search for the “ideal” academic position, the concerns and frustrations for a very uncertain future would continue for over three years, while consideration of the reality of leaving Canada and moving to the United States would continue to play on my mind even as that scenario would continue to become stronger with every passing application and interview in the United States.

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### **ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT AND UNIVERSITY**

In 1999, I received my first “break” in securing an academic position. I was invited to interview for a tenure-track position with the Department of Geography and Planning at the University of Toledo in Ohio (an institution who two years prior had declined my application for a previous faculty position appointment). Prior to visiting the campus, I reviewed available information online regarding the university, department, programs and faculty. Several appealing factors were evident that would help strengthen my interest and comfort level with this potential location for my career and personal life. First, the location in northwest Ohio meant that there would be a reasonable travel distance involved to maintain my personal and professional contacts in southern Ontario and for my wife to have the ability to continue to visit her extended family in the Ottawa and Montréal regions. Second, being close both to Ontario and the Great Lakes, the location of Toledo would provide an opportunity for me to maintain some degree of professional connections built over the previous ten years of research activities, and also expand that experience into new areas of interest activity. I was also struck by the internationally diverse

faculty, including the presence of two other Canadians on faculty and the academic education of others including the Department Chair who had received his Masters at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. Finally, after examining the department, undergraduate and graduate programs, profiles of faculty and students, and other aspects of the University, I had a very strong sense that this opportunity could in many ways be ideal for me and the development of an academic career. Frankly, all these "pros" clearly outweighed the "cons" that I may have had regarding leaving my native land of Canada and prospecting south of the border into the United States. The visit and interview only strengthened those beliefs as I came away from the experience with a feeling that the University of Toledo and its Department of Geography and Planning would be a great "home" for me and my family.

Alas the path ahead was not to be as easy as hoped. A few weeks after my visit, I received a call from the Department Chair who informed me that due to budget cuts and a hiring freeze imposed by the new University President all searches for tenure-track appointments at Toledo (for which there were over forty due to efforts to fill vacancies resulting from a recent early retirement plan) were suspended indefinitely. He then asked me if I would consider a one year Visiting Assistant Professor position in the hope that over the following year the hiring freeze for tenure-track positions would be lifted and I would be in a strong position as a candidate for such a position. At this juncture over three years has passed since I was awarded my PhD, and even though post-doc research and a series of term appointment teaching positions had kept me active, no other strong job prospects were available to me in Canada. With a four hour commute each weekend between my "home" and family in Kitchener, Ontario, and Toledo, Ohio, for the nine month academic year, I decided to take a chance and accept their offer in the hope that in a year's time the elusive tenure-track appointment could be there. As it turned out, that opportunity did occur and one year later I was offered and accepted a tenure-track position in the Department. Not only did the first year in the temporary position allow me to prepare for the chance to secure a career position (through teaching, research, service and with the support of the department chair and other faculty who welcomed and supported me), it

also gave me the time to learn more about the local community, university and department so as to be in a better situation of understanding and awareness to consider a more permanent move one year later.

It is important for academics to consider the size, resources, supporting environment, and opportunities afforded faculty who are dependent upon the reputation of a university and its mission in regards to research and teaching. I did not limit my potential job opportunities to these factors alone, but was careful to consider the potential impacts and implications to my career, especially if I was invited to interview for tenure-track positions. Of critical importance are the respective roles that teaching and research expectations would have at any potential institution and home academic college and department. It is important for a candidate to carefully consider the personal and professional balance that they seek between teaching and research and how willing they would be to alter that if required by an academic appointment. Generally speaking, larger research intensive institutions will allow for less teaching, perhaps as low as two courses per academic year, whereas smaller teaching programs may require as many as six to eight courses per academic year. There are, of course, many ranges to these extremes as with universities and academic departments having mid-range models of expectations in regards to tenure-track faculty teaching and research workloads. A candidate needs to carefully consider where his or her interests and expertise lies when considering applications and potential job offers at academic institutions. Does one have the experience and ability to conduct the degree of research (including securing external funding support and major peer reviewed publications) expected at a major research institution? Is the applicant comfortable and willing to accept the duties and responsibilities associated with teaching a large number or diverse set of courses involving perhaps the instructional organization, preparation and grading required for hundreds of students each year? And what will be needed to find a balance between teaching and research — and will the selected university provide for such balance? Many times an academic career that was heading toward tenure or some other form of permanent appointment has gone “off the rail” due to clear mismatches between a faculty members interests, abilities and desire in terms of research and teaching activities, and the needs, expectations and demands placed on them by their college or department. Such conflicts cannot always be

avoided in the job search or in researching positions, departments, and the institutions where they reside, but such an understanding and advanced research and consideration of potential academic positions may help resolve such mismatches. These preliminary questions are also useful to better formalize an applicant's career goals and ambitions in regards to the teaching and research activities at different scales that are unique to any given institution.

In retrospect, the role of the Department, and the faculty that reside there, are critical issues in considering any academic appointment, especially a cross-border career move which will be challenging and stressful to begin with. A supporting and collegial culture is essential to any young tenure-track career. From day one I was given every opportunity and chance to succeed. The Department, College and University provided the means, resources and tools to support my career development. I was able to continue and build upon previous research, but also work with faculty who involved me in other new opportunities and was supported by efforts to develop the necessary support mechanisms and local partnerships within the community that are so critical to my research efforts. In addition, I was able to focus and develop teaching and course development in my areas of interest, starting with and expanding from the extensive teaching I had first undertaken during the previous one year appointment. I had the ability to have input on curriculum development since the environmental focus of the undergraduate and graduate programs was new and my hiring was intended to build and strengthen that area. I was not burdened with a large number of new course preparations or course development, although I took the initiative to undertake some course content revisions as well as involvement in the emerging university interest for the online delivery of distance learning courses by creating new sections of courses utilizing that teaching method and technology.

It cannot be overstated that the supporting role and environment of the Department, College and University all provide the essential and necessary means to assist in the challenges associated with transplanted academics. It is important that all three levels of administration have some experience and understanding with the unique circumstances and situations with such faculty. I was fortunate that I received the support needed to assist me in the transition into an academic position and the major personal and professional changes associated with a move from

Canada to the United States. However, regarding one particular challenge, it should be noted that even with this level of experience and support, academic institutions (perhaps like many employers) continue to often struggle with the challenges of immigration and the work visa status of employees and their families. Although that particular concern and associated experiences, continued over a period of the first five years while at the University of Toledo, are complex and perhaps personally unique, it is worth noting that every academic looking to begin a career across the border should be aware that receiving legal standing to work in the United States (or Canada) in a temporary or permanent status, will require much effort and patience on behalf of the institution and the individual. In recent years the process and procedures, including the respective roles of the employee and employer, have changed with revisions to immigration laws and procedures in the United States, but still the burden and costs are often borne by the individual. I place the University and academic Department at no fault here since they were supportive and provided assistance and documentation as needed, but the lengthy delays, multitude of procedures, and costs in the thousands of dollars fell directly onto me. A reality all prospective cross-border academics (and other career professionals) should be aware of and prepared for. There is “no easy street” or “fast track” for academics or professionals and certainly no special treatment afforded Canadians — those friendly neighbours to the north in regards to securing legal work status in the United States.

## **PHYSICAL/ENVIRONMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS**

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As a geographer I have had a long-standing interest in the physical and environmental aspects of places. Even before my academic career began, my travels to many regions in Canada and the United States were always marked by the opportunities to experience firsthand the characteristics of the natural landscapes, climate, ecoregions, culture, and overall environment of the areas and cities visited. Although there was an intuitive interest in such aspects of places, one is often most familiar with and drawn to those elements of the environment that define your place of birth or the place of your youth. The famous adage “it is a nice place to visit, but I would not wish to live here” can be applied to many of my travel destinations. To this day, I enjoy the opportunities and experiences of visiting

many different regions within Canada and the United States, but continue to find myself drawn to the natural landscape and environment most familiar to—and experienced by—me as defined by the characteristics of place of my youth and life history.

Having grown up and lived the majority of my years in southern Ontario, I became accustomed to the seasonal climate, mid-latitude and mid-continental environment, glaciated landscape, and the predominance of the Great Lakes, modified by the largely rural agriculture human activities with large urban industrial based cities. In seeking out potential locations to undertake a professional academic career, there was an intentional and directed effort to consider universities in regions that share many of those place characteristics. In that effort, a certain amount of caution was directed especially in considering locations of “extreme” climate conditions: cold and long winters, hot dry environments, interior continental desert locations, and the lack of seasonality. The interest in advancing my career foci and experiences in the fields of water resources, coastal management, and the Great Lakes would also factor into my decision since I preferred to eliminate locations due to their non-familiar physical landscapes and lack of acclimatization. Although this was an admitted strategic effort toward a job search on my behalf, it was not without challenges as such an approach to limit opportunities to secure academic positions and the possibility of dismissing otherwise ideal matches with potential academic appointments.

Given all the other stresses and issues with moving to a new city (especially across the border into another country) and starting a new career path as a tenure-track academic position, my reasoning for placing some focus and concern on the physical landscape, climate and environmental characteristics of potential job places was to try and limit (or at least control) some aspects of the changes associated with such a move. In my case, given the ultimate move from southern Ontario into Northwestern Ohio, I was able to maintain a comfort level and familiarity with many of those characteristics of place that were closely shared by both locations. It may be the case for other individuals that such concerns are unwarranted and, in fact, provide an opportunity to experience radically or completely different landscapes and environments as an attraction, especially for geographers to experience. Such a change may also be seen by many as advantageous for expanding their career and personal



interests and sense of new places. Such benefits should not be ignored or dismissed, but instead should be carefully weighed in terms of the stresses, distractions, and priorities of such experiences relative to those characteristics important and key to career and faculty development, such as the role of the department and university and expectations of the particular faculty position appointment. One should also be cautioned about the impacts of a major change to a new physical environment on the personal and professional life of an individual and the difficulties that can arise from such changes, especially moves to extreme climates (cold winters, hot summers) that many may not easily adapt to.

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### **ASSESSING CAREER AND PERSONAL IMPACTS**

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Any move to a new place and job will undoubtedly have a major impact on the career and personal life of any professional, including academics. These impacts can be positive and career building, but also have unintended negative and long lasting serious implications. I am not certain whether the move from Canada to the United States presents any more significant or serious impacts than a move involving a great distance (for example across a country) or a major change of cultural region or physical environment within the same country. As discussed previously, there are many unique challenges and concerns associated with changing countries, most notably immigration issues, personal economic impacts, cultural and societal differences to adapt to, as well as a long list of legal and other factors (for example, health care and schools for children). The challenges and stresses that will be faced in addressing immigration, visa, and job status issues can persist for many years after moving and the initial job appointment and cannot be overestimated.

The role and support of the department, college and university are essential in resolving these concerns, but a fair share and amount of the effort and burden (including financial cost) will still be placed on the individual employee. It requires a great amount of acceptance and patience for the new faculty member (and their family) to deal with these challenges and work through the lengthy time frame and mass of policies, procedures and paperwork unique to establishing a permanent work status in a new country. In both cases, moving from Canada to the United States (or from the United States to Canada), the process does not place any special

treatment or premium on the value of the close friendly and long standing relationships between the two countries, so the faculty member needs to be aware that the immigration and job status concerns that impact their ability to secure a permanent employment status (and that of their spouses and children) may take several years to resolve. There remains no “fast track” or special treatment for academics or immigrations from these friendly neighbouring countries and even though policies regarding application procedures and financial arrangements have changed in recent years, and continue to evolve, faculty members need to be aware that the challenges of time, policies and costs remain and will be a source of great frustration and consternation.

Beyond the challenges of immigration and job status, moving to another country to start an academic career can provide great benefits and opportunities for geographers to expand their professional research and personal growth as an academic and individual. There can be a tendency in academia — as a graduate student, post-doc or holding temporary appointments at one’s “home” institution or country — to become set or stagnant in professional and personal growth due to the comfort level and familiarity with familiar spaces and geographic areas of research. Although opportunities may exist to continue one’s graduate or post-doc research in a place, a move to a new location can also lead a job applicant to explore new aspects of research, apply experience and expertise to new topics or geographic regions, and gain a broader experience within a focus area or subdiscipline of geography. Relocating to another part of the country or abroad will also provide chances to expand professional networks within one’s academic field and with other professionals with similar interests such as government agencies, local organizations, and other scientists and academics in the local area. Moving opens the door to having new topics to explore, background research to conduct, new paths to take in terms of research and potential applications, and perhaps the most important for a young new tenure-track faculty member, the ability to “strike out on your own” to begin building a professional career beyond graduate and post -doc work and outside of the influence of past academic advisors and mentors. Such experiences and opportunities can, in fact, be common following any professional move, but the often significant and dramatic changes that come with changing countries can only enhance such potential advances in an academic career.

Based on my experience, I encourage geographers who are seeking a new academic position that involves a move into a new country to envision the potential professional, career and personal growth that could be achieved by such a move and how changing countries can in fact revitalize and redirect an academic career to new and exciting directions and heights perhaps not as fully realized if you stayed in place. As an individual and as a geographer, the chance to experience and learn about a new place and gain a sense of its character and its unique elements should be seen as a very positive and rewarding aspect of any such move.

### **ATTACHMENT TO PLACE/SENSE OF BELONGING**

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As a geographer, there is often a close understanding and appreciation for the concept of “sense of place” in terms of where we live and work. We can acknowledge that place plays an important role in our understanding and appreciation of belonging to a location (home, city, place of work) and can have a great influence on our feelings of acceptance and attachment. With any move comes a period of both personal and professional adjustment as we adapt to the changes in our surroundings and the new experiences and characteristics that define our new place. It is also important both personally and professionally to gain a comfort level or familiarity with our work and living environment and experiences, which can be challenging and evolve over a period of time (weeks, months or years). It is also possible that to some degree or in certain aspects we may not truly ever completely adjust or assimilate to our new place. We will forever continue to carry with us some degree of comfort level with our native country built upon the long association of time through youth to adulthood and prior to the eventual career dictated move. It is important for individuals to understand, acknowledge and accept both the need to adapt and adjust to a new place, but also to have no fear or concern about the often inherent need to maintain some degree of attachment to our place of origin and growth. In terms of professional academics, including geographers, there should be an appreciation toward embracing of both old and new places as fundamental to the personal and career growth one will experience with such

a move and throughout their lives. We should accept, and not draw back from, our shared experiences with places we become familiar with and which can enrich and enhance us personally and professionally.

Personal and professional growth can come with the effort to build a sense of belonging and attachment to our new home and surroundings, both in the community and in the university environment. We have been given a potentially enriching opportunity to undertake new experiences, visit and appreciate new places and locations, expand our geographic knowledge and understanding of place, and take the steps needed to immerse ourselves in the culture, society, and environment that define this new location. This includes both the personal living and work spaces we will experience daily through our lives and the interactions with new places and people. In this way over time we can build our own sense of place and belonging to this new place we call home and work. We can use such experiences to allow for personal and professional growth and see the opportunity as a positive experience worthy of enhancing our lives and work. We should continue over the initial weeks, months and years to build a strong sense of place, not with the aim to replace where we came from, but instead to add this new place to our life experiences and accept the potential for personal and professional growth.

It is also important to understand and recognize that even after making an effort to develop a new sense of place post relocation, it is typical to always continue to maintain some connection or sense to our original home country that may be expressed as pride and appreciation of our heritage. Therefore, faculty moving to another country is encouraged to strive to learn and adapt to their new place, but not to hide or dismiss their heritage associated with their “homeland” country. This can often be a difficult balance to maintain and present conflicts in both personal and professional contexts as individuals can find themselves pulled between two places. It will require continued appreciation and effort to maintain this necessary balance to never forget where you came from and where you are presently. Even years after moving to a new country, migrants may continue to be perceived by others, both in their personal and professional lives, as a “non-native” or as coming from that other country. Even a decade later, I still find myself called upon often to give my Canadian perspective, experience or “expertise” on any number of issues, most notably universal

health care, immigration, hockey, the Royal Family, and the British Empire. In many respects I continue to be viewed by many as the “Canadian” and my life experience from Canada still defines me, both personally and professionally. I have come to terms with this characterization and do not view it as negative or degrading. I am proud of my heritage, but often cautious in expressing it outwardly so as not to force others to view me only in that manner (or that by doing so, I am somehow acknowledging my unwillingness or effort to adapt to the American society or culture, which could not be further from the truth).

Based on my experiences during the past decade, Americans tend to have a very strong positive view of Canadians generally, while at the same time, are also rightly proud of their heritage, history, and society. The fact that many public and political debates in the United States tend to focus on issues that have strong connections to Canadian culture (universal health care being the best example here) means that I am often asked—or cornered—to express my views on this issue. My approach has been a cautious and polite response in an effort to try to help inform and educate inquirers but not to dictate or “preach” my viewpoint. No doubt immigrants from any number of countries face these same challenges in adapting to a new culture, hold their heritage strong, and “represent” their home country and perhaps those from countries other than Canada experience an even greater burden in that regard. I certainly have not experienced any personal or professional bias or discrimination due to my Canadian heritage. In fact, most Americans seem to have a profound respect, interest and natural curiosity about Canadians. Admittedly, however, my relocation in a border state in close proximity to Canada may be influencing this particularly positive view of Canadians and Canada in general.

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## **OTHER CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

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Launching a new academic career, moving to a new place, and leaving home may make the migration experience quite daunting. However, the focus should be on the long term opportunities and the chance to use the experience to expand and diversify one’s career and personal life. A situation can be made easier by carefully considering all the important personal and work factors in determining whether such a move is in your best interest. One needs to be careful not to be overwhelmed by the

prospect of moving to another country, but also to be aware of the challenges such a move will present. It is important to consider whether the factors of culture, social issues, economic concerns (for example the cost of living relative to anticipated salary), distance from family and friends, ability to continue or develop new professional contacts, characteristics of the university, college and department, and the physical environment, especially climate, are manageable and you have a willingness to accept and adapt to those changing conditions of place, work and living.

Moving to the United States will also present concerns in understanding and evaluating the wide range of local conditions that could have a great influence on your career (and personal life). In different parts of the country, there are great differences in factors such as the quality and support for local schools in the area, the overall economic situation in cities and states that can vary considerably (perhaps more so than in Canada), the political environment, local acceptance of foreigners and immigrants, and the role that a university institution plays within the location community. Will a newcomer find a welcoming and supportive local community and university? Are local services sufficient to meet the needs and interests of new families? Are there opportunities for career growth, especially the ability and capacity to expand and adapt one's research and teaching in new and innovative ways? Is there a strong comfort level with the decision to relocate to a new place and is it sufficient to support and enhance your personal and professional life? Will it be easy to adapt to the new culture and environment and survive the hot dry summer climate of Texas or the deer hunting season in Wisconsin? Will you greatly miss the familiar aspects of home including "Hockey Night in Canada," Maple Leaf bacon, and Bryan Adams?

The bottom line in making the decision to migrate is a geographer's willingness to explore and enjoy the new experiences associated with a place and the ability to give up some aspects of a long held heritage and culture that will no longer be experienced on a daily basis. As a geographer, are you intrigued by the chance to live in a new community and be immersed in the social context and environment of a place you may know something about from brief visits, but will now have the chance to be part of? The challenges and concerns with moving from Canada to the United States to start an academic career are real and they will require careful consideration and appreciation with the important decision that

will impact the future of the job applicant and his/her family. As such, this decision cannot be taken lightly since the place (city, university, and department) may have a significant influence on one's career for many years. The richness of the cross-border migration experience created by a move abroad, especially for geographers, is filled with many exciting and rewarding opportunities as well as a number of challenges that can be overcome with careful planning and an open mind.





# CHASING A LIFE THAT BORDERS ON TWO NATIONS

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(FORMERLY TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN MARCOS, TEXAS, USA)

**E**ach generation that migrates loses a part of its culture and its roots, but gains in the number of adventure stories. Thus is the history of my family, tracing back to the generation of my grandparents. The move from our Canton homeland in south eastern China began in the 1930s when my grandparents, young adolescents then, became part of a diaspora of Chinese in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), Vietnam. My parents were born in Vietnam, they participated in the Chinese economy, but unrest in 1975 after the war became a push factor. Like their parents, they chose to leave home; their journey took them on a boat as refugees, choosing death in the South China Sea over living a forced political regime. Each generation was in search of a better life, from China to Vietnam, from Vietnam to Canada. Unlike my family's relocation which was due to desperation, a matter of life and death, hunger and fulfillment, in comparison, my move is more leisurely. However, the reason for my migration south of

the border is the same as generations before, to fulfill life not yet realized in the home country. Like the migratory Canada geese, I hope to bring my southern exposures north, back home, to complete a journey across the Canada-USA border.

As I was completing my dissertation, my search of faculty positions was narrowed to a few options in the USA. Partly, this is because geography education has a stronger leadership, is more developed, and better funded in the USA than it is in Canada. For this reason, the opportunities for a young scholar were much higher abroad than at home. The pull factor, like those in my grandparents' and parents' generation, was the need to make a living. Leaving Canada was a difficult decision as everything I love, own, am acquainted with are deeply rooted in one geographic location, Toronto.

Relocation is substantially more than physically moving. The emotions and memories of home, particularly when stark differences exist between the two locations, make the transition more difficult. In my head, it was almost a cultural overlay between "items I was used to" with "items new" with "items missing." In the process, I realized things that were absent in my new home that are important to me, thus a discovery process of personal priorities. The process of writing, thinking, and reflecting on my migratory experience has made me question the value of my identity namely, my "Chineseness" and my "Canadianness." What do they really mean to me in my mini transient world?

### **ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT'S OR UNIVERSITY'S REPUTATION IN CHOICE TO MOVE ABROAD**

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The department reputation was less important to me than the "happiness" factor of working within a supportive department. My reasoning for weighing more on the happiness element is because I realized that how well I "fit" within a department, professionally and personally, is more important to my personal development than the reputation of a department. Perhaps my education being outside of the USA allowed me to be objective about the institutional and departmental comparisons. Nevertheless, I began by asking some senior US colleagues about their impression of the department. The initial impressions collected were not entirely positive. The department reputation was based on historical

mishaps that stirred rumours, diffusing widely across the academic world. When I visited the campus, I was attuned to the interaction and simply being in the moment, evaluating with my intuition. The friendliness of faculty and efficiency of the administrative staff were all contributing factors to my decision to be in Texas.

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### PUSH-PULL FACTORS INFLUENCING MY DECISION TO EMIGRATE

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Before arriving in San Marcos, it was rumoured that Texas prided itself on a motto, “bigger is better.” Upon my arrival, I immediately sought out this symbol of wealth, I observed this in the size of houses, the engine of cars, and even in the food portions. The same principle seemed to apply to opportunities in the USA. Perhaps the population size of the USA, ten times the population of Canada, translates to a rough estimate of opportunities. Since moving to the USA, I learned to my relief that geography education is regarded as a subfield of geography, much like how science or mathematics education are subfields of respective home departments. In addition, a number of geography conferences list “geography education” as a potential topic. The opportunities in geography education are found in conferences dedicated to this field, grant opportunities, and academics with research focus. In Canada, the study of geography education is young and research opportunities are few.

A secondary pull factor that stood out in Texas is its warm winters and hot summers. Other than its weather system, little was known about Texas. From afar, especially across a national border, differences may be exaggerated, developing into stereotypes. Before making the final decision, my Toronto friends generously shared their impressions of Texas with me. I was educated on the need to buy a gun and a truck to fit in. Next, I should also give up my vegetarian diet to replace it with steak meals. To me, these Texas characteristics were pull factors, but not for the obvious reasons. Rather, I was curious about Texas and the opportunity to experience personal growth. The third pull factor is the adventure of exploring a new and different place. This was the geographic experience I desired, relocating to an unfamiliar **location**, understanding the culture of a new **place**, and learning about the world from different **scales**.

**ATTACHMENT TO PLACE, SENSE OF BELONGING,  
FEELINGS OF POST-MIGRATION “OTHERNESS”  
AFTER RELOCATION**

As an outsider peaking into Texas, I would describe it with five memorable traits:

**Trucks — Extra large — Xeriscape — Arid — Star**

My first impression of Texas is the number of **trucks**, from small to large. I wondered if they were used to transport animals or other heavy material, however, I later discovered they were a status symbol, their size being a direct representation of masculinity. My first ride in a truck highlighted another Texas characteristic — bigger is better (**extra-large**) — a friend’s truck was so high that I was not able to get in! The value given to size is pervasive in quantities of serving sizes at restaurants and living space to name a few. The size of a “large” beverage is substantially larger than “large” in Toronto. The large food portion sizes, one of many factors, lead to a phenomenon that is less obvious in Canada, commonly seen overweight and obese people.

Central Texas is usually cool in the night but hot in the day. This climate supports native species such as plants in the cactus family. For example, consumption goods such as agave nectar and tequila come from the agave plant. Although a lush green and manicured garden is not uncommon, **xeriscaping** is found in gardens that seek to naturally introduce native species more adapted to the physical landscape and **arid** climate of Texas. The Texas sun is illustrative of two local features. First, the sun is the symbol star of Texas. Although each state is represented on the USA flag as a star, Texas love of the star has earned the nickname of “Lone Star State.” **Stars** adorn houses and anything “Texas.”

Texas has a distinct culture around transportation (truck), cuisine (barbecue), language (y’all and n’hmm). From the outside, Texas has a reputation. I invited a colleague from New York to visit, to which he replied “I will never visit Texas.” I tried to reason with his resistance. As a car-free vegetarian who expects to hear “you are welcome” from a polite “thank you,” rather than “n’hmm,” I was thrust into new territory of living. With time and acceptance of the local culture, life in Texas was quite

pleasant. I was surprised to find that people were interested to hear about my personal and family background, perhaps due to the ties between my family history and the Vietnam war that USA was part of.

When I first arrived in Texas, I often looked for differences between my home and the new “home” whether it was sidewalks (extensive in Toronto), mass public transportation (abundant in Toronto), universal health care, gun ownership, ubiquity of religious emblems, diversity, and more. Luckily, time is a natural remedy of homesickness and longing of the heart. In the transition process, I have found solace in meditation, the ability to live in the present. This attitude has allowed me to call San Marcos home when I am in Texas, but easily transition to home in Toronto during visits.

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**ATTRACTION OF THE PHYSICAL/  
ENVIRONMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS  
OF MY DESTINATION IN THE US**

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Prior to my relocation, I knew very little about the physical characteristics of central Texas. San Marcos was described as a prime location in the state, situated between San Antonio and Austin, close to the artsy retirement town of Wimberly, and within the beautiful Hill Country. My desire to relocate to San Marcos, Texas, rather than another state with a large, metropolitan city was for a truly authentic experience outside of urban living. Only in comparison between living in a large city and in a town do I now know that my roots are deeply entrenched in urban life. One attraction of living in Texas is people. The motto of Texas is “friendship” and the citizens exhibit this trait well. Having lived in Texas for almost two years, this is the most memorable characteristic. Regardless of the location, whether it is in a grocery store, in a park, on the street, strangers will smile or greet me. Coming from Toronto, this common courtesy and friendliness is rarely seen. When this occasionally occurs, a natural reaction of the recipient to this nice gesture usually falls into two types: the person greeting is weird OR is interested (in me).

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## OTHER OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF LIVING AND TEACHING ABROAD

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My dual identity of being Canadian and Chinese, a female professor, an immigrant to Canada, makes for interesting conversation in the classroom. This heterogeneous background is often used as a geographic introduction on the first day of class. I invite students to collectively ask me ten questions that I can only answer “yes” or “no” to. At the end, the class as a whole should decide where I am from.

My Chineseness, both in skin color and cultural practices, also stands out from a predominantly Caucasian and Hispanic student population. I have used my family stories, travels to parts of Asia, and access to Chinese media as ways to enrich my courses, in particular World Geography. Students seem to embrace this difference. Although I feel comfortable in central Texas, part of me desires to be part of a large Chinese community, one that has abundant Chinese restaurants, a Cantonese radio station, and Chinese colleagues to share festivities with.

Part of my working and living experiences in Texas are confronted by broad differences in the philosophy of life. My adjustment is central to (1) food portion sizes, (2) gun law, and (3) mode of transportation.

In the land of the USA, the impression is that food is plentiful. Some of my observations come from large portion size at restaurants, free grocery with purchase of select grocery (I’ve only seen coupons for discount but not for free food in Toronto), buffets are commonly found (at cheap prices well below that of Toronto). In addition to the portion size of food, the volume of a drink was even more shocking. I tried to ask for a “small” size but was told that “medium” was the smallest available. Even then, the medium seemed more like large or extra-large to me. The food industry is pushing for cheap food but offer an unhealthy array of selections. When I wanted to trade in my soda for hot tea, I was told that I had to pay. I requested for another cup of hot water and was told that I had to pay for water! But I had already paid for my meal?! I didn’t understand why I had to pay for hot water. My shock of the foods consumed and eating habits is closely tied to where this food is eaten. It seems that drive-thrus (is this even a word, is it not spelled as “drive-through”?) are a welcomed way to eat one’s meal. Drive-thrus are not limited to restaurants, but even banks have a drive-thru ATM! A walk-up ATM is absent in San Marcos. If I wanted to make transactions after bank hours, I would have to stand in a queue at

a drive-thru ATM. How did the car become the vehicle for everything? It's not any faster when many other cars are in line at the bank, at the grocery pick-up, or at fast food chains. I began to notice some very big people, a size I rarely saw in Toronto or in the large cities I've travelled in Canada. As a geographer, I began to wonder why there were more observations of obese people in the USA compared to Canada. A recent CBC reported that the percentage of obese people is higher in the USA than in Canada. This confirms my observations. Is this attributed to the trends of San Marcos or is this a common southern or even national crisis — the large food portions, reliance on a car, and too many conveniences in society? Is it a surprise then that “diabesity” (diabetes and obesity), coined by “The Hungry Planet” has its epicenter in the USA?

The GUN. To me, the gun is a mystery. I know what it is, I've read about its power in the news, but I don't really know why people carry one or what its real purpose is. The gun is talked about but not really openly. It's not a polite question to ask but it piques my curiosity. Do I need one? I understand that gun ownership is the second amendment to free speech but if words can be a weapon, why do we need bullets that can cause real, physical harm? I've been told that a gun makes people feel safer because they can protect themselves from the perpetrators. I've also seen fridge magnets that pronounce pride in the gun “I don't call 911, I have a gun.” The logic makes enough sense. If I am in danger, I use my gun to shoot at the attacker. But what if the offender has a faster gun, is a better shooter than I, or I'm too shocked to fire? I've only seen a pistol once. It was a colleague who showed it to me, as we were on a bike ride. He assured me it was for our protection, in case of attackers. I thought he was poking fun at me, but when I saw the gun, I mentally froze. Such a small item can be so dangerous. My second response was discomfort. What if it goes off by accident? Why do we need guns when we pride ourselves as people living in a civil society? Can we not use the first amendment to resolve issues rather than use a weapon that can create permanent loss? The affection of guns leads me to wonder about the violence happening where instead of words, guns, a poor substitute for an argumentative point, are used to silence people who disagree with us.

I brought my gun confusion to a Texan who provided a convincing argument for gun ownership. Not only is the right to bear arms the second amendment, particularly in Texas, guns are used for self-protection (pride

in self-reliance and the long wait for help due to large distances between neighbours or any source of immediate assistance) and for hunting. I was enlightened from this conversation because I reached a point of acceptance. I suddenly realized the influence of place and location on local practices.

The main mode of transportation in San Marcos, and Texas generally, is the car. In a self-experiment of two years, I have opted to be vehicle-free, choosing to commute to school by foot, moving locally by university operated buses, travelling between cities by public transportation (e.g., Greyhound or university bus) as well as carpooling with friends, and exploring green spaces on a bicycle. Reliance on public transportation imposes time restriction based on the schedule but this also reinforces better time management and scheduling of activities. Although limitations exist, however, I have been able to meet daily needs by various modes of transportation. This experiment has a small sample size ( $n = 1$ ) tested over two years. Although the result is positive, multiple repetitions are needed to confirm the finding that a car is convenient but not absolutely necessary to travel.

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### WHAT IF ... ?

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If this was a research piece, it would be nice to contrast my Texas experiences within a large, metropolitan city. Serendipitously, after two years in Texas, while writing this reflection, an opportunity surfaced for me to relocate to Washington, DC, to work at the Association of American Geographers.

With only a year of working and living in the DC area, I aim to question how my experiences as a Canadian geographer, living life on “the other side” of the Canada-USA border, differ in a big city. I now work in Washington (DC) and enjoy various modes of public transportation, experience diversity through food, Smithsonian exhibits, and taking part in interest groups. The infinite opportunities to meet people and explore experiences create an unpredictably exciting existence in DC, in contrast to a very secure and anticipated reality in Texas. Where I represented TEXAS with five distinct emblems earlier, DC seems to represent a flow of energy, portraying the sense of “**D**oing **C**ounts.” In this city, there are infinite ways to be engaged and active, thus it doesn’t matter what you do, as



long as you do something that the city offers, it counts as “participatory living.” Despite the polar differences between DC and Texas, DC being closer both in proximity and culture to Toronto, the relocation process to a new home brings original challenges that demand general adaptations, recalibrations, and negotiation with expectations.

DC has its set of cultures, idiosyncrasies, and rhythm that depart from that of San Marcos. A cultural landmark is “happy hour”; I am learning about its value to the cohesiveness of a working place. It is a common practice after work, it is both cordial and collegial to take part where possible. Downtown eateries and bars are filled with working professionals, joined in unison laughter and buzzing with discussion, a scene that is different from a student dominant presence in San Marcos. An idiosyncrasy apparent to me is the juxtaposition of wealth and poverty. The number of impoverished pockets within the city paired with the number of pan handlers on the streets is a stark contrast to the wealth in the city’s capital. This should not be acceptable, yet people quickly walk by, mesmerized in their newest technology, rather than the new and old poor in the city. Finally, the city rhythm is unique because it runs at a big city pace, especially traffic jams, but people (bus drivers) operate with the patience of a southern town.

I have come to realize that it is difficult to fairly compare the notion of home in San Marcos to Washington to Toronto. Each location is geographically different thus each is enriched by the inhabitants and the culture. In this introspective exercise, I conclude that “home” is an elusive concept, just when I’ve defined where, what, and how my home should be, changes in life introduce new elements to be reckoned with. Like the calculus question that attempts to best estimate the area under a curve (curve being analogous to the up and down of life’s journey) or the prediction of an electron’s probability position (difficulty to pin down an electron’s position analogous to the inevitable changes in life), I do not think that I can ever clearly define where home is. I may approach a definition of home, but it will never be definite, because that excludes the possibility of change, of the need to negotiate adjustments. This mentality has allowed me to call San Marcos home, DC home, and also Toronto as home at different time periods in my life. In geography, it’s a matter of place. When I am in Toronto, THAT is home. When I am in Washington, THAT too is home. When I speak about my life in Texas, San Marcos was home.

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## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

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The opportunity to experience living the “American Dream” has been fantastic. In the last two years, I have been fortunate to meet prominent geographers and geography education researchers, be part of geography education projects, and to know that the teaching of geography is a prime concern in the USA. The same exposure would not have been possible in Canada. The flip side of this American dream is that sometimes nightmares happen when things are out of control. This includes the economic downturn and high unemployment (compared to Canada), lack of universal health care to support citizens (I’m paying taxes in the USA and wish that they went toward helping other people), and violence from improper use of guns.

I’m a Chinese and a Canadian at heart. Canada and the USA are very different countries, neighbours who engage in trade but are divided in political views and the English spelling of words. My alien traits (my work visa identifies me as a work alien status) give me a unique outside view of unfamiliarity. When I first saw the word “XING” (how does anyone know this means “crossing”?) printed on the road, I asked my friend why a Chinese name was written on the ground. I later realized the society’s predilection to truncating words from one letter (e.g., “neighbour” to “neighbor”) to multiple (e.g., drive-thru), spelling (“analyze” or “analyse”; “cancelled” or “canceled”) to pronunciation of the alphabet (Z — “zee” in Canada and “zed” in USA), to words that appear to me like a word puzzle (“check” for “cheque”).

To define home as one place limits the possibility of being elsewhere. So, like an electron, I am floating in space, searching for a stable energy level to rest, before potential relocation elsewhere. Eventually, I would like to migrate north, where home is where I wish to grow old. But at the moment, my desire is to be a twenty-first century geographer, travelling the world with work opportunities.

**AMERICAN  
GEOGRAPHERS  
IN CANADA**



# FROM NEW YORK TO MONTRÉAL

## Or How I Became a Canadian and a Québécois

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**M**y move from the United States to Canada was entirely typical in one respect. Like many Americans of my generation, my decision to settle in Canada was not motivated by economic considerations, but by a life-style choice, grounded in the perception of Canada as a socially more just, less violent, and generally more civilized society. However, my move to Canada was a-typical in that it was the outcome of a string of singular coincidences, rather than choice, which lead not only to a change of locales but also of identity. And it was a-typical in that it not only caused me to become Canadian, but also a Québécois. It is the story of that metamorphosis which I shall recount below.

When asked when I immigrated to Canada, I am unable to give a precise answer. From a strictly legal perspective, the date is 12 July 1969; the day I formally became a landed immigrant, crossing the border at Lansdowne, Ontario (Thousands Islands Bridge) en route from Philadelphia

to Montréal. The Canadian immigration officer dutifully stamped my American passport, completed the necessary forms, and bid me “Welcome to Canada.” Yet, that date is incorrect for in my head I was already Canadian, or at least a good part of me was. My Canadian journey had begun several years before that. I was not moving to a new country, but to a place I already considered my second home. To understand how that came to be, I begin my story on a sunny day in the month of April 1953 in New York City harbour.

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### **PUSH FACTORS: MY AMERICAN JOURNEY**

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I well remember that day, standing on the deck of the *Nieuw Amsterdam* out of Rotterdam (in those days, people still emigrated by boat), looking out — just like in the movies — at the Statue of Liberty and the New York skyline; the typical New York immigrant story. I was nine years old. My parents, both Viennese, had fled Nazi Austria to Holland in 1938, only to find themselves again under Nazi rule when the Germans occupied The Netherlands in 1940. After the war, like so many Europeans, scarred by two world wars and wary of the looming Soviet threat, my parents decided to seek a new life in America. Our boat docked in Hoboken, New Jersey, where we were met by my aunt and her current boyfriend who picked us up in his huge Cadillac. Boy, was I ever impressed! My American life had begun.

What followed was less impressive. My parents had few savings upon arrival. We moved in with my aunt into a cramped apartment on West 86th Street in Manhattan. A few months later we moved to a five story walk-up on West 90th Street, corner of Columbus Avenue. This was not a nice section of town, and it was one of the toughest New York neighbourhoods at the time, so dangerous that the police refused to answer calls. Our apartment was burglarized four times. For a nine-year-old kid fresh out of (ultra-safe) Holland, this was a major shock. But I adapted because I had little choice. I rapidly learned how to manoeuvre on the streets of the Upper West Side, although I did stupidly manage to get my arm broken once in an accidental gang fight. Race was the principal definer of where one stood in the neighbourhood kicking order. I was in the wrong group, White. Most gangs were Puerto Rican which meant that I spent as little time as possible on the street, and no time at all at night (unless I wanted to get my arm broken again).

Those formative years (1953–1961) on the Upper West Side had at least two side effects, each in its own way an ingredient in my yet-to-come Canadian journey. My nightly exile in our fifth floor apartment certainly enhanced my ability to function alone (I was an only child) and, specifically, to find pleasure in reading and studying long hours by myself (TV was still in its infancy) and also set in motion the idea that I would eventually move someplace else. Surely, there were safer places to be than the Upper West Side. We eventually moved to Jackson Heights in Queens, a nicer neighbourhood, but this did not alter my feelings. The 1960s were among New York's darkest ages, a far cry from the largely safe and racially tolerant city it is today. My love for geography developed here; over time I acquired an impressive collection of Atlases and travel books. I read up on distant places. I did not know where I would end up, perhaps California, who knew? Although I learned to love New York (and still do), something in my head was telling me that this is not where I would spend the rest of my life. As an aside (and fast forward), my old Upper West Side neighbourhood has since gone upscale and gentrified. My five story walk-up was gutted (no great loss), now replaced by expensive condos.

The rest of my New York story follows the general immigrant pattern. The melting pot steamroller rapidly transformed me into a true blue American. I don't even remember learning English. At school, I dutifully pledged allegiance to the flag every morning. I sang the "Star-Spangled Banner." I was in no way special. There was no identity problem. Almost all my classmates in public school were either born outside the US or the children of immigrants. Few spoke English in the home (I spoke German with my parents). But who cared, this was New York, we were all Americans, and proud to be. And, like so many other immigrants, I swiftly moved up the educational ladder. On this count, I was immensely fortunate to be growing up in New York City in the 1950s and 1960s, which provided a first-class educational system from public school through university, and all tuition-free or at a minimal fee. I, like so many other young New Yorkers at the time, owe much to this superb public system (which, unfortunately, deteriorated afterwards, but is coming up again) that allowed a kid from a poor neighbourhood to go to an Ivy League university and on to a successful academic career. I graduated with a BA in Economics from City College, part of the City University of New York system. I worked for a year after

graduation as a social worker at municipally-run Bellevue Hospital, which exposed me to another side of New York's underclass (most of my "clients" were homeless people who did little to improve my already low opinion of the US health system). But this was stop-gap. I wanted an academic career. I now had a decision to make. Where would I do my graduate studies?

Intent on leaving New York (but not necessarily the US), I sent applications only to graduate schools outside the New York area, which greatly saddened my parents. I sent out six applications, among which to two Ivy League universities — Cornell and the University of Pennsylvania — both of which accepted me to my great surprise. I eventually chose the Regional Science Program at the University of Pennsylvania, first because it was the closest thing to a degree in economic geography,<sup>1</sup> which is what I was aiming for and has remained my academic focus since, and because the Program offered me a generous NSF<sup>2</sup> scholarship (although Cornell also offered me one), without which I would never have been able to attend an Ivy League school. I was indeed fortunate. And thus, in the summer of 1966, I left New York for Philadelphia never to return,<sup>3</sup> not permanently that is. My three years at the University of Pennsylvania were among the most fruitful and enjoyable of my life. Besides getting a superb education, I did everything (or almost) a young student was supposed to do: partied, demonstrated (mainly, against the Vietnam war), and generally had a great time.

Although my three years at the University of Pennsylvania, both on and off campus, were entirely enjoyable, they further fuelled my growing unease with American society. Philadelphia, much more so even than New York, was a sharply segregated city, and also considerably more violent. The campus was surrounded by black ghettos, impossible to ignore. The mid-1960s were not a good time in America. Racial and social tensions ran high. Cities literally burned. Not only Philadelphia, but also Chicago, Los Angeles and other cities were torn by race riots. Richard Nixon's shenanigans and the unpopular war in Vietnam (plus the compulsory draft) further contributed to the general sense that things were going wrong. However, it was the race factor and the violence it engendered

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1. No Ivy League University, with the exception of Dartmouth, has a Geography Department.

2. National Science Foundation.

3. A fellow classmate at City College, Eric Weiss-Altaner, made the same move. We became roommates in Philadelphia. We shall hear more of Eric later.



that affected me most. The following three (less enjoyable) Philadelphia moments stick in my mind: (1) caught one morning in cross-fire between police and their targets; (2) trapped in a streetcar under attack from a street gang; and (3) assailed as I inadvertently wandered into a black neighbourhood. To make a long story short, I did not want to live in a city where whole neighbourhoods were closed to me and where people wanted to do me harm because of my skin colour. I imagine most blacks felt this even more strongly than I, but they did not have the options I had. Canadian cities were looking better and better.

Thus, upon the completion of my graduate course work in the summer of 1969,<sup>4</sup> I packed my belongings into my car and drove up to Canada, permanent residency papers and a job offer in hand. I was twenty-five years old. But, I still need to explain why I drove to Montréal and not, say, to Toronto and why I was already part Québécois in my heart.

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### PULL FACTORS: OF COINCIDENCES AND CHOICES

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My absorption into Québécois society occurred via something like osmosis. It just sort of happened. To describe how, I shall switch to a more analytical mode (I am an academic after all), classifying the different stages in the process under three headings: accidents, coincidences, and choices. The first two are, of course, similar; but I wish to make a distinction between circumstances — accidents — that were or remain part of my life (for example, having Viennese parents) and events — coincidences — that occurred by chance (i.e. meeting so and so).

***Accident 1 — My father worked in Paris in the 1920s.*** My father, Julius, was a fervent Francophile. He spent the best years of his life, so he told me, in Paris in the 1920s where he managed the Paris office of a Vienna-based travel agency. During his Paris sojourn, he became permanently enamoured with the French language and everything French. He naturally wanted to communicate his Francophilia to his son. A number of consequences followed from this. My father convinced me to choose French (rather than Spanish) as my second language in high school,

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4. I finally completed my dissertation two years later and formally received my PhD in 1972.

which I thus began to study at the age of fourteen. He often took me to see French films (being in New York helped) and on the first occasion we had enough money to travel outside the US took the family to Québec City. This was 1957. The trip was repeated during the summer of 1959. I well remember my father pointing out signs and asking me to translate. I was fifteen years old. Little did I know that I would day one be returning to this place.

***Accident 2 — My parents were Viennese, and still had friends and relatives there.*** It thus became a family ritual — again, when we could afford it — to make summer pilgrimages to Vienna. Because of Accident 1, this usually played out as a flight first to Paris, where we would spend a few days, and then take a train to Vienna. I got to know Paris quite well, and later made a few pilgrimages on my own with side trips to London (more on that later) and other European cities.

***Accident 3 — My multilingual upbringing.*** A corollary of the previous two accidents, plus my Dutch childhood, meant that French was my fourth language. When I started to study it, I already had Dutch, German, and English. This gave me a considerable advantage, especially for pronunciation, since the sounds that Anglos have difficulty getting their tongues around also exist in German and Dutch. This meant, from the outset, that my French pronunciation was pretty good, with no recognizable accent, although not necessarily the accent of a native speaker.

The upshot of these three “accidents” was that by the beginnings of the 1960s I had a pretty good feel for French, although still far from a native speaker. But nothing yet was pointing me toward Québec (for the New York kid I was, French was simply a hobby among many). For that to happen, I now move to coincidence #1, the spark that set me off on my Québec-bound journey.

***Coincidence 1 — CBF 690.*** One evening in 1962 (in October or November), I was playing with the AM dial on my radio and chanced upon a French-language station. Cool, I thought, a local French-language community station which would allow me to practice my French. That’s not what it was. As the reader will undoubtedly have guessed, CBF 690 was the call signal of CBC/Radio-Canada in Montréal, the flagship station of Canada’s French-language public broadcaster

(since replaced by an FM station). CBF 690 Montréal broadcasted at some fifty thousand watts, and could be picked up as far as New York after nightfall, although reception did sometimes falter.

I was intrigued. I always liked current events. I thus started listening to the nightly newscasts at 10 p.m. The reason I know it was October or November is that much of the news dealt with the November 1962 Québec Provincial election, one of the defining moments, I was to realize later, of Québec's Quiet Revolution. The Liberal Party, which won the election, was running on the slogan *Maîtres chez-nous* (Masters in our own house) with the promise to nationalize (Anglo-controlled) power companies, which subsequently lead to the creation of Hydro-Québec,<sup>5</sup> Québec's huge — and highly successful — state owned power company. But all this I was to only fully understand much later. The first nights in front of my radio, I did not really understand what was going on, still at the stage of trying to fully understand the French (my dictionary duly at hand). But, as time went on, my ear getting used to the language, I became increasingly intrigued. What was going in this odd place just north of me? I became addicted to CBF 690 Montréal, my nightly source for world news but, more significantly, for news of events up north.

#### ***Accident 4 — The New York Public Library and Times Square Newsstand.***

The true “accident” here is the City of New York and the vast resources it offers. The New York Public Library is not only one of the world's great research libraries, but also entirely free and accessible to the general public (and still is). Piqued by the nightly news bulletins on CBF 690, I started reading up on the history of Canada and French Canada in particular. I do not know how many hours I spent in the Public Library's magnificent reading room. All I know is that I was becoming quite knowledgeable on the history of our northern neighbour, discovering things I did not suspect. This was, of course, a *choice* on my part, the first conscious decision on my journey-to-come. Like most Americans, I had not the slightest inkling of Canadian history. We learned zilch in school. Canada might as well have been a region of Outer Mongolia. But, I was becoming hooked, not least because the

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5. Actually, a smaller version of Hydro-Québec already existed. But, the creation of Hydro-Québec in its current form is generally associated with the year 1963.

history of Canada gave me a whole new perspective on the history of my own country. Here were a people who dared reject the American Revolution. English Canada, I learned, was founded by “refugees” from that revolution. French Canada had refused to join it, staying loyal to the British crown.<sup>6</sup> Intriguing indeed.

Returning to current events, Times Square at the time housed a newsstand with newspapers from around the world, including the Saturday edition of *La Presse*, Montréal’s main French-language paper. Here “choice” and “accident” again fortuitously joined. I started buying *La Presse* on a regular basis when I could (it was not always available). Together with the nightly Radio-Canada newscasts, I was slowly getting caught up in the excitement of Québec’s Quiet Revolution.<sup>7</sup> This was heady stuff, a whole people in the process of reinventing itself. It was a damn sight more inspiring than what was happening at home. Like many idealistic young Americans at the time, John F. Kennedy was my hero. I was a member of the local Democratic Party and worked as a volunteer during the 1960 election campaign. Kennedy’s assassination in November of 1963, and the subsequent assassinations of his brother and of Martin Luther King, greatly dampened my faith in the American political system. Politicians were not being assassinated in Canada.<sup>8</sup>

**Coincidence 2—A crazy Russian chef.** While in college, I worked in the summer and travelled the next with the money saved. In 1963, I was looking for a summer job. My mother who at the time was head chef at the executive dining room of Macy’s (the department store) had heard that a free-lance chef who did summer contracts was looking for a sous-chef (read “slave”). I was a decent amateur cook, so

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6. The Americans sent Benjamin Franklin up to Québec to bring *les Canadiens* over to the rebel cause, but to no avail; this despite the fact that France itself was supporting the American colonists in their fight against England. Clearly, *les Canadiens* already had a strong sense of national self-interest, separate from that of France.
  7. I take it for granted that most readers know what the Quiet Revolution was. For those who do not, in a nutshell (and oversimplifying terribly) it refers to the decade (1960–1970, roughly) during which French Canada awoke from its long (rural, clergy-dominated) slumber to become the forward-looking, secular, society it is today. The rise of Québécois nationalism and the promotion of French was a central feature of that revolution. In Québec, French Canadians ceased to call themselves so and became Québécois.
  8. An assassination did occur in Québec during the so-called October Crisis of 1970, but that was *after* I had moved to Montréal. Pierre Laporte, a Québec cabinet minister, was assassinated by the FLQ (Front de Libération du Québec), a terrorist group dedicated to the separation of Québec, which thankfully no longer exists.

no problem there. Besides that basic criterion, the primary requirement was the ability to communicate in French. The chef, Nikita, was right out of central casting: the very model of a fallen, slightly mad, Francophile Russian aristocrat. Although in New York some thirty years, he had never condescended to learning English. Anyway, great chefs speak French, right? He hired me on the spot.

What does this have to do with Québec? The job was at the country residence — chateau would be more accurate — of the Bronfman family of Montréal (of Seagram's fame) in Tarrytown, NY, some forty-five minutes north of New York by train. I slept downstairs, next to the kitchen, on call whenever needed. It was not pleasant work, but paid well (plus room and board). More to the point, all the help in this upstairs/downstairs play spoke French. The chauffeur, whom I soon befriended, drove madam (or monsieur) down from Montréal each weekend. He always brought *Montréal Matin* with him, a tabloid that no longer exists (since replaced by the *Journal de Montréal*), which I devoured. The summer of 1963, besides improving my cooking skills, turned into a crash course in spoken street French, pejoratively called *Joual*,<sup>9</sup> far removed from the elegant French of Radio-Canada, and an introduction into the opinions of common Québécois (downstairs).

I was starting to get to know this strange society up north pretty well, with also a considerable (and growing) measure of empathy. But, I was still some way from feeling Canadian or Québécois. The next logical step, obviously, was actually going there and not just as tourist, which is where accident #4 comes into play.

**Accident 4 — The Québec General Delegation in New York.** As far back as I can remember, the Délégation générale du Québec à New York had its offices at street level in Rockefeller Center in the heart of the city.<sup>10</sup> I often walked by it, admiring the window displays inviting tourists to visit La Belle Province. In early 1965, I walked in and informed the nice lady at the front desk that I was looking for a summer job in a part of the Province where I would be forced to speak French (I was aiming for Chicoutimi). She informed me that this was impossible as I held neither a work nor a residency permit.

9. A deformation of *cheval*, the French word for horse.

10. It has since abandoned its ground floor locale, the victim of rising rental costs.

She suggested an alternative: the new French summer school at Laval University in Québec City, in principle for Anglos wishing to learn French, but also open to foreigners. Because heavily subsidized by the Federal Government, it was incredibly inexpensive; I think less than two hundred dollars, room and board included. I asked my father what he thought. Predictably, he encouraged me to go and not to worry about the money. We were not that poor. Choice #1 was not difficult to make.

**Choice 1 — Laval University, first summer.** Thus, in June 1965, I got on the bus for Montréal, where I planned to stay a few days before going on to Québec City. In those days, the bus station was located in the West End, near the city's business centre. Here, I had my first on-the-ground encounter with the social and linguistic divide that characterized Québec (especially Montréal) society at the time. As I got off the bus (it was early morning), hundreds of young men in business suits were streaming out of Windsor Station, speaking English to a man. All the workers I crossed, as I walked east, spoke French. The social divide came as no surprise — I had been well-prepared (recall coincidences 1 and 2) — but witnessing it firsthand predictably strengthened my growing sympathy for the French Québécoise cause. Social commentary aside, my first impressions of Montréal were entirely positive, a city I could see myself living in.

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## ON TO QUÉBEC CITY

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For the young street-scarred New Yorker I was, it was almost like landing in paradise. I could actually walk anywhere, anytime, without fear, even at night. Better yet, girls actually smiled back at me. I have very little recollection of my courses at Université Laval, many of which I skipped, but I have no trouble recalling my life off campus. I rented a bicycle and crisscrossed the region, went everywhere, and generally fell in love with the place. As the summer session ended, it was clear in my mind that I wanted to return. The second choice didn't require much soul-searching, only my parent's kind approval to pick up the tab (again) for another summer session at Université Laval.

**Choice 2—*Université Laval, second summer.*** This time I left earlier, at the end of the college year, wishing to spend more time in Québec City. In all, I spent some four months there in the summer of 1966. I convinced my classmate, Eric, to come with; he too would later settle in Montréal and marry a Québécoise, but, I'm jumping ahead. Again, we did not spend much time on campus, but generally mingled and went out with Québécois of our generation. That is when I met Céline, a girl from Lévis (town just across the river from Québec City), whom I would marry five years later. This momentous event—certainly for me—obviously further tied me to Québec; but, it would be incorrect to say that it was decisive in my choice to move to Canada three years hence, as Céline was willing to follow me to a US city, all the more so since by that time she had moved to Toronto to improve her English.

Looking back, it is clear that that summer was the turning point. I was now thoroughly *Quebecized* (I doubt that the word exists, but I can't think of another). It was clear to me that I wanted to come back here, but not necessarily for another summer school at Université Laval. I did not know how I would work this; I was about to begin my graduate studies at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. It is at this juncture that a truly unexpected sequence of circumstances enter the stage, almost as if higher powers were sending me a message: Mario this is your destiny, and don't even think of going anywhere else.

**Coincidence 3—*The Department of Regional Science.*** Entering my first class in the Master's Program in September 1966, I was immediately struck by the number of foreigners. Counting me, we were only three Americans out of a class of about twenty. The student sitting next to me leaned over and asked in a thick French accent whether I could explain what the teacher was saying. To be honest, I could not: the teacher was a Korean and his English was so poor that none of us understood (he was later replaced). More to the point, the student's name was Antoine Bailly, who went on to become a leading French geographer, plus a very good friend. He was not alone. The Regional Science Department in 1966–1968 was literally a Francophone stronghold, the destination of choice for the first generation of Québécois to undertake graduate studies in urban and regional planning, economic geography, and related fields. Among those in my cohort (or that of the following year), to mention but

three names, were Michel Boisvert, who went on to become a professor at University of Montréal, Pierre Lamonde, who like myself would become professor at INRS (Institut national de la recherche scientifique) in Montréal, and Luc-Normand Tellier, who would go on to found the Department of Urban Studies at UQAM (Université du Québec à Montréal). In all, nine of my classmates would go on to pursue academic careers in Montréal.

Coming back to the Regional Science Department (and its sister City Planning Department), I was spontaneously adopted by the Francophones, and specifically the Québécois, as one of their own. We met together, drank together, and talked politics together. Thus, as strange as it may seem, my three years in Philadelphia accelerated my integration into Québec society. I also began a ritual of commuting, when I could, between Philadelphia and Lévis to see Céline (she also came down on two occasions). But, other coincidences awaited me.

**Coincidence 4—Michel Chevalier knows Peter White.** Among my classmates,<sup>11</sup> although much my senior, was a certain Michel Chevalier, a native Montrealer and Conservative Party veteran, former advisor to John Diefenbaker (a Canadian Prime Minister). I mentioned to Michel that I was looking to work in Québec the coming summer (1967). On one of my trips to Lévis, Michel arranged for me to meet with Peter White, policy assistant to the then Premier of Québec, Daniel Johnson, and active in both the Conservative Party and the (now defunct) Union nationale, the governing party. Peter, I was to learn, was the scion of an old Anglo Westmount<sup>12</sup> family and classmate and soul-mate of Brian Mulroney, both having done law at Laval University, part of the new generation of (well-off) Anglos who realized that French was now essential if one was to succeed in Québec,

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11. Michel Chevalier was in City Planning. I, as well as Eric, would eventually switch, administratively, to the City Planning Department although my thesis advisors were in the Department of Regional Science. It's a complicated story, which has no bearing on the present story.

12. Westmount was (and still is) *the* quintessential, chic, rich, Anglo neighbourhood of Montréal.



especially in politics. Peter would go one, among other things, to become Brian Mulroney's private secretary, when the later became Prime Minister of Canada.<sup>13</sup>

Peter had political ambitions. He was positioning himself to run for the Union nationale in the County of Brome (Eastern Townships) in the next Provincial election,<sup>14</sup> although I was not aware of this at the time. To make a long story short, Peter needed two (bilingual) students with a basic grasp of regional planning to canvas Brome County and analyze its development problems. After a long lunch, he offered me the job; I also convinced him to take on Eric as the second student. We would work over the whole summer, with possible follow-up visits. Thus in May 1967, I duly acquired the title of Assistant Manager of the Brome County Rural Development Agency with offices in Knowlton on Lake Brome. Now, it is of some interest that neither Eric nor I held a work or residency permit, but no one, least of all Peter, seemed to care. In today's more restrictive environment this would probably have been impossible; we were basically working in Canada illegally.

Be that as it may, Eric and I gallivanted around Brome County during the summer and much of the fall of 1967, counting cows, interviewing farmers, and sitting in on town hall meetings (in English and in French). The county was about 50/50 in terms of the language spilt. This was my introduction to rural Québec and small-town French-English dynamics. Those few months also provided me with a privileged window on the Anglo elite of the time and on top-down inter-ethnic relations. Having done the downstairs thing (recall coincidence 2), here I now was cavorting with the upstairs crowd. Knowlton was affectionately called "Westmount-on-the-Lake," the summer refuge of the old Protestant Anglo elite. I befriended the local real estate agent, a former RAF pilot, who, after a few pints, gave me a short course on the ethnic pecking order: he could flog real estate to Anglo-Protestants, of course, to Anglo-Catholics (less good), to assimilated French-Canadians (if need be) and so on, but never, never, to Jews. His nightmare was inadvertently letting a Jew slip through the net; no-one would ever do

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13. In that capacity, Peter would ask me some twenty years later, to act as go-between the PM and the then mayor of Montréal, Jean Doré, for whom I had worked during his election campaign.

14. With hindsight, this was not a terribly judicious choice since the Union nationale would be wiped off the map in the 1970 election, never to resurrect.

business with him again. My ex-RAF acquaintance was an entirely decent chap, uncomfortable in his position, but one had to earn a living. For me, it was an education on the social realities of Québec and Canada at the time. Fortunately, times have changed.

During those months, I often drove up to Lévis and Québec City where I now had a network of friends. I went to parties and to *nationalistes* rallies. I was present at the Québec City Town Hall when De Gaulle spoke and cheered with the crowd. On the drive back to Knowlton, I almost drove into a ditch when, on the car radio, I heard *le Général* deliver his famous “*Vive le Québec libre*” speech at Montréal’s City Hall. In Knowlton, I had another drinking buddy, a rich Anglo playboy friend of Peter’s, historian on the side,<sup>15</sup> who held forth for hours on the history of Québec and Canada. I thought him somewhat of a snob and doubted he would amount to much (so much for my ability to judge human character). His name was Conrad (surname: Black) and, as the reader will have guessed, rose to become a global media baron and, less happily, also a celebrity corporate felon. Yup, I met some interesting characters that summer in Knowlton.

My Québécois cum Canadian education was now pretty much complete. I was as much at home in Canada as in the US. But, before crossing the border as a landed immigrant, a last coincidence needed to occur.

***Coincidence 5—Michel Chevalier becomes chair of the Institut d’urbanisme.***

Back in Philadelphia, at the beginning of the 1968–1969 school year, I discover that Michel has been named chair of the Institut d’urbanisme (City Planning Department) at the Université de Montréal. Almost as an aside, a few days later, he asked me whether I would like a job as professor at the Institut after completing my PhD course work the following spring. I said yes, of course. Thus, I never had to look for a job. The job came to me. And the first job offer that came my way was in Canada. Destiny had indeed decided that this is where I was to go.

Before going on to my early years (officially) in Canada, I need to correct what is probably a false impression of my own making. I have focused almost exclusively on my French Québec connection and on my nascent empathy for the Québécois cause, which is not false. However, my

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15. The author, notably, of a two volume biography of Maurice Duplessis, premier of the Province of Québec from 1936 to 1939 and then again from 1944 to 1959.

attraction to Canada did not stop there. My empathy for the Québécois did not mean that I had developed an anti-Anglo attitude; quite to the contrary. In fact, I was (and remain) strongly Anglophile and, here again, my family background is to blame with my mother, Kate, this time, in the lead role. My mother was a governess in London in the 1930s, a time she remembered fondly, and along the way developed a taste for British plays, British mystery novels, and British humour, which she successfully passed on to me. Here again, living in New York helped. There was almost always a British play on Broadway to see (when we could afford it). My mother systematically preferred (my father too) British over American shows on TV and British over American movies. The not inconsequential fact that our village in Holland was liberated by the British Eight Army, followed by a Saskatchewan regiment, did nothing to dampen my parents' Anglophilia.

No less important was the fact that my mother had a sister in London, married to an Englishman, and who, despite being born in Vienna, was more English than the Queen. I stayed with her on several occasions during my European capers and got to know London well. I was, in sum, already pre-disposed to liking a place that cultivated its British heritage. It is one of the things I continue to like about Canada. I much prefer the British parliamentary system (which *en passant* the Québécois have totally absorbed) to the US presidential system. Coming back to the years preceding my (official) immigration, Céline had moved to Toronto in the second half of 1967. I now commuted — when I could — not to Lévis, but to Toronto (an eleven hour drive from Philadelphia I got to know by heart). I liked Toronto, and might well have ended up there had the first job offer come from there. But, one does not argue with destiny.

A short Toronto anecdote nicely catches my growing favourable view of Canadian society at the time. It was a sunny day; I was sitting on the lawn in front of Queens Park, the Ontario Legislative Assembly. A group of students was demonstrating about I do not remember what. Police watched nearby. The students advanced toward the legislature, shouting slogans, and began to cross the lawn. Upon which three policemen approached the lead students, saluted, and said (as close as I can remember): "Sir, please try not to step on the grass." Upon which, in turn, the students politely moved back, taking a different route. I almost choked on my sandwich. I had just survived several demonstrations in Philadelphia. The contrast was striking. Not only were the Philadelphia police dressed

like storm-troopers — all in black, high leather boots, and obligatory dark shades (how different from the Ontario police and their smart red-stripped trousers!) — I had never heard a Philly policeman address anyone as “sir.” Yup, this definitely was a more civilized place.<sup>16</sup>

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### CONCLUSION: A GOOD QUÉBÉCOIS AND MODEL CANADIAN

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I thus started my academic career as a junior professor at the University of Montréal. I will not bore the reader with a litany of my publications and academic achievements over the forty years that followed. Suffice it to say that I have little reason to regret my choice. Within nine months of my arrival, a job again came to me. I was offered the opportunity of participating in the creation of Québec’s first Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, to be renamed INRS-Urbanisation and later INRS Urbanisation, Culture et Société,<sup>17</sup> where I have been since. During my first decade, I was offered several senior postings in the Québec government apparatus<sup>18</sup> as if it were the most natural thing, sealing, in a manner, my new identity. On a more personal note, Céline moved to Montréal, we married, had two wonderful daughters, Geneviève and Caroline, and bought a house in good Montréal neighbourhood, where we still live. My parents moved to Montréal to be with their grandchildren. The family was reunited. The journey was over.

My final absorption into Québécois society also owes something to another “accident” — my name — which now allows me to close the circle with accident #1. My family name — Polèse — is Italian; my father’s great-great grandfather migrated from the then Austrian Province of Venice to Vienna, the imperial capital. The name is somewhat of a tongue twister in English and French. When my father lived in Paris the French, with

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16. In defense of US police forces, they have, generally, become more “civil.” The New York police was always pretty civil, certainly when compared to Philadelphia. Recent events also suggest that Canadian police forces have become less so. On this criterion at least, the difference between Canada and the US seems to have lessened and perhaps disappeared.

17. INRS stands for Institut national de la recherche scientifique, a graduate school and research institute within the University of Québec system, established in 1968.

18. I was seconded by INRS to the Québec Government, thus not interrupting my status as an academic.

predicable chauvinistic flair, put an *accent grave* on the first è, making it French. The accent naturally crept back again in Québec. Thus: *me voilà* with an apparently French surname. The story does not end there. As I was born in Holland under Nazi occupation, my parents understandably chose not to give me a German first name. Thus, my father chose “Marius,” appropriately Latin but also Dutch, which in usage became “Mario,” which I have always been called. My father could not have guessed that Mario is also a common French Québécois given name (not in France). My journey, my self-perception and especially how *others* perceived me would undoubtedly have played out differently if I had inherited a good Austrian name like Klaus-Maria Brandauer, and therein lies a final anecdote.

In the late 1970s, I befriended William J. Coffey — we have remained good friends to this day — who was at Dalhousie University in Halifax at the time and was to become one of Canada’s leading economic geographers. Bill and I worked together on numerous projects and coauthored several articles and books. We were instrumental, together with Larry Bourne at the University of Toronto and other geographers and regional economists, in launching the Canadian Regional Science Association. The two of us essentially ran the association during its first decade, I as executive VP and Bill as treasurer. We also managed the *Canadian Journal of Regional Science*, Bill as English-language editor and I as French-language editor. These were good days for regional research in Canada. DREE (Department of Regional Economic Expansion) and its successor, DRIE (replace “Economic” with “Industrial”), both now defunct, were looking for visibility and academic credibility and had money to throw around. Promoting national unity — essentially keeping Québec and less economically favoured regions happy — was the name of the game. What better academic group to support than one jointly lead by an English Canadian academic, a Maritimer to boot, and a French Canadian academic, a Québécois? Bill and I played the English-French game to the hilt.<sup>19</sup> For Federal functionaries, Bill and Mario were the model Canadian duo. Did it matter that the later was really a kid from the Upper West Side of New York and the former a good Irish kid from Boston? What could be more Canadian (and more American)?

19. Both Federal Departments generously funded our annual meetings and the Journal, provided that appropriate visibility and space was reserved for the Minister and his deputies, which of course it was. Unfortunately, all this came to an end in the late 1980s when DRIE was disbanded.



# BORDERS, STATES, NATIONS

## Living Political Geography

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**A**s a political geographer, I study borders, states, territory, and nations and how power becomes invested in and moves through these spaces. As one who studies the politics of migration across the Mozambican-South African border, I have been keenly aware of how borders yield different meanings and material consequences for the varied groups who cross them, including those who work to create new lives on the other side of the border. I have also had a long interest in nation- and state-making in rural Mozambique along the South African border. Although I am conscious of my own positionality and how power also moves through me and shapes my research encounters and conclusions, to date, I have reflected little on how these questions of political geography, equally abstract and material influenced my own life and movement back home in the United States (US). This began to change in 2007 when I became an economic migrant myself and my partner and I left the Twin Cities of Minnesota for the “Great White North” of Canada, a journey that actually took us south

to a milder climate. As a result, the “stuff” of political geography — especially borders, states, and nation-making — now explicitly shapes my daily life in North America. In this essay I reflect on these issues impacting my personal and professional life as an economic migrant, focusing on the privileges and opportunities as well as the challenges and ambivalences.

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### BORDERS AND STATES

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My migration to Canada and the transition to my new life in Toronto were relatively easy. I had received a job offer from Toronto’s York University, which helped me acquire a Canadian work permit. Armed with official state documentation and permission, I was able to start working without delay. The seamlessness and ease of the process would likely have left me indifferent to and mostly unaware of the power of the Canadian state and its interests in my move across the border. The process for my partner, however, did not flow as smoothly. In fact, his movement brought us in contact with the biopolitical arm of the state functioning in part at and through the border. Tied to my employment, he was offered a work permit as my common-law spouse. Before we relocated, we flew into Toronto for a short trip to find a place to live and were able to pick up our work permits at the airport. We were surprised to discover that his permit contained several restrictions, including one stating he could not work with children. This posed a serious problem since he is a high school physics and math teacher. In working to lift this restriction, he had to undertake a special medical examination. By proxy, the state had entered his bloodstream searching for the presence of HIV antibodies and his lungs seeking signs of tuberculosis. In this biopolitical entry into his body, the state worked to exclude potential threats to the nation’s children from crossing the border into the classroom. It worked in some sense to keep the homeland safe. Such a process proved as fascinating as it was excessive. Particularly invasive from my perspective was the mandatory HIV test, as teaching duties do not require or even necessarily risk contact with bodily fluids. Corporeal anxieties abounded there on the edge of the nation-state.

Submitting the completed examination form required a second, unanticipated trip to the border. Assuming we had addressed the state’s concerns, the immigration officer thumbing through our paperwork caught us off-guard. Invested with the decision-making capacity of the state, she



as gate-keeper insisted we did not have enough evidence to prove we were common-law spouses, even though the same evidence was accepted by a previous officer at a different border several weeks earlier. This reflected the somewhat arbitrary nature of border patrol and state power more generally. It also made clear the state's biopolitical interest in our relationship in maintaining the "territorial integrity" of the state, including concern with who can cross the border for what purposes. The border here effectively entered my "union" and metaphorically my bedroom to determine whether my partner and partnership were legitimate guests. Armed with piles of joint bank statements, utility bills, and other forms of evidence that rendered our relationship legible, we made another trip to the border and this time satisfied a different immigration officer.

We re-entered the biopolitical realm once more during our medical examinations for permanent residence. At interest were our lungs and signs of tuberculosis, blood and traces of HIV antibodies, and our psyches and evidence of mental illness. As far as I can tell, the state's interest here is two-fold: to ensure a healthy polity and workforce (even and especially among permanent residents) and to minimize healthcare costs to the state, at least at the provincial level. The mandatory reading of our bodies unfolded once more with the permanent residence application when we were required to submit our fingerprints to the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) to ensure we did not have criminal records in the US. Now that the FBI has our prints on file, our bodies have been made legible to state institutions on both sides of the border. Biopolitics has gone transnational. In the process, I learned that my fingerprints have poor definition, which required four separate sets of prints to be submitted. I suppose the process provided me with novel knowledge of my own body, although I do not occupy a position where this information is particularly useful.

The Canadian state clearly has no monopoly when it comes to the biopolitical opening and reading of bodies, personal unions, and bedrooms (see, for e.g., Salter, 2006; Adey, 2009; Jones, 2009; Vaughan-Williams, 2010). But these requirements do seem to stand in some opposition to Canada's reputation as kinder, gentler, and more accepting than its neighbour to the south. One thing these encounters has made clear to me is that the state expresses and reproduces its power through such acts that are as equally invasive as they are mundane: the rendering open

of bodies and private lives happens daily and hence exists within the non-extra-ordinary arsenal of state practices. Biopolitical practices like these, moreover, remind us how the border exists not merely as a line on a map. Borders are multiplied and redirected inside bodies and bedrooms. In short, we carry national borders within us and within our interpersonal relationships (Amoore, 2006).

One final thought about border crossings and borderland issues: we could have refused such scrutiny, taking cue from Giorgio Agamben's refusal to give up his biometric information as a requirement of visiting the US (Agamben, 2004). But in doing so my partner would not be able to work as a teacher, and we would forego the benefits of permanent residence and eventually citizenship. Therefore, this type of refusal never proved a reasonable option. In making such a calculation, we effectively sanctioned the entry of the state and its border practices into these intimate spaces, however grudgingly.<sup>1</sup>

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### NATIONS: REFLECTIONS ON IDENTITY AND TEACHING

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I am an American citizen and identify as an American.<sup>2</sup> This is my nationality. From a critical academic perspective, I know this identity is socially constructed, and that I was taught to embrace this through overt nationalist training and more banal forms of nationalism, “unwaved flags” if you will (Billig, 1995). I have always “felt American,” but this sense of affiliation has become more obvious to me when I am outside of the US, whether doing work in southern Africa or living in Canada. This is not to say that I am uncritical of the US—far from it. The imperial flavor of US foreign policy is a source of great concern, as are the violence and exclusions that come with certain policies and attitudes, a point I return to below. I do nonetheless feel part of the American nation and in many ways am proud of this identity. It is where my political sense of belonging is anchored.

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1. For more on biopolitics at the Canadian-US border, see Sparke, 2006; Gilbert, 2007.
  2. I realize the problematic nature of the term “American” as a descriptor of the United States; it seems to monopolize if not colonize a term that could refer to the inhabitants of the Americas in general. Nonetheless, I choose to use it both because it reflects popular usage and to differentiate the people of the American nation from US citizens, as the latter are defined in terms of their relation to the US government. “American,” by contrast, refers more broadly to the nation or “the people.”

This identity is not always obvious to others when I am in Canada, unlikely when I am conducting research in southern Africa. In Canada, people tend to assume I am Canadian. Perhaps this has to do with my hegemonic whiteness and North American accent, which mark me as an insider. Although in an anonymous city the size of Toronto and one that has emerged as a destination of immigrants from around the world, perhaps we all seem Canadian regardless of skin color, dress, or accent. Regardless of the reason, my foreignness and especially my Americanness often remain hidden. “Outing” myself as an American has become a source of amusement, frustration, and opportunity, especially in my teaching. This is most notable in my third-year course “Nations and Nationalisms.” The course aims to expose students to how understandings of nations, along with practices of national belonging and exclusion, shape and are reproduced through overt political spaces and more mundane spaces of everyday life. While global in scope, the course explicitly takes on questions of Canadian and American nationalism and nation-building, in part to make the course more relevant to the students.

This is where I bring up my own identities as both “teacher” and “American.” Students in the course regularly make blanket statements about the US and Americans. Critiques generally circle around observations that the US is imperialistic (economically and culturally), ethnocentric, racist, brutish, and greedy. Although troublesome and often frustrating given the uncritical ways they are expressed, these comments are productive for teaching. We investigate in particular how they function in the making and reproducing of Canadian nationalism and notions of national-belonging. In one respect, in articulating the other that Canada is not, especially the negative qualities of the other, one reproduces a sense of her or his Canadianness and what it means to be Canadian. (Of course, we could substitute “American” or any other nationality for “Canadian” here.) From my perspective, this is neither inherently good nor bad — it is simply how identity is defined and reproduced.

For Canadian nation-making, one of the most important of these comparisons is with the US. I make students do the work here, asking them to find evidence of this sort of constitutive othering, that is, of how comparisons with the US help define and produce a sense of what is Canadian (by defining what is not). The most common example they draw from concerns national stories of immigration. On the one hand, the US

promotes the “melting pot” ideal of immigration, or the sense that new immigrants need to shed their ethnic or national difference and assimilate into greater American society in order to become American. Canada, in contrast, promotes the “tossed salad” ideal, or the sense that immigrants can and should retain important aspects of their identity rather than assimilate. Together different immigrant groups form the greater tossed salad that is Canada. The American melting pot is the Canadian tossed salad’s point of comparison. Canada’s is a story of much greater tolerance. It also reflects the country’s attempt to build a multi-cultural nation, to derive a sense of sameness and belonging out of (respect for) difference. Through these stories of nation-making and the normative contrast drawn between them, we see how they work to produce a sense of Canadian difference from the US and hence construct Canadian national identity (*cf.*, Winter, 2007).

More critically, I ask students to consider how these productive contrasts may be problematic. We discuss, for example, how such dichotomies can mask important similarities between the US and Canada, both as states and nations. For instance, we discuss exclusions within Canadian society. Students investigate the exclusions (and racist inclusions) of First Nations and of certain immigrant groups and draw similarities between these in the US and Canada. They then explore how these exclusions have equally shaped notions of nationalism and national belonging within both countries (Deloria and Lytle, 1998; Mackey, 1999; Cook-Lynn, 2001; Hing, 2004; Roediger, 2005; De Leeuw, 2007; Dua, 2007; Takaki, 2008; Walker, 2008; Ignatiev, 2009). We also discuss how certain immigrant groups are seen as dirty, polluting, and otherwise threatening to the nation and how this shapes debates about the permeability of international borders. In part these examples question the reality behind the “tossed salad” myth, as there are limits to the types of difference allowed within the Canadian nation, and students debate whether they agree with these limits. We link this back to the broader themes of the course by showing how border anxieties and the act of excluding certain (threatening, polluting, or otherwise unwanted) populations do not merely “protect” the nation but actively draw lines around and hence reproduce it (Mountz, 2004; Cheng, 2005; Sundberg and Kaserman, 2007). In both countries, a sense of belonging is generated by articulating that which threatens and more generally that which does not belong.

Another productive national myth addressed in my course is one in which the US, unlike Canada, is a nation-state shot through with imperialistic tendencies since this seems to be one of the primary bases upon which a distinction with the US is drawn. I ask students to consider the extent to which Canada may also have imperialistic tendencies. We can, for instance, draw a productive parallel with Canadian mining interests abroad which arguably reek of imperialism (Szablowski, 2007; Gordon, 2010). The goal here is not to make excuses or apologies for the US or make students reject or feel guilty about their Canadianness. Rather, it is to see how the *sense* of profound difference between the countries is productive in forming national identities and excavate what such assumptions can hide.

We also use these moments of critique of the US as a springboard from which to develop a more complicated and accurate understanding of politics and peoples in the US. Like all actually-existing nations, “America” is fractured and composed of groups with different and often competing interests regarding, for example, foreign policy, domestic policy, and what it means to be American. None of this is to suggest that the US government and American people should not be critiqued and held accountable for certain policies and attitudes. But nor should we ignore internal protest and its significance for political change and for our understanding of the American nation. Being an American myself gives me an advantage in this respect. I can remind students that I, like many Americans, do not support and actively resist certain policies and attitudes. I work to expose a nation that is fractured and productively scarred by dissent. In fact, I suggest to students that dissent is an important aspect of American history and identity and that America as a nation is far more politically and economically fractured than Canada (although I invite students to challenge me on this if they see things differently). I also use this as an opportunity to ask students (not always rhetorically) if such dissent dilutes or threatens my Americanness and, in relation, what impact their own dissent might have on their Canadianness and the Canadian nation more generally. In inserting myself into these debates, there is always a danger of navel-gazing and hence depoliticizing the issues at hand. Being mindful of this, such an exercise nonetheless affords a valuable opportunity to

challenge and work through overly simplistic understandings of US politics and the composition of the nation and to take on assumptions that nations are and should be internally coherent.

One of the benefits of discussing Canadian national identity with students is pointing out that their identity as a Canadian, like all national identities, is socially constructed and that this shows it is mutable and therefore can be reproduced in different ways. It is not my prerogative to dictate for students what this different sense of national identity and national belonging should look like. This is in part because I am an outsider but more importantly because I do not see this as the role of a teacher. I make students answer this question for themselves. At the end of the term, I have them articulate what they would like Canada and notions of Canadian-belonging to look like and how they think they might be able to turn this vision into a reality. When I apply for Canadian citizenship in the next few years (holding dual citizenship with the US), I will be confronted with the task of answering these same questions myself.

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### **NATIONAL AND ACADEMIC ECONOMIES: THE WORLD IS NOT FLAT**

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There is no doubt that the US and Canadian economies are intimately linked and that what happens on one side of the border reverberates across to the other side. Flows of peoples, goods, capital, information, and disease all cross the border, shaping economies on both sides. Nonetheless, these economies are not reducible to one another. Contra Thomas Friedman (2007) and his pronouncement that the world is flat, national borders do still matter in the realm of economies and will matter for the foreseeable future. This has long been clear to me in the context of my research where Mozambican migrants, for instance, cross the border into South Africa to find work given the regional powerhouse that is the South African economy. It is also clear in the context of the US-Mexico border, as these two countries are marked by profound economic differences and consequently experience labor patterns similar to South Africa and its neighbours. Canada in its relation to the US seems somewhat at odds with these examples. The power and economic differences between

the US and Canada, especially on a per capita basis, are not nearly as stark as the previous examples, and cross-border movement roughly along the 49th parallel has long been less contentious and politicized.

Differences, however, do exist, ones that shape my wealth and may shape my decision to stay in Canada. Put crudely, professors make more money in Canada than in the US. In fact, assistant professors in Canadian universities on average earn within the realm of associate professors in the United States (see, for e.g., Statistics Canada, 2009; Lewin, 2011). My sense is that this has much to do with the strong Canadian dollar or by contrast the weak US dollar, a relationship that has left the two currencies more or less on par for the last several years. The salary gap seems to have grown larger more recently: the global economic recession sparked by the unsustainable US housing market that has devastated the US has proven less brutal to Canada. State governments in the US have attempted to balance budgets and limit spending by slashing the resources of state universities. In places like California and Wisconsin, this has translated into unpaid furlough days (O'Leary, 2009; University of Wisconsin System, 2010). Salaries in this sense have actually decreased. While we in Canada have not been immune to the economic downturn, we have not experienced this severity of austerity measures. This means our salaries are comparatively stronger than even a few years ago, not because we are any wealthier but because of the economic crisis bleeding into the American academy.

I have never thought of myself as being particularly motivated by money or the professorship as an exceptionally lucrative career. But these differences in pay do matter, although possibly less than I initially had imagined. Even though I earn more than my American counterparts, my standard of living is not higher than it would be in the US. This is because of the high cost of living in Toronto and a level of graduate-school-inspired frugality that I, quite thankfully, cannot seem to shake. Nonetheless, because of my higher salary I am able to save more here than if I was in the United States. This is reinforced by the fact that my partner, as a high school teacher, earns more in Canada than he would in the US. As we now have a young son and begin to save for his future, including university, and ensure that we have enough money saved in case of an emergency, this financial security has become even more important. We may at some

point move back to the US, but the difference in salaries is one reason that would make it particularly difficult to leave. Economic security is indeed something difficult to give up.

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### NATIONAL DIFFERENCES THAT MATTER

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In teaching about the US and Canada, I spend a great deal of time trying to break down the presumed differences between the two countries and understand how they function in defining and reproducing nations. Nonetheless, being rooted in both places has made it clear to me that there *are* differences that matter, and matter far more than the financial reasons discussed above. In several ways, Canada has proven a kinder place to live and, importantly, raise my young son than the United States. The most substantial of these differences for me center around LGBTQ rights, maternity leave, healthcare, and support for education.

First, put simply, I find Canada less homophobic than the US, both in terms of state policy and public perceptions. This is not to say that there is no homophobia in Canada — there certainly is. Nonetheless, attempts to limit the rights of LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) folks do not occupy a pivotal space within national policy, legislative, and popular debate and practice. For instance, conservative US politicians and anti-gay activists warn that gay marriage will “threaten the integrity” of marriage and by implication the (hetero-normative) foundation of the American nation. Such dire pronouncements do not enter the Canadian mainstream. I am grateful for this absence. Furthermore, quite unlike the US, Canada recognizes same-sex and heterosexual couples as equals when it comes to immigration. This allows Canadian citizens and immigrants to sponsor their partners who can then apply for permanent residence and eventually citizenship regardless of sexual identity. The Canadian state, for all its biopolitical inclinations, seems far less interested in who we sleep with and how we identify in terms of gender and sexual identity and the identity and gender of our partners. I deeply appreciate this. Especially as I raise my son, this is the type of environment I want him to grow up in, one that is more inclusive and less interested in regulating and disciplining these intimate aspects of people’s lives.



If the overt homophobia emerging from factions of the US helps cement Canada's reputation as a more welcoming place, so too does the former's dismal commitment to parental leaves. In fact, the US has one of the worst such commitments in the world (Brown, 2011). In guaranteeing only 12 weeks of unpaid leave, it matches countries with far few resources like Swaziland and Zambia.<sup>3</sup> Canada emerges as more humane in this respect, guaranteeing 50 weeks of leave with partial pay, the majority of which can be split between both parents (Government of Canada, 2011). The leave is federally funded through a national employment insurance program. I fare even better as my employer, like many Canadian academic institutions, offers a sizable "top up" to ensure full pay for five months. While I took seven months of leave after the birth of my son, my colleagues at US institutions have been able to take only a fraction of this. Guaranteeing time off (and agreeing to stop tenure clocks for a year) is from my perspective not only more compassionate and better for our families, it is also better for our students and our research since we are not forced to split our extremely limited energies and stretched creativities to the point of futility if not insanity. Given that women are the primary childcare providers especially of infants, this aspect of Canadian policy shows in particular a commitment to women's careers whether intended or not. The Canadian federal government's commitment to childcare is another story. With a paltry childcare credit and no national childcare plan in sight, Canada and the US emerge as near equals.

These have been interesting times for healthcare politics in the United States. In 2010, the Obama Administration signed legislation to repair the US healthcare system and extend health insurance to over 30 million uninsured Americans (*New York Times*, 2011; US Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). It is nonetheless constantly under threat by those decrying the infringement of personal freedom and excesses of "big government" embodied in "Obamacare," a sarcastic euphemism meant to undermine the plan's legitimacy. While healthcare reform is a step in the right direction from my perspective, it is a far cry from the nationalized (or at least provincialized) healthcare of Canada. For American conservatives, this is a good thing.<sup>4</sup> As a Canadian resident

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3. To paint an even bleaker picture, companies with fewer than 50 employees are exempt from this policy and hence are not required to provide any leave (Brown, 2011).

4. For evidence, one can do a quick Internet search of the terms "Obamacare" and "Canada."

and recipient of top-quality healthcare, I strongly endorse nationalized healthcare and am supportive of the fact that my taxes go to fund it. This support is not (merely) self-serving. In fact, as a highly educated professional, I would likely receive the same quality of care in the US that I do in Canada and would receive some services more quickly. But poorer Americans, and certainly those with less certain employment, would not fare nearly as well. I find this ethically disturbing given that healthcare is not, or at least should not be, a luxury. From a nation-building perspective, moreover, it makes sense to me that the most basic of social services — healthcare — is provided to ensure a healthy polity. In the modified words of the late US Senator Paul Wellstone, “We are all healthier when we are all healthier.”<sup>5</sup>

More recent policy debates in the US have centered around the appropriate compensation of teachers in K-12 education and have emerged as equally acrimonious as debates in the US about LGBTQ rights and healthcare. Scott Walker, the Governor of Wisconsin, for instance, has used the economic crisis in his state to justify limiting the collective bargaining rights of public employees including teachers. Public debate, or at least factions within it, have painted teachers and other public employees as overpaid and as greedily gobbling up scarce public dollars in the form of excessive pensions and healthcare packages. The irony of all this is two-fold: it is not public employees who sparked the economic downturn, and many teachers in the US are barely able to make ends meet. Again, Canada stands in stark contrast. Teaching is a much more respected occupation in Canada than in the US and, reflecting this, I cannot imagine the abuse of teachers unfolding here as it has in the United States. Teachers are also well paid in Canada. It is not surprising many of my strongest and most motivated students at York work hard to attain a coveted slot in teachers colleges. Teaching simply does not garner the same prestige in the US, nor are teachers held in such high esteem. I suppose I am particularly sensitive to this issue given that my partner is a high school teacher. More than this though, I find this commitment to teaching to be

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5. Wellstone was fond of saying, “We all do better when we all do better.”

a dedication to building a strong, well-educated nation. The demonization of teachers in the US and the attempt to balance budgets on the backs of public employees more generally fail to grasp this type of payoff.<sup>6</sup>

In all of these respects — LGBTQ rights, maternity leave, healthcare, and public education — , Canada stands out as a kinder, gentler country, one that is in general more committed to building a strong, inclusive and well-supported nation. This is the case at least as far as Canada compares to conservative and so-called “Tea Party” factions in the US that see these forms of social services and care as infringements on freedom and in particular the rights of taxpayers. They promote an alienating and self-interested type of nation building, one focused on the individual at the expense of the collective. These qualities I admire in Canada did not draw me to the country — the job offer sufficiently did that. But coming to appreciate them will make it harder to leave and return to the US if the opportunity should arise.

That said, however, I must admit that there are aspects of the US that may eventually draw me back. The most obvious of these is the fact that as my parents age and must access healthcare in the US, I may be compelled to return to care for them. National borders in this sense do very much matter. Less tangibly, I still feel American and not Canadian. Canada may be my home, but America is my identity. Perhaps this will change when I am granted Canadian citizenship, but perhaps not. This is a testament to how strong national identity can be even when recognizing it is thoroughly socially constructed and equally recognizing some of the unwelcoming and exclusionary aspects of the US mentioned above. In the words of Louis Althusser (2001 [1971]), the US hails me as a member or subject of this nation; as I turn to listen, I am interpellated into it. As a member of the nation-state, even one living abroad, the negative aspects of the US do not repel me in any simple sense. In some ways, they actively invite me back as I feel I have a stake in re-creating the US in the image of a kinder more inclusive nation and political space. Ironically, it may be the very things I appreciate about Canada and concern me about the US that in part may compel me to return to the United States. For now, however, I make Canada my site of work and my home, spaces very much shaped by my perspective as an American, as conflicted as that identity may be.

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6. For interesting commentary on the harms of paying teachers such low salaries in the US, see Eggers and Clements Calegari (2011).

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**BETWEEN TELLING THE TRUTH  
AND BITING THE HAND  
THAT FEEDS  
My Experience  
Immigrating to Canada**

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**W**hen asked to contribute material for this book, I was intrigued. Here, I thought, was the opportunity to clear the air and set things right — an opportunity to present my manifesto. And then I thought better of it. What follows instead is an account which reflects my thoughts about and repercussions of my decision to emigrate from the United States and immigrate to Canada. I am using this as an opportunity not to bite the hand that feeds me — the Department of Geography at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario — but to thoughtfully consider my experience of coming to and working in Canada.

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### **PUSH/PULL FACTORS**

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My decision to emigrate abroad was driven largely by pull factors. In early 2004, I was offered a tenure-track position at Brock University to teach economic geography, quantitative methods, and cultural industries and to help build their MA program. More simply, I was offered a job. While I had never lived in Canada, I had studied and researched in Germany for about three years as an adult. I had also lived in Los Angeles for about seven years. The place where I grew up — southern Indiana — left lots to be desired, and not just in terms of employment prospects (though the many years I spent at Indiana University in Bloomington I remember fondly). Simply put, my attachment to place was not particularly strong, though I still got teary-eyed as my partner and I drove our enormous moving van from Los Angeles to St. Catharines, Ontario, in August of 2004.

At this time, the political situation in the US was not particularly pleasant. George Bush was embarking on a deficit-spending spree to finance the second war in his presidency, a decision I opposed at the time. Jingoism was rampant, and the ugly side of American patriotism was in high gear. Homosexual rights balanced on a precarious tightrope. *Roe v. Wade* always seemed a hair's breadth from being overturned. It was a stressful time for a progressive to live in "the land of the free and the home of the brave." While my partner and I weren't sure that we wanted children, we didn't want to raise them in the US. Collectively, these can be thought of as push factors.

Finally, Canada looked like a decent place to live. The Niagara Region's position between two Great Lakes was attractive, since I assumed that eventually southern California was going to run out of water. Universal health care sounded like a sane public policy, as did Canada's general restrictions on firearm ownership. I assumed that Canada in many ways would be a mix between Germany and the UK. Despite all these attractions to living in Canada, however, it all came down to getting the job offer and a temporary work permit.



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### **DEPARTMENT OR UNIVERSITY REPUTATION AND MIGRATION DECISION**

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Brock's reputation had little to do with my decision to migrate. I wanted a tenure-track position. I had spent most of my adult life preparing for such a position and such positions are relatively rare. I was offered this position. The logical thing was to accept it. The fact that the university was located in Canada made it that much more attractive. However, had it been in Mississippi, the Yukon, Sweden, or anywhere else my partner would be willing to live, I still would have taken the job.

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### **ATTRACTION OF PHYSICAL/ENVIRONMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS**

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My understanding of physical environment in this region of Canada—aside from Niagara's ready supply of (more or less) potable water in the Great Lakes—was not something I cared about one way or another. Even if I had known this was the second warmest place in Canada, I doubt that would have swayed my opinion. While the terrain is beautiful here—full of deciduous forests and agricultural land similar to where I grew up—I find far more fascinating the structure of the local economy. As Canada's early industrial core (thanks to abundant hydroelectric power and the short transmission range of DC voltage), the economic landscape is stamped with not only older relics, but overlain with the derelicts of more recent waves of deindustrialization. Proximity to Niagara Falls, one of the world's natural wonders, provides the foundation for an even older tourist industry. In addition, urban encroachment from Hamilton, which in turn is destined to be swallowed by the Greater Toronto Area, coupled with ever-increasing agricultural competition from foreign exporters, threatens the rich agricultural lands in the area.

Likewise, the Niagara Region's proximity to Toronto places the Niagara peninsula in a curious position. Toronto seems to drain the Niagara Region of its talent, leaving behind those persons unable to migrate. More recently, local policy-makers have focused on a Floridian approach to invigorating the economy (Florida, 2002). For an economic geographer, then, the Niagara Region offers an interesting observatory, a container of natural experiments. I was fascinated by questions such as,

will attempts to make it a more attractive region here pay off, or will it merely habituate ambitious locals into a set of tastes that can only be met by moving to Toronto?

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### **CAREER/PERSONAL IMPACTS OF MIGRATION DECISION**

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If known at all, Brock is viewed as at best a second-tier institution. However, tenure requirements are more reasonable here than at more highly ranked institutions. The Department of Geography at Brock is one of those mythical places where collegiality, service and teaching really do count toward tenure and promotion, as opposed to the more usual paying of lip service to this balance. So while coming here placed me in a less visible program, it placed me in a nice place to work.

In addition, Brock's new MA program opens up the possibility that I'll be able to attract competent graduate students, though this is problematic given not only our ranking but Ontario's apparent overcapacity in Geography MA positions and the university's inability to fund more than a handful of international students. Frequently our international students are stronger academically than our domestic students. Given the prevalence of post-structuralism in our program, I tend to supervise graduate students who otherwise fall through the cracks and wish to examine more empirical topics such as alternative energy policy or labor market dynamics. And on a more personal note, the impacts of my position are also mixed. I am now physically closer to my birth family who live just a long day's drive away instead of on the other side of the continent.

We initially decided to live near the university in St. Catharines, in part because various colleagues hinted that living close by made one a better departmental citizen and in part because I hate commuting. Given St. Catharines' lower cost of living (and locational inertia), we bought a house a few blocks away in the same neighbourhood. Though we now own a car, we can walk to the grocery store, the central bus depot, and any part of central St. Catharines within twenty minutes.

Relocating has harmed my partner's earning power since the Niagara Region has limited employment opportunities for grant writers, office managers, and other related jobs. In conjunction with the region's

industrial legacy, this undoubtedly contributes to the flight of the young and talented to Toronto, ninety minutes away in normal traffic by car. For us, though, that was too far.

Moving across the continent did sever me from a diverse and fractious community in Los Angeles that I had grown to love. Even though I hated driving, I thought of myself as an Angelino. I have yet to think of myself as a “Niagran” (or whatever the correct phrase is). While still in touch with non-academic friends in southern California, however, I have made a community among non-academics in St. Catharines.

Ultimately, moving allowed me to achieve my dream of being a professor. At least for me, the years I spent deferring gratification paid off, even if I no longer study Germany. True, Brock has some problems. But it has its strengths as well. My pay has nearly doubled in the seven years I’ve been here. I have comprehensive health coverage. I live in a country with efficient, universal health care. Firearms are rare. People are polite. I have a pension. Sometimes my students have a genuine interest in economic geography. I contribute to my child’s education fund. Catholic schools are free (not that I am Catholic, but I am concerned about sending my child to a good school). The summers are magnificent. Semesters are only twelve (!) weeks long, not counting three more weeks for finals. When I hear my colleagues in the US speak of their working conditions, I cannot help but feel that I made the right decision.

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#### **ATTACHMENT TO PLACE/ SENSE OF BELONGING**

In most places I have lived, I had ambivalent feelings about that place. Is the grass greener elsewhere? What would I give up by going elsewhere? Perhaps this is the condition of most people who have moved from place to place during their life, shearing their roots and setting them down repeatedly in new soil. St. Catharines and the Niagara Region are no different. Here, my attachment to place tends to change with the seasons. In the fall and throughout the long winter, I come to loathe the icy monotony. In the spring and summer, my mood blossoms into good cheer. Likewise, my stress levels fluctuate in the same manner, and perhaps this most clearly

explains my ambivalence. When I feel good, I am in the best place to live in the world. When I feel dreadful, anywhere else on earth would be a better place to live.

Similarly, my sense of belonging varies with my mood and the season. Today, nearing the end of a year-long sabbatical, I feel a sense of community, safety, and belonging with a warm circle of friends. When immersed in the day-to-day trivialities of my job, I often feel like I belong. But when this is punctuated by various unpleasantries, I wonder how I ended up here, if anyone recognizes my fraudulence, and if I might just be too old to run off to the circus.

I have come to understand, if not always embrace, the combination of comprehensible and nonsensical conventions at my institution. I am no longer stunned by the ways things are done at Brock, and with the changing composition of the faculty and administration, it seems to behave more like how I would have expected a traditional institution to behave. Efficiency is now a buzzword, though it remains to be seen if it becomes anything more than that.

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## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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When I try to understand the challenges and opportunities of living and teaching abroad, I recognize many variables are at work, even if their effects cannot always be isolated from one another. Thus, while most of this essay deals with the challenges and opportunities at Brock, other everyday factors also provided challenges. Because we didn't have any credit history, when we arrived my chair kindly vouched for us at his bank so that we could get a bank account. Getting insurance was likewise a chore. We had no car when we arrived because our old car, a perfectly serviceable 1990 Nissan Sentra, did not meet Canadian seat belt requirements. However, we needed a car to have car insurance. If we didn't get car insurance within six months after resettlement, we would have to pay a much higher rate. Thus, we opted to buy a "clunker" (though the fact that it was bitterly cold and we were getting tired of walking to the grocery store made the decision easier). A few years later, we decided to buy a house, though only then did we learn that by waiting a few years, we had missed some sort of special deal on mortgages to brand-new immigrants.

However, these annoyances are outweighed by the thankful feeling I have every time I leave the doctor's office, still stunned that I don't have to pay a bill or sign some interminable insurance form.

There have been both challenges and opportunities of teaching in my current department. As a place to work, Brock has short semesters, though at times it feels intellectually isolating; I've heard students who transfer in from other universities say it feels somewhat like a high school, though I think that this is changing. Total enrollment is around 15,000, though this varies from year to year. The university rarely attracts international scholars to their colloquiums, though it does have a few nationally recognized programs. At times, Brock feels like a place that's trying to catch-up with the big kids.

Brock is shifting its focus from a primarily undergraduate-only program to one with an array of graduate programs. Our annual rankings in Maclean's are usually in the middle to lower end of the distribution although the mean entering marks of our students are among the lowest in Canada. In 2008, my department opened a MA program. Unfortunately, many other already established departments also increased their intake of graduate students. The net result has been a difficulty in attracting qualified students from Canada, which in turn impacts my ability to conduct research. The year I arrived was the second year of Ontario's "double cohort," as Bob Rae's educational reforms had eliminated Grade 13 a few years before. This double cohort provided us with some of our first graduate students, and they performed quite well. Still, it would be nice to have more students with training from other universities to minimize the feeling that the MA program is simply an extension of our undergraduate degree. These impressions help frame the following discussion of the challenges and opportunities I find at Brock. For me, the challenges and opportunities of teaching abroad are inextricable from my experience of Brock as an institution.

As a regional university, the overwhelming majority of Brock's students come from Ontario, often from communities within a few hours' drive. This means that our student body consists of either white suburban students or those from the Niagara peninsula, largely but not always of modest scholastic aspiration. Anecdotal evidence indicates that many of them see attending university simply as the next thing to do before they get a "real" job. This presents me with three challenges as a faculty

member. First, I was used to teaching more engaged students at UCLA and IU. Techniques that worked there do not work here, and holding expectations of what was normal there merely feeds my frustration here. Second, I must put myself in their shoes in order to engage students which is difficult since I didn't grow up in Canada. Third, most have a very utilitarian or instrumental understanding of higher education: it will lead them to a job. My solution to these challenges is to make clear that what they are learning in my class, be it economic geography, statistics or what have you, provide both general and specific skills for people wanting to process information for a living. Furthermore, I underscore that the most useful skill they can learn is to think metacognitively, to think about how they think and learn, as this helps them become self-oriented learners. I impress upon students the utility of this skill set, and fail those who can't master it.

The abbreviated length of our short semester system provides another challenge. Each academic year has circa six to eight fewer weeks of instruction than a comparable US academic year. Thus, over the course of a four-year degree, Brock students are shorted the equivalent instructional time of over a year compared to US students in a standard 15- or 16-week dual semester system or a three ten-week quarter system. This makes me feel vaguely guilty while we sit through our three-week examination period, wondering who came up with this inefficient system. My students could get so much more out of a course if I just had a few more weeks to round things out. This discrepancy between my own experiences and the Brock system makes me wonder how our university credits are even transferable under the Carnegie system. More importantly, this makes it difficult to draw on my own undergraduate experience as a benchmark, because we covered more material every semester. As a result, I suspect it takes me longer to fine-tune my courses than it does for those who were trained under this system.

The general model of education at Brock provides another challenge because it does not follow the common liberal arts degree model. There are very few electives outside of the major, so students are not particularly well-rounded. This probably made more sense when there was a grade 13 / Ontario Academic College, but it does not make sense now. Furthermore, most colleagues are loath to admit that we need any remedial courses in writing or mathematics for our students. If they

do admit it, they usually just pass the buck and say it is the job of the K-12 system to insure that our students can write. As a result, in my non-methods courses I've begun to focus more on writing as a skill, and less on thematic content. This is challenging because it means that I have to put my students' best interest ahead of my own interest in teaching them economic geography.

The Canadian first-hiring policy doesn't seem to be particularly helpful either since many departments just seem to be clones of their faculty-members' PhD-granting institutions. Around campus, OISE, Toronto and Queens are particularly well-represented, which I suspect leads to some intellectual in-breeding and group think. In the Faculty of Social Sciences, this result in pockets of stultifying orthodoxy, often combined with disdain for evidence-based research. Still, there are bright spots as I make connections with other researchers less enamored with discourse and more interested in evidence-based research.

What other institutional challenges have I encountered? A particular concern is academic integrity. Many colleagues do not take academic misconduct seriously. This only reinforces Brock's "if you can walk and talk you can get into Brock" image. In turn, this harms our student's chances of finding employment. On a more personal level, it also creates more work for me. More than once a TA has told me that they had brought a case of alleged academic misconduct to one colleague X for student Y, but then colleague X apparently failed to prosecute the case. In one instance, the following semester I had to prosecute the student in one of my classes. Still, our program, one of the smaller in the faculty, prosecutes many times more students for this than most of the larger programs.

A related challenge concerns failing students. Failing too many students leads to raised eyebrows, not just from the chairs, but also from the higher administration who seem more concerned about maintaining enrolments than insuring any kind of student quality. Grade inflation is an annoying problem, though anecdotes suggest that my department maintains a tighter ship than some other large programs. But I want more than anecdote. My recent request to the Associate Dean to make transparent the distribution of marks by major and course went unanswered. Without these data, it is difficult to determine if we are fighting a rising tide of grade inflation, or we are just confirming my bias that my department is virtuous.

Our teaching assistant system provides multiple challenges and needs a radical overhaul. I have had to reduce the difficulty of some courses because I could not find enough (or in some cases, any) teaching assistants that could handle the material. This is compounded by the historical reliance on active undergraduates and a pool of long-time BA/BSc-only teaching assistants. Furthermore, when I arrived in the department, fresh out of SAGE/UAW Local 2865 (the Los Angeles branch of the UC system's graduate teaching assistant union), I was appalled that none of my colleagues kept track of TA hours. When I began actually using the time sheets of which many of my colleagues seemed oblivious, I realized that TA contracts often lacked enough hours to pay them to attend lectures. Requests for more money so that I could pay TAs to actually go to my lectures were rebuffed. I was not the only one who encountered such resistance. One colleague wanted to restructure our full-year introductory human geography course so as to improve students' writing skills, but was denied the necessary funding. Against this backdrop, many long-time Brock faculties portray our TA system in almost heroic terms, providing students with opportunities for small group learning. However, it seems to me that the benefits of small group learning are largely a rhetorical device when many of the TAs don't possess the necessary background in the subject area. Our TA system is broken, but due to inertia and group-think, I doubt if it will be restructured in any kind of pedagogically beneficial way.

More generally, institutional inertia at Brock is shot through with an anti-entrepreneurial mentality. Perhaps this reflects our byzantine funding system. As an economic geographer, this leaves me puzzled. For instance, our departmental budget is not funded based on student enrollment but by the number of majors. On the surface, this makes sense. However, it leads to counter-intuitive decisions: we recently cut a summer course that would generate ample revenue (with 100 to 200 students paying for a "full" course, which is really a full-year course equivalent). While this would have generated between \$150,000 and \$300,000 of revenue, it would have cost the department about \$20,000 to run the course. Because we have no financial incentive to run the program, as we would only pay for running it, but receive none of the revenue it generated, we responded to another budget cut by dropping the summer course. As another example, in a faculty meeting, when I learned that



old equipment — such as filing cabinets, light tables and photogrammatic equipment — would be collected and carted to a scrap pile, I suggested we could sell it on E-bay and keep the funds in the department. Everyone looked at me as if I was insane and the chair told me we couldn't do that. As a result, perfectly good antiques ended up in the trash. I recognize that this collection of constraints reflects, in part, my assumption that Indiana University and UCLA were run the "correct" way, and that any deviation from these norms are wrong. Still, I can't help but feel frustrated by these kinds of challenges at times.

However, there is a silver lining. Brock is in transition. For instance, my hopes for a more entrepreneurial climate may come to fruition. For better or for worse, the university appears to have been co-opted by elements of the local growth machine (Molotch and Logan, 1987). While many of my colleagues decry this, I see it as opening the door to many opportunities. Many of these opportunities relate to the expansion of the university. The region's business elite, so far as I can tell, brought in a new president a few years back. Whatever people may say about him, at least he smiles and says hello when passing you in the hall, which is more than can be said for the previous one. He has a vision for the university and the region, perhaps developed in concert with focus groups and the Board of Directors. Soon after he arrived, urban scholar Richard Florida was invited down from Toronto, which loosely coincided with a wave of place-marketing and branding. The university web portal was overhauled, and a recruitment campaign presented "A bold new Brock." (Frankly, though, I thought we should spend the money on restructuring the TA system so we could deliver a more pedagogically sound seminar system and thereby improve our long-term competitive position by turning out better-prepared students. Nobody asked me for my input, so that lovely idea went unused.) Donations were sought from faculty to help fund new initiatives. Our local MP seems to have funneled us money for new buildings, one of which will contain a bio-sciences business incubator. The Chinese government is funding a Confucius Institute on campus (essentially, a cultural liaison on par with a Goethe Institute or British Council outpost). A downtown arts complex is being constructed out of a former hair cloth factory (evidently it was the last one operating in North America before it closed). Collectively, these developments position Brock to be an even bigger cog in Niagara's economy, and make it a more interesting place to live.

Additional interdisciplinary programs are likewise being created (though I will be hesitant to join any after encountering ideological rigidity in some of the older ones), I suspect in part because they are cheaper to operate than a standard department and in part because they are the one area in which Brock might be able to compete successfully against other Ontario universities. Of particular interest, a Digital Humanities program has been created which aims to feed talent into the local computer gaming industry. While I was initially off its mission, I've since become more sympathetic after I met some of the scholars, game designers and students involved in the program and local industry. Probably not coincidentally, I've also seen its potential for my own work on cultural industries and regional development.

Brock also provides an opportunity to engage in non-traditional scholarship. Thankfully, our union — BUFA — has championed non-traditional forms of scholarship, pedagogy and service, going so far as to incorporate this into our collective agreement. Our union has successfully argued that this position aligns with our administration's recent call for closer cooperation between Brock and the Niagara Region. While I suspect this call for cooperation is in part an instrumental attempt by our Board of Directors to reinvigorate the local economy, I am not categorically opposed to it. In fact, it not only opens up a space for new practices, it rewards faculty outside of STEM disciplines for engaging in participatory and other non-traditional forms of scholarship and pedagogy. This aligns with my own interest in teaching our students some practical skills such as writing clearly, reasoning logically and the like. It also rewards me for systematically evaluating what does and does not work in my courses.

My department's MA program likewise provides an opportunity to give back to my discipline and more importantly, return a karmic favor by identifying potential economic geographers. Finally, the Niagara Region, as one of North America's many overlooked, deindustrialized landscapes, provides the perfect natural laboratory in which to observe processes of regional growth and change.

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## CONCLUSION

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My decision to immigrate to Canada was a logical choice. It provided me with a tenure-track job working in my area of expertise. While the milk comes in bags, and nobody knows what a prize “drawing” is, immigrating to Canada has turned out well for me. My colleagues — even if we don’t always see eye-to-eye — are generally nice people. While there may be more prestigious universities with better-prepared students, I’m not there, and I am choosing to make the best of my situation as I continue to make a new life in a new land.

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## REFLECTING ON MY “BORDERLANDS”

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**T**here are several reasons why I chose to participate in this project, which seeks to shed light on the experience of elite cross-border mobility among full-time, academic geographers in Canada and the United States. As will be elaborated below, there are two broad ethical and epistemological issues that I think about a lot in relationship to my own experience of professional mobility from the United States to Québec/Canada. The first relates to the occupation of a complicated space between Anglophone and Francophone geographies. I am currently trying to understand what possibility there might be for “critical” but transnational geographical practices that actively work across these two worlds. Such practice would help to challenge what I consider to be the hegemony of Anglophone geography, including Anglophone critical geography.

The second ethical and epistemological issue that animates my engagement with this project is linked to my longstanding engagement with Mexico as a researcher. Most recently, in collaboration with a graduate student, I have been working on a research project that addresses Mexican asylum seekers in Montréal. This project only brings to the fore my own expanded and privileged access to international mobility. As I will discuss below, my own experience of fluid and flexible borders lies in direct and inverse relationship with the ever-increasing, violently policed borders experienced by many Mexicans within North America (see Martin *et al.*, forthcoming). As such, I believe that an examination of the expanded mobility of skilled migrants between Canada and the United States must be placed within the broader context of North America (and the world at large) (see Shamir, 2005).

As someone who has privileged interviewing as a method of research, I also accepted the invitation to participate in this collaborative project in large part out of recognition to all of those individuals who have agreed to participate in my own research projects. Though I ask others (perhaps too often . . .) who have lived difficult lives to narrate their stories to me, I am often very hesitant to address or to fix the contents of my own narration and the frame that I might use to explain my own life. There are many reasons for this (and, as I have learned from interviewing, some people are simply better at telling their story than others), but I suspect that this is due to the fact that I am always uncertain how to forthrightly address my own privilege without falling into an unproductive space of guilt.

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### MOVING TO MONTRÉAL

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I moved to Montréal (Québec/Canada) from the United States (Poughkeepsie, New York) in 2005, after accepting a position in the Département de géographie at the Université de Montréal. The move was made for two reasons. First, I was in active pursuit of a tenure-track position, and this was a good job (*une bonne offre*). The Université de Montréal is a leading research university in Canada, with a PhD granting program in Geography. The decision was made, nonetheless, for personal reasons as well. My husband is from France and Montréal seemed to be

an interesting kind of compromise in between North America<sup>1</sup> and France (although I find that description always problematic — Montréal is not really that at all). Montréal represented a real space of possibility for us that neither the United States nor France offered. There was one small hitch: the Université de Montréal is a francophone university, the largest francophone institution of higher education in the Americas.

The move to Montréal meant, in other words, a multiple “border-crossing”: to Canada, to Québec, to Montréal. The move also meant navigating head-on the ever-present cross-winds of contested national identities in Canada, with the attendant issues of language, society and culture. When I accepted the position, I possessed a fair level of conversational fluency in French, but such a base was without a doubt insufficient for the demands of university life. I should also note that upon arriving officially in Canada I felt very “American” in my general lack of knowledge of Canadian/Québécois issues. Now, when I try to think back to my prior knowledge of Montréal the following fragmented memories emerge: the 1976 Olympics; a high school friend who had a French first name because she was born in Montréal as a result of her father escaping the draft; certain Canadian acquaintances in the mid-1990s making bitter comments about Québec. In a more recent life, I had travelled a few times as a tourist to Montréal from New Hampshire.

Without a doubt, the move represented major changes in institutional and working environments. Previous to my employment at the Université de Montréal, a public university with 55,000 students, I had held positions in two small private elite US colleges (Dartmouth, and most recently Vassar). Small classes, beautiful and well-maintained working environments, and access to significant resources, which fomented immediate access to an enriched intellectual environment, characterized my experience in these particular institutions. These were complimented, in turn, by governance practices that appeared to be more open, less hierarchical. By contrast, upon arriving at the Université de Montréal, I was immediately struck by the weight of the bureaucracy and hierarchy that structures the institution. I learned almost

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1. I find that in Montréal, the term “North America” is often used in conversation to describe our geographical location, gesturing to the undeniable and ubiquitous presence of the United States.

immediately, nonetheless, about the importance of a unionized faculty. We went on strike, in fact, during my first semester. Salaries, benefits, and working conditions are negotiated collectively, leading, I believe, to broader equality within departments and across disciplines. Later on, I also discovered the importance of paid maternity leave — a right that was not questioned and that did not have to be negotiated. These latter dimensions are significant differences between the Québécois/Canadian context and that of the United States, and they are differences that I fully embrace.

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### **WORKING “IN FRENCH” (OR, THE HEGEMONY OF THE ANGLOPHONE GEOGRAPHY)**

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Adapting to working and living in (*Québécois*) French has certainly been the most profound part of the transition marking my move to Québec. Without a doubt, there are things in my background that have made such a transition possible, even pleasurable. I have a transnational background (without elaborating, this background weaves together Germany, Colombia, Mexico and the United States), which translates into a certain comfortableness with the co-presence of multiple languages and ease and familiarity with certain forms of alterity. In some ways, in other words, the fact that I now teach in a Francophone university is not terribly surprising. That is not to deny that it has come with a whole set of challenges that I certainly didn't perceived at the outset.

One of the first tasks I had as a new professor at the Université de Montréal was to teach a course on cultural geography (*géographie culturelle*). In so doing, I confronted right away the boundedness of my own language/knowledge. Knowing very little about francophone cultural geography, the syllabus that I ended up putting together contained a mixture of French and English readings, which, I was assured, was standard practice (but let's be honest, completely unimaginable in an Anglophone geography department). I remember being quite moved by my students who took on the task of reading in English largely without complaint. The students in our university (and, in different ways, other members of the university community) live within a space similar to that described by Minca (2000: 287):



All are forced continually and inescapably to dialogue/work on two parallel levels — within the context of their own national geographies, with their rules, logics, and languages, but also within the broader international (read Anglo-American) context, with its own logics and its own particular *lingua franca*.

Yet the context is still different because the communities of reference for Québécois university students in geography are forever unsettled. There is constant shuttling between what might be considered the traditions of "Québec" geography, "French" geography, and "Anglo-American" geography, which references Canada and the United States, in particular. My sense is, in fact, that francophone students at the Université de Montréal never have a choice of "full retreat" into their "own" language, into a system of knowledge production where the borders and the references seem at least partially and provisionally stable.<sup>2</sup> My sense is that this ability to retreat into a seemingly stable community of knowledge allows for an abstractness or "purity" of thought that must, at times, be advantageous.

This is further complicated by the fact that the movement between these worlds, while probably frequently chaotic, is marked by a certain division of labor, a hierarchy of knowledge, a hierarchy of language. I could be wrong, but I suspect that pretty much across the board, that which is presented as cutting edge research often equates to academic literature in English. Within our particular context, this generates a distribution of hierarchy in knowledge and among our students: fully bilingual; monolingual francophone; allophone. These hierarchies become even more pronounced as one moves from undergraduate to graduate study. In our institution, students that wish to pursue study at the graduate level *must* have at least reading fluency in both languages. This linguistic context is even more complex for immigrant students for whom neither English nor French are maternal languages. While it goes without saying that working in multilingual context can offer amazing opportunities — and in theory should place us at the forefront of international education and research —, it is not evident that this is always the case in practice. I worry about the impact of living in such parallel worlds has on the intellectual development

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2. I fully recognize the point made by Samers and Sidaway (2000), in response to Minca (2000), that national traditions in geography, and "Anglo-American" geography in particular, has always been the product of transnational, multilingual engagements. Nonetheless, we still attempt to narrate a story of Anglo-American geography as if it had some kind of internal logic.

of our students. Does this fragmented, yet hierarchical terrain make them feel implicitly one step behind? Does it impact their capacity to develop arguments, to fully understand concepts, to “master” geography?

My language/knowledge boundedness and the persistence of hierarchical forms of knowledge have been complicated by the imperative I feel to further a critical geography agenda in research and teaching. To “further” such an agenda has meant — to varying degrees — the imposition of readings in English, replete with references to a predominantly Anglophone world. Yet this position also seems absurd and almost too paradoxical to maintain. Not only does it engage in a complicated politics of language, which only works to mobilize hierarchy rather than question it, it also goes against a praxis that recognizes that what constitutes “critical” geography is also highly contingent and contextual.

Let me also say that I am not passive in front of these dynamics. I have slowly started to seek out ways to engage in a “geographical praxis” that better responds to this context. My syllabi have become progressively more francophone and, slowly, I have learned to put aside the readings and debates that I have long cherished. Although I am slowly becoming schooled in Francophone geography, I fear, always, that I pick up on fragments of conversations; I worry that I misunderstand the broader context. To put it crudely, how can I know which Francophone geographers are suitably “critical”? And, while I make a tentative move toward becoming more fully engaged with Francophone geography, there is another nagging doubt that always follows me. In some ways, I was hired *because of* my knowledge of and engagement with critical Anglophone geography; in some ways, that is precisely what I have to offer my students and the department. In that sense, an abandonment of “what I know” also seems highly problematic. Given such a context, I am coming to realize that there are multiple avenues for an improved “geographical praxis.” In part this requires a flexible and contingently-based linguistic/knowledge practice.

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**WORKING “ON MEXICO”  
(ONE NORTH AMERICA’S SUBALTERN SPACES)**

While I navigate these complicated sets of issues, which speak, I am convinced, of historical patterns of exploitation and exclusion, as well as continued grievances and prejudices, they exist within larger and shifting

political economies of exclusion (see, for example, the fascinating preface to the 1994 edition of *Nègres blancs d'Amérique* by Pierre Vallières). I was hired at the Université de Montréal as a specialist in Latin America, development and gender, with a particular expertise in Mexico. As a reflection of this expertise, in 2007, I was invited to serve as the *directrice scientifique* of the Chair of Contemporary Mexican Studies (Chaire d'études du Mexique contemporain), an opportunity that I have found both challenging and rewarding. The centerpiece of the *Chaire* is the presence each year of a professor from the UNAM (the national university of Mexico) as Chairholder at the Université de Montréal. This individual is responsible for organizing colloquia, speakers' series, and other events that will promote knowledge and understanding of contemporary Mexico, both within the university and for the larger public. My role in the *Chaire* has been one of support, trying to build continuity in activities over the long term.

The *Chaire*, which is the outcome of an agreement between the Université de Montréal and the UNAM, sits at the intersection of a complicated set of processes. On the one hand, the *Chaire* is part and parcel of the rapid "internationalization" of higher education, in both institutions. As part of the general move toward the globalization of québécois/francophone modernity, the Université de Montréal aspires to being a global institution of higher education. From the vantage point of the Université de Montréal and of Québec, this internationalization serves several functions. These include maintaining competitiveness and standing both within Canada and globally; building (global) institutions that serve as local engines of growth for the knowledge economy; and finally, the recruitment of international students as a new, increasingly important clientele, and an important international migrant steam. In this light, the *Chaire* plays one small piece in an infrastructure that encourages globalized modes of education and with this the increased international mobility of both professors and students. This is also quite paradoxical, however. For, if there is one group within North America that has suffered a dramatic increase in barriers to mobility, it is Mexican citizens. As a result, the *Chaire* must also be considered a site of geopolitical positioning and struggle. The contemporary nature of Mexico — post-national, neoliberal, diasporic, traversed by extreme social inequality, violence and militarization — poses direct questions to the elite forms of globalization

supported by the Université de Montréal. There are important political stakes involved in what image of Mexico is projected, by whom and for whom, through the activities of the *Chaire*.

My activities with the *Chaire* led me in 2009 to work on a collaborative exploratory project aimed at studying Mexican migration to Montréal.<sup>3</sup> One of the primary goals of the granting organization was to increase linkages and mobility among scholars in the Americas. Ironically, we were in the process of organizing a visit to Québec by our Mexican collaborators just as the Canadian government decided to impose a visa requirement on all Mexican travelers to Canada. The primary goal of this policy was to curtail the rapid increase of Mexicans arriving in Canada for the purpose of seeking political asylum. In light of this abrupt policy change, we felt compelled to explore the issue of asylum seeking among Mexicans in Montréal, a research project that Ms. Annie Lapalme, a graduate student working under my direction, has since pursued in much greater depth.

It is not at all surprising that the portraits that emerge from the lives of Mexican asylum seekers paint a quite different picture of contemporary transnational mobility.<sup>4</sup> While their stories are quite diverse, there are a few themes that I would like to mention, which contrast sharply with my own experience of transnational mobility. First, regardless of education and background, asylum seekers frequently end up working in difficult, precarious, “non-desirable jobs.” Second, certain asylum seekers have experienced violent forms of exclusion in Mexico, in the US, and now in Canada. Thus, the practice of asylum seeking speaks to the existence of a transnational homeless shadow population that is excluded from the possibility of citizenship in all three countries. Third, despite the fact that many asylum seekers attempt to build ethical lives for themselves and for their families, these efforts are continuously undermined by the repressive state practices of all three states in North America, thereby undercutting efforts to build personhood, a modest life, or social recognition. As such, Mexican asylum-seekers form part of the *antimonde* of North America (see Brunet, 1981; Houssay-Holzschuch, 2006), hidden from view, criminalized, often leaving only traces of their existence.

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3. The initial project was funded by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

4. See the very recent controversy surrounding the expulsion of Paola Ortiz from Montréal.

I was born in Mexico to a US citizen (my mother). For the first 30 years of my life, I was solely a US citizen, until I established Mexican nationality in 1998. I was able to acquire this second nationality because in 1998 the Mexican government made dual nationality possible. While not explicitly NAFTA related, the shift in policy made it possible for the Mexican diasporic population to invest and own investment and property owning in Mexico.<sup>5</sup> In July 2005, when I crossed officially into Canada for the first time as a landed immigrant at the Montréal-Trudeau airport, I presented the immigration official with my official letter of offer from the Université de Montréal. After studying the letter and my passport for a few minutes (let's say 10), the border official gave me a one-year work visa, and I moved on to pick up my luggage and to start my new life. I cannot remember the exact particulars of the conversation, but I believe that she stated that the particular migratory regime that I fell into (hence the one-year visa) was related to NAFTA. Soon after, the Université de Montréal made available expert assistance to help me apply for permanent residence, which I now hold. At this moment, I am actively thinking about becoming a Canadian citizen, which would give me access to a third passport. I am, in all intents and purposes, a citizen of North America, with flexible and fluid access to all three countries. My mobility — and my current residence in Canada — is directly inscribed in the relative expansion of mobility rights for highly skilled workers. In a parallel fashion, my rights, my personhood, my subjectivity have expanded. I can revel in a flexible, transnational form of citizenship. My gain, their loss.

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### **CONCLUSION: THE POSSIBILITY OF CRITICAL SPACES OF TRANSLATION**

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As the reflections above indicate, the move to Québec/Canada has provided for me, in a grounded, experiential, "lived" manner, the opportunity to understand the operation of power, difference and hegemony in a comparative transnational context. While I certainly was aware of my own privilege in the United States, moving to Canada has enabled me to understand firsthand how privilege can be actively mobilized (thus expanded?)

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5. Children born to Mexican citizens outside of Mexico can now establish Mexican nationality as well.

to cross a border, to secure a job, build a life. What, exactly, gives me more rights than others to make such a move? As a result, moving to Montréal has complicated and enriched my understanding of imperialism, violence and exclusion and the degree to which these are (always) transnational projects. Moreover, different places contain distinct histories of power and marginalization, and these intersect in complex ways with also differentiated contemporary processes of power and marginalization.

By way of closure, I reflect on a roundtable that the *Chaire* organized last spring that addressed political violence in contemporary Mexico. The participants and audience were quite thoroughly heterogeneous in terms of national origin and first language. And the linguistic practice that we engaged in was one of passive trilingualism: everyone was invited to speak in the language of his or her preference, with informal translation always readily available. English, though present, did not dominate the conversation. As Annie Lapalme observed afterwards, the roundtable had a really interesting energy. We were brought together by common concern regarding the escalating violence in Mexico, a concern that was voiced in multiple languages, from multiple disciplinary and national points of view. These fluid linguistic practices were made possible by the fact that the participants (speakers and audience), many associated with Francophone institutions in Québec, were already attuned to and receptive of multilingual practice. In this, I see the seeds of an interesting critical practice, the construction of critical spaces of translation.

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**SUSAN W. HARDWICK** is a Professor of Geography at the University of Oregon. Her teaching and research interests are centered in urban geography and the geography of immigration, ethnicity, and race in the North American context. She is senior author of the widely used university text, *Geography of North America: Environment, Political Ecology, and Culture*, eleven other academic books, and a long list of articles in journal such as the *Annals of the AAG* and the *Journal of Geography*. Dr. Hardwick served as past President of the National Council for Geographic Education and was an elected National Councillor of the Association of American Geographers. She currently serves on the Board of the American Geographical Society and is a member of one of the national steering committees guiding the National Science Foundation-funded *Roadmap to Geographic Literacy* project. Dr. Hardwick is the mother of four sons and Molly, a 125 lb. Newfoundland dog.

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**PATRICIA MARTIN** received her PhD in Geography from the University of Colorado in 2003 and has been on the faculty in the Geography Department at the Université de Montréal since 2005. As a specialist in Mexican development and politics, she is currently conducting research on various types of social and political violence in Oaxaca. Since 2009 she has also been studying the diverse fates of Mexican asylum-seekers to Canada.

**MARIO POLÈSE** was born in The Netherlands in 1943 and grew up in New York City. He holds a BA in Economics from CUNY and a PhD in Regional Science from Penn. Fascinated and intrigued by Québec culture since he was a teenager, he moved to Montréal in 1969 and worked as an advisor to the Québec Government. In 1970 he became professor at INRS (Institut national de la recherche scientifique, Université du Québec), where he has remained since. In 2000, he was awarded a prestigious senior Canada Research in Urban and Regional Studies. He has published over a hundred articles in scholarly journals in English and French. Mario Polèse, although past normal retirement age, is still active. His most recent book is *The Wealth and Poverty of Regions* (2009). He has held teaching positions in Latin America, Switzerland, Spain, and France. He is happily married and father of two splendid daughters.

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# M

## IGRATING IS A LIFE-CHANGING DECISION THAT ACADEMICS

might take because of career. But leaving a homeland is a lot more than a job issue. Many other factors and adjustment challenges are put in the line.

This book tells the stories of a selected group of geographers who migrated to one side to another of the Canada-US border. The often emotional autobiographical testimonials of those academics go a long way toward capturing the full range of feelings and experiences related to migration and settlement decision-making, especially as personal processes play out within the larger context of North American mobility.

Common themes, issues, and questions emerge from their texts: the push-pull factors influencing their migration decision-making; the role of the department or university's reputation in their decision to relocate abroad; the potential attraction of the physical/environmental characteristics of their new site of residence; the career or personal impacts of relocation; their attachment to place, sense of belonging, or feelings of "otherness" after relocation; and other opportunities or challenges they may have faced living and teaching abroad.

As these various authors remind us, becoming a migrant is about much more than finding the right job or ending up in a particular locale. Mobility is also about seeking and finding pathways that lead to personal growth and a deepened trust in oneself and one's family.

**RÉMY TREMBLAY** is Professor at Télé-université (Université du Québec's distance learning institution). His work investigates the many dimensions of the North American city, mostly how it is perceived and lived.

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