

globalization and paranoia in anthony mann's border incident

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Today it [illegal immigration] is the greatest peacetime invasion suffered by a country under open, flagrant, contemptuous violation of its laws— Mr. Willard F. Kelley, assistant commissioner in charge of the Border Patrol Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them.

Gloria Anzaldua, *La Frontera: Borderlands*

early during Anthony Mann's 1949 *Border Incident*, a film noir, semi-documentary hybrid focusing on illegal bracero smuggling, Pablo Rodriguez, a Mexican immigration agent, and Juan Garcia, a bracero who befriends Rodriguez but is unaware that he is undercover posing as a bracero, arrange to be transported across the border. They meet a smuggler at a crowded marketplace. For seventy pesos, the smuggler provides Rodriguez and Garcia with small flower pins identifying them for transport across the border later that evening. Immediately after the transaction, Rodriguez spots his American partner, Jack Bearnese, wearing a flowery cowboy shirt and a cowboy hat. Posing as a petty criminal escaping into Mexico with stolen immigration cards that he will sell to Parkson, the Anglo boss of the bracero smugglers, Bearnese' disguise signals Rodriguez that he is the contact man. Rodriguez walks toward Bearnese, lights his cigarette, and informs him of the time and place of the crossing. Although the plaza is swarming with people, crowding the stalls and walkways, the camera cuts to an intimate, tight close up of the exchange between Rodriguez and Bearnese. Garcia looks on in the background, framed between Rodriguez and Bearnese, struggling to comprehend their conversation. He is transfixed by Bearnese's shirt. In this intense triangle of glances, Rodriguez and Bearnese look at each other and Garcia stares at both but, in particular, at Bearnese's shirt. As Bearnese hands the book of matches to Rodriguez, the camera cuts back to a wide shot of the teeming multitude of unemployed braceros engulfing them; Garcia, however, continues to stare at the shirt. After Bearnese leaves, Garcia exclaims, "How beautiful, that shirt." Rodriguez responds, "Yes, it gives a man distinction." The plan is in motion. Bearnese and Rodriguez are set to infiltrate the bracero smugglers, Rodriguez as a bracero, Bearnese as a criminal. As they depart the marketplace, the scene slowly fades out.

Garcia's misapprehension of the shirt's significance, like his misunderstanding of his position as a bracero in a national ideology and economy intent on maintaining the difference between U.S. citizen and bracero, plays off the meaning of the word "distinction." The shirt does indeed give "distinction," as Rodriguez claims, but for more reasons than the film allows Garcia to realize. In a film obsessed with borders of all types, not just the literal border but also the differences and distinctions between bracero and U.S. citizen, the unusual emphasis on the cowboy shirt foregrounds issues of racial difference, nationality and the transmission and circulation of information, goods and, ultimately, the braceros themselves. When Rodriguez and Bearnese both become swept up in the criminal group they are infiltrating later in the film, and Bearnese's shirt is stolen by the smugglers as a prize, their distinction from braceros is under threat because they are disconnected from the institutions of law and authority legitimating their roles as officers, as well as guaranteeing their identity.



On the surface, *Border Incident* appears to champion the Bracero Program, the economic productivity of agribusiness in Imperial Valley and the efficient Immigration and Naturalization Services and its officers willing to sacrifice their lives to protect national interests. Despite the semi-documentary sequences' glowing praise of the economic productivity of the border and the efficient and lawful management of the region, the film noir border-crossing scenes issue a stern warning about the dangers of globalization. The border crossing scenes stage paranoia about economic and ethnic challenges to nation-state sovereignty and identity in the postwar United States by delineating how globalization compromises distinct ethnic, regional, economic, and national differences. At the time of *Border Incident's* release, postwar attitudes regarding the Bracero Program were changing. The seeming wartime necessity of the contract labor program to fill manpower shortages no longer justified the program, and rising U.S. surrounding multifarious border problems – security, illegal border crossers and communism – heightened negative public attitudes towards braceros. Reflecting divided public opinion surrounding the Bracero Program, *Border Incident* which operates similarly to Mann's 1947 film *T-Men*, also a semi-documentary film noir, which according to Susan White creates a "narrative split... designed to place an unassailable boundary between the lawful and the unlawful in a film in which such boundaries are often in flux" (96). Unlike *T-Men*, however, *Border Incident's* "narrative split" is forecast as an explicit focus of its content, registering two contrasting and opposed visions of the border. The film's film noir sections stress the border as a dangerous, threatening wilderness, both natural and unreal, an uncanny space of paranoia. Employing film noir's visual trademarks – chiaroscuro lighting, crowded mise-en-scène, rapid editing, contrasting shot scale, etc. – these border-crossing scenes are expressionistic visions of the bracero's paranoia. The semi-documentary sections in contrast, exalt the border region's economic and agricultural productivity, praise

the Immigration Naturalization Services and officers sacrificing their lives for national interests, and emphasize the healthy, symbiotic relationship of people and nature, braceros working the land and the crops providing its bounty for the American citizens. While the film's narrative divide replicates these two visions of the border, stressing the dangers of racial and national contamination and employing narrative contrasts to contain the threat of braceros, the film noir sections begin to invade and contaminate the police procedural, semi-documentary sections, slowly seeping into those narrative sections attempting to contain and control the violence of the interior, noir narrative. Over the course of the film and the opening sequence in particular, borders presented as distinct, both visually and physically, are in truth mixed and intermingled, contaminating and infecting each other, the film noir sections merging and blending with the semi-documentary style sections. By the film's end, when the story returns to the semi-documentary frame narrative, it becomes clear that *Border Incident's* narrative divide intends to supplement the porous and weakened transnational border between the U.S. and Mexico.

Part of what makes film noir so difficult to classify is its unorthodox position within film history and genre. Film noir is, of course, a French term coined by film critic Nino Frank in 1946, describing a series of American films from the 1940's that French audiences were able to view for the first time. The war had impeded French consumption of these dark, pessimistic films that, to them, signaled the dark side of the American dream. Therefore, part of film noir's definitional conflict results from this transnational naming and identification, but also from the retroactive status of the term itself. For its temporal distance from the object it names in part creates the discipline it investigates.

Some critics have argued that these semi-documentaries are opposed to the central ethos of noir, since the stress on law and authority over individual action puts it at odds with film noir's undermining of symbolic law and order. According to Joe Tuska, the semi-documentaries' focus on "the machinery of official detection – where the individual and the libido tend to be wrapped in, and penned in by, the rules – can be directly counterposed, for example, to the individualism and intuitive action of the private eye" (Krutnik 207).

Although *Border Incident's* narrative feels divided in its combination of film noir and police procedural, it is in fact a very common combination of style and genre for the postwar period. Semi-documentary, police procedurals are characteristic of noir's middle period (1945-1949) and often focus on "social problems and crime in the streets, corruption and police routine" (Schrader 59). Police procedural, semi-documentaries differ from traditional crime films because they stress "systematized technological investigative procedure" (Krutnik 203) rather than focusing on individuals and couples, which increases the possible narrative complications. Also, in police procedurals detection is not a matter of intuitive action but of "organizational machinery, and a manifest objectivity displaces the pervasive, potentially corruptive subjectivity of the 'tough' films" (Krutnik 203).

Critics have noted the central relationship between borders and film noir and that *Border Incident* fails to differentiate individuals from institutions, leaving open the question of who occupies the space of the border. According to critic Dana Polan, the film grounds the authority of the framing story cinematically, hoping to neutralize the menace of the night-

time, noir border scenes that threaten to cross the narrative divide. He claims, "The end shots of the agency bureau in Washington are filmed with the framing symmetry and an even and bright lighting that give the image a clarity and surety that the interior narrative of the film had denied." For all its "clarity" and "surety," the legitimating narrative of government institutions that attempt to frame the unlawful border within a space of authority ultimately fails to solidify the narrative's boundaries and, in effect, continues to be haunted by noir images of the border and the solitary, individual actions of characters set adrift from institutions guaranteeing their power. Although Polan correctly identifies the film's complicated narrative divide, he fails to recognize how the representations of the noir-like border threaten the framing narrative of the daytime world of institutional authority presented during the opening and closing scenes.

Also claiming that borders are essential to understanding film noir, Eric Lott's essay, *The Whiteness of Film Noir*, investigates what he believes to be "the specifically racial means of noir's obsession with the dark side of 1940's American life" that has been "remarkably ignored" (Lott 542). Arguing for the centrality of racial difference as a shaping force of the "American imaginary," Lott claims that "film noir's relentless cinematography of chiaroscuro and moral focus on the rotten souls of white folks...invoked the racial dimensions of this figural play of light and dark" (Lott 453).

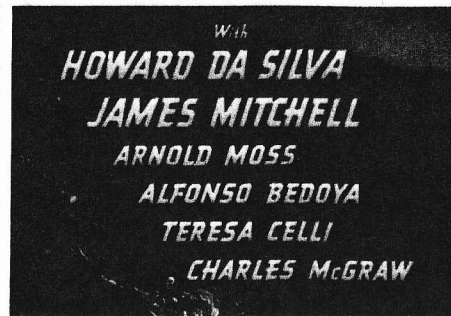
Lott's essay investigates specific examples of film noir's representations of African-Americans, Latinos and Asians in films such as *Double Indemnity*, *Murder, My Sweet*, *The Lady from Shanghai*, and *Touch of Evil*, leading him to conclude that, "film noir is a cinematic mode defined by its border crossings" (Lott 548). Lott argues that what facilitate these racial crossings are the new technical innovations of movie making. New exposure meters, faster film stock, and better location filming all allowed film noir to capture people's "fall from (g)race into the deep shadows" (Lott 548). For Lott, racial crossings are figured in terms of light and dark lighting and composition, since "noir's crossing from light to dark, the indulgence of actions and visual codes ordinarily renounced in white bourgeois culture and thereby raced in the white imaginary" (Lott 548). These racial crossings, however, also threaten the moral and social boundaries of whiteness, potentially throwing "its protagonists into the predicament of abjection" (Lott 549). To counter this threat of abjection, Lott argues that "film noir rescues with racial idioms the whites whose moral and social boundaries seem so much in doubt." He concludes that, while noir exposes whiteness to the venerable and paranoid threat of racial crossing, ultimately "black film' is the refuge of whiteness" (Lott 546).

What is remarkable about Lott's otherwise insightful essay is his discussion of *Border Incident*, where he rightly questions the film's reversion to blatant stereotypes of Mexicans. Lott offhandedly remarks, "Anthony Mann's otherwise honorable *Border Incident* [1949] contains a pair of thuggish Mexican goofs" (561), yet does not discuss the film beyond this superficial gloss on the role of race in the film. Although the film's focus on border crossing seems particularly apt for his analysis, *Border Incident* also stages these crossings with heavily stylized film noir visuals, making the film a prime example for Lott to explore the centrality of film noir's racial ideology. Additionally, Lott's analysis fails to consider *Border*

Incident's as well as film noir's, idiosyncratic association to genre. The film's alternation between stylized film noir sections and generic semi-documentary, police procedural sections facilitate a formal analysis of the film and situate the film in relation to genre more generally.

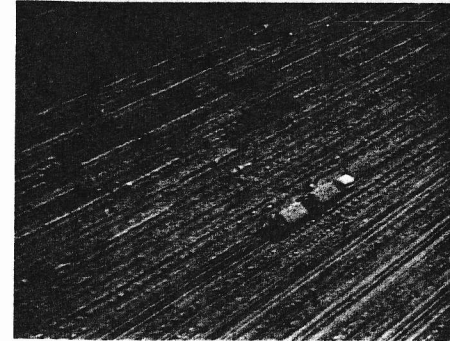
Nowhere is *Border Incident's* representational dilemma more explicit than the credit sequences and opening section, which establishes a series of spatial oppositions contrasting heavily stylized, film noir border crossing scenes against authoritative voiceover and official establishing shots of governmental buildings associated with the semi-documentary and police procedural. The film begins with the title and credits overlaying a long shot of a truck urgently speeding past a barbed wire fence traversing a Southwestern desert terrain. A series of dissolves follows quickly, presenting low angle shots of dark mountain ranges and rugged, foreboding valleys. Suddenly, a silhouetted figure of a human appears on a dark, shadowy mountain range, outlined against the backdrop of the twilight sky. At first the shape on the mountaintop is imperceptible, blending into the mountain landscape forming the skyline, the profile limited to the top-most part of the frame, away from the central focus of the screen. However, just as quickly as the image of the man on the mountain appears, the image dissolves into a montage depicting more mountains and valleys. The sequence ends with a long shot of a river curving through a dark valley, acting as a natural border to the

The second scene of the opening sequence introduces a narrative break with the noir vision of the border and signals the film's first shift to the world of law. A brief montage-like sequence employing voiceover, high key lighting, and daytime, aerial shots of the agricultural fields and canals of Imperial Valley, California resembles the documentary newsreels made popular during World War II. The fields are bright, orderly and well maintained, contrasting visually with the nighttime, noir opening title



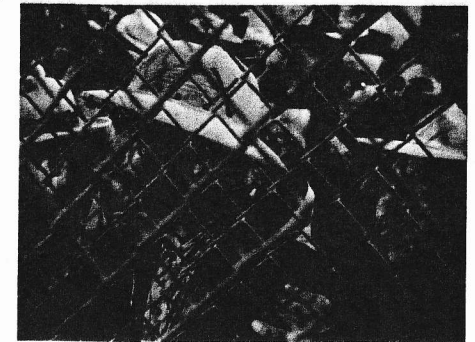
sequence of wild mountain ranges and rocky valleys. Adding to the feeling of human mastery over nature, an authoritative voiceover accompanies the aerial shots, claiming that the "all American canal" represents a "monument to the vision of man." The voiceover underscores the ability of industry and human ingenuity to transform a "desert wasteland" into a "garden" and "agricultural empire." Shots of the canal and agricultural grids of Imperial Valley dissolve slowly into each other while the narrator continues to describe the importance of Mexican labor in harvesting the wealth of the land, describing the braceros as a "vast army." Visually reinforcing this economically framed image of the land, high-angle shots portray a harmonious balance of man and nature. Braceros dot the fields below, blending into the rows of vegetation, as if operating within nature's rhythms and cycles. The dissolving shots high-

light the organized grids of land, the efficient stretch of the canal and the clean plow lines, accentuating an orderly, managed order, managed and methodical control of the land. and methodical control of the land.

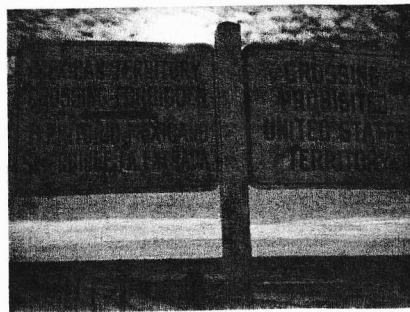
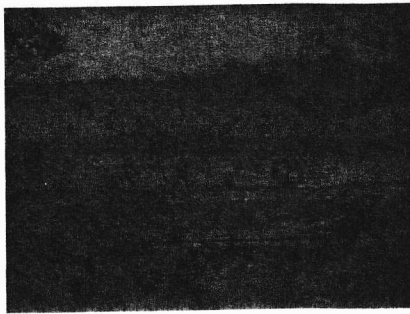


bracero's faces, tracks the length of the fence before pausing briefly on a few obscured faces, and then, finally, tracking down the rest of the fence.

The next scene returns to the barbed wire fence of the desert, placing the logic of demarcation and difference guiding the documentary sections in jeopardy through the panic, paranoia and confusion of the border crossers. Reversing the previous scene of braceros waiting patiently behind the official border, the camera tracks along the barbed wire fence from right to left and the voiceover claims, "there are other braceros who come and go illegally, who jump the fence." The nighttime, barbed wire fence contrasts with the daytime, orderly and policed fence of the previous sequence; the barbed wire indicating a porous and dangerous border. The voiceover concludes that the film is "based upon factual information supplied by the Immigration and Naturalization Service of the United States Department of Justice," the camera tilting upwards to a territorial sign placed above the fence, warning the would-be crossers: "Crossing prohibited, United States Territory."



As the voiceover drops out, dramatic music rises in volume and three braceros approach the barbed wire fence from a distance, crossing back into Mexico. The editing quickens during this sequence, and the cinematography shifts from closeups to long shot, disori-



entating the viewer by emphasizing the bracero's paranoid point of view. As the braceros approach a dark valley, afraid of the potential dangers that await them, the figure of the man on the mountain appears again, however, this time he watches the braceros with binoculars and signals a group of horse-riding smugglers with a flashlight. The bandits speed off to intercept the braceros and the film cuts back to the braceros' point of view as they approach the ominous valley. Once the braceros enter the valley, the bandits pounce on them, fighting with them at first, then killing and robbing them before they deposit the braceros' bodies in quicksand to hide the evidence of their ghastly deed. Taken in its entirety, the opening scene contrasts proper institutions against the paranoia of the unlawful border and braceros lost and disconnected from the institutions that would ensure their safety. Most obviously, the exchange between the darkened, dangerous film noir border and brightly lit, bird's eye view and authoritative voiceover works to place the lawful and unlawful elements of the border in opposition. The fluctuation between these two visions



provides the narrative and spatial separation between a series of oppositions guiding the film: Mexican vs. U.S. citizen, economic productivity vs. wilderness, nature vs. technology. While the voiceover provides a sense of safety and distance from the danger of the film noir border-crossing scene, authorizing a return to the border and minimizing its danger in the process, its sudden evacuation during the border crossing scene proves the voiceover's authority to be vulnerable and transitory. The viewer has the sense of observing another world, a border different and disconnected from the one represented in the semi-documentary scenes.

Evidence from the screenplay helps establish the film's representation of the border as a space of uncanny danger and paranoia. The screenplay dating from December 18, 1948 describes the opening shot as "a long desert valley, its floor brilliantly moonlit. Jagged low desert mountains are silhouetted against the moon – a scene of eerie unreality..." It is the opposition between the "eerie unreality" of the border crossing scenes, already established through the silhouetted figure on the mountain range, against the ostensible "realism" of semi-documentary scenes that divide the representations of the border.

In order to strengthen the opening section's divide between film noir and semi-documentary, the rest of the film relies on the thematic opposition between nature and culture to structure and reinforce its narrative logic. The film repeatedly links the braceros with nature and naturalistic imagery, while Anglos are associated with modernization, technology, law and surveillance, which seemingly justifies their "superiority" and distinction from the braceros. In addition to the opening's aerial shots of braceros dotting the fields, the film abounds with examples of Mexicans identified with nature and equivalent to the land they work. When the Mexican smugglers meet Parkson, the head of the criminal smuggling gang, they are dumbfounded by the modern technology in the office, from the magical workings of the dictograph machine, which they believe to be a television, to the gun-lighter. Another example of the film's use of the simplistic binary between nature and culture is the flower pin used to signal the smugglers when it is time to cross the border. This "primitive" form of communication – the flowers signify but as signs of nature – as well as the rudimentary sense by which the pins signify – in contrast to, say, verbal communication – accentuates the film's racial stereotypes, which assume that the braceros or Mexicans are closer to nature or, in fact, operate in a state of nature. This equation of Mexican with the natural, ultimately, facilitates their dehumanization and transport as laborers and commodities. The Mexicans' simplicity, their naïve and natural demeanor, make them ripe for such exploitation according to the stereotypes of the film.

While technology and modernization emphasize the cultural, ethnic and national divide between Mexicans and Anglos, the film also stresses the importance of the braceros' hands, strengthening racial and national stereotypes. Before Pablo is loaded onto a truck transporting him across the border, he must first have his hands inspected for calluses, to insure that he is a bracero. With panic clearly written on his face, Pablo knows he lacks a true bracero's calluses, yet he quickly concocts a clever story when he is discovered: he is a criminal escaping persecution and imprisonment in Mexico. Pablo asks the smugglers, "Does one have to be a bracero to want to cross the border?" The bandits, confused by the question, eventually accept Pablo's story and decide to transport him along with the braceros. This

use of hands as distinctive markers occurs again twice in the film, first after Pablo and Juan spend the day working the fields, when Juan slowly begins to realize that Pablo is not actually a bracero and, as a result, offers Pablo gloves to protect his hands. The final reference occurs at the end of the film, when Juan discovers that Pablo is an undercover agent, claiming this fact explains Pablo's "soft hands."



The film's thematic focus on bracero's hands is not entirely fictional. Fears of illegal immigration were, in fact, a real threat among the media and with American public. A 1954 article in *Life* magazine entitled, "Bulge of Braceros at the Border," focusing on the lapsed treaty between the United States and Mexico the previous year, details the story of Toni Barreneo, a mining clerk who, according to the article, "transformed himself into a bracero" for quick, American money. Toni roughed-up his hands and created calluses by rubbing a water-

hose and pouring formaldehyde on his hands. After working six months and earning 500 dollars, Toni returned to Mexico, rejoined his family and bought a small house, resuming his job as a mining clerk. The article states that Toni is "well educated and speaks good English," but goes on to stress that he must hide this fact in order to successfully cross into the United States. Additionally, Toni must imitate the braceros' look and manner, darkening and dirtying his skin in order to be granted a temporary work permit. The article contrasts Toni's story with that of Angel Cos, a vaquero (cowboy) who must enter the United States illegally to earn nine times what he would make in Mexico. Even though Angel is more deserving of a work-permit, Angel must illegally travel across the dangerous border region. The article compares Angel's withered and callused hands, explaining that he has been working since he was four years old, with a picture of Toni's "transformed" hands. The article, like the scene of Pablo having his hands inspected, points to the U.S. fears of eliding the difference between U.S. citizen and braceros. Yet the article, like the film, work to reinforce the collapsing difference between Mexican and American by transforming the bracero into an extension of his hands. The focus on hands – the old woman feeling for calluses, the gloves – reveals how the agricultural demands of Imperial Valley equates the bracero with his hands, converting the hands into metonymic signs of racial, economic and national difference. Indicating the signifying power of the border, its ability to transform both people and objects into metaphors and metonyms, the significance of hands reduce the braceros to their labor and, ultimately, fuse them to the land they work. As if tied to the dirt, the fields and the crops they harvest, the braceros are subjugated by the logic of their labor, undifferentiated from the crude products they produce.

In contrast to the crowd scenes of braceros and the scenes linking braceros to nature, the land, and their labor, Anglos in the film are united through institutions and connected by modern technology and communication. The clearest example of the connection between technology and surveillance occurs during the film's opening sequence, when the silhouetted figure framed against the mountain is later revealed to be an Anglo working with the bandits. The shadowy figure, which first disrupts the introduction's establishing shots, is later connected to technology and power – his use of the binoculars and flashlight to signals the others – and becomes an early example of Anglos' dominant and controlling use of technology, especially to the detriment of the braceros.

But more than just connecting technology and surveillance, the shadowy figure initiates a visual pattern the film connects with the border: the paranoid threat of the dialectical collapse of the human and the natural and the urban and the rural, of the human intrusion into nature and the dominance of nature over the human. As an uncanny image issuing from the mountain range, seemingly indecipherable from the landscape, the man on the mountain blurs the boundary between the human and the natural; human power rising from the mountains and the terrible threat of the border region linked to the human that metaphorizes that menace. The figure of the man on the mountain is accorded a type of ontological ambiguity, neither fully natural nor fully human. This ambiguity accords the image its power, the manner in which it stands in as a cipher for the paranoia of the entire border region. The power of the shadow, in essence, resides in its capacity to represent two things while ostensibly signifying neither one entirely, more than just a man on a mountain, more than a shadowy figure haunting the fringes of the mountain range. The figure is transformed, by its oblique and lurking presence, into a pure image, a metaphor more than a man proper, something that represents the border's power by converting nature into the site of the human, the site of surveillance and observation, the place where culture, civilization and the watchful gaze of institutions reside.

However, the film attempts to reestablish this often blurry distinction between nature and culture at other crucial points. While the film connects the dangerous, indistinct relationship of people and the land to the power of paranoia and surveillance, the film also focuses on the border's role in marking ethnic, national and racial difference. Juan Garcia's fixation on Bearn's cowboy shirt and Rodriguez's responds, "Yes, it gives a man distinction," emphasizes the extent to which the border patrols national distinction as well as other ethnic and economic differences. Pablo's sense of distinction reveals Bearn's difference from the braceros in more than one way. Indicating both racial and economic difference, the shirt reinforces the traditional, stereotypical disparity between Americans and Mexicans, with Americans possessing the economic and racial superiority to legitimately wear such clothes. The flowery shirt, which plays off the signifying function of the flower pin, also implies that Bearn's disguise as a criminal operates differently than Pablo's disguise as a bracero. For Pablo, working undercover necessitates blending in with the braceros, converting him into an anonymous, faceless laborer, and capitalizing on the racial assumptions that "Mexicans all look the same." Bearn's disguise, on the other hand, works according to an opposed logic. His "distinction" allows him to go unnoticed, to be just a typical American, working within

the the racial and economic stereotypes permitting his undercover investigation to operate successfully.

Bearnes and Rodriguez's plan to infiltrate the criminal ring backfires, however, when Rodriguez is trapped at the bracero labor camp and Bearnes is captured by Parkson's hired hands and tortured for the stolen immigration cards, his fancy cowboy shirt stolen by a Mexican. The shirt's usurpation reveals how all objects and, as we shall later see, people are susceptible to the hazards of circulation. Not only are the stolen immigration cards, which to this point are still controlled by the authorities, seized by the wrong people, but the shirt now enters into a circulation threatening to become out of control. At this point in the film's narrative, the opposition between distinction and circulation is under jeopardy. If distinction operates like a border – a physical indication of difference, separating self from other – then one can begin to see how circulation opposes distinction, threatening to undermine difference. An example of circulation's dangers occurs early in the film, just after the opening section, when viewers are introduced to the U.S. and Mexican immigration officers. Deciding how to infiltrate the bracero smuggling group, the head Mexican immigration official claims that, "If the criminals work in a circle, we will work in a circle." Not only does this notion of the circle connect the police to the criminals directly, it undermines the assumed distinctions between law and criminality since the police will openly follow the methods, techniques and approaches the criminal group employs. While Bearnes and Rodriguez mirror the criminal groups' illegal circulation – braceros circulating across the border to the U.S. and back again to Mexico once they have earned enough money, where they face the risk of being robbed by the very same bandits that smuggled them to the U.S. in the first place – their circulation is initially connected to the official and legitimating authority of the law. The potential for Bearnes and Pablo to be caught up in illegal circulation, however, their case and their lives derailed by this circulation, becomes a real possibility. Circulation's implicit dangers, indeed the inherent problems of "crossing," are obvious for not only braceros and criminals, but also for the officers, who, by mirroring the braceros and criminals' techniques, must "cross" through masquerade and placing the distinctions guiding the law into jeopardy.

The border's logic of exchange and circulation, however, quickly reverts to a degrading black market of illegal circulation when braceros are literally and metaphorically transformed into objects of exchange. Bearnes' earlier claim that he runs the risk of becoming a "clay pigeon" is realized in the very next scene as Parkson shoots clay pigeons with a bb-gun, literalizing the previous metaphor. Later, Parkson himself refers in code to the braceros as "curios" over the phone. This reduction of people to mere "curiosities," the equal to the objects they produce, issues from the very same economic system that fosters productive capitalist exchange and circulation. Yet this nighttime exchange and circulation of braceros replicates its daytime, legal counterpart since both sides – governmental and criminal – employ similar tactics and representations of braceros.

Once Bearnes is discovered as an undercover immigration officer, he is transported to the fields by Parkson's henchmen to be murdered. Bearnes frantically tries to run away, but is shot in the leg and collapses to the ground before he can escape. Hysterically clawing and gripping at the ground, Bearnes is framed from a low camera angle, pain distorting his

face as Parkson's men drive a tractor over his body. The most violent scene of the film by far and probably one of the most gruesome scenes in all film noir, Bearnes' murder powerfully reverses the documentary sections' glowing praise for the economic productivity of the region and the orderly workings of immigration officials and the law. Trampled by the machinery his investigation intends to uphold, the scene of Bearnes' murder underscores the perverted collusion between agricultural production and the law. In essence, Bearnes is transformed into a "bracero" when crushed by the tractor, experiencing the bracero's paranoia and fear of being swallowed up by the earth. As with the opening sequences, when the braceros are dumped into the quicksand pits, Bearnes' murder underscores the uneasy relationship between the people and the land and the potential of economic circulation to collapse distinction, a fear the documentary sections negate by emphasizing the healthy, productive relationship between the people and the land.

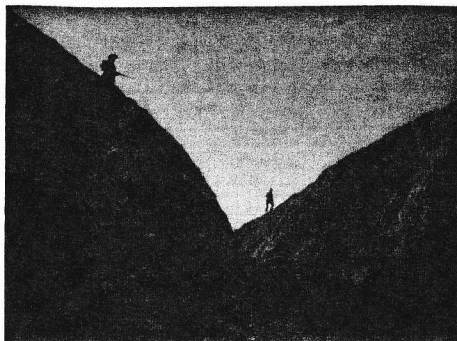


The film's climatic conclusion revisits the Valley of Death border-crossing scene from the opening sequence. After Bearnes' murder, Parkson's smuggling operation is exposed, forcing Parkson to flee with his henchmen before the immigration officials arrive. Deciding to kill Pablo, Juan and the rest of the braceros in the valley of death – the same valley where the bracero crossers were killed during the opening sequence – Parkson is overtaken by his own henchmen and forced to walk the valley of death with the braceros he intended to kill. Park-

son, Pablo and the rest of the braceros must walk through the valley, surrounded by Amboy and the other bandits, who scale the mountain ridge, guns in hand, ready to shoot the vulnerable victims. Quoting the visual iconography of the opening sequence, Amboy and the others appear as silhouetted figures blending into the mountain range's shadow, hovering above the braceros that walk in the valley below. As the braceros continue through the valley, Pablo disarms Parkson and forces him in front of the braceros, placing him at the greatest danger. While the bandits lie in wait for the braceros, Parkson steps into the clearing and tries to warn them, but before he is heard, or because they do not care, Parkson's gang shoots him and a battle ensues between the remaining braceros and bandits, and Juan both struggle with the bandits, fighting for their lives. Pablo kills his assailant braceros during the opening of the scene, but he falls into a quicksand pit, presumably the same one that consumes the dead braceros during the opening sequence, fighting to free himself as the police and immigration officials rush to the scene. Juan arrives, struggling to pull Pablo from the quicksand, and yet only after the police arrive can they free Pablo.

This return to the Valley of Death from the film's opening links the border with rep-

etition and death. Just as objects and people circulate during the film, challenging the border's inviolability, the film's narrative also circulates and revisits the same scenes and similar spaces, obsessively indexing the places where distinctions break down and the points where paranoia reigns. When Parkson is disarmed and forced to walk the valley of death as a bracero would, he experiences, like Pablo and Bearnes before him, the bracero's fear and paranoia. This role reversal – Parkson forced to walk with the braceros – reveals how paranoia itself circulates. Already establishing the braceros' paranoia while crossing the border during the opening sequence, the film carefully stages how paranoia's circulation is produced by the border, transforming everybody into a potential bracero. Like the emphasis on the quicksand at the beginning and end of the film, paranoia is a figure for the perils of economic circulation, crossing itself in these instances, suggesting that everyone – bracero, criminals, immigrations officers and law officials – is subject to the paranoia of collapsing differences and dialectical fissures at the border.



After the rescue, the voiceover returns and signals the resumption of the semi-documentary style, calmly and assuredly stating: "And so this action in the desert was concluded. Murder, robbery, rescue. All these things that are true and part of the racket." The use of "and" and the voiceover present an illusion of continuity, as if the film noir border crossing scenes were observed and controlled by a legitimate authority, organizing the disruptive film noir visuals and jarring editing and dramatic shifts in shot scale. Then, fading into the final section of the film, the camera tracks toward a government award ceremony, Mexican and U.S. flags enclose the event, framing the narrative within the brightly lit, clean, unambiguous mise-en-scene of the previous semi-documentary, police procedural sequences. Pablo receives a medal of consideration from the United States, while Bearnes is posthumously honored by the Mexican government. After the awards are distributed, the film cuts to a superimposed image of a farmer working the fields. The voice over states, "the life in the valley goes on. The food is brought from the earth by the hands of

the workers now safe and secure, living under the protection of two great governments and the bounty of God almighty."

Combining the award ceremony, the superimposed images of braceros in the fields and the narrative surety of the voice over confirming, "The life in the valley goes on," the film's conclusion reframes the interior, violent storyline within the restrictive and containing narrative of the police procedural and semi-documentary sequence. The violence of the braceros' lives is treated as mere exceptions that, perhaps, derail the controlled police procedural genre, but ultimately pose no real threat or challenge to the law. The U.S. and Mexican flags work to visually reestablish the iconography of nationalism to the region, for the flags position the genre within a nationalistic framework guaranteeing the actions of individuals, in this case Rodriguez and Bearnes, whose actions are, for the most part, unmoored from governmental institutions. Yet, we can rightly question the quick and seemingly arbitrary inclusion of the ending frame narrative and, in particular, the deployment of the iconography of governmental, state, and institutional power. The end seems rushed to reestablish order in a film that has denied, for the most part, precisely that order and stability. In a narrative world where circulation threatens the very notion of national state sovereignty, the inclusion of metonyms of national power – flags – seems like a bald-faced attempt to shore up the waning supremacy of nation states jeopardized by the growing role of globalization in late capitalist economies.

