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THE REPRESENTATION OF THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER IN TELEVISION NEWS: TEXTUAL ANALYSIS ON BODIES AND SECURITY ENFORCEMENT

LA REPRESENTACIÓN DE LA FRONTERA MÉXICO-ESTADOS UNIDOS EN LAS NOTICIAS TELEVISIVAS: ANÁLISIS TEXTUAL SOBRE CUERPOS Y SEGURIDAD REFORZADA

David González Hernández

Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Occidente, México

Autor de correspondencia: David González Hernández, email: davidgonzalez@iteso.mx

Abstract

This article analyzes how television news has enhanced the role of representation of the United States-Mexico border in themes such as immigration, represented in “spectacular” ways related to “warfare.” By using textual analysis on TV reports, I aim to show how local television network news in the United States (NBC) and Mexico (Televisa) construct the representation of the U.S./Mexico border through a particular conflicting vision to account for border enforcement and interventions on both sides and with similar visual strategies. The analysis centers on actual “visual text” or television news reports, which tries to demonstrate how assumptions guide the activity of local network coverage, and how, at the same time, limits what the news reports, and consequently contributes to the perpetuation of a representation related to “crisis” in the border region.

Keywords: Media Representation, Television News, U.S.-Mexico border, Textual Analysis

Resumen

Este artículo analiza cómo las noticias de televisión han sobredimensionado la representación de la frontera de Estados Unidos y México en temas de inmigración de manera "espectacular" y relacionada con un discurso de "guerra". A partir del análisis textual de noticias televisivas, mi objetivo es demostrar cómo las noticias de cadenas de televisión local en los Estados Unidos (NBC)

y México (Televisa) construyen una representación de la frontera entre los Estados Unidos y México a través de una particular visión conflictiva para dar cuenta de la seguridad, el orden e intervención en la frontera, con estrategias visuales similares. El análisis se centra en el "texto visual" o en los reportajes de noticias de televisión, que intenta analizar las suposiciones guían la actividad de la cobertura y cómo, al mismo tiempo, limita lo que se informa en las noticias. Esto, en consecuencia, contribuye a la perpetuación de una representación relacionada con la "crisis" de la región fronteriza.

Palabras clave: Representación Mediática, Noticias Televisivas, Frontera México-Estados Unidos, Análisis Textual

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Introduction

There is a consensus among media scholars about the use (or accusation) of television in general, but especially television news, to represent "the real world" in a very selective manner, from early (Fiske, 1987; Hall et al., 1978; Hartley, 1982; Jensen, 1987; Schudson, 2005; Postman & Powers, 2008) to more contemporary ones (Brown & Roemer, 2016; Freedman, 2011; Lewis, 2016; Ponce, 2015). Much of the discussion is ultimately concerned with the issue of power (Gurevitch, 1991/2004; Schudson, 2011), although the notion of power has been conceptualized differently in diverse genealogies of knowledge, the primary motivation for its concern match: Television news and media in general, should be

scrutinized because they exercise considerable power and influence in modern societies.

A "cultural critique" perspective drives the academic research consensus that still exposes, especially in the field of communication media studies, the differential news treatment of social groups in conformity with the well-established hierarchies of power and privileges (Hall, 1996; Lewis, 2016). The "cultural critique" orientation (Ang, 1990), commonly found in Cultural Studies social research, is interested in culture by the historical and particular meanings with an open-ended politically oriented debate, aimed at evaluating and producing critique on our contemporary cultural condition.

Today, it is common to recognize the mutual constitution of media and the

contemporary cultural condition. This assumption underlines the possibility that television institutions can be examined in relational contexts and systems of communication such as the content or, understood in cultural media studies mostly from the analytically or formalist perspective of “texts,” such as multilayered meanings. In more direct and sustained consideration to the “nature” and cultural impact of communication media, text defines a symbolic form of power: the “capacity to intervene in the course of events, using the production and transmission of symbolic forms” (Thompson, 1995, p. 17).

My argument is that television news has enhanced the role of representation of the United States and Mexico border in themes such as immigration in ways that had a formative “spectacular” (related to “warfare”) impact on this system of communication, and hence on the “balance of symbolic power” between United States and Mexico television news and “real” individuals (migrants). Television news uses on the most distinctive features, namely its representation of sites and people, in particular, people’s bodies —powerful features or not— in their process of storytelling. News coverage of borders constitutes one of the most visible features of the contemporary world. The overflow of recent news stories about the U.S.-Mexico border under Donald Trump presidency

provides just a small indication of the proliferation of coverage on both countries. News stories that have also overflow the digital realm (Carlos & Becerra, 2018). However, news coverage of people and the border has decades of history linked to topics such as immigration, trafficking, binational trade, and policies.

Using textual analysis my aim in this article is to show how local television network news in the United States (NBC) and Mexico (Televisa) constructs the representation of the U.S./Mexico border through a particular conflicting vision to account for border enforcement and interventions on both sides and with similar visual strategies. The analysis centers on two actual “visual text” or television news reports from 2007 (NBC) and 2012 (Televisa), which tries to demonstrate how assumptions guide the activity of local network coverage, and how, at the same time, limits what the news report. Consequently, it contributes to the perpetuation of a representation related to a “crisis” in the border region.

Representation and media

The concept of representation can help understand, at some levels, the notion of Television News as “text” (Barthes, 1981). The idea of form and representation resonates with Hall’s culture definition “By culture, here I mean the actual grounded terrain of

practices, representations, languages, and customs of any specific society. I also mean the contradictory forms of common sense which have taken root in and helped shape popular life” (Hall, 1996, p. 439). These different aspects of culture related to the construction of social meanings, where meanings rely on representation through language: A process of constructing reality.

To Chris Barker, a “good deal of cultural studies is centered on questions of representation. That is, on how the world is socially constructed and represented to and by us in meaningful ways... meaning have certain materiality. That is, they are embedded in sounds, inscriptions, objects, images, books, magazines and television programs” (Barker, 2008, pp. 7-8). Exposing the control of representation is one key element (Hall & Morley, 2018). There is a good set of relationship between Stuart Hall approach’s to representation and the Poststructuralist approach when involves viewing representation as something larger or abroad than particular representation. In such

manner, there is literature concerning the study of culture as signifying practices of representation in race¹, gender², and politic³; raising questions of inclusion and exclusion. Furthermore, in “Representation, meaning, and language,” Stuart Hall (1997) establishes that representation is defined as an interpretative activity that subjects engage in communicating and making sense of experience. This “making sense” is constructed over language and operates through a process where concepts are organized in particular ways into a “system of representation.”⁴

The terms of “representation” and “media” have a long history together, at least over the past forty years. In the early years of Cultural Studies, it was difficult to separate the development of Television Studies from Cultural Studies (Miller, 2002). This factor partly explains the converging disciplines and perspectives in Television Studies: Textual traditions, sociology, mass communication, and contemporary feminist theories, structuralism, post-structuralism,

¹ To Paul Gilroy (2000) the representation of African-American as victims or objects through circulation of stereotypes, prejudices, images, and knowledge manifest a crisis of “raciology”—the discourse of race difference— produced by a white colonial power that we must overcome.

² The representation of gender also raises issues of power and asymmetrical relations among men and women.

³ The written, audio, visual and audiovisual discourses link with aspects of democracy, citizenship and the public sphere define a “politics of representation.” Is the interlinking between

micro-politics identity/representation with the macro-politics of institutional and cultural rights.

⁴ According to Hall, there are two systems of representation. The internal representation, a representation related to mental process, the type of representation we figuratively embrace and maneuver in our minds. The external representation, that is, the material expression or manifestation of language through words, images, objects, sounds, and movements. Representation is what media is all about, denoting—as the term does— signs, symbols, depictions, likeness, and substitutions.

post-colonial studies, queer theory, and Marxist critical thought. Media representation, especially television is implicated in the “provision and the selective construction of social knowledge, for social imagery, through which we perceive the ‘worlds’, the ‘lived realities’ of others, and imaginarily reconstruct their lives and ours into some intelligible ‘world of the hole’” (Hall, 1977, p. 140). According to Hall, there is a link between the system of representation and the system of culture and media.⁵

Television news

The news is one of the principal texts of television. Although the analysis of TV news could seem outdated in an era where everything revolves around social media, the way in which news today is represented still deals with factors related to objectivity, construction of the “real world,” narrative and language use (Fiske, 1987). Television news appears to be “the most real” of the programs in television to achieve neutrality toward bias (Golding & Elliot, 1979; Meltzer, 2010). The background on “news” is rooted in the liberal press of the eighteenth century, related to the Enlightenment (Schudson, 2011) and the empirical notion of reality. The

idea of objectivity assumes that news television broadcast is supposedly not to take sides and are required to present an impartial summary of significant events.

Television news selects the events, their criteria for putting reality together is not clear most of the time. Michael Schudson (2005) argues, following Richard Hoggart, that the ambiguous criteria for the news selection depend on culture and the ideological environment that determines the form and content of news. Television news programs present “stories” in the form of “narrative with principal and minor actors, connected sequence, heroes and villains, beginning, middle and end, signaling of dramatic turns, a reliance on familiar plots” (McQuail, 1987, p. 206). In some occasions, the form is more important than the content (Hartley, 1982).

According to John Fiske (1987), television news uses simple words, and people are a label in stereotypical terms to make stories easier to tell. “Such labeling favors one-sided ways of looking people and events (Fiske, 1987, p. 285). Since the 1990s and 2000s, television news appears across the globe. The production of news holds a strategic position in influence on public life because of these set of aspects. The visual

⁵ These set of conditions demonstrate the interdisciplinary and multidimensional object-approach of media and television because it conceives institutions (with history and interests), technologies (that changes time and space),

symbolic forms or discourses (narratives, texts, programs) and mediums of culture (social change or cultural practices and public).

element of television news has received secondary to little attention—in spite of the conventional wisdom of research claiming that the media environment drives on still and moving pictures (Schröder, 2002). According to Wojcieszak (2009), media scholars interested in news primarily analyze still photographs in print media. Thus, “the questions of how images in television news are contextualized, complemented, displaced, explained or contradicted by the auditory channel and linguistic messages on the screen have not been studied extensively” (2009, p. 459). Moreover, to Roy (2011) existing scholarship has primarily relied upon content analysis and reception studies to address the question of power.

U.S.-Mexico border in the media

There is a large body of literature concerning media representations of minorities centered on, mostly, African Americans and Latina/os. More recently, there is an increase of study on the border from a Media Studies perspective. Research about media coverage on the U.S.-Mexico border draws on several academic traditions, which include race and ethnic studies. “These investigations tend to focus around two questions: whether Hispanics are covered in ways proportional to their percentage in the local population (Greenberg, Burgoon, Burgoon & Korzeny, 1983; Van Slyke Turk, Richstad, Bryson, Jr.

& Johnson, 1989) and whether there is a bias in this coverage. Explorations of the latter question suggest that stereotypical symbols have been used in the representation of Mexican Americans” (Wallen, 2003, p. 138). For example, these investigations claim that the U.S. press where Mexicans were labeled as “wetbacks” first, and “illegal aliens” later, are devices that have stigmatized the Latino community (Miller, 2002; Nevins, 2002; Salwen & Soruco, 1997).

The most insightful work is probably Ruth Wallen’s “Barrier or Bridge: Photojournalism of the San Diego/Tijuana Border Region.” Published in 2003, Wallen was one of the first to explore the content and photographs of the border in local newspapers over ten years (1990-2000) systematically. Her opus highlights relations between communication media images and the representations of the U.S.-Mexico border to demonstrate that pictures in U.S. reporting tend toward a more polarized reading than the text. There is a lack of images of cooperation, and the visual preference follows a strategy for negative and dramatic photographs. In contrast, Mexican coverage is much more static, always portraying the border as a bridge from the perspective of official culture in Mexico. Although the depiction continues to be, to some extent, static in Mexican reporting, the notion of the border as a bridge reformulates according to the argument of this article.

In her research on reporting on the immigration rallies of May 2006, Merskin (2008) found that in broadcast coverage of A Day Without an Immigrant, (May 1, 2006) there was a potentially “violent” over-representation of photographs and scenes that show Latinos positioned as threatening. Studies that address the theme of Mexican immigration reveal xenophobic metaphors of war and invasion that criminalize that Latino body, portraying her as a threat to the “American way of life” (Chávez, 2001, 2008; Santa Anna, 2002, 2012). Anti-immigration sentiments have been sustained through a rhetoric of nativism, especially pervasive in California's Proposition 187 during 1994 (Ono & Sloop, 2002). Also, Padín's (2005) research on news reports found that the U.S. press in Oregon simultaneously represented Latinos as a social burden and moral threat. All these studies analyzed magazines, newspapers, radio, and television with extensive historical background detailing U.S. immigration laws and reactions of panic.

Method: Textual Analysis

The study focuses on two news stories: Television news reports broadcast in NBC (United States, English) and Televisa (Mexico, Spanish). Both television channels broadcast along the U.S.-Mexico border

region of San Diego, California (United States) and Tijuana, Baja California (Mexico) but, like most local TV stations with corporate affiliations, are considered the most viewed in the region for each country.

The “cultural critique” or the kind of analysis Ang (1990) calls for is a response that is in part against the “semiotic” turn, that is, to bring back into play reception and broader context. Nevertheless, even as Ang wrote, and as the literature on news media grew with diverse approaches, textual analysis of film and media still proves relevant (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). In this sense, this article draws from the early semiology to ground the study of images, but moving away from the Barthian notion of a single ideology in the analysis of media messages.

The insights of textual studies may help to remind other qualitative researchers that while data sets hold information, they are, first and foremost, texts which must be analyzed and interpreted to yield that information. If the media of qualitative research are language and texts, then various forms of textual and discourse analysis are necessary for several areas of mass communication and several levels of inquiry. (Larsen, 1991, p. 133)

Theoretical sources from Roland Barthes and Charles Sanders Peirce, help applied a textual analysis to news stories. Textual analysis, as a method, explores the “latent meaning of the text” and serves an understating of “why-the-content-is-like-that” (Hall, 1997). Considering news report as texts and cultural forms made available to audiences, the study of news sees texts (including images) as operating on two levels, the denotative and the connotative. Barthes (1977), a French linguist, studied the literal meanings of texts (denotative), and the broader meanings that members of a particular culture associated with the sign (connotative). Barthes developed a method to analyze the way in which signs become new signifiers in broad cultural contexts. This interpretative approach can speak of issues of power, the “connotative practices” (Barthes, 1977; Wallen, 2003), and contains theoretical development and methodological grounding in the interpretation of image and text combination in a determinate cultural context: the semiology of images.

In “Rhetoric of the image” Barthes defines three type of messages (linked by redundancy to produce a whole): The linguistic message or the message made up of words (caption, labels inserted); the code-iconic message, the “literal message” or any meaning “held” in the denoted message; and the symbolic image, the non-coded iconic message related to a larger social code. “All

the knowledge we need to read this message is bound up with our perception. We need to know what an image is and what the objects are. The first message is literal; the second message is symbolic” (Barthes, 1977, p. 36).

According to Barthes, the linguistic can be detached from images messages, but the last two types of messages share the same iconic substance. They are perceived and “read” in cultural context at the same time but only can be distinguished by operational validity, similar to the distinction in the linguistic sign (signifier/signified). In a broad sense, this type of analysis refers to a structural description of the messages, the whole constitution by redundancy or the tying together the linguistic, the literal (denoted) and symbolic (connoted).

The first stage of the analysis involved the description or denotation of the news items selected. Details of both television news reports describe the visuals and the captions. The second stage involved close reading and identification of strategies present. The reading was carried out on a scene-by-scene basis, and the findings were noted on an analysis sheet. The interpretation of the findings within the representational framework of the case study constituted the final stage of the analysis.

United States and Mexican local television news: the border enforcement reporting

My argument is that news media border enforcement and security coverage have altered the conditions under which mediated visibility is exercised, particularly about representations of the U.S.-Mexico border as a “spectacular” (related to “warfare”) zone. These representations have variously influenced a “balance of symbolic power” between the United States and Mexico, as well as shaped news media and public sentiment across both countries.

I further explore these issues by focusing on two examples of television news media. Television news uses the distinctive feature of honing in visually on people and places, focusing mainly on the body —its physical characteristics and gestures— as it engages in the process of storytelling. The decision to select only two news stories mediates the fact that these examples are the most visible subject on the border: The migrant. What is rather striking about U.S.-Mexico televised news reporting from either country is that both use very similar visual strategies. Thus, this study also considers U.S. and Mexico border politics.

In this section, I use textual analysis to demonstrate how local television network news in the United States (NBC) and Mexico (Televisa) construct the representation of the

U.S.-Mexico border through particular visuals of people. The analysis centers on an actual “visual text” or a television news report. It reveals that the working assumptions that guide the activity of local network coverage set limits on news coverage: consequently, contributing to the perpetuation of a representation of conflict related to the border region.

In the case of San Diego, it was a news series on NBC television (December, 2007) that sparked my interest in what I term the “out of control” representation of the border. The news report describes the escalating tension in the boundary zone of San Diego and Tijuana between migrants (whether residents or smugglers was not clear) and border patrol. However, the images that accompanied the narrative drew my attention to the visual strategies: what Barthes (1977) calls the “connotative procedures.” I noticed how the border region was almost always represented in relation to a “war zone” in surveillance mode, with images revealing objects such as a double fence (“iron curtain”), infrared night vision scopes, helicopters, ground sensors, illumination with bright lights by night, and all-terrain border patrol vehicles moving up and down the area.

The other case, a news report on migrants aired on Notivisa Canal 12 (the Televisa station in Tijuana), portrays the threat of fellow-national migrants to the local Mexican public. The story reports the

struggles of local authorities to maintain control of the impoverished migrant “living in our streets.” The imagery presented on television is sometimes similar to the NBC television report.

The United States example: NBC television news

The first case is a news report dates back to December 17th, 2007, and was transmitted by the local NBC station (KNSD).⁶ This news report, uploaded on YouTube, is under the name “Attacks on US Border Patrol Agents in San Diego, CA” (See the example in still pictures).

The news report lasted one minute and thirty-two seconds in KNSD Channel 7/39 San Diego, a local channel affiliate to the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), a United States television network headquartered in New York City, the property of NBC Universal, a subsidiary of Comcast Corporation. The story is about the boundary zone, “traditionally” related to a history of crime and smuggling that of late was getting worse. It describes border patrol agents encountering several assaults

throughout two months with rock throwers and “smugglers,” which required them to introduce a special response team” equipped to shoot pepper spray across the US border. However, there are reports of residents of Tijuana complaining about the fired canisters at their homes. Border patrol agents claimed that the “smugglers” use the Tijuana neighborhoods as a shield and that it’s difficult to be accurate in hitting them with spray. The story ends suggesting the possibility of some solution about immigration policy between the two countries.

The news report is composed of 28 images: 18 images provided by the border patrol agency (16 moving images that lasted a total of 39 seconds and two still photo pictures of a border patrol unit). Two more images from interviews and three images from the network camera recorded along the border (including fences, images with the city of Tijuana as background, lasting a combined 13 seconds).

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zD6cN14Xq1k>

Image 1. Immigrants climbing the border fence

In the audio-visual situation, the television viewers encounter images that present the boundary zone of Tijuana and San Diego. The graphic layout of the images (Image 1) contain captions that function as a time-place location “San Diego” and the source “West cam 22, 2006-10-17” and the news reporter identification “Greg Bledsoe/KNSD reporting.” The caption of the image adds an attention-catching voice device “It’s one of the most notorious neighborhoods of the border.” However, the moving images show three human forms moving through the middle of the double fence and no iconic denotation of a “neighborhood” or a type of urban life community. These pictures assist the viewers’ inferential process about who

are the people in the images and what they are doing. A surveillance camera records white light against the green glow of a monitor recording as a single shot silhouette shadows (immigrants) from a distance —so you cannot see their faces. The illegality or criminality of their actions is constructed by the position of climbing, and therefore, trespassing of the fence.

The image of a government official (Image 2), a black person dressed in a green uniform with a badge on his chest and the flag in the background —a headquarters location, is shown in an illuminated close up. The caption reads: “Damon Foreman. Border Patrol agent.”

Image 2. Border Patrol Agent



The image of the official reveals him standing up and looking directly at the interviewer, as an iconic-symbolic sign conventionally used to indicate a government declaratory-explanatory attitude. He states: “It’s an area whom’ has a tradition and history for being a smuggling type of neighborhood.” His voice alternates with the voice of the reporter: “And border patrol agents say lately it’s getting worse.” The audience then hears the official: “The increase in the assault has been skyrocketing,” to which the reporter responds by saying, “The place is Tijuana’s “Colonia Libertad” neighborhood. Over the past eight weeks averaging about once per day someone on the Mexican side targets agents on the U.S

with rocks.” Next, images show an altercation (rock throwing) of individuals with border patrol agents (Image 3).

This sequence transmits images on behalf of the government suggesting the possibility of visual sensationalism and the legitimacy of their decisions. There are images presented in a wide shot frame of male people moving in a “running away” fashion from authorities, or chaotic movements –both the agents as the “smugglers.” For the most part, the people portrayed in the images are faceless and act in a threatening and combative manner toward the camera (Image 3), or are portrayed engaging in altercation by throwing rocks or fighting with border patrol agents.

Image 3. Altercation at the border



The word to label the people in the altercation is the stereotypical “smuggler” which according to Fiske (1987) favors a one-sided way of looking at people and events. It is not

clear these are “smugglers” or criminals. The people are voiceless in this news report, yet they’re reified as a portrait as the “alien other.”

Image 4. Human Rights Activist



In the spirit of being objective, the news report attempts to tell the story from different points of view (however, migrants, residents of Tijuana, or even the “smugglers” were not

interviewed, so there is not a clear identification of the people in the images). The news report shows an interview of a Latin/Mexican-American human rights

activist, seated in a desk with a bookshelf behind him (Image 4).

This connotes an air of knowledge and agency. In a declarative sentence, he defines the situation that “Some folks have described as a war zone.” This feature expression, supplemented by a series of images (Image 3), invites the viewer to witness an account of “warfare.” Through

most of the text, there are slides of images suggesting a representation of the border as a “war zone,” an instance of word-play to describe a “no man’s land.” The verbal and visual signs appear to create a universe of meaning in which the conflicts between border patrol agents and “smugglers” have been increasing toward a situation of a “war zone.”

Image 5. The border fence and Tijuana



This universe is enforced by the framing of the fence as the subject in some images (Image 5), with a dramatic shot of the wall itself dividing two lands, enhancing the perspective of distance from the viewer. This example matches Wallen’s (2003) findings. Wallen argued that during the 1990s, the *San Diego Union Tribune* coverage of the border evolved in relationship to changing political realities “though the images may tend toward a more polarized reading than the text” (2003,

p. 137). That is, the tendency of photographs to represent a more dichotomous point of view than the text, thus, images are still “one step behind” the content. These findings stated that the U.S. reporting lacked images of “cooperation” between San Diego and Tijuana in their print pages, and the visual preference followed a strategy for the often negative and the dramatic photographs. “If newspapers are to represent increased ties between the two cities, photojournalists need

to explore methods to visually depict collaboration and editors must be willing to print these pictures” (Wallen, 2003, p. 158).

The Mexican example: Televisa television news

The second case is a news report dates back to August 10th, 2012 transmitted from a local network, Televisa (XEWTV).⁷ This news report, also uploaded on YouTube, is called: “*Realiza DIF Tijuana jornada asistencial de atención al migrante*” [DIF’s {Department of the National System of Family Integral Development} Tijuana branch carries out a welfare attention day to migrants]. The length of the news report is less 50 seconds long. This television report consists of one (verbal) unit: The studio anchor reads both the report presentation and the narrative. Usually, television news reports consist of four units: a) the introduction, read by a studio presenter; b) the basic news narrative, presented by a news reporter; c) the sound-bites, produced

by news sources embedded in the news narrative; and d) the closure of the report, by the studio presenter (Nylund, 2003).

This television news adopts a style of presentation that transmits the idea of local authorities; in this case the mayor of Tijuana, and can almost be read as a municipal “bulletin.” There is no contextualization or evaluation from the anchor about this material on-camera.

The news report tells the story of the overflowing deported migrants living as indigents under the streets of Tijuana, on the river canal. To “maintain control” and “counteract this situation” the Mayor of Tijuana carried out a welfare program, which consisted of a series of social services along the border canal: Legal counsel, medical and health attention. The news report ends assessing the difficulties to maintain control in a city that receives at least 400 deportees daily.

⁷ XEWTV Channel 12 Tijuana, the local channel affiliate to Televisa, Mexico’s largest television network.

Image 6. Mexican newswoman anchor



Five images comprise the news report. All of the images are from the network camera showing what seem to be migrants walking along the border canal. In the audio-visual situation, the audience first encounters the customary practice of having a newswoman merely reading a script on camera with a still-image as background, in this case, five individuals standing along the border canal (Image 6).

The graphic layout of the first images (Image 7) presents three captions that function as: a) newscast identification “N,” meaning, Notivisa, b) the subject “Attention to migrants”: and c) the location “Migrants at the canal. Public health problem.”

Image 7. Migrants at the Tijuana Canal



The narration continues during the voice-over, “It is estimated that more than two thousand indigent take refuge and they live inside the Tijuana River Canal. This represents one of the greater problems of public health in our city.” However, the eight-second establishing shot shows five individuals on the border canal: Four walking

around on a dirt road, one sitting down. These five individuals are shot from a distance; the video assists the viewers’ inferential process about who these people are, and what they are doing: Silhouette figures—whose faces can’t be recognized—assumed as migrants, living on the international fence and River Canal, and blamed for being a potential menace.

Image 8. Migrants at the Tijuana River Canal



In the next image (a pan image of twenty seconds duration) one can locate the action within the larger space of the border (Image 8), but there is no iconic denotation of the welfare program in “which thirty modules of different services were installed: Legal counsel, medical and health attention” or the “more than fifteen hundred people responded.” Instead, the camera work illustrates a certain stretch of the border river trough in a high-angle pan taken from a distance (a concrete canal filled with dirt and bushes where wastewater runs parallel to the migrants living site) targeting eight or nine

individuals walking across the river canal. Playing with a language familiar to U.S. audiences (the previous example), where the border is often portrayed as seamy and lawless, the footage suggests that the “greatest problem” of the border is to be found within the canal boundary. These images reinforce the idea of the proximity of the migrant and environmental degradation.

The frame of this news report evokes the local government view of migration, a quote from Tijuana’s Mayor Carlos Bustamante, assessing the legitimacy of its decisions to “maintain control.” However,

the visual representation tends toward sensationalism. As stated, the images are from a wide-shot perspective (the same as the previous example): Faceless people moving and hiding in the bushes from the lens of the camera. There are no interviews—not even with the Mayor—, people are voiceless and “shady.” Migrants, once deported, represents a serious threat to public health, and one reason for the “out of control” border. What is more critical, refugee migrants also seem to be indigents.

Discussion

We have yet to understand the full significance and long-term consequences of television representation of the U.S-Mexico border. They are indeed essential and in need of further study. These examples show how the exercise of political power is open to view, not only in the sphere of local politics but on an international/regional scale. These actions, such as border patrol and military or police interventions along the border take place in an international and regional arena (San Diego-Tijuana region): They are visible, observable, and capable of being witnessed simultaneously in television by thousands of

individuals living around the U.S.-Mexico border. The proliferation of cross-border news channels means viewers no longer rely solely on national broadcasters for information. Of course, the increasing availability of channels such as Tv Azteca America, Telemundo, Univision, NBC, ABC, CBS, Televisa, Tv Azteca, in open air households across the border does not mean that they are viewed regularly. Among other reasons, this is because many people do not speak the language of these channels—English and Spanish—. Nevertheless, the accessibility and the increasing presence of multiple news channels, and thus images, has made multi-channel homes important sites for comparison and reflection.

Media reporting about migrants, in summary, maximizes the presence of “conflict” on television screens in a very similar visual manner, although with differences in content. Whereas the U.S. example represents the border in a “warzone” frame that internationalizing a security consciousness of surveillance of the border, the Mexican television report on the “out of control” border in need of surveillance in accordance to public health or humanitarian service, base its relevance on local public.

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Source images

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