

Relational Enforcement: The family and the expanding scope of border enforcement

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Introduction

The introduction of President Trump's "zero tolerance" policy for migrants crossing the US-Mexico border in April 2018 resulted in border officials forcibly separating parents or guardians from their children. The images of families torn apart at the US-Mexico border ricocheted around the world, and families suffered the traumatizing consequences of parents in detention while children were placed in jails and shelters for migrant youth. After global backlash, President Trump agreed to halt separations in June 2018, though the practice continued as officials used prior criminal records as reason to continue separating families. As of April 2021, the parents of 445 children separated under these policies have still not been located (Kavi, 2021). The trauma of family separation policies focused on the targeting of the relationship between parents or guardians and their children. As Carol Anne Donohoe, a representative with the legal aid and humanitarian service organization *Al Otro Lado* summarized, "We tortured those families, we took their children" (quoted in Levin, 2021).

Family separation policies were perceived as particularly egregious because of their explicit mobilization of family bonds in the service of migration enforcement. The practice of family separation *was* a deterrence practice precisely because parents, guardians, and children were imagined to be attached to one another by bonds of love and care, making separation unthinkable.ⁱ In October of 2018, President Trump confirmed the logic of deterrence underlying the effort to separate family members, commenting that, "If they feel there will be separations, they don't come" (Shepardson, 2018). Families have been idealized, shaped, and reconstructed

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through immigration policies across the world, and have experienced the repercussions of immigration enforcement efforts in myriad ways. Yet the use of family separation as a deterrence tactic in the US highlighted the way in which migrant families as social units can be direct targets of immigration enforcement and deterrence efforts.

Geographers and social scientists more broadly have examined the role of the family within border enforcement practices. Geographical attention to family life has increased since Gill Valentine's (2008: 2098) description of the topic as an "absent presence" within geography (see e.g. Hall, 2019; Harker, 2011; Harker and Martin, 2012; Lauren L Martin, 2012; Tarrant and Hall, 2020). Within immigration-related research, the topic of the family has been central to understanding state enforcement ideologies, practices, and the impacts for some time. In this paper, we explore research on enforcement related to migrant families and suggest that, by building on and extending these existing research efforts, there exists space for a research agenda driven by a new understanding of the relationship between families and immigration enforcement. Drawing on examinations of emerging enforcement strategies including family separation and public information campaigns, we suggest that the family *as a social unit and set of relationships* is increasingly targeted in an attempt to regulate transnational migration. In turn, we develop the term "relational enforcement" to refer to the way in which border enforcement efforts target not only individual migrants themselves, but also the wider familial and social networks of which they are a part. We conclude by arguing that greater attention to relational enforcement tactics, processes, and impacts is necessary for grappling with the ever-expanding geographies of border enforcement today and propose potential directions for future research.

Families & immigration enforcement

Much work in the field of human geography and related disciplines has examined state efforts to regulate transnational mobility. A thread of this research has focused specifically on the family (as both discursive structure and social relation) as something that is mobilized, regulated, and affected through border enforcement efforts (Lauren L Martin, 2012). In this section, we review three topical themes explored in existing geographical and related social science research on the family as it relates to immigration and border enforcement: 1) how familial ideologies and imaginaries are mobilized and shape enforcement practices and policies; 2) how these policies and practices serve to regulate and govern families and ‘the family’ in particular ways; and 3) how families and familial members are affected by, push back against, and negotiate these policies.

Family as mobilized in im/migration enforcement

A broad range of interdisciplinary scholars have illustrated how the family is a core organizing institution for the exercise of migration control as efforts to regulate who has access to national territory emerge from and (re)produce national imaginaries of idealized families. For example, Catherine Lee’s (2013) historical examination of family reunification in US immigration law illustrates how notions of the ideal family (i.e., family ideation) have and continue to shape immigration policies as they work to (re)produce particular family formations that are deemed culturally acceptable and desired (e.g. D’Aoust, 2018). The production and reproduction of familial ideologies and associated immigration policies are deeply gendered (e.g. Longo, 2018),

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racialized (e.g. Watson, 2018), and sexualized (e.g. Luibhéid, 2018), as they draw on and perpetuate particular notions around what families look like, what families do, and who can be legitimate members of families (Bonizzoni, 2018). As Joe Turner (2020: 15) notes, family can be seen as *both* an “ideological rationale and site of intervention” within migration policy, and creating ‘the family’ relies on racialized, imperial, heteronormative, and violent forms of bordering.

Discourses of family and familial responsibility are mobilized to garner support for anti-immigrant/anti-asylum seeker policies. For example, Kate Slattery (2003) traces how false tales of refugees throwing children overboard off the coast of Australia were used to frame refugees as uncivil and therefore rightly excludable from Australian territory. This example demonstrates how, as Lauren Martin’s (2012) examination of immigrant family detention in the United States suggests, state and nonstate actors produce normative family subjects grounded in spatialized discourses of innocence and criminality, prison and home, and parental authority versus security. More recently, Sara Smith and colleagues (2019) point to how family separation policies in the US context were enabled by historical and deeply-rooted racialized tropes of incivility, criminality, and threat that serve to dispossess people of color and immigrants of the right to kinship and childhood. In legal battles over family detention, state and non-state actors worked to both navigate and mobilize particular frameworks of family to achieve particular goals (e.g., detaining families, ending family detention). Nancy Hiemstra (2021) argues that historically racialized, gendered, and criminalized understandings of ‘family’ within the US crystallize into gendered and racialized caricatures of “breeders,” “anchor babies,” and “bad immigrant parents,” imaginaries at odds with the idealized American family that justify

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implementation of harsh enforcement practices such as family separation and denial of abortions to migrant teens in US immigration detention centers. These caricatures, she (2021: 12) writes, “thus obscure and bolster the racist, patriarchal, and heteronormative foundations undergirding U.S. political, economic, and social structures” (see also, (Kaiser, 2018; Long, 2006). Similarly, Sean Wang (2017) describes the media rhetoric denouncing Chinese birth tourism in South California, where the “anchor babies” under attack represent a collision between birthright citizenship provisions and the reproduction of families that do not fit national imaginaries.

Importantly, the centrality of the family in immigration law and policy is connected to nationalist fears over demographic change as policies work biopolitically to manage native born and immigrant population to achieve particular ends (Dahlman 2018; Robbins and Smith 2017; Nast 2017). In turn, scholars have pointed to the ways in which together, this strand of scholarship frames how imaginaries of “appropriate” families are mobilized within immigration policies and enforcement practices, ideologies that drive the more concrete forms of regulation and impact on actual migrant families that we detail in the following two sections.

The Regulation of Families through Enforcement

While familial discourses and ideologies inform and shape im/migration related laws and policies, the implementation of these laws and policies serve to regulate families in particular ways. Nazli Kibria (2019: 810), for instance, argues that family ideation has driven the construction of US family-based admissions and family reunification policies, driven by “racial family logics” that both emerge from and inform the development of US immigration policies.

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Josiah Heyman's (2009) research provides a concrete example, where interviews from border policing along the US-Mexico border reveal that enforcement officials rely on a combination of racialized family logics and stereotypes about what kinds of activities such families might engage in to determine whether to stop border crossers. "A darker-skinned and/or poorer family group may be targeted as a possible case of transporting unauthorized children," Heyman (2009: 386) notes, "whereas an apparently richer or whiter family group is highly unlikely to be stopped, thanks to a mental interpretation about their more likely social legitimacy as travelers within the United States." Here, we see the practical implications of family ideation, described above, for enforcement tactics, as imaginaries of what particular racialized families 'should' do are translated into enforcement practices.

In another example, Jinan Bastaki (2019) calls attention to the consequences of narrow framings of family that are grounded in racialized and colonial notions of vulnerability and protection. Drawing on research in Greece with Arab refugee women, she explores how asylum law and policy affects adult children migrating with their families. Within this context, children over the age of 18 have their asylum claims assessed independently, regardless of their desires, and are not afforded the right to remain with their families throughout the process. This practice has particularly negative consequences of women who are made more vulnerable via policies that separate them from their families and/or create barriers to reunification. Bastaki (2019) further argues that these particular policies are connected to racialized narratives that posit Arab societies and families as inherently abusive to women; this ideological framework limits the state's ability to recognize women's desires to remain with their families as legitimate or to account for this within law and policy. As she (2019: 267) writes:

While there is a growing recognition of the category of female asylum-seekers who are seeking refuge from dangerous family situations....or wider societal dangers...those who wish to remain a part of their traditional family structures are not always recognized...this can have an adverse effect on adult refugee women and their families who wish to remain together.

Inquiry into algorithmic enforcement technologies have further drawn attention to the way in which familial relationships—as pieces of data that are analyzed and mobilized to produce risk profiles—are key to shaping uneven practices of border enforcement and policing. Family relationships are key to risk profiling (Amoore, 2006; Evans and Koulisch, 2020; Nofferi and Koulisch, 2014) and tactics of premediation (De Goede, 2008) that underscore algorithmic approaches to border security, which combine the biometric attention to the individual body and its embodied characteristics with the imagined impacts of networks, connections, and associations such as family relationships that could impact national security. For instance, Dean Wilson and Leanne Weber (2008: 133) detail how risk profiling relies much more on aggregate information and associations than any risk factor specifically connected to the embodied individual migrant, such that “the association of illegalized border crossers with biometric technologies fuses a disparate array of amorphous dangers – terrorism, organized crime and uncontrolled migration – as a single unified threat to national sovereignty.” Family is implicitly woven into biometric border enforcement as well: for instance, Simone Browne (2015) details the case of Suaad Hagi Muhamud, a Canadian citizen born in Somalia, who was detained in Kenya after a holiday because airline officials believed she was not the person pictured in her passport – namely, that her lips were the wrong shape. Three months later, she was finally allowed to fly home only after a DNA test proved she was the mother of her Canadian-born son, who had remained behind with relatives in Toronto. Here, the biometric

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‘truth’ of Muhamud’s identity was constructed not through the (valid) documentation of the Canadian passport she carried, but through the family relationship itself. Browne (2015) argues that Muhamad’s blackness overruled her documentation as well as the possible support she could have received from the Canadian government; Muhamud later asked, “What would have happened if I did not have a child?” (quoted in Browne, 2015: 142).

Beyond profiling, biometric technologies raise additional challenges that forced migrants must negotiate as they work to have their family units recognized within the context of applying for asylum. For example, Karen Olwig's (2020) examination of Somali asylum seekers in Denmark illustrates how families have had to negotiate biometric definitions of families that rely on assumptions about the nuclear family structure which ultimately inhibit their ability to define ‘family’ on their own terms. Biological notions of citizenship and associated requirements to prove biological connection as a means of confirming familial relations erode refugee's access to legal rights and protections as they establish yet another barrier that must be overcome in order to gain access to rights and entitlements associated with family units. Within this strand of scholarship, specific case studies demonstrate how migrant families themselves are regulated and governed through immigration enforcement policies and practices.

Familial Impacts and Resistances

In addition to examinations of the mobilization of familial discourses and ideologies within im/migration enforcement and the regulation of families within these efforts, scholars have also examined how families are affected by and push back against these practices and

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policies. Drawing on 100 in-depth interviews with migrants and citizens across five European countries, Elisabeth Strasser et al. (2009) outline how state policies impact how families 'do family'. Decisions around the size of the family, socio-legal practices such as marriage, and who has power within the family are all impacted by state policies. Migrant desires and cultural beliefs have been mediated and shaped by state policies that set expectations for what family is and what families do. Kirsi Kallio and Jouni Hakli (2019) introduce the concept of familiality to refer to what family means in people's everyday lives and to draw attention to the mundane politics of care that refugees and asylum seekers must negotiate in light of state policies. Receiving states' definitions or understandings of family often fail to correspond with how refugees define and experience family. Therefore, they must negotiate these inconsistencies in order to access protections and legal avenues for different members of their familial network.

Others have explored the reverberating impacts of immigration and border enforcement policies and practices as they move through familial networks and relationships. For instance, Cassandra Rodriguez (2016) explores how illegality becomes a familial experience, particularly in cases where families contain both citizen and non-citizen members, further supporting Dreby's (2015: 103) conclusion that illegality has "begun to accrue a social significance similar to that of racial or class background." Rodriguez (2016) describes how family decisions implicate the wider network of family members, such as plans for moving the whole family if one member is deported, or how children will cope if parents are deported. Such work stresses how border enforcement efforts stick not only to individual migrants, but to their family and friends through the intimate connections that structure their social networks and

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produce trauma through the resulting “forced transnationality” of migrant families (Ybarra and Peña, 2017).

Others have drawn attention to the way in which the effects of border and immigration enforcement policies reverberate across borders and beyond the individual migrants who are detained or deported. For example, Nancy Hiemstra (2019) illustrates how transnational familial and social networks absorb the impacts of migration enforcement. When migrants from Ecuador to the United States are detained and deported, their extended networks in Ecuador experience heightened insecurity, and deprived of remittances, others are pushed to consider migration. Rather than sever connections between migrant sending and receiving communities in Ecuador and the US, border enforcement efforts reinforce these connections instead (Hiemstra, 2019). Jeremy Slack et al. (2016) draw similar conclusions about the wider effects of violence on migrant relations. Violence during border crossings ripples outward, affecting family and friends. As Slack et al. (2016: 22) write,

Even if a person did not experience the violence directly, what happened to family members and friends is internalized, forms painful memories, and sows fear and frustration in the community. The border, which has always been viewed as a risk, is seen as increasingly impenetrable and dangerous.

Here, the violence of enforcement is experienced by migrants’ networks and communities, who are subjected to pain and heightened emotions through their intimate connections with other migrants.

Border enforcement efforts affect migrants’ financial networks as well. Geoffrey Boyce and Sarah Launius (2019) explored the financial impact of immigration enforcement for migrant families within the US, finding that for migrant family members, the detention or deportation of migrant individuals costs the average US-based migrant household more than \$24,000 of lost

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income and economic opportunities. The financial impacts of immigration enforcement ripple further outward, however, extending to migrants' wider networks of friends, family and community members across national borders. Richard Johnson and Murphy Woodhouse (2018), for instance, explore how heightened enforcement makes migrant travel between Central America and the United States increasingly expensive, requiring migrants to fund their travel through loans. Central American migrants' families and communities take on the burden of their debt if migrants experience detention, deportation, or death, resulting in both the impoverishment of wider extended family networks as well as the forfeiture of loan collateral, in the form of land or homes. The impacts of migration enforcement on extended family and community networks result in increasing pressure to migrate as families struggle to repay ballooning debts, fueling subsequent migration attempts (Johnson and Woodhouse, 2018). Megan Ybarra (2019) also describes how the effects of enforcement ripple outward to affect migrants' extended families and relationships. In her research on the vulnerability of deported migrants, Ybarra (2019) notes how migrant's family members are very often the target of extortion efforts that occur as a result of deportation, extending the impacts of deportation beyond the migrant to wider networks and connections. Mobilizing family ideologies, describing the regulations that shape family mobility, and exploring the impacts of these practices for families themselves have all been central to how geographers and migration scholars have understood the role of the family within immigration enforcement.

Towards Relational Enforcement

As the previous section illustrates, much research in geography and related disciplines has pointed to how the family is enrolled, regulated, and impacted in border enforcement efforts throughout the world. To date, researchers have engaged with ‘the family’ in two primary ways. First, ‘the family’ is examined as a discursive or ideological structure that is mobilized in order to sort and categorize im/migrants, creating differential access to territory and associated rights and privileges. Second, the family is examined as a social structure whose members are impacted by border enforcement practices in uneven and complicated ways. In this section, we turn to examinations of the border and border enforcement as relational to suggest a new line of inquiry that draws attention to the mobilization of ‘the family’—as a social unit and set of relationships—as a tool and target of enforcement that is mobilized in border enforcement policies and practices to affect migratory decisions, patterns, and processes. As is detailed below, relational thinking has long influenced geographical study of borders and migration, however, we argue for a distinctive approach to analysis that uses the family as a lens to understand new strategic directions in enforcement that target the social relations within which migrants are embedded in order to affect migration-related decisions.

Drawing from a long trajectory of relational thinking within geography (Bartos, 2018; Elwood, 2020; Massey, 1993), studies of border enforcement have drawn attention to the connections between humans-non humans, people, and places that enable, are affected by, and are created through enforcement efforts. Relational thinking has offered new perspectives on how networks, flows, and social interaction defined border spaces and pushed back against fixed understandings of distance and proximity (Darling, 2010; Lloyd et al., 2005). For instance, Anssi Paasi (2012) explored the promise and drawbacks of relational thinking for borders,

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arguing that relational thinking provided an alternative to more container-based understandings of territories, regions, and places. Relational approaches to borders focused attention on their specific temporalities, their multiple sites both at and beyond the boundary of the state, and the increasing spatial disconnect between bordering practices and the state territorial boundary. As Paasi (2012: 2307) notes, however, relational approaches to borders must be juxtaposed with the very real materiality of static, territorially-grounded infrastructure, that reinforces how “borders trap thinking and acting in the world in territorial terms.” Framing borderlands as spaces of engagement draws on a long tradition of borderlands imaginaries that both celebrate the ties that draw people together as well as note the uneven power relations that continue to imbue such spaces with violence and trauma (Anzaldúa, 1987; Lloyd et al., 2005).

Within an enforcement context, the perspective of relational thinking highlights how enforcement is complicated by the connections and networks between migrants and other things. For Juanita Sundberg (2011: 322), relational perspectives “account for the materiality and physicality of bodies while emphasizing that their properties and capacities are historically contingent and geographically situated outcomes of association, relations between things.” By highlighting the relationships amongst migrants and the nonhuman elements of borderlands between the US and Mexico, Sundberg (2011) explores how phenomena such as deserts, rivers, cats and plants disrupt border enforcement efforts. Here, relational understandings of border enforcement emphasize the mutually constitutive nature of the human and nonhuman elements of border spaces, and highlight how pushing migrants towards increasingly remote desert environments has consequences for migrants’ welfare as well as making enforcement

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more difficult (Sundberg, 2011). Similar relational perspective on migrants and space underscores Polly Pallister-Wilkins' (2019) analysis of migrant mobility. Enforcement efforts and wider public narratives about 'flows' of migrants obscure how the relationship between migrants and the physical geography they traverse affects their ability to move. As she writes (2019: n.p.): "Put simply, the physical geography alongside infrastructures affects how people move and risks they encounter on their journeys." Geoffrey Boyce (2016) maintains that the relation between terrain and migrant becomes an important and complicating factor in border enforcement. Framed through a focus on intimacy and connection, Boyce's (2016: 255) analysis maintains that enforcement efforts fail to take seriously the "relationship of intimacy – the intimacy of a body to its environment, reflected in the complex ways that the two continuously interact, pass through and condition one another." Boyce (2016) frames this approach to border space as topological and enfolded rather than relational, but the relations among weather, heat, and geology are central to his explanation of how the interactions of migrant and terrain render spaces opaque and hinder enforcement.

Biometric border enforcement, too, relies on the complex relations between embodiment, documentation, and the discretionary power of border police: returning to the case of Suaad Muhamud, Brown (2015: 144) describes the relational constellation of factors that constructed the border Muhamud failed to cross:

For Muhamud, the border extended beyond the act of alignment in the airport when her body was read as suspect and continued throughout her detention, in the reporting by Kenyan and Canadian news outlets, and through the actions of the Canadian government.

Border enforcement here involved an articulation between race and the body, media and government narratives, and the documentation Muhamud carried. As this and the other

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examples referenced here demonstrate, scholars both within and outside of geography employ relational understandings of ‘the border’ and border enforcement efforts in the sense that they are far from singular or static, but instead rely upon and continually (re)produce relations of various kinds.

Building upon and extending this framework further, we argue here that border enforcement is increasingly relational in another sense as well: *border enforcement efforts increasingly work to strategically, and often intentionally rely upon and mobilize social relations as a means of affecting migratory patterns and trends*. We term this approach relational enforcement. While framing migration through relational thinking builds on a long tradition of scholarship in geography, we argue for increased attention to enforcement efforts that target the migrant as embedded within social relations, including and beyond that of the family. We use the lens of the family to illustrate the potential of this approach.

Recent examinations of US policies of family separation have begun to point to this type of relationality or relational enforcement. Benjamin Roth and colleagues (2019) document how in April 2018 the Trump administration’s “zero tolerance” policy led to the separation of immigrant families at the US-Mexico border, ultimately affecting more than 2,700 children. They (2019: 85) conclude that, “the rationale of current immigration deterrence policy is to use childhood trauma as leverage, with no consideration for the consequences.” Family relationships are mobilized as deterrence, with the threat of children being separated from their parents and the additional trauma children would then experience positioned as the consequences of migration. Familial impacts are not simply an unintended consequence of enforcement efforts; rather the threat of family separation and the harms it causes are

leveraged by the state as a deterrence mechanism. Craig Mousin (2019: 61) quotes US officials who describe family separation as a “tough deterrent” to migration and summarizes this practice as “Weaponizing children in defending the border.” While family detention and separation are not new phenomena (Lauren L. Martin, 2012; Slack et al., 2015), how family separation was strategically used during the Trump administration to deter future migration attempts suggests a different kind of use of ‘family’ within this policy. Rather than something imagined, regulated or restricted through policy-making, or something which was impacted by policy-making, the family itself was the target of enforcement efforts. The threat of family separation was used to influence migration-related decisions. The family was not simply acted on through enforcement, it was targeted as a social relation powerful enough that its manipulation could affect particular outcomes.

Stephen Lee (2019) uses a similar approach to backtrack and examine the history of US immigration policies that regulate families through what we would term a relational lens, arguing that border enforcement efforts have consistently works to subject the family (as a social relation) to slow death. In his comprehensive survey of US immigration policies, Lee (2019: 2319) argues that “the law governing admissions, enforcement, adjustment of status, and remittances routinely leaves noncitizens waiting, marooned, left out, and helpless in their efforts to remain or reunite with their family members.” Yet beyond a reshaping of the ‘appropriate’ family through immigration regulations, these policies work, Lee maintains, to target and erode the bonds of migrant families themselves. This move to consider the migrant family as social relation targeted through enforcement mechanisms suggests how Lee’s analysis could be framed through our understanding of relational enforcement, as a survey of border

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enforcement efforts that work to strategically, and often intentionally, rely upon and mobilize social relations as a means of affecting migratory patterns and trends.

Our examinations of the use of public information campaigns (PICs) by the United States and Australian governments has revealed similar patterns. PICs have been used by both countries since the early 1990s and are part of the suite of border enforcement technologies and strategies utilized in each national context. In the US, PICs were used first as a local initiative within the Border Patrol's Tucson Sector during the 1990s, then expanded nationally beginning in 2004 (Williams, 2019). Meanwhile, in Australia, PICs began with a TV and radio campaign in Behai, China in 1994 to discourage asylum seekers from traveling to Australia (Watkins, 2017). Across these national contexts, the use of PICs has emerged alongside increasingly harsh border enforcement tactics, such as walling, detention, and externalization of enforcement into third countries. However, unlike these 'hard power' strategies, PICs are popular as they "allow governments to be seen to be doing something to control their borders whilst still maintaining a humanitarian image" (Oeppen, 2016: 66). Importantly, PICs are referenced by government officials as part of the suite of border enforcement actions engaged in to address 'migration crises.' For example, in March 2021, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki discussed PICs distributed by the US State Department throughout Central America and in Brazil as a key strategy the US government was utilizing to stem the tide of unaccompanied minors arriving at the US border. As she further explained: "The [US State] department has also worked with Facebook and Instagram on an advertising campaign that put out—put our migration messages in the social media streams of millions of individuals who fit the profile of intending migrants" (Psaki, 2021). Here we see PICs referenced as an effort specifically intended

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to reduce migratory flows via the strategic circulation of targeted messages. Moreover, border enforcement agencies (e.g., US Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection, and Border Patrol; Australian Department of Home Affairs) are directly involved in financing and developing campaign materials, further illustrating the way in which PICs are mobilized as a border enforcement mechanism.

Throughout our research across both the US and Australian national contexts, we have seen the rise of PICs that focus – in different ways – on the relations of ‘family’ to specifically, intentionally, and strategically mobilize social relations to impact migratory behavior. PICs suggest two ways that enforcement functions relationally.

Within the Australian context, the distribution of campaign messages specifically relies upon and mobilizes familial and social networks. For example, in the July-October 2013 “By Boat, No Visa” campaign, migrant diaspora communities living in Australia were the specific targets of messaging, which focused on the slogan: “If you come here by boat without a visa, YOU WON’T BE SETTLED IN AUSTRALIA.” From 20 July to 5 September, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship spent \$7.5 million AUD on advertisements to members of the diaspora communities in Australia, before beginning messaging targeting families internationally across the Indian Ocean region (Australian National Audit Office, 2016). The Auditor General’s (2016) report on the “No Boat, No Visa” campaign describes the “primary target audience” for the campaign as the diaspora communities in Australia, “particularly the relatives and friends of potential irregular immigrants” (Australian National Audit Office, 2016: 60), followed by the general Australia public, who “may be friends and influencers of the target communities, both on and offshore” (Australian National Audit Office, 2016: 60). The logic

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guiding this strategy was explained as follows: “it was intended that these people would pass on the message about the policy changes” (Australian National Audit Office, 2016: 60). Within this context, the familial and social relations of potential migrants were mobilized in order to spread information to them that policy makers hoped would dissuade migration attempts.

In the US context, familial and social relations are mobilized as well, but not as vectors of information sharing, but instead as networks of power, influence, and possibility. For example, in 2014 the US worked with private public relations firms to release a set of materials as part of the Dangers Awareness Campaign. While the goal of this campaign was to reduce the number of unaccompanied minors arriving to the southern land border of the US, much of the messaging speaks to the families, particularly the mothers, of potential child migrants, not the children themselves. The campaign is described in a Customs and Border Protection (CBP) press release as “an aggressive Spanish language outreach effort and an urgent call to action to community groups, the media, partners and relatives in the US and Central America to save and protect the lives of migrant children attempting to cross the southwest border” (US CBP, 2014).

The CBP Commission at the time further elaborated:

Families need to understand that the journey north has become much more treacherous and there are no ‘*permisos*’ for those crossing the border illegally. Children, especially, are easy prey for coyotes and transnational criminal organizations and they can be subjected to robbery, violence, sexual assault, sex trafficking or forced labor (US CBP, 2014).

Families and loved ones more broadly are spoken directly to throughout campaign materials as each piece ends with the statement: “They are our future. Let’s protect them.” This call to action is directed at families and loved ones who are framed as having the power and responsibility to stop children from migrating (anonymous, personal communication, April 7

2021). Within this context, the relationality of contemporary border enforcement is made evident as the targets of messaging expands beyond potential migrants themselves to both recognize and mobilize those around children to 'protect' them by stopping them from migrating. While there is much to be said about how this approach over-simplifies the complex reasons youth migrate and their experiences of migration (Heidbrink, 2020), our point here is simply to draw attention to the way in which border enforcement expands to target the families and loved ones of potential migrants, not just migrants themselves. In each of these examples – the family as audience for circulating messages in the Australian context, or the family as networks of responsibility in the US context – the family as a social relation and network of care and responsibility is mobilized intentionally to deter people from migrating.

As the examples above illustrate, families are increasingly the target of deterrence messaging and enforcement policies as separation is used as a threat to inhibit migration and family members are mobilized as actors capable of affecting the migrant decisions and capacities of their loved ones. Families are idealized, certainly, through these policies (what kind of families, what kinds of bonds they share, or assumptions about how they relate to one another through intimate ties and proximity). Families can be regulated through these approaches as well, as Lee's example suggests. And families certainly are affected by the messages that target their relationships, bonds, and connections, as the Dangers Awareness message of "They are our future. Let's protect them" implies. Yet these examples also challenge us to reconceptualize how border enforcement operates. They move our gaze outward from the individuals who cross borders to see how these individuals are embedded within familial relations and networks that are not only impacted by enforcement but that are also

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strategically and intentionally mobilized by border enforcing states as a means of deterring migration attempts.

Relational Enforcement: A Research Agenda

We use the term relational enforcement to refer to how border enforcement practices, strategies, and tactics increasingly rely upon and mobilize familial and social relationships to affect migration-related decisions and regulate transnational mobility. This concept builds on and extends existing research on the relationship between the family and immigration enforcement and relational understandings of borders and bordering processes. Rather than positing border enforcement as just a relational process, we want to draw attention to the way in which enforcement targets the relationships within which people are embedded as a means of influencing and controlling their mobility. The examples that we present here show how relational enforcement works differently depending on the context. In the case of family separation and Lee's analysis of US migration policies as slow death, the family bonds themselves are the target of enforcement practices. Lee's analysis is particularly instructive, as many scholars have detailed the ways in which US immigration policies are built on ideologies of appropriate families and impact migrant families in different ways – but Lee argues that the family as a social unit is the underlying target of this policy trajectory, and the object is the death of the migrant family. Similarly, in the case of family separation, the social unit of the family – the assumptions about familial ties and the relationships between parents and children – is the target of separation policies that are leveraged as a deterrence mechanism. Meanwhile, in the case of public information campaigns in the US and Australia, it is not simply that family

members are affected by the reverberating impacts of border enforcement efforts; it is that family members themselves are targeted for their ability to influence migration-related decisions.

We argue that relational enforcement, or the strategic targeting of familial relationships and networks within immigration enforcement, offers new possibilities for geographic analysis. Building on the extensive scholarship on immigration enforcement and the family, relational enforcement draws attention to how the family is not only affected by, but is also targeted by, enforcement efforts. While this perspective is deeply related to other scholarship on migrant families and how family ideologies have infused and shaped regulation of migration, it offers new perspective on enforcement strategies and tactics by drawing attention to the way in which it is not just migrants themselves, but the families they are part of, that are targets of enforcement. We encourage researchers of border and immigration enforcement to consider the following questions:

- What kinds of assumptions about migrant relationships infuse enforcement agencies, practices, and logics?
- Through what kinds of tactics, strategies, and messages are migrant families and social networks targeted through relational enforcement efforts?
- How do relational enforcement efforts harness emotion and affect differently from other forms of immigration enforcement?
- How do migrant families and social networks understand and respond to enforcement tactics, strategies and messages targeting their social units?

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- How do relational enforcement efforts work alongside and through 'hard power' forms of immigration enforcement and deterrence, such as walls, detention, and deportation?
- How do relational enforcement efforts build upon connections forged through histories of colonialism and racial capitalism, or extend contemporary settler colonial or neocolonial relationships?
- How do relational enforcement efforts alter the geographies of enforcement, opening up or foreclose particular spaces as sites of enforcement?

Feminist geographical research methods, in particular, would be well-suited to consider the importance of relational enforcement efforts within the daily lives of potential migrants, their families, and their wider social networks. For example, the emerging focus on the intimate economies of migration enforcement (Conlon and Hiemstra, 2017) demonstrates the potential of feminist geographical analysis to explore the intimate and everyday scale through detailed ethnographic and archival research. Visual methods also offer promise, such as recent efforts to radically re-imagine border enforcement through feminist mapping (Campos-Delgado, 2018; Kelly, 2019). Important, too, would be a focus not only on relationships between migrant countries of origin and traditional resettlement destinations such as the US, EU member states, or Australia, but to consider more broadly how relational enforcement occurs in emerging sites of refugee settlement (Batréau and Tuitjer, 2021) and involves collaborations between various state- and non-state actors, including humanitarian organizations or the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Attending to the way in which those who make up migrants' familial and social networks are targeted and mobilized through enforcement efforts challenges scholars of border and

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immigration enforcement to recognize how enforcement increasingly relies upon and centers more than just migrants themselves. The examples here point to the importance of considering how families and social networks more broadly are sites of intervention that are acted on with the goal of shaping migrant access to the financial, social, and emotional supports needed to engage in unauthorized migration attempts. Moreover, inquiry into relational enforcement prompt us to expand where we look and where we see enforcement at play. Attending to the relational dimensions of border and immigration enforcement opens up the banal spaces of everyday life and intimate relationships of love and care as sites of enforcement (Smith, 2021). More robust and sustained inquiry into relational enforcement provides the opportunity to unpack the nuanced and complex ways in which border and immigration enforcement plays out over space and time.

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ⁱ It is important to clarify that many families were already separated across the US-Mexico border because of previous migration enforcement efforts, including restrictive visa regimes, immigration detention and deportation, and many families have become ‘transnational’ not by choice. Additionally, while the separation of families from their children clearly relied upon logics of family that associated the family with love and care, feminist scholars in particular (e.g. Borges Jelinic, 2019) have also demonstrated how not all families are sites of love, care, and attachment.