

SUSPENDED LIVES: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FIVE MEXICAN
IMMIGRANTS IN AUSTIN, TEXAS

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

From 2005 to 2012, I worked as a waitress and bartender in two restaurants in Austin, Texas. After working at these restaurants for just over a year I gained a seasoned “veteran” status and its subsequent few perks. These perks included being scheduled on busier shifts, having more flexibility in time off requests, and gaining the respect of the “back of house” employees. In comparison, to the wait staff, line and prep cook positions had a low turnover rate and were predominately staffed by Mexican-born men. The acceptance and friendships from cooks saved me from dire consequences countless times as they were more willing to assist when I made a mistake or needed food rushed. However, a more personal perk was becoming friends with many of them and hearing their stories which I had naively never considered before. I listened to accounts of being separated from wives, children, and other loved ones for years while being unsure when they would see them next. I heard stories that mentioned lack of access to social services despite being documented. Several men expressed a genuine love of life in the United States but also at the same time missed Mexico. More often than not, they worked two jobs or six days a week with double shifts. I became consciously aware of individuals, obscured in the kitchen, whose lives seemed to contain a constant inner juxtaposition between lives in Mexico and the United States. I wondered what their lives were like and wanted to obtain a glimpse of the complexities that so many individuals throughout the United States have to navigate around every day. How does one perceive and experience their life as a Mexican immigrant?

This research project examines five Mexican immigrant restaurant workers in Austin, Texas in an attempt to explore how they understand their experiences *between borders*; a reality that includes physical settlement in the U.S. but emotional investment in both Mexico and the U.S. Striffler (2007) has argued that his Mexican immigrant respondents in Arkansas inhabited a “border zone”, a conflicting space that tangles one or more cultures, histories, economies, and policies. Striffler stated this space made his respondents home both in Arkansas and Mexico but without being at ease in either one. Similarly, my respondents constantly strive to balance the difficult reasons they left their home communities with their reasons for staying in the U.S., and the sacrifices they make by staying. Their lives are complex and require sophisticated techniques to navigate through this tug of war between borders.

A significant issue this study hopes to highlight is that coming to the U.S. was not meant to be a permanent move by the respondents. They came to the United States because there were few jobs available and wages were generally lower in their home communities. Furthermore, it was difficult to obtain loans and obtain a higher education in Mexico. Because the United States has an unappeasable demand for unskilled labor and moderately high wages, my respondents moved to the U.S. to temporarily financially assist loved ones in Mexico and save money for their own futures. Unfortunately, returning home became difficult and less desirable due to a variety of factors that include strict immigration policies, lack of financial opportunities in Mexico, financial demands from their sending communities, personal safety concerns and the development of new relationships. They found themselves in positions they did not expect and made the logical, but challenging, decision to remain.

Macro level political and economic conditions shaped the environments that coerced these men to both move to the U.S. and then unexpectedly settle. The United States and Mexico currently have the largest economic disparity between two countries that share a land border than anywhere in the world. Additionally, as of 2012 Mexico (out of 37 industrial countries) was ranked lowest in average annual wages and yet the highest in average annual worked hours on the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development online report. Global market changes, government mismanagement, and U.S. influence between 1940 and 1980 has created this long lasting disparity between Mexico and the U.S. Consequently, several generations of underprivileged young men have had limited options to pursue in Mexico. The United States may have seemed as a way to improve their situations but once they reached their destinations, they found that these same conditions made it difficult to return to Mexico. This study balances a macro level focus on migration with individual perspectives and experiences. It grants a view how larger politics and economics have influence on individuals and their personal lives.

A secondary goal for this study is to humanize the participants and represent them with respect and honesty. Mexican immigrants in the United States are often depicted with negative stereotypes and oversimplified discriminatory rhetoric in the mainstream media. The respondents of this study, like all people, are individuals with unique histories, personalities, and experiences. In order to properly discuss how they have understood their experiences, they must be addressed as people, not caricatures. Moreover, these men were kind enough to speak on sensitive subjects, provide detail on a variety of topics, and generous with their time. They deserve our respect. Each respondent has been given a pseudonym and are collectively referred to as ‘the Guys’.

Further, because I focus on their individual experiences, this study relies heavily on direct quotes and will include italicized words to express terms that were emphasized in the interviews. This is to provide a sense of context and familiarity with them while protecting their confidentiality.

It should be noted that while documentation status is generally a significant topic in studies on Mexican immigrants, this study does not specify the participants' statuses. I explained to each of them that, unless they wished to, their documentation status did not need to be discussed as it was not a major concern for this study. I chose not to focus on the difference between documented and undocumented Mexican immigrants for four reasons. First, both groups largely compete for the same jobs and are in labor markets where forms of human capital such as education, English proficiency, and work experience have become less valued (Gentsch and Massey 2011). Second, the majority of jobs they compete for pay the same in spite of legal status. Despite the fact that overall wages in the United States have increased, the wages of legal Mexican immigrants did not because they have been competing for unskilled jobs with those that lack any labor rights at all. This has forced them to accept the same pay and conditions as undocumented workers (Gentsch and Massey 2001). Third, the vast majority of undocumented workers have bank accounts, pay taxes, and buy homes or cars just as documented workers (Gomberg-Muñoz 2010). Finally, Mexican immigrants of any legal status experience separation, discrimination, economic disadvantages, exploitation, culture shock, and other similar phenomena that are significant to this study. In other words, the lived experiences of living between borders for Mexican immigrants, whether

they have documentation or not, is so similar that distinguishing between the two makes little difference in this study.

This thesis is sectioned into five parts in order to thoroughly cover my research approach and findings of this study. It will begin with the theoretical approach which takes elements from various anthropological perspectives. The discussion also delves into why only one theoretical perspective would not accurately reflect the varied realities surrounding the Guys' lives. Theory is then followed by methodology. This section provides a general overview of phenomenology and the data collection and analysis process used to obtain the results for this study. The paper then leads into the economic and political macro level events that have created and exacerbated migration from Mexico and worsened conditions for immigrants in the U.S. These events played the most significant role in coercing the Guys to move and eventually settle in the U.S. This paper then narrows down to a smaller scale into the analysis results. The results are divided into two chapters. The first, Transformation, covers the participants' decisions to leave their home communities and cross the U.S.-Mexico border, and experiences once they reached the other side. It specifically highlights how emigrating to the U.S. from poor, rural areas in Mexico was a transformative experiences for the Guys when they were young men. The second half, Suspension, discusses the Guys' experiences of life in the United States. It focuses on the aspects of their lives that make it problematic to emotionally settle in the U.S., despite being physically settled. These subjects together create a composite picture of life as lived by some Mexican immigrants, with a multi-layered description of what these individuals perceive to be the most significant experiences of their lives 'between borders'.

CHAPTER II

THEORY

When I first began constructing my approach to this study and took my first dive into the background research of the varying theoretical perspectives surrounding migration, I was first attracted to World Systems Theory. Then, after further reading, I drifted to the most prominent contemporary approach, Transnationalism. My initial attempts to wedge my project into a single theoretical perspective failed. My respondents' interviews do not perfectly reflect the commonly accepted ideas behind Transnationalism, nor did World Systems Theory adequately explain their lives. Thus I chose to draw from multiple perspectives. As Massey et al. (2003:21) have stated about their study on Mexican migration into the United States, "various explanations are not logically contradictory... Thus, a synthetic approach to theory construction is in order." My synthetic approach draws from Transnationalism, Border Theory (housed within Transnationalism) and World Systems Theory because both my data and my own personal thoughts agree with certain aspects of each perspective.

World Systems Theory

World Systems Theory is influential in this study because it places primary focus on the global market and highlights this market's ability to alter large groups of people's lives. World Systems Theorist in migration studies are accurate in placing the focus on the global market as the primary driver of Mexican migration into the United States (Baba 2013). World Systems Theorist generally divide the world into periphery and core

relationships where wealthier “more developed” areas import surplus from “less developed” areas. Additionally, it argues that there is one single World Market and when economies are negatively interrupted by that market it forces those unlucky enough to be in the periphery to depend on the core (Massey et al. 2003). Thus economic exploitation is created by global exchange relationships (Horevitz 2009, Sorinel 2010). Those that are born in rural impoverished areas of Mexico suffer the most from their nation’s weakened economy. This reality “pushes” workers out of the country; especially since Mexico lacks assistance for the unemployed. Fortunately for the United States (arguably the primary core), the constant demand for low-wage labor “pulls” migrants across the border. In fact, American corporations regularly recruit low-wage labor within Mexico’s poorer areas, offering them temporary work visas and a guaranteed job. This labor is the “surplus” that the United States is moving to its core because it depends on “low-wage workers to help keep prices of manufactured goods low” (Kimberlin 2009: 768). These “push and pull” factors are not imaginary. This reality is reflected in the Guys’ responses that they came to the United States either for employment that was unavailable in their home communities or better wages.

World Systems Theory has its faults however. Critics have claimed that the theory is too deterministic by only viewing migrants as passive players that are inevitably “uprooted” without agency (Brettel 2008, Galaty 2011, Horevitz 2009). After talking with my respondents I agree with World Systems supporters who argue that immigrants are simply making a “rational choice” or are “responding to marketplace coercion” (Kimberlin 2009: 766, 768). All of my respondents came from small towns or rural areas in Mexico. Those from rural locations have very limited options available to them,

particularly since obtaining an education past the first few years of high school is difficult for those with few financial resources. One respondent (Bonito) described the poverty in which his family lived during his youth. “Without clothes, I mean we were *poor!* No Clothes! No Clothes... We used to have a house with no concrete walls. They had metal sheets. That was the walls.” Another stated, “You maybe had some fruit and bread to bring to school. We did not have all the things like here. Only like one (pair of) pants, two shirts, and some shoes.” (Jorge) All of the Guys grew up in low-income households without any real way to assist besides leaving their hometowns and were in a world where their best odds of obtaining a job and making a higher wage was in the United States. Some might claim that they had different choices, but I would argue that my respondents were coerced to migrate north due to conditions that they had no part in creating. Critics have fairly argued that World Systems Theory has “overly generalized” (Galatay 2011:4). While it is true that Mexican immigrants come from varying socio-economic backgrounds and locations within Mexico, global economics plays a significant role for many in the decision to migrate in the first place. It does not mean individuals, like the Guys, have no agency, but their economic background is the starting point.

Currently World Systems Theory is generally considered outdated but there has been a modernized multi-disciplinary response by supporters called World-Systems Analysis (Galatay 2011, Kardulias and Hall 2008). This refreshed approach, as outlined in the *Journal of Worlds-Systems Research*, adopts the basic tenants of World Systems Theory but has also responded to the critiques against it (Galatay 2011). Supporters of World-Systems Analysis reduce the significance of core-periphery dependency by applying the theory as a process in the world-economy but not as a control on individuals

(Galatay 2011). They draw attention to agentive action such as “negotiated peripherality” (Galatay 2011, Kardulia 2007). Negotiated peripherality acknowledges that those who are forced in the peripheral of the world systems can make efforts to benefit themselves and their loved ones within the limitations in which they are placed. This new approach is more realistic to the complexities of real world political, social, and economic conditions. My synthetic approach is more in-line with the updated World-Systems Analysis.

Transnationalism

Dissatisfied with the deterministic approach of World Systems Theory and the lack of attention to individual agency, critics pulled away from Neoclassical immigration theories in favor of a more refined approach offered by Transnationalism. In current research Transnationalism has become the most prominent approach in immigration studies. Transnationalism is a broad theoretical umbrella that does not set political-economics as the primary focus, but instead centers on flows across borders. Flows across borders can include people physically crossing a border or social crossings, such as forms of communication, information, and financial and emotional support. World Systems Theory has been guilty of generally portraying the world as divided into distinct cultural spaces. Transnationalism discards this approach by drawing attention to relationships and cultural exchanges made across borders whether by trade, communication, war, or migration. For my study, I draw from the transnational understanding of *social* flows across the United States-Mexico border (Glick Schiller 2003, Kearney 1995).

Thinking in terms of social flow, immigrants maintain their relationships with loved ones in Mexico in various ways but there are three particularly common ways.

First, is the sending of financial remittances that assist in maintaining “social and economic relationships with family members” (Kimberlin 2009:759). Shortly after arriving in the United States, all of my respondents expressed a sense of responsibility to send money home. “You’re still helping your family a little bit. And a little bit makes *a lot* of differences for us... When I first came here I sent like all of my check. If I made three hundred dollars I would make it with forty dollars, forty dollars a week. Like I said I *saw* my mom crying (over my brother leaving and lack of money.)” (Martín) In addition, two respondents mentioned sending remittances in attempts to get family members passports and temporary tourist visas (some successful and some not) in order for loved ones to visit them in the U.S.

Another way social relationships and information are exchanged is through modern technology, specifically the internet. All but one of the respondents mentioned using e-mail as a form of regular contact and two stated they kept up with loved ones through Facebook. In fact, one of them explained that his cousin—who lived in the United States for four years but has since moved back to Mexico—sent their family a desktop computer in order to video call them using Skype; though he said he did not use Skype very often. The use of modern technology draws attention to how regular communication can be maintained across borders. Information can be regularly exchanged through not only the internet but through telephone and letters. Communication creates “transnational circuits” and “social networks” which are significant topics commonly addressed in Transnationalism (Zavella 2011:5).

Transnational theory is strongest when highlighting cross-border communication and relationships, but Transnationalists can be overly optimistic in referring to Mexican

immigrants as continual transnational participants, especially when they suggest that immigrants can be active members in their sending communities despite the physical separation. For example, it is often argued that immigrants regularly send remittances, participate in their sending community's local politics while in the U.S., and that they retain their "Mexican identity" (Heisler 2008, Roberts et al. 1999). However, scholars like Zavella (2011:6) question the validity of these concepts. In her 2011 ethnography *I'm Neither Here nor There* Zavella asks, "what constitutes regular and sustained contacts: If migrants lose touch with kin in Mexico yet retain a deep sense of *mexicanidad* (Mexican identity), is this a transnational identity?" Some sociologists have responded to these vague models by distinguishing between *broad transnationalism* (or expanded participation) and *narrow transnationalism* (or core participation), the former meaning sporadic involvement in their sending communities and the latter meaning regular activity with their sending communities including political, social, and cultural involvement (Heisler 2008, Levitt 2001, Portes 2003). The fact that "one or more" activities and "irregular" participation is included in these labels reveals how varying immigrant realities actually are. These concepts are rather vague and can be interpreted in very different ways depending on the scholar.

I found it very difficult to identify where my respondents and their families fit as transnational participants. All of the respondents kept in regular contact with loved ones in Mexico but only one sent financial assistance on a regular basis. "Yeah, all the time. I send money each month... Not much but a little." (Roberto) On the other hand the rest of the Guys sent money only for specific reasons such as assistance to purchase a large commodity like a refrigerator, help with a medical bill, or aid in getting a guest visa to

visit the U.S. More importantly, a great many Mexican migrants and immigrants do not maintain relationships across borders. Two respondents mentioned family members who, after arriving in the U.S, did not keep in regular contact with their loved ones nor send financial assistance. “They (my three brothers) didn’t send nothing... And they came here and they disappeared. You know? Because there was no phone to call... They used to have mail like close to the biggest small town but my brothers never did anything like even send a letter. But they did not (even) try.” (Bonito) Finally, only one respondent stated they kept up with their home communities’ politics in some form. “My mom likes to tell me about it (political issues) and about the neighbors... like gossip. I don’t mind because she likes to talk about stuff like that.” (Roberto) I was initially guilty of adopting Transnationalism’s optimistic views regarding transnational participation but I have since realized that my respondents—considering their length of time in the U.S. and socio-economic backgrounds—do not completely support the image of migrants presented in transnational theory.

The other form of cross-border flow that Transnationalism focuses on is physical flow. Transnationalism often invokes an imagery of borders being “fluid”, “permeable”, and migrants “transcending borders” arguing that migrants move across borders much more freely and often than is actually true (Horevitz 2009, Kearney 1995). Brettell (2008:120) exemplifies this notion when she says that in the “transnational perspective, migrants are no longer ‘uprooted,’ but rather move freely back and forth across international borders....” I do not argue that people do not cross the border regularly but I do argue that the U.S.-Mexico border is so restricted and dangerous that terms such as “permeable” and “fluid” paint an inaccurate picture. Economic, political and personal

factors greatly limit the mobility of migrants. My respondents mentioned failed attempts by themselves and loved ones to cross the border without documents, failed attempts (with great financial cost) to get family members temporary guest visas and passports, and the personal expression of feeling physically “stuck” in the United States. None of these accounts portray a “fluid” border.

Border Theory

Not all transnational theorists have been satisfied with the fluid border metaphors and have adapted newer approaches that still reside within the Transnationalism umbrella. Concepts of borders (especially the United States-Mexico border) have been more increasingly divided between *borders* and *borderlands*. *Borderlands*—also referred to as social boundaries—are understood as social and cultural hybridized spheres (Alvarez 1995, Baba 2013, Zavella 2011). These conceptualized spheres are affected by physical borders but are usually seen as formless zones that people move through while negotiating cultural identity and residence (Diner 2008). As Alvarez (1995: 448) pointed out, the term *borderland* can “conjure up in many of us an image of the so-called Spanish Borderlands” which reflects the term well because it is an expansive area that has been altered politically, culturally, and socially many times throughout history.

This study, on the other hand, draws from the more literal understanding of *borders* in transnational migration studies. *Borders* are seen as politically created geographic lines that are associated with institutions and cultural structures. This approach highlights how physical borders and institutions have real effects on levels of migration flow and who gets to participate in that flow. Baba (2013: 3) explains this more

clearly by saying, “As the policies of late capitalism encourage the global flow of goods, services, and finances, the State has placed increasingly burdensome restrictions on the movement of persons across national borders.” Also as Roberts et al. (1999) has pointed out, while transnational migration systems do exist, social stratification is the prime factor in determining the type of migration when considering that the systems obviously favor the wealthier entrepreneurs and large corporations in controlling movement across the border.

Border Theory is more realistic as it diverges from the fluid imagery often invoked in transnational studies. My respondents’ stories expressed how much more difficult getting across the border can be for Mexicans than Americans. One spoke about an attempt to get family members legally across in order to visit him, “I told my sister ‘I’m going to send you some money so you can come, if you can visit.’...I was crossing my fingers like ‘please please please!’...I knew she got the appointment and I called her. And she was like ‘No...they didn’t give us that.’ I was very disappointed and surprised but I said ‘don’t worry we’ll try again.’(Martín) Another provided, in amusing detail, an account of his younger brother’s trials attempting to cross into the United States undocumented but gave up after failing three repeated attempts. The respondents only addressed crossing the border with stories and opinions involving physical, emotional, and financial difficulty.

Another reason I apply the concepts of *borders* to my study is because many Border theorists have argued that adopting the more conceptualized and behavior focused *borderlands* in immigration studies draws attention away from the subjects’ real lives and the socio-economic issues that plague them across physical borders. Alvarez (1995:449)

calls these theorists “literalists” and that they have “focused on the actual problems of the borders, including migration, policy, settlement, environment, identity, labor, and health.” Factors involving health, finances, and restrictions on mobility seem to be the top driving factors in life changing choices my respondents have made in their lives. My study looks at how the Guys’ personal experiences have been affected by the *border* associated issues they have faced in their lives because it draws focus to their contexts and conditions.

This is not to say that *borderlands* do not exist, nor am I arguing that they do not affect the realities of immigrants such as my respondents. But I do approach my research viewing the *border* as more significant than *borderlands* because it holds a great deal of power by forcing migrants to renegotiate their lives based on conditions that are entirely determined by the border and the institutions attached to it. On the other hand as Baba (2013) has pointed out borders and borderlands are directly and irreversibly connected. Crossing a physical border involves facing new social boundaries and navigating complicated interactions and realities throughout them. Zavella (2011) provides a clever adaption to their relatedness by suggesting that scholars step away from the ideas of “transnational identity” and instead she suggests using “translocal social relations.” Her approach recognizes the real affects physical borders make not only on movement, but on interactions. It also incorporates communication and relationships that are made across borders. Translocal social relations more accurately depict the very complex experiences that migrants and immigrants face on a regular basis.

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify the foundation from which my research was built. Combining the portions of World Systems Theory and Transnationalism that I adopt with the political and economic background of both the United States and Mexico reveal the context in which my respondents have had to navigate their lives and has resulted (not by coincidence) in their permanent settlement in Austin, Texas. Global markets have pushed workers out of Mexico and pulled them into the United States and the most vulnerable to these pressures are the rural poor. The combination of the global market's effect on the Mexican economy and U.S. politics involving restrictions on the border together create a situation that has coerced my respondents into settling in the United States. These participants have used their negotiated peripherality to make the best of their situations for their home communities in Mexico and the United States. Migrating across the border is a logical move within a realm with few options but migrants are not necessarily isolated once they make their trek. Communication through modern technology and financial assistance can maintain personal relationships that can be significant to their experiences in the United States. My thesis is a micro look into the experiences of individuals whose current lives have been influenced by these macro issues.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The thesis question for this study involves understanding how certain individuals have experienced being a Mexican immigrant in the United States because migrating from Mexico into the United States, as a phenomena, has significant social, political, and economic implications. I am interested in their migration experiences, and the similarities shared in those experiences. As a qualitative methodology, phenomenology is well suited for this study. Phenomenology attempts to describe lived experiences in a way that captures the “essence” of a phenomenon in order to provide a more complex understanding and to humanize the individuals related to it (Dowling and Cooney 2012).

Phenomenology is a philosophical perspective that originated in the first decade of the twentieth century, but several decades later anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz (1973) began adopting phenomenological methods to anthropology. In the nineteen eighties phenomenology gained momentum as more anthropologists became interested in lived experiences over symbolic meanings or social discourses (Desjarlas and Throop 2011). Phenomenology as a methodology has been particularly appealing to some anthropologists because it requires thick description that is so commonly drawn from ethnographic work (Cleaveland 2013, Gilgun 2008). It is also attractive to researchers because it attempts to limit bias from unexplored assumptions and promotes the researcher “engaging a certain sense of wonder and openness to the world” while collecting and analyzing their data (Dowling and Cooney 2012: 24). Finally, unlike other methodologies, phenomenology does not try to make a complete in-depth analysis of a situation but is more focused on direct description (Desjarlais and Throop 2011). This

methodology assists anthropologists in drawing out depth and applying a critical self-awareness.

Phenomenological Approach

There are a large variety of “types” of phenomenology but as a methodology it is most commonly divided into two schools: Husserlian (descriptive) and Heideggerian (interpretive). Edmund Husserl was a German philosopher who is recognized as the original creator of phenomenology and developed the philosophy and methodology behind it throughout the nineteen tens and nineteen twenties. He argued that having someone actually experiencing an event is what makes an event real. Dowling and Cooney (2012:23) nicely summarized Husserl’s concepts when stating “Husserl said the world could only be known through people’s thoughts and that there is no real existence outside the mind.” Husserl also argued that phenomenology was based purely on description, and not explanation, in order to get to the true meaning of an experience (Hailu et al. 2012). In order to completely disconnect from their previous assumptions and accurately describe these experiences, a researcher needed to use the technique of ‘phenomenological reduction’. Husserl called the point of disconnection ‘phenomenological epoché’ (Desjarlais et al. 2012, Dowling and Cooney 2012). This is more commonly known as ‘bracketing’ which is a process of writing memos throughout analysis in order to set aside preexisting accepted realities and assumptions. The goal is to maintain an open mind while being aware of how developing ideas relate to any original hypotheses (Starks and Trinidad 2007). There is also an emphasis on being aware of context in interviews since contexts are complicated and as Slife and Christensen (2013: 231) have pointed out “meanings are so sensitive to context, and contexts can so

easily change.” Being aware of their own process allows a researcher to examine the data from different angles that could be otherwise easily overlooked.

Interpretive/Heideggerian Phenomenology

Husserl’s approach was a starting point for the study of lived experiences but many have disagreed with some of the theoretical concepts upon which Husserl based phenomenology. Those, dissatisfied with Husserl’s theory of finding objective truth within a descriptive process, have turned toward a more interpretive form of phenomenology. Heideggerian (or interpretive) phenomenology is an adaption of Husserl’s methods that also incorporates concepts from the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (one of Husserl’s students), hermeneutics, and later refinements of the theory by Hans-Georg Gadamer. While Husserlian phenomenology focuses on description, the Heideggerian approach attempts to understand experience. Heidegger dismissed bracketing because he believed that individuals can not remove their ‘pre-understandings’ (Dowling and Cooney 2012, McConnel-Henry et al. 2009). On the contrary, he believed that the researchers’ pre-existing notions grounded in their own experiences actually enhanced understanding (McConnel-Henry et al. 2009). In the Heideggerian approach the researcher attempts to understand a phenomena by describing how their respondents explain it. The primary difference between the two approaches is that a Husserlian emphasizes description of experiences while a Heideggerian emphasizes understanding them (Dowling and Cooney 2012).

Interpretive Phenomenology and Hermeneutics

Interpretive phenomenology also draws from hermeneutics and Gadamer’s interpretation of hermeneutics. Looking at Husserl from a hermeneutic perspective a

major issue is that the latter assumes there is no single truth to be found, contradicting an essential element of the phenomenological perspective. Hermeneutics rejects the argument that one can objectively know anything. A hermeneutic perspective focuses on interpretation as well as exploring the factors that limit an observer's interpretation. This is the area of interpretive phenomenology that Gadamer emphasized, arguing that no one can be a detached observer because the observer is *within* the context and, inevitably, in the meaning as well (Dowling and Cooney 2012, Jahnke 2012). Hermeneutic phenomenology involves the researcher attempting to be conscious of and limit their 'preunderstandings'. They attempt to understand but acknowledge that there is no such thing as an objective observer because their own values and concepts will be intertwined in their analysis (Jahnke 2012, Slife and Christensen 2013).

Critical Interpretive Phenomenology

Heidegger argued that some values and perceived realities can be helpful in understanding how people internally interpret a phenomena (Willen 2007). This perspective forms the basis of critical phenomenology; a specialized form of interpretive phenomenology which incorporates critical hermeneutics. A blending of critical theory with phenomenological methodology, critical phenomenology draws attention to experiences that are created by political and economic inequalities (Miner-Romanoff 2012, Willen 2007). Societal definitions and norms are generated by privileged classes and it is thus significant to be aware of historical context and the under privileged perspectives (Miner-Romanoff 2012, Thompson 1981). My respondents lives are positioned in various forms of structural inequality and have individual and collective experiences related to their positions in society (Willens 2007). Interpretive

phenomenology is an excellent methodology for humanizing its subjects. Because of this, it is also well matched with studies that look at groups navigating through political and social inequalities. Consequently, critical phenomenology is important because it pulls the researcher's attention toward codes related to the subject's positions in their societies.

Data Collection

Phenomenology as a methodology is rather unique compared to other qualitative methods used in social sciences because it allows flexibility in sample sizes. For example, Jackson (2008) did a very moving and informative phenomenological study based on his ethnographic fieldwork among migrants from Sierra Leon in which he used data from only one informant. His respondent provided enough detailed accounts that Jackson was able to describe intimate features of the migrant's past experiences. Sample size for phenomenological studies is typically small, ranging from one to ten participants (Starks and Trinidad 2007). This method's significance is in its quality rather than quantity.

As for this study, it was my goal to have a sample size of eight to ten participants. To recruit participants I reached out to ex-coworkers, friends, and acquaintances and asked them to introduce me to potential participants. Some of these acquaintances would simply give me a person's name and phone number while others would ask me to meet them at a specific time and location to introduce me to a prospective participant. The original recruiting demographics involved young and single males, but recruiting them turned out to be rather difficult. Most of the younger men I attempted to contact were either actually from Central America, did not return my calls, or stated they did not feel

they were permanently settled in the United States. Because of this initial experience the recruitment demographics for the study were altered to individuals that: 1) did not currently work at the same restaurants as I had previously worked; 2) would be willing to participate; 3) were male; 4) between 25 and 45 years of age; 5) born and raised in Mexico; 6) permanently settled in the United States; 7) had a family with them in the United States; 8) spoke some English. With this new demographic profile I was able to recruit eight research subjects, five of whom are included in this study.

Data collection methods of phenomenological studies include structured interviews, participant observation, and direct observations but semi-structured interviews are most common. I used semi-structured interviews in this study because they provide more data than observational methods for phenomenological questions. This is because they are specifically “designed to elicit information on the experiences and feelings of the participants” (Hailu et al. 2012: 10). In addition, a semi-structured interview creates a guideline for when interviews go off topic while allowing room to explore unexpected and intriguing areas. Initially eight men agreed to participate in the study but for various reasons the sample size decreased to five. The first two participants were not included due to a lack of detailed information. For example, the second respondent to be removed had stated he would not be able to participate in a second interview and his first interview had been cut short due to time constraints. I believe his two jobs made participating difficult. Another individual completed two full interviews but I decided to remove his data from the study for two reasons. First, I do not feel his interviews provided thick descriptions of his experiences. Secondly, I believe his responses were such because he was uncomfortable participating in the study and

speaking with me. I believe this is partially my own doing as his first interview was the first of the study and his second interview was the fourth. The other interviews of the study were more productive partially due to the fact that I became more comfortable with the process, better at probing, and realized which subject areas seemed to be most informative. This first respondent never clearly stated these feelings but after reviewing my notes and transcripts I suspected my inexperience had affected his responses.

Finally, the third respondent to be removed from the study was an enthusiastic participant that provided in depth accounts and reflections on his experiences. He was removed due to three interconnected reasons. First, while he did fall within the sought after demographic age of between 25 and 45 year old, the next youngest respondent was eight years older. Second, he had lived in the U.S. for five years while other participants had lived in the U.S. for at least fifteen years. Finally (and most importantly), he was the only participant that responded that he did not move to the U.S. due to financial reasons. Instead he moved his family to the United States because he was concerned for the safety of his family from the drug and human trafficking cartels. I initially found his experiences fascinating, but once I began developing themes it became clear how significant these three differences were. His age, length of time in the U.S., and reason for migrating made him too unrelated to the other participants. That being said, I sincerely believe that he represents a new and interesting change in immigration from Mexico in the 2010s. Migration driven by danger from the drug cartels is worth examining in a different study.

Provided below is the guide I used during interviews in this study. It included a short list of biographical information at the end asking for the respondent's age, marital

status, number of children, number of years in the United States, residence in cities other than Austin, and number of siblings. I included a few italicized notes for myself to keep the goals of the question in mind.

Interview Guide

*What were your expectations before coming to the United States?
-To more sympathetically understand the experiences once they arrived and how it affected their current lives*

How do you find life in the United States?

Tell me about your best experiences in the United States

Tell me about your worst experiences in the United States

Tell me about your thoughts on living in the U.S.

Tell me about family and friends you have in Mexico

*Tell me about being separated from _____
-If/how they keep in touch –how often they see them –emotional experiences*

*Tell me about any of your family members that live in the United States
-Include spouse and children*

Tell me about friends you have made in the U.S.

Tell me about your thoughts on living in (sending community) or Mexico in general?

Tell me about any future plans

What is important to know about your life as an immigrant in the United States?

All of the interviews lasted between an hour and two hours and all five participants were interviewed twice on separate occasions. All interviews were conducted in person and all but one took place in a parking lot either outside of their place of

employment or outside another public business that was conveniently located. One interview took place at a coffee shop but interestingly we ended up moving to the parking lot after an hour and continued for another hour sitting on the gravel ground. There were two reasons the interviews inevitably ended up in parking lots. First, all but one of the Guys asked me to conduct the interviews at their home but this was not approved by the Texas State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Instead, I would suggest meeting at a public park or outdoor coffee place but none of them seemed keen to these options. This was perhaps due to time and financial constraints, legal concerns, or personal discomfort. Secondly, one respondent found it convenient to have the interviews take place near his work so he could participate during his break and still work a double shift. While two others requested I meet them outside their work immediately following the completion of their shift.

Each interview was recorded and then transcribed. While the majority of the interviews were conducted in English, some parts veered back and forth between English and Spanish. The sections of the interviews that were primarily in Spanish I translated and transcribed. Additionally, one of the respondent's spouses volunteered to assist in translating. I provided her with transcriptions (with identifying information removed) that she transcribed as well. I then compared both translated transcriptions to create a final copy in which to begin analysis.

Analysis

Phenomenological analysis is done through a careful process of coding segments of data (or statements) that reveal detailed experiences and how they were experienced.

These codes are then grouped into meaningful themes drawn from the data.

Phenomenological analysis becomes a repetitive inductive process that involves writing and rewriting until broader themes and meaningful subgroups of associated experiences are more clearly defined. This process is neither easy nor done on the first try. The coding process for this study took a little over a month. It was a cycle of lumping and splitting, stepping away from the process to concentrate on background literature, and returning a few days later to reorganize or create new codes. The analysis process was completed once I returned satisfied with the previous round of recoding.

The methodology for this study was oriented toward interpretive phenomenology. I did not reject bracketing (like Heidegger) but approached bracketing as a useful coding and interview development tool. After each of my interviews I would write field notes for myself but include mini “journal entries” about things I had thought of, was curious about, or expected to happen. I used these entries to first help me figure out what subject matters to explore in the second interviews and read while coding to get a glimpse of my mental state at the time of the interviews. Another bracketing technique I used was writing handwritten memos on printed copies of the transcripts. Transcribing required listening to the interviews multiple times which allowed me to think about the different ways statements can be interpreted. These memos were primarily self-reflections drawn from my earlier entries combined with the ongoing coding process. I found that bracketing was a useful tool to self-critique but I reject Husserl’s goal of a “phenomenological epoché”. My interpretive phenomenological approach more closely followed Gadamer’s ideas of acknowledging that being a detached observer is impossible but attempted to limit my effects on the results via bracketing.

The final product of any phenomenological study should be rich in description, informative, and interesting (Desjarlais and Throop 2011). Most phenomenological studies attempt to invoke an emotional reaction in order to “allow the reader to get a feel for what it is like to have the experience.” (Starks and Trinidad 2007:1376-1377) Life as it is lived is difficult to express but phenomenological methodology provides a way to make something complicated approachable. Much like my theoretical perspectives, I have applied a blended approach to my methodology that incorporates Husserl’s focus on understanding through direct description, Gadamer’s rejection of true objective observation, Heidegger’s acceptance of pre-understanding, and critical hermeneutics’ focus on the under privileged. Like many interdisciplinary approaches, phenomenology is restricted enough to guide a researcher to insightful material but is also flexible enough to allow one to explore information and acknowledge the method’s limitations. My analysis does not actually contain my respondents’ real truths, but I have confidence that my attempt to humanize and invoke understanding (even in myself) is genuine and therefore valid.

CHAPTER IV

ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

In 1940, the number of Mexican born immigrants in the United States was the lowest it has ever been (Borjas and Katz 2007). From 1940 to 1970 Mexico had gone through what has been referred to as the “Mexican Miracle.” This term refers to a time of expansion in the Mexican economy and corresponding urban, health, and education development (Gomberg-Muñoz 2011, Heigl 2010). The global economic and political changes that followed dramatically altered migration patterns between Mexico and the United States. This chapter covers the macro level processes that form the back drop for the Guys’ decision to come to the United States, their reasons for remaining, and the economic conditions that still affect their current lives.

Labor Demand

In 1942, the United States entered World War II and the country’s demand for unskilled labor rapidly increased, specifically in seasonal agriculture work in California. In response, the governments of the United States and Mexico agreed to develop the Bracero Program, which lasted until 1964. This program provided temporary work visas to 5 million Mexican workers and bused them to temporary low-wage jobs in order to fill the demand for season agricultural labor in the U.S. The Bracero Program had two key long term effects on immigration. First, the Bracero Program encouraged regular migration, in fact, it spurred a consistent *circulatory* migration between the United States and Mexico that lasted for decades. The circulatory migration was originally based on seasonality, encouraging multiple trips to earn extra income for workers and their

families (Gentsch and Massey 2011, Roberts et al. 1999). One reason for this is that many employers often urged their Bracero workers to recruit family and friends to come do seasonal work that would not be filtered through the Bracero Program (Gomberg-Muñoz 2011). Because the Bracero program only recruited healthy adult males, the second effect of the program on immigrants was that it created a habitual separation of these men from their families (Hernandez 2009). This separation is a substantial issue in Mexican migration studies and continues to be the reality for countless migrants in the United States. World War II—created by foreign global issues—created a large demand for workers in the U.S. and actively made efforts to increase migration from Mexico. The longevity of the Bracero Program and conditions that created it are the starting point of a long-term increase in Mexican migration (legal and not legal) into the U.S.

Economic Disparity

Mexico's Economy 1970-2000

Following the economic highs of the Mexican Miracle, Mexico's economy fell apart in the nineteen seventies, forming the extreme economic disparity between the Mexico and United States that exists today. In 1973 the members of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) created an oil embargo in defense against the growing influence of (predominately American and British) large oil companies. This spurred a global recession that spread throughout the mid-nineteen seventies. The Mexican economy had already begun to decline during the nineteen sixties and became more stratified as the middle class began to disappear (Gomberg-Muñoz 2011). Despite Mexico being an oil producing country, it had been a net oil importer from the mid-

nineteen sixties until the mid-nineteen seventies (Grayson 1988). The global recession took full hold of Mexico's economy by 1976 and reckless government spending during the presidency of Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970-1976) left the country in debt (Camín and Meyer 1993). Not only did Mexico face high oil prices from the embargo, but the recession lowered Western demand for imported goods which drove their export prices down (Kirkwood 2000). The Mexican economy was so terribly affected the government was forced to drop the value of the peso. In September of 1976 the peso's value dropped by over 50 percent in one week alone and there was rapid growth in the unemployment rate (Gomber-Muñoz 2011). These conditions made the discovery of a large Mexican oil reserve in 1976 appear to be the country's saving grace, since, at the time, the global price of oil was considerably high and rising. The peso's value quickly improved. Mexico began to be courted by various countries offering substantial loans for relatively long payment times and low interest rates. By 1982, President José López Portillo had been hosted by 18 different countries (Grayson 1988). Optimistic with their newly discovered safety net, the government borrowed large amounts of money from foreign countries and the IMF (International Monetary Fund) in order to sustain the economy, expand public spending, and to enlarge their oil production capacity (Cornelius and Martin 1993, Haber et al. 2008). These hopeful exchanges over looked the overvalued currency, stagnant agricultural sector, dependence on imported goods, mismanagement of public spending, and lack of skilled labor (Grayson 1988). The price of oil rose dramatically between 1976 and 1981 but suddenly the price went into free fall in 1982. By 1985 the price dropped to three times less than its value in 1981 (Kirkwood 2000). This forced the Mexican government to default on its loans and weakened the economy

so terribly that the real minimum wage dropped 47 percent (Massey et al. 2003). At its worst point, the Mexican peso dropped from 10 MXP/1USD to 2,300MXP/1USD and the poverty level eventually reached 60 percent (Gomberg-Muñoz 2011, Massey et al. 2003). The lack of jobs and low wages made individuals and families look to the regular seasonal work and economic stability in the U.S. Consequently, this economic collapse was the basis for the current economic disparity and migration issues that exist between the United States and Mexico today.

The terrible economic blows of the nineteen eighties convinced the Mexican government to adopt the neoliberal economic approaches being implemented in the United States during the Reagan and Clinton administrations. This had the result of furthering the economic gap between the United States and Mexico and further encouraging migration. The new approach made Mexico's leaders very supportive of the creation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994. However, the implementation of NAFTA had mixed results.

NAFTA resulted in creating two conditions that amplified the economic disparity and migration issues between Mexico and the U.S. Firstly, the passing of the trade agreement solidified Mexico's vulnerability to the global market. The Mexican government removed laws that blocked foreign ownership of Mexican companies and relaxed its trade regulations (Muggill 1999). The economy became focused on exportation of raw materials and manufactured goods based on Western demand. Foreign companies gained all the benefits since they took over the Mexican manufacturing sector and NAFTA removed Mexico's ability to regulate tariffs. These factors made the Mexican government lack any means of protecting the national economy from global

market fluctuations. Secondly, NAFTA created long term harm on Mexico's credit system. New regulations under NAFTA allowed foreign banks to buy Mexican commercial banks and establish new foreign owned ones (Haber and Masacchio 2013). Despite investing in Mexican national banks, foreign large banks did not trust in smaller scale investments and perpetuated the perception that Mexico held a "culture of non-repayment" (Mayer 2001:324). The 'Second Peso Crisis' was created when the peso was dramatically devalued due to the international financial communities' lack of confidence in the peso (Muggill 1999). Loans became difficult to obtain and interest rates that averaged 15 percent before NAFTA jumped to 130 percent after (Gomber-Muñoz 2011). In his first interview, "Daniel" stated that he owns a house that he started renting out after moving to the U.S. He allowed family members to keep the bulk of the rent money in exchange for maintaining it. Unfortunately, the last tenant left the house in such terrible condition he had to take out a loan in order to properly repair it. The interest rate on this loan is 40 percent and the bank expected payments to begin immediately after obtaining the loan. Daniel stated that this loan was one reason returning to Mexico was not an option since he has a better paying job in the U.S. Mexico's global economic vulnerability—which neoliberal economic policies has only made worse—has made the country's economic recovery difficult. Given these realities, the U.S. provides an enticing escape from low wages or crippling debt.

United States Economy 1990s and 2000s

The United States economy expanded a great deal over the following two decades, increasing the country's already wide economic disparity with Mexico. Coming out of the nineteen eighties and into the start of the nineteen nineties the United States

was in the beginnings of its rapid recovery from the global recession created by the oil industry. Besides a general expansion in global trading in the nineteen nineties, NAFTA overall worked in the United States economy's favor, unlike its effects in Mexico. The economic expansion in the United States was due in part to the availability of cheap labor in Mexico. American corporations not only moved businesses in to take advantage of the cheaper labor, they also started recruiting inside Mexico in order to import low-wage workers back to the United States (Hernandez 2009). The nineteen nineties ended up being the longest period of economic expansion in United States history. By 1997 the United States' GNP was about eight times more than Mexico's (Massey et al. 2003, Roberts et al. 1999). Consequently, during the nineteen eighties and nineteen nineties, my respondents were growing up in rather poor areas in an economically weak country- next door to an economic powerhouse with a high demand for inexpensive labor.

Another reason the United States economy did so well during the nineteen nineties is due to technological advancements, especially in telecommunications. Austin, Texas in particular benefited from (what has been popularly called) the "Dot Com Boom." Technology based businesses began to pop up around Austin as early as the mid-nineteen eighties but really took off in the late nineteen nineties. It's estimated that between 1986 and 2001 around 40,000 tech-based companies either started (e.g. Dell and Texas Instruments) or moved (e.g. Motorola and Samsung) into the central Texas city (Striffler 2007). The Dot Com boom also created a large number of new jobs. These included white collar middle class work as well as jobs in construction, maintenance, and the service sector which drew Mexican migrants to Central Texas. In fact, all of my respondents arrived in Austin between 1990 and 1998. One of the Guys' first job in

Austin was in construction building a new facility for Samsung and another helped build the Freescale Semiconductor Ltd (Motorola) facility. Even when the Dot Com Boom ended up “busting”, the state’s economy was so strong that it weathered the 2008 recession better than most other states in the country. Between 2007 and 2012 the U.S. economy lost 3.3 million jobs but Texas gained about half a million (Orrenius et al. 2013). The comparatively low cost of living and growing amount of work in the service and construction sector in Austin, Texas made it a wise place for a new migrant to move.

End of Circulatory Migration and Worsened Conditions

Between 1984 and 2004 the United States passed several pieces of legislation in reaction to an increase in migration across the border. Massey et al. stated it best when they explained that there was a “rising hysteria about an alien invasion, and the perceived risk to national security posed by an uncontrolled border...” (2003:89). Over all, these new laws made the situation more complicated. They failed to decrease the number of Mexican immigrants and changed migration patterns. Before this time the dominant pattern of migration was circulatory, that is continual and short-term (often seasonal) movement of migrants between a host country and their country of origin. After the passage of the new immigration laws migration became more permanent.

The economic disparity between the United States and Mexico has always encouraged migration into the United State, but the passage of particular laws such as the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), also contributed to an increase in migration. The IRCA restricted employers from hiring undocumented migrants. It also funneled more resources to increasing border patrol and enforcement but, more

importantly, it allowed undocumented immigrants that could prove their residency after January 1st, 1982 to become naturalized (Massey et al. 2003, Richter et al. 2007). Consequently, of the 2.7 million undocumented immigrants who were able to obtain citizenship, Mexican born immigrants made up 85 percent (Orrenius et al. 2013). The goal of these measures was to considerably reduce the amount of migrants coming into the United States but it had quite the opposite effect (Hernandez 2009, Richter et al. 2007). Lawmakers did not consider that the vast majority of Mexican migrants in the U.S. were men with families in Mexico. Following the passing of the law, many migrants chose to permanently settle and begin the naturalization process. This was followed by immediate family members joining them and being able to sponsor other loved ones who wished to migrate (Roberts et al. 1999, Massey et al. 2003). IRCA, and other initiatives like it, ignored future affects and resulted in an unexpected increase in migration.

Throughout the nineteen nineties the United States passed federal and state laws that were conceived as a stronger assault against migration into the U.S. across the U.S.-Mexican border. However, the nineties actually saw an increase in permanent settlement of Mexicans in the United States (Brettell 2008). These laws included (but were not limited to) the Immigration Act in 1990, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) in 1996, and various state initiatives such as Operation Gatekeeper and Operation Hold-the-Line. These resulted in constant growth in the number of border agents, increased border surveillance technology, and building the now infamous border fence. They also created immigration caps that particularly discriminated against immigrant families who wished to cross together, and harsher punishments for violators (Massey et al. 2003, Zavella 2011). Perhaps more importantly,

the INS expedited deportation processes and began deporting immigrants without legal review (Gentsch and Massey 2011, Zavella 2011). Despite all of these measures, migration numbers from Mexico continued to increase. Of the 11.6 million Mexican immigrants currently living in the United States, 30.7 percent arrived during the nineteen nineties and 34.5 percent arrived in the two thousands (Grieco et al. 2010). An additional effect of the crackdown along the border was that these measures resulted in the movement of undocumented crossing locations into more remote and hazardous areas. Today, undocumented migrants risk suffocation in the back of trucks crossing the border, drowning, heat exhaustion, and death from exposure in the desert border counties of Texas, New Mexico and Arizona (Massey et al. 2003). There has been a 500 percent increase in deaths since 1994 from attempting to cross the border (Chacon and Davis 2006). Before these changes, immigrants did not have a strong incentive to settle in the United States since workers could easily cross the border for short stints during hard economic times. After these new laws and the militarization of the border, considering the economic difficulties people face in Mexico and the dangers crossing the border, it comes as little surprise that families would decide to settle in the United States.

On top of these measures, the U.S. also passed two other laws in 1996 that directly discriminated against *legal* immigrants and migrants that were already in the U.S. One example, is the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act which placed tight restrictions on the ability of legal immigrants to access means-based government benefits (Richter et al. 2007). Additionally, the Anti-terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act made any foreign born individual (legal or not) in the U.S. that had ever committed a crime not only vulnerable to deportation but possibly subject to one year of

imprisonment as well (Zavella 2011, Genstch and Massey 2011). Similar stipulations were further expanded in the 2001 USA PATRIOT Act. These laws have failed in their goals to lower the numbers of undocumented immigrants but they have succeeded in making many suffer and even lose their lives and in making border crossing so hazardous, these laws have made it more likely that those who do cross the border stay in the US.

All three issues (U.S. labor demand, economic disparity, and end of circulatory migration) created significant changes for Mexican migrants. The three decades of economic instability in Mexico made making even a simple living extremely difficult, especially for the rural poor. In addition, the economic boom in the United State resulted in a significantly high demand for unskilled labor. However, the opinion of the majority of citizens and law makers in the United States did not want Mexican migrants entering the country but wished to have a substantial supply of low-wage labor meet their demand. The legal restrictions involved in legal immigration, and border security, were created to control this influx of migrants but it failed and has had unexpected consequences. These efforts have made it more dangerous for migrants to cross without documents and have increased permanent settlement of those that do cross. Considering the financial concerns, mobility limitations, and safety concerns, the choice to settle for migrants like my respondents is a logical choice. This means that Mexican migrants, in recent history, have been and are currently, coerced by their circumstances into becoming permanent settlers (Striffler 2007, Zavella 2011). Finally, these circumstances have actually worsened conditions for legal immigrants inside the United States. Legal Mexican immigrants were robbed of their rights in the passing of immigration laws, resulting in a

decrease of security from deportation and they have been denied government benefits that other documented foreign born individuals are able to enjoy.

In this chapter I have addressed some of the macro level conditions that have played significant roles in my participants' lives. These background circumstances have had influence over their living conditions, job availability, legal rights, and physical safety. I do not wish to over simplify their circumstances by depicting a closed image of them as pawns in the "global market game." However, the economic disparity (created by the global market) between the United States and Mexico is a driving factor and border regulations have played a part in the permanent settlement of Mexican immigrants like my respondents.

CHAPTER V

INTRODUCING THE GUYS

Provided below are brief introductions to each of the Guys in order by age. All of them (at the time of the interviews) worked as cooks in restaurants in Austin, Texas and had loved ones in both Mexico and the United States.

Martín: 33 years old. He is kind, thoughtful, and comfortable to talk to. He went to Houston, Texas from Guanajuato, Mexico in 1998 when he was 18 years old, and moved to Austin, Texas the following year. He has six siblings. All four of his brothers all came to the U.S. before him but his two sisters remained in Mexico. He lives with his wife and son in an apartment.

Bonito: 33 years old. Bonito is friendly, hilarious, and easy going. He also provided the most detailed and descriptive interviews. He came to Austin, Texas with his cousin from a small town a couple of hours away from Mexico City. He arrived in 1997 at the age of 17. He is the second youngest of 12 siblings and five of his brothers were in the U.S. before he arrived. Bonito and his wife have never been legally married but have been together since they were 18. They have two daughters and own a home in Austin. He originally stated he did not wish to pick a pseudonym for himself. Instead his wife picked it, stating she thought Bonito sounded attractive.

Roberto: 37 years old. Roberto is more serious than the other Guys, and gave me the impression that he was older than his age. His responses required the most probing, but he was kind and patient during the interviews. He came to California from Chihuahua, Mexico in 1992 when he was 16 and then moved to Austin in 1996. He is the third

youngest of eight brothers. While all but one of his brothers live in the U.S., all twenty of his nieces and nephews live in Mexico. He is married and has five children who live with him in Austin.

Jorge: 38 years old. Jorge is sharp and similar to Bonito in that he is quite funny. He was also very enthusiastic during the interviews. He moved to Austin from San Luis Potosi in 1995 when he was 18. Since moving to Austin, Jorge met his current wife and had three daughters. They all live in Austin together. He has two brothers and one sister that live in the U.S. and one brother who still lives in Mexico.

Daniel: 45 years old. Daniel has a very confident and pleasant personality. He is articulate and speaks English well. While he grew up in a low-income farming family, he is the only one of the Guys that did not come from a very impoverished background. He also had the highest level of education having obtained a high school degree and taken two years of college courses. Daniel moved to California in 1985 for five years when he was 17. He moved back to Mexico in 1990, but then moved to Austin in 1997. He has seven brothers (three in the U.S.) and three sisters. He owns a house in Mexico but lives with his wife and daughter in the U.S.

CHAPTER VI

TRANSFORMATION

I said “I go to go.” And then my sister...everybody started crying. Oh my God! I remember my sister crying and hugging me. She told me “You don’t have to go! You don’t want to go! You don’t have to go!” (*Bonito begins to tear up and takes a deep breath*) Oh my ... I was like “Don’t make it hard. Just let me go” And my mom was smoking one after another. God... I said “I got to leave.” My cousin brought me to the city. Right after I got on the bus, they put on this Mexican song, that group is Maná. He sings a song like “I’m leaving from the town, don’t know if I’m going to come back or not. I’m leaving I’m packing all my stuff ...Memories.” And they put that song on the bus! I was crying and crying on the bus. I was like “I want to get out of this bus!” You know? But I was like (*Mimicking convincing himself*) “No...I got to go, got to go, got to go.” Right now I am 33, I was about 17. I was not 18 yet because like I said I couldn’t buy cigarettes but gosh ...I had a girl-friend at that time. “Man! I’m leaving my girl-friend” but I was not really worried about that. I was thinking about my mom, seeing my mom crying again because another son’s leaving. I told her “I’m going to come back in two years.”

But Bonito never returned to his hometown. That was 16 years ago.

When Bonito decided to leave, he understood there was a sad severity to his situation but, like the rest of the Guys, he was unprepared for the changes ahead of him. Migrating into the United States can be traumatic. For any immigrant the personal

difficulty of leaving one's own home country cannot be overstated and these men all came to the United State between the young ages of 16 and 18 years old. All but one of them crossed the border without anyone they knew. In addition to the harsh and dangerous process of crossing the border, they left behind family, friends, and their personal comfort zones. These events were followed by facing disappointment and culture shock while maneuvering in a foreign location with limited financial and social assistance. Permanently moving over the U.S.-Mexico border can be a slow and long-term (if not permanent) transformative phenomenon, as it has been for the five men in this study. This chapter breaks down the experiences of these men into three phases: leaving their home communities, crossing the U.S-Mexico border, and dealing with adjustment once on the other side. These sections will show how the men speak about their experiences and what was most significant to them.

Leaving: Divided Lives

I was surprised when all of the Guys were openly willing to discuss their experiences leaving their home communities, but it became obvious that this was the starting point for a major change in their lives. Chavez (1991:258) has similarly noted “crossing the border is a territorial passage that marks the transition from one way of life to another way of life. No matter how similar or familiar it may be, life in the United States is different from the life migrants leave behind.” Mendoza (2006) has also pointed out that the experiences of places, such as the border, can play a significant role in individual identity. "I want to say this...because everything changed after. It was the beginning of *this life*" (*Jorge*). In this quote, Jorge suggests that he has divided his life

into two parts. When he refers to "this life" in the U.S., we must infer that there was a "that life" in Mexico. Jorge was not alone in this way of thinking. In fact, all of my respondents appeared to divide their lives this way: pre and post crossing. "Life here is different. It is (pause) separate, I don't know how else to say (it)." (Roberto) The phrases "my life there" and "my life here" were stated multiple times throughout the interviews. These short phrases aid in revealing that the physical border is a line that has physically and mentally divided these men's lives and is represented in how they discuss their lives in general.

For many young Mexican men, crossing the border holds such importance as a life transition that it has often been considered a form of rite of passage. Rites of passage are ceremonies that entail transitioning from one status in life to another, such as from child to adult, and includes a liminal stage where the initiates are often removed from the wider society, and a final stage where they are reincorporated into society (van Gennep 1909). The portion of the Guys' interviews on coming to the U.S. reflected this notion of crossing the border as a rite of passage. Martín swore to his mother that he would never follow his older brothers' foot steps but eventually made the hard choice to leave. "I did not like it there but I did not want to go. But I had to; for me as a man." After Daniel answered why he decided to come to the United States, he paused for a few seconds and added, "(It was) time to be a man." Jorge stated, "I keep telling my little brother to not come. He wants to come. I understand. You feel like you have to." These quotes reveal how these men felt pressure to cross the border once they reached a certain age. They attached coming to work in the United States with male adulthood and felt going to the United States was an inevitable event.

Scholars have associated rites of passage with “cultures of migration” all around the world. Such as Cohen and Sirkeci (2011) on Turkish migrants in Germany. Monsutti (2007) on young Afghans to Iran and Aguilar (1999) on Filipino migrants to Japan. This is because global economic disparities make movement of labor inevitable which causes continual migration patterns. Additionally, individuals that are from poorer areas and are just maturing into adulthood may face limited life trajectory options in their home communities, are less likely to have children to immediately care for, and are more physically capable to endure low-wage manual labor (Azaola 2012). All of these factors create conditions that would naturally lend themselves to rites of passage.

Crossing

The Guys crossed the border at a significant time in history. The border became much more difficult and dangerous between 1990 and 2010. All of my respondents came to the United States between 1990 and 1999 and have not returned partially because of this change. For example, the U.S. Border Patrol budget, compared to 1990, had more than quadrupled to over a million dollars by the year 2000 (U.S. Customs and Border Protection 2013). The Mexican Migration Project at Princeton estimated that in 2000 around 500,000 Mexican citizens crossed into the United States, 39 percent were documented, 21 percent had temporary work visas and 40 percent were undocumented. In 2008, the same project estimated that 560,000 Mexicans crossed the border, 34 percent were documented, 65 percent had temporary work visas and 1 percent were undocumented (Gentsch and Massey 2011). This drop in undocumented crossing illustrated how perilous the journey became which resulted in coyotes rising their prices

significantly and more individuals applying for temporary visas (Massey et al. 2002). Unfortunately, temporary work visas became more difficult to obtain with number caps, demographic priorities that favor those with degrees, and higher financial costs (Gomberg-Muñoz 2010, U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services). Crossing had become a daunting process for all Mexican migrants. This also made returning to Mexico more risky, since one's ability to return to the U.S. was much more difficult.

On the first page of the first draft of my codes, scribbled length side in large letters, I had written the word "*DEATH*." A code that quickly jumped out to me in all of the interviews about crossing the border. The Guys expressed that when a family member was leaving to migrate to the U.S. they were mourned "like they were dying" (Daniel). It is not hard to understand the literal association with death due to the dangers of crossing. Over 300 deceased border crossers are found in the United States every year who, more often than not, succumbed to dehydration, hypothermia, or drowning (U.S. Customs and Border Protection 2013). My respondents and their families are familiar with these dangers. "My mom went to the church. My mom is really close to God, you know, so she went to talk to God to ask if her sons are alive or if they are dead. If they never made it here. If they passed away along the way." (Bonito) But it is also important to understand that the association with dying is also a metaphorical death. "Every time one of my brothers came here we all cried. Like...Like if he was going to be dead because you don't know if he will return, like back to Mexico. Because you don't know if he will be the same if he returns!" (Martín) As Martín expresses in his quote—similar to Jorge's distinctly divided life—his family recognized the life changing significance of migrating crossing the border.

Crossing into the United States is particularly traumatic and dangerous for those without documents. Daniel, Bonito, Jorge, and Roberto all told of having at least one experience braving the cross without papers. Roberto down played the difficulty of his crossing despite crossing at the age of 16 without friends or family and facing overheating, dehydration, and exhaustion in the desert. "The first time when I came here I just had to cross the river and walk like maybe... maybe, well like all day...and part of night. It's dangerous but I didn't see anything dangerous like snakes or anything. It was cold but that's it." Bonito's first crossing was with his cousin but they were quickly noticed by border patrol agents and chased right back across the river. They immediately made a second attempt.

We walked there for like two miles maybe. Under the storm drains... My cousin was really scared. I was like "Nothing's going to happen man, nothing's going to happen" I was just playing with him then. Did you ever see the cartoon with the tortugas? They have Donatello...and uh. (*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles?*) Yeah. "You ever see those guys man?! Where are those guys?! They're going to come find us!" (laughs) "Don't worry, nothing's going to happen" ...(Bonito's face becomes serious) All the things we got to do to get here (shakes his head) It's a lot. I said nothing but I was scared.

Jorge had a harder time telling his undocumented crossing experience than the rest of the Guys.

I got into a train (Jorge's face begins to flush and eyes water. Recollects his composure) I'm sorry...I got into the train but it was *freezing*...

freezing. I had no...I only had my t-shirt and it got wet. I got wet, my shoes got wet. It was freezing and there was ...Its three or four hours to Mexico from here but on the train, they stop the train like every ten minutes! And they look in every one of those boxes. I had a lighter and my foot was freezing already. I got my lighter trying to heat my foot a little bit. And the coyote is like "Hey! Who's got the lighter!? Turn it off! Somebody's going to see us!" They don't want to see a little light because the immigration there is looking for that. If you see a little light, might be somebody there. (Mimicking security guards) "Let's go see." I was miserable on that trip and my toe is (still) not right.

Jorge still finds it difficult to reflect upon his crossing experience. When I reminded him that he did not need to tell me anything; to only tell me what he was comfortable with, he replied, "I did not talk about it for like...I don't know, like, for (quite) some time. I couldn't. But I can now." Martín did not provide much detail on his crossing experience—despite speaking at length about leaving Mexico and arriving in the U.S.—but did state that for migrants “you don't forget. It's hard. You may get lost, you don't know if you can trust the people with you. You could walk for...days.” Crossing without documents required the Guys to put their lives in strangers' hands, face fear, and expose themselves to harsh environments; all without much certainty of success. These men talked at length about crossing because it is a life changing phenomenon. It is traumatic and unforgettable.

Those that cross with visas do not face the same trials as those that use coyotes, or other "unofficial" means, to cross, but it should not be forgotten that crossing with documents can still be an emotionally difficult experience. "Yes, the first time (crossing without documentation) was harder, but I cried the second time (with documents.) I did not the first (because) I thought I would go back after one or two years. The other one, I wasn't sure I would be back. I said 'good bye' to mom, dad, and brothers and sisters. To my wife's family." Even though Daniel made the crossing legally, he was still leaving behind his loved ones. He had not been to the United States for seven years and moved to Texas, despite never having been there before. He knew it would be difficult to visit his family and for them to visit him. Daniel expressed that the time he crossed undocumented was something he "got through" but referred to the second time as something he "deals" with. Jorge similarly stated, "My sister's family got the papers. They did not want to be around that (drug violence.) My niece is happy here but my sister misses it. She doesn't like it....Maybe she feel like it's too different. Her husband said 'we go there'. Maybe she feel she had no choice. She did not want to come before. When I met them at the place (their brother's house) he said she cried like the whole time (crossing.)" Even though they did not have to endure the physical difficulties of crossing without documents, Jorge's sister and Daniel faced fear, separation, and uncertainty crossing the border

The Guys' stories are poignant because they include overcoming fear, uncertainty, exhaustion, cold, heat, and more. All of the Guys spent the majority

of their first interviews discussing their 'crossing stories' because they were life changing. Unfortunately these experiences are not rare or exceptional. They are the norm. "I guess it's the same story everybody tells you...All my brothers, we all stay here now. There's no easy- NOW there's no easy way to go back there and have a life with family already."(Martín) The families of border-crossers have loved ones that may actually die or be gone indefinitely. Their personal identity may be changed by crossing. These are the prices that families pay for a chance for individuals to improve their own or their loved ones lives.

Expectations and Adjustment

Once the Guys had reached their respective destinations, their experiences contrasted with their expectations of what their lives would be like in the United States. When they were each asked to discuss what they thought life would be like once they migrated, they all answered in one (or both) of two ways. The first answer is summed up in Jorge's two word response, "easy money." "Like you could pick up money from the streets or something like that." (Martín) Daniel answered similarly when he said "nice, busy....like money will be everywhere." Roberto stated that he thought it "Would be like...like the American dream...like when you have like a sweet dream. You can get anything, you can help your family. You can get enough money to buy things. All the sweet and good things."

Three of the Guys mentioned that this expectation partially originated from knowing others that worked and lived in the United States. A visit from Bonito's brother impacted his perception of living in the United States. "My brother was dating an

American girl, speaking good English, and had good clothes... You'd be like, 'Oh my God!' You know, like we want to show people what we have. Like show off. It's stupid but I thought my brother had a lot of money." Jorge spoke excitedly about the status that more expensive items obtained by working in the U.S. provided. "People used to come here (United States) to work for two years and come back with *the car!* Oh *the car!* They were *driving* a *car* around, listening to music and everything. I just thought 'Wow America!' " Martín expressed that others in his home community shared similar ideas framed around a rare visit from a much older brother, "We were watching him and was like 'Look! This man coming from U.S.A. Another country!' It was exciting. You didn't see that a lot. My mom was the only one with family here (in the U.S) in the town. Everybody thought we had money. 'You guys have money! You have brothers living up there.'"

These expectations are understandable considering the poverty they originated from. By comparison, loved ones in the U.S. were wealthy, just not necessarily as wealthy as they appeared. The mental image of life in the U.S., which guaranteed an easier way of making a living wage than in their home communities, helped create the fortitude the Guys used to uproot themselves and start over in the U.S. It seemed that all they needed to do was make the journey.

The second expectation that all of the Guys, except Daniel on his second trip, stated was their move was going to be a temporary one. The Guys believed that their trips would only last a few years at most. They planned to return with saved money to improve their families' and their own lives, just as they had seen others do for years before them. Martín's response was more personal, "Like I said, I *saw* my mom crying for all my

brothers for coming. I *always* told my mom ' Mom I am never going to leave' (His voice quivers) 'never going to go.'" Martín then looked me in the eyes with a stern seriousness as if trying to convince me to believe him, "I was going to go back." Besides thinking about what they were leaving behind, my respondents thought it would be relatively easy to find a decent paying job, live cheap, save money, and return home after a few years. "I thought, get the job, work, save, help the family, go back. No problem. It wasn't like that." (Roberto) Only the first part of this plan came to fruition. They had not previously accounted for the increased physical and financial difficulties entailed with getting back over the border, nor the complications they would face once on the other side.

Initially the Guy's each were impressed by the obvious economic advantage that the United States has. Bonito spoke about how he "felt tricked" when he first arrived. "You come here and you don't see *anybody* poor. You think 'there is no poor people here.' The streets...everything is different. Now I understand, now I see it. You know but back then I thought 'Oh my god every body's rich!" "It's very very different. I don't know how else to say it. Over there you don't have all the things like here." (Daniel) Jorge also said he initially was distracted by the difference. "At first it was exciting. It is very different. I wanted to know everything about America! It was so exciting and new! But then, after that time (the first two months), we worked.. a lot." Roberto simply stated, "My first thought was what a lovely place...Yeah that is right, but then it was hard." Their initial feelings of being impressed were soon dwindled by the reality that "easy money" does not exist for Mexican immigrants from humble backgrounds. Improved pay compared to Mexico? Yes, it could be found, but it was certainly not easy.

Any initial down time to explore their new location was quickly replaced by the need for paid work. Because the economy in Austin was growing so rapidly in the nineteen nineties, all the Guys stated it took little effort to find work once they arrived but it was limited between construction and restaurants. Both jobs involve hard physical labor and enduring extreme heat for many hours. Bonito was able to get a job, via a contact his brother knew, as a subcontract construction worker building the Samsung Austin facility. "That was a hard job. It was hot and we worked every day but it was work." Martín similarly got a job building the Freescale Semiconductor (a branch of Motorola) facility in 1999. The rest of the Guys found "back of house" restaurant jobs. Roberto, at the time of our interview, had worked for the same restaurant he started at when he first arrived in Austin in 1996. Roberto, Jorge, and Daniel all found jobs as dishwashers and worked their way up. "Dishwashers can be kept late. The first one (restaurant I worked at in Austin) would close at midnight but we would leave at about two. (*"In the morning?"*) Yes and I would burn my hands a lot that first month too." (Jorge) "First, (I) was a dishwasher at a restaurant and after that I became a line cook. Then I became a head chef. I always worked in the restaurants, even in Mexico. It is hard work but I knew what I was doing." (Daniel) The physically demanding work and average 12 hour shifts six (often seven) days a week made America lose its exciting charm rather quickly.

Their new daily jobs and culture shock emotionally wore down on the Guys. All of them spoke of having a strong desire to return and suffering from extreme homesickness in the first six months. The Guys said initially their lives were "depressing", "boring", and "confusing". Bonito and Jorge stated their homesickness was

partially due to their living situations. Bonito had someone arrange him a place to stay which ended up being a two room apartment with six other migrant workers. “It was tiny. I used to sleep on the carpet. There was no bed there. They didn’t have AC working. I would sleep over there by the window with a big fan. It was hot and sad there. I was hot and sad.” Jorge moved into a small house his two brothers were renting. He stated the living situation was “weird. Not comfortable. I had not seen them in years. It was...there was...It was small. They were good to me for that but it was not home. It was better when I moved out.” The Guys were also unsure where to go, what to do, and had limited mobility. They primarily worked and stayed home. “You didn’t like it because you come from a town, for me, where you could go everywhere. Do whatever I want! Meet with all my friends. With all the people! Talk with everybody.” (Martín) Jorge similarly stated, “its not scary...it’s like, you don't like anything. No freedom.”

A primary reason the men were so homesick was that they were socially and culturally isolated. Daniel and Bonito both mentioned a lack of social networks and became conscious of their minority status. “I don’t know maybe now it’s different because now there are a lot of Spanish people here. But back then, when I came here (*stops mid-sentence*) well there *was* a lot of Spanish people but not like now.” (Bonito) “Spanish people are everywhere now, but it was hard to find community (then).” (Daniel) This was made harder because the Guys did not speak the language initially. Learning a new language is very difficult and if someone does not plan to stay in the U.S. for very long there is little reason for them to learn English (Gomberg-Muñoz 2011). Roberto mentioned suffering from nightmares the first six months and Bonito said he suffered from the opposite. “I was having good dreams. Like I was back there with my family and

friends. And I was with my family and I was with mom and sister. It was nice. NICE!
And then I woke up. It made it worse.”

Eventually the Guys became more acclimated to their surroundings once they became used to their new country and began making friends. Daniel, Martín, and Jorge told me about others who told them they had had similar experiences but attempted to comfort the guys by explaining that time would get them past their homesickness. "They said it happened to them but you can't listen. You miss everything! You want to go back! But they were right." (Martín) "Once I knew more people. They'd come pick me up and take me to the store or to play soccer. Go to the park. You're going to forget, you're going to like it here." (Jorge)

Immigrating to the United States caused a divide in these men's lives. This divide occurred in phases. There is a distinct "before" and "after" for them but there is a middle phase. The divide began when they decided they had a personal responsibility to leave and to take steps toward adulthood. A phase in between "before" and "after" began the second they left their home communities. They arrived with the experiences of cold, heat, fear, and other difficult conditions. Once they arrived, they faced even more trials of homesickness and culture shock. This journey is so life changing and difficult that it is associated with death, literal and metaphorical. It has transformed the Guys' lives into a new and, perhaps, permanent life. The next chapter will fast forward fifteen plus years to explore the experiences of their lives at the time of the interviews. To examine their experiences in the structural, financial, and personal conditions on the other side of the border which led to the Guys—despite not initially planning to—settling in the United States.

CHAPTER VII

SUSPENSION

The primary goal of this study was to understand what it is like to live within a border zone that has real physical and emotional ramifications. Because these men crossed the border, they have been able to obtain better paying jobs, help their families in Mexico, and start new families in the U.S. But they also have to experience being separated from their loved ones, various forms of discrimination, and limited job options. Mexican migrants' lives are complex but (like everyone) they make the best choices out of conflicting circumstances. This chapter covers the areas of the Guys' current lives that make their permanent settlement in the United States an uneasy one. A "permanent settlement" that is not actually settled.

Why Leave?

The idea of the 'American dream' waiting with open arms can be unrealistic for low income Mexican migrants. The dangerous and heavily restricted border, the dehumanizing rhetoric on Mexican immigrants, the lives and people they leave behind, and low-wage physically demanding labor all play a part in separating dream from reality. The Guys have all lived in the United States for at least 15 years but they still have parts of their lives that do not make settling an easy decision. This portion discusses the negative experiences the Guys have had in the past (and still do) as Mexican immigrants in the U.S.

The Guys identified physical separation (particularly from parents) as the most common negative experiences of living as an immigrant in the United States. For example, Daniel's parents are aged and have a hard time traveling, and he was able to visit only once every couple of years. He stated "sometimes it's too hard. You miss them a lot. I missed my father the most...And right now I think about it and it is very hard. They did so much for my brothers and sisters, for us." "I didn't see my mom and dad for like eight years because I came here and sent the money but they couldn't come here before that. I came here and never went back but I missed them every day." (Jorge) Roberto spoke about keeping in contact with his parents. "I do not talk to them much. Only one or two weeks. (*Once a week or two?*) Yeah. Like that. I call, but my brother, he calls almost every day." Martín described the time he helped send his mom and sister money to purchase a home phone. "It was so good to hear them! We talked and talked. Now we talk all the time but when they got the phone. Oh that was, that was good." The Guys work hard to maintain their relationships with loved ones via phone, letters, email, and Facebook but they cannot make up for the physical separation. Countless other immigrants and their families have to deal with this sad discomfort every day.

An emotional disconnection between family members who were once close can also be the result of their physical separation. Jorge spoke about being reunited after many years with his older brother once he had arrived in Texas. "It was really weird. It was like somebody that I had never met before. With my older brother it is still kind of the same because we never really had time together after so long." Similarly, Martín spoke about the brother with whom he was the closest until he left for the border. Martín slept on the couch to say goodbye to his brother before he left in the morning. "I didn't

hear anything! When I woke up I was like “Oh no!” I was crying because I was looking for him. That was it. I didn’t see him for like three years after. He came back but (he) was this ‘American guy’ I didn't know. I was thirteen or fourteen when he went and when he came back I was almost seventeen or something.”

Roberto, Bonito, and Daniel claimed that the worst part of their families' separation was the constant worry of family emergencies. Bonito wondered, "What if something happens? I can't drop all the things and go. Maybe my wife could but I can't." Similarly Daniel commented, "My parents are not young. I worry a lot. I worry about getting a bad (phone) call. What would I do? I don’t know what I *could* do." Their concerns were very real as, at the time of his second interview, Roberto's mother was gravely ill but he could not afford to go back to see his mom. Furthermore, his father was in desperate need of financial assistance for her medical care. The Guys deeply regretted that this separation from their family members in Mexico limited their ability to be supportive during family emergencies.

Another negative area of their lives as Mexican immigrants was the discrimination the Guys and their immediate families have had to face. Roberto and Daniel both mentioned the predominately negative portrayal of Mexican immigrants in American popular media. Mexican immigrants in the United States are often lumped together in the "illegal alien" stereotype. This stereotype is usually a one-dimensional approach that associates them "as lawless, unclean, uneducated, and threatening interlopers who paradoxically steal jobs and leech public assistance" (Gomber- Munoz 2011: 106). Jorge and Roberto both stated that they felt U.S. citizens see them as stealing jobs. “Some people think we steal all these jobs. They say it to me before. It’s stupid.

They want the work? They can (have it.) I did not take it from anyone.” (Jorge) Daniel addressed his frustration with main stream media by saying, "I have dual citizenship. I see myself as American *and* Mexican but the people (in the U.S.) don't see me like that. You know why? Read the news, on the radio." The discrimination the Guys faced is largely due to a negative stereotype that dehumanizes them and socially segregates them.

The final part of the Guys' lives that they felt was difficult in the U.S. was their jobs, especially their long work weeks. Bonito, Jorge, and Martín all have full time jobs with a second part time job. Roberto and Daniel stated that that they have also previously done the same. Long working hours are rather common in Mexico. As of 2013, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development annual report listed Mexico as the country with the highest average annual work hours at 2,237, out of 37 industrial countries, including the United States (annual average of 1,788). Bonito, at the time of our interviews, was a plumber Monday through Friday and worked at a restaurant Friday through Sunday. He stated, "I used to work like so much...well I come here and I'm *still* working that much." Perhaps ironically, Jorge and Martín both referred to the idea of going to Mexico as a place to rest. "I don't think I'll go back (but) I think going back would be nice. To rest, to not worry, to (closes eyes, smiles, and puts his hands behind his head.) To have a little money and to not work for a little time." (Jorge)

The Guys provided little detail on their day to day lives at their jobs, despite various attempts at probing. When I probed Martín and Bonito about their jobs they both said "well, you know", referring to my time working in restaurants. "You have seen. You know...It is small and (you can) not get in the way. Know how (and) where everything is all the time." (Roberto) I had seen the tiny kitchen that Roberto worked in. The walking

space he shared with three other cooks could not have been more than four feet wide and nor more than five yards long. “It’s the same (as other restaurants.) I don’t know. Work fast, don’t get in the way, help the people.” (Jorge) In my experience, line cooks have complicated, stressful, and fast paced jobs. They must remain on their toes during busy rushes. They manage the food order tickets, delegate tasks, and restock quickly as needed. They stand in, what can be, small spaces surrounded by extremely hot flatiron stoves, ovens, and—the most dangerous—fryers. They are physically demanding jobs that offer limited raises and lack any job security. All the Guys stated, similar to my experiences, line or prep cooks were expected to not take time off for illness and were never provided paid days off. While the Guys’ spoke about their jobs being difficult, they also did not seem to consider it important and, perhaps, not a good practice to complain about them either.

I believe the Guys did not wish to talk much about their daily lives at work because they did not see it as personally significant or part of their identity. Besides Daniel, they did not identify themselves and their lives with their work despite working around 70 hours a week. But Daniel is the exception because he had been a chef before coming to Austin. “I cooked in a nice hotel in Mexico and worked at real nice places in California. Like five stars.” The rest of the Guys saw their jobs as routine and mundane. Unlike Daniel, they started in restaurants due to circumstance, not by preference. “I finished the (contract construction) job. This guy I worked with told me to come in (to the restaurant) and ask about a job.” (Bonito) “My brothers worked in places before I came. Washing dishes, cooking, and like that. I thought ‘maybe I can do that.’ So I

walked to places and asked. Then one day they said ‘okay, come tomorrow (to work) and we’ll see. And that is how I started.’” (Roberto)

Mexican migrants commonly apply for restaurant jobs because restaurants are equal opportunity employers for migrants. Most restaurant back of house jobs are not based on legal status, do not require experience or an advanced education. All the Guys’—regardless of previous experience and legal status—started their current jobs as either dishwashers or minor prep cooks which start at the same general pay range. At their current positions, they made between nine and sixteen dollars an hour. Roberto and Jorge worked their way up to head line cooks which comes with more responsibilities but allows them higher pay and the ability to pick their schedules. They both prefer to work day shifts because the evenings are much busier at their respective restaurants and the hourly wage is the same between the day and night kitchen staff. Kitchen jobs allow everyone to start on the same playing field despite their backgrounds and are thus understandably appealing to Mexican immigrants.

I did not know it at the time I heard it, but Roberto, speaking with a sense of desperation and frustration in his voice, provided a response that ended up summing up in a few simple sentences the three major negatives themes that developed from the Guys’ interviews.

“Life in America is not as hard as there, but, like I said, it is very different.

The hard things here are not the hard things there. I am tired every day.

And... the people, (sighs) the people they think we come here and steal

the work. I work hard, I pay the taxes and bills! But they don’t know.

They don't know I miss my family! My mom (who is ill); I don't know if I will see her. I don't! That is what I want the people to know."

Why Stay?

Bonito and Roberto expressed that they felt a strong sense of responsibility to remain in the United States in order to better aid their family as a whole. The family-centered values of Mexican immigrants are often characterized by social scientists as *familismo*. Smith-Morris et al. (2012) have described familismo as a strong cultural value that includes an obligation on the individual to be responsible for all family members, an understood expectation of support from other members, and an importance of family in all major life decisions. Roberto provided regular remittances to family members in Mexico and when asked about his thoughts on life in Mexico, he stated, "It would not be right to live there. I am more helpful to my family (here). I would be ashamed." Bonito recounted a story from many years ago when he was an undocumented immigrant and sent money to his family regularly. He had been pulled over while driving on his way to visit his sister in another state.

They sent me to Mexico but I didn't have any money saved. But like I said, (back then) I helped my mom a lot. I couldn't save because I was sending money to there. Right as I got to the border I tried to make it back to Texas. I didn't want to see my mom. I was like, "Man, I don't want to go there without money." That was a mistake, a bad mistake, but instead I was like (claps hands and moves one hand like a rocket shooting off) I was like that. I couldn't face her...I hadn't seen her in two or three years maybe.

Furthermore, the Guys reported that starting a family while in the United States was the most important factor in deciding to permanently settle. All five respondents left Mexico as single young men and then began serious relationships and had children while in the United States. Immediate responsibilities and life goals are prone to change considerably once someone has children to care for. All the Guys stated that having their children receive a good education was a primary reason for staying in the United States. In 2008, less than a third of Mexican immigrants 25 years and older had a high school degree or higher (2011 Brick et al.). Daniel was the only respondent with a high school degree. After graduating, he came to the United States to save money for college. He returned to Mexico and went to college for two years before moving back to the United States. Bonito, Jorge, and Martín stopped going within their first two years of high school and Roberto was pulled out before starting seventh grade. All of them expressed the view that having their children graduate high school was a very important goal to them. Bonito stated he gained a real appreciation for an education and learning English from his older brother. At 17 years old he enrolled himself into an Austin high school twelve miles away from where he worked and lived.

He used to take me downtown and he was telling me “See! You are missing a lot! Look at all you are missing because you don’t speak English”... So I started going to school by myself. So went to ----- High School and I met my wife there. And I was there for like a year. And then I just stopped. I was too old already, it was embarrassing for me. And it was really hard for me to do all thehistory, read, writing. They put me

in hard classes. Like I work a lot already, but I don't want the same thing for my daughters, you know?

Roberto, Bonito, and Jorge stated they felt American culture valued education more and an education is required to succeed if someone were to remain in the U.S. Since all of the Guys' children were born in the U.S. they were eligible for school-funded programs, financial assistance, and lived walking or a bus-ride distance from public schools. They stated that these opportunities would be less likely and less easy to access in Mexico and thus a vital reason to stay.

Safety concerns for themselves and their families were another, more serious, factor that has kept the Guys from visiting or moving back to their communities of origin. It would be naive to think that Mexican immigrants in the United States are ignoring the fact that areas of Mexico have been hazardous and unstable for the last decade. Since the start of the Mexican Drug War in 2006, staying in the U.S. has been the safer option for some migrants. The war has been a scary tangle of the Mexican government versus the various drug cartels and the drug cartels fighting each other over territory. As of 2012, there were an estimated 47,500—likely closer to 100,000—murders in Mexico linked to the drug war (Morton 2012, Steinburg 2012). During the interviews, two of the Guys spoke about the dangers in their home communities. Roberto, for example, comes from the state of Chihuahua. A state that has suffered a great deal of bloodshed.

No I don't want to go back because the life over there is very hard. Right now there are the La Mafia. It's *right now*; they go around to the little towns where I lived. They take the people out of the houses, all the people go to other little counties near them. So you can't go back there because

they are going to look at the people who go from here to there (*Mexico*)
because they think we have lots of money and they are wrong.

Jorge's family is from the state of San Luis Potosi. It shares a border with two states whose civilian populations have arguably suffered the most during the Drug War at the hands of the Los Zetas drug cartel. "Girls disappear near there. My sister and her family came here because my nieces are getting older. *I* have two daughters. No, I could not go back. I would not know and I would worry all the time." The Mexican government has estimated—though the number often fluctuates—that more than 20,000 people went missing in Mexico between 2007 through 2012 (Castillo 2013). For individuals like Jorge and Roberto, the Drug War cannot be ignored as they know people they care about who have suffered greatly because of it. When they contemplate travel, they consciously take into account their own personal and family safety.

The Guys talked positively about obtaining better incomes and having access to a larger amount of commodities in the U.S., but expressed the higher cost of living with a family (despite being a negative aspect) was a major factor in their decision to stay. It costs more, day to day, to live in urban areas in the U.S. than in many areas of Mexico, especially with a family. As Mitlin and Satterthwaite (2013) have argued, the comprehensive real costs of non-food essentials for urban low income households is rarely thoroughly explored. These costs include transportation to and from work, rent, medicine and health services, cost of keeping children in school, fuel, water, and electricity. The guys could no longer cut down costs by living in small spaces with other men or family members once they started their own families. This means that daily costs were higher and they were less able to save money or send remittances. All the Guys,

except Roberto, stopped sending money regularly around the time they moved in with their significant other and had a child. “I think about it a lot and feel guilty. I helped my family (in Mexico) but now it’s (either) your sister over there (in Mexico) that you haven’t seen in a long time or something, *now, here* with your family that needs to be done, to be paid for. You know?” (Bonito) “Before I was married, I was saving money and helping my family (in Mexico.) There’s a lot of things about my family, where we spend the money...helping. It’s good to have a big family and sometimes...not. I have a kid, apartment, my wife, and the money is needed always someplace.” (Martín) While the Guys do make more money working in the U.S., their day-to-day costs have become more expensive trying to provide for their families. They all live paycheck to paycheck which is an ongoing cycle. Moving anywhere else would require a lot of saving and planning that they cannot afford.

Being Permanently Unsettled

The most significant aspect of my interviews was the Guy’s expressions of long-term uncertainty. I asked the Guys about any future plans or any goals, besides their children’s educations, during the interviews. This question seemed to be by far the most difficult for them to answer and was always met with long pauses. All the Guys either said they had none, were not sure, and Bonito answered by telling me about an older business idea him and his family used to have. But he specified “we used to talk about that. My brother was always talking big dream and things like that when he came here. That was five maybe six years (ago).” When asked to expand on their answers, their responses were vague. All Martín said was, “I guess it’s like I can’t.” Roberto said he

desired for his children to obtain good jobs once they were done with school but about the plans for himself he simply shrugged. In general, these men had been very forthcoming about very personal matters. However, when asked a question about the future, that I thought was simple, they only had ambiguous answers.

One form of future uncertainty was on plans to move in the future. Martín and Bonito were asked to talk about their thoughts on remaining in Austin or leaving. Both answers were vague but alluded to it as a temporary place. “I did not mean to be here for this (length of) time. I have been here, how long? (*15 years*) Hm. It’s not like my *home*. I don’t know how long I will be here.” (Martín) “It’s a place to live. I have the house but we might sell. It can be expensive. We have talked but (laughs) with my work I don’t have the time to think.” (Bonito) Mendoza (2006) noted similar findings in a mental mapping study on Mexican immigrants’ in Albuquerque. For example, “One respondent had lived there 20 years and yet always saw it as a temporary place” (Mendoza 2006:550) and another who was unsure how long they would remain but was not particularly concerned about plans for the future. Jorge, Martín, and Bonito all claimed that they felt they had “no options” to move. “I don’t save money like I used to. I have more bills, and kids, cars, house, and all that. And the situation changed here after 9/11 and stuff like that. And the economy there and here. I told my brother ‘Don’t do it. If you come here you’re going to be stuck like us’ I mean we’re not ‘stuck’ but that’s what it is like. Being stuck. No options.” (Jorge) “I have a kid, apartment, my wife, and the money is needed always someplace. Can’t save, can’t move. There is no options.” (Martín) It appears that, at least for Jorge, Bonito, and Martín, the Guys must maintain a fluidity on their concept of home and the question of their future locality.

These men (as Mexican immigrants) have a daily tug of war with their lives in the United States. Relationships, familiarity, and other forms of emotional investment make the idea of home a multi-layered one. The Guys are always separated from their loved ones in Mexico and face the negative effects it has on their relationships. They see “mainstream” society often portraying them as one-dimensional and controlling the discourse surrounding their presence that questions their motives and ethics. They work long hours in terribly hot environments that have little room or sympathy for illness, exhaustion, or family issues. These jobs pay for the ever constant bills and other family needs. But they also have a personal responsibility to their families to be in the United States. An initial responsibility to aid loved ones across the border but then new responsibilities when they started a family of their own. They have a responsibility to keep their families safe and to make sure their children receive good educations and better futures. Unfortunately, this juggling of personal and financial responsibilities make them unable to take claim to their own future paths. The Guys have suspended lives. I borrow this term from one of the four Mexican immigrant family formations Patricia Zavella (2011) identified, called Suspended Families. Zavella meant the phrase to refer to families who have to put off their goals of moving back to Mexico for long periods of time, even indefinitely. Similarly, due to the constant instability of their lives, the ability of the Guys to have long term goals, outside of their children's, have been suspended, indefinitely.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The Guys came to United States because of limited economic options and a sense of obligation. Economic reasons were at the center of their decisions. They chose to leave, to improve their own and their family's situation. However structural problems such as the vulnerable economy, lack of unemployment assistance, limited and crippling credit system and inadequate support for education encouraged them to leave. They were keenly aware of the availability of jobs and better pay in the United States from seeing others go before them. It perhaps seemed a moral responsibility to take the journey despite the uncertainty. From an individual and ethical perspective, the Guys felt they had few options.

Because the economic conditions that force migrants to leave their sending countries are so often created by their own government AND their receiving countries migration for economic reasons should be considered a form of forced migration and should be approached as such in U.S. and Mexico government policies (Golash-Boza & Menjívar 2012). The pattern of migration to the U.S. from Mexico has been an historical process starting during WWII. Which was followed by Mexican government mismanagement, the global oil crisis, the strong influence of the U.S. over foreign markets and the current demand for labor in the U.S. The economic disparity between both countries cannot be ignored. Mexican immigrants are not "leeches" as they have the highest labor participation percentage than any other group in the U.S. (foreign born or not.) There is a high demand for labor in the U.S. and a demand for fair wage work in Mexico and yet U.S. policies do not permit anywhere near enough visas to relieve this

situation. Instead, the U.S. has created a militarized border, dehumanized individuals who cross it, and increased expedited deportations. As of 2011 the U.S. Department of Homeland Security had deported a record breaking 396,906 individuals (Golash-Boza & Menjívar 2012). The Guys have had to accept and maneuver through the difficult environment these conflicting circumstances have created. They have had little choice. While perhaps cliché, there is truth in Marx's (1973[1852]) quote, "men make their own history, but not of their own free will; not under circumstances they themselves have chosen."

The U.S. government's ineffective measures to deter migration have increased its negative and life changing effect on individuals crossing the border. U.S. policies unknowingly ended circulatory migration and instead have inadvertently made temporary migrants permanent residents. Furthermore, a militarized border has forced those that cross without documents to face haunting, life threatening conditions. Strict policies have made visa and passport proceedings increasingly more expensive and difficult to obtain which only aids in separating loved ones for long durations or sometimes indefinitely. Crossing the border is now such a life-changing event that it has become a rite of passage which can divide lives indefinitely. The Guys live in a space between borders because their realities are physically divided.

Their divided lives force them to be in a constant state of negotiation and uncertainty. Despite many factors, their financial responsibilities end up being the top priority and final deciding factor for major life choices. My thesis question at the time of my proposal was, "What is the lived experience of living between borders?" but I now believe that "between borders" can be misleading. Between borders may suggest an even divide but

factors (especially economic necessity) make the physical and emotional push and pull uneven. It is an ongoing process that places financial need and family responsibilities weighing heavier than all other factors. The sacrifices that are required to make these decisions is what keeps their lives unsettled. They have little choice but to stay considering they are expected and have the ability to assist family and improve their conditions in Mexico, provide for their immediate family in the U.S. and make sure their children receive a better future. These men and women sacrifice a great deal including relationships, time off to relax or spend personal time with their families, even their physical wellbeing considering the dangers and difficulty of their jobs. But more than that, they also sacrifice the comforts of being certain of their own futures. Chavez (1991:272) stated this argument well when he said, “the term ‘settler’ does not necessarily translate as ‘permanent resident’.” They live in a border zone that makes them “stuck” and yet unable to settle. Their ‘forced transnationalism’ robs them of the ability to look forward to and plan their next objectives. Their children's futures are the only ones they have the luxury of considering. The Guys live day to day in a fluid state but choose to work hard, follow their sense of responsibility, and do the most of what they can in the immediate. It is admirable and deserves a great deal more respect than mainstream American society often gives.

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