

Immigration and discrimination: Towards a conceptual implementation of Max Weber's notion of meaning

Inmigración y discriminación: Hacia un trabajo de aplicación conceptual de la noción weberiana de sentido

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Abstract

In this paper, we examine the heuristic utility of Weber's notion of meaning to explain the perception of immigrants in the United States, particularly undocumented immigrants. The methodological rule implying that the understanding of the meaning of such perceptions can only be achieved through the notion of structure and the theory of socialization, as presented by Jorge Bustamante, is contested. We argue that with the notion of meaning comes into play the conception of an individual motivated by subjective reasons when perceiving immigrants as X or Y, and that those reasons, far from being justifications, have a real, objective basis. We advance a comprehensive framework of law SB1070 to attempt to elucidate some of the reasons that motivate involved actors' approval or disapproval of this law.

Keywords: immigration, discrimination, individual, structure, meaning (*Sinn*).

Resumen

Discutimos acerca de la utilidad heurística de la noción weberiana de sentido para explicar la percepción que se tiene en Estados Unidos de los inmigrantes y los indocumentados en particular. Cuestionamos la regla metodológica de que para comprender el sentido de esas percepciones hay que pasar por la noción de estructura y la teoría de la socialización, como lo plantea Jorge Bustamante. Sostenemos que la noción de sentido pone en juego la concepción de un individuo motivado por razones para percibir de X y Y manera a los inmigrantes y que esas razones lejos de ser justificaciones tienen un fundamento real, objetivo. Avanzamos un bosquejo comprensivo de la Ley SB1070 tratando de elucidar algunas de las razones por las que los actores involucrados la aprueban o la desaprueban.

Palabras clave: inmigrantes, discriminación, individuo, estructura, sentido (*Sinn*).

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Introduction

In this paper, we analyze Max Weber's notion of meaning, derived from the German word *Sinn*. Under the framework of the general theory of rationality (GTR), we make use of this notion's heuristic utility to explain the different perceptions in the US of immigrants, particularly undocumented immigrants, as the result of an opinion formed on the basis of motives and reasons. It should be said at the outset that we rely on GTR because there is continuity between Max Weber's theory of rationality and GTR, as both share the conception of causality

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and knowledge. This conception should be clarified by means of a comparative theoretical discussion because this discussion is the only way to discern the epistemological background of concepts derived from a theory. In this study, we examine Rational Choice Theory (RCT), especially the "structural-comprehensive" model proposed by Bustamante, Delaunay, and Santibañez (1997) and Bustamante (2010).

Why focus on RCT first? We make this choice because 1) within the methodological individualism paradigm, this theory is often confused with the GTR; 2) it is the best known among these types of theories in the social sciences; and mainly, 3) the comparison is more instructive when objects placed side by side share similar characteristics, such as these two theories derived from the same school of sociological thought. Ultimately, our aim is to reach the second point of analysis, which is undoubtedly the most important one, with a theory that, while firmly rooted in its principles, explains the issue from a global perspective.

We regard it as the most important perspective because Bustamante's structural comprehensive model offers a reading of the notion of meaning [*Sinn*] that warrants discussion for two reasons: 1) because it matches the basic idea of this work, in the sense that we value the heuristic utility of the notion of meaning in explaining the discriminatory policies of the state and their consensus among the public; and 2) because it assumes an innovative epistemological position by using a model that conceives this issue as "structural" and "comprehensive," thus establishing a relationship of compatibility between the notion of meaning and structure.

Given that this model is inspired by Weber and Bourdieu, we examine the place and functioning of Max Weber's comprehensive method within Pierre Bourdieu's theory of socialization. The purpose of this distinction is to highlight the epistemological distance between Bourdieu and Weber when applying the notion of meaning.

Parting from the notion of the alienated individual and the methodological rule that, to understand the meaning of action and ideas, the idea of *structure* and the theory of socialization as accounted for by Bustamante must be presented, in an effort to bring Marx and Bourdieu into contact with Max Weber, we consider the epistemological importance of placing the individual at the center of sociological analysis because, as suggested by Weber, only the individual pursues objectives and gives meaning to action. This analysis operates in accordance with the individualistic postulate.

Even when Weber recognizes the heteronomous nature of individuals, the consequent coercion of social media presupposed by said condition does not impede the exercise of autonomy and the freedom to assess the environment, to choose and to act according to their material interests and ideals, as argued by Boudon (2011, p. 19). This psychic faculty and this condition of freedom, as Weber explained (cf. 1995, p. 28), give true meaning to the postulate of understanding, thanks to the realization that it is possible to understand the meaning of human activity and also to explain the social phenomena that result from collective social action as an effect of individuals' rationality. The principle of rationality implicit in the concept of understanding presupposes a confrontation between individuals' intellect and reality (cf. Boudon, 1995, p. 198), which means that an individual is motivated by subjective reasons when perceiving and acting upon immigrants in a particular manner and that those reasons, far from being mere justifications determined by the structure, have a real, objective rationale (cf. Boudon, 2000, p. 120).

Consequently, we start from the Weberian axiom whereby the *homo sociologicus*, unlike the *homo economicus*, not only pursues the realization of material interests through action in accordance with a means-end rationality (instrumental, utilitarian, or practical rationality) but

also seeks to achieve ideal interests, acting justly in accordance with values (axiological rationality) (Weber, 1996, p. 349; 1976, pp.46-47). Based on this axiom, Raymond Boudon (2012) highlights the difficulty of explaining the behaviors and the resulting phenomena only from the perspective of instrumental rationality, as presupposed in RCT. The author stresses the importance of operating with axiological rationality because of the organic union between both rationalities. As stated by Weber (1996, p. 366), these two rationalities operate in an "inseparable" manner because, in many cases, they are fused to the analytical attitude assumed by the individual when assessing the social environment or, in Georg Simmel's (2009) words, the "content of life." Raymond Boudon defines this analytical attitude as cognitive rationality. The concept of cognitive rationality allows studying repressive immigration policies and the attitude of the electorate towards immigrants as the effect of behaviors that are intelligible and that can be understood rationally, regardless of whether they are motivated by economic reasons (instrumental rationality) or values (axiological rationality). It finally comes down to determining the reasons that presumably lead individuals to act in X or Y way when faced with a given problem. With this axiom in mind, we advance a comprehensive outline of the conflict of values surrounding the controversial Arizona SB1070, considering the actors involved, as driven by subjective reasons to propose, approve, or disapprove of the measures comprising this law.

By comprehensive outline, we mean the prefigurative features of actors and rationalities inferred from data obtained through surveys and other sources. These data tell us about the actors' identity, status, and meaningful perceptions, in other words, their intelligible perceptions, rationally speaking. We say "meaningful" in the sense that there is logic behind actors' behavior, but in this study, such logic is accounted for schematically, that is, through proposals that deserve to be revisited and developed in the context of a space entirely devoted to them. This is the reason behind the word choice "towards" in the subtitle of this work: "towards a conceptual implementation of Max Weber's notion of meaning." On the one hand, we uphold a particular reading of the notion of meaning; on the other hand, we try to analyze its ground of implementation, showing how it operates and delineates objects, with one goal in mind: to demonstrate this theory's heuristic utility in explaining the perceptions of immigrants in the United States, particularly undocumented workers. Consequently, we present a theoretical discussion, including this section, because there are also theoretical rationalities behind them.

As the reader may note, elements concerning actors' rationality are included in the body of this text and the information backing those conclusions is presented, in many cases, in corresponding footnotes. We try in this way to ensure ease of reading because it allows us to focus on how the theory functions while rationing the available space. It is also due to an economy of space that questions surrounding SB1070 are treated without further ado. Nonetheless, the contextualization of the law is not neglected, as we attempt to understand and explain the reasons on which attitudes and behaviors generated in its environment are based—even when it is done schematically. Our understanding of this law is that of an academic audience not necessarily specialized in the subject. Regardless, that is what we expect from the media impact generated by this law on both sides of the border.

We discuss this issue from two perspectives: a theoretical perspective that presents the theory underlying a given concept; and its methodological implementation, which includes evidence based on the premises that support this theory. We insist on this: even when in one section we explain and discuss the theory and in the other we apply it, in both cases the goal is the same. We attest to the fruitfulness of a theory, referring to other methodological approaches, through different concepts, and exemplifying the way in which this concept explains the research object.

Rational Choice Theory *versus* the general theory of rationality

As argued by Massey, Duran, and Malone (2009), it seems that US immigration policies are inspired on the rationalist interpretations of behavior derived from neoclassical economic theory and by extension, we would say, RCT.¹ According to this interpretative model of behavior, immigration, and especially undocumented immigration, would result from individual decisions based on a cost-benefit analysis. Penalties for employing illegal workers, restrictions on access to health and education services, and the strengthening of border control, among many other measures, would respond to this strategy: raising immigration costs to cause a cognitive deterrent effect on potential immigrants.

Massey et al. (2009) question whether immigration can be understood from this conception of rationality. They argue that, because the issue is much more complex, theory needs to be regarded as a heuristic device. Thus, it is no longer a matter of true or false theses and hypotheses, and the focus is on theory's usefulness for understanding the phenomenon.

From this standpoint, we find GTR particularly useful for analyzing the issue of immigration. The best approach to distinguishing between GTR and RCT is to recognize their points of epistemological convergence and divergence. Both RCT and GTR adhere to the individualistic postulate and, in that sense, belong to the same paradigmatic approach: methodological individualism. They both agree with Max Weber's postulate stating that phenomena must be understood under the premise that each behavior, attitude, and belief has meaning —*Sinn*— for the actors involved and that this meaning can be interpreted by the analyst or observer with the support of decentralization techniques. This postulate is the origin of the maxim, "One need not have been Caesar in order to understand Caesar" (Weber, 1995, p. 29). These theories also include the postulate of rationality, which raises the need to reconstruct the logic of the actors. However, the theories differ with regard to the conception of rationality formulated by each school. Similarly, both approaches derive from Max Weber's concept of rationality; however, while RCT conceives rationality as solely instrumentalist, GTR regards it as something that goes beyond the utilitarian sphere. GTR rejects the supposition that rationality operates under a motivation that is purely instrumental. In Raymond Boudon's view, Weber's concept of rationality operates in a utilitarian and axiological manner. In other words, individuals are not motivated solely by material interests: they also act according to values. In many cases, these values intertwine with instrumental rationality because there is an organic union between instrumental and axiological rationality (Boudon, 2002, p. 91).

It is easier to understand certain behaviors with such a conception of rationality in mind, as the scope of research is broadened to include non-utilitarian reasons, to establish a relationship or meaningful connection (*Sinnzusammenhänge*) between behavior and motive. "We call motive, [says Weber (1995, p. 38)] to a significant complex that seems to the eye of the observer or agent meaningful reason for a given conduct." It should be noted that this quotation not only reminds us of the importance of the notion of meaning in understanding behavior but also gives full meaning to GTR by creating the possibility of translating motives into reasons.

Meaning *versus* structure

As readers may recall, Marx and the Marxists understand ideas and, in broad terms, all manifestations of social life as superstructural elements determined by the economic structure. As such, they are the ideal expression of dominant material relationships, even elaborations of the ruling class (Marx and Engels, 1974, p. 51).

¹ Incidentally, Colman (1990) and Abell (2000), to name but two, are included among the promoters of this approach.

In *Wetbacks: raw material for the expansion of American capital*, Jorge Bustamante (1976) uses this epistemological conception of knowledge to study the relationship between Mexican immigrants and the dominant society from two perspectives: a perspective that refers to the relations of production and a perspective that is manifested as their ideal expression. The former perspective concerns the economic sphere, and the latter, the cultural sphere. Nonetheless, it is actually this latter aspect that interests him most. In fact, in the aforementioned study, the author attempts to explain the origin and function of the racial prejudice and discriminatory attitudes and behaviors inflicted on immigrant workers by the dominant society, despite immigrants' contribution to the accumulation of capital and the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production. Within this approach, racial prejudice would simply be the superstructural effect or elaboration of the ruling class to ideologically dominate the working class as a whole, divide it politically, and thus ensure the reproduction of the conditions (including the practice of wage discrimination and the downward levelling of wages) that allow the capitalist exploitation of the working class.

In Bustamante's view, these two aspects belong to the same social reality and represent two dimensions that cannot be analyzed through the same methodological-theoretical approach. Indeed, the economic sphere (economic dependence vis-à-vis immigrant labor) derives from the structure, that is, from the capitalist mode of production; and the cultural sphere (discriminatory, xenophobic, and anti-immigrant behaviors) derives from ideology and perception (Bustamante, Delaunay, and Santibañez, 1997, p. 232) that belong to different categories. According to Bustamante, the economic sphere is objective, and the perceptual sphere is subjective; therefore, the former is quantifiable, while the latter is subject to interpretation. Thus the need to merge elements of comprehensive sociology with elements of structuralist sociology, as Bustamante puts it. The decision to resort to the Weberian notion of meaning is also rooted in this assertion. Moreover, this notion, or what corresponds to the German word *Sinn*, entails that an individual's behavior means something, that is has meaning, and that meaning is intelligible.

The problem is that Bustamante adds a structuralist twist to this notion of meaning, distorting Weber's methodological perspective the moment he postulates the possibility of understanding behavior dichotomously in terms of structure and culture. Such behavior is structural in the sense that the state legitimates discrimination through the laws that deny rights to undocumented workers, and such behavior is cultural because "nationals" practice discrimination in their relationship with immigrants/foreigners (sic). The xenophobia of "nationals," expressed through campaigns against undocumented immigrant workers, would place all immigrants in a position of vulnerability; not only undocumented workers suffer discrimination, but also documented immigrants, given their racial kinship with undocumented Mexicans, are affected. Again, this xenophobia is conceived through the culture-structure dichotomy; that is, it is structural because the state produces it, and it is cultural because the "nationals" legitimize it by internalizing the distinction (Bustamante, 2010).

Beyond the significance assigned to the notion of structure, either as resulting from the Marxist conception of the stratification of instances and the subordination of one to the other —base and superstructure— or from the Bourdieusian theory of correspondence between structures —*habitus* and the social field— Bustamante's explanatory model poses behavior as an activity performed by alienated individuals and determined by structural causes. This situation may be read as a structural law that says: if (A), then (B).

This proposal establishes a cause (A) and an effect (B), in which discrimination (B) appears as a result of the structure (A), but its meaning is not evident. Nonetheless, behaviors have meanings; they have a sense that must be clarified to understand why a number of individuals

behave in a certain way, in other words, why some Americans discriminate against foreign workers, especially undocumented ones. Once again, the notion of meaning motivates the postulate that individuals have their own reasons for acting in a certain way.

Additionally, as noted above, methodological individualism considers the individual and his/her rationality as the starting point of analysis. In the structuralist method, however, the structure captures all analytical attention because the reason that explains why individuals think and act the way they do emerges from it. In Weber's view, the notion of meaning is an attribute of individuals who are sufficiently free to think and make decisions based on a subjective meaning that ultimately determines their fate. Unlike a stone falling to the ground as a result of an external force (gravity), individuals are capable of reasoning (Boudon, 2003, p. 72; 2004, p. 63), and this ability makes all the difference between structuralism and methodological individualism.

The notion of meaning —*Sinn*— or intended meaning —*gemeinten Sinn*— derives from a rational conception of causality, while the notion of structure is anchored in a material conception that traditionally rejects the reasons or motives behind individuals' behavior. As we all know, the materialist conception of sociological explanation is confused with the figure of Marx. Similarly, Durkheim's positivist conception arises from this diffuse tradition, as well as the following methodological recommendation: social events should be explained by social facts, always treating the latter as though they were observable things (cf. Durkheim, 1997, pp. 15-20).

For Durkheim, society is a field transversed by social forces, and individuals can do nothing but submit to their rule. Like gravity, these are invisible forces, but they can be observed from the outside, through tangible evidence or signs. Consequently, in studies of migration from poor countries to rich countries, some explanatory models conceive the individual as an object moved capriciously by forces that push (*push factors*) and attract (*pull factors*) (Herrera, 2006, p. 110). In some countries, jobs and wages would attract workers from those countries that drive their workforce out as a result of the lack of jobs and attractive salaries. Similarly, to understand the strengthening of immigration policies and the public response, the individuals and the reasoning underlying their positioning should not be the focus of analysis; rather, attention should be focused on the social forces pushing individuals to act in favor of or against these policies.

This is also the case with structuralist explanations. Nonetheless, instead of considering the factors pushing individuals to take a stance regarding repressive immigration policies, this approach examines the structures because they are what determine those factors. Therefore, ideas, beliefs, values, behaviors, and, in a word, culture in general are traditionally regarded as effects of structure. This is clearly seen in one of Bustamante's tenets (2010, p. 317): immigrants are culturally vulnerable, i.e., easy targets of discrimination, because the structure makes them vulnerable, meaning by this that the state fails to provide them with the same rights as "nationals." In this way, an observable social fact (cultural vulnerability or discrimination against immigrants by "nationals") is explained through another observable fact (the structural vulnerability or the state's attitude regarding immigrants). If (A), then (B), then the solution would lie in abolishing (A).

With respect to meaning, again according to this school of thought, the significance or understanding that each actor has of his or her behavior, particularly in the case of those who regard immigrants and undocumented workers negatively, is nothing more than an ideological elaboration taken on to justify the discrimination exerted by the dominant group. All this is assumed to be under the understanding that the state is the creator of this ideological development. It could be said that the logic of the state becomes a mere ideological

justification and that the “nationals” do nothing but internalize it through socialization in the context of their relationship with immigrants.

Evidently, Bustamante uses Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of socialization to explain the mechanisms through which attitudes and discriminatory behavior among “nationals” are transmitted. Making use of these concepts, Bustamante sets out to explain why “nationals” adopt the discriminatory attitude of the state.

Methodological individualism versus genetic structuralism

The problem is that the paradigm of understanding —which indicates that every action makes sense for agents and that such meaning can be understood through motives or reasons— is alien to Bourdieu. This is the case when the matter is considered through the conception of causality. In Bourdieu’s view, individuals —or “nationals” when considered through Bustamante’s discrimination theory— do not rationalize their relationship with immigrants; rather, this relationship is internalized through socialization, thereby excluding any possibility of calculation (cf. Bourdieu, 1997, pp. 166, 179). Bourdieu recognizes the importance of the reconstruction of logic (1980) —the logic of practice— as non-causal and determined by the social field in which the *habitus* is structured.

The tendency to perceive in a specific manner —say, the tendency to perceive undocumented immigrants as potential criminals, as is currently the case in Arizona— is a disposition acquired through socialization. This attitude is learned directly or indirectly from others, specifically from those who dominate the social field, that is, those who do their best to maintain the status quo of the social structures of the field. The social order confirms dominance through its pure objectivity. The agents perceive, appreciate, and conform to the social order by convention and for convenience, because it exists and they want it to continue to exist, for orthodoxy. Bourdieu calls this phenomenon the “embodied social program of perception” (1998, p. 23).

These attitudes respond to strategies determined by the *habitus*. This concept refers to the structure that makes agents think and act in terms of what plays out in the social field, that is, the space in which the agents’ interests come into play. It is a structure that is structured, as the social field structures it. The social field gives meaning to the context because it creates the illusion —the *illusio*, as Bourdieu would say— that what is sought as a worthy goal is worthy of interest. Here lies the importance of analyzing these two structures, the *habitus* and social field, because they determine individuals’ thought and behavior.

According to Bourdieu, all the structured structures —the fields— contribute to the legitimization of the established order, providing key arguments used to maintain domination. In this case, the state is the structure that supplies most arguments. This belief gives rise to Bustamante’s intention to conceptualize the distinction made by the state between “nationals” and immigrants/foreigners as the genesis of discrimination.

The problem is that, if we want to understand and explain why and how agents validate laws and discriminatory measures according to the genetic structuralist method of Pierre Bourdieu, then we must accept that the cause behind individuals’ thought and behavior regarding discriminatory practice does not lie in the logic of individuals but in the logic of the field. The logic of the field not only expresses the relation of domination in a field —in this case, the logic that determines the relationship between nationals and immigrants/foreigners— but also affects the cognitive structure of the agents. This means that the sense of legitimacy, which could be defined as that which is accepted and recognized as valid by members of a society, is an illusion. It is in this context that Bourdieu’s theorization takes distance from Weber’s:

"Recognition of legitimacy is not, as Max Weber believed, a free act of lucid consciousness" (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 127).

How does one reconcile the postulate of understanding with the idea of an alienated individual when clearly Weber argues otherwise? Consistent with the theory, Bourdieu posits the existence of a "hypnotized" individual (cf. 1998, p. 12) whose reasoning must be analyzed as the product of a distorted perception of social reality. The reasons that agents ascribe to what they say or think are nothing but justifications or elements of consciousness grounded in a veiled reality through actions that conceal the interests of those who dominate the field. That is why Bourdieu suggests analyzing agents' reasons as an effect of domination, as an effect that emanates from the correspondence between the field and *habitus*. Consequently, to reconcile the postulate of understanding with non-rational aggregation mechanisms, such as those described by the theory of socialization, it is quite difficult, if not impossible. As we have noted *ad nauseam*, the notion of meaning brings into play the conception of an individual who is motivated by subjective reasons to perceive immigrants in one way or another, and those reasons, far from being justifications, have a real, objective foundation. Nevertheless, this does not mean that those reasons are fully conscious² or true because, in some cases, they may be false, dubious, or weak (Boudon, 2003).

By this we mean that individuals understand objects or contents of life from a position that varies according to the constitutive parameters of the contexts in which they act, as Simmel (2009) would say. These parameters can be social, geographic, demographic, etc. and influence behaviors, attitudes, and ways of perceiving the social environment (cf. Weber, 1995, p. 200). Also, these parameters change considerably from context to context, and these changes explain the phenomenon of variability of cultures and the ways in which individuals see the problems emerging from social coexistence. These ways of thinking can be understood and explained if they are conceptualized as ideal types. With a single parameter, one can test the construction of an ideal type and roughly conceive communities monolithically.

For example, one would hardly expect a Hispanic immigrant or, in many cases, a descendant of Hispanic immigrants to perceive SB1070 in the same way as a US non-Hispanic citizen. The rationality of community anchoring, for reasons of sensitivity, should have a higher incidence in the former than in the latter. Things change because other parameters, such as education, social position, and way of life, which contrast considerably in large cities and small communities, are taken into account, as Simmel (2013) explains. The fact is that the inclusion of these and other parameters may disaggregate a community into subgroups that reveal the existence of other categories with positions of rationality that are more distanced regarding issues that affect the home community.

In theory, as Weber (1967) noted, one may construct as many ideal types as wished for and "draw on" the description of the rationales to the level required by understanding and explanation. That said, we must again warn the reader that it is not our purpose to advance a formalized explanation of SB1070 and the reactions to it by the American public. As we have already said, and as the reader may soon notice, in broad terms we outline the actors and

² Both Weber's and Boudon's theories of rationality reject any possibility of interpreting behavior from conjectures based on the existence of a deep or alienated psychology, as proposed by Marx in *The German Ideology*, by Freud or Jung, or by any theorist who explains social phenomena as the result of the action on the individual of forces emanating from the economic, cultural, social, and psychological structures.

rationalities we ascribe to them. In short, the goal is to show the theory's mode of functioning, that is, the way in which it clarifies the data enabling the formulation of hypotheses or points of knowledge that can be taken up and developed later.

Sense and attitude towards SB1070

For Bourdieu, collective representations are distorted conceptions of social processes. Is it because of such distortions that sometimes individuals accept and recognize laws that are clearly not in their best interest? Is that the case with the 29% of Latinos who approved Arizona's SB1070 (Kelley, Fitz, Wolgin, and Garcia, 2012), especially the section authorizing police to check the immigration status of individuals suspected of not having the required documentation? Weber argues that the opposite is true; individuals understand the social processes surrounding them through ideas that are objectified in the social reality. Hence the postulate of understanding and rationality: individuals have their own reasons to act or think in one way or another. Once again, we say: what they do or believe does make sense.

It seems that those Latinos who voted for SB1070 believe that undocumented immigrants feed sensationalist news in good proportion, as argued by Gov. Janice Kay "Jan" Brewer, and that this measure could, as she assures, stop the crime wave that has bloodied the streets of Phoenix. It is estimated that 27% of Latinos consider the requisition of papers to all the individuals suspected of not legally residing in the country to be a favorable safety measure (Kelley et al., 2012). Plausibly, those Latinos, perhaps sufficiently integrated into the society, do not believe that the law may affect their dignity because they believe that they cannot be mistaken for an undocumented Mexican immigrant in a police raid. It is not by chance that the acceptance of the measure popularly known as "papers please" or "show me the papers" grows in significant jumps from the first generation (19%) to the second (34%) and from the second to the third (42%) (Kelley et al., 2012).

Hypothetically, these individuals feel sufficiently integrated to dispense with the community or the resources distributed by the state through its minorities-targeted aid policy or to think of social mobility in terms of an individual rather than a collective strategy. Therefore, it is likely that the rationality of community anchoring does not work with these individuals

This argument can be inferred from the reduced number of third-generation Hispanics who believe in the idea of a strong, protective state (58%), which is significantly lower than that expressed by those belonging to the first generation (81%) (cf. Taylor, Lopez, Martinez, and Velasco, 2012).

The postulate of understanding and rationalization assumes that individuals confront "public opinion," i.e., what is said in the media regarding undocumented immigrants, with facts of reality that are observed and internalized with the help of the elements of knowledge within their grasp. It is odd, Boudon notes, that, in their concern over creating an opinion regarding a given problem, individuals resort only to what they see and know. They are also receptive to knowledge generated around them (1999). With all the shortcomings this might entail in terms of information and cognitive limitations, the actors manage to form an opinion and express it freely when the case so requires. As Weber says, "absolute coercion exists only for slaves" (Weber, 1995, p. 287). The proof is that not all those who approve this law are Anglo-American citizens, nor are those who voted against it all Latinos.³

³ This can be inferred from nationwide surveys conducted in 2010 and 2012, the first by the CNN Opinion Research Corporation (2010) and the second by the Pew Hispanic Center (Kelley et al., 2012). The importance of the proportion of Latinos and Anglos who were in favor and against SB1070 shows the relativity of the Latino and Anglo community vote: while 24% and 29% of Latinos in 2010 and 2012, respectively, were in favor of the law, 34% of Anglos in 2010 expressed opposition to it.

The vote for and the vote against this law were massively structured, in the first case by white Americans and in the second by Latinos. It is true that the results could be read from a structuralist approach, in the sense of Bourdieu's genetic theory, as pointing to a struggle to preserve the structure of domination —the field— and to transform it (cf. Bourdieu, 1987, p. 150). However, definitely the explanation certainly falls short when trying to explain the behavior of non-Hispanic individuals who voted against the law. Could it be said that they experience solidarity with the oppressed, given a certain awareness or knowledge of the mechanisms of domination hidden behind the law? Not likely. If such were the case, the Latinos who voted against it would have thought of the same mechanisms. However, above all, because they do not possess the sociological knowledge to decode the meaning of social reality, they are unaware of the domination mechanisms that hide behind the interests at stake in the field. That is the task of the sociologist and, as Bourdieu would say, the task of observing the observed accept the absurd, its own domination. Uncovering the mechanisms of symbolic domination is to expose the paradox of *doxa* (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 12). Bourdieu rejects the reasoning based on perception categories specific to each individual. He breaks away from common sense to favor explanations based on variables not perceived by individuals (cf. Bourdieu, Chamboredon, and Passeron, 1968).

By contrast, methodological-individualist explanations allow considering a hypothesis that integrates the perspective of agents because they understand it as something that makes sense in their eyes. In fact, in their view, meaning, far from being based on a reality distorted by the will of those who dominate the field, expresses reasons that deserve to be analyzed from a causal point of view. Even when those reasons are in many cases false or questionable, they should not be treated as the result of a force emanating from some structure.

For Hispanics, voting against the law expresses the following conviction: that the law is not a good thing for them because they themselves could be victims of police inquiries given the racial kinship with undocumented immigrants from Mexico. According to the results of a recent survey, 8 out of 10 Hispanics are convinced of this (Kelley et al., 2012). In these cases, individuals do fear for their moral integrity⁴ because they are perhaps not sufficiently integrated so as to feel emotionally detached from the community they racially "belong to" and have tied their fate in the United States to an individual strategy of social ascent, that is, carrying Weber's sociological casuistry for developing an ideal type (cf. Weber, 1995, pp. 50-1) a little further. This explanation presents an individual who understands the law based on its implications for his or her own interests. It is an instrumental rationality, as proposed by RCT.

In the case of non-Latinos who also expressed opposition to the law, one might consider the hypothesis of an analytical attitude regarding the appropriateness of a law whose procedures affect the dignity of people, either directly (undocumented workers) or indirectly (Americans of Mexican descent, particularly those who are poor and with low socio-cognitive resources). This individual views the law from a very different position from that of a Latino. A Latino reacts partly to defend his or her dignity and partly because of emotional factors related to a group of individuals whose culture he or she shares. This Latino sympathizes with immigrants and understands the relationship with them in terms of a collective strategy. This rationality of community anchoring makes sense when the events are considered from the perspective of the relation between the individuals and the state.

⁴ Hispanics' sensitivity regarding discrimination has been growing since 2007. In 2007 (Taylor et al.), only 54% of Hispanics resented discrimination as an obstacle to their aspirations for social advancement. The proportion of people who believe that discrimination would increase with laws such as Arizona SB1070 grew to 74% in 2010 (CNN). A similar proportion of Hispanics (76%) manifests the need for a government to protect them from discrimination (Pew Hispanic Center, 2012).

Thus, we have this non-Latin individual who votes against SB1070 on account of his or her moral capacity to qualify the law from the position of an *impartial spectator* and under a criterion that concerns not only one's own interests but also those corresponding to the common good. According to Boudon, individuals assume this position of rationality when they are capable to decide on a given issue, setting aside their own interests, passions, and prejudices (Boudon, 2007, p. 298). Those who act under this logic generally share the view that immigration is a process that enriches society and that wealth increases through hard work.⁵ Here the individual acts under the influence of a rationality that integrates instrumental and axiological rationality in an "inseparable" manner, as Weber (1996, p. 366) puts it, or in an "organic" manner, as Boudon (2002, p. 91), who defines it as cognitive rationale, puts it. As Weber asserts in a famous note, this proposition show that not only is the individual motivated by his/her material interests, but also he or she is able to guide his or her behavior in the direction of a relational ideal (Weber, 1996, p. 349; 1967, pp. 46-47).

The prospect of Mexican population growth concerns many Americans the same way it worried Mexicans in the past in Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, San Antonio, and other cities in the Southwest in an age —during the years prior to the annexation— during which the demographic relationship was reversed. Huntington (2004), for example, says what many in America think that, if something is not done now to stop the "horde of immigrants," there will be consequences to be paid later, which is what the last Mexican governor of California said in reference to Anglo immigrants (William, 1983, p. 10). The formation of a nation within the nation, according to this logic, is underway. The cultural threat is visible because, in the southwestern United States, specifically in states bordering Mexico, nearly four out of ten people —and almost five when undocumented immigrants are included— are of Latino descent, mostly Mexican (Brown and Lopez, 2013). Through SB1070, Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer has suggested that it is relevant that among them there are undocumented immigrants, provided they can be identified and deported. Nonetheless, many believe that that should not be the goal of immigration policy but rather a means to control the growth of a minority⁶ conceived by intellectuals such as Huntington as an insoluble problem. Undocumented immigrants' cultural characteristics and values are be harmful for the future of the United States because of their inability to assimilate the values on which the economic growth and the morality of the country have been built since the days of the early settlers. Samuel Huntington's pen (2004) expresses an opinion shared by many.

It would seem not only that undocumented immigration is a matter of public debate but also that there is a nativist ideal of an "America true to the values inherited from the founding fathers" in the atmosphere.

Returning to the opinions derived from economic rationality, it is important not to underestimate the power of seduction of Huntington's ideas with respect to public opinion and the ruling elites. For example, ideas that emphasize the positive consequences of a repressive immigration policy in the quality of jobs are noteworthy. In fact, Huntington says that the drastic reduction of immigrant workers would generate an oversupply of labor in sectors

⁵ In the United States, nearly one person in two thinks that immigrants work hard, according to a recent survey (Kohut, Suro, Keer, Doherty, and Escobar, 2006). Almost six out of ten people think that in the US one can get ahead by working hard (Pew Research Center, 2012). It would be safe to attribute the same reasoning to these same individuals who oppose the law.

⁶ Older people seem to have less tolerance to the demographic and cultural changes that have occurred in the past ten years, during which the Mexican population grew 47% in Arizona. It has been said that during, the tenure of Joe Carpio, sheriff of Maricopa County, there has been fear and anger merely because Spanish was being spoken in public places (Greene, 2012).

traditionally dependent on immigrants, thereby causing wages and the interest of American workers to increase (Huntington, 2004).⁷

As we have said before, utilitarian rationality often intermingles with axiological rationality. In this sense, a new hypothesis could be introduced that regards the opinion favoring the criminalization of undocumented immigrants as a structured behavior motivated through not only material interest but also ideal interest, which incidentally affects both Americans of Mexican descent born in the US and those not, especially when they belong to the lowest social stratum. It is not fortuitous that the opposition to SB1070 has been structured with the massive vote of Hispanics. It is clear that there are “conflicting motives,” as Weber would say, between the state of Arizona and the Hispanics who oppose this law. In this conflict, the latter have found an ally in the federal government. The proof is that the law has twice been postponed and partially revoked. It could be said that, in this conflict, the state of Arizona has its own reasons for treating this issue the way it does and that those reasons are objectified in a social context (border drug trafficking, undocumented immigrants, etc.) and in a cognitive context (perceptions of and opinion concerning undocumented immigrants and Mexicans as a national minority throughout the state’s history) that do not impact equally on the local and national spheres. The federal government, for its part, understands the problem from a different rationality from that adopted by the state government. The former manages the relationship with Mexico, and this task requires not a partial visualization of the issue but a consideration of the whole picture.⁸ The federal government juggles with the stick and carrot (the border wall and intensification of deportations of undocumented immigrants —during Obama’s administration⁹— in exchange for the promise of immigration reform, to give a rough example) in its relationship with Mexico. Naturally, this juggling act occurs in addition to the formal motivation that was filed in court to confront the state of Arizona on account of the usurpation of functions within the purview of the federal government. These functions are linked to immigration.

Meaning, individual, ideal type, and final considerations

It has already been noted that the notion of meaning involves the idea of an individual who is motivated by reasons and that those reasons, far from being mere justifications, as conceived by Bourdieu and through him by Bustamante, translate their material and ideal interests. However, to operate with the notion of meaning, or in other words, to make sense of social activity, we must build an abstract ideal type. Now, to create an ideal type, Weber (Weber, 1995, pp. 49-51) recommends keeping in mind the type of social action (Weber, 1995, pp. 55-56) and conceiving the social phenomena as the result of behaviors performed by individuals who rationalize their social environment. In Boudon’s words, this individual would be an ideal-typical actor, and as such, he or she should be endowed with meaning and by extension with meaningful content, to express it in Weber’s terms. In the language of Raymond Boudon, this means reconstructing the logic of the actors, or in other words, specifying the reasons or system of reasons behind individuals’ behaviors and beliefs. An example would be trying to understand why, in American public opinion, some believe that the criminalization of illegal immigration is a good measure and others do not.

⁷ Note that the oversupply of labor is already expressed in agribusiness in California and so far there is no indication of wage increase in that sector. It is estimated that the San Joaquin Valley was short approximately 250,000 farmworkers to raise crops (“California loses” 2012).

⁸ The execution in Texas of Mexican inmate Edgar Tamayo, despite diplomatic pressure from Mexico and the intervention of the Secretary of State (John Kerry), who expressed concern that the case could transcend and affect the treatment of Mexico’s justice regarding their citizens (“Texas execution,” 2014), serves as example.

⁹ Deportations of undocumented Mexican immigrants during Obama administration increased by 30% in comparison to Bush’s mandate (cf. López, González-Barrera, and Motel, 2011). It is estimated that, between 2009 and 2013, 400,000 immigrants were deported per year and that the vast majority of them were of Mexican origin (cf. López, Taylor, González-Barrera, and Oates, 2013).

To ascribe a rationale or logic to a social category, such rationale must be credible, i.e., it must express the social reality of the actors who conceive it. In other words, it should be the result of a psychic activity that exposes the link between individuals and their context.

Certain experiences cannot be understood without reference to specific social and cognitive contexts that mark the existence of individuals. For example, the problem of undocumented immigration is not lived with the same intensity in all states of the Union as it is in Arizona, and in many states the issue is so irrelevant that it may not even be raised. Bordering Mexico, Arizona is a state where Hispanics have been perceived as a threatening minority characterized by their soaring growth in population over the last three decades.¹⁰ Because of issues related to economic growth—which was spectacular for several decades but stopped some years ago—plus the eastward displacement of clandestine routes of entry of undocumented immigrants¹¹ and the strategic geographical position of the main metropolis, Arizona and Phoenix have become the destination and trading platform of Mexican drug cartels and organized gangs trafficking undocumented immigrants.¹² The perception of these events has been magnified in such an alarming way that in Arizona it is said publicly¹³ that almost all undocumented immigrants make their living through illegal enterprise, when, as we have seen in the previous footnote, nearly four in ten people are Latino and more than three out of ten Latinos do not have documents proving their immigration status. This situation is the origin of the belief that the fight against the presence of undocumented immigrants in the state is also a fight against drug trafficking and against *vendettas* that bloody the streets of their cities.¹⁴ It is not by chance that, in Phoenix, immigration is perceived not only as “a big problem for the community” but also with much more concern than in other cities, e.g., 55% against 19% in Chicago and 21% in Washington, DC (Kohut et al., 2006). The close correlation between undocumented immigrants and insecurity is a notion that not only cognitively affects Anglos or non-Hispanic but also affects Latinos. In fact, the Center for American Progress Actions survey shows that three out of ten Latinos believe that the section of SB1070 concerning the authorization of the police to question people suspected of residing in the state without papers will impact positively on their safety (Kelley et al., 2012).

It is important to remember that, as a social category, undocumented immigrants are powerless to intervene on their own behalf in controversies of which they are subjects and that among their advocates there are individuals and categories of individuals who know that their sole benefit and satisfaction is to act in defense of human dignity. This situation shows that the social fate of a group not only depends on its own power to impose respect of its dignity. If such were the case, the story of the Jewish Diaspora would have been different. For us, these

¹⁰ Indeed, the Latino population has doubled over the last three decades. In 1980, Mexicans accounted for 16.3% of the 2,718,000 inhabitants of Arizona at the time (*Bureau of Census Department of Commerce*, 1983). Today, they represent 29.9% and approximately 40% if the 450,000 Mexicans living in the state without documents are included (Hofer, Ritina, and Baker, 2010). Arizona is the state of the Union with greatest growth in recent times, and Latinos constitute the group that has most contributed to its growth (*Bureau of Census Department of Commerce*, 1983; *Bureau of Census United States* 2010).

¹¹ In 1986, the Border Patrol had in its detention center in San Diego up to eight times more undocumented immigrants than Arizona (629,656 versus 71,675, respectively). Tucson was by far the least important center of detention in the Southwest. Since then, trends have changed rapidly, and in 2010, Tucson became the most important detention center of the Southwest, with a number of arrests that exceeds that of San Diego by at least three times (68,565 to 212,202) (*United States Border Patrol*, 2011a).

¹² The Tucson Border Patrol detention center records more than half of the crime-related arrests, specifically the smuggling of drugs and weapons, felonies, and even murders, in the Southwest (*United States Border Patrol*, 2011b).

¹³ Recall the statement of Gov. Jan Brewer stating that most undocumented immigrants transport drugs to the United States from Mexico (“Arremete gobernadora de Arizona [Strike down Arizona Governor],” 2010).

¹⁴ The Supreme Court, in its decision to suspend SB1070, contextualizes the problem as follows: “Against a backdrop of rampant illegal immigration, escalating drug and human trafficking crimes, and serious public safety concerns, the Arizona Legislature enacted a set of statutes and statutory amendments in the form of Senate Bill 1070...” (*United States of America vs. State of Arizona*, 2010).

individuals are ideal-typical actors with attitudes based on a rationality, a logic, whose cornerstone is human dignity. Nevertheless, this is only a hypothesis or a theory integrated with elements of consciousness, and as such, it is not observable. Does Weber's woodcutter in *Economy and Society* cut wood for his fireplace, to exercise, or to relax? Most likely, he does it to heat his home. This is the most plausible hypothesis because he has a fireplace, because it is cold, and because of other plausible parameters that affect the psyche of the woodcutter in the sense suggested by this hypothesis. Therefore, in the same way, our hypothesis, or theory, has no other basis than that which is inferred from the context and the parameters that give, or are thought to give, meaning to the behavior of the actors. Thus, we have an ideal-typical actor moved by a hypothetical motivation. As Weber notes, "rationality is nothing but a potential hypothesis to be verified empirically and controlled, as any other hypothesis in the natural sciences" (Weber, 2012, p. 64).

We are convinced that the idea of human dignity is a value transported in time and space through a diffuse rationalization process, as Weber defines it. Weber explains it as an irreversible process in the long term because there are historical forces or factors likely to favor or obstruct it. By virtue of this concept, we have explained some of the social and cognitive mechanisms responsible for regarding undocumented immigrants as criminals in Arizona, and from the perspective of demographic and cultural imbalance thus generated, thereby inhibiting understanding of the issue from the perspective of human dignity. Drug trafficking, terrorism, and the threat of collusion between them, which has happened in other parts of the world, are forces that have generated reactions against values associated with the notion of the free movement of people across borders. Regardless, that is what happened with the attacks of September 11, and it is likely that this attitude is strengthened to the extent that such events are repeated, as happened in Boston in April 2013. Therefore, instead of the free movement of persons, which is the case with goods, borders are reinforced and walls are built, affecting the dignity of individuals, as happens on the border of Mexico with the United States, to cite only a single case and leaving aside the Gaza Strip on the border with Israel and many other cases.

It is clear that those who rationalize the problem of undocumented immigration from the perspective of criminalization, blinded by the issue of security and the ideal of clinging to a nation built on old Puritan values, lose sight of the consequences of the drastic restriction of immigration, consequences that are already being felt in farm work, where employers are more dependent on Mexican labor. Traditionally organized in lobby groups, employers advocate for Mexican labor. They may not care about the consequences of the law on their lives, or the moral and material damage brought upon immigrants, but they do care about the shortage of labor. Because they are economic actors, they rationalize all that can affect profit or capitalist acquisition, in Weber's words. They do not lose sleep because of the consequences for the ideal order noted by Huntington.

This point is interesting because it connects us with a concept that Weber (2000, p. 324) defined as the paradox of human will and destiny. This paradox refers to what we want to achieve through a specific purpose and through certain means and the results we get, which are not always what we hoped for. In Boudon's words (1977), this situation corresponds to what he defines as perverse, unexpected, or undesirable effects. Politics, says Weber (1959), are not a car pulled by horses that can run or stop as one wants.

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