MIGRANT SPATIALITY:
IDENTITY, BELONGING, AND A QUESTION OF DIASPORA

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ABSTRACT

This project seeks to understand the motivations behind long-term movement into and out of the United States (U.S.) by Mexican residents, in particular those who have returned to Mexico despite established professional and personal lives in the U.S. It intends to fill the gap in literature regarding retired populations, specifically, which remains a population with whom minimal work has been done. Despite challenges associated with legalization, which is often a timely and costly process, naturalized U.S. residents do not necessarily remain in the U.S. long-term. Anecdotal evidence suggests immigrants often plan to return to their nations of origin, or otherwise consider it an option. The unique geographic proximity between the U.S. and Mexico, however, results in the maintenance of distinct affective attachment to the latter nation, as is reflected in this project. Presently, much of the work centering immigrant experiences considers the effects of involuntary returns, i.e., the ramifications of deportations. In contrast, this project considers the motivations of voluntary returnees to Mexico, specifically those of retirees who hold either U.S.-American residency or dual U.S.-Mexico citizenship. Field work was completed in June 2019 in the Mexican state of Guanajuato; this project used ethnographic research methods to evaluate the experiences of retired Mexican nationals both in the U.S. and in Mexico. The results of these interviews suggest that a sense of belonging was a vital factor in the decision to return to Mexico, thus requiring an engagement of identity as it is experienced within a diasporic population. Despite significant time spent in the U.S., interviewees’ ongoing connection to, and/or preference for, their home country influenced their experiences as transnational subjects. This research project offers an analysis of this ongoing connection to their nation of origin, and its relationship to diaspora, identity and belonging.
For my grandparents,
and for everyone who has ever made the long journey north.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The inside of the house was painted a peach; my memory has transformed it nearly orange in the afternoon light, Christmas lights as decorations and the heat almost stifling. The front door led directly out onto the narrow sidewalk that remains common in La Moncada, the small town where the bulk of my research was conducted, and where the beginnings of my family began in the late 1960s. The entryway doubled as a sitting room, leading directly into a kitchen-slash-dining room, beyond which you could see the green of the land their house was built on. As we rearranged ourselves, Javier’s wife offered us a shared caguama—a 40oz of Corona Familiar. I accepted the rather large glass I was offered, though I don’t drink beer, and for a moment we exchanged pleasantries while his wife said goodbye to some of the neighborhood children that played outside their home. She mentioned that one child in particular was fond of them, and he briefly ducked into the home to bid Javier goodbye. Behind the couch where Javier sat, there was a large portrait of la Virgen de Guadalupe, a familiar sight in Mexican homes and a comforting reminder of the personal connection I have always maintained in the work I have pursued.

“Tu abuelo me habló en mayo,” Javier told me. My grandfather had recently been in town for the town’s May celebrations; while there, he reached out preemptively, and without my knowledge, to ask an old friend if he might be willing to be interviewed for my thesis project. He did not offer any details besides this, and in fact I hadn’t realized I had a volunteer for this project until my grandmother and I visited her niece, Maria de Jesús, to identify potential participants. Though we soon realized he was related to my aunt’s husband, he and my grandfather have known each other for years; the Lule family has long populated this town despite my grandfather having left, permanently, over forty years ago.
My grandparents crossed the border separately in the mid-seventies, during a time of high unemployment in Mexico that resulted in said government's support for "the departures of working-class men" as a solution (Shashkevich 2018). My grandfather, twenty-eight years old, was by then the father of two daughters, the oldest a toddler and the youngest a newborn. He traveled with his late brother, Nicolás, wading across the Rio Grande at Brownsville. My grandmother crossed later, guided by this same brother and a coyote, arriving in Hidalgo and then McAllen, Texas, with both daughters in tow. In the seventies, it was possible to arrive clandestinely and then board a plane from Houston to Chicago, where my grandfather awaited them and where he found work using someone else’s papers. In casual conversation, I have heard similar family histories recounted by other second-generation Mexican-Americans. The methods my grandparents and others relied on to cross the border in preceding decades would find minimal success today, as the changes in United States (U.S.) immigration law and border enforcement practices have made crossing a nearly insurmountable task, though this does not mean that it has become an entirely impossible act (de Leon 2015, 28; Loyd and Mountz 2018, 173).

The work done as part of this thesis is equal parts a reflection of transnational experiences as it is the lived realities of immigration law in the U.S. Concerning the latter’s extensive history, I find it pertinent to establish it as one deeply rooted in xenophobic ideology and a strong preference for Anglo-Saxon migration, rooted in continuously evolving anti-Black and anti-Native policy (Gomberg-Muñoz 2017, 25; Loyd and Mountz 2018, 57; Luiselli 2017, 17). In recent years, the fear of Latinx peoples has both increased and adjusted to changing geopolitical realities (Vega 2017). Xenophobia is not new, nor is it limited exclusively towards displaced Latin American populations. Social attitudes towards immigrants, in particular Mexicans, have been shaped by ever-changing policies, which will be considered in more depth within this project’s review of
literature. Most notable for the purposes of this project is the intersection between the resulting public perception of immigrants and how immigrants themselves perceive themselves as a result of this scrutiny. These constructions, both on personal and broad social scales, contribute to identity formation among this population.

Considering the relationship between Chicanidad and more recent Mexican migration, I consider it vital to engage the theoretical approaches that Chicanx scholars have developed prior to and following the Chicano organizing rooted in the 1960s civil rights movements. Chicanidad, a cultural marker with a variety of definitions and conceptualizations, is defined in this paper as an identity chosen by individuals of Mexican descent, and is most commonly engaged by those living in the U.S. Within the thought and scholarship developed in the field of Chicano/x Studies, autobiographic projects by Chicanx creators have historically explored, and emphasized, the mobility associated with their subject formation. As individuals who are “hyphenated,” (as described by Chicana scholar Gloria Anzaldúa), they are simultaneously “foreign” and “native” to this nation due to U.S.-specific constructions of identity and belonging resulting from white imperialist imaginings of citizenship. The viewpoint offered by this project is specific to the experiences of those who are U.S. born individuals of Mexican descent; I find, however, that the concepts introduced in these many texts—specifically regarding notions of belonging—are a shared factor influencing the Mexican residents who participated in this study. As such, this project aims to consider the motivations of voluntary returnees to Mexico, with a specific focus on the topic of identity.

Identity, as it is engaged by the late cultural theorist Stuart Hall, serves as a pseudo-narrative specific to an individual’s space in the world, built as much on exclusion as it is inclusion. I consider his perspective to be of significant value when analyzing the formation processes
engaged by Latin American (im)migrants arriving to the U.S., with the subjects of this project being no exception. Hall’s theorizing established identity as “fractured”—that is, the modern movement of peoples and the histories of any given nation result in the construction of the individual across intersecting positionalities. This framework allows engagement of the multitude of cultural practices Mexican (im)migrants experience, both prior, during, and following their translocation. How they conceptualize themselves as individuals, as residents, and as global citizens, is dependent on every micro- and macro-level decision they make in their personal lives. This is especially significant when the individual makes the decision to break certain cultural connections and recreate them abroad; being Mexican in Mexico is not the same as being Mexican in the U.S. As will be discussed later, the racialization of foreign peoples in the U.S. is a historical project that is regularly reproduced through contemporary laws and policies; evolution is constant. Regardless of these shifts, however, there is still movement to—and from—the U.S., with the later being of particular interest to this project.

Subjects interviewed as part of this research left the U.S. under very specific circumstances: following their retirement from the U.S. workforce, a characteristic that is itself an important aspect of their choice to return to Mexico. Retirement in the U.S. is the subject of think pieces and a variety of ad hoc advice. For immigrants with legal status, their decisions are made more complicated by their transnational relationships. Leaving one’s nation of origin does not sever the entirety of one’s relationship to it. Individuals may have left family and friends behind who remain there, expecting an eventual return. This is distinct from American ex-pats settling in Mexico in hopes of affordable retirement (Peddicord 2021). In contrast, Mexican immigrants and their families may have collectively decided to migrate to the U.S., with the understanding that everyone would remain there upon arrival (Aguilera 2004, 345). Their various familial obligations and
economic restrictions all influence the decision to remain in the U.S. post-retirement, or otherwise return to Mexico. While some work with elderly migrants has been completed, much of this is the result of research published in the 1990s, over twenty years out of date in the face of ongoing changes to immigration patterns and immigration law. At least one study has specifically worked with populations regarding potential retirement decisions; building upon this, my interest lies in these retired populations themselves (Aguilera 2004, 343).

Choices surrounding retirement are made complicated by the transnational nature of Mexican immigrants, as well as the relationships they maintain. My own family’s history of migration has served as inspiration for research, with the relationships we have maintained both in the U.S. and abroad taking significant influence from cultural and economic factors on both sides of the border. These experiences are not limited to my family alone, but serve as an anecdotal starting point for this project. This Mexican immigrant population must negotiate their place in the country that has historically denied them both access and acceptance. Why might someone who has spent decades abroad (and in many cases, established new social connections and family units) choose to return to their nation of origin, knowingly leaving behind these U.S.-based communities? In answering this question, this project aims to shed light on identity, citizenship, and belonging—all of which are of vital importance to studies related to Latinx peoples in this nation, both historically and in the present.
2.1: Migration, the U.S., and The Invention Of Legality

Immigration, and therefore its regulation, remains a hot-button issue in the U.S., no matter popular depictions of this nation as a melting pot. Its evolution over the last 150 years has foundations in the late 19th and early 20th policies, which must be considered when tracing and analyzing contemporary practices. Prior to the 1920s, visas and passports were not required of Europeans seeking U.S. entry (Gomberg-Muñoz 2017, 22; USCIS 2016). In contrast, policies for non-white immigrants severely limited their presence through a variety of constrictions, with the most historically significant being the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. Though it remains one of the few (and the first) pieces of legislation specifically barring one group entrance to the U.S., policies enacted after prioritized (and continue to prioritize) the entrance of certain immigrants over others (Gomberg-Muñoz 2017, 25). These laws, developed throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and continuously modified today, have significantly influenced the general population’s perspectives on migration as well as how these immigrants themselves are perceived by greater U.S.-American society.

The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 established a quota system that created immigration patterns fitting the desired racial composition of the U.S., with “non-white” populations excluded entirely while Northern and Western Europeans were specifically prioritized over immigrants from other geographic regions (Gomberg-Muñoz 2017, 26). However, the desire for Latin American workers, with a particular emphasis on Mexican citizens, resulted in their continued employment in the agricultural sector. Those employed were often men who did not seek to settle permanently in the U.S. While reforms were enacted as a result of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965,
its most significant effect was the shift from cyclical labor migration to more permanent family settlement, seen in Mexican and Filipino migration patterns alike (Gomberg-Muñoz 2017, 29). Prior to its implementation, however, the Bracero Program (in place between 1942 and 1962) allowed married Mexican men to legally work in the U.S., a practice rooted in the labor shortages that resulted from WWII (Saldívar 1997, 207). The specificity of these men being married was intentional; ideally, this would deter workers from establishing themselves permanently in the U.S.

While immigration policies continued to evolve throughout the sixties and seventies, I choose to situate us more contemporarily with the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). This legislation made the employment of undocumented persons illegal, though provisions made largely protected employers from prosecution, with only two percent of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) budget allotted to employer sanctions in 1996 (Golash-Boza 2016, 8; Gomberg-Muñoz 2017, 31). Instead, IRCA extended amnesty to 2.7 million undocumented persons who entered the country prior to 1982; this later extended protection from deportation to the children and spouses of IRCA applicants. Despite this, Mexican immigrants were the least likely to seek citizenship, reflecting the oftentimes cyclical migration patterns of this population (Hellman 2011, 237). This may be due to the geographic nearness of Mexico, as well as Mexican citizenship practices, which until the late 1990s did not allow for dual citizenship (Badger 2014). Minimal work has been done with this population in direct relation to amnesty, outside of surveys sponsored by the Department of Labor three and five years after the law was implemented (Badger 2014).

In contrast, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRAIRA), passed in 1996, drastically reduced the ability of an undocumented person to ever change their immigration status, in addition to facilitating the deportation of lawful permanent residents.
Presently, lawful permanent residents who are racialized as Black, particularly those of Caribbean descent, are most impacted by policing, including that which results in expulsion (Loyd and Mountz 2018, 213). This period also marked a shift towards greater militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border, a phenomenon that continues today (De Leon 2015, 31; Gomberg-Muñoz 31).

This weaponizing of the border through shows of force and reliance on the natural dangers of the Sonoran Desert divides the U.S. in accordance with the goals set by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) (De Leon 2015, 32; Dorsey and Díaz-Barriga 2015, 207). Presently, deportations number at over 200,000 a year, with the yearly total between 2008 and 2015 well over 300,000, peaking in 2012 with 409,849 removed (DHS 2015). CBP’s power within the interior of the nation is of particular relevance, as it effectively widens the border and makes all residents, regardless of legal status, vulnerable to questioning by this agency (Dorsey and Díaz-Barriga 2015, 204). These changes have occurred alongside the increasing criminalization of migration despite the legal framing of deportation as a civil penalty rather than as punishment (Golash-Boza 2016, 87). For undocumented persons living in the U.S., the risk of a ten-year bar is a real one directly linked to legalization efforts. Should their efforts to adjust their status be rejected by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), they face a ban of up to ten years as a direct consequence for having remained, unlawfully, within the nation’s borders (Gomberg-Muñoz 2017, 62).

It is therefore fair to establish the role of migration laws in creating immigrants, and in their further marginalization through federal policy (De Genova 2004, 179; Golash-Boza 2016, 139; Saldívar 1997, 96). By enacting a set of requirements that define who has the legal right to exist in a territory, immigration law creates a subgroup of people that can then be labeled undocumented. This label is fluid: a non-citizen might one day become a citizen, or a legal resident
might be deported. Independent of this, non-citizens interact with citizens regularly, in a variety of contexts, and therefore the realities of legality and citizenship are not limited to undocumented persons in the U.S. (Golash-Boza 2016, 3).

Despite this, immigration laws are often interpreted as belonging to a sort of natural order independent of their real-world relationship to shifts in sociopolitical agendas. Dean Spade frames this misinterpretation of the role of law as one that considers such policies the “the neutral arbiter of fairness and justice” (Spade 2014, 149). Nicholas De Genova (2004) frames illegality as a product of law and policies targeting Mexican migrants in the U.S. Most importantly, he defines it as a historical process throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that targets Mexican and Latinx populations in distinct ways as compared to European immigrants (De Genova 2004, 170). Thus the social and cultural implications of shifting immigration policies are of the utmost interest to scholars who engage this population, myself included.

The effort to maintain law as a form of integrity within the context of a so-called “secure” border, the U.S. has most recently turned to deportation (Walters 2002, 280). Deportation has historically served two purposes: that of maintaining order, and of policing a population at an international level (Walters 2002, 282). That deportation is not legally recognized as punishment does not erase the realities of these policies; for undocumented individuals, such legislation effectively renders their very existence a criminal act. “Illegality” is a concept created by the laws that claim to be preoccupied with preventing it. Furthermore, deportation is not a risk solely for individuals without proper documentation. Legal permanent residents can also be deported on grounds of criminality, with such deportations the result of policing practices towards people of color in the U.S. as well as misunderstandings on part of these legal residents, who may not have been aware that they were still subject to immigration law (Golash-Boza 2016, 6; Coutin 2016,
Illegality has become a “spatialized socio-political condition”; it is dependent on the laws and policies in place that police bodies and that ultimately render certain individuals legal (De Genova 2004, 161). There exists a distinct differentiation between immigrants who are considered lawfully present and those that are labeled “illegal aliens” by U.S. policy. These differences call upon Spade’s argument wherein law has been reinterpreted by the public and by policy makers to be understood as a neutral source of justice. Thus, illegality becomes a representation of moral value.

As it exists in the U.S., citizenship has become largely a result of sociocultural linking of personal identity to nationality (Berlant 2014, 37). In this country, non-white migrants remain codified both by federal laws and day-to-day social practices. Race has historically maintained influence in the passing of laws targeting migrants in the U.S. (Ferguson 2014, 208). The racialization of new immigrants and targeting of Latinx (specifically Mexican and Central American) immigrants entering or living in the U.S. continues in the present. There is a narrowing of the differences between criminal and immigrant law that can in turn be analyzed through an antipolicy lens (Stumpf 2006, 408). In using such labels as “anti-terrorist” and “anti-crime,” the current administration weaponizes these concepts in a bid to eradicate perceived threats, which results in the targeting of Latinxs as a whole, regardless of their legal status. Commentary labeling these populations of color as inferior or as risks has only further cemented the role of morality as it is used to rationalize harmful laws and policies, suggesting a cycle of worsening targeting and wrongful interpretations of Latinx migration to the U.S., especially in light of intensifying policies targeting both the border area and individuals attempting to cross it (Dorsey and Díaz-Barriga 2015, 209).
These shifting policies are themselves a representation of the U.S.’s desire to advance their own political prowess. Moreover, I believe it pertinent to invoke biopower as a lens through which we might analyze these changes, and which I invoke here using Foucault’s conceptualization. Biopower aims to limit and control subjects when in a particular place; at its simplest, it refers to having power over bodies (Estévez 2013, 61). Within the context of U.S. immigration law, these policies have come to act in terms of limiting and controlling both subjects and non-subjects. Considering the rapidly deteriorating conditions of migrants camps in the U.S., it is accurate to describe the U.S.’s investment specifically in state’s ability to modify “the sovereign’s right to let live and make die” (Estévez 2013, 61). State powers control all aspects of their subjects’ lives, allowing for complete dominion over their territory and the individuals within it, regardless of their citizen status.

This is not the first time a border space, however broadly defined this may be, has been made hostile; this shift from exclusive domination of a territory’s subject to the utilization of biopower to maintain control over individuals within, and outside of, its borders was first seen in state responses to mass migration originating in Haiti (Loyd and Mountz 2018, 31). Some of the crises seen in the treatment of Haitian migrants are actively replicated today at the U.S.-Mexico border, once again providing evidence for the U.S.’s preoccupation with its biopolitical power. This power has had deadly impacts, regardless of temporal context. Haitian migrants under U.S. custody suffered significantly due to medical neglect (Loyd and Mountz 2018, 156). This is not a new behavior on part of the state. Presently, there exists in the U.S. what has been called a “border crisis.” I want to make it clear that while this is a crisis created by the state, it does not mean that individuals caught up in its web are without suffering, or that this suffering does not continue to exist in the present.
In recent years, the practice of separating children from their families while in custody has also sparked outrage (ACLU 2019). Footage of sixteen-year-old Carlos Gregorio Hernandez Vasquez, a Guatemalan migrant who was held in ICE custody, as served to contradict official reporting of his May 2019 death from the flu (Dickerson 2019). As of August 2020, seventeen individuals in U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody have died according to official reporting (Silva 2020). This comes in tandem with reports that ICE has not administered adequate medical care to detainees, whether in form of preventative care such as flu shots or in correctly recording the medical treatments that these individuals have received or which they require (Tahir 2019). This treatment has not improved with the recent reports of the novel COVID-19 virus’ presence in detention centers, with hundreds of new cases being reported in facilities (Moreno 2020).

The power and scope of CBP, like immigration law, has rapidly increased in recent years (De Genova 2004, 180; Golash-Boza 2016, 2). The treatment faced by detained migrants and asylum seekers extends of U.S. biopolitical power to individuals either not under their territorial control or that exist in conflict with state perceptions regarding what the ideal citizen looks like. For citizens of color, the discrimination they face is compounded by state efforts to moderate their lives. Consider, too, the increasing reports of asylum seekers being denied entrance to the U.S. despite its own policies (Estévez 2013, 65; Golash-Boza 2016, 39). This nation-state seeks not only to dominate subjects within its borders, but also maintain control over individuals outside of it, particularly those in countries relevant to U.S. interests. The militarization of the Mexico’s southern border via the implementation of Programa Frontera Sur (2014) serves as another example of U.S. involvement outside of its borders being posited as a necessary action to protect its sovereignty and subjects under the guise of immigration control (Matalon 2016).
For undocumented persons, adjusting their legal status is not an option made easily available to them. A variety of reforms over the last century have had varying impacts on all immigrants’ ability to be naturalized, though they have had distinct ramifications for individuals from the Global South. Presently, legalization in the U.S. is a timely, and costly, process. The two main family-based programs available to undocumented persons with U.S. citizen or lawful resident family members cost, on average, between $3000 and >$8820 as of 2017, with processing times ranging between six months to well over a year (Gomberg-Muñoz 2017, 12). Interviews with such individuals, however, highlight a much larger financial and emotional toll relating to lost wages, attorney fees, and travel associated with the legalization process. Borjas, in his 2017 study, calculated the 2014 gap between undocumented individuals’ income and that of documented workers to have shrunk to eight percent, however it is pertinent to point out that the gender-based differences among this population continue to be significant, as well as point out that in 2007 this adjusted earnings gap was around sixteen percent (Borjas 2017, 26). Thus while more contemporary calculations suggest an improvement, the history of this wage gap (and in fact more recent events, considering the impact of COVID-19 on the global economy) must be accounted for when analyzing the motivations of those seeking to adjust their legal status.

Efforts to alter one’s legal status are made more complicated by changing immigration laws, which attorneys may not be aware of when working with their clients. Failure to take these changes into account can result in deportation orders, and the aforementioned loss of wages and subsequent displacement of non-citizens and citizens alike. Immigration law does not exclusively impact undocumented persons living in the U.S.; mixed-status families are commonplace, and their lives are heavily influenced by the policies that target their non-citizen family members (Golash-Boza 2016, 2; Gomberg-Muñoz 2017, 49). For some, adjustment of their legal status is
not an option, leaving them in the precarious position of continuing their day-to-day responsibilities without proper documentation and, subsequently, vulnerable to deportation orders. Adjusting one’s status alleviates much of the pressures associated with this insecure position, particularly the economic instability associated with the low wages undocumented persons earn (Badger 2014). This does not, however, alleviate the racialization experienced by such populations; migrants seeking entry (particularly asylum-seekers) are often aware of the anti-immigrant attitudes and state persecution they may face in attempting to enter the U.S. Yet attitudes cannot erase the present or history of Latinxs in the U.S., whether as citizens or as undocumented persons.

The presence of Mexicans in the U.S., specifically, is one with roots beyond the Mexican-American War, after which Mexican citizens residing in formerly Mexican territory were offered U.S.-American citizenship as a result of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (Dowling 2014, 10). Though racially classified as white, Mexican(-American)s nevertheless encountered Jim Crow-style discrimination well into the 20th century throughout the American Southwest, itself an extension of historically present anti-Mexican sentiment (Dowling 2014, 38; Gomberg-Muñoz 2017, 19; Saldívar 1997, 28). Immigration and labor laws have alternatively racialized Mexican workers as either desirable or undesirable within particular contexts; legal workers, such as braceros, benefited from particular shifts in labor legislation, though these did not extend to all potential workers (Saldívar 1997, 124). Racial scripts (i.e. how we perceive and act towards a racialized group) have allowed for Mexican subjugation to develop as an extension of attitudes or behaviors that uphold white supremacy (Molina 2010, 159). This reality, however, is made complicated by the fact that, legally, Mexicans and other Latinx groups are considered racially white in the U.S. This racial identification is rooted in the same treaty that resulted in the
acquisition of the American Southwest. In 1848, citizenship was reserved for whites; extending it to Mexicans of various racial and ethnic backgrounds did not extend it to people of color, but rather necessitated this group’s legal status as white to maintain white political power (Roberts 2011, 5). This does not, however, mean that the collective experiences of Mexicans in the U.S. have reflected assimilation into whiteness.

Latinxs (including Mexican-Americans) have historically remained “other” even after generations spent in U.S.-American territory (Lacayo 2017, 567). A consideration of this racialization, and how it is constructed in the U.S. and then experienced by Mexican immigrants, provides vital context for this project. Scholars Omi and Winant propose that race is produced via racial projects, which are themselves interpretations of racial dynamics that attempt to reorganize resources as well as maintain particular social structures (Omi and Winant 1994, 55). This theorizing establishes race without fixed meaning; it is continuously (re)constructed through various political projects. The state, as evidenced by the above 1848 example and others, has a significant role in the construction of race and of the subsequent lived experiences of racialized persons. Discrimination is experienced at the hands of the state and from fellow U.S. residents. To alleviate these experiences, some may “alter their sense of self and, ultimately, their identities, to better fit the neoliberal subject citizens that they believe U.S. society and its government would want” (Menjívar 2016, 607). Within Menjívar’s project, individuals repeatedly attempt to differentiate themselves from negative perceptions of Latinx immigrants via defining themselves in opposition to preconceived notions of so-called illegality. In doing so, they play into the system that has established them as illegal, and ultimately undesirable.

This is not to say that Mexican(-American)s do not resist the ramifications of their racialization in the U.S. Rather, I consider it a vital component of the work my project aims to
produce. Identity formation, which I use here to refer to how an individual develops a conceptualization of who they are as an individual and as a part of their community, has arguably become a central topic within discussions surrounding representation. Despite the increasing racial and ethnic diversity of the U.S., people of color continue to face discrimination and lack of representation, whether from a social, political, or economic perspective. Despite the growth of non-white and mixed-race populations in the U.S., people of color remain disadvantaged within a variety of contexts (USCB 2018, “Older People…”; Patten 2016). Regardless of legal status, Latinxs must navigate xenophobic spaces linked to the immigration policies outlined here.

One method of confronting this reality is through the production of arts. In Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies, José David Saldívar posits the borderland as one that challenges “dominant national centers of identity and culture” (19). Echoing Anzaldúa, the borderland becomes liminal, and in this art—as in the reflections offered by participants of this study—this in-betweenness moves into the lived experiences of transnational subjects. Author Benjamin Alire Sáenz engages with the affective consequences of these realities in the text, “Exile.” He recounts the anger associated with complying to Border Patrol’s demands as well as his efforts to resist some aspect of their control. These challenges to his “belonging”—his continual interactions centering around his being labeled as a foreigner in his own country—reflect larger attitudes regarding Mexicanidad (used here to mean Mexican identity) / Latinidad within this now-widening border space.

“Exile” results from the specific context of existing in a borderland space. The U.S.-Mexico border remains contentious both in a literal and figurative sense. Its engagement by Latinx—particularly Chicanx—scholars is extensive. As stated, the American Southwest is one deeply rooted in Mexican (and Spanish) history. Those of Mexican descent have historically
populated this region, and their ongoing presence is challenged by policies and social attitudes alike that target perceived foreigners. Concerning the borderland, specifically, there has been an ongoing engagement of its role in Chicanx identity formation. Anzaldúa is one such scholar who explored this space as one to which liminal Chicanx peoples “belonged.” Others, including Sáenz, highlight the sociopolitical targeting of this Mexican(-American) population by the state. This borderland is itself the representation of divided loyalties; popular representations of Latinidad (and Chicanidad) highlight the division experienced by U.S.-born or transplanted Latinxs, who are both too foreign for the U.S. and too American for their countries of origin. The U.S.-Mexico border is a physical representation of this division, given its literal and figurative existence (as less than half of the border is actually physically present in the form of fencing) (Mark, Gould, and Kiersz 2019).

Outside of this immediate geographic space, the policing and patterns of discrimination that Latinxs face even as full citizens remain systemic. Victor Rios’ *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys* allowed for otherwise silenced voices to express the reality of poverty and gang violence among young Black and Latino men. Rios highlighted the effect of police targeting and brutality, particularly the ways in which self-fulfilling prophecies are formed (Rios 2011, 68). At present, Hispanics of all races comprise 32.8 percent of the prison population, despite constituting 18.1 percent of the total U.S. population as of 2018 (Federal Bureau of Prisons 2018; USCB 2018, “Hispanic Heritage Month…”). Of the estimated 10,061,568 Latinxs of Mexican origin in the United States, for individuals twenty-five years of age and older, only 11.8 percent have attained a bachelor’s or graduate / professional degree, compared to the approximately 34 percent of the entire population who has (American Factfinder 2017). In recent years, hate crimes against Latinxs have manifested in physical attacks against individuals alongside a 21-percent
increase in their occurrences (Brooks 2019). This violence is not new, considering historical accounts of anti-Mexican sentiment as well as laws that enabled such attitudes.

For Mexicans, popular perceptions have been contradictory; workers have historically been perceived as “birds of passage” and as threats to U.S.-American racial order, often simultaneously (Molina 2010, 163). These attitudes have pertained largely to Mexicans as potential workers in the agricultural sector, though arguably they are not limited to this population either as farmworkers or a wholly perceived historical threat. Migrant workers have long been used as sources of cheap labor, in particular in occupations that are both dangerous and undesired by the greater American population. Government support of these workers has varied; prior to WWII, deportations of citizen and noncitizen Mexican(-American)s increased, given high unemployment rates and perceptions of Mexicans in the workforce (Golash-Boza 2016, 45; Saldívar 1997, 125). Yet while presently there remains significant anti-Mexican/Latinx and anti-immigrant sentiment, Mexican laborers remain part of the U.S. economy despite efforts to bring legal consequences to employers using undocumented labor (Golash-Boza 2016, 38). Sanctions are a limited deterrent for employers, emphasizing the value of immigrant labor at an economic level. In cases where companies have provided undocumented employees false documents, the workers themselves faced legal consequences (Abrego 2011, 355). Companies that employ undocumented persons prioritize the economic factors relevant to their success rather than the laws that limit the presence of these workers as well as those that detail the incarceration they face with minimal consequences faced by employers.

Undocumented workers, regardless of national origin, are at an increased risk of exploitation. Some are under the impression that they have limited, or in some cases, no legal rights in the U.S. (Abrego 2011, 355). For those who experience maltreatment or even criminal
acts against them, this belief contributes to their unwillingness to report such events to proper authorities (Golash-Boza 2016, 42; Spiggle 2019). Even so, cases in which undocumented persons attempt to recover lost wages have resulted in the courts’ deciding that “compensation need not subscribe to U.S. standards” due directly to their undocumented status (Gleeson 2012, 72). This same New Hampshire court case recognized that such a ruling might incentivize employers to rely on easily exploitable undocumented labors; nevertheless, it “concluded that immigration status has direct bearing on the level of compensation undocumented workers are eligible for” (72). While adjusting one’s status is one way of reducing the exploitation risk that immigrants face in the U.S., it does not erase the predatory practices of U.S.-based companies as they relate to this vulnerable population.

2.2: Workers’ Motivations

Despite these known challenges associated with legalization and ongoing examples of xenophobic and racist violence, there remains an abundance of migrants seeking to enter, or otherwise remain in the U.S. regardless of status (Wiltberger 2019). This does not mean, however, that their intention is to remain permanently in the U.S. It is perhaps unsurprising that legal residents of Mexican origin might choose to leave behind a country that has intensified its scrutinization of all Latinx peoples, regardless of any social ties they may maintain. Before retirement, this population, alongside other Hispanics of all races, has an employment-population ratio of 76.9 percent for men and 55.7 percent for women as of January 2018 (US Department of Labor 2018). Latinx workers of all levels are significant portions of the workforce, both from a historical and contemporary viewpoint. These are members of U.S. society no matter the xenophobic rhetoric that may now be commonplace. What might inspire legal permanent residents,
particularly those who have spent significant portions of their lives in the U.S. building up new social networks and economic wealth, to return to their country of origin?

Much of the work centering immigrant experiences today considers the effects of involuntary returns, i.e. the ramifications of deportations. Additionally, recent policies have centered on new arrivals, or on childhood arrivals. The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) has allowed for undocumented persons to receive a renewable deferred action of deportation in tandem with eligibility for a work permit. Eligible individuals were under thirty-one years of age as of June 15, 2012; arrived in the U.S. under the age of sixteen; and are currently in school or have graduated from high school or earned its equivalency, among other requirements (USCIS 2015). DACA, however, does not open an avenue towards legal residency or eventual citizenship for recipients. There remain challenges to both this program and to other efforts to reform immigration law in the U.S., particularly with respect to increasing deportation rates (Gramlich 2020).

But involuntary returns are not the only source of returned Mexican nationals. Such returns, however, are the result of complex legal policy that is nearly ever-changing, and that have significant impact on all individuals residing in the U.S., regardless of legal status. As such, this project considers the significance of its interview subjects—who have experienced first-hand the multifaceted requirements of “becoming legal” —choosing to return to their nation of origin. The challenges associated with legalization, and the arguably significant payoff that it brings, alongside these established U.S.-American lives are not enough to deter individuals from leaving. The transnational experiences of these individuals suggest that we as researchers must expand the spaces we situate our work in. It is no longer enough to focus on Latinx experiences in the U.S.;
rather, work must be done to join the experiences that transnational Mexican(-American)s navigate, including those that center notions of identity, belonging, and citizenship.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

La Moncada is a town in southern Guanajuato, Mexico. Buses connect it to cities such as Celaya, known for its cajeta, and Salvatierra, a city strategically located between the cities of Guadalajara, Mexico City, and Monterrey. Broadly speaking, migration out of Guanajuato is commonplace, with generations of such movement documented (Montalvo and León 2016, 746). La Moncada sits within the Tarimoro Municipality, with a population of approximately 4,377 as of 2013 (SCIM 2013). Historically, Mexican immigrants have settled both in the American Southwest and outside of it, with significant numbers of guanajuatenses (individuals from Guanajuato) settling in Chicago (Gárcia and González 1999, 6). My family is a part of this migratory movement; after arriving in the 1970s, they were able to adjust their status due to IRCA. Originally settling in Rogers Park, they would move to the suburb of Evanston in the 1980s, where they have remained since. Despite over forty years in the U.S., my grandparents regularly return to La Moncada, where extended family remains, and where they also tend to visit other small towns where their loved ones reside.

As a child, my brother and I would travel with my grandparents, driving three days from Chicago to La Moncada to spend time with them and the many family members that awaited us. While I was unable to visit as a student in high school, I was able to visit with far more regularity as an undergraduate. It was during one of these visits that I noticed that several of the friends my grandparents would greet were returnees—oftentimes, my grandmother would describe an individual as having “returned” from the U.S., not as she did during these travels, but to live in La Moncada full-time. I first discussed these observations with Dr. Gilberto Rosas, my current academic advisor, in Spring 2018; his support led to my decision to investigate this phenomenon as part of this master’s thesis. As such, this research first considered motivating factors influencing
voluntary returns amongst retired Mexican nationals. The individuals I came into contact with during this January 2018 visit were contemporaries of my grandparents (both born in the 1940s), all retired, and often described visits North in casual conversation with myself and with my grandparents.

Considering the ethnographic focus of this project, I trained with Dr. Ellen Moodie during Spring 2019 once the parameters of my project had been established. Her methodological training has been a vital starting point for my own research, and her course on writing ethnographies was central to preparing for the fieldwork that I pursued in June 2019. This study is based on qualitative interviews conducted with twelve subjects during this period, taking place over the course of two weeks in the towns of La Moncada, Ojo Seco, and La Estancia, Guanajuato. Interviews were semi-structured, with a set of questions used to guide conversations with subjects. These questions considered individuals’ decisions to leave Mexico, their life experiences in the U.S. and in Mexico, and their ultimate choice to leave the U.S., among others. Their responses are more fully analyzed in the following section, with respect to relevant themes that were found among interviewees.

All interviewees were retired Mexican nationals; some held dual citizenship with the U.S., while others were permanent residents who often undertook travels northward to fulfill the obligations of this legal status. Individuals were found via snowball sampling, wherein one subject or contact might lead me to an additional interviewee. La Moncada is a small town, and my contacts—extended family members, some of whom I have regularly visited during visits to Mexico—were instrumental in assisting my search for potential candidates given their familiarity with the town’s inhabitants. María de Jesus Muñoz Rodríguez, my grandmother’s niece, identified several potential interviewees as individuals fulfilling my research criteria. Family members in the U.S. also suggested reaching out to friends or extended family members, either as potential
interviewees or as additional contacts. As recounted in this project’s introduction, my grandfather reached out to a friend during a May 2019 visit, who later consented to be interviewed as part of this project. Similarly, Cristina Moreno Rojas, a member of my stepmother’s extended family, served as my contact in La Estancia. In some cases, subjects would go on to recommend other potential interviewees they were familiar with, including both family members and acquaintances.

Given the central research focus of this project, I acknowledge that its scope is somewhat limited; though my interest lies in Mexican experiences in the U.S. and in Mexico, my sample pulls nearly exclusively from inhabitants of the Tarimoro municipality. To claim this perfectly represents Mexico, or even Guanajuato as a whole, would be ill-advised. That said, casual conversations with other second-generation Mexican-Americans have yielded similar observations to my initial January 2018 experience. Recognizing this, I consider this project one that serves as a vital expansion of work focusing on voluntary returns amongst migrant populations, regardless of national origin (Díaz et. al. 2016, 2012; Ottonelli and Torresi 2013, 783). The methodology I employed is similarly focused on individuals’ particular experiences, with in-depth analysis employed following completion of fieldwork identifying over-arching patterns, particularly those relevant to my research question. While the results of these interviews reflect these specific retirees’ experiences at home and abroad, their responses offer perspectives not previously considered in the literature concerning (Mexican) migration patterns.

All individuals spent at least twenty-five years in the U.S. and retired to Mexico between 1996 and 2019. La Moncada, similar to the neighboring towns of Ojo Seco and La Estancia, is a rural town; it holds a variety of family-owned shops, with some agricultural work still practiced. In recent years it has become common for the younger generations to find work in the neighboring city of Celaya or otherwise relocate within Mexico. With the exception of one interviewee, subjects
were approached during the month of June, and were subsequently interviewed either just outside of their home, in “el portal” (i.e. entrance room or doorway), where many spend leisure or social time, or inside of it. Only two individuals answered questions outside of their immediate property, following a chance meeting at the town plaza where they preferred to respond to said questions. Generally speaking, individuals were eager to assist in this research project regardless of the value they applied to their own experiences; that said, due to personal concerns concerning safety, interviews in La Estancia were kept briefest, with at least two potential subjects refusing to participate.

Given some lingering concerns regarding their responses to some of the questions asked, specifically pertaining to their initial entries into the U.S., subjects were not asked to participate in recorded data collection. While this project included IRB approval to do so, I found that discussing issues of immigration invoked perturbation from several subjects, and as such chose to instead record responses by hand through a combination of paraphrase and direct quotation when deemed necessary. Additional notes were taken immediately following interviews to describe the interview process alongside other details that were deemed potentially relevant to further analysis; responses from this research process are included in the Appendix in survey form. The interviews themselves took between half an hour to an hour to complete; following their completion (i.e. answering of the fourteen questions posed), interviewees were often open to continued socializing, discussing topics both related and unrelated to some of the questions asked. Subjects from the towns of Ojo Seco and La Moncada both had some familiarity with my immediate family, reflecting the relative size of the area, and were generally interested in exchanging stories and maintaining social ties throughout the interview process.

The questions that were posed during this project were as follows:
¿Cuando migró usted a los Estados Unidos?

¿Por cuánto tiempo quedó usted en los Estados Unidos?

¿Cuándo estableció su residencia permanente?

¿En cual parte de los Estados Unidos vivió, y por qué?

Si fue empleado, ¿que tipo de empleo tuvo?

¿Qué tipo de comunidad / relaciones sociales estableció en los Estados Unidos?

Si viajaba o regresaba usted a México, ¿con que frecuencia lo hizo?

¿Tenía usted otra familia en los Estados Unidos y/o en México?

¿Cómo era su relación?

¿Cambió estas relaciones mientras estuvo usted en los Estados Unidos?

¿Cuándo decidió regresar a México?

¿Qué influyó esta decisión?

¿Mantiene usted relaciones con amigos o familia que se quedaron en los Estados Unidos?

¿Cuáles son diferencias significativas entre su experiencia en México comparado a los Estados Unidos?

In English, which I offer in order to be as transparent as possible, they are:

When did migration the U.S. occur?

How long were you in the U.S.?

At what point did you become a legal resident?

Where did you settle, and what motivated you to settle there?

What kind of occupation, if any, did you maintain during this period?
What social ties did you establish in the U.S.? What kind of community?

How often, if at all, did you travel to Mexico?

Did you have other family in the U.S. or in Mexico, and if so, what was your relationship to them?

Did these relationships change during your time in the U.S.?

When did you decide to return to Mexico?

What were the biggest influences in this decision?

Do you maintain relationships with friends and family who have remained in the U.S.?

What are significant differences in your experiences in Mexico as compared to the U.S.?

Subsequently, the question of language becomes a focal point within my own methodology, given this paper’s presentation in English compared to the Spanish-language interviews I conducted. Though beyond the immediate scope of this project, the role of language and accessibility as it relates to transnational experiences (whether they be those considered here or in other investigations) should be considered alongside other notions of identity and belonging. I undertook all translating aspects myself in conducting this research, moving from Spanish responses to the English-language analysis in the following sections.

In conducting this research, I take significant influence from the work of Virginia R. Dominguez, particularly her contributions to Should I Stay or Should I Go?: New Fieldsites, New Visions. I am interested in her describing of some of her work as too “alive,” a description that I seek to recreate within this project (Dominguez 2012, 40). Both my short- and long-term interests in academia revolve around the blurring of boundaries; the work I have thus far pursued is largely
qualitative, and my background in the creative arts has been put to good use in the writings I’ve thus far produced in my academic career. Additionally, while my grandparents have no plans to return to La Moncada and live out their retirement there, I have spent enough time there to consider it a home away from home. My return to this town as a site of research makes such academic pursuits thus inherently personal. As such, I recognize that my positionality within these communities is reflective of truths beyond simple encounters. There is history rooted in the work I have pursued and in the individuals who took part in it.

Researchers such as the late Zora Neale Hurston have pushed against narratives that position so-called nonnormative subjects as permanently juxtaposed to the majority, without recognition of the intrinsic value of these populations as well as the community or cultural-specific knowledge they might hold. This project’s methodology strives to embody the “individual” Hurston engages in works such as _Mules and Men_. I am interested in the telling (and sharing) of this information, rather than a “showing” that does not acknowledge the role of these subjects. As such, it is in the Appendix that my interview notes and initial overarching themes are considered at its most benign; the Analysis portion of this project (i.e., my extrapolation of meaning from these responses) is itself the result of larger frameworks implemented by academic practice. Ultimately, the goal of this research project is the elevation voices that have not been considered previously. In that spirit, I aim to center the experiences of this oftentimes ignored populations through their own words and perspectives, such that their perspectives are made an integral part of canon moving forward.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In conducting these interviews, I came to realize that the most salient of these questions was the final one: *What are significant differences in your experiences in Mexico as compared to the U.S.?* Mexican(-American) artists have long produced material engaging their displacement, as well as their own movement, within the U.S. The Mexican diaspora is largely placed within the borderlands, though Saldívar highlights the evolution of this space as one that disrupts standard North-South understandings of migrant movement and Mexican / Chicanx identity in favor of a topospacial in-betweenness (Saldívar 1997, 75). That is, these opposite forces of the North (U.S.) and South (Mexico) live together in these artistic expressions, creating an affective attachment that, in this project, is reproduced within individuals even outside of the borderland space. Interviewees were themselves caught between notions of “home” that culminated in their eventual return to their nation of origin, as reflected in their responses.

4.1: “Aquí Versus Allá”: Mexico as a Preferred Home

The first of these twelve interviewees was Javier. Before we went to meet him, my aunts had helped me brainstorm potential candidates; Jesu and her sister, Neni, hunched over a table scribbling while their mother hovered nearby, offering names as needed. We listed between fifteen and twenty names and decided to visit Javier first, as he’d previously confirmed with my grandfather his interest in participating. It was early afternoon when we arrived at his home, and once pleasantries were exchanged I outlined my project and read to him the consent forms I had painstakingly translated in preparation of this fieldwork. Upon offering verbal consent, we began the interview process, wherein I asked the series of questions outlined in in the Methodology portion of this paper.
Javier specifically described his experiences as “más bueno aquí,” meaning better in Mexico than in the U.S. ¹ He referenced the importance of ones’ roots, in addition to comments on the perceived “calmness” of Mexico, a concept I will consider later in this project. First, however, I want to highlight that Javier’s reasoning for his preference closely mirrored other interviewees’ commentary. One participant, Rudolfo, answered the above question by stating that in Mexico, he is “feliz feliz” (“happy happy”), while another, Gerardo, stated, “Para mí, mi tierra es mejor” (“For me, my land is better”).² This was not necessarily a universal sentiment, nor is it to say that interviewees preferred every aspect of Mexico; one interviewee referenced the quality of healthcare in the U.S. as preferable, while several also explained that the economic realities of Mexico make work in the North necessary, describing these as “better” up North, or otherwise suggesting that one does not go for pleasure (“no se van por gusto”).³

While these latter two aspects are vital components influencing Mexican nationals’ decisions to migrate, this affective attachment to Mexico as one’s motherland is of most interest to me. This recurring theme invoked by participants prioritizes a sense of belonging. Individuals repeatedly suggested that the idea of “returning to one’s land” was important, and therefore living there full-time was an experience that offered them more comfort. This was not implied to be a physical comfort. Rather, their responses suggested a deep connection to their home country. I now offer the questions I posed for myself when analyzing the ethnographic data: What does it mean to leave your home country for years and return to it afterwards? What sort of life is being built in the U.S. and then left during this process? How does this reflect interviewees’ connection

¹ Interview, Javier, 8 June 2019, La Moncada, Guanajuato, Mexico.
² Interview, Rudolfo, 10 June 2019, La Moncada, Guanajuato, Mexico; Interview, Gerardo, 14 June 2019, La Estancia, Guanajuato, Mexico.
³ Interview, Rudolfo, 10 June 2019, La Moncada, Guanajuato, Mexico; Interview, Octavio, 14 June 2019, La Estancia, Guanajuato, Mexico; Interview, Tomás, 14 June 2019, La Estancia, Guanajuato, Mexico.
to Mexico and the U.S.? There is something about Mexico, or interviewees’ hometowns, or even their physical home, that results in the ongoing connection that individuals maintained despite the decades spent abroad, one that is beyond the simple presence of loved ones in that area (evidenced by the family that remained Stateside, post-retirement, as described by this study’s participants).

I am most interested in what relationship exists between these places and their conceptualization of themselves, particularly within the context of a Mexican diaspora that challenges a permanent resettling outside of the homeland. The transnational experiences of migrant populations represent “a complex series of traversing and mixing, syncretizing and hybridizing” that is additionally “constituted by displacement” (Saldívar 1997, 107). Because of this, writes Saldívar, the Mexican diaspora holds key understandings to expanding the social and academic understandings of cultural studies and identity politics, invoking dialogues on Black diaspora cultures theorized by Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Kobena Mercer, and others (19). The ongoing ties maintained by immigrants across borders are distinct from historical patterns; with “advances in transportation and communication technologies, it is now possible for immigrants to maintain more frequent, immediate, and intimate contact with their countries of origin” (Foner 2007, 2487). Subjects identified strongly with their origins as Mexicans despite their time abroad, providing a starting point for this research’s exploration of (national) identity as it is maintained or constructed abroad.

4.2: The Border as a State Of Mind

Themes concerning identity-formation and decolonization have long been explored by Chicanx theorists (including such authors as Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, and José David Saldivar, whose work I consider central to my own scholarship). It is from this background that I...
consider the so-called issue of identity, which is often framed as “either/or”: either they are prioritizing their Chicanidad or sexuality or gender. Prioritizing one’s ethnic and/or racial identity in conjunction to their broader life experiences in the U.S. has historically been a struggle, due in large part to the historic processes that have influenced the U.S. as a political power, and which continue to shape it as a nation today. Identity, particularly in fields such as sociology, is sometimes considered a word we longer need to engage. Its definitions can be contradictory, simultaneously framed as innate and fluid. I choose to begin with this invocation to establish that the question of identity—and, as such, that of belonging—is one I grappled with when analyzing the responses of participants of this study.

Alongside this theoretical framework, I wish to highlight my engagement of the Mexican-American border, despite my work clearly taking place within the interior of each nation. The site of the border remains a central point to conceptualizations of immigration as a threat to the U.S. Independent of this negative perspective, scholars have worked extensively to identity and analyze the cultural significance of this same space. The border as a hybridizing force is one that renown academics, such as the late Gloria Anzaldúa, have identified as being linked closely to the identity formation of Chicanx, or Mexican-American, peoples. Anzaldúa suggests it is a place of a new mestiza consciousness, with her focus on liminal be(com)ing which thus “creates” an identity beyond the binary of Mexican or American.

Anzaldúa’s analysis encourages the reconsideration of our own relationship to the borderland. What does this space symbolize? And to what population is it relevant? Within this project, the significance of identification within this geographic location is a topic of consequence. That said, this reconceptualizing is not limited to the specific borderland space highlighted here, especially when recognizing the large and varied Mexican(-American) population within the U.S.
In that same vein, Saldívar has considered the cultural production of the U.S.-Mexico border outside of its immediate location, tracing its reinvention in a variety of projects undertaken by Mexican and Mexican-American artists. A conversation between these varied fields is one I am interested in identifying within the experiences of my interviewees.

4.3: Identity and Belonging

While not a subject of this project, my great-aunt expressed a similar sentiment to the one shared by interviewees. Jesu is a legal resident of the U.S., spending approximately half the year in Mexico with her mother and extended family, and the other half in San Francisco, CA, where her husband and son live. Mexico is an ongoing specter in the lives of Mexicans abroad, hence my consideration of this project as one that expands our understanding of diasporic groups.

Says Octavio Paz of Mexican citizens, “[We] express our desire to live closed off from the outside world and, above all, from the past” (Paz 1985, np). In this essay, titled “Hijos de Malinche,” he claims that “the Mexican breaks his ties with the past, renounces his origins, and lives in isolation and solitude.” Paz considered the relationship between the Mexican citizen and his country during the mid-20th century; despite his longevity within the Mexican national project, I believe his vision is too particular to an imaginary Mexican subject that, if it did exist, does not in the present, a sentiment echoed by Saldívar’s Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies (149). Considering the significant Mexican population in the U.S. (and that has existed since at least the 19th century), this interpretation fails to recognize the varied experiences of Mexican nationals; most startlingly, and perhaps a simple result of the passage of time, it does not account for the transformation of Mexicanism from a feeling limited to Mexicans in the homeland to a state that is felt across borders, as is evident among participants of this project.
Paz does not speak to the absence of Mexicans from their land, and how this too is a factor in how “Mexicanism must be defined as separation and negation” (Paz 1985, np). I want to clarify that I do not consider negation as a vital part to this construction of self; based on the conversations I had with interviewees, there was a far more vital claiming of Mexico even while—perhaps, especially while—abroad, and a self-described sense of pride (“orgullo”) in being Mexican. Moreover, this connection hinged on the land itself, rather than an explicit isolation and/or solitude whose awareness Paz claims as necessary to transcend the exile that Mexicans must feel as so-called “hybrid subjects”. Those interviewed lived in homes they owned; the ability to return to this land, which was perceived as “theirs,” was often cited as a reason for the comfort that individuals ascribed to their retirement. For several of those interviewed, returning to extended family—with whom relationships were maintained during their time abroad—was also a major source of contentment, as well as reifying their connection to Mexico both in past interactions and in the present. Isolation or disconnection from this homeland was not something experienced by those interviewed, regardless of whether they preferred life in Mexico or felt their experiences in the U.S. were comparable.

For these interviewees, there is the conceptualization of self within the idea of Mexico. They are locating themselves within a national imaginary that does not necessarily exist; rather, they link physical geography to lived experiences. Thus while they were not physically present in Mexico, they were calling upon an idea of Mexicanidad that connects them to this geographic space. Emotional attachment transformed this literal space into a more personal, important place, which Doreen Massey examines alongside the nature of mobility in the 1991 publication, “A Global Sense of Place,” in which she writes, “Time-space-compression refers to movement and communication across space, to the geographical stretching-out of social relations, and to our
experience of all this” (Massey 1991, 25). Despite the availability of reminders in the U.S., such as Mexican barrios, businesses, and other forms of community, individuals value the experience of existing in Mexico, complicating the idea of locality as it pertains to transnational subjects. Says Massey,

“[T]he search after the 'real' meanings of places, the unearthing of heritages and so forth, is interpreted as being, in part, a response to desire for fixity and for security of identity in the middle of all the movement and change. A 'sense of place', of rootedness, can provide - in this form and on this interpretation - stability and a source of unproblematical identity” (26).

This rootedness is explicitly invoked by several interviewees, with their language specifying the literal land on which they have relocated to as a vital aspect of their contentment in Mexico. Subjects, perhaps relatedly, also suggest that their life is simply “better” in Mexico, though it is important to highlight that their present lives there are within a post-retirement context in comparison to the working lives they left behind in the U.S.4

The responses shared in this study suggest an ongoing disconnection from the U.S. as a space as compared to participants’ conceptualization of the specific place they inhabit when in Mexico—that is, they have ascribed meaning to what was once a neutral space. Belonging is itself a contentious notion, given the colonialism-centric history of both the U.S. and Mexico, and the ongoing challenges associated with the conceptualization of settler-colonial nation states. While not directly relevant to the formation processes interviewees experienced, I consider these challenges a parallel to, if not an extension of, the patterns of resistance that have long existed against the U.S. as a colonial power, and which today remain relevant when considering the

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4 Interview, Gerardo, 14 June 2019, La Estancia, Guanajuato, Mexico; Interview, Diana and Patricio, 14 June 2019, La Moncada, Guanajuato, Mexico.
changing nature of Latin American migration. The extent to which these theoretical approaches might coexist is of great interest to me, as it highlights a relationship between the U.S.-American and Mexican national discourses that have been, and continue to be, reenacted by their citizens. Individuals’ connection to their home (that is, the one which they have framed as having returned to) is one that goes beyond that of nationality as it has been invoked by Mexican scholars such as Octavio Paz and instead makes possible this notion of a “return” (Saldívar 1997, 75). There is a certain level of affect influencing their ongoing connection to Mexico, and more specifically, the physical space they are inhabiting. While many interviewees expressed that the lives they led in the U.S. were enjoyable, nearly all expressed a preference for Mexico. These conversations revealed that it was not as simple as reducing it to a working life abroad, and a retired one in Mexico (though I will note my intention of expanding this project to more fully consider the consequences of leisure as a motivator).

What these interviews revealed was a connection between the previously described hybridized borderland and the limited sense of belonging experienced by participants. This feeling of “ni de allí ni de allá” is not limited to Chicano identities, itself a concept regularly considered within early and contemporary theorizing and writings. Rather, it is a dissonance experienced by transnational subjects regardless of immediate geographic location due to both their internal and external displacement (as is reflected in this project). This transformation of space to place should be “imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings” (Massey 1991, 28). These networks invoke an affective response that transcends borders, without which, in fact, this borderland state of mind is not possible, a sentiment Massey’s 1991 publication echoes.

“Affective,” though, does not necessarily specify what kind of feelings are involved in this ongoing connection. As has been surmised, interviewees readily invoked “belonging” as a
concept—they are more comfortable in Mexico on “their” land. Javier described Mexico as a “patria querida” (“beloved motherland”), while Diana and Patrcio expressed that while their life in the U.S. was good, it was better in Mexico because it was their land (“Allí bien y aquí mejor que es nuestra tierra”).

Aguilera (2004) points out that Mexican immigrants can maintain social ties to communities in Mexico at the same time as they are physically present in the U.S.; of relevance to this project are findings “indicating that immigrants do not have to reject cultural traditions in their sending country to take part in U.S. society” thus confirming the ability for Mexican nationals, including those who took part in this study, to maintain a long-term attachment to their nation of origin (Aguilera 2004, 256).

This analysis, however, invokes the question of why such individuals might lack the same attachment to the U.S., despite the social or cultural connections they may have established. As highlighted in the Introduction, the realities of Latinxs (and, more broadly speaking, people of color) in the U.S. are varied; ultimately, however, such individuals are forced to navigate within a society that has repeatedly shown itself to be actively hostile to non-white individuals, in both historical and more contemporary contexts. While interviewees did not specifically cite the issues of racism and xenophobia, I find it pertinent to point out these realities given the abundance of literature across genres that feature them. Moreover, participants consistently pointed out the communities in which they settled were made up of as extended family, and to a lesser degree coworkers and friends, implying national origin as a unifier. Thus while individuals may value certain experiences within the U.S.—such as those relating to healthcare, economic mobility, or the presence of family in the North—these are not necessarily sufficient to offset the advantages

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5 Interview, Javier, 8 June 2019, La Moncada, Guanajuato, Mexico; Interview, Diana and Patricio, 14 June 2019, La Moncada, Guanajuato, Mexico.
they associate with living in Mexico, which within this project are largely framed within notions of belonging.

There are “particular settings where identities are produced, contested and transformed” which contribute to this concept of belonging (Jones and Krzyżanowski 2008, 40). Jones and Krzyżanowski point out the difficulty in ascribing concrete analysis to this notion, and in their project consider "how transient, sometimes unclear relationships can contribute to an individual’s position vis-à-vis a collective identity” (42). Boundaries are not as fixed as literature would imply, a sentiment echoed in subjects’ prioritizing of their relationship to Mexico: for those who traveled to Mexico prior to retirement, there was a range in visit frequency spanning from twice a year to every two years. Though I do not want to conjecture as to the specifics behind this range, I do want to mention that the working-class nature of these subjects, as well as the reality of their changing legal status while in the U.S., likely had an influence. These visits took place regardless of the social networks (whether they were biological ties or platonic relationships) that individuals established in the U.S., which included immediate and extended family as well as a broader social network made up of friends and coworkers. Furthermore, interviewees ultimately relocated despite their children and grandchildren remaining in the U.S. This sensation of belonging to another collective—in this case, one rooted in Mexico and in existing within its borders—took precedent over other identity markers, thus resulting in the repeated declarations regarding living on ‘one’s own land’ and subjects’ final decision to remain in Mexico.

4.4: Alternate Influences: Health and Wealth

In addition to the above influences, the significance of economic stability and potential leisure are also potential factors in relocation, and while not the primary focus of this paper, I consider both aspects relevant. In recent years, the Mexican healthcare system has experienced
major overhauls (Arenas et. al. 2015, 1856). Despite these supposed improvements, one interviewee cited the U.S.’s healthcare system as preferable to that of Mexico, though their return did not coincide with the changes made within the last ten years.\(^6\) Another interviewee specifically cited asthma as the reason for returning to Mexico, implying that their time in California exacerbated the issue.\(^7\) Recently, Mexico has undergone a rights-based reform of the medical system, one rooted in both ethical and political rationalizations (Frenk and Gómez-Dantés 2015, 36). At the same time, U.S.-based healthcare remains a matter of contention within the political arena, with rising costs of care having significant impact on patients’ experiences (Anderlini 2018, n.p.). Work with older populations within the medical community is ongoing, though highlighted as a field of relevancy in addition to existing concerns regarding healthcare disparities (Feasley 1996, n.p; Williams et. al. 2016, 34). The question of healthcare access, then, may explain both past instances of relocation in post-retirement contexts, as well as predict future patterns of returnees to Mexico.

The question of economic stability was an additional aspect invoked by interviewees. Several pointed out that work was easier to come by in the North (at least in their own experiences), with one interviewee suggesting that individuals migrate out of necessity.\(^8\) Other individuals cited their monthly pensions as sufficient to fund their lifestyle choices in Mexico, though this is not to say that these can be described as opulent. Individuals were living on land and in homes that they owned, including those they had built with remittances.\(^9\) Generally speaking, retirement is of global concern given the rapidly aging populations of both developed and developing countries.

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\(^6\) Interview, Cesar, 11 June 2019, Ojo Seco, Guanajuato, Mexico.
\(^7\) Interview, Efraín, 14 June 2019, La Estancia, Guanajuato, Mexico.
\(^8\) Interview, Octavio, 14 June 2019, La Estancia, Guanajuato, Mexico; Interview, Rudolfo, 10 June 2019, La Moncada, Guanajuato, Mexico; Interview, Tomás, 14 June 2019, La Estancia, Guanajuato, Mexico.
\(^9\) Interview, Cesar, 11 June 2019, Ojo Seco, Guanajuato, Mexico.
(Jackson 2002, 486). These demographic changes are predicted to cause major economic shifts, one that I consider mirrored in the economic concerns subjects shared while discussing their retirement decisions. Writes Richard Jackson, “public spending on pensions and health benefits for the elderly in the typical developed country will grow from 11 to 18 per cent of GDP over the next 50 years” (Jackson 2002, 487). State support alone, however, is not necessarily sufficient in providing for any population, including that of its retirees. Samuel Stebbins and Michael B. Sauter suggest that the “average” American will spend approximately 1 million USD following their retirement, taking into account the average life expectancy of 84.4 years and assuming a retirement age of 65 (Stebbins and Sauter 2020). While this average does not account for the discrepancies that may exist among underserved populations, it nevertheless highlights significant factors influencing retirement choices for individuals living in the U.S.

Rudolfo and others described the ability to live comfortably off retirement pensions in Mexico, suggesting that doing so in the U.S. would offer challenges that were otherwise avoidable. As of the writing of this project, the exchange rate between Mexican pesos and USD is approximately 20.42 to 1. Housing additionally plays a critical role in individuals’ decisions to return to Mexico: "several studies have shown that those who own homes in the United States have significantly lower chances of return migration" (Arenas et. al. 2015, 1856). Participants’ responses made clear that land ownership was both a question of belonging, i.e., the implication that the land is as much theirs as they are committed to said land (echoing anxiety considered in Foner's 2007 publication), as it was a financial reality. My conversation with Rudolfo explicitly highlighted the fact that money goes farther in Mexico when discussing the differences between his experience there compared to the U.S., with Tomás echoing this sentiment while recalling time
spent in the north.\textsuperscript{10} Even beyond the use of retirement pensions in Mexico, Guanajuato state has been specifically identified as a major recipient of remittances from the U.S. (Montalvo y León 2016, 748). As such, the role of financial stability as it relates to retired incomes must also be recognized as an influence in these retirees’ decisions to return to Mexico, alongside the other factors considered within this project.

\textsuperscript{10} Interview, Rudolfo, 10 June 2019, La Moncada, Guanajuato, Mexico; Interview, Tomás, 14 June 2019, La Estancia, Guanajuato, Mexico.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

During a recent phone call home, my mother asked me to explain this project to her.

“It’s about people who go back to Mexico after they retire,” I told her, watching as she cleaned the counters of her home in Northfield, IL, where she relocated while I was an undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Like my father, she is the daughter of a man who crossed the Rio Grande. Neither of my parents, who separated prior to my sixth birthday, visit Mexico with any sort of regularity. It has been at least ten years since either of them traveled there to visit family. Despite this, as stated earlier, my brother and I regularly accompanied (and in my case, continue to accompany) our grandparents for summer and, sometimes, winter visits, where we are content to unwind in the Mexican countryside. My father, despite the extended family that remains in Guanajuato, has little interest in Mexico outside of experiencing it via tourist attractions; any mention of visiting results in an explanation of his plan to spend at most a few days in La Moncada, and the rest of it in the big cities of Guanajuato, San Miguel de Allende, and Dolores Hidalgo, to name a few.

In contrast, my mother’s response to my thesis explanation was: “Is this a bad time to tell you I’m going to do that, too?”

Immigrant experiences are varied and impossible to define in full. My intention with this project is to highlight the significance of place in the experiences of migratory populations, as well as complicate our understanding of the Mexico-U.S. migration path. It is no longer defined by transient male workers or one-way travels, but rather a diaspora that includes a back-and-forth movement that can continue even beyond a more permanent “return.” More specifically, this paper has sought to consider the motivations of Mexican nationals who return to Mexico following their
retirement through the lens of identity. It remains pertinent to understand the motivations of such movement out of the U.S. given the sizeable Mexican population that exists in this nation. That one might choose to leave a country they have spent their working life in is significant; that this decision is made even after securing authorization, despite its costly realities, is of even more interest, particularly in this moment of rapidly changing approaches to immigration laws at a global scale. Such behavior highlights underlying values that have yet to be explored in-depth, despite some efforts to generalize the broader relationship between identity, belonging, and migration, as noted by Jones and Krzyżanowski. Ultimately, the confluence of these realities have significant impact on the migration choices undertaken by Mexican nationals, as witnessed by participants of this study.

As noted in the Analysis portion of this project, such decisions are further influenced by both questions of healthcare access and the financial status of retirees; both aspects are deserving of in-depth consideration in future projects. A potential theme that fell outside the realm of consideration due to limitations relating to both data collection and completion of this project is that of leisure. While Johnson, Mudrazija, and Wang considered the relationship between leisure and consumption (i.e., the rate at which retirees spend their savings or income), I am interested in how leisure was repeatedly associated with interviewees’ geographic location, which interviewees specifically related to a notion of “comfortableness”, one that was represented by joy and a preference for one’s presence in Mexico. Similar to some of the analysis concerning notions of belonging, I believe that the physical space that individuals chose to inhabit were of particular importance when conceptualizing the potential enjoyment of their retirement years. Moving

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11 Interview, Javier, 8 June 2019, La Moncada, Guanajuato, Mexico; Interview, Zacarías, 10 June 2019, La Moncada, Guanajuato, Mexico; Interview, Tomás, 14 June 2019, La Estancia, Guanajuato, Mexico; Interview, Diana and Patricio, 14 June 2019, La Moncada, Guanajuato, Mexico.
forward, I intend to consider this relationship and its role in the retirement decisions made by Mexican nationals. Additionally, the limitations of snowball sampling meant that the gender ratio of this project does not necessarily reflect the gender dimensions of migration from Mexico, an aspect that I intend to engage in future explorations of this topic.

Furthermore, I would be remiss in not acknowledging that some retired Mexican nationals do choose to remain in the U.S. Consideration of their motivations regarding retirement choices is a direction that would enrich the work this project aims to do, particularly regarding the gaps in literature centering the varied voices of immigrants and transnational subjects. Their experiences in the U.S. and ultimate decision to remain there, in comparison to those of individuals who took part in this ethnographic project, remain relevant. Discussion and analysis of these differing motivations would be significant in expanding the academic canon, as well as beneficial to further development of this project. Finally, this research focused on individuals from three relatively rural towns in Guanajuato, Mexico, and are by no means representative of Mexican diasporic tendencies as a whole. Rather, they represent a particular behavior pattern that should be considered when discussing the short- and long-term effects of immigration policy in the U.S. I do want to emphasize that while my project focused specifically on Guanajuato, conversations had with others with personal connections to Mexico have suggested that retired populations like those interviewed exist outside of Guanajuato. Thus, widening the scope of this project to both non-returned retirees and Mexican citizens from other regions of Mexico would be worthwhile developments within this project and the literature it expands.
REFERENCES


INTERVIEWS

Javier, interviewed by Liliana Lule, La Moncada, Guanajuato, Mexico, June 8, 2019.

Fabiola, interviewed by Liliana Lule, La Moncada, Guanajuato, Mexico, June 9, 2019.

Maura, interviewed by Liliana Lule, La Moncada, Guanajuato, Mexico, June 10, 2019.

Zacarías, interviewed by Liliana Lule, La Moncada, Guanajuato, Mexico, June 10, 2019.

Rudolfo, interviewed by Liliana Lule, La Moncada, Guanajuato, Mexico, June 10, 2019.

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Gerardo, interviewed by Liliana Lule, La Estancia, Guanajuato, Mexico, June 14, 2019.

Octavio, interviewed by Liliana Lule, La Estancia, Guanajuato, Mexico, June 14, 2019.

Efraín, interviewed by Liliana Lule, La Estancia, Guanajuato, Mexico, June 14, 2019.

Diana and Patricio, interviewed by Liliana Lule, La Moncada, Guanajuato, Mexico, June 14, 2019.
APPENDIX: SURVEYS

Interview notes and responses presented in survey form

Javier:

¿Cuándo migró usted a los Estados Unidos? / When did migration the U.S. occur?
Arrived in 1974-75, Indiana, without papers

¿Por cuánto tiempo quedó usted en los Estados Unidos? / How long were you in the U.S.?
Twenty-four years

¿Cuándo estableció su residencia permanente? / At what point did you become a legal resident?
27 July 1993
American citizenship: 12 July 2001

¿En cual parte de los Estados Unidos vivió, y por qué? / Where did you settle, and what motivated you to settle there?
Mostly Dallas, for work

Si fue empleado, ¿que tipo de empleo tuvo? / What kind of occupation, if any, did you maintain during this period?
Hotel worker, twenty-two and a half years

¿Qué tipo de comunidad / relaciones sociales estableció en los Estados Unidos? / What social ties did you establish in the U.S.? What kind of community?
Black population in area, with few Latinos

Si viajaba o regresaba usted a México, ¿con que frecuencia lo hizo? / How often, if at all, did you travel to Mexico?
[No response]

¿Tenia usted otra familia en los Estados Unidos y/o en México? ¿Cómo era su relación?
¿Cambiaron estas relaciones mientras estuvo usted en los Estados Unidos? / Did you have other family in the U.S. or in Mexico, and if so, what was your relationship to them? Did these relationships change during your time in the U.S.?
He had brothers in California, and more generally, family in the U.S.

¿Cuándo decidió regresar a México? ¿Qué influyó esta decisión? / When did you decide to return to Mexico? What were the biggest influences in this decision?
He retired three years ago, and cites the calm (“la tranquilidad”) of Mexico

¿Mantiene usted relaciones con amigos o familia que se quedaron en los Estados Unidos? / Do you maintain relationships with friends and family who have remained in the U.S.?
Children and grandchildren in U.S., 5 sons and 2 daughters
Visits to each other every 6 months, approximately

¿Cuáles son diferencias significas entre su experiencia en México comparado a los Estados Unidos? / What are significant differences in your experiences in Mexico as compared to the U.S.?
Described his experience as better in Mexico, referencing one’s roots as well as the calmness (see above), referencing Mexico as the beloved motherland (“patria querida”)

Fabiola:

¿Cuándo migró usted a los Estados Unidos? / When did migration the U.S. occur?
She left before her children; spending twenty-five years in the U.S. more or less12

¿Por cuánto tiempo quedó usted en los Estados Unidos? / How long were you in the U.S.?
Returned in 2014, but was retired for fifteen years at the time after having turned 72

¿Cuándo estableció su residencia permanente? / At what point did you become a legal resident?
Nineteen years ago (as of the time of this interview, this would have been around 1998)

¿En cual parte de los Estados Unidos vivió, y por qué? / Where did you settle, and what motivated you to settle there?
In Dallas, for work

Si fue empleado, ¿que tipo de empleo tuvo? / What kind of occupation, if any, did you maintain during this period?
She worked as a dishwasher for eleven years

¿Qué tipo de comunidad / relaciones sociales estableció en los Estados Unidos? / What social ties did you establish in the U.S.? What kind of community?
Largely with family, with whom she arrived

Si viajaba o regresaba usted a México, ¿con que frecuencia lo hizo? / How often, if at all, did you travel to Mexico?
Post-retirement, every December and May

¿Tenia usted otra familia en los Estados Unidos y/o en México? ¿Cómo era su relación?
¿Cambiaron estas relaciones mientras estuvo usted en los Estados Unidos? / Did you have other family in the U.S. or in Mexico, and if so, what was your relationship to them? Did these relationships change during your time in the U.S.?
She had one daughter in Mexico; they communicated via telephone and visited one another

¿Cuándo decidió regresar a México ¿Qué influyó esta decisión? / When did you decide to return to Mexico? What were the biggest influences in this decision?

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12 As will be noted in some of these write-ups, interviewees would often correct themselves or give different responses. As noted in the methodology, this is likely due to ongoing concern regarding legality, as well as the pressure of being asked for exact years/dates during the interview process.
Retirement in 2014 (see above)

¿Mantiene usted relaciones con amigos o familia que se quedaron en los Estados Unidos? / Do you maintain relationships with friends and family who have remained in the U.S.?
Regular visits

¿Cuáles son diferencias significativas entre su experiencia en México comparado a los Estados Unidos? / What are significant differences in your experiences in Mexico as compared to the U.S.?
PREFERRED medical care in the U.S. Several of her children now reside in the U.S. (i.e. she is no longer with them)

Maura:

¿Cuándo migró usted a los Estados Unidos? / When did migration the U.S. occur?
1974

¿Por cuánto tiempo quedó usted en los Estados Unidos? / How long were you in the U.S.?
Over 30 years

¿Cuándo estableció su residencia permanente? / At what point did you become a legal resident?
Around 1978

¿En cual parte de los Estados Unidos vivió, y por qué? / Where did you settle, and what motivated you to settle there?
Arrived in Chicago and remained there, as her siblings were there.

Si fue empleado, ¿que tipo de empleo tuvo? / What kind of occupation, if any, did you maintain during this period?
Kitchen worker

¿Qué tipo de comunidad / relaciones sociales estableció en los Estados Unidos? / What social ties did you establish in the U.S.? What kind of community?
Established friendships in Chicago

Si viajaba o regresaba usted a México, ¿con que frecuencia lo hizo? / How often, if at all, did you travel to Mexico?
After establishing residency, every one or two years

¿Tenía usted otra familia en los Estados Unidos y/o en México? ¿Cómo era su relación? ¿Cambiaron estas relaciones mientras estuvo usted en los Estados Unidos? / Did you have other family in the U.S. or in Mexico, and if so, what was your relationship to them? Did these relationships change during your time in the U.S.?
Initially parents were also in Mexico; they also were legalized (date not mentioned)
¿Cuándo decidió regresar a México? ¿Qué influyó esta decisión? / When did you decide to return to Mexico? What were the biggest influences in this decision?
Ten years ago (at the time of the interview, this would have been around 2009)

¿Mantiene usted relaciones con amigos o familia que se quedaron en los Estados Unidos? / Do you maintain relationships with friends and family who have remained in the U.S.?
Yes, with siblings and three children, primarily through telephone and visits

¿Cuáles son diferencias significativas entre su experiencia en México comparado a los Estados Unidos? / What are significant differences in your experiences in Mexico as compared to the U.S.?
Life in the U.S. was as enjoyable as in Mexico; she preferred it in the U.S. (“allá más que aquí”)

Zacarías:

¿Cuándo migró usted a los Estados Unidos? / When did migration the U.S. occur?
1975

¿Por cuánto tiempo quedó usted en los Estados Unidos? / How long were you in the U.S.?
He mentioned being undocumented from 1975 until 1981, and then referenced a later year for residency (see below) prior to retiring in 2019. (Answer unclear)

¿Cuándo estableció su residencia permanente? / At what point did you become a legal resident?
1986

¿En cual parte de los Estados Unidos vivió, y por qué? / Where did you settle, and what motivated you to settle there?
Eleven years in Dallas; also lived in Chicago (one year), Indiana (five years), Nevada (five years), Tennessee (four years), Missouri (four years), Georgia (two years), Louisiana (three years), and Minnesota (two to three years), all motivated by work

Si fue empleado, ¿qué tipo de empleo tuvo? / What kind of occupation, if any, did you maintain during this period?
Construction

¿Qué tipo de comunidad / relaciones sociales estableció en los Estados Unidos? / What social ties did you establish in the U.S.? What kind of community?
Mostly friends and workmates (“compañeros”); family was in Mexico and arrived to U.S. later

Si viajaba o regresaba usted a México, ¿con que frecuencia lo hizo? / How often, if at all, did you travel to Mexico?
Regularly visited twice a year
¿Tenía usted otra familia en los Estados Unidos y/o en México? ¿Cómo era su relación? ¿Cambiaron estas relaciones mientras estuvo usted en los Estados Unidos? / Did you have other family in the U.S. or in Mexico, and if so, what was your relationship to them? Did these relationships change during your time in the U.S.?

Family in Mexico, communication largely through letter and phone calls

¿Cuándo decidió regresar a México? ¿Qué influyó esta decisión? / When did you decide to return to Mexico? What were the biggest influences in this decision?

Returned in 2019 upon retirement

¿Mantiene usted relaciones con amigos o familia que se quedaron en los Estados Unidos? / Do you maintain relationships with friends and family who have remained in the U.S.?

Four children in Dallas who communicate through phone calls and personal visits

¿Cuáles son diferencias significas entre su experiencia en México comparado a los Estados Unidos? / What are significant differences in your experiences in Mexico as compared to the U.S.?

He feels more comfortable and “free” in Mexico (“Me siento más cómodo aquí”; “Aquí estoy libre”)

Rudolfo:

¿Cuando migró usted a los Estados Unidos? / When did migration the U.S. occur?

Sometime in 1973

¿Por cuánto tiempo quedó usted en los Estados Unidos? / How long were you in the U.S.?

Went back and forth until 1980 onwards, returning to Mexico in 2014

¿Cuándo estableció su residencia permanente? / At what point did you become a legal resident?

Post-IRCA (exact year not given)

¿En cual parte de los Estados Unidos vivió, y por qué? / Where did you settle, and what motivated you to settle there?

In Louisiana for two years, mostly Texas for work.

Si fue empleado, ¿que tipo de empleo tuvo? / What kind of occupation, if any, did you maintain during this period?

Construction

¿Qué tipo de comunidad / relaciones sociales estableció en los Estados Unidos? / What social ties did you establish in the U.S.? What kind of community?

No real community—socialized primarily with wife.

Si viajaba o regresaba usted a México, ¿con que frecuencia lo hizo? / How often, if at all, did you travel to Mexico?
Twice a year, in May and December

¿Tenía usted otra familia en los Estados Unidos y/o en México? ¿Cómo era su relación? ¿Cambió estas relaciones mientras estuvo en los Estados Unidos? / Did you have other family in the U.S. or in Mexico, and if so, what was your relationship to them? Did these relationships change during your time in the U.S.?
Most of the family was in the US; parents, however, were in Mexico, and communicated primarily by letter and to a lesser extent via phone.

¿Cuándo decidió regresar a México? ¿Qué influyó esta decisión? / When did you decide to return to Mexico? What were the biggest influences in this decision?
5 years ago (at the time of the interview, this would have been in 2014)

¿Mantiene usted relaciones con amigos o familia que se quedaron en los Estados Unidos? / Do you maintain relationships with friends and family who have remained in the U.S.?
Personal visits are made

¿Cuáles son diferencias significativas entre su experiencia en México comparado a los Estados Unidos? / What are significant differences in your experiences in Mexico as compared to the U.S.?
When working, money is better in the U.S., though money goes further in Mexico. Emotionally, happier in Mexico (“happy happy,” or “feliz feliz”)

Cesar:

¿Cuándo migró usted a los Estados Unidos? / When did migration the U.S. occur?
1970

¿Por cuánto tiempo quedó usted en los Estados Unidos? / How long were you in the U.S.?
Forty years

¿Cuándo estableció su residencia permanente? / At what point did you become a legal resident?
1978 (via a Silva Letter)

¿En cual parte de los Estados Unidos vivió, y por qué? / Where did you settle, and what motivated you to settle there?
Chicago felt safe and orderly

Si fue empleado, ¿que tipo de empleo tuvo? / What kind of occupation, if any, did you maintain during this period?
Eight years in a “pollera” (unclear on whether this was in food service or tailoring; did not clarify); upon receiving Silva Letter, moved onto landscaping

¿Qué tipo de comunidad / relaciones sociales estableció en los Estados Unidos? / What social ties did you establish in the U.S.? What kind of community?
Socialized with various people; returned to school in order to learn English. Also had children.

Si viajaba o regresaba usted a México, ¿con que frecuencia lo hizo? / How often, if at all, did you travel to Mexico?

At first could not visit; in the 1980s, would go every year.

¿Tenía usted otra familia en los Estados Unidos y/o en México? ¿Cómo era su relación?
¿Cambió estas relaciones mientras estuvo usted en los Estados Unidos? / Did you have other family in the U.S. or in Mexico, and if so, what was your relationship to them? Did these relationships change during your time in the U.S.?

Had children in the U.S. as well as family in Mexico. Communicated via phone calls and letters.

¿Cuándo decidió regresar a México? ¿Qué influyó esta decisión? / When did you decide to return to Mexico? What were the biggest influences in this decision?

His goal was to retire at sixty-five, which he did. He used the money he saved on his house in Mexico, citing family as an influence.

¿Mantiene usted relaciones con amigos o familia que se quedaron en los Estados Unidos? / Do you maintain relationships with friends and family who have remained in the U.S.?

He describes these relationships as perfectly maintained through phone calls and visits. He visits three times a year, though he said he doesn’t like to bother his children.

¿Cuáles son diferencias significativas entre su experiencia en México comparado a los Estados Unidos? / What are significant differences in your experiences in Mexico as compared to the U.S.?

For him there is no difference. He describes his life in Chicago as very beautiful (“muy bonita”), and stated he enjoys Mexico and the U.S. the same.

Tomás:

¿Cuándo migró usted a los Estados Unidos? / When did migration the U.S. occur?

1972

¿Por cuánto tiempo quedó usted en los Estados Unidos? / How long were you in the U.S.?

Until late 2015, early 2016

¿Cuándo estableció su residencia permanente? / At what point did you become a legal resident?

Forty-five years ago (at the time of this interview, this would have been 1974)

¿En cual parte de los Estados Unidos vivió, y por qué? / Where did you settle, and what motivated you to settle there?

Dallas, due to work.

Si fue empleado, ¿que tipo de empleo tuvo? / What kind of occupation, if any, did you maintain during this period?
Landscaping

¿Qué tipo de comunidad / relaciones sociales estableció en los Estados Unidos? / What social ties did you establish in the U.S.? What kind of community?
He had some friends and family in the area.

Si viajaba o regresaba usted a México, ¿con que frecuencia lo hizo? / How often, if at all, did you travel to Mexico?
Once a year

¿Tenía usted otra familia en los Estados Unidos y/o en México? ¿Cómo era su relación?
¿Cambió estas relaciones mientras estuvo usted en los Estados Unidos? / Did you have other family in the U.S. or in Mexico, and if so, what was your relationship to them? Did these relationships change during your time in the U.S.?
Parents and siblings in Mexico, who communicated via phone

¿Cuándo decidió regresar a México? ¿Qué influyó esta decisión? / When did you decide to return to Mexico? What were the biggest influences in this decision?
Late 2015 / early 2016, with family (specifically his parents’ ages) as motivators

¿Mantiene usted relaciones con amigos o familia que se quedaron en los Estados Unidos? / Do you maintain relationships with friends and family who have remained in the U.S.?
Yes, through telephone communication

¿Cuáles son diferencias significativas entre su experiencia en México comparado a los Estados Unidos? / What are significant differences in your experiences in Mexico as compared to the U.S.?
Financial realities were different; jobs in Mexico did not pay well. Specifically referenced leaving as something that isn’t decided on out of joy (“no se van por gusto”)

Gerardo:

¿Cuándo migró usted a los Estados Unidos? / When did migration the U.S. occur?
1948

¿Por cuánto tiempo quedó usted en los Estados Unidos? / How long were you in the U.S.?
Until 1996

¿Cuándo estableció su residencia permanente? / At what point did you become a legal resident?
1987

¿En cual parte de los Estados Unidos vivió, y por qué? / Where did you settle, and what motivated you to settle there?
Chicago—he got there and liked it
Si fue empleado, ¿qué tipo de empleo tuvo? / What kind of occupation, if any, did you maintain during this period?
Furniture factory

¿Qué tipo de comunidad / relaciones sociales estableció en los Estados Unidos? / What social ties did you establish in the U.S.? What kind of community?
He had family in the area

Si viajaba o regresaba usted a México, ¿con que frecuencia lo hizo? / How often, if at all, did you travel to Mexico?
He spent time in both countries

¿Tenía usted otra familia en los Estados Unidos y/o en México? ¿Cómo era su relación? ¿Cambiaron estas relaciones mientras estuvo usted en los Estados Unidos? / Did you have other family in the U.S. or in Mexico, and if so, what was your relationship to them? Did these relationships change during your time in the U.S.?
Yes—primarily communicated via letters, and then phones

¿Cuándo decidió regresar a México? ¿Qué influyó esta decisión? / When did you decide to return to Mexico? What were the biggest influences in this decision?
1996; he wanted to live in his own home, and did not want to be retired in the U.S.

¿Mantienes usted relaciones con amigos o familia que se quedaron en los Estados Unidos? / Do you maintain relationships with friends and family who have remained in the U.S.?
Yes, through phone calls and twice-yearly visits

¿Cuáles son diferencias significativas entre su experiencia en México comparado a los Estados Unidos? / What are significant differences in your experiences in Mexico as compared to the U.S.?
He stated that his land (or country) is preferrable (“Para mí, mi tierra es mejor”)

Octavio:
¿Cuándo migró usted a los Estados Unidos? / When did migration the U.S. occur?
1979

¿Por cuánto tiempo quedó usted en los Estados Unidos? / How long were you in the U.S.?
He referenced differing years; twenty-two or twenty-seven (went back and forth). Ultimately stated he spent half his life in the U.S.

¿Cuándo estableció su residencia permanente? / At what point did you become a legal resident?
1984, through IRCA.

¿En cual parte de los Estados Unidos vivió, y por qué? / Where did you settle, and what motivated you to settle there?
Chicago, for work.

Si fue empleado, ¿que tipo de empleo tuvo? / What kind of occupation, if any, did you maintain during this period?
Landscaping

¿Qué tipo de comunidad / relaciones sociales estableció en los Estados Unidos? / What social ties did you establish in the U.S.? What kind of community?
He had friends and family (cousins) in the area

Si viajaba o regresaba usted a México, ¿con que frecuencia lo hizo? / How often, if at all, did you travel to Mexico?
Once a year

¿Tenia usted otra familia en los Estados Unidos y/o en México? ¿Cómo era su relación? ¿Cambiaron estas relaciones mientras estuvo usted en los Estados Unidos? / Did you have other family in the U.S. or in Mexico, and if so, what was your relationship to them? Did these relationships change during your time in the U.S.?
His family was in Mexico, and they communicated via phone (not a personal phone; he stated one served the entire town) and letter

¿Cuándo decidió regresar a México? ¿Qué influyó esta decisión? / When did you decide to return to Mexico? What were the biggest influences in this decision?
Retirement in 2009

¿Mantiene usted relaciones con amigos o familia que se quedaron en los Estados Unidos? / Do you maintain relationships with friends and family who have remained in the U.S.?
Regular visits every two years.

¿Cuáles son diferencias significas entre su experiencia en México comparado a los Estados Unidos? / What are significant differences in your experiences in Mexico as compared to the U.S.?
Work was better in the U.S.

Efraín:

¿Cuándo migró usted a los Estados Unidos? / When did migration the U.S. occur?
1968 (initially stated 1978, see below)

¿Por cuánto tiempo quedó usted en los Estados Unidos? / How long were you in the U.S.?
Thirty-four years

¿Cuándo estableció su residencia permanente? / At what point did you become a legal resident?
1978
¿En cual parte de los Estados Unidos vivió, y por qué? / Where did you settle, and what motivated you to settle there?
Los Angeles, due to work and family (a godmother) in the area

Si fue empleado, ¿que tipo de empleo tuvo? / What kind of occupation, if any, did you maintain during this period?
Carpentry

¿Qué tipo de comunidad / relaciones sociales estableció en los Estados Unidos? / What social ties did you establish in the U.S.? What kind of community?
Family only—mother and siblings

Si viajaba o regresaba usted a México, ¿con que frecuencia lo hizo? / How often, if at all, did you travel to Mexico?
Once a year

¿Tenía usted otra familia en los Estados Unidos y/o en México? ¿Cómo era su relación? / Did you have other family in the U.S. or in Mexico, and if so, what was your relationship to them? Did these relationships change during your time in the U.S.?
(See above)

¿Cuándo decidió regresar a México? ¿Qué influyó esta decisión? / When did you decide to return to Mexico? What were the biggest influences in this decision?
2000, with health reasons resulting in his return (asthma)

¿Mantiene usted relaciones con amigos o familia que se quedaron en los Estados Unidos? / Do you maintain relationships with friends and family who have remained in the U.S.?
He has seven children in the U.S., communicating by phone and visiting. Family also visits him.

¿Cuáles son diferencias significativas entre su experiencia en México comparado a los Estados Unidos? / What are significant differences in your experiences in Mexico as compared to the U.S.?
State that in Mexico it was his land (“Pues es mi tierra aquí”)

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Diana and Patricio:

¿Cuándo migró usted a los Estados Unidos? / When did migration the U.S. occur?
Diana: 1978; Patricio: 1977

¿Por cuánto tiempo quedó usted en los Estados Unidos? / How long were you in the U.S.?
Approximately twenty-five years

¿Cuándo estableció su residencia permanente? / At what point did you become a legal resident?
Both stated they became residents the year they arrived. Additionally, they became naturalized U.S. citizens in 1996.
¿En cual parte de los Estados Unidos vivió, y por qué? / Where did you settle, and what motivated you to settle there?
They settled in Dallas (“allí llegamos”), where there was also work.

Si fue empleado, ¿que tipo de empleo tuvo? / What kind of occupation, if any, did you maintain during this period?
Patricio: In charge of a building, referenced cleaning and security, as well as working with materials (“materiamo”)
Diana: Worked as a seamstress, but had arrived to be a Spanish teacher

¿Qué tipo de comunidad / relaciones sociales estableció en los Estados Unidos? / What social ties did you establish in the U.S.? What kind of community?
Stayed among other Latinos

Si viajaba o regresaba usted a México, ¿con que frecuencia lo hizo? / How often, if at all, did you travel to Mexico?
Described as during vacation (“durante las vacaciones,” i.e. holiday season), usually over the winter even when given other opportunities to travel.

¿Tenia usted otra familia en los Estados Unidos y/o en México? ¿Cómo era su relación? ¿Cambiaron estas relaciones mientras estuvo usted en los Estados Unidos? / Did you have other family in the U.S. or in Mexico, and if so, what was your relationship to them? Did these relationships change during your time in the U.S.?
Had family in Texas when they first migrated. With family in Mexico, communicated by letter and over the phone.

¿Cuándo decidió regresar a México? ¿Qué influyó esta decisión? / When did you decide to return to Mexico? What were the biggest influences in this decision?
December 1998

¿Mantiene usted relaciones con amigos o familia que se quedaron en los Estados Unidos? / Do you maintain relationships with friends and family who have remained in the U.S.?
Visits during holidays to family that lives in the U.S., otherwise mostly via telephone (“teléfono más de todo”)

¿Cuáles son diferencias significas entre su experiencia en México comparado a los Estados Unidos? / What are significant differences in your experiences in Mexico as compared to the U.S.?
They described life in the U.S. as good and in Mexico as better (“Allí bien y aquí mejor que es nuestra tierra). Work in the U.S. was compared to their retired life in Mexico (“Allí teníamos que trabajar…aquí tranquilos”)