Joanna Dreby, *Divided by Borders: Mexican Migrants and Their Children* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010). xxi, 311 pp., $21.95 paper.

Most of the recent books on the children of immigrants, whether they focus on new arrivals (*Learning a New Land*, 2008) or on children born in the United States (*Inheriting the City*, 2008), have concentrated on these youngsters' adaptation to American society, their performance in school and the workplace, and their attempts to renegotiate ethnic identity in a new land. Joanna Dreby's *Divided by Borders* is different. She explores what happens to the children of Mexican immigrants to the U.S., and to the migrants themselves, when those children are left behind in Mexico.

The larger context for Dreby's analysis is both the intense pressure on low-wage and unemployed labor to migrate in a global economy, and the increasingly repressive U.S. immigration policies that make migration more difficult and dangerous, and that undermine the ability of migrant parents to remain connected to their children. Many of the migrant parents that Dreby studied, for example, chose to leave their children in Mexico with grandparents or other relatives rather than put them at risk while crossing the border illegally; and they were unable to visit those children in Mexico, sometimes for

years, because of concern that they might not be able to cross back into the U.S.

Dreby employs what she terms "domestic ethnography" (p. 4) to explore the lives and actions of mothers, father, children, and extended family members, particularly grandparents, as they struggle to implement "the immigrant bargain": "the expectation that parents will make economic gains during their time abroad and that children will make their parents' sacrifices worthwhile" (page 4). She conducted formal interviews with 142 parents, children, and caregivers in both central New Jersey and southern Mexico; examined several thousand surveys of Mexican school children, along with drawings from hundreds of elementary students; interviewed twenty-three teachers and administrators (both in Mexico and New Jersey); and analyzed data from in-depth interviews and observations of a dozen migrant families over a four year period. This multi-pronged methodology enabled her to evaluate family narratives from a variety of sources.

Unfortunately, for all concerned, the bargain between immigrant parents and their children in Mexico proves to be very difficult to fulfill. The parents find low wage work in restaurants, construction, factories, and landscaping; but even when they squeeze in two or more of these jobs each week their remittances to family members are often meager, barely able to cover the children's basic needs. Their children suffer emotionally from the separation and frequently drop out of school during their teens, often with a strong desire to migrate north themselves.

Divided by Borders has separate chapters that illustrate how **gender dynamics** impact or are impacted by the migration experience. Dreby discovers that children, parents, and caregivers all agree on the proper roles of fathers and mothers: fathers are responsible for the economic wellbeing of their families and mothers provide emotional and moral support, or as she phrases it, "a mother's love is expressed in words and a father's love is

expressed in dollars, or pesos" (page 79). This places a special burden in migrant mothers, since migrant fathers can fulfill their obligations and feel good about themselves simply by sending remittances; but migrant mothers must find ways to offer their children, many of whom are very young, the love and emotional support they seek through phone calls, packages, and letters. The pain that these mothers feel being separated from their children is a central theme of the book. Mothers who remarry or find new partners in the US are also frequently judged harshly by family in Mexico, more so than are fathers.

At the same time, the children's caregivers in Mexico by and large are grandmothers or aunts, those Dreby calls "middlewomen." They love their grandchildren, nieces or nephews, but they feel obligated to raise these children, often on meager resources, while sustaining the children's relationship with their parents. This takes a heavy toll on aging grandparents who must cope with the demands and disillusionment of adolescent grandchildren. And for other extended family caregivers, questions from migrant parents in the United States about how their money is being spent and whether their children are well cared for can severely strain family ties.

While the children suffer greatly from being separated from their parents, they also, Dreby notes, find ways to exercise some control over circumstances by demanding additional gifts from their missing parents, by pleading to rejoin their parents in the U.S. and ratcheting up the parents' guilt over leaving them in the first place, and by acting out at school or in the community in ways that threaten the immigrant bargain. By the time they reach adolescence, children's resentment over having been left behind fades into ambivalence over ever reuniting with their parents. Even in adolescence, however, sons are generally more able to draw upon their parents' contacts and resources to migrate north and to find work. For daughters, teenage romance frequently presents new opportunities and new families to replace the one that they lost.

While the connections between increasingly harsh U.S. immigration policies and the choices that migrant parents make could be better integrated throughout the book, Dreby's final chapter makes this linkage painfully clear and establishes *Divided by Borders* as a first rate addition to the literature on immigration. One can't help but reflect on the families in this book, struggling honorably to make the best out of very difficult choices, when one hears comments from right wing politicians about "anchor babies" and proposals to revise the birthright provisions of the U.S. Constitution. They should really read this book.

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