

(Mobile book) Transborder Lives: Indigenous Oaxacans in Mexico, California, and Oregon

Transborder Lives: Indigenous Oaxacans in Mexico, California, and Oregon

Lynn Stephen

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Lynn Stephen : Transborder Lives: Indigenous Oaxacans in Mexico, California, and Oregon before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Transborder Lives: Indigenous Oaxacans in Mexico, California, and Oregon:

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. EhBy DonHad to buy it for school10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Insightful, Well-Researched and PresentedBy R. BornemanTransborder Lives: Indigenous Oaxacans in Mexico, California, Oregon By Lynn StephenLynn Stephen's Transborder Lives ends with a call for

"producing results that are useful to those they work with as well as interesting to an audience of anthropologists and students" (325). Stephen's own work as a "collaborative activist ethnographic researcher" (321) has certainly risen to the occasion. Mixing substantial portions of transcribed interviews with historical research and careful analysis, Lynn Stephen's work bears out her thesis that the migration of Oaxacans to and from the U.S. has had profound impact across many borders: national, gendered, linguistic, political, economic. Her adoption of the term "transborder" (as opposed to the politically limited terms "transnational" or "binational") is done without fanfare and amply demonstrated to be apt (6, 65). Among the greatest strengths of Stephen's work is her production of what Geertz referred to as "thick" ethnography. Her reproduction of several substantial portions of her subject interviews does not detract from her work, but is seamlessly integrated into her variety of topics. From the horrific narrative of border-crosser Emiliano Gmez (155 - 159) to the more reflective political commentary of Juan Gmez (45 - 49) or the focus on the impact of 9/11 on immigrant experience from Patricia Cruz (153 - 154), Lynn Stephen effectively portrays a sense of a transborder community that transcends simple individual portraits. In terms of her own dictum, "let them speak for themselves" (307), Stephen's integration of their narratives with her broader portrait of the complex interactions of transborder mechanisms succeeds admirably. Throughout her work Stephen's activism keeps us aware that her work is not operating within an academic bubble. This work even applies to those seemingly far from the locus of immigrant lives; it touches on potent issues as 9-11 (14, 130, 153); the role of multi-national-corporate prepared food in America and American economy (10, 131 - 134), and America's historical struggles with race and racism, including the Alien Land Law - 1913 (69), Operation Wetback (74); *Perez v. Lippold* (222); and Oregon State Constitution (150). While some of her work focuses on the Zapotec and Mixtec communities in Oaxaca, it is clear that the "impact" of migration is not merely on the U.S., but rather profoundly affects lives in Mexico, such as the multi-generational impact of immigration (12) and profound cultural shifts on world-views (20, 51). Stephen charts the complexity of transborder effects from the global, as in the impact of free trade (122 - 131, 313 - 314) to the intimate, dealing with gender roles and domestic violence or gendered shifts in income (53 - 55, 183). Staunchly avoiding a polarizing "racial" filter in her work, Stephens boldly explores what Arredondo referred to as the "striations within" the Mexican community (212 - 220). The topics she addresses are wide-ranging but ever centrally focused on her transborder theme. Her research and formal structures are well handled. When she discusses the U.S. census' work on immigrants, she actively demonstrates census issues (221 - 230) by producing the original documents (228) instead of simply telling us about the census (as was the case in Molina's work). She even provides a brief overview of the pre-Conquest of Oaxaca in her presentation of the on-line historical information generated by members of the local village (283 - 293). She thus smoothly integrates a portion of Oaxaca's historical past in a contemporary discussion of the use of modern technologies in a transborder context. Her citations range widely, from Anzalda (23) to Huntington (64). She provides her readers with quite informative charts, graphs (87 - 93) and maps (104 - 115). All in all this is an excellent work, deserving praise. This is not to say the book is without its flaws. There are brief awkward moments in her writing, however minor they may be. Her presentation of the notion of civic and religious cargo (ix, 55 - 62) was unnecessarily confusing due to a lack of contextualization in her use of the term. There were also a few awkward moments which emerged in her reference to Foucault (154), to California's "twenty" missions (66) and to the unquestioned assertion that the indigenous of Mexico always were ranked below Mestizos (207). Occasionally decontextualized information was presented, for instance, in the vote on the San Andrés Accords, while she notes that the legislation was not passed in Oaxaca (210), she gives no explanation as to why this might have been the case. Such oversights are infrequent, however. There are a few topics which she neglects in this already comprehensive and wide-ranging work, but which may serve for further fertile exploration in a trans-border context. It is obviously outside the scope of her investigation to do ethnographic reportage on the U.S. citizen entities affected by the transborder phenomenon. It would be fascinating to see how she would treat border guards and Minutemen (29), formal and popular religion, gang violence (25, 37), and evolving mechanisms of chain migration (mentioned somewhat, but more in the context of "coyotes"). I found it interesting that while I gained a sense of these transborder lives, I never quite gained a sense of place in her work. While I feel she tries to be attuned to the particularities of place, in the end, I did not have a clear portrait of Teotihuacan del Valle or of San Augustin Atenango; nor was there a clear sense of what it was like to be in Santa Ana, Oxnard, or even Woodburn. While I agree with her assessment: "The numbers of Mexicans are so great in towns like Santa Ana and Oxnard, California... that we could speak of them as extensions of Mexico" (63), and while she quite effectively provided a vivid portrait of the transborder lives in these areas, the locales themselves remained vague and ambiguous. Then again, Stephens is writing ethnography, not geography. As a concluding comment, I was deeply struck by the personal account of Pancho Mendoza (218 - 219). The same years he was in Oxnard were the same years I was teaching ESL to immigrant students in the same school district. While Pancho was not one of my students, his personal portrait of the ethnic sub-divisions and negotiations within the high school setting reflected potently the experience and observation I had as a teacher in the same setting at the same time. Altogether that simple account brought to reality of Lynn Stephen's work to a clarity and sense of personal engagement for me, which I deeply appreciate.

Lynn Stephens innovative ethnography follows indigenous Mexicans from two towns in the state of Oaxaca the Mixtec community of San Agustn Atenango and the Zapotec community of Teotitln del Valle who periodically leave their homes in Mexico for extended periods of work in California and Oregon. Demonstrating that the line separating Mexico and the United States is only one among the many borders that these migrants repeatedly cross (including national, regional, cultural, ethnic, and class borders and divisions), Stephen advocates an ethnographic framework focused on transborder, rather than transnational, lives. Yet she does not disregard the state: She assesses the impact migration has had on local systems of government in both Mexico and the United States as well as the abilities of states to police and affect transborder communities. Stephen weaves the personal histories and narratives of indigenous transborder migrants together with explorations of the larger structures that affect their lives. Taking into account U.S. immigration policies and the demands of both commercial agriculture and the service sectors, she chronicles how migrants experience and remember low-wage work in agriculture, landscaping, and childcare and how gender relations in Oaxaca and the United States are reconfigured by migration. She looks at the ways that racial and ethnic hierarchies inherited from the colonial era hierarchies that debase Mexico's indigenous groups are reproduced within heterogeneous Mexican populations in the United States. Stephen provides case studies of four grass-roots organizations in which Mixtec migrants are involved, and she considers specific uses of digital technology by transborder communities. Ultimately Stephen demonstrates that transborder migrants are reshaping notions of territory and politics by developing creative models of governance, education, and economic development as well as ways of maintaining their cultures and languages across geographic distances.

Lynn Stephens multisited ethnography insightfully unpacks globalization from below, revealing the contours of cross-border communities as they reweave the social fabrics of twenty-first-century North America. Jonathan Fox, University of California, Santa Cruz