

North America: Weak regionalism, strong borders

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1. Introduction

Regionalism and immigration in North America

This chapter shows that regionalism can serve as a tool to protect the interests of nation states in a globalized world. Discussing the interplay of different regimes (trade, security, and immigration), it particularly highlights that the fortification of borders and the integration of markets are not to be understood necessarily as contradictory phenomena but are closely intertwined. The chapter also underlines that regionalism is not an incremental process. There are clearly interlinkages as regards regional integration of different issue areas. These, however, do not necessarily imply positive ‘spill over’ effects, whereas integration in one field consequentially brings about integration also in others. Thus, by looking at the issue of immigration and the role it played in integration in North America, this contribution touches upon core questions of regionalism.

The discussion in this chapter is largely based on existing scholarship while putting an explicit focus on questions of international migration and regionalism. It is divided into two main sections which provide a comprehensive overview of the recent history of regional integration in relation to the field of international migration, as well as a discussion of the factors that shape the extent of regionalism on migration. It first traces the position and role of immigration in the development of the major regional cooperation agreement, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Within this first part, it also focuses on the windows of opportunities and momentum the economic integration in a post-NAFTA era created in terms of cooperation on migration matters in the region. In the second main part it looks at the emergence of a North American security perimeter, i.e. dynamics of securitization, and its impact on cooperation in the field of international immigration until today.

The major perspective of this chapter is on the United States, as well as its relation to and cooperation with Mexico, rather than discussing the relations between all the three North American states to an equal degree. This perspective is first and foremost based on the fact that the United States is indisputably the decisive player in North America. Second, it reflects that immigration has played a much more prominent role between Mexico and the United States than it did in the relations of those two

countries with Canada. Third, it also mirrors the ‘existential dilemma’ of the region (McDonald 2011, 113), namely that in many ways the regional character of North America is debatable, and rather than a truly regional, i.e. trilateral, integration, what we have seen is ‘double bilateralism’, as will be discussed in more detail in the chapter.

The relevance of studying a ‘region that isn’t a region’

In many ways looking at North America in terms of a region is a challenge. Scholars of regionalism have struggled in classifying this world area, or even in deciding whether it is a region at all (McDonald 2011, 113). Even if we share the approach that regions ‘are always in the process of construction, always provisional and always open to revision’ (Söderbaum 2011, 55), the notion of North America remains disputable. As McDonald (2011, 113), moreover, rightly highlights in many ways, concepts and approaches that have been developed to study the prime example of Northern regionalism, the European Union, are often ill suited to account for integration, its emergence, and developments in North America. The story gets even more complex if we add international immigration into the picture. In contrast to Europe, economic regional integration in North America, as was remarked at the start of this introduction and will be elaborated in the following, did not facilitate interregional mobility and the softening of borders within the region. However, while the North American case tells us much about its regional particularities, it is at the same time also indicative for wider challenges of regional integration. Any comprehensive theory of integration should potentially be a theory of disintegration as Philippe Schmitter (2004) famously argued more than fifteen years ago. Recent events in Europe, such as Brexit, in many of which immigration centred controversies played a pivotal role, have further corroborated this statement. In that sense, studying North America is particularly relevant since it also contributes to understand why and in which ways international immigration, and more importantly, the surrounding (domestic) politics of immigration, can be a key factor in maintaining disunity, or even a driver of disintegration.

2. NAFTA and immigration: Limits and opportunities of regionalism

Setting the course for more, not less ‘Westphalianism’

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) lies undoubtedly at the heart of North-American regionalism. Until the process of its establishment in the early 1990s (and its signing in 1992) Mexico, Canada and the United States rarely have been considered to represent a region at all. It was only then that a tri-national region began to take shape (Long and Suarez-Mier 2017, 272). NAFTA emerged in the context of, and in response to, the development of regionalism in other world areas, most notably in Europe but also in Asia, and the economic competition it brought about (Börzel 2011, 21). At the same time it very much developed in distinction from the European integration model, based upon the neoliberal consensus in all the three North American countries during that period: ‘While the European Union was itself a market expanding enterprise, the burgeoning bureaucracy in Brussels was easily viewed, through the lenses of the Reagan/Thatcher Revolution and the Chicago Boys, as a retrograde bastion of welfare state inefficiency, bent on overregulation’ as Golob (2012, 255) argues. The architects of NAFTA explicitly rejected the state-led, bureaucratic and institutionalized character of the European Community, consequently setting up a minimalist institutionalist structure (McDonald 2011, 115). The highly asymmetrical relationship within the region, with a dominant super hegemon as well as conflicting interests on immigration also played a relevant role in the arrangement of the institution-light design of NAFTA, and the rejection of an expansive regionalism. The existent power asymmetries supported a path of ‘double bilateralisms’ as scholars of North American regionalism (see Pastor 2004) have poignantly called it. Canada and Mexico were alert that the US would impose its preferences in trilateral negotiations. Thus, from the start, North American integration happened along narrow, market-restricted, double-bilateralist lines with the US as a pivot, which weakened the potential for more substantial regional approaches in arenas such as immigration (Golob 2012, 258). While Canada and Mexico were not ready for more US hegemony, the US itself had equally no interest in a more expansive arrangement that would enable its neighbours to have more involvement and freedoms in areas like immigration (ibid., 255). In the following I will discuss this role migration played in the establishment of NAFTA more in depth.

Regional priorities

Upon the signing of NAFTA, the agreement was portrayed by the then president of the United States not only as a step towards North American regionalism, but an important leap towards cooperation of the entire Western hemisphere.

‘More than 150 years ago, Simon Bolivar, [...], spoke about an America united in heart, subject to one law, and guided by the torch of liberty. My friends, here in this hemisphere we are on the way to realizing Simon Bolivar's dream. And today with the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement, we take another giant step towards making the dream a reality’ (Bush 1992).

NAFTA was indeed creating the largest free trade area in the world at the time of its launch in 1994. Though beyond free trade, as already suggested above, cooperation in most other areas remained strongly Westphalian. This is clearly the case with regard to international migration. Unlike the flow of goods, services, and capital, the flow of labour was deliberately not liberalized under NAFTA. The agreement established solely some rules for temporary entry, which were largely based on already existing US immigration law. The agreement also continued the differential treatment of Mexican and Canadian citizens by the United States. It did not provide a visa-exempt status to Mexican nationals, a status which was given to Canadians already prior to NAFTA by the Immigration and Nationality Act (for a comprehensive overview of migration/labour mobility related provisions see Yost 1996). Given the architecture and the underlying conditions structuring North American regionalism referred to above, this lack of any regional immigration regime is hardly to be viewed as a surprising outcome. It might be even less puzzling, considering that more than any other issue, migration is widely conceived as being the cornerstone of national sovereignty. Migration is also a field in which conflicting interests between the United States as a receiving country and Mexico as a sending country had prevailed for a long time (Rosenblum 2011). Moreover, while migration has been a large-scale phenomenon between Mexico and the United States fostering regionalization from below, this is less an issue in relation to Canada. Whilst migration from Mexico has significantly slowed down since the 2008 economic recession, Mexican-born immigrants still represent the largest bulk of the foreign-born population in the United States. About 12 million Mexican nationals were living abroad in 2015, 97 per cent of which were living in the United States (OECD 2017). Consequently, remittances by Mexican immigrants residing in the United States are an essential part of the Mexican economy, being the third-largest source of foreign revenue in the country (Felbab Brown 2016). As noted before, this is much less the case between Canada and Mexico

(see Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada 2018). In Canada, both North and South America, still remain relatively less important in terms of immigrant stock and flows compared to the case for the United States. In general, regionalization in North America has been -and despite a rapid increase in the wake of NAFTA- continues to be very uneven, which feeds the dynamic in which Canada and Mexico have always been much more interested in the United States than they are interested in each other (cf. White 2015, 101). To fully comprehend the side-lining of immigration in NAFTA however, the domestic politics of immigration in the United States have to be taken into account.

Domestic Politics

The free trade deal was a controversial issue in all three states. The most heated political battle across the political spectrum, however, emerged in the United States. On the left, activists were opposing corporate-led globalization, on the right anti-immigration activists were mobilizing against it (Golob 2011, 257). This right-wing opposition to NAFTA has been most famously represented by the figure of presidential candidate Ross Perot, who in contrast to the official, governmental narrative, argued that the US will remain a magnet for immigration by Mexicans (Wunsch 1994, 141).

This politicization of immigration, which manifested itself in the course of the emergence of NAFTA, did not represent a rupture in the history of the conflicted relationship of the United States with immigration, nor was it limited to discussions on regional integration, on the contrary: Despite the fact that the self-image of the United States strongly relies on the idea that it is a nation of immigrants, there always has been a lot of ambivalence and even opposition towards immigration. In the early 1990s the issue of immigration had notably gained in saliency overall (Cornelius 2005), which also further fuelled debates on NAFTA.

Given the highly contested nature of the issue, the US government was particularly keen to exclude labour mobility from the agreement. The administration was aware that inclusion of migration issues within NAFTA could jeopardize congressional approval (Johnson 1994, 957). Similar views were shared by then Mexican President Salinas and Canadian Prime Minister Mulroney, who both also tried to keep immigration off the table (Yakamavich 2002, 479). Securing ratification at the domestic level was difficult enough for them without the inclusion of immigration.

It has to be noted though that Mexico initially had aspired to achieve opportunities for a migration agreement through trade liberalization and only later did it adjust its position on this question (Miller and Gabriel 2008, 149) mirroring its weaker role in the negotiations. Side-lining immigration, thus, was not exclusively a matter of prioritization of the ‘freedom of goods over people’ but it was also shaped by power-asymmetries that lie at the very core of North-American regionalism.

Economic regionalism and the management of migration

As briefly indicated before, regional integration was very much framed by the official negotiators of NAFTA as a way to manage migration through economic development, a notion promoted by the government of the US as well as of Mexico. A major slogan by the Mexican government to garner support for NAFTA was ‘Mexican tomatoes rather than Mexican tomato pickers’ (Cornelius and Martin 1993, 485). To put it differently, NAFTA was viewed as promoting US immigration control objectives, curbing migration through the economic development it was expected to bring about. The then U.S. Attorney General Reno even argued that if NAFTA were not passed, effective immigration control would become an impossible mission (Andreas 1999, 60).

Along these lines of thought, the idea of a North American free trade arrangement was also encouraged by the Commission for the Study of International Migration and the Cooperative Economic Development established by the US Immigration and Reform Control Act of 1986. In its 1990 report, the Commission recommended the government to ‘expedite the development of a US-Mexico free trade area and encourage its incorporation with Canada into a free trade area’ (Commission for the Study of International Migration and Cooperative Economic Development 1990, 11). The report by the Commission, however, also clearly outlined the short-term implication of development through trade, emphasizing what migration scholars have termed the ‘migration hump’, i.e. the dynamic that development stimulates migration in the short and medium term, which is actually enhancing people’s ability to migrate (ibid., 41). In a similar vein, one of the leading US migration scholars, Douglas Massey, already wrote at the end of the 1980s that,

“[a] realistic appraisal of the relationship between migration and economic development, ... suggests that policies to promote additional economic growth in sending nations will not reduce immigration to the United States in the short run; indeed, they may increase it. If it is in the interest of the United States to promote

rapid economic development in Mexico, then it is also in its interest to accept relatively large numbers of Mexican immigrants.” (Massey 1988, 384).

Various studies at the time also suggested that even the expected long-term effect on reducing immigration would be highly questionable, factoring in that migration is a cumulative process and that further liberalization of sectors like agriculture through free trade would mean a significant uprooting of labourers who would search new employment opportunities abroad (Andreas 1999, 60).

Despite the promotion of regional integration as a tool to curb immigration ‘naturally’, it was not by accident that the first formal, national border control strategy by the United States, which paved the fundamentals for today’s militarized state of the US border, was launched in 1994 (cf. Rosenblum 2013, 3). The National Strategic Plan (NSP), a multi-year migration control enforcement programme to deter irregular migration at the south-west border was thus launched parallel to the entering into force of NAFTA (Morales 2008, 122), suggesting the acknowledgement of, and/or concern over, the looming effects of further economic liberalization on (unwanted) immigration. To put it differently, a ‘barricaded border’ and a ‘borderless economy’ were created in tandem (Andreas 2003, 3). While from a regional integration perspective closing the border, and opening the market are seemingly contradictory developments (Ashby 2014), they can thus be strongly interrelated as the example of North American regionalism suggests.

By making border crossings more difficult, however, the contrary of the desired effect was achieved. Immigration from Mexico soared throughout the 1990s until the early 2000s (Lauby 2016, 6). Seasonal labourers preferred to stay rather than risking not to be able to enter the country in the future, which decreased circular mobility. North American regionalism therefore more or less indirectly led to more (permanent, irregular) migration in the United States. Furthermore, one of the central assumptions underlying the idea of curbing migration through economic integration, namely that immigration from Mexico was shaped predominantly by the Mexican economy rather than the US economy, proved partly wrong. In retrospect, it turned out that migration was heavily influenced by macro-trends in the US economy rather than the other way around, not least because a substantive wage differential between the two countries remained in place (ibid., 4). Moreover, while all three NAFTA countries had some economic gains from the agreement its effects were distributed unevenly, particularly in rural areas and groups such as low wage manufacturing workers who

tended to migrate to the US (Ackelson 2006, 3), which were negatively affected. In other words, the economic forces that have driven so many Mexicans to (irregularly) stay in the United States before remained not only unaddressed by NAFTA, by not containing any regional migration arrangements, they were in some sense even exacerbated.

The absence of any labour mobility arrangements and the strong emphasis on NAFTA as an instrument to reduce migration from Mexico into the US, however, further reinforced the idea that lifting restrictions on immigration and promoting more freedom of movement was an unacceptable route (cf. Ackelson 2006).

In sum, the underlying logic of regionalism in North America, but also the dynamics it unleashed, were very different from regional arrangements in Europe as well as South America (see the chapters by Geddes; and Brumat and Acosta in this volume). The point of NAFTA was to enhance the mobility of capital and goods, but to reduce the mobility of people.

Eventually, and most importantly for the study of regionalism and migration, the regional economic integration in North America has generated or heightened the process of sealing off national borders, and at the same time enabled a more integrated security regime (cf. Ashby 2014, 484). The economy and security are not to be understood simply or exclusively as competing regimes of North American regionalism driven by adversary interest groups, instead they have to be seen as interlocked phenomena, a pattern that was reinforced in the years to come.

Economic regionalism as a facilitator of transnational cooperation on migration

Thus it would be wrong to conclude that the NAFTA approval shut the door on formalized cooperation on migration in the region. Although no regionalism in the true sense emerged, a regional security regime took shape based on double bilateralism and reinforcing US interests, which included cooperation on immigration control matters (see next section). This, however, was not a clear-cut, linear development. At one moment, economic integration actually did open up also some opportunities for a potential liberalization of the regulation of intra-regional human mobility.

NAFTA most notably paved the way for new relations with the United States and Mexico as partners rather than problematic neighbours (Rosenblum 2011,1). This new relationship also opened a window of opportunity for a more regional outlook on the

issue of immigration and more concretely, bilateral rapprochement on the matter, which effectively also implied an end to Mexico's policy of no migration policy.

In 1997 presidents Zedillo and Clinton signed a Joint Statement on Migration, which was presented as a 'first step leading to specific proposals to manage migration between our nations in a mutually beneficial manner' (Kunz and Lavenex 2008, 15). Moreover, the US and Mexico for the first time also agreed on a set of procedures regarding deportation notifications and the process of removals (Rosenblum 2011, 12).

Cooperation gained further momentum under the leadership of George Bush and Vicente Fox. The latter had made the deepening of integration, with labour migration on top of the agenda, already a programmatic priority during his electoral campaign; a program he held on to once in power (Morales 2008, 123). In 2001 Bush and Fox set-up high-level discussions on migration, which they described in a joint declaration as 'the most fruitful and frank dialogue we have ever had on a subject so important to both nations'(cit. after Delano 2009, 42). The two leaders stressed that they recognized migration issues as 'vital to our prosperity, well-being and the kind of societies we want to build' (ibid.). They discussed a migration agreement which contained enforcement but also important liberalizing aspects: the authorization of irregular Mexican migrants in the US, improved border enforcement, a temporary Mexico-specific worker program, and a public-private partnership for development of the origin communities in Mexico (Rosenblum 2011, 12). Mexico's President Fox framed the prospective agreement between the states as NAFTA-Plus (Delano 2009, 45), and asserted that NAFTA stood ready to take the next logical step, moving forward to a common market and virtually lifting immigration restrictions (Yakamavich 2002, 465).

Sending a message to the Mexican diaspora in the US as well as domestically the Mexican leadership set out labour mobility as a long-term goal, and the legalization and protection of the rights of Mexican nationals in the US as a short-term goal (Morales 2008, 122). Given the significant amount of cheap irregular Mexican labour forces in the US labour market, Fox's approach (the so called 'whole enchilada') had the merit of putting the formalization of a *de facto* labour market already operating between the US and Mexico at the core of negotiations, as Morales (2008, 127) remarks.

While this phase has often been praised as a time of shared migration responsibility in the domain of migration, Sanchez-Rodrigues and Mumme (2013, 131) emphasize that asymmetry and different interests between the two countries as regards immigration persisted. Referring to the US ambassador to Mexico of the time, the authors (ibid.) note that while Mexicans insisted on calling the talks on migration between the countries' two leaders 'negotiations', the US counterpart labelled them as 'conversations'. Given the ongoing sensitivity and salience of the issue of irregular migration, there was a lack of support for comprehensive reforms within the US government and Congress.

In sum, the 'whole enchilada' approach overestimated Mexico's bargaining powers vis-a-vis its northern neighbour and underestimated the political complexity that shapes the migration policy field in the United States (Morales 2008, 129). The overall rapprochement between the US and Mexico on migration matters eventually came to a standstill after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which brought about an ever-narrower focus on security, national identity, and border control by the United States. Towards the end of 2002 the US government declared that the political conditions did not exist in the US to advance the migration discussions with Mexico (Delano 2009, 42). The idea of a comprehensive bilateral migration agreement never made it back to the table despite efforts by Mexican decision makers (ibid.). The increase of drug related violence in Mexico also undermined US trust in Mexico's ability to be a reliable partner and thus further reduced the possibility of bilateral agreements on migration (Rosenblum 2011, 17). Following the inauguration of President Calderon (in office from 2006-2012), the Mexican position on migration eventually also shifted markedly, exhibiting a stronger focus on security issues and combating crime (Kunz and Lavenex 2008, 14).

3. Immigration and the emergence of a regional security perimeter

Double-bilateral security

After the 9/11 attacks, North American borderlines were more than ever understood as sources of insecurity rather than opportunity (Golob 2012, 260). Being concerned about market access in the context of the domestic US security priorities in 2001, Canada signed a Border Partnership Agreement (better known as Smart Border Accord) in order to market itself as the 'good neighbour' (ibid.). Mexico, worried to

be left behind, followed suit in 2002. Not only did these agreements further consolidate the double-bilateralism initiated by NAFTA (*ibid.*), more importantly the Smart Border Approach also established the idea that in order to be efficient, border controls needed to be extended beyond the borderline (Andreas 2004). This ‘de-bordering of the border’ (Andreas 2004, 4) by its very nature relied on much greater cooperation between states in the region.

It is worth noting at this point that it would be mistaken to think of the US-Canada and US-Mexico relations, with regard to border cooperation, as fundamentally different to each other, as Longo (2016, 195) reminds us. Rather, Canada has been serving in many ways as a testing ground, which if successful will be introduced in the South (*ibid.*).

In 2005 another major North American ‘regional’ integration initiative was established: the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP). As Golob (2012, 251) argues, SPS represented the ‘apotheosis of the double-bilateral ethos at the heart of North-American integration’. It remained committed to an ‘institutional-light, spill-over free North America’ (*ibid.*, 263). While not based on a formal treaty, SPP meant to enhance security and bolster economic growth through dialogue. SPP was rather short lived; in 2009 it was replaced by the North American Leader’s Summit. But it revealed anew important dynamics and continued previous patterns of regional integration dynamics in relation to immigration. The NAFTA story was repeating itself with regard to its approach towards migration. While aiming further at the liberalization and integration of the economy, it further securitized human mobility and migration. One key component of SPP was the establishment of a common security perimeter, essentially regionalizing security in North America. This implied that North American security was about to become more than ever before US security (Ashby 2014, 485).

SPP was inherently linked to economic integration in a post-NAFTA North America. The statements of the US Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Shannon Thomas, at a 2007 North American Trilateral Summit made this unambiguously clear, emphasizing that the SPP ‘understands North America as a shared economic space’ which needs protection not only on its borders but ‘more broadly throughout North America’ through enhanced ‘security cooperation’. ‘To a

certain extent, we're armouring NAFTA', he summarized the SPP rationale (cit. after Carlsen 2008).

Security cooperation as enforced through the SPP was again not an incidental parallel development to NAFTA and economic integration, but in many ways a direct consequence of NAFTA and economic liberalization in more general. As Coughlin (2015) points out, these initiatives were means to managing security risks that go along economic liberalization, i.e. ordering societies that have been disordered by neo-economic restructuring. What is more, security cooperation, addressing a great extent US domestic concerns, had been carried on the side of Canada and Mexico with the belief that it would safeguard regional economic integration; a belief that turned out to be partly misled, as suggests the economic protectionism under the Obama administration which was fuelled by the financial crisis (Gilbert 2012, 201).

Also, in the SPP process migration politics played a key role. Similar to NAFTA, and although it was not a binding agreement, the SPP faced severe opposition and migration was a central concern of opposition groups in the United States. One of the biggest organizations mobilizing against the SPP was co-founded by Jim Gilchrist, who had been also the founder of the Minuteman Project, a right-wing organization aiming for stricter immigration enforcement (Worrel 2010, 126).

The concerns of these opponents were largely unjustified., While further reinforcing a common external border through SPP also the borders between North American States continued to thicken (Grondin and Larrinaga 2009, 680). This thickening of the border also included the US-Canada border, which had often been referred to as the 'largest undefended border'.

Thus, on the one hand control was strengthened at the national border. But on the other hand it also expanded simultaneously, pushing control outward, as close as possible to origin countries. In line with the Smart Border approach, SPP was another step in reconfiguring borders in North America, and a move away from either a national fortified border or a regional security perimeter, but rather merging both components (Gilbert 2012, 212).

The national territory had eventually become 'the last line of defence' (Shahar 2009, 824) instead of the major one. In sum, regional (economic) integration did not erode state power to exercise migration control, instead nation states extended and shifted their ability to control as the North American example illustrates.

Mexico- the US border guard

Another major initiative of the externalization of migration control powers worth mentioning is the US-Mexico Merida initiative (Fitzgerald and Alarcon 2013, 129). It dates back to 2007 and emphasized shared responsibility to combat crime. It contains US assistance for Mexico and Central America. Fighting drug crimes is usually described as its main objective; such a view however, would be too limited. Merida can be seen as a major transfer of US homeland security concepts to its southern neighbour, and by creating a regional security plan, Merida continued the spirit of the regional security perimeter of the SPP.

To quote assistant secretary Shannon again:

‘...in order to have prosperity we have to have good security. This means recognizing that we cannot protect our borders at the frontier. What we can do at a frontier is regulate the movement of people, regulate the movement of goods and services or facilitate them. But ultimately good security requires cooperative relationships among the countries of North America to identify external threats and to intercept them well before they get to our borders and in many instances well before they get to North-America’ (cit. after Ashby 2015, 165).

Especially in the second phase of the Merida initiative (from 2010 onwards) enhancing the US-Mexico border security, or creating a ‘21st century border’ as it has been officially framed, had been central. As a result, US and Mexican custom officials today work closely together. Based on a change in the law in Mexico in 2015, US customs and immigration officials are allowed to carry arms in Mexico today (Seelke and Finklea 2017, 20).¹

The United States also provides assistance to Mexico to secure its borders with Guatemala and Belize (Seelke and Finklea 2017, 21). The US-Mexico security cooperation has also been eventually mirrored in Canada-Mexico relations, including for instance the sending of officers to Mexico to assist in training programs as part of the Anti-Crime Capacity Building Programme (Gilbert 2012, 205).

Transnational cooperation and externalization of border control was eventually further strengthened in 2014 in response to the Central American ‘migration crisis’, when an increased inflow of unaccompanied child migrants to the United States from the Northern Triangle rose to the top of the US political agenda.

¹ Similarly as a result of the Canada-US Shiprider Agreements first initiated in 2009 law enforcement officers from both states are authorized to enforce the law on both sides of the border, in order ‘to secure it from threats to national security, as well as prevent cross-border smuggling and trafficking’ (Royal Canadian Mounted Police 2018)

As migration of Mexicans coming to the US had as a matter of fact stopped, Central American immigration has become a major issue, and the role of Mexico as a transit country rather than a sending country has become more relevant than ever (see Vera Espinoza in this volume). US and Mexican officials have cooperated closely to curb the flow of Central Americans in 2014 (Seele 2017, 5). The number of apprehensions of Central American immigrants in Mexico has gone up significantly due to US know-how, equipment and funding in the framework of Mexico's Southern Border Strategy (ibid.). In 2015 alone, the US Congress approved a sum of 79 million USD to support Mexico in securing its southern border, money in addition to the 86,6 million already appropriated for enhanced border enforcement helping Mexico to implement its southern security plan and leading to mass deportations and apprehensions (Korthuis 2016). In 2016 the US allocated again 75 million USD for Mexico's National Migration Institution, the body in charge of the southern border (Castillo 2016, 4). Consequently, in the past years significantly more Central Americans have been deported by Mexico than by the United States, reducing immigration to the US notably (Seele 2017, 5).

Political elites and senior officials in the US widely referred to Mexico as having significantly 'stepped up its game' (Isacson, Meyer and Smith 2015, 7) in preventing migrants from Central America from coming to the United States in the wake of the crisis. Transnational cooperation on that matter not only with Mexico but also Central America seemed to be at unprecedented high levels at that time, as indicated by the following statement by a leading Border Patrol representative, made in an interview which I conducted in the wake of crisis:

'We asked for help in the three countries and I don't know that we've seriously expected any of that before last year. We always do things, capacity building and good relations with those three places but actually asking them to do more to keep people at home, get the word out, my experience told that that's not going to work, but it seems to have had some effect. Mexico's real commitment to do things for a secure border on their side of the border, we've never seen that level of effort before.' (Interview by the author with US Border Patrol, June 2015).

As for Mexico, the externalization of border control has over the years actively contributed to its transformation from a transit country into a country of immigration (Menjívar 2014, 359). At the same time, it has led to human rights concerns as regards potential violations and lack of compliance with international refugee law by the Mexican government (Korthuis 2016).

In sum, since the 1990s, national borders within the region thickened, and transnational cooperation on migration focused mainly on security-oriented goals was increasing. While these measures did not necessarily reduce migration (Massey, Durand and Pren 2016), from the perspective of the United States, barricading the border became a politically highly ‘successful policy failure’ as Andreas (2003, 2) called it. More resources were allocated to Border Patrol, and government effectively signalled that it was proactive in fighting ‘irregular’ migration.

As migration eventually started to become more trans-regional, instead of intra-regional with a rise in flows from Central America, the nationals targeted by this border control measures also partly shifted from Mexicans to Central Americans, which in turn further facilitated cooperation on migration control between the US and its southern neighbour. To put it differently, one of the major issues standing in the way of cooperation on migration matters, namely that sending and receiving countries have inherently different interests, was partly eased. This is not to say that power asymmetries which have been structuring much of the regional cooperation in North America have disappeared. In many ways the United States as a regional hegemon exported and diffused its ideas and interests in the region. Moreover, the ‘complex domestic politics of migration’ (ibid.) also explain why the expansion and externalization of border control southwards towards Central America has not led to labour migration agreements and more liberalization of mobility within North America.

Notwithstanding its limits, cooperation in the region has led to relevant domestic changes particularly in Mexico beyond economic restructuring. It had a notable effect on the policy field of security, and interrelated the interrelated migration policy field. Mexico is widely recognized today to be one of the closest partners of the United States when it comes to immigration, a partnership which reached a peak in addressing the 2014 Central American migration crisis.

A new disunity under Trump

Under president Trump, the United States have declared to strengthen national interests anew, favouring unilateral approaches over cooperation. In this vein, NAFTA was defined by president Trump as the ‘worst trade deal ever’ (Reuters 2017). After repeated threats by Trump to withdraw from the agreement,

renegotiations started in summer 2017, and are still ongoing at the time of writing of this chapter (2018).

Mexico-US relations in particular have been on shaky grounds since Trump took over office. Trump made anti-Mexican rhetoric a central component when running for office, blaming Mexicans for stealing American jobs, promising to build a border wall which Mexico should pay for, and announcing mass deportations of ‘bad hombres’ (cf. Lee Anderson 2017). The construction of the (in)famous border wall was linked by the president to the NAFTA renegotiations from the start of his presidency, and used as a threat to end talks:

‘[...] the reason I say they are going to pay for the wall is because Mexico has made a fortune of the stupidity of US trade representatives. They are beating us at trade and they are beating us at the border, and they are killing us with drugs...If you are going to say that Mexico is not going to pay for the wall, then I do not want to meet with you guys anymore, because I cannot live with that.’ (President Trump cit. after Lee Anderson 2017).

In response to these current developments the popular weekly *The New Yorker* (Wallace-Wells 2017) even declared the ‘end of the idea of North America’. With regard to immigration it is not so much the idea of further militarizing the border, however, which represents a rupture in the context of North American regionalism. The ‘novelty’ is rather in the (at least symbolic) return to an exclusively Westphalian idea of border security, as opposed to simultaneous techniques of securitizing borders, which includes the outwards shifting of control through international cooperation. Chances of advancing a truly regional, i.e. trilateral, agenda have not been great under president Obama, who in many ways had a rather global than regional outlook (Gilbert 2012) either, but they undoubtedly appear dim under Trump. Migration politics once again is playing a key role in North American regionalism, and as it should be added today, its potential unmaking.

Conclusion

National interests and regionalism

This chapter has first underlined that North American regionalism takes the form of a weakly developed and primarily trade-based regional co-operation without supranational governance, which was (among others) developed with the specific intention of reducing migration flows. Migration and mobility, moreover, have continued to remain neglected aspects of North American regionalism

notwithstanding increasing regionalisation and continuous regional immigration flows. It has been argued that the domestic politics of migration is a key factor in understanding this development. The chapter then pointed out that instead of facilitating mobility, regional economic integration has (more or less implicitly) been the driver for the development of a 'regional' security perimeter. It simultaneously thickened borders inside the region but also enabled the externalization of border control i.e. the outward shifting by the United States of the responsibility of keeping 'unwanted immigrants' out.

While from a regional integration perspective, closing the border and opening the market seem to be a paradoxical evolution, these two phenomena can be strongly related to each other as the North American example suggests. Businesses and market interests, which tend to be a driver of openness in terms of international migration in a nation state context (Hampshire 2013, Hollifield 1992), thus do not necessarily play an equally strong role when it comes to fostering regionalism in terms of regional mobility and migration regimes. More than that, concerns over security and identity have not been simply outweighing market interests; instead both are interlocked in North American regionalism.

In public discourse, national interests and regionalism are often understood as opposing phenomena. The North American case reminds us though, that regionalism can in many ways better be viewed as a tool to enhance or protect the role and interests of nation states, including those in the field of migration, in a globalizing and mobile world (cf. Closa 2015).

In many ways North America with a regional hegemon as a pivot is a specific case. At the same time, when it comes to immigration the North American example eventually also supports the idea that differences between Europe and the rest of the world are in some instances overstated (cf. Söderbaum 2011, 55). While a comparison with the EU has not been an explicit objective of this chapter, let us acknowledge that the outward shifting of border control, but also significant contestation about mobility within the region as well as tendencies of a return to a more 'narrow nationalist' agenda, are not unknown dynamics in today's Europe either.

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