The Devil's Arm: Points of Passage, Networks of Violence, and the California Agricultural Landscape

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One of the enduring images of the California agricultural landscape is that of the wide, flat fields stretching off to the horizon, peopled by rows of farm-workers bent double as they weed and thin crops. The image is as much a part of California as are the great valleys of Yosemite or the impressive span of the Golden Gate, and in the iconography of the state, as much taken for granted. Those who travel the agricultural valleys of the state on a regular basis pay little heed to such stooped-over workers; like the iceplant and oleander verges of the freeways they are part of everyday California, and usually worthy of about as much scrutiny. This is not surprising. As Raymond Williams, John Berger, Denis Cosgrove, and numerous art historians have long insisted, the most significant cultural work that 'landscape' does (whether that landscape is painted on canvas or built into the very earth we live and travel on) is to naturalise social relations - to make them so ordinary as to hardly seem worth commenting on, and certainly not worth contesting. Indeed, this very process of 'naturalisation', this process of making the landscape seem to express unproblematically and simply the 'culture' of a place is crucial to the landscape being productive of surplus value. 'Landscape' is thus a crucial term for cultural studies, at least of any cultural studies programme that seeks to locate the production of culture within its material context: 'landscape' is literally a site for the negotiation of power, material gain, and the content of justice as it varies across space. And as I hope to make plain in this essay, a proper study of landscape needs to get behind, and in spatial terms beyond, the representation that the landscape seeks to project - one of productive but natural, for example, and to look at the specific struggles that go into its very making. One of the primary contentions of this essay, in fact, will be that the struggles that go into the making of a landscape are not confined to the locale of that landscape, but extend well beyond it. In that sense to equate landscape with the 'culture' that lives in it (which has been the traditional pursuit of cultural geography) makes little, if any, sense.

So while there may not seem to be much to notice in those crews of workers and the landscapes they till in - they are, after all, just weeding - it is worth taking a more careful look at them, the ways in which they work, the landscapes they work in, and the landscapes they travel through. By turning our gaze for a moment from the wide-flat fields that seem so timeless, to look instead at the farm-workers themselves, as they embody the history of struggle over work conditions, makes us aware of important changes over time. These changes show that no matter how hard a landscape works to obfuscate the relationships of power that go into its making, those relationships are never really very solid, never very stable. The mask that is the landscape continually threatens to fall away - and frequently does. Seemingly stable relationships of power threaten to dissolve as workers have to struggle for everything: from the tools they use to where they sleep to how many toilets there ought to be in the fields.

An attentive observer will notice, for example, that since around 1975, some of those workers toiling in the California sun have begun to stand up a little straighter, to hold a little more securely, to find it easier to repeat tomorrow the work they did today. Before 1975 state law refused to outlaw the forced use of the short-handled hoe, a hoe so devastating in its effects on farm-workers' backs that, seen from any perspective of morality or justice, it is simply impossible to understand how it remained for so long a key tool of California farm labour. And yet it did; and as is well known in the annals of California history, farmers fought long and hard to retain the right to force farm-workers to use it. Even now it has not entirely disappeared from the California landscape: it is still sometimes foisted upon farm-workers with little power to resist, no matter what the legality of its use.

In a history of labour practices that is frequently barbaric, California farmers' struggle to retain their ability to force farm-workers to use short-handled hoes is one of the most barbaric of all. With a handle only twenty-four inches long, the hoe forced farm-workers to spend all day doubled-over at the waist as they thinned and weeded crops. The hoe was nothing short of debilitating for anyone who used it. Chronic, searing back pain was the cost of securing work in the California fields. Permanent disability was a simple fact of farm-working life. Farm-workers called the hoe el brazo del diablo - the devil's arm - an arm whose evil purpose was to wear down the bodies that wielded it.

Despite clear evidence that the devil's arm destroyed the health of farm-workers, growers argued that banning the hoe would be disastrous. They argued that the hoe made farm-workers work with greater care, assuring that losses due to careless hoeing would be minimal. The detention of the hoe was, according to growers, a means of giving farm-workers greater control over their work, but it was even more a means of maintaining farmers' control over farm-workers. One attorney working to outlaw the devil's arm said: 'the hoe was flat-out a symbol of oppression - a way to keep control of workers and make them live humbled, stooped over lives'. The devil's arm made grower's control evident in the bodies of workers. It did not so much internalise discipline (as Foucault argues is largely the case for 'modern' forms of control) as make it overtly manifest. Most particularly, the devil's arm was a means of violent control - low-grade violence to be sure, but violence nonetheless, a violence made possible (and valuable) by the very


fact that as workers became too injured to work, there were always others waiting to take their place, others ‘willing’ to suffer unremitting violence deployed against their bodies in the name of extracting the greatest amount of surplus value out of their labour. No better support for such a claim can be found than the fact that even after it was outlawed in 1975, growers continued to fight - and continue to fight to this day - to reassert their right to use the devil’s arm.

The story of el brazo del diablo is not unusual. It is one of hundreds that could be told about labour relations in the California fields. Indeed, the sort of violence that the devil’s arm represented - the steady debilitation of healthy bodies in the name of profit - together with the ceaseless struggle against such violence, is every bit as important to the shaping of the California landscape as are the more spectacular sorts of violence that are so well known in the annals of California’s labour history: the strikes and lockouts, the bloody deportations, the deadly gunfights of deputised farmers.

How, then, should we begin to account for the role of violence - both of the spectacular and the mundane sort - in structuring work and landscape in California? How should we account for violence in the production of capitalist surplus value? Or, more specifically, to understand the awesome productivity of the California landscape, where should we look to find the violence that is so much a part of the landscape’s making? Just how long is the devil’s arm?

DEAD LABOUR AND THE VIOLENT LANDSCAPE

There are no easy answers to these questions. To start from the fact of violence itself may not be the best approach, for except in the case of direct violence - strikes and labour-related assault and murder - the sort of everyday violence that is a fact of life in the California fields appears accidental and episodic, a problem, like the devil’s arm, to be combated on its own terms. Focusing directly on specific acts of violence, or even long-standing violent practices at the point of production, tends to exclude the structural links between the production of surplus value in the California landscape and violence in locales perhaps quite distant from the point of production itself. Such a strategy has the effect of isolating and localising violence, making it appear the function of specific, isolated, and localised conditions and effects. It makes it appear disconnected from larger social processes and from other places, places perhaps thousands of miles away.

My contention is that to understand the systematic nature of violence within the political economy, we must attend to its complex geographical manifestations. One way into this question of the relationship between violence and economy in California is through the landscape, for it is the landscape that integrates and provides the material foundation for other aspects of the political economy. But to understand that point, we need to take seriously and literally one of Marx’s most compelling metaphors in Capital: the metaphor of dead labour. From there we can begin to see that the landscape is produced within (and helps to make possible) a geographical network of violence, which while always historically contingent, is also always made functional to the production of surplus value. Ironically, such dead labour is in turn only possible because of the complex mobility of living labourers - mobility that is itself advanced through, and conditioned by, the network of violence.

DEAD LABOUR AS LANDSCAPE

‘Capitalist wealth’, Marx famously begins the first volume of Capital, presents itself to the world as ‘an immense accumulation of commodities’. From this rather innocent starting point, Marx produces a complex and subtle argument about the way ‘things’ internalise and simultaneously mask the social relations that go into their making. The importance of this argument about the fetishistic quality of commodities is that it points to the need for a careful analysis of the specific social relations that make the commodities through which we know and live in the world, through which we reproduce the world and ourselves. In turn, this requires us to look ‘beyond’ the commodity, to the sites and times that actively structure the social relations of capitalist production.

Yet our experience of social life remains always mediated by the commodities we have produced. We always and everywhere confront social relations as concretised ‘things’, as ‘reifications’. Nowhere is this more true - though often less apparent - than in what David Harvey calls the ‘built environment’. For Harvey, the built environment ‘has to be regarded ... as a geographically ordered, complex, composite commodity’ that is ‘fixed’ in space in a manner unlike many other commodities. This fixed environment ‘functions as a vast, humanly created resource system, comprising use values embedded in the physical landscape, which can be utilized for production, exchange and consumption’. The built environment functions, in different places or at different times, or even all at once, as both productive capital and as part of the ‘consumption fund’ through which labour is reproduced. Taken together, the built environments in a place, whether well or poorly integrated, constitute the landscape of that place, and that landscape is vital to the continuing production of surplus value. This is so for the simple reason that the social relations of what is historically and socially ‘normal’ (in terms of standards of living, educational possibilities, the importance of leisure and so on) is physically made manifest in the landscape itself. The built environment is not only a means of production and consumption, but it is a physical - reified - representation of the social relations of production and consumption. It ‘tells’ us - if we learn to read it, or if those who read it for us are convincing enough - what is possible, what must be overcome, what is to be struggled for and against.
Or, just as likely, it masks the relations that go into its making: the nearly tended fields of agricultural California during the 1970s both spoke loudly and said nothing at all about the degrading value of the short-handled hoe in California labour relations.

Understood as a commodity, as a complex built form, the landscape is a particular type of concealed labour. It is the result of the labour required to transform nature into a socially useful 'thing'. When we confront the landscape, when we live in it and look at it, then we are confronting labour; but it is labour that is past, concealed, alienated, or as Marx so colourfully put it, dead. As a site of production - the fields of California, for example this dead labour, this already produced (laboured over) space, 'absorbs' living labour. Living labour - embodied labour power - goes to work under conditions established by labour now dead. Under conditions of surplus value production within capitalism:

the means of production are ... [a] means for the absorption of the labour of others. It is ... no longer the labourer that employs the means of production, but the means of production that employ the labourer. Instead of being consumed by him as material elements of his own productive activity, they consume him as the ferment necessary to their own life-process, and the life-process of capital consists only in its movement as value constantly expanding.\textsuperscript{13}

The means to this end of 'value constantly expanding', of course, is the production of new commodities, the production of more 'dead labour'. The dead, in the service of the dead, consumes living labour.

And yet, of course, living labour, like capital, must be continually reproduced: living labour, and more particularly living labour that is properly conditioned, properly skilled, properly 'free' to do the work needed of it, at a cost appropriate to existing conditions, is every bit as necessary as capital (both in the form of circulating money and in the form of 'fixed', dead labour). And here the landscape takes on added importance. For the landscape is not just a site of production, but at least as importantly it is a site for the reproduction of labour-power, and for the living labourers that embody that labour-power. Harvey comments:

Certain commodities perform in the realm of consumption a somewhat analogous role to that played by fixed capital in the production process. The commodities are not consumed directly but serve as instruments of consumption. They include items as diverse as cutlery and kitchen utensils, refrigerators, television sets and washing machines, houses, and the various means of collective consumption such as parks and walkways.\textsuperscript{14}

In other words, they serve as means of reproduction, both the reproduction of labour power as it is embodied in individual labourers, and the reproduction of the social relations that sustain the relations of production exact at any given location.

The landscape, variously defined, exists as part of this means of reproduction. As a physical place, a setting, it provides the forum for everyday life: if the historically developed separation of work from home requires long commutes for workers, then automobiles, buses, or trains become a necessary condition of the reproduction of labour power; if affordable housing is not part of the 'normal' social relations of a place (as in the case of much of agricultural California), then trailer camps, cheap motels, and ditch-bank shantytowns arise within the landscape as key sites of labour reproduction. In other words, as a representation of what is good, proper, or historically possible at any given time in any given location, the landscape serves to condition what Marx called the 'moral and historical element' inherent in reproduction.\textsuperscript{15}

The nature of reproduction is thus crucial for determining the shape and meaning of the landscape, just as the shape and meaning of the landscape is a crucial determinant in the nature of reproduction. But more than that, the historically developed landscape is a key factor in not just reproduction, and not just production, per se, but in the production of surplus value. If the real cost of variable capital (labour power) is a crucial determinant in producing surplus value, and if that real cost is not only a function of the historically sedimented processes by which labour is reproduced (here as a quality to be supported and upgraded because of its special skills and relative scarcity, there as a quantity to be purchased as cheaply as possible), then the landscape, 'by concretizing social relations, by becoming real, affect[s] surplus value in quite tangible ways ... [for example] by providing both a place of reproduction and an ideological bulwark against agitation'. The very form of the landscape, in other words, 'represents the complicated relationships of labour and capital, of production and reproduction, struggled over in place, even as those struggles are erased from view and the landscape is made to appear as if it is natural, resistant, concrete'. Living labour, in other words, confronts dead labour as a produced space, as the landscapes that establish the very conditions of living labour's existence.

DEAD LABOUR, CIRCULATION TIMES AND LABOURING BODIES

To address exactly how living labour confronts dead labour as a produced space - as a landscape - and to address why this confrontation is important, we need to turn to questions of mobility, for it is within systems of circulation (circulation also made possible by the built landscape) that the opportunities for and necessity of violence arise within capitalist political economy. As George Henderson has so insightfully argued, the construction of a landscape suitable to the needs of surplus value production in California presents itself to capital (to a California farming corporation, for example) as a
series of problems to be overcome. These problems arise, Henderson argues, due to severe disharmonies in the circulation times of capital, crops and workers. Agricultural production is particularly problematic because it is discontinuous. During the maturation period of crops, capital just sits there, frozen in place, no longer mobile; and it is therefore especially vulnerable to all manner of risks: depressions in price, pests, collapse of markets, labour unrest or shortage at crucial moments, fluctuations in interest rates, and so forth. Moreover, during that period, labour too is largely idled: thinning, pruning, weeding, preparing the ground and other similar tasks take far less labour than does harvesting. Idle farm-workers, in the eyes of growers and farming communities, are a burden. If they are not receiving wages, then they are unable to pay for their own reproduction; they become a drain on local services; they agitate; often they organise. They are unwanted, and growers and townspeople alike work hard to make sure they move along. This disharmony of circulation times is important. More than any other factor, it explains why California agriculture continues to grow more intensive - and more labour intensive - each season: the intensification of farming is a desperate attempt to overcome the contradiction that lies at the centre of the disharmony. Mechanisation is only a partial solution, and one that actually increases risk by fixing even greater portions of capital in place and only using it intermittently, removing it for extended periods of time from circulation. Labour mobility is seen by growers as a panacea.

But this raises the obvious questions. Where will growers find workers sufficient to their needs and how can they assure that labour is properly conditioned so it performs when and as needed, as cheaply as possible, but then 'disappears' when it is not? The key answer in California has always been to find ways to keep labour moving - moving into the state from afar, and moving around the state as crops in different districts mature. The circulation of labour - the physical circulation of labourers - is key, as it is in any production process, but in agricultural California, labour has to circulate not only in and out of the workplace on a daily basis, but also in and out of a crop region - and often the state - on a seasonal basis.

This sets up a series of problems faced by farmers and farming corporations concerning what level of cooperation and competition creates the best economies of scale: hence the amazing patterns of monomapping amidst stunning diversity; hence also the historical development of local and transregional co-operative enterprises like the Agricultural Labour Bureau of the San Joaquin Valley and state institutions like the California Commission of Immigration and Housing that sought to rationalise labour mobility around the state. Monomapping within regions assures that risks to lenders of capital are minimised (because local knowledge about agricultural practices can be exploited to the benefit of distant lenders) and diversity across regions means the establishment of a migratory labour circuit that allows farm-workers to move between crop districts over the course of the year and thereby reduce the localised costs of labour reproduction. In addition to the 'natural' mobility demanded of workers through this geography of monomapping and diversity, the US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) has, through well-timed raids and operations, raised the cost to undocumented labourers of staying put: losing control of the border increases vulnerability to arrest and deportation, which as we will see brings with it ever greater costs - monetary and bodily - to migrant workers.

The mobility demanded of migratory workers has the effect of shifting the contradiction produced by disharmonies of circulation time to new locations, to other spaces. Mexico and the border are obvious 'other locations', but so too are the cities of the Central Valley, and, crucially, the very bodies of mobile, migratory workers. George Henderson again provides the best analysis of the importance of circulating bodies to the political economy:

... to the extent that the long, historical transformation of independent producers into wage workers and the reproduction of wage-worker social formations are the signal events of capitalist penetration, and the theory thereof, there is an express contradiction: the perpetuation of wage bodies is simply another skin of 'nature' that capital fails to penetrate ... Unless capital does away with the human body, it will always face the 'natural limitations of the labour-power itself' as a barrier to increased rates of reproduction. Workers are sites of biological processes and energy flows for which capital has only partial solutions (e.g. robotics). They are themselves obstacles to capitalism. Bodies persist. That they are waged bodies is a capitalist solution. The body is thus a 'geographical space for circulating capital'; Henderson continues, 'no less than a crop district, an irrigation network, or even a branch-banking system'. But the body is a different kind of space from these others: people have wills and desires of their own. Their conditioning as wage labourers must therefore be careful and complete; it is often, by necessity, violent. 'In their quest for a constant supply of commodity-labour', Henderson argues, 'farm employers subjected “their” variable capital to extraordinary discrimination and difference-making practices.'

This sounds innocent enough, but think of California's history: from the expulsion of Chinese people from the mines of the California foothills in the mid-nineteenth century, to the refusal to build housing for migratory Mexican workers in the Central Coast strawberry fields in the late twentieth; from the incarceration of radical white male migratory workers during World War I, to the assault and murder of undocumented Central Americans and Mexicans seeking to cross the US-Mexico border to work in the fields at the end of the Cold War; from the violent strikes in the fields and the struggles to organise cannery workers in the towns during the 1930s, to the relentless toll on the health of farm-workers extracted by
chronic injury in the 1990s, the patterns of mobility and violence - the means by which capital circulates through farm-workers' bodies - is made possible by a careful (if still contingent) division of labour based on race, ethnicity, and gender. Violence is both a precondition for and a result of the 'difference making practices' of the California agricultural system.

Since 'the body' is both a precondition for and a barrier to capital circulation in the fields of California, it is little surprise that farm employers have sought to divide those bodies, one from the other, as carefully as possible, even as they have sought, in the never-ending mantra of California agricultural history, 'more labour'. This labour has come from all over the world as growers have been happy to exploit any and all walks of life from white 'vagrants' to black sharecroppers, from Boy Scouts to Guatemalan refugees. The important point, however, is that each labour supply, in its specific differences, has been developed and exploited as a particular answer to particular problems faced by growers at particular times as they have worked out how to grow surplus value in the fields. In turn, the development of each of these answers has required farmers to find ways to properly 'condition' the labour that comes to them - or better yet, exploit already conditioned labour, to look for labour that is already weakened and little able to resist the depressed wages, poor living conditions, and debilitating working conditions that face them.

The process of 'conditioning' is, thus, never confined to the point of production. The desire for tractable,pliant labour sources that minimise the risk to farmers inherent in the dualities of capital,crop, and labour circulation times, implicates the California farming landscape in a complex geographical web of relationships that stretches from the point of production to labour source communities around the globe. For California farm-workers this web is experienced as a series of nodes, or what could be called 'points of passage'. Each of these 'points of passage' Likewise presents - and indeed is constructed through - opportunities for violence, both the sorts of violence represented by the devil's arm and the more spectacular sort, each of which has a role to play in the conditioning of labour and labourers' bodies. It is important, therefore, to look, even if only briefly, at each of these points of passage and to see how they are functionally linked to the California landscape, to see how they make labour dead.

POINTS OF PASSAGE, NETWORKS OF VIOLENCE

Violence is a tricky word. It can signify anything from calculated murder, to the unremitting violence of oppressive work conditions, to the sorts of discursive 'violence' misapplied by ideas. Here, because it is a fact of California farm-working life, I am particularly concerned with physical, bodily violence, whether intentional or not, and whether episodic or chronic. Yet it is important to understand that such bodily violence is only one among many means of 'conditioning' labour in California fields.

It must be understood within a larger context of oppressive and repressive aspects of social life like chronic debt used as a means to win farm-workers' compliance to grower practices, subordinate housing conditions, fear of being reported to the INS, or (because of citizenship status) lack of redress for illegal employment practices. In other words, the role of violence in the production of the California agricultural landscape has to be understood within a larger context of a multidimensional power struggle. Violence is thus best understood as part of two inseparable networks, one geographical, the other conceptual. The first extends across all spaces through which farm-workers travel so as to make their labour power available to those willing to buy it. The second is the total net of social relations within which those workers are ensnared. A way into these networks is to start in the fields themselves and then to work our way out (and back) along the trails that farm-workers have forged on their ways in and out of the fields.

THE POINT OF PRODUCTION

Farm work is one of the most hazardous occupations in the United States. Mortality rates are more than five and a half times the national average; and the average life-span of agricultural workers is only 49 years (compared to the national average of 75). Acute and chronic injuries are exceptionally common, with injuries from machinery, falls, and livestock, together with more chronic conditions such as respiratory disorders, cancer, mental illness, and chronic back pain among the most frequent problems associated with farm work. In 1990 in California alone, there were over 22,000 reported work-related disabling injuries in the agricultural sector. As we will see, this is a mere fraction of the injuries sustained.

Such injuries are only a part of the story. Ironically, farm-workers have the highest rate of malnutrition in the country. In addition, farm-workers have exceptionally high rates of exposure to chemical pesticides (and higher than normal rates of cancer). Agricultural counties have the highest rates of infant mortality in California. About 25 per cent of the farm work in the United States is performed by children; and in California, children 'account for a disproportionate share of agricultural workplace fatalities and injuries'. Farm-working children also suffer more from pesticide exposure, parasitic diseases, vitamin deficiencies, and respiratory diseases than do their non-farm-working counterparts.

It may be hard to consider such deaths, injuries, and illnesses as 'violence' until one also considers the degree to which such problems are part of the structure of agriculture in the United States. They are not accidental. As Arcury and Quandt argue, 'assuming that increasing knowledge about farm injury or illness will lead to reductions in rates of injury is ... faulty. To get to ... [the] underlying causes, it is important to understand the farming system in which the work is done'.
California agriculture is intensifying; so too is farm work: seasonal labour demands have increased 22 per cent over the past 20 years. According to Philip Martin, an agricultural economist from the University of California at Davis, fruit and vegetable growers alone require between 800,000 and 900,000 workers over the course of the year 'to fill the equivalent of 300,000 to 350,000 year round jobs'. In other words, despite continued diversification of crops, California agriculture remains intensely seasonal; increased seasonal work means increased mobility on the part of farmworkers. According to one study, four out of ten farm-workers migrate for at least a portion of the year; that is they travel at least 75 miles in search of work. Three out of ten farm-workers seasonally 'shuttle' between the US and Mexico. One in ten - or at least 80,000 workers in California - follow the crops full time. Even so, growers continue to worry about labour shortages and to lobby intensively for the revival of the bracero programme that allowed them to directly recruit 'guest workers' in Mexico and work them under near-indentured servitude conditions.

Real wages among farm-workers have declined at least 20 to 25 per cent over the past two decades. For some crops that decline has been far sharper as new labour systems (such as sharecropping) have been implemented. Tracking such changes, however, is becoming increasingly difficult - perhaps not accidentally - since the California Employment Development Department has now decided to stop collecting data on agricultural workers' wages.

If the state's lack of interest in tracking wage rates is relatively new, it has long turned a blind eye to housing conditions even as workers face increasing housing shortages. Recourse to shantytowns, cars, chicken sheds, barns, or simply sleeping on the open ground is common. After spending weeks with the poorest of migrant workers living in cardboard shacks in a ravine in San Diego, a reporter for the New Yorker speaks almost gloweringly of the chicken shed that avocado pickers live in on a nearby farm. So it shouldn't be surprising that investigators not infrequently find farm-workers living in caves carved out of hillsides bordering the fields, caves that are often barely large enough for one prone body. A study from the University of California estimated in 1995 that some 250,000 farm-workers and their families lived in substandard housing. This number included, at least statistically, all migrant workers, and some 160,000 seasonal non-migrants. As a consequence, health problems are exacerbated and communicable diseases are endemic. Such health problems are compounded by the fact that sanitary conditions in the fields themselves are scandalous.

While the fields of California provide much needed jobs, and while they are often perceived of as a haven from difficult economic and political environments at home, they are nonetheless remarkably violent landscapes, landscapes dedicated to the production of profit through the production of disability, illness, and disfigurement. 'That they are waged bodies is a capitalist solution,' as George Henderson said. 'That they are waged bodies is a capitalist problem' - a problem only deepened by assuring a surfeit of bodies circulating in and out of the fields and by steadily wearing those bodies down, assuring that they have neither the strength nor the wherewithal to resist.

Yet they do resist. So set against this geography of debilitation are the history and geography of often violent worker militancy: wild-cat and organised strikes; long, brutally interrupted organising drives; lockouts; the murder of organisers; bloody fights between scabs and strikers. This history and geography are well known, and the successes of organisations like the Industrial Workers of the World, the California Agricultural Workers Industrial Union, and the United Farm-workers are rightly celebrated even as the shortcomings and defeats of these organisations are acknowledged. So too is it well known the lengths that growers will go to undermine and eliminate worker organising and power. But rather than retell that story (as important, interesting, and complicated as it is), I will turn at this point to another point of passage in the network of violence, a point of passage that is immensely important in assuring that agriculturalists in California have the necessary number of bodies available to them when, where, and as needed: the border.

**THE BORDER**

At least 90 per cent of the farm-workers in California are not US-born; around 70 per cent are not US citizens (by contrast in 1967 the percentage of foreign born was around 50). Between 70 and 80 per cent are male; two thirds are under 35 years old and seven per cent are under 18. Around 80 per cent are Latino. The remainder are Southeast Asian, English-speaking American and Caribbean. The vast majority of Latino workers in California are Mexican or of Mexican descent, but increasing numbers come from Central America, and growing numbers of indigenous peoples from Southern Mexico and Guatemala are joining the agricultural workforce each year. In 1989, three years after the immigration amnesty of 1986, perhaps as little as 7 per cent of farm-workers were undocumented aliens; by 1995, official counts (which always underestimate) put the number at 37 per cent. One final statistic is important at this point: individuals of Latin American origin comprise about 40 per cent of all undocumented aliens in the US, but 90 per cent of those detained as illegal are Mexican.

All this is to say that the Mexico-US border is an increasingly important fact of life for farm-workers, whether they follow the crops, migrate seasonally between Mexico and the US, or intend to reside permanently in the US. For migrant workers from Mexico and farther south, the border obviously must be crossed in order to secure work in California. Many do this illegally, either on their own or by hiring a 'coyote' to guide them across. Many of those attempting to cross are caught and returned to their
who make it across, eluding either capture or death, indentured servitude is
on the increase in California as labour sub-contractors keep migrant
workers in perpetual debt as they attempt to pay off; under threat of assault,
the syndicates that saw them safely across the border, and as they feel
powerless to expose their conditions to governmental authorities. Under
such conditions, capture by the border patrol at the place of production is
prohibitive costly and something to be avoided at all costs. The advantage
grows obvious. As Verdine Robinson argues, the 'revolving door' that is
the border - a door that both invites people in and pushes back - 'is not
contradictory at all'. It is a means of weakening labour through both
stigmatisation and simple economic calculus. Violence at the border pays.
The fundamental dilemma of any Latin American migrant into the
United States is that their labour is desperately desired, but their presence
is most unwelcame. The border stands as the primary regulator of this
system, the primary point of passage in the network of violence that drives
migrant farm-workers underground, and stigmatises them so thoroughly
that their labour becomes ever cheaper, ever more pliable.
But if the cost of crossing the border is so high, and getting higher,
then there must be a reason that so many people attempt to cross it. Where
are they coming from? Here we turn to a final point of passage: the home
or source region.

THE SOURCE REGION

Many of the illegal shanty and chicken shed workers that William
Langerwische, the New Yorker's reporter, found in San Diego in 1998 were
Zapotecos from rural villages in the Mexican state of Oaxaca. They had
been recruited from small, isolated villages, beginning in 1984, by a flower
grower in Southern California - and there they were enslaved: held in
perpetual debt, frightened by submission by warnings about the Border
Patrol, and forced to work sixteen hours a day. Eventually, the grower,
charged with engaging in slavery, plea-bargained a conviction under
racketeering charges. Whatever the outcome of that case, for most of these
workers there was nothing to go home to: no jobs, a disintegrating social
network, and declining agricultural fortunes as transformations of the
Mexican rural political economy - transformations only accelerated by the
North American Free Trade Agreement - have devastated traditional village
economic structures. In Oaxaca, as in Jalisco and Chiapas, along with
nearly all other regions of Mexico, what Marx so rightly called the 'dull
compulsion of economic necessity' cannot be underestimated. But neither
should it be naturalised. That economic necessity is fully integrated into
the California political economy: indeed, California farms are capitalised
on the assumptions of continued (and continuous) labour migration from
the south.

This migration has been set in motion by, among other things, the fact

1 million in 1994 to
nearly 1.0 million in 1999. In other words, migrants have been pushed into
the deserts and
mountains. Claudia
Smith, 'Condemning
Migrant 'Seekers
to Death', San Diego
Union, 2 April, 1999, p37; Ken
Ellegood, 'Data on
Border Arrests Raine
Gatekeeper Debate',
Los Angeles Times, 1
October 1999, p35.

55. The California
Rural Legal
Assistance
Foundation estimates
that 'coyoating' is
between a $7-
and $8-billion dollar-a
year industry; the
Border Patrol agrees: Gregory Alan Gross,
'Star-Old
Gatekeeper is
Praised, Denounced',
San Diego Union, 31

56. Murder, rape,
and violent theft have
all decreased at the
border in urban
San Diego after
Operation
Gatekeeper began.
There is no data on
such violent crime
for rural areas where
most migrant
now cross: Ellegood, op. cit.;
Smith, op. cit.
prohibitively high, it is even higher for Central Americans. US policy requires that undocumented workers be returned to their ‘home’ country. Not only is the trek back north often impossibly expensive, the likelihood, during the wars, and to some degree since, of being assaulted or murdered upon return is high. The Guatemalan government, for example, branded all those who sought to flee their communities as ‘subversives’. For the El Salvadoran farm-worker just quoted, getting caught by La Migra presented a stark choice: ‘They caught me. They asked me where I was from. I told them I was Mexican. I was afraid that if I told the truth, they’d send me back to El Salvador’.

Growers in California do not cause wars in Guatemala and El Salvador, but they are happy to take advantage of the labour delivered to them by these wars, just as they have historically been happy to exploit the labour delivered to them by the Mexican revolution, the political and economic collapse of China in the nineteenth century, the steady immiseration of immigrant workers in the factories of the Eastern US early in the twentieth century, the Filipino migrants flecing the turmoil attendant upon American Imperialism in the Pacific, the Dust Bowl era refugees from agricultural consolidation in the Mid- and South-West, and political refugees from the wars against Southeast Asia in the 1960s and 1970s. The point is that the California agricultural landscape - the agricultural system is made possible by a network of violence that incorporates these places and establishes them, through this violence, as points of passage rather than settlement, points that farm-workers must move through in order to serve themselves up to the growers who employ them. The capitalist problems that are waged here find their partial solution not only in Modesto and Monterey, not only in Salinas and Sacramento, but also in Oaxaca, El Salvador, Laos, and Cambodia. The mobility of labour, mobility deeply structured by the threat and reality of both accidental and purposeful violence, is a precondition for the dead labour that is the fruit and vegetables grown in California, that is the California agricultural landscape.

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Think back to the image with which this essay opened: the image of the wide flat fields with workers stooped over double by the devil’s arm. Think also about just how complex a system it is that makes it possible for so debilitating a landscape to be so amazingly productive. That system is made possible by a certain kind of mobility, one that is deeply intertwined with just as intense a fixity: the fixity of dead labour in the commodities and landscape that constitute everyday life in California and beyond. In turn, this mobility of labourers - of embodied labour power - is conditioned through a series of points of passage existing within a network of violence that extends from the point of production across the globe. This network of violence is crucial in organising labour power in such a manner so as to

Mexican government indicated in 1995 that some 600,000 Mexican households were receiving remittances from remittances from family members in the United States: Gross, op. cit.

65. To the degree that this statement is correct, it must be kept in mind that the reproduction of California labour in Mexico and Central America is a complex process. As Zabin, Hughes, and Wiley, op. cit., show, migration to the United States for many workers is temporary, beginning with internal migration that lowers the cost (to migrants) of their eventual move to the US. For a second careful study of the roots and processes of migration to California, see Alexander Monzo, op. cit.

66. See Rothenberg, op. cit.


minimise the risks - to growers, bankers, and marketers - that accrue through the uneven ‘circulation times’ that are crops, capital, and corporeal workers. California growers have always had to find answers to two related questions. Where will the labour come from that is needed to do the work of planting, weeding, and harvesting, and how can that labour be kept moving so as not to become either a prohibitive cost or a powerful force for change? The answer for growers, whether intentional or not, has always been to rely on violence: the everyday unremitting violence wrought by el brazo del diabo and the destruction of health associated with substandard living conditions, the violence inherent in the border, and the fortuitous violence of political and economic upheaval in distant places. This answer in turn is only possible because of what I called, following Raymond Williams and others, the ‘cultural work’ of landscape: its ability to naturalise, obscure, and now, it is clear, localise social relations. In order to understand the California landscape in all its impressive productiveness, we need to set our sights not only on the landscape in its specific local setting (as important as it may be), but also on the mobility of farm-workers, so as to see how that mobility makes possible, and is made possible by, the levels of violence necessary to reproduce the low wage rates and horrid working conditions that allow the rest of us to eat cheap strawberries in March or ridiculously inexpensive canned tomatoes the year round. The California agricultural landscape exists only to the extent that it is integrated with other landscapes, economies, and systems of violence both near to and far from the point of production, and at scales ranging from the bodies of workers themselves to the regional systems of states and nations marked so clearly by the metal wall stretching along the Mexico-US border. If labour is made dead in the fields of California, it is only done so to the degree that it is made dead elsewhere too. Understanding how these different points of passage, these different sites in the network of violence, are linked into a functioning whole by highly mobile, very much living labourers, is a primary task for all of us who want to understand the landscape as a fundamental concretisation of the very immiseration that makes that landscape - and our comfortable living - possible.

NEGOTIATING AND NARRATING EMPLACEMENT: BELONGING AND CONFLICT IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Vikki Bell

I definitely wouldn’t miss the Troubles; although they say they’re over you can never be sure. I definitely wouldn’t miss that. I wouldn’t miss the uncertainty of it - especially living in Belfast. Were you aware of the times when they were going around shooting bouncers? It was last year and I remember, I thought it was funny, the bouncers down at L* had to walk in zigzags up the footpath when they were going to the shop, had to skip from side to side up the footpath, because they were afraid of getting shot, because they were going around doing a lot of bouncers at that time at pubs, especially Catholic pubs. And so I wouldn’t miss that, and the tension ... and the weather, I wouldn’t miss the weather (R, male, 18).

... spatial practices in fact secretly structure the determining conditions of social life. I would like to follow out a few of these multiform, resistance, tricky and stubborn procedures that elude discipline without being outside the field in which it is exercised, and which should lead us to a theory of everyday practices, of lived space, of the disquieting familiarity of the city.

... Their story begins on ground level, with footsteps.1

The movements of the bouncers’ bodies mark out a trace of fear; the zigzagged footsteps trace the tactical negotiation of violence in the very embodiment of those who consider themselves, without being able to have any certainty, potentially at risk. Readable at the level of everyday practices, such embodied negotiations register the ongoing legacy of violent conflict in Northern Ireland at the level of the body. The steps speak, tapping out a history of conflict that has had its disciplinary effect, which those in its midst negotiate and those who pass through are obliged to engage with. With the story about the bouncers’ walk, this respondent introduces the tension that is aroused in himself because of the conflict in Northern Ireland. Whether or not the bouncers’ really did walk in zigzags is not something one can prove from these words, but it is a narrative of introduction in which the respondent is presenting a vignette to emphasise the point I am similarly making here - that emplacement is a process that is registered at the level of the body. To begin with footsteps, the ‘pedestrian rhetoric’ that is a ‘spatial acting out of the place’, is to suggest that walking as a mode of embodiment has the


2. Ibid., p98.