



Moving encounters: Latinas/os about town in East Boston, MA



Mitchell Snider

University of Kentucky, Department of Geography, 817 Patterson Office Tower, Lexington, KY 40508, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 4 April 2016

Received in revised form

26 September 2016

Accepted 4 October 2016

Available online 4 December 2016

Keywords:

Emotions

Encounter

Latina/o

Dialogical

Mobility

Everyday practices

ABSTRACT

Latino and Latina migrants experience the urban in ways that are often more challenging, complex, and stressful than naturalized or native-born citizens, yet work in the US on Latino experiences has lagged behind the changing complexity of Latina/o geographies. While scholars have analyzed the emotional dimensions of the encounter, this research claims that immigrants' everyday socio-spatial mobilities are entangled with emotional encounters they have with people in the city. It therefore considers how participants' urban socio-spatial mobilities are formed in relation to real and imagined emotional encounters with others in the city. I analyze these encounters through Henri Lefebvre and Mikhail Bakhtin's conceptualizations of encounters as moments of dialogue important in better understandings of what is meant by the 'self'. Further, their concepts help to consider the interpretations and presence of broader social structures. Therefore participants discussed how opportunities for and limits on certain activities, areas, or modes of transportation were formed in part through emotional encounters. Thus fear, sadness, relief, joy, anger, and surprise result from moving encounters with others in the city impact they ways in which participants feel like they have access to or are excluded from urban spaces and relationships with other residents. The research was conducted in East Boston through semi-structured interviews with 26 with immigrants mostly from El Salvador and Colombia, 12 months of participant observation, and informal interviews with other community members.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

[M]any Americans, don't see us in a good light. If somebody encounters an American ... No—they don't like to see you here. It hasn't only happened with me, it's happened with quite a few of my friends [...] And they feel strongly about us. Why? We haven't done anything to them! We don't say anything to them. We don't fight with them. We don't argue with them. And even so, they look at us poorly.¹

In an interview with Prospero, a Salvadoran migrant in his early 20s living in East Boston, he described the emotional encounters he had in everyday spaces with people and indicated that they were crucial aspects in the formation of his material and imagined socio-spatial mobilities in the city. In a similar fashion, most of the other participants indicated a strong correlation and mutual influence between their emotions, their urban mobilities, and the moving encounters they had with others in the city. That is, the encounters

they had while moving through the city were often highly evocative, and the participants' emotional understandings of these encounters would in turn influence how they felt they could or could not move in the city thereafter. Thus the decision to go to the grocery, walk in the neighborhood, go to the beach, venture on a cross-town trip, ride the subway, or drive a car were made through both remembering and/or imagining emotional encounters in the city.

East Boston's residents are largely foreign born, and it is home to nearly 20% of Boston's Latino residents according to the 2010 census. Immigrant residents of East Boston come mostly from El Salvador and Colombia, but there are also many from Brazil, Mexico, and Italy. It is a neighborhood largely divided between underserved foreign-born residents and their families and more affluent and largely non-Hispanic white communities located in Jeffries Point.² It is within this context that most participants interacted with a majority of their acquaintances and, in many respects, it is a comfortable part of the city with beautiful parks, a modicum of shopping and social services, and some entertainment

¹ E-mail address: Mitchell.snider@uky.edu.

¹ Due to space limitations, original transcripts in Spanish have been omitted.

² <http://nubeastboston.org/our-community>.

venues. Travelling to other part of the city for work, relaxation, or to simply get to know the city, however, was often discussed through anxiety-inducing encounters with others. Yet many of the encounters discussed below occurred in East Boston itself.

In this research, the participants' emotions were often formed in relation to aspects of a 'migrant subjectivity' that often position them as an object of xenophobia, racism, or generally hostile anti-immigrant attitudes. These aspects of migrant experience have major effects upon the ways in which migrants can access and be mobile in the city. Accordingly, migrants' lives revolve in many ways around emotions that may not hold for others (Ho, 2009; Leitner, 2012; Svašek, 2013). To better understand the interrelation of emotion, mobility, and social inclusion/exclusion I consider how migrants' emotional understandings of their mobilities are formed through encounters with others. Though work in geography has conceptualized different types and potentials of encounters, few have considered the ways that these encounters shape people's material and imagined mobilities. This study largely considers unintentional encounters that range from goodwill to more antagonistic moments. As Swe (2013, 231) notes, within "the dialectical process between migration and integration, transformations of identity occur individually as well as collectively on a daily basis in migrants' encounters with their new social, cultural, and political contexts". Herein, I use the term *moving encounter* to stress the entanglement of movement and emotionality in the encounters described by Latino³ migrants living in the East Boston, a majority Latino community that sits across Boston's Inner Harbor from Boston proper.

To consider the above relationship, this paper utilizes concepts offered by Mikhail Bakhtin and Henri Lefebvre to unpack the dynamism of encounters between people. For Bakhtin (1984, xx), encounters are embodied sites of identity construction while at the same time emotional affairs in which a person's consciousness is formed through its interactions with other people's consciousnesses. For his part, Lefebvre cautioned that encounters never simply take place between two parties; they only make sense in reference to (an)other, a *third party* from which we derive meaning from society (Lefebvre, 2002). This *third party* provides a crucial and infinitely complex reference point through which society and the self are constructed and interpreted (Lefebvre, 2002). Thus, the participants' mobility practices were predicated not only upon the encounters they had with others in the city but also how they interpreted these encounters as reflecting larger values in society.

In the following, I first consider how geographers and social scientists have mobilized 'the encounter'. I then clarify relationships between migration, mobility, and emotion. This is followed by a description of the intersections between the Bakhtin's *dialogical self* and Lefebvre's *third party* that demonstrates its relevance to the study at hand. Finally, I turn to the study and its participants to consider the ways emotion, urban mobilities, and encounters impacted the participants' feelings of belonging and experiences of social exclusion.

³ The term Latino is a broad term that includes, in its widest usage, anyone from a Spanish-speaking or Lusophone country in the Caribbean, Central or South America. While I recognize that it is largely a construct used in the US, it is perhaps useful in that, though racialized in the US, it has no specific racial meaning. Further, since it indeed broad, I utilized it to consider how the research question touched upon men and women from various countries in 'Latin' America. While a problematic term because it erases difference, it is a salient political category in the US because laws and popular discourse often target 'Latino' and migrants often utilize and possibly adopt the term in political efforts at strategic essentialism, or the adoption of an identity to frame themselves in a way recognizable to power.

1.1. Geographies of encounter

Scholars have written much about the radical potential of the encounter, even while recognizing that these encounters may not always be "collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable" (Bhabha, 1994, 2). More recently, Gill Valentine (2008) critiques the 'naïve assumption' that celebrates moments of contact through profusions of goodwill; she asserts that contact often does not lead to mutual respect and it can further exacerbate prejudices and stereotyping (e.g. Mielke, 2008). However, encounters have also been recognized as critical opportunities for renegotiating prejudices and stereotypes. 'Micro-encounters', for example, are a part of daily civic life that can act as a foundation for mutual respect, cosmopolitanism, or 'a baseline democracy' (Laurier and Philo, 2006; Amin, 2006; Thrift, 2005). Community-based encounters that proactively work to break down racism, privilege, discrimination, and stereotyping can also increase feelings of belonging and reduce social exclusion (Leitner, 2012; see also Matejskova and Leitner, 2011).

However, while encounters enacted with a radical or purposeful goal may offer a heightened potential for forming anti-racist politics or challenging inequalities, 'ordinary' encounters are also formative and important moments of identity construction (Walton-Roberts and Pratt, 2005; Cresswell, 2006). Though 'ordinary' invokes both routinized life as well normative and juridical ordering through such legal institutions as citizenship, it also speaks to how these quotidian "[s]ocial norms and mores, interactions with other people, the demonstration of respect for difference, and a host of other social practices may make an immigrant (or any other individual, for that matter) feel more or less welcome and embraced by a community" (Staeheli et al., 2012, 637).

While the participants in this study did not discuss encounters with 'Americans' or others in *intentional* settings (especially in those meant to reduce racism or lessen inter-ethnic tension), they did speak of moving encounters, both real and imagined, that occurred in the everyday spaces of the city: the subway, the bus, the street, parks, restaurants, or in church, for example. These discussions highlight the ways encounters interrelate to the participants' urban mobilities, their emotional qualities, as well as the ways in which emotions transform and impact the participants' mobilities.

1.2. Moving and feeling: intersections for migrants

Despite considerable literature that considers Latino/a (and especially Chicana/o) perspectives in the US, the ways that migrants' everyday material and imagined urban mobilities influence experiences of exclusion or belonging have been largely overlooked (though see Conlon, 2011; Hiemstra, 2010; Wilson, 2011).⁴ These mobilities are important because the speed at which people, objects, and ideas move, the number of journeys and routes they take, and the fixities which make them possible do much to create connections, liquidity, and speed in the world as well as "disconnection, social exclusion, and inaudibility" (Sheller and Urry, 2006, 210). A 'politics of mobility' might therefore unpack how social relations (themselves constitutive of and constituted through power) both produce and are produced through the practices and representations of mobilities (Cresswell, 2010). This paper analyzes one way in which social relations are reproduced through the participants' emotions as they relate to being, striving, and/or failing to be (im)mobile in the world.

⁴ Of the research that exists, little elicits participation from Central and South Americans (though see Falconi and Mazzotti, 2007).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5045478>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5045478>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)