


## Spectres of Belonging: The Political Life Cycle of Mexican Migrants

By Adrián Félix. *Studies in Subaltern Latino/a Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. 200pp, \$28.95. Paperback

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In this work, Adrián Félix invites us to delve deeply into the personal political lives of Mexican migrants to the United States. The book relates the political life cycle and the migrant life cycle by showing how Mexican migrants enunciate their political claims by naturalization, entrust their political claims by engaging with Mexican politicians, and embody their political claims through repatriation to their homeland. These concepts relate to the beginning, middle, and literal end of a migrant's life cycle through death. This book reminds us that the toughening of the border between the United States and Mexico has real consequences for the documented and undocumented persons who navigate between the two countries over the past few years. Styled as a political ethnography, the research for this book was completed between 2006 and 2018. Félix uses a wide variety of qualitative data to construct and articulate his argument, including focus groups and ethnographies of U.S. citizenship classes, interviews with politicians and candidates, archival data from the Los Angeles consulate, and interviews of the families of Mexicans repatriated postmortem.

The book focuses on the ways in which the racialized immigration policy of the United States has thickened its border with Mexico and impacted the political process through which Mexican migrants simultaneously cultivate cross-border citizenship claims between both countries throughout their lives. Félix argues that the enduring cross-border loyalty is not failed assimilation, but a product of the anti-immigrant context sustained in U.S. politics. Conversely, participating in U.S. politics and becoming a naturalized citizen does not represent a severing of ties but an opportunity to participate in transnational citizenship. To assist in weaving these narratives together, Félix elaborates the concept of “diasporic dialectics” to show how processes on both sides of the border work in concert literally from the migrant's political baptism through naturalization until death and repatriation to Mexico. The book draws upon theories of citizenship, democracy, and nationalism to ground its work.

After a foreword by poet Gustavo Arellano, the book is organized into five chapters. The first chapter is a broad introduction and a brief theoretical overview. The second chapter looks at the “birth” of transnational citizenship through the U.S. naturalization process drawing upon theoretical understandings of naturalization along with the author's observations as a teacher of citizenship classes. The third chapter looks at the involvement of Mexican migrants in the United States with the politics of Mexico through their interaction

with persons elected (or seeking election) to represent the migrant constituency. The fourth chapter analyzes the repatriation of remains and shows that this private act embodies transnational citizenship through the Mexican state's involvement. The fifth chapter concludes the book by reiterating the overarching narrative of the migrant political life cycle. In the epilogue, the author gives personal insights into one migrant's repatriation story.

Félix provides a well-written and cohesive narrative of the migrant political life cycle through this work weaving together both anecdotes and theory seamlessly. Félix's transparency and recognition of how his background as the son of Mexican migrants to the United States influenced both his access and expectations help the reader to better understand the work. The author makes it a point to bring in the gender dynamics in each of the cycle chapters without detracting from the core arguments. This detail not only allows one to understand the differences between the political life cycle of male and female migrants but further enriches the arguments. By using an ethnographic approach, the author unpacks otherwise standardized processes and causes us to question the various contours of citizenship.

By explicitly choosing to weave the theoretical interventions into the ethnographic narratives, some contributions require more effort to understand than if they were presented by themselves. The link between migrant engagement in Mexican politics and migrant engagement in U.S. politics is not clear, and there is little discussion of migrant partisanship in the United States. The author chooses to focus on migrants from Zacatecas because of his familiarity with the area and the fact that it is a primary sending area for migrants. It would be interesting to see how this cycle would play out in the other migrant-sending areas that the author mentions, such as Michoacán. Also, the racial identification of migrants is absent from the story and given the increased focus on Afro-Latino populations in scholarly and popular literature, it would be useful to incorporate racial understandings into the narrative in some way.

More broadly, would this study look differently in Texas or Arizona versus California? How much of transnational citizenship exists because dual nationality is permitted in both the United States and Mexico? How would the transnational citizenship concept look for immigrants from countries who have a desire—yet an inability to participate in cross-border politics due to conflict or political turmoil? Also, given the author's explicit discussion of the United States' racialized migration policy, how would the concept of transnational citizenship work for immigrants from other races (e.g. Black immigrants from the Caribbean or Africa)? That these questions for further inquiry and others can be made speak to the relevance and importance of this work.

The work empirically contributes to the understanding of Mexican Americans in general and immigrants more broadly by complicating the processes and narratives of belonging. Félix uses the world of Mexican migrants to make solid contributions to theories of nationalism, political participation, and identity formation. He also challenges us to rethink and broaden our understandings of citizenship and naturalization. In addition to its scholarly value, this book will be useful for policy makers interested in how immigration policies can make participation in civic lives on both sides of the border easier and more robust. Félix's work is both timely and necessary.