



Salvadoran Migration to Southern California: Redefining El Hermano Lejano (New World Diasporas)

BETH BAKER-CRISTALES

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Beth Baker-Cristales describes the ways in which migrants create multiple--and sometimes contradictory--relations to the states in which they live, demonstrating how the state becomes a central actor in the processes of globalization and transnationalism. Looking at the national state as both a form of governance and a powerful idea, she argues that the national state shapes the ways migrants conceive of themselves and the way they construct social identities.

The web of transnational interactions is complex, she emphasizes, and the exchange of information, persons, capital, goods, and political power expands state boundaries and affects populations in two countries. Transnationalism stretches the notion of citizenship.

Nearly two million Salvadorans live in the United States today, most arriving in the last two decades and half of them living in the Los Angeles metropolitan area. The money they send "home" has come to replace traditional exports as the largest single source of foreign currency in El Salvador, and Salvadorans in the homeland look to the United States as a path to upward class mobility and increased wealth.

Baker-Cristales offers a grounded history of Salvadoran migration and examines the institutions and practices that facilitate migration to the United States and help migrants to bridge the geographic distance between the two countries. She analyzes rich ethnographic data on national identity--collected during a decade of fieldwork with Salvadoran migrants in Los Angeles--relating it to conceptions of belonging and exclusion and to the role of the national state in globalization.

This important work will enliven debates over globalization and international migration. It will be of interest to scholars of Central American studies, immigration, transnationalism, and global processes, as well as to those interested in the concept of the state.

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