

### Public Migration Policies from an Agnotological Perspective: Institutional Omission and Confusion Around the “Bracero” File

### Políticas públicas migratorias en perspectiva agnotológica: omisión y confusión institucionales en torno al expediente “bracero”

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#### ABSTRACT

This article derives from a series of previous studies since 2008 about the movement of former workers in different parts of Mexico. This movement has several sociological edges: social rights, labor migration, return migrations, public migration policies, emotional experiences of migration, old age, rural areas, etc. The role of ignorance in the relationship between braceros and authorities is addressed, in the light of this complexity. Ignorance, known as agnotology from the pioneering works of the historian Robert Proctor, has become an object of study to understand another aspect of contemporary governance. It consists in the deliberate production of ignorance that is infused and spread to a given audience, often taking advantage of its vulnerability. It works by omission (absence of information) or confusion (multiple information). The above is my object of study and then I present its first research results.

*Keywords:* 1. public migration policies, 2. Bracero Program, 3. Agnotology, 4. Mexico-United States.

#### RESUMEN

Este artículo deriva de una serie de estudios previos que he venido realizando desde 2008 acerca del movimiento de los exbraceros en distintas partes de México. Dicho movimiento tiene varias aristas sociológicas: derechos sociales, migración laboral legal, migraciones de retorno, políticas públicas migratorias, experiencias emocionales de la migración, tercera edad, medio rural, entre otros. Ante esta complejidad de temas, se antoja abordar el papel de la ignorancia en la relación entre braceros y autoridades. La ignorancia, conocida como agnotología desde los trabajos pioneros del historiador Robert Proctor, se ha vuelto objeto de estudio para comprender otro aspecto de la gobernanza contemporánea. Consiste en la producción deliberada de la ignorancia que se infunde y difunde a un público determinado, aprovechando a menudo su vulnerabilidad. Funciona por omisión (ausencia de información) o por confusión (multiplicación de informaciones). Lo anterior constituye mi objeto de estudio cuyos primeros frutos de investigación presento a continuación.

*Palabras claves:* 1. políticas públicas migratorias, 2. Programa Bracero, 3. agnotología, 4. México-Estados Unidos.

Date received: January 23, 2017

Date accepted: October 25, 2017

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## INTRODUCTION

*Ignorance of the law excuses no one from compliance therewith.*

This article exposes the first results of an ongoing investigation. Its existence and relevance derive from a series of previous studies since 2008 about the movement of ex-braceros (Schaffhauser, 2012-2015) in different parts of Mexico (both rural and urban areas of the states of Michoacán, Zacatecas and Mexico City). The inquiries I have made are part of direct observations of protests, marches and assemblies of braceros. In the same way, they are part of my own “appearance” in the parliamentary committee for the subject of braceros, as well as in the precincts of the Congress of the Union and in the Palace of San Lazaro in Mexico City (May 2012). I also interviewed bracero leaders and public bracero,<sup>2</sup> among others. This research focuses on studying and analyzing what happened to Mexican migrant workers after finishing the Bracero Program (officially) in 1964; that is, what institutional luck they had and how their social rights are respected by the corresponding authorities. The above questions are specifically related to the constitution of a peasant savings fund established during the first years of the program (1943-1947). This fund was fed by the contributions of the braceros, discounting 10% of their salaries for that purpose. In the first instance, the American bank Wells Fargo was in charge of its administration and management, then the National Bank of Rural Credit made the payment to its beneficiaries (braceros or rights holders).

During the Bracero Program (1942-1964), this operation was carried out little by little and only for a few, leaving the vast majority of these migrant workers in social vulnerability. In the eyes of the ex-braceros, this process is associated with a gigantic fraud that continues to affect many of them and in which the Mexican State and its institutions have incurred. In the opinion of the lay sociologist, this process corresponds to a problem under study that I detail below and intend to address under the agnotology approach; this is the social and cultural production of ignorance. Indeed, I start from the premise that a fraud or a scam is always nourished by the ignorance of a certain crowd.

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<sup>2</sup>The expression “public bracero” is just vague and its theoretical relevance is to be a notion in the process of conceptual elaboration. His conception is inspired by John Dewey (2003). It refers not only to the braceros who participate in the movement, but also to those who are outside or moderately linked to it. It also concerns the relatives of ex-braceros such as widows, children and grandchildren. What unites these atypical categories is that they were formed in a group that shares the same problem and that has two dimensions: material and financial. In addition, it concerns the payment of the savings and emotional fund because it refers to the search of the bracero public about the recovery of their personal integrity and social identity degraded over the years. In this regard, having a common agency characterizes the public bracero.

Thus, the Social Support Fund for Former Mexican Migrant Workers –the so-called braceros– implemented in Mexico and the United States<sup>3</sup> between 2005 and 2012,<sup>4</sup> is characterized as the devious result of a struggle undertaken by families of ex-braceros, organized in civil associations since the 90s of the last century. On the other hand, it is also a political attempt to correct the undesired effects of the Bracero Program (1942-1964). Its initial political objective was the public organization of Mexican labor migration to meet the needs of North American agriculture and communication infrastructure.<sup>5</sup> These drawbacks derive from the constitution of the aforementioned Peasant Savings Fund. The payment of the money corresponding to that fund has thus far been delayed and inefficient, defrauding hundreds of ex-braceros who currently live in Mexican rural areas, often precariously. It is estimated that there were 4,646,199 contracts signed during the bracero agreements. This sum corresponds to 3,233,755 railroad and agricultural workers since several thousand of them had two or even more contracts throughout the program (Schaffhauser, 2012, pp.211-212).

The protest movement that provokes the partial non-fulfillment of the social rights embodied in the Bracero Program is unprecedented in Mexico. It is a broad social mobilization (virtually all the states of the federation have been involved in it and has even been extended to several entities of the American Union) that mainly groups seniors and their families. It should be noted that this movement has some relevance for gender studies. This is due to the fact that a substantial number of nonconformists actually correspond to their widows since, according to the Bracero proa organization, 14 braceros die every day.

From the above, it is estimated that of those 3,000,000 or more beneficiaries mentioned above, only about 750,000 veterans of the Bracero Program survive today. Moreover, between 2005 and 2012, it is estimated that 217,656 ex-braceros (see maps 1 and 2 on cartography of social supports in Mexico-United States and in Michoacán at the end of the article) received the social support corresponding to the bracero assistance program

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<sup>3</sup>Through the Mexican consulates in the American Union, braceros resident in the United States or simply commuters (frontier) could go to these diplomatic representations to receive their payment, provided they met the requirements set by the Ministry of the Interior.

<sup>4</sup>It is noteworthy that during the administration of Enrique Peña Nieto, due to the reluctance of the PRI government to assume the previous social commitment to the ex-braceros, only two payments were made to these. One was made in December 2015 and the other in November 2018, benefiting a little more than 9,000 people.

<sup>5</sup>The Bracero Program in its beginning had two slopes destined to the field and the construction of railroads. Its implementation was mainly carried out in the states of the southwest and the Pacific coast of the United States, due to the pressure exerted by the lobbying of wealthy farmers in those regions. Later, that is, after the end of the Second World War, the program focused exclusively on agriculture.

through Trust 2106 (and then paid 10230), in the administrations of Presidents Fox and Calderón. This amount corresponds to one third of the number of braceros still alive, and only 7% of the braceros who participated in the program. This movement is also sociologically significant because it opposes rural Mexico to urban Mexico; that is, from deep Mexico to the Mexico of the centers of economic and political decisions. Its social and political impact at the national level is an invitation to reflect, in general, on the situation of older adults in Mexico, as well as the role of the Mexican migrant in the production of national wealth (through remittances and payments for savings funds). Since this problem is binational, it is also an incentive to reflect on the relations between Mexico and the United States in a migratory perspective.

In other words, the study of the bracero movement consists of several sociological edges. Its themes are social movement, social rights, legally organized labor migration,<sup>6</sup> return migrations, public migration policies, emotional experiences of migration (Honneth, 2011), old age, rural areas, migration, etc. Now, my theoretical-methodological experience mainly based on the interactionist and pragmatism paradigm (Dewey, 2003) has allowed me to articulate, in a heuristic way, the reflection on the study of the bracero movement with its public and political dimension; that is, through the complex game of interactions raised from the beginning of the mobilization of ex-braceros. They also lead to the implementation of a social support program aimed at them, through the creation in 2005 of a trust (2106 and subsequently 10230) under the control of SEGOB (see maps 1 and 2 on cartography of social supports in Mexico-United States and in Michoacán at the end of the article). The conduct of this program has suffered a series of political maneuvers by the authorities to postpone or stop the course of its execution.<sup>7</sup>

The correlation of forces between the movement of the braceros and the political power highlights a dimension little attended and studied by researchers. In addition, it has to do with the ignorance that public authorities produce to conceal or distort aspects of its relationship with the unhappy public. It may even suggest that ignorance, also known as

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<sup>6</sup>The Bracero Program is a political milestone in the history of legal labor migration to the United States. Currently, they are structured through the H2A (for the field and agriculture) and H2B visas (for the tertiary sector of low-skilled services such as gardening, masonry, painting, etc.); in addition, it includes Canada through the PTAT program for agriculture.

<sup>7</sup>Under the administration of Enrique Peña Nieto, the implementation of the Social Support Fund has a new juridical and legal position. This is because approximately 40,000 files that were approved by the administration at the end of President Felipe Calderón's term are still pending. That is why some of its beneficiaries took legal action to recover the money from social support. In December 2015, after three years of struggle, they obtained the compensation of approximately 7,000 braceros and their relatives. This amount corresponds to 17.5% of the 40,000 pending files.

agnotology from the pioneering works of the historian Robert Proctor (2008), is a method for “contemporary governance.” It consists in the deliberate production of ignorance that is infused and spread to a given audience, often taking advantage of its vulnerability. The above is the object of study of the agnotology that I present below.

### WHAT IS AGNOTOLOGY?

The theoretical-methodological axis of this research rests on an interactionist perspective inherited from early pragmatism (Mead, 1964; Joas, 1999). It consists in saying that ignorance is always the product of a social interaction. Ignorance is contagious; it is shared and transmitted. After all, it is an interaction. According to another pragmatic principle that rejects general concepts, ignorance is not an object of study or an a priori form, but is a relation and consequently a social construction since ignorance is always located and relative to a world or a means. Its differentiation with knowledge does not correspond to a clear conceptual frontier but rather a porous one. The ignorance-knowledge axis is not an opposition, but an articulation. It has an eminently moral dimension constituted by the relation between truth and falsehood (Bouveresse, 2007, pp.11-37); that is, between the value of the first and the power of the second.

The problem of this investigation begins with a simple question “Why we do not know what we do not know?” In the case of ex-braceros, the question is “For a long time, why the ex-braceros did not know what they did not know about their social rights?” Thus, I think it is fundamental to make a parenthesis that allows the reader to understand the edges that the cultural production of ignorance, or agnotology, contains.

Like our colleagues in the natural and exact sciences, social scientists usually carry out our research with an epistemological base, regardless of our background and traditions. We often quote Thomas Kuhn to clarify from what paradigms we build study programs and their research routes. To guide our empirical explorations or to build a theoretical base that nurtures the meaning of our research, we quote Emre Lakatos, Paul Feyerabend, David Bloor or philosophers of atypical traditions such as Michel Foucault, Ludwig Wittgenstein or Charles S. Peirce.

We do all this for the sake of *Knowledge* production. We are all (or many) and each one is an epistemologist; that is, we believe convincingly in the relationship between science and knowledge. In addition, from Jürgen Habermas and his founding book *Science and technology as “ideology”* (1986), in sociology, many believe in the production of knowledge as an organized construct around an interest that tends to generate an emancipatory value to the subject through such knowledge. Under this assumption, it means that the better we know the social and cultural world in which we live, the more the possibility of transform it into a more habitable and hospitable world for all increases.

However, the exact and natural sciences, as well as the social sciences and humanities, are socially instituted activities. This implies its participation in the affairs of society, its administrative closeness with the State and the political power of those who, for example, depend economically on public research centers (CPI for its initials in Spanish); it also includes universities in Mexico, despite the autonomy that some have. The margin of maneuver and free-will of the first is always a reason for struggle and negotiation with the administration of research in the social sciences. This restriction tends to guide the type of knowledge that we produce, the topics that we are going to investigate or not, as well as the methods to do it in one way or another. In addition, the participation of the public research centers in the National Development Plan to meet the political agenda of the current government, places research in an instrumental function defined by the agenda and some institutions, in accordance with a political vision of what national priorities are or should be.

Furthermore, the academic environment creates a game –what Pierre Bourdieu calls a social field– with rules that are not always explicit and whose *illusio* (Cosey, 2005) keeps its participants convinced that the game is worth it. In the end, this conceals power relations (correlations of strength and meaning) that define the type of game to be played, such as shortage of goods, symbolic violence, competition between participants, hierarchy outside the criticism, Matthew effect, etc. There are the ingredients that produce the ignorance of the academic environment about its practices and values, as well as the distorted relationship between both.

Now, there is a blind spot within our epistemological reflection. It consists in knowing what happens when science and the social sciences co-participate in the production of social ignorance. Either by omission or by abundance of information both end up confusing the user of this type of knowledge. In general, ignorance corresponds to a knowledge gap. Because we are often professors and teachers, researchers believe that it is possible to fill this gap based on learning and through the transmission of knowledge; that is, courses, workshops, seminars, distance or face-to-face counseling. Ignorance and knowledge are in this sense a matter of communicating vessels. In a manner of speaking, the student studies with an empty brain and fill it as his university education progresses. However, what happens when there is too much information or when it is diverse, varied and poses a problem of selection criteria and discrimination for its full use?

There are issues identified by North American historians that correspond to this confusion and come from the existing links (or due to the collusion of interests) between some scientists. These are a minority of subjects whose trajectory has been carried out mainly outside the academic precincts and large industrial consortiums. The publication of reports by these scientists is part of what Robert Proctor (2008) calls the cultural production of ignorance and what Eric Conway and Naomi Oreskes call “the doubt

factory” (2010). Taking advantage of the statute of specialist or official expert, his works consist of confusing the citizen. This allows discrediting other “serious” reports, relativizing knowledge. In this way, it manages to cancel or delay political decisions on public problems that require prompt and energetic decisions. In this case, the most important thing is not the information gap, but its increase. This causes contradictions, doubts and perplexity among the public since they do not know how to properly handle the corresponding information. It is a kind of new sophism.

The big tobacco industry, the asbestos industry, the mining companies that use chemicals such as mercury –so that their products continue to be consumed–, have made us believe that it is more important to know if science can fully verify its dangerousness and not know if they are harmful or harmless to health. This is where the “merchants of doubt” come into action (Conway & Oreskes, 2010). The notion of danger becomes a relative piece of information. It loses its real dimension of being an interpretation problem with all its nuances. If we add to the above the issue of the environment and the distortions that this topic has caused in recent years, we have a vein that has explored personalities such as Robert Proctor (2008), Naomi Oreskes or Erik Conway (2010). Their studies are related to public scandals that highlight the responsibility of politicians, the right to information and transparency for public health issues. In addition, they seek to restore the moral role of science to deny scientific impostures. Here ends the parenthesis.

#### PROBLEM STATEMENT

The analysis focuses on how political power, public institutions and the implementation of public policies on migration are also creators of ignorance or agnotology. They deceive the public that they intend to assist. The role of science, and in this case of the social sciences, must also be considered because it produces inductions that disorient the beneficiaries of these public actions. In the case of the ex-braceros, this dimension is particularly visible historically through the so-called Bracero Program and sociologically through the implementation of the social support program for ex-braceros.

It is not insignificant to say that the bracero issue has been attended mainly by North American historians (Craig, 1971; Calavita, 1992) and to a lesser extent Mexican (Durand, 2007; Vézina, 2016), focused on the study of the “Bracero Program” and its different edges and backgrounds (Alanís, 1999). This is to the detriment of sociology of the bracero problem that deals with the struggle and the current condition of these former migrant workers. This orientation also shows the interest in social sciences and humanities to study a specific research topic.

It is necessary to clarify that I am starting from a series of abductions (in the sense proposed by Charles S. Peirce, 1988) that constitute a halo of mystery around the bracero program and problem. They are points of ignorance where scientists do not know how to

respond correctly. There are five and cause some perplexity for their approach in the form of simple questions.

- Did the Bracero Program end in 1964 or in 1967?
- How many braceros were there in total during the program?
- How much money corresponded to the Peasant Savings Fund that was set up?
- Currently, how many interests have the money generated in this fund (anaticism)?
- Why did not Mexican migrant workers react, protest and contest after concluding the Bracero Program? Why did it happen in the mid-nineties of the last century?

Nowadays, nobody can answer these questions since each one constitutes a field of exploration for research. However, this ignorance or lack of knowledge about these issues does not prevent some authorities –and researchers– from agreeing to say that the program ended in 1964, for example. In this way, they refer to the fact that the parliamentary activity of the Congress of the American Union did not extend the Bracero Program any longer. In addition, they overlook the fact that the United States Department of Labor continued to register employment contracts for Mexican workers until 1967.

This biased interpretation is not insignificant because today it has an effect on the attention to ex-braceros by the Mexican authorities. This is because they dismiss all those braceros who worked between 1965 and 1967; that is, 36,636 employment contracts are excluded from the social support of the corresponding labor rights. For the authorities, these workers were not braceros (Schaffhauser, 2015, p.3). We see how the first two enigmas are logically interrelated.

Table 1: Number of Contracts during the Bracero Program (1942-1967)

Year	Number of Contracts
1942-1964	4,646,199
1965	20,286
1966	8,647
1967	7,703

Source: Bustamante (1976, p. 27)

There is also confusion between the number of workers and the number of employment contracts, since the former were able to repeat work events under this legal concept. It means that today different figures circulate about the number of braceros, which are actually estimates about the actual number of workers involved in said program. All this



leads to a kind of quantitative cacophony that corroborates the maxim of the British Prime Minister of Queen Victoria, Sir Disraeli. He claimed that statistics are the art of lying with a display of precision. Therefore, the small table above refers precisely to employment contracts in the United States and not the number of braceros who participated in the program.

The above is a small sample of the inaccuracies that surround the bracero file. In short, we do not know how many braceros have really been and we also do not know precisely when the Bracero Program ended. Was it in 1964 or 1967? (Center for Finance Studies, 2008, p. 4). The confusions generated by the production of data and knowledge about the Bracero Program constitute a branch of agnotology since the production of scientific knowledge (sociology and history, mainly) is overlapped with its political (government and authorities in charge) and social use (associations and public braceros). The first is a continuous process of efforts to build and have reliable information, while the second corresponds to a fixed and strict conception of information. This becomes a long-lived or eternal truth instead of being, according to the epistemology of Karl Popper, a fact not falsified at the moment.

In other words, although the social sciences and humanities are capable of producing a well-founded knowledge, it also seems evident that the use of this knowledge, outside the academic sphere and without taking necessary epistemological precautions, may tend to be distorted and finally integrate a rhetorical jargon that favors or attends short-term political interests that are far from the scientific spirit embodied in the protocols that guide research in social sciences and humanities. In summary, the process of ignorance by omission consists, deliberately or not (subjectivity here does not matter so much, but what is important is the result and the consequence of the omission), in presenting information as if it were complete and its content perfectly limited. In this sense, we can consider that the omission works as a social and political bias in the interactions between publics and institutions.

During my investigation of the process that led to the ex-braceros movement, a question arose. This became a loose end that I could not explain theoretically nor document empirically. Why did a period of silence follow about 30 years after the end of the Bracero Program (officially in 1964)? And why, after so long, did they raise their voices, expose the failure of the authorities and demand the money corresponding to the savings fund? I had no tangible elements to explain this process and the sudden change that led to the expression of the bracero discontent. This question became a search.

#### FIRST EXPLORATION HINT

Based on the assumptions made by agnotology, I consider, as a general hypothesis, that this silence has to do with the omission in which the banking administrations and public

institutions incurred for not informing the braceros about this issue and emphasize their social rights on the payment of the Peasant Savings Fund.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, agnotology –or production of ignorance– basically consisted in not communicating this information to the beneficiaries of the fund.

However, the state of ignorance in which braceros were immersed during the program may correspond to the ignorance of public servants on this matter. This means that the implementation of a law or the fulfillment of a legal and social provision also requires that whoever has to execute it is aware of its content and trained for its full implementation. The foregoing could be the first clue to answer the question and consists in saying that there is in general a gap between a social right and its knowledge by the beneficiaries and the officials who are responsible for its execution. We can also argue that this type of right was new in terms of migration, since the Bracero Program, at that time, was considered as a laboratory for subsequent documented migrations to the United States.

Also, the period of silence corresponds to a time when the media was rudimentary in the rural sectors of the country. This would justify the difficulty in locating and assisting ex-braceros, for example. Finally, the vulnerability of the braceros rested on their low educational level (often corresponds to incomplete primary) and their limited institutional capital; that is, the experience in dealing with the Mexican bureaucracy. This condition of vulnerability caused many braceros to blindly sign their respective contracts not only because they were illiterate, but because they did not know what their rights were. This could be a plausible explanation of the so-called period of silence. Finally, the braceros would be the only ones responsible for their social misfortune since they did not know about their labor rights, because they had a basic academic level.

However, ignorance is not a characteristic that defines the identity of a subject, but corresponds to a relationship; that is, an interaction that involves, at least, two interlocutors with knowledge, capital, intentions, desires and limitations. Ignorance is an interaction of epistemological nature. I consider that this is an important theoretical consideration to focus this research. In this sense, ignorance is the complete or partial lack of access to knowledge. This lack can be structural (educational, for example) or circumstantial (communication), which implies institutions such as schools, political institutes, labor unions, government offices or mass media.

This type of preliminary explanation that aims to focus its empirical exploration (through consultation of files, meetings with braceros, interviews with the protagonists of the program, i.e. ex-braceros and their relatives, as well as officials of both countries), allows to avoid what constitutes, in my opinion, the Achilles heel of agnotology or at least

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<sup>8</sup>Over the years and before the authorities failed to comply, the savings fund formally became a retirement fund.

what causes a controversy over their noble intention (that is, act for the restoration of knowledge and truth). This controversy assumes that there are subjective intentions (always unhealthy) of those who produce or participate in the production of ignorance and, finally, argue the existence of a plot fomented by a few to the detriment of thousands of others.

I consider that ignorance is inherent in the objective and subjective relationship between administrators and officials, being shared by both sides. Many times its “cognitive” form is inserted between two or several pieces of knowledge; ignorance is never total, but fragmented and often presented with the attire of a knowing. That is precisely what dictates the relationship between the user and the public server. Often, the former thinks by belief (and maybe naivety) that the latter knows everything there is to know about what the execution of his function entails.

Here it is necessary to refer to the excellent study of Jacques Bouveresse about the belief (2007). He points out the existing collusion between truth and falsehood. The French philosopher suggests that both allow to locate the extremes between which transits the production of knowledge that takes effect for the rooting of scientific and social beliefs. In this situation, it is worth remembering and emphasizing the study of the logical-mathematician Charles S. Peirce on the methods of fixing the belief. This serves us as a tool to distinguish ignorance and knowledge through the respective depth of its practical, epistemic and moral bases (Peirce, 1988).

In summary, it is necessary to take into account the following: 1) the period of silence of the braceros after the end of the Bracero Program is a point of entry for agnotology in terms of producing ignorance by omission. 2) Ignorance is not a characteristic of a particular group. This is shared or, rather, it is transmitted from one group to another and has to do, for example, with the lack of training of the officials who attend new programs such as the Peasant Savings Fund for braceros. Similarly, it has to do with the limited dissemination of information regarding the labor rights of the bracero public (see footnote 2), as well as those who are retired from the Bracero Program. 3) Due to the above, there is the idea that behind ignorance there is no plot of a group of people, but that the information gap (favoring incurring errors and false beliefs) is a characteristic of human behavior. In this sense, the love for truth and for knowledge is a value and finally a belief. In addition, as the border between truth and falsehood is not always clear, the same happens between knowledge and ignorance (Bouveresse, 2007).

## SECOND EXPLORATION HINT

The second hypothesis that I propose to illustrate the agnotological approach has to do with the implementation of the social support program for former Mexican migrant workers, between 2005 and 2012. It should be noted that this program is the result of the

struggle undertaken by associations of ex-braceros and the mobilizations of them to make their problem visible (Schaffhauser, 2016) in the mid-1990s; as well as the political negotiations at federal level that have been achieved to solve this social problem, from the administration of Vicente Fox.

It is also important to emphasize that although the social support program was conceived during the administration of Vicente Fox Quesada (2000-2006), its execution and management were carried out during Felipe Calderón's six-year term (2006-2012). Finally, it must be said that the political color is not a trivial fact here. Unlike PRI presidencies that had ignored the bracero problem between 1964 and 1999, both governments of the PAN confronted and sought to resolve this conflict.<sup>9</sup> Unlike the previous case, the social and cultural production of ignorance does not work through the information gap; that is, institutional silence. It operates through a technocratic institutional communication device responsible for the implementation of the social program.

This institutional operation basically consisted in 1) the definition of operating rules designed practically behind the backs of the braceros and their civil organizations; 2) an extremely punctilious application of its content; 3) encourage sudden changes<sup>10</sup> in its implementation. However, the Social Support Fund produced counterproductive effects, despite the desire to inform, communicate and transparent the process of attention to the public bracero. This provoked diverse reactions and the production of a battle of figures between researchers, public servants and representatives of civil associations of ex-braceros around the hard data of the Bracero Program (real number of ex-braceros, the real end of the Bracero Program (1964 or 1967), real amount of money deposited in the savings and interest fund generated). In addition, the conception of the social program for ex-braceros does not really solve the problem of the payment of the savings fund, but replaces

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<sup>9</sup>One of the explanations that we can mention in this regard has to do with the position of President-elect Vicente Fox. He embodied the political alternation, hence his willingness to serve broader sectors of society and seek new mechanisms of dialogue with vulnerable groups.

<sup>10</sup>This strategy has two dimensions. 1) It consists of being extremely fussy when reviewing the requests of the braceros and evaluating the attached vouchers. 2) Modify the payment system in a single exhibition of 38,000 pesos for installments of 4,000 pesos per year and staggered over a period of more than 10 years. This last provision was implemented between July 3, 2009 and June 1, 2010 (30 to 34 relationships) resulting in the publication of five lists of social support corresponding to 149,040 people. See: <http://dof.gob.mx/extrabmigmex.php>

it. For the authorities, when the braceros receive the social support of 38,000 pesos, they give up their rights to recover the money from this fund.<sup>11</sup>

Ignorance also corresponds to a communicational distance that emphasizes the existence of two language games. One is that of the administration and the other is that of the braceros themselves. In addition, this distance acquires a moral dimension since the requesting ex-bracero is not a victim of the administration while not demonstrating the normative basis of his condition of vulnerability, which corresponds to criteria established by the Ministry of the Interior.<sup>12</sup>

So the administration starts from the principle that:

- It is acting according to the law and for the sake of public good and welfare.
- It considers that braceros are those who have a “problem” and not the State (as a supreme institution), which does not have a “problem” to solve.
- The technical language of administration is the only valid language and its concepts have to be learned by ex-braceros; that is, social support,” “trust” “request,” “email,” “pay slip,” “file number,” “operation rules,” “polling station,” “download or upload,” “Relationship of payments on the web,” etc.
- And last, but not least, the applicant seeks to scam public institutions and, therefore, it is necessary to exercise a constant suspicion and control over him.

There is another important element that influences and has to do with the fact that the administration in charge of the bracero file has a staff poorly or poorly prepared to handle the bracero case. They do not know the history of the Bracero Program, its social and political consequences and the situation in which braceros and their families live. They also do not know the whole process and the different stages that the execution of the social program for ex-braceros contemplates. In addition, they are not empathetic enough to put themselves in the user's place and understand their problems. Their work is atomized and consists of the execution of a single task. They do not even know what the tasks of their other colleagues are. This situation tends to demotivate the public servant and turn his work into a tedious burden for him. Thus, in the eyes of many public servants, the bracero file tends to be perfectly interchangeable with another subject such as education, health, family, work, taxes, culture, sports, recreation, etc. Their position is reduced to an appointment. In this sense, the bracero movement exemplifies how public institutions in Mexico, its services and its personnel operate.

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<sup>11</sup>When the braceros received the check for 38,000 pesos, they had to sign a letter in which they waived their right to sue the authorities and claim the entire corresponding savings fund.

<sup>12</sup>See: [https://dof.gob.mx/extrabmigmx/Lista\\_48.html](https://dof.gob.mx/extrabmigmx/Lista_48.html)

All of the above encourages and produces a kind of social ignorance for both public servants (in relation to the specificity of their function, i.e. philosophy of the program, content and application methodology) and users (ex-braceros); they have fragmented information, often contradictory and sometimes out of date, which does not allow them to successfully carry out their procedures. Hence the ethnomethodological importance of analyzing the integration of the ex-braceros files when polling stations were installed, twice (2006 and 2008), at the national level. For this, it is vital to interview and obtain the testimony of the officials who served the requesting public, as well as the testimony of the ex-braceros about how they were treated and how was their procedure.

According to the above, it is important to emphasize that the production of ignorance through administrative malfunction is not the result of an isolated conscience or the product of the conspiracy of political opponents. This situation is not the execution of an evil plan, but rather qualifies how social programs work in Mexico and other countries.

They are characterized by creating inadequate communication –with moments of clarity and others of confusion–, as well as producing a selection among the theoretical applicants (all those who have the right to support). All this to generate solidarity with those chosen by the program –through its operating rules and requirements<sup>13</sup>–, while excluding those who have been rejected for not complying with the requirements.

That is why after the implementation of the program between 2005 and 2012 there are two types of braceros: those compensated or “consented” and those rejected. It means that for the administration the rejected ones do not exist, they are not or they have not been braceros. This situation is another effect of bureaucratic ignorance (confusion or overlap between executive, judicial and legislative power) as if justice, law and morals were the exclusive property of the public administration and not a good of the citizens.

Likewise, the production of ignorance is not the exclusive prerogative of the State and its institutions, but rather it happens with a certain frequency in the world of ex-braceros. Profit is the main motivation of its production. Previous investigations (Schaffhauser, 2009 and 2012) reflect the multiplicity in situations of abuse of weakness to the detriment of the braceros and their families, where dishonest people try to take advantage of their helplessness. The cases are diverse: pseudo-leaders of fictitious associations that charge for their services and retain documents for registration procedures and demand money to return them; deceitful lawyers; relatives who kept the money from the social support that belonged to their ex-braceros grandfathers; postmen who demand a percentage to help

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<sup>13</sup>The requirements applied through Trust 2106 (later numbered 10230) are for the former Mexican migrant worker. Check receipts of payment, U. S. Social Security card, labor contract, matricula consular (brown color), honorable mention granted by the U.S. Department of Labor.

collect the check for this support in telegraph and telecommunication offices, among other cases.

These situations only explain that some associations of ex-braceros such as Braceroproa or ex-braceros in *Lucha A. C.* are dedicated to purging their ranks of corrupt subjects, which has generated excitement, distrust and confusion in the world of braceros.

These two research hints consist in the construction of a bridge between migrations (and its effects), public policies and agnotology. The first has to do with a problem of silence, lack of information and generalized neglect, while the second one is a communication distance between public servant and user, lack of preparation of the administration (specifically through its officials) and confusion that generates partial, contradictory and out-of-date information. It is also a problem that journalism also incurs in general (television, radio, press and internet) for not adequately covering the subject.

### CONCEPTUAL APPROACH

We will start from a conceptual distinction between ignorance or agnotology by omission and agnotology by confusion. The first is socially and politically more traditional than the second. It has been an engine of governance in the past, since the ignorance of the public was conceived through the non-communication of important information for them. It is similar to a censorship process. The second corresponds to modern times where communication is not only massive, but also global, which complicates the previous method of censorship. Therefore, modern agnotology relies on excessive information and difficulty for the subject to process it, to compare it, to verify the source and to evaluate the methodology with which that information was produced. It confuses the public, which never knows if the arguments come from reliable data. In addition, it is necessary to mention that the implementation of public policies to attend, regulate or fight against the migratory phenomenon (this is, from its origins and causes, its actuality, its multiple forms or the wide effects it produces in the culture) often resides in a dualism that consists of generalizing an intervention of the State, extending a public will and paradoxically building its limits, through the concept of national borders.

In other words, on the one hand the public will directs its efforts and on the other the effects produced by it dissipate.<sup>14</sup> It also means that any public policy creates, or rather

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<sup>14</sup>For example, the French labor law states that any worker, including legal immigrant workers, has rights to social benefits (housing, family, education, transportation, retirement, etc.). However, if the worker leaves the country, he immediately loses all his rights and in particular that which concerns retirement. In this way, although the worker paid throughout his active life (through monthly discounts on his payroll), he cannot enjoy it when he returns to his country. The same thing happens for a French worker if he decides to settle abroad.

updates an identity and an alterity. It also establishes a moral boundary between both through a series of requirements between beneficiaries and those that are not. This implies that any public policy requires compliance with the requirements to be part of its universe of action.

Thus, public policies build solidarity with their beneficiaries, a kind of dialogue and interactions between them and the authorities, but they also mean discrimination and exile for everyone else. In this sense, the implementation of the Social Support Fund for ex-braceros has led to a separation on two sides, those “chosen” by public institutions and those who do not meet the requirements demanded by the administration. In the end, these served as an identity filter; that is, an institutional representation of those who are ex-braceros and those who are not from the bureaucratic point of view.

Contrary to the innocence that defines the word solidarity as an expression of benevolence and altruism, solidarity as a public problem and as public policy often presents two faces. One accepts and another rejects the applicants. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to say that all public policies build mechanisms of solidarity and exclusion. It also reinvents, each time its mission is fulfilled, a community of beneficiaries and the national community itself. From the administrative point of view, consider that there are authentic braceros and other apocryphal is a sample of agnotology that characterizes the relations between public bracero and State, since the conflict began. It is a unilateral relationship, because there is no, in contrast to the above, a State and institutions that are legitimate or illegitimate. However, the bracero public wants that, through their movement, the institutions act as such; that is, as responsible public services committed to any citizen.

## FINAL COMMENTS

This research creates an opportunity for the study of the bracero movement. Its novelty lies in the agnotological turn that is infused into its problematic. What is the role of ignorance (of the public and public servants) in the design and implementation of social programs derived from public policies? The above means that although the investigation requires new explorations and inquiries to expand the accumulated data, it also implies to keep in mind that this empirical collection needs to be analyzed in another way. In this sense, agnotology is just a perspective to problematize, on other epistemological bases, the articulation between the Bracero Program and the social movement in general. In addition, it places the interest for this type of study in a critical, citizen, democratic, and, in the words of Habermas (1986), emancipatory horizon.

What is the relationship between social rights and ignorance, and what this relationship tells us about the type of citizenship that exists and that we want to have in Mexico or elsewhere? Therefore, this research holds a moral implication that consists in



problematizing ignorance as an opposite element, an obstacle, in the relationship between the State, its institutions and the publics of society. The right to know, to be informed about their rights and how to exercise them is a citizen imperative in which sociologists must contribute through our investigations. Then, we advocate increasing the level of emancipation, reflection and autonomy of the different public citizens. The ex-braceros belong to one of these publics. They are in a situation of vulnerability because they are older adults, live in the countryside and share the problems that affect life in rural areas. They are also former migrants, that is, a floating category that lacks social and political status (the right to be a migrant).

Now, the main problem that the agnotological perspective could pose is to generate a kind of suspicion and to attribute to agents responsibilities in situations of abuse of weakness, even if they did not act with malice or profit, but by complete ignorance. I argue that it is necessary to delimit this responsibility and distinguish between those who use ignorance in their favor and those who act out of ignorance and multiply it. Here is the difference that separates intentionality from lack of preparation. In the first case, it means that those who take advantage of the ignorance of others have control over the information and can distinguish between the true and the false and act accordingly. This type of person exists both in the state apparatus and outside of it. They often rub shoulders with members of the bracero public.

In the second case, perhaps the most common, ignorance is a “good” that is shared and transmitted to others. Ignorance is the product of social interactions, because confusion is relational. Besides I do not know, I also share my ignorance to others. Also, I do not have elements to compensate this situation since due to my ignorance I do not feel the need to doubt. That is the figure of the public official immersed in his routine that rhymes with bureaucratic boredom. The syndrome of this type of ignorance is the lack of curiosity and interest in doing things well; that is, trying to serve the public well (Sennett, 2009).

This type of structural ignorance leads to confusion and poor coordination between services, and it also has to do with new methods to carry out administrative tasks. The poor performance of bureaucratic personnel does not have much to do with their lack of preparation, but with the multiplicity of structural reforms applied to the State and its institutions, whose officials can hardly assimilate the orientation and meaning. Ignorance is related to poor administrative compliance and demotivation for what constitutes their work identity. Thus, it would be worth exploring the relationship between the neoliberalization of practices in State institutions (where the guidelines consist in the effectiveness, the separation of activities, the lack of own initiative and the atomization of the public servant) and the production of ignorance, either by omission or confusion.

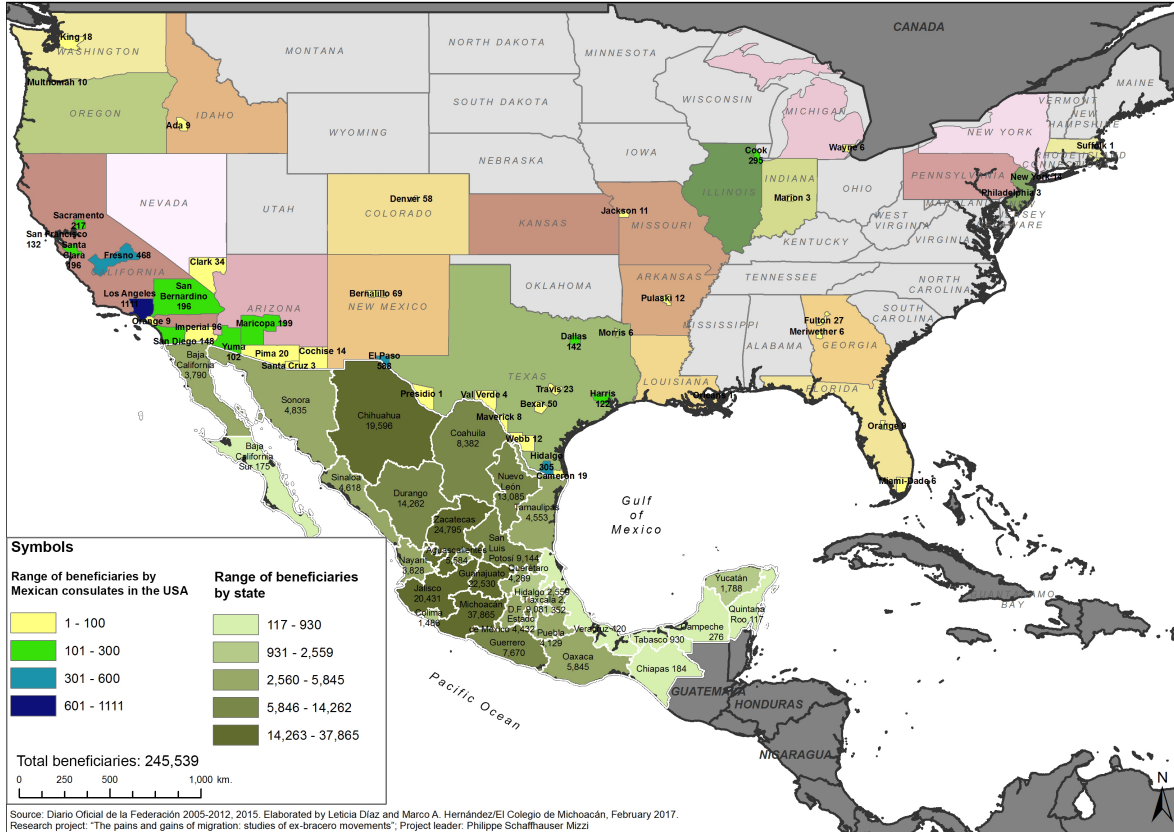
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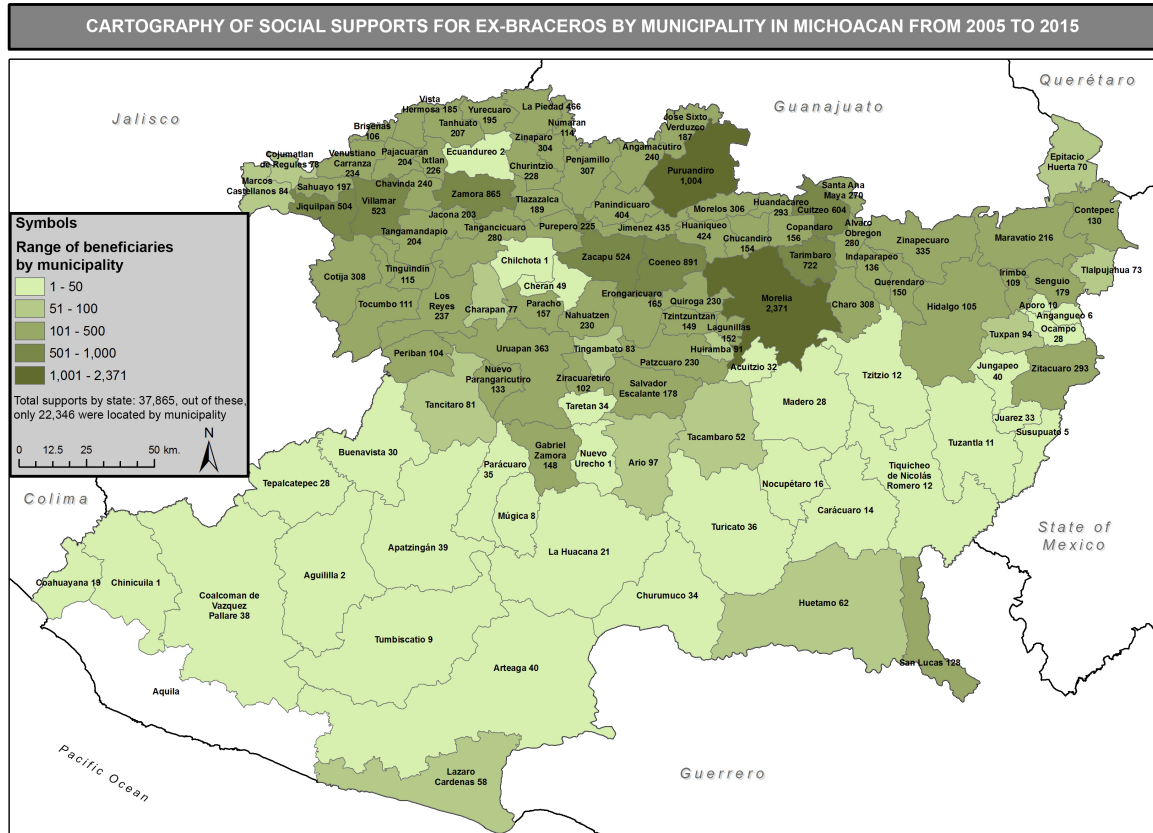
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### Map 1

CARTOGRAPHY OF SOCIAL SUPPORTS FOR EX-BRACEROS IN MEXICO-USA FROM 2005 TO 2015



Map 2



Source: Diario Oficial de la Federación 2005-2012, 2015. Elaborated by Leticia Díaz and Marco A. Hernández/El Colegio de Michoacán, January 2017.  
 Research project: "The pains and gains of migration: studies of ex-bracero movements"; Project leader: Philippe Schaffhauser Mizzi