

MIGRANT PATHWAYS: URBANIZATION AND TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION
IN TWENTIETH CENTURY MEXICO

by

RICHARD VELÁZQUEZ

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Student: Richard Velázquez

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This thesis has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the Department of History by:

Julie Weise	Chairperson
Marsha Weisiger	Member
Carlos Aguirre	Member

and

Scott L. Pratt	Dean of the Graduate School
----------------	-----------------------------

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

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THESIS ABSTRACT

Richard Velázquez

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Scholars of Mexican migration, both in the U.S. and in Mexico, have defined the Mexican migration by the transnational migration experience. While certainly an important aspect of Mexican migration, this narrow focus has overlooked an arguably more significant phenomenon for migratory communities in Mexico: rural to urban migration. Working primarily with the personal testimonies of people who have migrated to the United States has revealed that urbanization has played a major role in the lives of many transnational migrants, many of whom only resorted to international migration when their ability to migrate and work in Mexican cities was compromised. By looking at changes in Mexican migration over a century, it becomes clear that transnational migration only occurs *en masse* as a result of disruption. For rural Mexicans, this disruption came in the form of private labor recruitment, contracted labor programs, or displacement resulting from violence or political and economic restructuring.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Richard Velázquez

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene
University of North Texas, Denton

DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Arts, History, 2016, University of Oregon
Bachelor of Arts, International Studies, History, and Spanish, 2014, University of
North Texas

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Latin American, Mexican and Mexican-American History

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Instructor, Upward Bound University of North Texas, 2014

GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

Graduate Teaching Fellowship, History, 2014 to 2016

PUBLICATIONS:

Book Review, *Deported: Immigrant Policing, Disposable Labor, and Global Capitalism*. By Tanya Maria Golash-Boza (2015). *International Migration Review*. Forthcoming.

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Para mis padres, los migrantes, campesinos, y trabajadores.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In August of 1991, my mother made her way across Mexico with the United States as her destination. She was one of approximately 370,000 Mexican people who left their homes for *el norte* that year.¹ My mother was an early migrant during this period, as the number of migrants only grew in the coming years hitting nearly a million a year at peak migration. I was born a month after my mother's arrival in Texas, and this mass migration of people from Mexico defined my childhood and has remained important in my adulthood. Uncles, aunts, cousins, and friends followed my parents and other early migrants to the United States, many staying and working with us while they established themselves in their adoptive country. While exciting that Mexican family and friends were now closer and a part of my daily life, this exodus from Mexico also became visible when I visited my parent's place of origin. The first time I visited my father's home in rural Guanajuato, I was welcomed by an entire family. My grandfather and grandmother still lived in Rosales, Guanajuato, along with most of my father's brothers and sisters who also called the *rancho* their home. Today, many of the rooms once occupied by aunts and uncles remain abandoned year round. My grandmother lives alone in her house. Their village, once filled with people and activity, is now littered with abandoned houses with little movement for most of the year. Many of these houses are old, but others are new, large, and built with migrant money and migrant hopes of one day returning to live in the countryside. Without a doubt, this mass movement of people from Mexico's fields to the United States has left its mark both on Mexico and on the United States, but this

¹ Jeffrey S. Passel, D'Vera Cohn, and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, "Net Migration from México Falls to Zero—and Perhaps Less," *Pew Research Center*, April 2012.

period of migration has now come to an end. The era that has defined my childhood is over.² Mexicans are returning home, by choice or by force, but to a different Mexico.

Despite the fact that my experience has centered on transnational migration, the Mexico of my parents did not always revolve around migration to the United States. Born in 1966 and 1970, my parents grew up within the “Revolutionary Nationalist” period, an era defined by the Mexican state’s focus on national, industrial development. Both of their childhood experiences were characterized by movement within Mexico as a result of this exclusive industrial and infrastructural investment. My mother’s parents worked for the state-owned railroad *Ferrocarriles Nacionales de Mexico*. Her family travelled across Mexico—from urban area to urban area—connecting vast swathes of the countryside in the process. Because of this constant movement, my mother was born in Michoacán instead of her family’s native Guanajuato. My father, on the other hand, was from a *campesino* family, but they also moved around the country with frequency regardless of their peasant background. They suffered from severe poverty and found themselves migrating between Mexico City and rural Guanajuato in their attempt to weather the unfavorable conditions in the Guanajuatense countryside. It was not until his father’s communal land, or *ejido*, was challenged due to their constant movement that they were forced to settle and stay in the countryside to maintain possession of their landholdings. Even so, as my father’s older siblings grew older, they picked up where their parents left off and resumed migration to the Mexican capital. Some of my aunts and uncles ultimately settled in the capital while others found opportunities in other Mexican urban areas. But after the economic crises that destabilized Mexican cities and the Mexican

² Passel, Cohn, and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, “Net Migration from México Falls to Zero—and Perhaps Less.”

working class, many ultimately changed their destinations for the United States, my parents included.

While our experiences are only anecdotal, oral history, church records, and census records show that my parents situation was not unique to them or to their time period. My parents' regional home, Central and Western Mexico, has been the most populated area in Mexico since independence and certainly remained so during the Porfiriato, the beginning of this study. They have also produced the largest amount of both domestic and transnational migrants throughout the twentieth century.³ Because of their large, dense populations relative to other regions in the nation, the states of Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacán, San Luis Potosí, and Zacatecas, (fig. 1) have provided the largest amount of migrants to both the United States and to Mexican urban areas.⁴ Since the early twentieth century, these five states have been the home of as much as 70 percent of the Mexican people who leave for Mexico's northern neighbor.⁵ But because Mexico, and more specifically this region, have produced millions of transnational migrants throughout different periods, U.S. scholars of Mexican migration have almost exclusively focused on the transnational migration. This transnational migration experience, some scholars

³Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, "Censo General de la República Mexicana 1895" Entidad política de la República a que pertenece el lugar del nacimiento, (February 7, 2016).

⁴Douglas S. Massey, Jacob S. Rugh, and Karen A. Pren, "The Geography of Undocumented Mexican Migration," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 26, no. 1 (February 2010): 133;

⁵Fernando Riosmena and Douglas S. Massey, "Pathways to El Norte: Origins, Destinations, and Characteristics of Mexican Migrants to the United States" *International Migration Review* 46, no. 1 (2012): 10.

argue, is so historically rooted in the movement of people between both nations that it has created a culture of international migration in rural Mexican communities.⁶

With the data collected by the Mexican Migration Project, migration scholar Douglas Massey proposed “Cumulative Causation Theory,” arguing that once the processes of international migration begins, social capital is developed through the expansion of migration network which in turn promotes further transnational migration.⁷ Massey and other scholars have operated under this assumption, predicting that an escalation in the development of migratory infrastructure would only continue to increase international migration over time.⁸ And while other scholars recognize that rural Mexicans have had alternative destinations, they minimize the significance of these networks, proposing that historical migrant-sending states “specialize in international movement to the exclusion of internal trips.”⁹ But recent demographic studies insist that Mexican migration to the United States has significantly decreased over the past few years, with some arguing that more people are returning to Mexico than crossing into the

⁶William Kandel and Douglas S. Massey, “The Culture of Mexican Migration: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis,” *Social Forces* 80, no. 3 (2002): 981–1004.

⁷ Douglas S. Massey, “Social Structure, Household Strategies, and the Cumulative Causation of Migration,” *Population Index* 56, no. 1 (1990): 3–26

⁸ Nadia Y. Flores, Rubén Hernández-León, and Douglas S. Massey, “Social Capital and Emigration From Rural and Urban Communities,” in *Crossing the Border: Research from the Mexican Migration Project* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004), 184–200.

⁹ Patricia Arias, “Old Paradigms and New Scenarios in a Migratory Tradition- U.S. Migration from Guanajuato” in *Crossing the Border: Research from the Mexican Migration Project*, Massey, Douglas, and Jorge Durand, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004); Estela Rivera-Fuentes, “Cumulative Causation Among Internal and International Migrants,” in *Crossing the Border: Research from the Mexican Migration Project* (New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 2004), 201–31.

U.S.¹⁰ While one could attribute this drop in transnational migration to a number of reasons, such as the militarization of the border, slump in the U.S. economy, and the escalation of the war on drugs, these changes in migration are not unique to this period.

Structural changes in governance imposed from the upper rungs of society to the rural working class have altered the social, economic, and political reality for rural people on many occasions. These policies have affected which destinations rural Mexicans have found to be most worthwhile and, by altering migration networks, have also transformed the rural Mexicans' commercial prospects, their ideological beliefs, and even how they perceive themselves. Mexicans have been migrating since the beginning of the century, both to urban areas and to the United States, and scholars must place contemporary forms of migration in the context of historical manifestations. Assumptions about future Mexican migration cannot be based on one period of migration, but instead, should be informed by historical patterns and migratory trends over a longer timeframe.

Understanding the significance of urbanization to both rural Mexican communities, and Mexican history in general, scholars should not be surprised to see a return of rural to urban migration in contemporary times, even if in different context than the historical manifestations of this relationship.

¹⁰ Damien Cave, "Better Lives for Mexicans Cut Allure of Going North," *The New York Times* (2011); Tara Bahrapour, "For first time since Depression, more Mexicans leave U.S. than enter", *The Washington Post* (2012)



Figure 1. Major sending states within historical migrant-sending region

Scholars of Mexican migration have acknowledged how previous migratory movements have influenced later mass migrations through the construction of migratory infrastructure, but only in the context of transnational migration. The question of how this has happened, what it looked like, and most importantly, how domestic migration has played a part remains unclear. The absence of the largest and most significant movement of people in the history of Mexico, the movement from the countryside to the cities, presents a major gap in the larger study of Mexican migration. Throughout the twentieth century, more Mexicans left the countryside for Mexican cities than for the United States. This fact has been treated as peripheral by U.S. scholars of migration, but it is extremely significant in the development of Mexico, especially considering the Mexican labor force in the U.S. were often from the same regions or even the same people. Scholars have not acknowledged how cities have been critical to not only development of rural Mexico, but also the development of transnational migration. Only through the collapse of urban networks have transnational networks gained prominence. Mexican scholars, likewise, have written more about urbanization, but have not effectively explored the connection

between movements for urban areas and the United States. By looking at the twentieth century in its entirety, we can observe rural migration in all of its forms and how it changes over time. The fluctuations in migration patterns and preferences becomes clear. The connection between migration and urbanization becomes indisputable.

In Chapter I, I begin with the Porfiriato, as migration to both cities and to the United States was negligible beforehand. Unlike his predecessors, President Díaz championed modernization--specifically railroads. His ability to secure the support of foreign investors distinguishes him and this period from the political and economic instability that characterized Mexico from independence. Railroads and the economic growth of the cities facilitated and attracted people from the countryside. This was needed for the growth of the Mexican capital which had stagnated for decades. Not long after the implementation of Díaz's economic program, Mexico erupted into a revolution. Urbanization was already in full effect when the revolution began, and the violence and instability that followed resulted in the disruption of migration networks that had been established prior. For the first time, many rural Mexicans were forced to look to destinations outside of their country to satisfy their economic needs. U.S. labor recruiters, also using the same Porfirian infrastructure as urban migrants, penetrated deep into central Mexico and offered distressed rural Mexicans economic opportunities in the United States. Both urbanization and transnational migration were effectively established during this period, which I define as beginning with Díaz's presidency and ending in 1940, the end of the Cardenas' presidency and the Revolution's radical period. Despite a large number of rural Mexicans looking to the U.S. for opportunities, many resented having had to leave their place of origin. Through oral history and *corridos*, or ballads,

migrants communicated a fondness for Mexico and a desire to return home. They rejected the United States culturally and hoped that the situation in Mexico would improve so they could return. Many Mexicans ultimately did return after the Revolution, some by choice but many others by force. These migrants, like today's immigrants, had to find a way to survive back home. Fortunately, there were plenty of employment opportunities in Mexico's increasingly industrialized urban areas. The same rural Mexicans who fed Yankee mouths later went to build Mexico's biggest city.

Mexico's next president, Manuel Ávila Camacho, disrupted the left wing politics and concern for social justice advanced by his predecessors. Like Don Porfirio thirty years prior, Ávila Camacho focused on growing the Mexican economy, albeit employing different economic philosophies than the infamous Mexican general. Chapter II examines this period of massive economic growth dubbed the "Mexican Miracle" that began with Ávila Camacho's presidency and went well into the 1970s. During this period, millions of rural Mexicans left their homes to work in Mexico's urban areas, and especially Mexico City. Mexico's mixed economy proved to be successful in attracting growth to the Distrito Federal, with many rural people finding opportunities either in the construction of the growing city and its infrastructure, servicing the upwardly mobile urban class, or even working in the burgeoning private or parastate industries themselves. Growth also occurred in Mexico's regional urban centers, but because of the centralization of power that characterized Mexican political economy following the Revolution, growth was overwhelmingly concentrated in the Mexican capital. As in the previous period, Mexican urbanization was interrupted by a major event, in this case, World War II and Mexico's commitment to the United States in the conflict. While

previous leaders directly challenged U.S. interests and placed Mexico in contentious situation with their nationalist policies, Ávila Camacho was more than happy to satisfy U.S. requests for contracted labor with the Bracero Program. The Bracero Program facilitated the movement of hundreds of thousands of Mexicans to the United States from 1942 to 1964 and set the foundation for networks of migration that would follow after its termination. But even though the program was responsible for a mass movement of people, demographic studies show that more rural Mexicans actually chose to either migrate to the cities or at least maintained both Mexican cities and the United States as possible destinations for their migration. Scholars like to project the Bracero Program as a landmark moment in the history of Mexican migration, but in reality, it was an interruption and secondary in significance to larger movement of people away from rural Mexico to Mexican cities that was already in place. Corridos, oral history, and church records all demonstrate that despite the interest by both Mexican and U.S. in transnational migration phenomenon, urbanization remained an important aspect of rural Mexican life. After the program, some rural Mexicans continued to migrate to the United States, many without documents, but most remained in Mexico, satisfying their economic necessities with domestic migration.



Figure 2. Ejidatarios shutting down highway near Celaya.¹¹

Chapter III begins with the inauguration of President Miguel de la Madrid in 1982 and carries on into the present. This period saw the decline of Import Substitution Industrialization, Mexican ‘Revolutionary Nationalist’ politics, and ultimately, mass urbanization in Mexico. The global economic crises of the late seventies and early eighties had a profound impact on Mexico, and with Mexico’s enormous external debt, de la Madrid felt exceptional pressure to restructure Mexico’s government and economy. This subsequent generation of leaders responded to Mexico’s structural problems with neoliberal policies; they privatized, deregulated, and liberalized the economy to the best of their abilities while simultaneously decentralizing the government. A complete restructuring of Mexican society followed which put many urban Mexicans out of work and reversed the trend of growth that Mexico had experienced in the decades prior. Scholars agree that neoliberal reforms were responsible for this latest mass migration of Mexican people for the United States, the largest migration of people from a single country in the history of the United States, but they have not identified exactly how this

¹¹ Richard Velázquez, *Ejidatarios near Celaya*, July 2014.

economic restructuring has been responsible for such massive displacement.¹² Many argue that neoliberal reforms directly impacted rural communities through the privatization of the ejido, but in many places, the ejido remains the dominant form of land tenure.¹³ Oral history tells a different story. Rural Mexicans have retained and defended their constitutional rights to communal lands. Despite disinvestment and neglect, rural Mexicans have been able to maintain their rural communities and communal agricultural production alive through urban migration and remittances. Without a doubt, neoliberal reforms targeted communal land and were responsible for the displacement of some communities, but I argue that privatization in the cities had a bigger impact on rural people than the gradual privatization of the countryside. The focus on efficiency and cost cutting that privatization demanded cost many people jobs, brought about high rates of unemployment, and essentially made cities an unaccommodating destination for migrants who now had to compete with urban workers for menial positions. Once again, urban migration was interrupted, but this time by major political and economic restructuring. Predictably, rural Mexico redirected its migration now for the less favorable but established transnational migration network. This migration network became significant for rural migrants once again, but only until it was no longer possible to continue exercising it.

¹² Jens Krogstad and Michael Keegan, "From Germany to México: How America's Source of Immigrants Has Changed over a Century," *Pew Research Center*, October 2015.

¹³ Michael Foley, "Privatizing the Countryside: The Mexican Peasant Movement and Neoliberal Reform," *Latin American Perspective*, 1995; David Bacon, *The Right to Stay Home: How US Policy Drives Mexican Migration* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013).

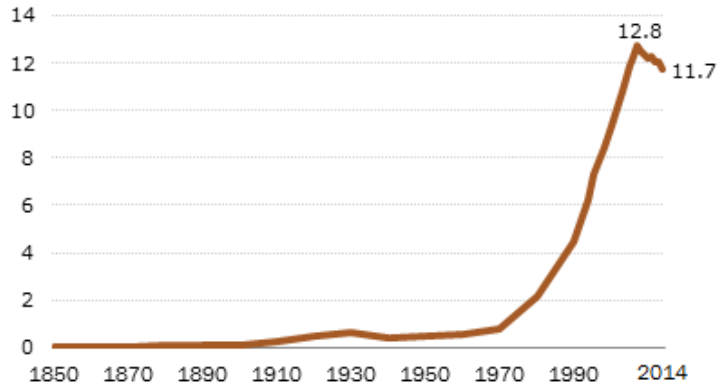


Figure 3. Mexican immigrant population in U.S in millions¹⁴

While oral history and song have been exceptionally informative in understanding the intricacies and experiences of migration from the perspective of those who migrate, it has its limitations in that it does not provide the quantitative evidence necessary to make absolute claims about migration. At the same time, the quantitative data that I have found is in line with my conclusions, but it alone does not clearly demonstrate how migration and urbanization have influenced each other over time. Using both quantitative data and personal testimony together when possible allows for the most comprehensive understanding of the phenomena. Even so, given the time and financial constraints, it was impossible to represent the experiences for migrants from all regions and time periods and their motivations for migrating. Because of this, I have narrowed my focus to migrants from Guanajuato, and specifically, those from the municipality of Comonfort when possible. Aside from my personal familiarity with this region, Guanajuato is important because of its classification as a major migrant-sending state to the United States by many scholars. Migrant testimony provides us another narrative, one that

¹⁴Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, “More Mexicans Leaving Than Coming to the U.S.,” Pew Research Center, November 2015.

challenges the tendency to define traditional migrant sending states solely by their connection to transnational migration.

Oral testimony and song paint a vivid picture of Mexican reality prior to, during, and following migration, but the legitimacy or accuracy of the oral history and song has been brought into question by scholars. Yet, we must recall that all sources are biased and influenced by the institutions and power dynamics present in society during any given time. My choice of sources is a specific response to the marginalization of the communities both in Mexico and in the United States. It is a response to official documents, records, and policies whose justifications have been crafted by those in positions of power to serve their own interests. When possible, I make the conscious choice of centering the narratives of those who migrate. I acknowledge that there may be some historical inconsistencies with oral history and song, or even an idealization of certain experiences and situations. But I argue that migrants' emphasis on certain realities or situations over others is not illegitimate, on the contrary, it is an expression of the collective sentiment regarding migration. The reoccurring themes may not be representative of all migrants throughout the century, but they are present because many migrants do sympathize with the unpleasant experience of leaving their home and families for a strange place. Even if some of the *corridos* used throughout the manuscript were produced for commercial consumption, they were popular because they had mass appeal. Mexican migrants identified with the sentiments being expressed in large numbers.

When possible, I include a gendered analysis, especially with the oral history that I have collected. This proves more difficult when deriving testimony from historical

collections, as men have been more involved in migration for the greater part of the century, and thus, make up most of the interviewees. Finding interviews for the first period of mass migration, and specifically urbanization, proved difficult in itself regardless of gender. Nevertheless, examples of urbanization do exist but not where one would expect to find them. Because, presumably, Mexicans did not perceive urbanization to be a strange or unique phenomenon, it was not thoroughly investigated by state officials or U.S. researchers during this time period. Instead, the unusual movement of people from rural Mexico to the United States piqued the attention of the state and U.S. academics. Thus, the experiences of transnational migrants were investigated and documented which reveal in detail the life of Mexican migrants prior to their departure for the U.S. In these narratives, we see that Mexico City played an important part in their lives, even at the turn of the twentieth century.

CHAPTER II

RAILROADS, REVOLUTION, AND RESETTLEMENT: PORFIRIATO to 1940

Considering that by 1900, rural Mexicans had experienced decades of continuous conflict and disorder dating as far back as the struggle for independence, it should come as no surprise that many rural Mexicans were anxious to leave the countryside at the turn of the century. Following independence, Mexico underwent seemingly endless civil wars, multiple foreign invasions, and numerous forced changes in governance for the remainder of the century. After ousting the standing government of Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada with his Tuxtepec Rebellion in 1876, Porfirio Díaz inherited a nation in disarray but finally brought institutional stability to the land.¹⁵ Even so, Mexico's notoriety for governmental disorganization was so that the United States refused to recognize Díaz's new government until he could demonstrate an ability to secure their shared border against Native American raids, cattle thieves, and the smuggling of contraband.¹⁶ Despite these challenges, however, Díaz—like the many liberal leaders that preceded him—was committed to modernizing Mexico. He strove to develop the country on par with Western Europe and the United States: he wanted to remake the former crown of the Spanish colonies into a serious competitor in the emerging global capitalist system.¹⁷

Díaz faced a lot of challenges. Even after proving that his government was there to stay, he had to address Mexico's international reputation for banditry, which hindered the nation's ability to attract foreign investment. Mexico was a perilous and precarious

¹⁵ Paul Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress: Bandits, Police, and Mexican Development* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 66

¹⁶ Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress*, 68.

¹⁷ Michael Johns, *The City of México in the Age of Díaz* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1997),

place for its inhabitants and visitors. Confrontations between police and rural bandits were a common sight in the countryside. Insecurity was so high that many foreigners expected to be robbed when travelling though the country and at times were even disappointed if they were not.¹⁸ President Díaz was aware that in order to successfully change Mexico, all of its provinces needed to be pacified. He needed to stabilize the country to make it safe and efficient for the movement of goods and people. He responded to the rural unrest by increasing the police presence in the countryside. By 1880, he had expanded the Rurales police force by 90 percent and had secured a 400 percent increase for their budget. But rural Mexicans did not agree with Díaz's positivist image of development. They resisted the militarization of the countryside through direct confrontation with officials and the destruction of infrastructural projects in whichever way they found possible. For rural Mexicans, the development of infrastructure meant loss of land and resources. Their trees were cut down for telegraph poles and their stone used for roads and railroad foundations. Sparks from locomotive engines set fire to their crops.¹⁹ *Campeños* (peasants) responded by destroying and derailing train tracks, dismantling telegraph poles, and peddling whatever resource they could recover from the destroyed infrastructure.²⁰

While these challenges were not unique to the *Porfiriato*, the period of Porfirio Díaz's rule from 1876 to 1910, Díaz distinguished himself from earlier Mexican presidents in his ability to maintain power. Unlike these previous leaders, he was able to

¹⁸Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress*, 4-12.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 94.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

weather challenges from both the *pueblo* (the common people) and competition within the ruling class. He acquired enough power to reduce the regional influences of *caciques*, or local political leaders, which had historically challenged leadership in Mexico City. Unlike many of his predecessors, he was finally able to truly concentrate power within the Mexican state, and in turn, control the country's expansive land mass in its ancient capital, Mexico City.²¹ Don Porfirio ruled Mexico with enough confidence to attract large amounts of foreign investment. With this influx of capital, he was finally able to develop Mexico's economy: at last he had the opportunity to establish the much needed railroad network that could bring together the regionally fractured nation. With his project of modernization, Díaz connected a formerly isolated rural Mexico to the country's urban areas and, by consequence, to the rest of the world.

Mexican Urbanization at the Turn of the Century

Both early and contemporary scholars of Mexican migration identify the Mexican Revolution as the first major event to motivate rural Mexican transborder migration en masse.²² But scholars have not addressed the significance of Mexican urbanization during this time period. Scholars of other migrations in Latin America have made the connection between urbanization and transnational migration, but most scholars of Mexico remain fixated on the significance of transnational migration.²³ From the late 19th

²¹ Stephen Haber, *Industry and Underdevelopment: The Industrialization of México, 1890-1940* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1989), 12.

²² Douglas S. Massey, Jorge Durand, and Nolan Malone, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Immigration in an Era of Economic Integration* (New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 2002), 30; Mark Reisler, *By the Sweat of Their Brow: Mexican Immigrant Labor in the United States, 1900-1940* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976), 15.

²³ Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, *A Tale of Two Cities: Santo Domingo and New York after 1950* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), 3.

and throughout the 20th century, rural Mexicans employed many different strategies in their attempt to mitigate the negative impacts of Díaz's policies. While many resisted modernity outright through the aforementioned sabotage, others suffering from economic hardship and instability took advantage of the new infrastructure in their search for opportunities to better their situation. The rural campesino became a migrant when he or she looked to outside sources of employment to better their economic conditions. First, many went to Mexican cities, and primarily Mexico City, in their attempt to better their situation. If impossible there, Mexicans took the rail north to the United States where contractors happily enrolled Mexican labor. But the cities came first, and transnational migration en masse only occurred because the cities, and the country at large, was no longer able to satisfy the needs of those living in the countryside. The Mexican Revolution stunted the development of rural to urban migration networks as cities were not immune to the violence and instability resulting from the conflict. Mexicans went to the U.S. in large numbers only due to disruption, a trend set during this period that remained a constant in the subsequent waves of migration.

Oral testimonies and the Mexican *corrido*, or ballad, document this move from the countryside to the cities, and the switch in destination from cities to the United States during this period. These mediums are valuable because they capture the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of rural Mexicans from their own perspective. Corridos traditionally tell the story of significant events or narrate experiences important to those who compose them. Like many other types of folk song, the artist is not the most important character of the song. Instead, the transfer of information across space and time

remains most important, with many songs sung by everyday people and also famous artists. When expressing lament at leaving his beloved Mexico later in the song, the rural Mexican singer also expresses knowledge and adoration of the Mexican capital, singing,

Me duele hasta el Corazón
dejar mi patria querida,
adiós, mi padre y mi madre,
ya les doy la despedida.

Adiós, México lucido
con su hermosa Capital,
ya me voy, ya me despido,
no te volveré a mirar.²⁴

My heart aches so
to leave my beloved country,
goodbye, my father and mother,
I bid you farewell.

Goodbye, my illustrious Mexico
With your beautiful capital,
I am leaving farewell,
I shall never see you again.

This change in commercial prospects and self-perception was occurring prior to the first mass movement of rural Mexicans for the United States; campesinos had already been travelling and settling in the Mexico's ancient capital attempting to take advantage of the burgeoning investment during the Porfiriato. Following nearly a century of relatively stagnant growth, Mexico finally saw the political stability necessary for economic expansion under President Porfirio Díaz. The increase in foreign investment resulting from this stability allowed for the construction of railroads and other forms of infrastructure, connecting a formerly isolated rural Mexico to its urban areas and ports.²⁵ The creation of railroads allowed President Díaz to carry on his project of modernizing Mexico, and specifically, Mexico City. The railroads allowed for a more efficient movement of goods, and equally significant, labor. Throughout the 19th century, Mexico

²⁴ Maria Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound: The Mexican Immigrant Experience in Ballad and Song* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 73.

²⁵ Robert V. Kemper and Anya Peterson Royce, "Mexican Urbanization since 1821: A Macro-Historical Approach," *Urban Anthropology*, 1979, 267–89.

City had a consistent population of approximately 200,000, but by 1895, the population had for the first time outpaced national growth, totaling 329,775. By the final years of the revolution in 1921, the population had nearly doubled to 615,327.²⁶ In 1900, more than half of Mexico City's inhabitants were from other parts of Mexico, a quarter of the country's total migrants, with the state of Guanajuato—the later focus of this study—providing the second largest number of migrants to Mexico City.²⁷ One of the earliest scholars to address Mexican migration to the United States, Manuel Gamio, attributed the rural exodus towards the United States to the lack of economic opportunities in the Mexican countryside in his landmark study *Mexican Immigration to the United States: A Study of Human Migration and Adjustment*.²⁸ He argued that there was an excessive number of peons in rural Mexico, with a high concentration of land in the hands of a few proprietors.²⁹ As in Mexico City, Gamio argued that the attraction resulting from the abundance of resources in the destination relative to the place of origin, in addition to the need for labor in places like Mexico City and the United States, led to a natural exodus for in favor of both of these locations. In his study, Gamio briefly addresses urban Mexico, and through a comparison with rural Mexico, he concludes that many of those living in urban areas were experiencing a poverty similar to the overwhelming poverty of rural areas. He also identified that impoverished urbanites are typically from rural

²⁶ Pablo Piccato, *City of Suspects: Crime in México City, 1900-1931* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 21.

²⁷ John Lear, "México City, Space and Class in the Porfirian Capital, 1884-1910," *Journal of Urban History* 22, no. 4 (May 1996): 454–92; Pablo Piccato, *City of Suspects: Crime in México City, 1900-1931* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 75.

²⁸ Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States: A Study of Human Migration and Adjustment* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1930), vii.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

backgrounds. Likewise, he argued that despite the difference in the living conditions for Mexicans or rural origins living in Mexican urban areas and in the United States, both essentially serve the same function: providing better wages to impoverished rural Mexicans.

Despite the historical significance of his primary study, Gamio's first scholarly publication did not thoroughly address urbanization in Mexico. Gamio's work on migration always focused on documenting the realities of Mexican migration to the United States and, like subsequent scholars, prioritized this phenomenon over mass migrations within his own country. But this is not to say that Gamio did not recognize the prevalence of rural to urban migration during this time period; he would later be forced to acknowledge and address urbanization in his collection of biographical documents, *The Life Story of a Mexican Immigrant*. Unlike his first publication which was dense in analysis, his subsequent publication was a collection of immigrant testimonies, with much less interpretation. These autobiographical testimonies reveal that despite both past and contemporary investigators focus on transnational migration, rural people actually prioritized internal networks over migration United States. This release of personal testimony by Gamio provides a clear window into the lives of rural Mexican people who became transnational immigrants at the turn of the century and shows that while Gamio focused on Mexican migration to the United States, he could not avoid the reality of urbanization that was occurring in his home country at the same time.

One such migrant, Carlos Almazán, prioritized urban migration to the transnational alternative. Hailing from the historical migrant-sending state of Michoacán, he and his family struggled to maintain their livelihood in rural Mexico after the death of

his father. Seeking to better their family's economic condition, Almazán left for Mexico City to seek better fortunes.³⁰ After stints as a delivery boy and other menial jobs, Almazán found himself managing a *carnicería*, or a meat market. He described his time in Mexico as lucrative, so much so that he was able to marry and start a family in Mexico City during this period. But then the revolution started, and his business began to suffer.³¹ Despite trying to find work and make a living in other businesses, Almazán went bankrupt. Unable to find opportunities in a tumultuous Mexico, Almazán left for the United States. After working numerous jobs throughout the Southwest, Almazán eventually found work in the infamous Simon Brick Yard in Laguna, California, where he described the workload so heavy that he was “left almost dead” after his daily shift at work.³² But despite obtaining a good standard of living through his work at the brick yard and his small scale farming on the side, Almazán recognized his position as a second-class citizen, and at the time of the interview with Gamio, aspired to return to Mexico as soon as it was feasibly possible.³³

Like Almazán, Gonzalo Placarte also experienced a difficult life following the loss of a parent. But it was his mother, not father, who was absent from Placarte's life. Placarte lived as a migrant in his formative years, travelling between his native Guanajuato to Michoacán with his father to work in ranching. The death of his father in 1900 prompted an immediate need for a greater income, and he left for the United States with a friend. After working in the north for a few years, he tried his luck in Mexico City,

³⁰ Manuel Gamio, *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant* (Toronto and London: Dover, 1971), 88.

³¹ *Ibid*, 89.

³² *Ibid*, 90.

³³ *Ibid*, 91.

which he actually found to be more lucrative than working across borders. Like Almazán, Placarte married and started a family while in Mexico City, and despite having a good paying job and being offered a raise upon resignation, Placarte was tired of working as a street car conductor and decided to try his luck north of the border once again. Placarte also moved across the Southwest in search of the best opportunities for his family, working in Santa Fé and Salt Lake City before settling in Los Angeles. Placarte admitted to enjoying a stable and lucrative lifestyle from his agricultural possessions in California, but like many other Mexican immigrants, he foresaw returning to Mexico later in his life. He appreciated the United States for the opportunities it provided, but ultimately continued to call Mexico home and maintained no desire to become a U.S. citizen or to live his final days in his adoptive country.

Similar to Gamio, an economist from the University of California, Paul Taylor, took an interest in Mexican migration throughout the early twentieth century. Taylor published a series of volumes between 1927 and 1934 documenting the experiences and perspectives of Mexicans migrating to the United States. Controversial at the time for being nothing more than transcribed interviews of Mexicans laborers, Taylor's work has proven to be a rich resource for scholars studying migration during this period. Despite interviewing migrants for information regarding their trek to the north, Taylor was also indirectly documenting migrant's experiences with urbanization prior to transnational migration. Unfortunately, Taylor did not disclose the names of the people being interviewed, but the unnamed Mexican migrant stated,

My uncle was shot when the forces of Villa came into town. My father being a school teacher lost his position. During the war all of the schools closed... Then when the religious troubles came to the Mexican nation the state of

Jalisco and city of Guadalajara were the center of the maelstrom. Business was very, very bad. Many houses closed. I closed up my place of business and went to Mexico City and opened up another shop but things were not much better... In February I went to the old town and things were much worse than they have been. There was a shooting every day. I sold the shop, machinery, and stock, came back to Mexico City and with my wife and little boy came to the United States three months ago.³⁴

Mexico City did not prove a fruitful endeavor for this migrant in the midst of so much turmoil in the country. Nevertheless, Mexico City provided a safe haven from his native Jalisco, which was embroiled in first the Revolution and, later, the more regional Cristero War. Having heard of the opportunities and safety presented by moving northward to the United States, the migrant took his chances and moved his family and himself northward to Chicago after living in Mexico City for an extended period of time.³⁵

While many of migrants from this period migrated due to violence or poverty, not all urban migrants turned transnational immigrants migrated due to necessity. Felipe Montes, a predominantly white *mestizo* from Guanajuato, had no pressing need to migrate. An avid student of music, Montes was upset at the revolution's disruption of his ability to continue studying the art. Music schools were closed, and Montes was forced to work instead of study.³⁶ Montes' family followed the revolutionaries and soldiers, who were their largest consumers of the products they sold. Eventually Montes tired of following the soldiers and risking his life on the battlefields, and he went to León,

³⁴ Paul Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States*, vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1932), 266.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 266.

³⁶ Gamio, *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 98.

Guanajuato, to learn how to style hair. Montes became a barber, and went to Mexico City to put his newfound skills to work. Things went well for Montes in Mexico City, but he eventually decided to continue moving across the country. Montes admitted to liking travel, and he thought that his occupation “was good for that, since one can find work wherever one goes.”³⁷ After having lived and worked in Leon, Mexico City, Orizaba, Veracruz, Progreso, Merida, and Ciudad Juarez, Montes finally made his way to the United States to join some of his brothers.

Through oral history, rural Mexicans revealed that they had sought out and made the most of every opportunity available to them in order to better their economic conditions. At the beginning of the twentieth century, travelling to urban areas proved to be his first recourse due to proximity and the fact that migration networks were already in place due the introduction of infrastructure. Even so, many of the migrants who initially enjoyed employment in Mexico’s urban areas eventually looked for opportunities in the United States, at times due to necessity and at others due to their ambitious inclinations. While urban destinations were preferred throughout the late nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries, migration destinations became more or less interchangeable with the passage of time. Both destinations remained popular for campesinos until 1910, when the very regions from which migrants descended erupted into insurrection against the Porfirian government that had facilitated the degradation of rural Mexico and the exodus of the rural Mexican people. In these twenty plus years of conflict and instability, many Mexicans chose to stay and fight for better conditions in their home country. Fearing

³⁷ Gamio, *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 98.

much to lose, many others instead took advantage of the transnational migration networks already in place and fled the country for their northern neighbor.

Transnational Migration during the Porfiriato and the Revolution

On June 2, 1908—two years before the outbreak of the revolution that transformed Mexican society— the *Diario del Hogar*, a Porfirian opposition newspaper, published “El Problema de la Inmigración,” a thought piece on the state of immigration in Mexico at the time. Even though the Mexican Revolution had not yet transpired, the editors of the newspaper expressed great concern at the development of rural Mexican migration to the United States. The editors argued U.S. legislators were aware of the lack of economic opportunities in the Mexican countryside, and in turn these policy makers “...dictar leyes que atraigan al inmigrante, que le seduzcan las condiciones en que puede entrar a un territorio a cultivar los campos o a desarrollar las industrias.”³⁸ The editors argued that rural, unemployed Mexicans were being seduced away from their homes by the increasingly attractive conditions propagated by U.S. policy. The editors framed the phenomenon as a problem: Mexicans were leaving the countryside to provide the fruit of labor to foreigners, when they could and should be using their creative power for the betterment of Mexico. In line with their larger politics, the editorial board took this opportunity to lambaste Mexican policymakers, whom they claimed had failed to create the conditions to maintain employment for this part of Mexican society and in the service of the Mexican nation. At the same time, the board proposed that Mexico open its borders to immigrants from the entire world so they too could contribute to national growth.

Interestingly, the editors criticized the United States for closing their doors to the

³⁸ Editorial Board, “El Problema de La Inmigración,” *Diario Del Hogar*, June 2, 1908, sec. Boletín del Diario del Hogar.

Chinese, not knowing that in a few decades the mass migration resulting from the Mexican Revolution would shift the US' exclusionary focus from the Chinese to the Mexican immigrant being discussed in the article.³⁹

Indeed, Mexico's rural population was being seduced away from the countryside. Two Porfirian decrees, in 1889 and 1890, finally called for the implementation of the liberal land laws of the Constitution of 1857: all lands were to be privately owned. This led a mass dispossession of campesinos, especially those relying on the *ejido*, or communal lands.⁴⁰ The loss of land created the conditions for the development of a transient rural workforce in search of opportunities, and while Mexico City's population exploded by virtue of being the domestic destination with the greatest potential for work, rural Mexico also began sending record numbers of people north of its national borders. From 1900 to 1926, the Mexican born population in the United States grew from 103,393 to approximately 890,746 people, a massive increase in the population.⁴¹ But these migrants did not naturally part from their homes in the countryside. As the editorial board of *Diario del Hogar* had predicted, Mexican workers were being lured away from their homes by private contractors and the U.S. state. The growth of railroads, and specifically the construction of the Mexican Central Railroad, linked Mexico's isolated borderlands to Mexico City and to the rural but densely populated states of Guanajuato, Zacatecas,

³⁹Editorial Board, "El Problema de La Inmigración," 1908.

⁴⁰Lawrence Cardoso, *Mexican Emigration to the United States, 1897-1931: Socio-Economic Patterns* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1980), 6.

⁴¹Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States: A Study of Human Migration and Adjustment* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1930), 2.

Queretaro, and Aguascalientes in between.⁴² The Southern Pacific Railroad did the same for the Californias and Western Mexico. First these railroads allowed *engachadores*, or labor recruiters, to penetrate deeply into Mexico in search of labor to replace the declining Chinese workforce following the exclusion act of 1882 and later the Immigration Act of 1917 which broadened the ban to include other non-Mexican nationals.⁴³ They also allowed the implementation of the first Bracero Program in 1917, and although it only lasted four years and moved a few ten thousand Mexican labors, it set the precedent of State-imposed transnational migration that would follow.⁴⁴

Gonzalo Galván and Pedro Villamil were two Mexican worker lured to the United States by means of private labor contractors. Hearing stories from his friends about the wealth and opportunities of the United States, Galván committed to finding work north of the border, but struggled to find his way to the U.S. due to his impoverished situation. With the promise of a *renganche*, or contracted employment, in El Paso, Texas, Galván borrowed money from a friend and made his way to the Texas-Mexico border. Once there, his contract brought him to work in a railroad camp in Wiles, California.⁴⁵ Pedro Villamil also travelled to the United States via contracted railroad labor, but his contract took him to Nebraska instead.⁴⁶ Both workers sought out better socioeconomic advancement through their contracted migration to the United States, but neither was

⁴²Lawrence Cardoso, *Mexican Emigration to the United States, 1897-1931: Socio-Economic Patterns* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1980), 13.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 14.

⁴⁴Philip Martin, *Promise Unfulfilled: Unions, Immigration and the Farm Workers* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 42.

⁴⁵Manuel Gamio, *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 21.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 69.

satisfied with their experience in the railroad yards. Galván only worked at the yards a day before trying his luck in a copper foundry, while Villamil lasted a full eight months before leaving the yards behind in favor of working in a hotel in Kansas City.⁴⁷ In the case of both of these migrants and many others, *enganchadores*, or labor contractors, only served as a means to arrive to the United States. Once across the border, migrants consulted family members or community members for better labor opportunities, many times disregarding the contracts that had originally brought them to the United States. However, not all Mexican migrants needed labor contractors to facilitate their relocation to the U.S. Many cut the middle man and made for their way for the U.S by any means necessary.

In the corrido, “Consejo a los Norteños” or advice to the northerners, the composer—presumably a migrant himself—warned other potential migrants of the challenges they could face in their attempt to cross into the United States at the tail end of the Revolution. He, advised his *paisanos*, or countrymen, to migrate despite the difficulties they could face, arguing that the benefits outweigh the risks. He also produced a significant amount of advice to guide potential migrants and to facilitate their trip to the U.S. In this corrido, we began to see what motivates people to leave for their place of origin. Migrants like the composer communicate the reality of his situation and convince others that they have much to gain in foreign lands.⁴⁸ The composer sings,

⁴⁷ Manuel Gamio, *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 70.

⁴⁸ María Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, 72.

Aquí si nos afanamos
siempre andamos encuerados,
por allá en el extranjero
parecemos diputados.

...

Ese no vio que el país
esta peor que los infiernos,
todas son bullas y habladas
y de comer solo cuernos.

Here when we work hard
we are always naked,
over there in foreign land
we dress like senators.

...

He did not see that
our country is worse than hell,
everything is noise and talk
where we eat only horns.

The migrant artist identified a number of factors that motivated rural people to leave their place of origin in the song. In the first stanza, the singer stated that in Mexico they were naked, while in the United States, they had the means to dress like politicians. In the second stanza, he said that others do not know that Mexico is worse off than hell itself and alludes to the hunger people experience when he sang that they ate only horns or bones. Poverty and malnutrition were common experiences for rural people throughout the early twentieth century, initially a consequence of the Porfirian politics but later of instability and turmoil resulting from the Revolution.

The Mexican Revolution posed serious threats to the lives of many rural Mexicans. Some willingly participated, but many others found themselves unwillingly caught in the crossfire. Pablo Mares, a rural, mestizo *Jalisciense*, knew it was time to leave the country when his life was threatened by the revolution. After taking control of Mares' town, revolutionaries went to his home and demanded liquor. Mares denied them the alcohol but the revolutionaries satisfied their *vicio* elsewhere and returned to harass Mares. When the party arrived at his home drunk, Mares recalled, "he menaced me with a rifle. He just missed killing me and that is because another soldier hit his arm and the bullet lodged in the roof of the house... On the next day, and as soon as I could, I sold everything that I had, keeping only the little house... I ran away just as soon as I could.

That was about 1915.”⁴⁹ After travelling to Texas, Mares found work all over the United States, from Miami to Los Angeles. He enjoyed his tranquil life in the United States, but admitted that when the situation returned to normalcy in Mexico, he intended to return and settle permanently. He still retained ownership of his house, but does not what condition it is in. We can speculate that Mares reminisces on his time living in Mexico prior to the revolution and longed to reunite with his family and resume life within his community.

Luis Tenorio, another Jalisciense, but with familial connections to Guanajuato, also left Mexico in 1915. One of Tenorio’s closest friends, Clemente, joined the revolution, and attempted time and time again to recruit Tenorio into his revolutionary group. Tenorio rejected and distanced himself from the friend, eventually marrying and settling happily in Ocampo, Guanajuato. Unexpectedly, Clemente’s revolutionary band took the town, and showed up at Tenorio’s house at night. Clemente told Tenorio stories of the revolution over drink, and inebriated, Tenorio volunteered to join Clemente’s revolutionary band. As soon as he had the opportunity, Tenorio abandoned his childhood friend and made for the United States.⁵⁰ In Ciudad Juarez, the enganchadores contracted him to work on an Arizona railroad, which he eventually left to work in construction in Los Angeles.⁵¹ From here, Tenorio called for his wife, and was eventually reunited with her and his child. Like many of his contemporaries, Tenorio was pushed out of Mexico by violence and insecurity. Although he did necessarily want to leave Mexico, unlike

⁴⁹ Manuel Gamio, *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant*, 2.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 6.

⁵¹ *Ibid*.

many of his contemporaries, Tenorio mentioned no desire to return home. Although we are unsure of Tenorio's experience following the interview, it is possible that his desire to stay in the United States may have not materialized.

Send Them Back

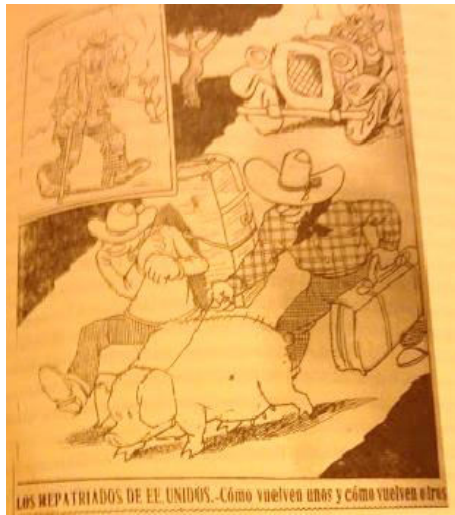


Figure 4. U.S. Repatriates: How some return vs. others⁵²

Tenorio had no desire to return home to Mexico, but many Mexicans residing in the United States did not have the luxury of choice. With the Great Depression in full effect in the early 1930s, Anglo-Americans needed a scapegoat for the high unemployment and found it within the Mexican community. Local, state, and even the national government passed laws to rid the U.S. of Mexicans by any means necessary, even if they were citizens of the United States.⁵³ Between 1930 and 1940, approximately one million Mexican descended people were deported to Mexico.⁵⁴ Published on March

⁵² Georgina Escoto Molina, "Migrantes Guanajuatenses Y Las Repatriaciones, 1929-1935," in *Nuevos Aspectos de La Historia Moderna de Guanajuato*, Colección Bicentenario (Guanajuato: Universidad de Guanajuato, 2011), 127-77.

⁵³ Francisco Balderrama and Raymond Rodríguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 4.

⁵⁴ Balderrama and Rodríguez, *Decade of Betrayal*, 151.

2, 1931, in an issue of *El Nacional Revolucionario*, the political cartoon demonstrates the critical perspective of transnational migration many Mexicans developed in regards to the United States following repatriation. In the top right corner, a man with tattered clothes, a cane, and a small bag of possessions is depicted returning to Mexico. In the larger image, three men eagerly stroll home towards Mexico with a sense of urgency. These men wear nice clothes and have more possessions than the previous man. One even has an automobile, another some livestock. The title of the cartoon reads, appropriately, *LOS REPATRIADOS DE E.E. UNIDOS. –Cómo vuelven unos y como vuelven otros*, or the repatriated, how some come back in comparison to others. Migration to the United States, despite alleviating insecurity for many migrants fleeing conflict, did not always address inequality. It promoted uneven socioeconomic advancement and development in the Mexican countryside.

Mexico's left wing president from 1934 to 1940, Lázaro Cárdenas, recognized the economic fragility of the Mexican countryside. Having enforced policies that angered and ran against the interests of the United States, Cárdenas felt especially pressured by the U.S. when asked to stem undocumented migration and to assist in the mass deportations occurring during the Great Depression. Cárdenas made rhetorical gestures to satiate concerns in Washington D.C., in the form of nationalist appeals to Mexican migrant citizens, but Cárdenas himself was actually nervous at the prospect of Mexicans returning to Mexico.⁵⁵ He was conscious of the political instability and lack of opportunities

⁵⁵ Fernando Saúl Alanís Enciso, *Que Se Queden Allá: El Gobierno de México Y La Repatriación de Mexicanos En Estados Unidos (1934-1940)*. (Tijuana and San Luís Potosí: El Colegio de la Frontera Norte and El Colegio de San Luís, 2007), 25-27.

already plaguing the nation.⁵⁶ Cárdenas understood that demand for work was already higher than the country could provide; additional demand would lead only to more pressure on the state and greater insecurity for his government. Cardenas' repatriation program was largely unsuccessful at creating migrant colonies or at even providing the necessary resources to transport migrants back to their place of origin. Ultimately, a number of these migrants returned back the United States or were forced to find employment in Mexico's urban areas once again.⁵⁷ Mexicans who left during the Revolution or Porfiriato came back to a different Mexico, one where a Post-Revolutionary state was in the midst of preparing to industrialize the historically agricultural country. Soon enough, Mexico would have the industry to put the labor power of Mexico's countryside to productive use.

Race

One of the many characteristics recorded by Gamio in his autobiographic survey was the racial appearance of the migrants being interviewed. Gamio was conscious of racial formation in Mexico, and throughout the book, he described Mexican immigrants using detailed racial descriptors. He used the predictable white, mestizo, and Indian categories, but also commented on the nature of the mestizaje: He went so far as to describe migrants as specifically white mestizos and Indian mestizos as well. Gamio recognized that race was central to people's experiences, but despite identifying people's race in terms of indigeneity, when discussing race in the United States, he racialized Mexicans by nationality in contrast to Anglo-Americans. We can see through the

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Balderrama and Rodriguez, *Decade of Betrayal*, 149.

interviews that indigenous migrants were more likely to migrate due to necessity than white migrants. Gamio recognized this discrepancy to an extent, but did not explore how migrant's experiences differed once in the United States. He did not argue that Mexican's experiences in the United States were influenced by their racial appearance as racialized in Mexico, instead focusing on the general second class citizenship of the Mexican and Mexican-American in the United States and on the defensive strategies employed by Mexicans to preserve their economic and social wellbeing. Despite Gamio's lack of transnational racial analysis, it is clear through examples such as Elisa Recinos, that indigenous Mexicans had a harder time migrating to the United States, and if successful in arriving, at advancing socioeconomically. Recinos and her husband walked from Torreon to Juarez in what took them over four months, and even after making it to El Paso, Recinos had to beg on the streets in order to feed her family.⁵⁸ Mexicans of indigenous appearance had a more difficult time bettering their conditions both in Mexico and in the United States, and despite the fact that many times both poor white, light-skinned mestizos, and darker skinned Mexicans came from humble backgrounds, the lighter skinned *paisanos* found more success through migration. Gamio directly informs us that race was influential in how migrants experienced migration, and indirectly through his interviews, allows us to determine that race also impacted the migrant's overall ability to advance socioeconomically.

⁵⁸ Manuel Gamio, *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant* (Toronto and London: Dover, 1971), 11.

It is generally accepted among historians that first wave of mass Mexican migration to the United States occurred during the Mexican Revolution.⁵⁹ Yet despite its significance and presence in U.S. scholarship of Mexican migration, this initial movement to the north was not the first instance of mass migration in Mexico nor did it define migration for Mexicans following this period. At the turn of the twentieth century, the United States was not the most popular destination for rural Mexicans seeking opportunities outside of their home. Structural changes to land ownership during the Porfiriato displaced many campesinos, while at the same time, investment in infrastructure and in manufacturing attracted those who could no longer make a living in Mexico's provincial areas. This combination of rural dispossession and urban growth made way for unprecedented urbanization at the turn of the twentieth century. It would take the violence and destruction of the Mexican Revolution for rural Mexicans to change their destination to the United States. Given the historical context, it is not surprising that recent reports on Mexican migration to the United States find migration to the United States to be in decline. Rural Mexicans have adapted to ever-changing circumstances and have migrated to whichever destination they found most convenient for them at any given time from since the founding of the nation. It was only during periods of abrupt disruption of daily life, such as the Revolution and the economic crisis of the late twentieth century, or direct recruitment, such as the Bracero program—that we see changes in which destinations are preferred by rural migrants. But with the change in destination and influx of migration north, we see the U.S. absorb and utilize Mexican

⁵⁹Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States: A Study of Human Migration and Adjustment* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1930); Lawrence Cardoso, *Mexican Emigration to the United States, 1897-1931: Socio-Economic Patterns* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1980).

labor only when convenient and in line with its interests. As soon as economic growth declined, the U.S. state moved to send what they perceived to be excess Mexican labor back to Mexico. This period provides the first example of this relationship, but more examples follow.

Gamio's and Taylor's scholarship is invaluable to contemporary scholars. Their use of oral testimonies was novel at the time, demonstrating an early example of a people's history that challenged the top-down narratives that had been constructed by Mexico's ruling class prior to his time. Many of their conclusions on Mexican migration and Gamio's observations of rural Mexico were accurate, but they did not really address why some people chose the US over domestic urban areas. Gamio's argument for migratory preference, for example, were founded on environmental determinist ideas, arguing that people selected certain states north of the border because they shared similar climates with the migrants place of origin.⁶⁰ But both of their interviews reveal otherwise. Rural people have a long history of seeking better economic prospects that predate large scale international migration. During the times of the hacienda, rural Mexicans would leave their hacendados whenever possible to sell their products or their labor in more favorable markets. While at times this meant working with a different hacendado, many times it resulted in relocating to an urban area.⁶¹ Some Mexicans did indeed find themselves utilizing the newly expanded railroad to migrate to the United States, but Mexican migration north of the border was fairly uncommon until the early twentieth

⁶⁰Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States: A Study of Human Migration and Adjustment* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1930), 21.

⁶¹Omar Fonseca and Lilia Moreno, *Jaripo: Pueblo de Migrantes* (Jiquilpan, Michoacán: Centro de Estudios de la Revolución Mexicana "Lázaro Cárdenas," 1984), 89.

century. It was not until the Mexican Revolution that U.S. contractors found their way into central and western Mexico, recruiting rural people to labor in the place the other groups of immigrants that had been barred by the Immigration Act of 1917.⁶² In this early case of transnational Mexican migration, the exodus for the United States was not arbitrary. It was not a consequence of personal preferences for location, but instead a function of external influences that motivated migration for such a distant location. The promise of work and better wages motivated rural Mexicans from the central and western states to leave for the United States in large numbers during this period. This first major recruitment would lay the foundation for future Mexican migration; the destinations favored by these early US contractors would later become what we identify as traditionally migrant-sending states.

Undoubtedly, the relationship between the Mexican countryside, urban areas, and the United States was clearly established at the beginning of the twentieth century, along with the epistemic infrastructure would serve to guide later generations of rural Mexicans in their search for better opportunities. Gamio was able to identify this relationship, and although his understanding of what caused international migration earlier in the century were at times speculative, he would go on to communicate a tremendously influential proposal at the end of his study. Gamio successfully promoted a guest worker program between the United States and Mexico; he laid out the foundation for the Bracero Program that was to come only a decade later.

⁶²Fonseca and Moreno, *Jaripo: Pueblo de Migrantes*, 142.

CHAPTER III

EL MILAGRO GUANAJUATENSE, 1940-1982

The Great Migration: Import Substitution and Urbanization

With the confidence that comes from securing the presidential seat, Manuel Avila Camacho made his controversial political position very clear from the onset of his 1940 *sexenio* (six-year presidential term). Avila Camacho publically declared “Yo soy creyente” (I am a believer) and brazenly identified himself as a follower of the Roman Catholic Church.⁶³ This declaration came at a time when rural Mexican teachers—carrying out the former President Lázaro Cardenas’ assignment of providing “six years of socialist education for every child in Mexico”—were being violently confronted by Cristeros or local Catholic sympathizers.⁶⁴ If attacked, a more fortunate teacher had his ears severed as a warning to leave rural religious practices alone.⁶⁵ In a more hostile community, federal teachers faced lynching on a mass scale, many times after being publically beaten, insulted, and dragged through the streets of the community.⁶⁶

Although legally questionable given the explicit separation of church and state following the Revolution, the new president’s declaration had profound political implications.⁶⁷ Most importantly, Avila Camacho broke away from the post-

⁶³John Johnson, *Political Change in Latin America: The Emergence of the Middle Sectors* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1958), 143.

⁶⁴Cristeros –Anti-secularist rebels primarily from central Mexico, who waged armed struggle against the state under Plutarco Elias Calles’ presidency.

⁶⁵Donald Hodges and Gandy Ross, *Mexico, the End of the Revolution* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002), 50.

⁶⁶Marjorie Becker, *Setting the Virgin on Fire: Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán Peasants, and the Redemption of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1996), 125.

⁶⁷The Constitution of 1917, Article 130 was explicit in the separation of church and state.

revolutionary anti-clericalism of his predecessors: presidents Obregon, Calles, Cardenas and the numerous venerated leaders of the Mexican Revolution. But Avila Camacho's rebellion from radical, post-revolutionary political convention was not limited to his religious preferences. Avila Camacho's statement indicated a pronounced turn to right-wing politics; his conservative religious conviction extended into policy. After twenty years of political and economic experimentation, Mexico's revolutionary honeymoon was over.

Avila Camacho's controversial presidency has drawn the attention of many U.S. scholars of Mexican migration. He was, after all, the president who signed the landmark Bracero Program into law in August 1942.⁶⁸ But despite his pronounced presence in Mexican history, many scholars have overlooked the other momentous movement of people occurring at the same time as Avila Camacho's transnational labor project. Early studies of the Bracero Program emphasized its exploitative nature and argued that the program was necessary for the development of the Mexican state, U.S. agribusiness, and the normalization of Mexican-U.S. relations.⁶⁹ More recent scholars, however, have moved away from materialist and structural forms of analysis in favor of emphasizing the agency of those who participated in the program.⁷⁰ In the award winning book, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico*, historian Deborah Cohen focuses on the ideology of the Bracero Program. She recognizes the history of blaming *campesinos* (peasants) for the country's supposed "backwardness,"

⁶⁸ Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 20.

⁶⁹ Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story* (Charlotte and Santa Barbara: McNally & Loftin, 1964), 17-20.

⁷⁰ Cohen, *Braceros*.

and argues that of all the boundaries navigated by braceros in their journey from rural Mexico to the United States, the notion of modernity “was the ultimate border that they had to cross.”⁷¹ Cohen demonstrates that many Braceros viewed the program as a means for progress, both in terms of social standing and economic position.

Participation in the Bracero Program can be effectively interpreted through either structural forms of analysis, the more individualistic framework of agency, or a combination of both, however, analysis of the Bracero Program cannot be removed from the context of urbanization in Mexico. Even at the peak of the Bracero Program, the United States was not the most popular destination for rural migrants during the period dubbed as the “Mexican Miracle.” From 1940 through the 1970s—a period that encompasses the entirety of the Bracero Program—millions of rural Mexicans preferred domestic destinations to the United States. Others who initially worked in the United States found it dissatisfying and went on to seek opportunities in Mexican cities after their stint in *el norte*.⁷² Additionally, scores of Braceros contracted in Mexican urban areas were originally of rural origin, or if contracted from rural areas, had worked in urban areas before signing their contract with U.S. and Mexican governments.

In other words, the U.S. Bracero and the *Defeño obrero* (worker in Mexico City) were—in many instances—the same person. The workers necessary to develop modern agribusiness in the United States and build the infrastructure for industrial production in Mexico City were sourced from the same rural, migrant-sending communities in Mexico. While it is true that ideas of modernity had some influence in motivating rural workers to

⁷¹Cohen, *Braceros*, 7.

⁷² *the north*—Term used by migrants to refer to the United States

leave for the United States during the Bracero Program, this ideology was first applied in the Mexican context. Campesinos had already established cycles of migration in Mexico prior to the Bracero Program. Indeed, Díaz's modernity had impacted migration and urban development since his rise to power.⁷³ Migration from rural Mexico to the Mexican capital had developed, to an extent, as a response to ideas of modernity. Upon arrival, rural migrants were confronted with discrimination: in the eyes of native urbanites, their rural counterparts, their culture, and their place of origin were backwards and inferior to their urban and modern existence. The persistence of these ideas with the Mexican elite and general city dwellers facilitated the belittling and harassment of rural migrants in the metropole. At times, notions of modernity were even used to justify the criminalization of campesinos working in the city.⁷⁴ While perhaps not always consciously, ideas of modernity in urban Mexico justified the cheap, low wage rural workforce necessary for the industrialization of Mexico. Modernity complimented the Mexican state's new economic policies perfectly. It was the justification for the economic emphasis on urban areas and disinvestment in the countryside, for the creation of a rural migrant workforce. With the new Import Substitution Industrialization Project, also known as ISI, the development of a modern, national industry was prioritized, while investment in backwards communal agriculture was set aside. This was not a new phenomenon: ideas of modernity had antagonized rural Mexico for over a century, and

⁷³ *Porfiriato*- Period in Mexico under President Porfirio Díaz, 1876-1911; Robert V. Kemper and Anya Peterson Royce, "Mexican Urbanization since 1821: A Macro-Historical Approach," *Urban Anthropology* 8 (1979): 267–89.

⁷⁴ Pablo Piccato, *City of Suspects: Crime in Mexico City, 1900-1931* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 22.

these ideas would facilitate yet another monumental change in Mexican society under ISI.

On April 21, 1941, under the guise of continuing the revolutionary project, Avila Camacho signed the Law of Manufacturing Industries, effectively expanding tax exemption to national industries beyond those deemed “necessary” by previous administrations.⁷⁵ In conjunction with the Chambers Law, which unified commerce and industry into a single interest, the Mexican president centralized capital in Mexico City and signaled a move that favored protective industrialization.⁷⁶ Avila Camacho attempted to break down the regional political and economic alliances that had challenged the Mexican state since the end of the revolution.⁷⁷ Centralization was not new for Mexico, but nationalization and the direct challenge to international and regional capital on this scale was. Despite isolating some powerful regional interests, Avila Camacho’s conservative position on religious and popular issues satisfied other formidable and formerly antagonistic elements in Mexican society, most importantly the Catholic Church and its supporters. Avila Camacho also counted on the support of a large and established Capitalino industry from Mexico City.⁷⁸ This “revolutionary nationalist” restructuring of the Mexican economy only exacerbated the already tangible inequality between the Mexican countryside and a rejuvenated urban Mexico.⁷⁹ Mexico City’s new policies

⁷⁵ Susan Gauss, *Made in Mexico: Regions, Nation, and the State in the Rise of Mexican Industrialism, 1920s-1940s* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2010), 69.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 72.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 73.

⁷⁹ Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption*, 3-4.

transformed the entire country into a consumer society; it now had the ability to mass produce commercial foodstuffs, steel and petroleum products, and a wide range of other consumer goods from its public and private manufactures. Mexico's subsidized industries created new markets and national demand for products formerly imported and unattainable to most Mexicans, especially those residing in the countryside. It could be argued that campesinos desired these goods and in their attempt to obtain them, followed the goods their place of origin. But even so, the changes in rural people's material reality remain a more visible consequence of industrialization. After quelling regional interests, solidifying economic investment, and introducing new products to its citizens, Mexico had reached the political stability and financial support necessary to promote significant economic growth.

And grow it did.

Born in Mexico City in January of 1920, Mexican composer and actor Chava Flores' childhood fell entirely before of the "Mexican Miracle."⁸⁰ In his song "Mi Mexico De Ayer", Flores reminisces about the Mexico City of his youth. In the following verse, he described a day in neighborhood as:

*Empedradas sus calles
eran tranquilas
bellas y quietas
los pregones rasgaban
el aire limpio
vendían cubetas
tierra pa' las macetas
la melcocha, la miel
chichicuilotos vivos
mezcal en penca
y el aguamiel.*

The streets paved in Stone
were tranquil
beautiful and quiet
the announcers made proclamations
the air clean
they sold buckets of soil
for the potted plants
the candy, the honey
live plovers
mezcal in dried cactus
and the cactus juice

⁸⁰ "Chava Flores," *Sociedad de Autores Y Compositores de México*, Biografías, 2009.

Flores recalled a time when Mexico City's streets were beautifully paved and peaceful, when the air was clean and people could sell their wares in utmost tranquility. While Flores reminisced on the Mexico City of the past in the song, he also recognized the Mexico City of the during the Mexican Miracle in the song "Sabado, Distrito Federal."

*Los almacenes y las tiendas son alarde
de multitudes que así llegan a comprar
al puro fiado porque está la cosa que arde
al banco llegan nada más para sacar.*

The warehouses and stores are full
from all those how come to shop
on credit because the situation is rough
the only arrive at the bank to withdraw money

*El que nada hizo en la semana está sin lana
va a empeñar la palangana allá en el Monte de
Piedad
hay unas colas de tres cuadras las ingratas
y no faltan papanatas que le ganen el lugar.*

He who did nothing during the week is broke
they pawn their cookware at the Monte de Piedad
the lines are three blocks long the ingrates
there's no lack of peon who will steal your spot

*Desde las doce se llenó la pulquería
los albañiles acabaron de rayar
qué re picosas enchiladas hizo Otilia
la fritanguera que allí pone su comal.*

The *pulquería* has been full since twelve
the construction workers have finished laboring
what spicy enchiladas Otilia made
the street food vender who situated right there

In this song, Flores sung of the commotion of a typical Saturday in Mexico City. The stores and markets are so packed that lines form everywhere. Money is scarce, so people withdrew what they can from the banks, while other pawned their silverware and still others bought on credit. He warns people to be mindful of the lower class people, presumably rural people, who will take your spot in line if you lose sight for a second. By noon, Flores says, the *pulquerías*—a favorite of the rural class—are packed with construction workers who have finished their day's labor. This song contrasts heavily with the previous. Flores remembers Mexico City as a peaceful and enjoyable place to

live prior to industrialization. Singing in the 1950s, Flores argues that Mexico City is now more packed with people than an ant colony, and refers to many of these new inhabitants in a pejorative manner. Flores' observations were not merely subjective; the city did indeed change significantly.

Industrialization in the Mexican capital reached unprecedented levels after the radical post-revolutionary period. Mexico's new leadership prioritized mending the relationship between the Mexican state, the private sector and the United States, all of which were damaged by the radical expropriations of the previous administration.⁸¹ This shift in policy promoted growth in the Mexican economy, an astounding average of approximately 6 percent every year from 1940 to 1970.⁸² But the creation of consumer society meant divestment for the countryside: urbanization was promoted to the detriment of the *campo* (rural areas). The revolutionary project of agrarianism—land expropriation and redistribution—was discarded. Despite maintaining a lot of the radical rhetoric from the revolution, the policies reflected a different reality that satisfied foreign investors and U.S. diplomats.⁸³

This period of “Stabilizing Development” had immediate consequences.⁸⁴ It directly decreased the real wages in rural Mexico, particularly for agricultural workers, and forced many to leave for the urban areas that were receiving the greatest amount of

⁸¹ Sarah Babb, *Managing Mexico: Economists from Nationalism to Neoliberalism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 78.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 79.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

investment from the government's ISI.⁸⁵ This new economy, which coupled demand for labor in urban areas with decreasing wages in the countryside, motivated rural Mexicans to leave their places of origin for Mexican cities once again. But because this growth (and power) was mostly centralized in Mexico City, rural migrants favored the Mexican capital over other urban areas. The 6 percent annual growth in the Mexican economy was reflected directly in Mexico City's population. At the beginning of Avila Camacho's presidency, the beginning of what is now referred to as the "Mexican Miracle," Mexico City's population numbered roughly 1.5 million.⁸⁶ By the late 1970s, the population of greater Mexico City had skyrocketed to nearly 15 million.⁸⁷ Nathan Whetten and Robert Burnight noted this massive movement of people within Mexico in their 1950s study of internal Mexican migration. The two scholars used the 1940 and 1950 Mexican census to track the movement of people in Mexico during the midcentury and were shocked at the level of internal migration occurring in Mexico during this period. In 1950, 3,305,717 people were living outside of their state of origin. Of these three million internal migrants, 266,916 were from the state of Guanajuato, which constituted twenty percent of the state's population. Almost half of Mexico City's population, on the other hand, was composed of people from outside of the Federal District, at 46 percent or 1,303,343 people.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Ibid., 78.

⁸⁶ Robert Kemper and Peterson Royce, "Mexican Urbanization since 1821: A Macro-Historical Approach," 267-89.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Nathan Whetten and Robert Burnight, "Internal Migration in Mexico," *Rural Sociology* 21, no. 2 (1956): 143.

This internal migration represents a significantly larger amount of the population than the Bracero Program that was occurring simultaneously. The Bracero Program only accounted for the movement of twenty thousand people just one year prior in 1949, less than what one state, Guanajuato, sent to in the same year. Even counting the 87,000 undocumented people residing in the United States in that same year, it become clear than more rural people depended on the cities for their financial wellbeing than on the United States during this period.⁸⁹ Other cities also enjoyed growth during the Mexican Miracle, but Mexico City was the primary destination for most rural Mexicans, including those from the municipality of Comonfort, in the historically migrant-sending state of Guanajuato.

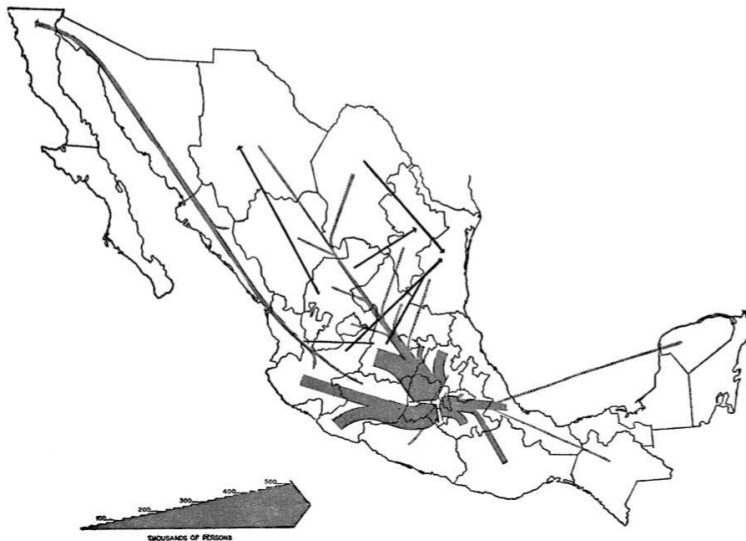


Figure 5. Whetten and Burnight illustrate internal movement⁹⁰

In my attempt understand what national policy looked like on the local level, I travelled to Comonfort, a town in the historically migrant-sending state of Guanajuato.

⁸⁹ Martin Phillip, "Braceros: History, Compensation," *Rural Migration News* 12, no. 2 (2006).

⁹⁰ Whetten and Burnight, "Internal Migration in Mexico," 146.

Surrounded by countless unrestored pyramids, Comonfort's history is profound. Its pre-Columbian name underscores this history. Formerly known as Chamacuero, or "place of ruins," the formerly Tarascan town was later renamed after Ignacio Comonfort, a prominent liberal politician and one-time president of Mexico.⁹¹ Indicative of the instability that characterized Mexico in the nineteenth century, Ignacio Comonfort was assassinated by bandits while travelling through Chamacuero in 1863.⁹² The town was thus named after the assassinated former president and is now the municipal seat of the larger municipality of the same name. Although the seat is not the largest source of migrants in the area, studying rural migration in this region brought me to the location of local power. Like other towns built in the vision of the Iberian conquerors, the three pillars of colonial Mexican society occupy the heart of the city. The government building lies adjacent to the colonial church, which lies across the plaza from the historic market. Of the two institutions that could potentially provide me with information about migration, demographics, or policy, only the church possessed an archive for me to follow my investigation. Reflecting the larger governmental corruption on the national and state levels, the local municipal archive had been sacked and burned after a change in government a few years prior. The Parroquia de San Francisco de Asís would be the only source for written institutional documentation in the Tarascan's place of ruins.

Accessing the small and secluded archive in Comonfort's local parish was no easy feat. After explaining my project, proving that I was indeed a historian, and waiting a

⁹¹José Luis Cuellar Franco, "Comonfort," *Enciclopedia de los Municipios de México ESTADO DE GUANAJUATO*, 2005, <http://www.e-local.gob.mx/work/templates/enciclo/guanajuato/municipios/11009a.htm>.

⁹² Ibid.

week for the Church officials to deliberate whether or not I should be granted access, fortunately, I was eventually admitted into San Francisco de Asís’ small and well organized archive. It contained all of the documents one might expect in a Roman Catholic establishment: baptismal records, newsletters, edicts, and most importantly, marriage certificates. Communication between churches over marriages proved especially illuminating. In the Catholic Church’s attempt to confirm that both of the partners had been baptized within the church and had not previously been married, officials sought out baptismal records from couple’s churches of origin. When juxtaposed with the church in which people were married, these documents reveal a connection between a person’s place of origin and his or her destination. After examining scores of documents, I discovered that some destinations stood out as more popular than others.

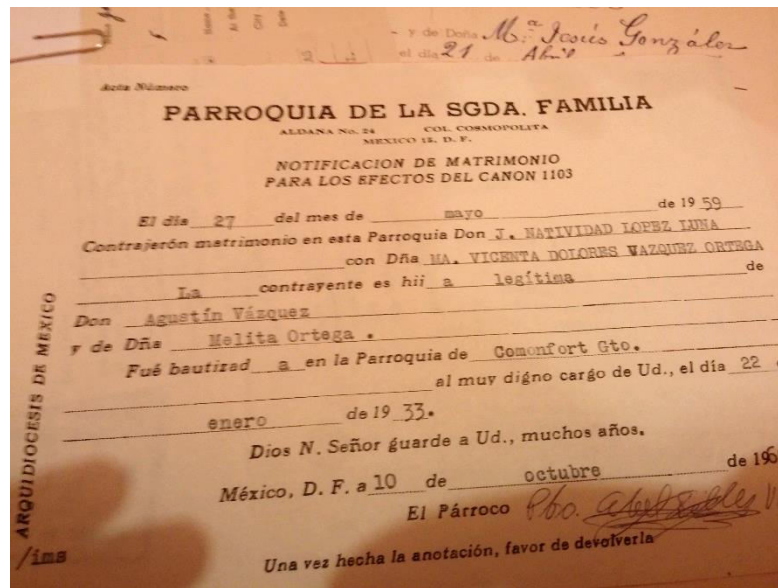


Figure 6. López Luna’s and Dolores Vázquez’s marriage certificate ⁹³

⁹³ “Notificación de Matrimonio Para Los Efectos Del Canon 1103” (Parroquia de La Sagrada Familia, 1959), Box 77, Expedient 8, Parroquia San Francisco de Asís.

Marriage documents originating outside of the local Comonfort municipality reveal Mexico City as the most popular destination for people baptized in San Francisco de Asís, followed by the regional city of Celaya, Guanajuato. The document above, a “Notification of Matrimony,” was not intended to remain in the possession of Comonfort’s parish. With the instructions “*Una vez hecha la anotación, favor de devolverla,*” Parroquia de la Sagrada Familia in Mexico City demanded that their document be returned after their Guanajuatense counterparts had finished recording the matrimonial information. But for whatever reason, the document remained in Comonfort and provides an example of Guanajuatense migration to the rural capital in the heyday of the Mexican Miracle. Mr. Natividad López Luna married a now Mrs. Vicenta Dolores Vázquez Ortega on May 27, 1959. Natividad López’s place of origin cannot be determined. He could have very well been a native of Mexico City or likely even another rural migrant living in the capital. Dolores Vázquez, on the other hand, is clearly identified as a native of Comonfort, Guanajuato, in this document. In a time when people were still labeled “legitimate or illegitimate children,” the breakup of a matrimonial union was a serious sin and under rare circumstances could a person remarry, much less have children outside of their original marriage. The church had to verify that the person in question had not been married before and would not marry again. After marrying, Sagrada Familia did just this by contacting her baptismal parish, San Francisco de Asís. The inquiry regarding Dolores Vázquez’s status is only one of scores of similar documents that reveal a connection between a predominantly rural Comonfort and urban

areas in Mexico. In the church's attempt to protect the sanctity of holy marriage, an especially strong connection between Comonfort and Mexico City becomes clear.

Another couple, Gaspar Velázquez Moreno and María Estér Vázquez Alvarado, also married in Mexico City, albeit in the more nondescript church of Santo Domingo de Guzmán. This church lies in the Coyoacán neighborhood of Mexico City, in the southern outskirts of the capital. Given its distance from the center of the metropole, Coyoacán has for most of its history been removed from the city and has maintained a more provincial character. Coyoacán, like the newlyweds, has a rural history.⁹⁴ But despite marrying in the rustic borough, Velázquez Moreno and Vázquez Alvarado opted out of celebrating in Santo Domingo de Guzmán. The interecclesiastical communication states that the couple preferred Comonfort to celebrate their matrimony for “family reasons.” Almost certainly, either the spouse or groom was from Comonfort and maintained a connection with their family there. Perhaps both Gaspar and María were from Comonfort and had moved to Mexico City together. Celebrating in their place of origin made their wedding accessible to their family members and friends, and guaranteed a large attendance as is custom in rural Guanajuatense towns. Rural Mexican migrants have historically preferred urban migration over the transnational option for this precise reason: they were able to maintain closer connections with their families in their place of origin.

⁹⁴ Antonio Peñafiel, *División Territorial de La República Mexicana*, vol. 1 (Dirección General de Estadística, 1907), 41.

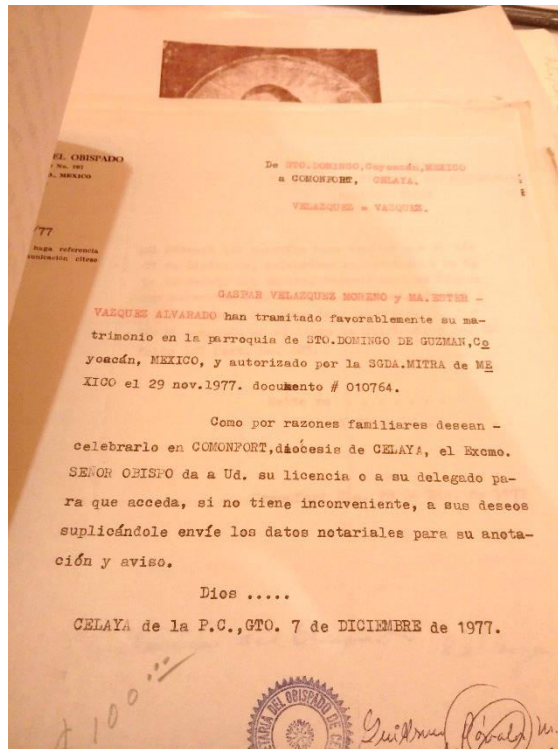


Figure 7. Inter-ecclesiastical Communication ⁹⁵

This trend was observable in the life of María Olalde, a campesina woman from Rosales, a rural village in the municipality of Comonfort. Like Gaspar Velázquez Moreno and María Ester Vázquez Alvarado, María Olalde lived through ISI. As she was born in 1965, her formative years fell into the last two decades of the ISI period. While the connection between urban and rural is clearly demonstrated through the church documents, the daily experiences that motivated people to leave their *ranchos* for urban Mexico remains murky. To better understand what pushed people from the countryside, I spoke to Olalde and asked her to share her experiences growing up in Rosales, Guanajuato. She responded that in Rosales

⁹⁵ “Inter-ecclesiastical Communication” (Santo Domingo de Guzmán, 1977), Box 77, Expedient 13, San Francisco de Asís.

you were destined for nothing. For nothing. A lot of times the land would give you nothing, because there was no rain or because your parents didn't work hard enough. For whatever reason, there was always poverty. A lot of poverty. A lot of suffering. A lot of hunger. So much desire to have what other people had. I remember all of this, I remember that I almost wanted to cry because there were times where I would not eat so my younger siblings could have something to eat.⁹⁶

Twenty years after the Avila Camacho presidency, Mexico's attempt to create a consumer society had not yet successfully penetrated every region in the country. Olalde's memory of her childhood paints a very grim picture of rural life; it is clear that the formerly revolutionary countryside remained marginalized in Mexican society. She described a life without electricity, potable water, lighting, heating, or appliances such as gas stoves or refrigerators, all while living in an adobe house with dirt floors like many others in her community. But unlike them, Olalde's family was able to obtain some commodities that others in her community found inaccessible. "We were able to brush our teeth because our aunt from Mexico City would bring us toothpaste and toothbrushes," she told me, "but I remember a lot of children didn't have any." She added, "We had a table, but only because it was a gift. But I remember that there were people who would eat on the floor. We slept in beds; they were given to us by my father's brothers in the D.F. (Distrito Federal, Mexico City). They would always give us things; in that sense it was nice. But I remember my cousins not having beds, not having

⁹⁶María Olalde, interview by author, Grand Prairie, Texas, August 3, 2013.

tables or chairs.”⁹⁷ Olalde was able to identify a level of inequality between rural Mexican and urban areas, but also within her community. Even though she was impoverished, Olalde’s family was able to acquire, albeit limited, consumer goods secondhand by virtue of having relatives in a major Mexican urban area. But the division between city and countryside was not so clearly defined. Having family in Mexico City, Olalde’s immediate family tried their luck there, but their ties to the countryside ultimately required their return. She states, “Yes, we were from Palmillas. We moved back because of my father’s land. From Palmillas we went to Mexico City for about five years. My dad worked in a slaughterhouse with one of my uncles. After that, another one of my uncles was disputing my father’s land because he was not working it, and that forced us to go back.” Olalde and her family left the countryside for economic prospects of the Mexican capital. But even this proved challenging. Being *ejidatarios*, or communal land owners, their absence and inability to work the land allowed other *ejidatarios* to challenge their ownership of land, one of the conditions outlined by the redistribution of land following the Revolution.⁹⁸ Olalde’s family could not maintain both sources of income simultaneously.

The connection between cities and access to goods was by then firmly established in María’s and her siblings’ consciousness. It was within this context that the oldest of María’s siblings, Guillermo and Lurdes, would find themselves eventually returning to work in Mexico City. María recalled that “Juan, me, Francisco, Leonardo, Guillermo, and Lurdes—we were so many siblings. Lurdes went to the DF and worked there as a maid.

⁹⁷Ibid.

She went with one of our aunts and never came back. She got married over there. Guillermo also left to look for work. He also went to Mexico City and never came back. Francisco and Leonardo came here, to the United States.”⁹⁹ María’s oldest siblings, Guillermo and Lurdes, sought out opportunities within the Mexican national boundaries. Born in the 1950s and growing up entirely within the period of revolutionary nationalist Mexico, the two oldest children of the family took to the ancient city for economic opportunities towards the end of ISI. But unlike their two older siblings, María and her younger siblings grew into adulthood as the transition from ISI to neoliberalism materialized. The younger generation of siblings witnessed the deterioration of their older brother’s and sister’s economic situation. It no longer seemed worthwhile to look for work in Mexico City when the people who already lived there were losing their jobs. From 1982 to 1985, for example, unemployment in Mexico City rose from 5 to 15 percent and real wages dropped by 65 percent.¹⁰⁰ The restructuring of the state and the economy in the early 1980s and through 1990s interrupted the decade’s long pipeline between the countryside and Mexico urban areas. This would motivate this younger generations of rural Mexicans, who also felt the need to leave their place of origin, to instead favor migrating for the United States like the first Braceros forty years earlier.

⁹⁹María Olalde, interview by author, 2013.

¹⁰⁰ Diane Davis, *Urban Leviathan: Mexico City in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 296.

State Intervention: The Bracero Program and Undocumented Migration

Fueron testigos Don Pablo Ojalde el día 21 de Abril de 1952 y Doña Angela Or...
Asistió el P. D. Aquilino...
Date JULY 27, 1952 Date Abril 27, 1952
Dear Father:
In accordance with the prescription of Canon... received your notice that
the Instruction of the Sacred Congregation of the Sacraments, 29 June, 1941. I am sending you the information listed below for entry in your Baptismal Register. May I ask that you be kind enough to acknowledge receipt of this notice by signing and returning to this Church the attached stub
Name JOSEFINA BARCENAS
Parents: MAGDALENO BARCENAS * MARIA MATA
Baptized in the Church of SAN FRANCISCO DE ASIS
City COMENFORD State GTO.
Date 1924
Contracted Marriage with
Name ELEUTERIO VALLEJO
Parents: JESUS VALLEJO * TEODOSIA GOMEZ
At the Church of ST. MARGARET MARY
City PHARR State TEXAS
Date of Marriage JULY 27, 1952
Priest REV. GEORGE O'CONNELL, C.M.I.
Address BOX 575 PHARR, TEXAS
Name Eleuterio Vallejo
Baptized in this Church on the 5 day of Diciembre
Contracted Marriage with
Name Eleuterio Vallejo
At the Church of St. Margaret
City PHARR State
Date of Marriage Julio 27 de 1952
Priest Rev. George O'Connell
Church
City and State Pharr, T.

Figure 8. Barcenas and Vallejo Marriage Receipt ¹⁰¹

Hailing from a “Comenford” Guanajuato, Josefina Barcenas married Texas native Elueterio Vallejo on July 27, 1952, at St. Margaret Mary Church in the border town of Pharr, Texas. Baptized in San Francisco de Asís in 1924, the twenty-eight-year-old Josefina had found her way to Texas at the peak of the Bracero Program. But for the majority of the program, the Mexican government had banned Texas from participation due to the innumerable reports of racial discrimination by Mexican nationals working in the Lone Star State.¹⁰² Although only three years had passed since Mexican officials had lifted the formal embargo on Texas, Josefina moved to the intolerant state and married Eluetario. Hundreds of thousands of Mexicans moved to work in Texas despite this poor

¹⁰¹ “Marriage Receipt” (Saint Margaret Mary Church, 1952), Box 77, Expedient 7, San Francisco de Asís.

¹⁰² Otey Scruggs, “Texas and the Bracero Program, 1942-1947,” *Pacific Historical Review* 32, no. 3 (August 1963): 251–64.

treatment and discrimination.¹⁰³ Because of Texas' institutionalized racial injustice, the labor shortage during the war that could not be satisfied with legal migration, so Texan officials encouraged undocumented migration as a solution.¹⁰⁴ Undocumented migrants thus entered Texas unprecedented scale, even as Mexico and the United States attempted to run the largest contracted labor program in their collective histories.

Migration to the United States was not perceived positively at first by rural Mexicans. When government officials arrived at Cayetano Loza Ornelas' rural Guanajuatense community in 1942, people were suspicious about participating in the Bracero Program. Their community, a former hacienda, had recently been expropriated by the post-revolutionary Mexican state and distributed to the former hacienda workers. The townspeople, understandably, were hesitant to leave their newly acquired ejidos.¹⁰⁵ Eventually, some of Loza Ornelas' siblings were swayed into participating and did so with mixed results. One brother, Juan, did well in the United States and, after returning to Mexico to visit family, decided to go back to the U.S. and make it his permanent home.¹⁰⁶ Another brother did not fare as well. Manuel was treated poorly by contractors and was traumatized by his experiences across the border. He told stories of other Braceros dying due to negligence on the part of their employers. Many died from illness and no access to healthcare. Another fellow worker burned to death when his shack caught on fire.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Scruggs, "Texas and the Bracero Program, 1942-1947," 251.

¹⁰⁴ Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992), 34.

¹⁰⁵ Mireya Loza, "Cayetano Loza Ornelas," in Bracero History Archive, Item #684.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

When asked why he did not bring back any money, Manuel told Cayetano that people were frequently robbed so he had already sent back was all that he had made, which was only enough money to purchase a few calves. Manuel was unhappy with his experience with the Bracero Program. He never returned to the United States again.¹⁰⁸

For both Mexico and the United States, official involvement in migration was not new. Repatriation had been arranged since the Porfiriato, and even more ambitious attempts were undertaken by Lázaro Cardenas through his colonization and repatriation projects of the 1930s. This first attempt to move large numbers of Mexican nationals was more of a propaganda effort than a legitimate attempt to repatriate Mexicans. Building on the revolutionary nationalist sentiment, President Cardenas had seized the opportunity to project himself as a legitimate champion of the Mexican people and of the national interest. The Repatriation Program largely failed to achieve its goals, both in attracting Mexican immigrants back to Mexico and in establishing communities for those who did move back.¹⁰⁹ Clearly, previous efforts did not compare in size or significance to the ambitious program undertaken by the U.S. and Mexican governments in 1942. The Bracero Program was a defining moment in Mexican migratory history. Never before had Mexican state policy so deliberately moved such a large number of people from their communities north to the United States. While previous state interventions argued in favor of bringing Mexico's "missing children" back to their homeland, the Bracero

¹⁰⁸ Loza, Mireya, "Cayetano Loza Ornelas," in Bracero History Archive, Item #684, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/684>.

¹⁰⁹ Fernando Saúl Alanís Enciso, *Que Se Queden Allá: El Gobierno de México Y La Repatriación de Mexicanos En Estados Unidos (1934-1940)*. (Tijuana and San Luís Potosí: El Colegio de la Frontera Norte and El Colegio de San Luís, 2007), 257.

Program took the nationalist rhetoric and flipped it on its head.¹¹⁰ It was now the duty of Braceros to represent Mexico in the fight against fascism and to modernize their nation with their newly acquired knowledge from the north.¹¹¹

The Mexican government used ideology in its attempts to encourage the movement of its citizens to and from the United States, but was successful only in the former. The government was so successful, in fact, that migration to the United States was soon more than the state could organize or control.¹¹² Although the ideological justifications were not exactly the same, the Repatriation and Bracero programs both employed notions of nationalism and modernity to promote participation. It can be argued that the Bracero Program's use of modernity was novel compared to previous state attempts at controlling the movement of people, but Cardenas' also based his arguments on principles of modernity. Coupled with his popularity in rural and working class communities, participation should have been widespread.¹¹³ As the revolutionary leader who redistributed land and expropriated foreign oil, Cardenas remains arguably Mexico's most popular president in history. But even so, his rhetorical appeals and repatriation policy went largely ignored by his largest supporters: the campesino, the Mexican immigrant.

Clearly, ideology was not the primary reason behind migration. Ideology masked the material reasons for the development of the both the Bracero and the Repatriation

¹¹⁰ Alanís Enciso, *Que Se Queden Allá*, 257.

¹¹¹ Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico*, 3-4.

¹¹² Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.*, 141.

¹¹³ Adrian Bantjes, *As If Jesus Walked on Earth: Cardenismo, Sonora, and the Mexican Revolution, Latin American Silhouettes* (Wilmington, Del: Scholarly Resources, 1998), xi.

programs and subsequent participation (or lack thereof). The issues that Cardenas was conscious of on an intellectual level were experienced by rural Mexicans in their daily lives. Those who had left the countryside for the United States had no interest in returning to poverty and a lack of opportunities, and many ignored their president's appeal to return. Because Avila Camacho's foreign policy lined up with the interest of the campesino, his migration program was more successful. Rural Mexicans had already been seeking opportunities to alleviate their poverty in the now labor-satiated urban areas, and because the Bracero Program specifically targeted rural communities with high unemployment, it was the promise of possible socioeconomic advancement that eventually motivated hundreds of thousands of Mexican people to participate. Despite the nationalist and rhetorical appeals of repatriation by Cardenas, the program was ultimately not in line with the material interests of rural Mexicans. Avila Camacho's program was, even if it failed in many to deliver on its promises.

As in previous periods of Mexican history, transnational migration was not the rural migrant's preferred approach for socioeconomic advancement. Migration to the United States from 1940 to 1982 was not spontaneous; it was a consequence of government intervention and disruption of already established networks. While migration between Mexico and the United States existed even prior the acquisition of the Northern Territories by the United States, it did not become a popular alternative to urban areas until the state directly recruited people from rural Mexico and forcefully established migration networks between the two countries. Even so, the United States never became the primary solution for inequality in the countryside during this period. Urban areas remained more popular for rural Mexicans, likely due to familiarity and proximity to the

migrant's place of origin. The Bracero Program, nevertheless, did lay the foundations for later patterns of cyclical Mexican migration that would occur following its dissolution in 1964.

Sowing the Seeds- The End of the Bracero Program

In the 1960 documentary, "Harvest of Shame," a southern landowner proudly proclaimed, "We used to own our slaves; now we just rent them."¹¹⁴ He was describing the system of migratory agricultural labor that made his farm productive during this period. But it was not just the South in which slave-like conditions prevailed; the agricultural industry depended on exploitative conditions nationwide. The film follows agricultural laborers as they move from harvest to harvest detailing the atrocious conditions in which people lived, worked, and travelled. Four years before the official end of the Bracero Program, the PBS documentary brought the nation's attention to the plight of the migrant agricultural laborer, dispelling the triumphalist narrative attributed to agricultural work due to the end of slavery. Interestingly enough, the documentary did not focus on Mexican or Mexican American labor, despite their pronounced presence in agriculture, but it did include some interviews with what appear to be Mexican laborers. The film made no explicit racial distinctions. Journalist Edward Murrow interviewed visibly white, black, and Latino laborers throughout the film to document labor inequities across racial lines. But despite its failure to directly criticize the issues stemming from the Bracero program, the film successfully brought agricultural working conditions to the forefront of national discussion. Four years later, the Bracero Program was terminated.

¹¹⁴ Fred Friendly, *Harvest of Shame* (CBS, 1960).

“Harvest of Shame” propelled the nation and government’s already shifting perspective on the Bracero Program.¹¹⁵ The Bracero Program opened the door to millions of rural Mexicans looking for economic opportunities outside of their impoverished rural communities, but in the process of establishing formal, state sponsored pathways to the United States, the program introduced rural Mexicans to destinations, networks, and means to arrive to such destinations. The program facilitated the development of a permanent migration network. Thus, by the time of the film’s release, Mexican migration to the United States had already taken a different shape than what had characterized it for the previous two decades. While Mexican participation in the Bracero Program did increase over the years, participation in the formal program actually became less significant in terms of overall migration to the United States. Even at the peak of the Bracero Program, INS apprehended three times more undocumented workers than the total amount of formal, Bracero workers in the country that year.¹¹⁶ The program cemented transnational migration as an alternative approach for rural migrants, and with the decline of the program and Mexican industrialization, the places most heavily targeted by the recruitment in the Bracero program became the largest migrant-sending regions for the rest of the twentieth century.

¹¹⁵ Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.*, 154.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

CHAPTER IV

DEL D.F. A DALLAS: NEOLIBERALISM AND MIGRATION, 1982 to 2008

The Revolution Fades

U.S. citizens scrambled across the U.S.-Mexico border to take advantage of Mexico's faltering economy in August of 1982. Both Mexicans and Anglo-Americans squabbled for products in local supermarkets, depleting stores of basic goods such as a sugar, meat, and flour. Anxious shoppers formed lines outside of gas stations in Tijuana, Nogales, Ciudad Juarez, Nuevo Laredo, and Matamoros to take advantage of the comparatively low gas prices. With stores raising prices from the stress of increased demand, informal markets sprang up to satisfy local Mexican needs.¹¹⁷ Mexico had just devalued the peso for the second time in one year, yet the economic situation of the country continued to deteriorate by the day. With the all eyes on Mexico, President José López Portillo surprised the world. Uttering the now famous words, "Ya nos saquearon. México no se he acabado. Nos volverán a saquear," López Portillo nationalized Mexican banking.¹¹⁸ This would be the last breath of the Revolutionary Nationalist Mexican Project.

In the twenty years prior to this milestone event, Mexico experienced major changes in migration. The Bracero Program came to an end. The system of contracted labor gave way to undocumented migration, a form of that appealed to many Mexicans migrants, due to fewer restrictions, and to growers, who enjoyed the lack of government

¹¹⁷ Louis Harrell and Dale Fischer, "The 1982 Mexican Peso Devaluation and Border Area Employment," *Monthly Labor Review* 108, no. 10 (October 1985): 25.

¹¹⁸"We have been sacked. Mexico is not defeated. We will not be sacked again."; José López Portillo's sixth governmental report of September 1st, 1981; Edward Buffie and Allen Sangines Krause, "Mexico 1958-86: From Stabilizing Development to the Debt Crisis," in *Developing Country Debt and the World Economy* (University of Chicago Press, 1989), 141-68.

overview in their hiring practices. Anti-Mexican sentiment reached a new high, in part due to Mexican and Mexican-American labor organizing, but mostly to an increasingly hostile depiction of Mexicans by the U.S. media.¹¹⁹ With labor and popular support, the U.S. government militarized its southern border and deported hundreds of thousands of Mexican workers, both documented and undocumented, through the offensively named “Operation Wetback.” Naturally, many of those Mexicans made their way back to the United States, but not all. Presumably, many stayed in Mexico and found themselves looking for work in the only places that offered employment: cities. But this source of economic support would soon be severed for the millions of rural Mexicans who had come to depend on it.

With one month left in his presidency, López Portillo’s nationalization of the bank challenged the expectations of international capital. Despite decades of expansive economic growth by means of urbanization and industrialization, by the time López Portillo assumed office import substitution industrialization began to show its cracks. Government corruption, mismanagement, and inefficiency proved unsustainable, causing skyrocketing inflation, and ultimately, a default on loans by the early 1980s.¹²⁰ Mexico plummeted into a financial crisis, and its leaders began to feel pressure from foreign investors and non-governmental organizations to solve its financial problems. As this situation became a topic of international scrutiny, newly elected leaders satiated international actors by promising a gradual move away from the Import Substitution

¹¹⁹ Don Mitchell, *They Saved the Crops: Labor, Landscape, and the Struggle over Industrial Farming in Bracero-Era California* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 239.

¹²⁰ Dag MacLeod, *Downsizing the State: Privatization and the Limits of Neoliberal Reform in Mexico* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 100.

Industrialization economic model. Beginning with the administration of Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988), neoliberal policies, later to be called “social liberalism” by succeeding presidents, removed the state as the primary actor in the Mexican economy.¹²¹ Economic growth stagnated, with the public sector hit the hardest by the reforms. Thus, after nearly six decades of state-led development, Miguel de la Madrid, López Portillo’s successor, began the process of bringing to an end the state-centered model by privatizing the banks that López Portillo so famously nationalized a year earlier. He commenced the structural transformation of Mexican society that continues to this day.¹²² Mexico’s new leadership reduced their use of anti-imperialist rhetoric, modifying and employing it only when it was necessary to justify policies that, ironically, ran completely contrary to the logic of the previous nationalist, post-revolutionary Mexican leadership. Most importantly, the new neoliberal program promoted austerity and the privatization of the highly esteemed parastate industries that post-revolutionary administrations since the 1940s had proudly developed. While responsible for a significant amount of Mexico’s debt, millions of Mexicans depended on them economically. Even if inefficient, the Mexican state and its state-sponsored industry was central to the economic growth sustained throughout the twentieth century.

Even though the neoliberal policies of the 1980s and 1990s mostly targeted urban Mexico, because so many rural Mexican communities depended on urban migration and the remittances that it produced, the Mexican countryside was devastated by these

¹²¹ Stephen Randall and Herman Konrad, *NAFTA in Transition* (Toronto: University of Calgary Press, 1995), 48.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 74.

policies. Many Mexican communities, even those in states that have not historically produced significant amounts of transnational migrants, were dependent on migration to urban areas for their survival. Rural Mexico had long been abandoned by the Mexican state. Despite maintaining agrarianist rhetoric for decades, the Mexican government was more concerned with using the surplus labor produced by the countryside to build urban areas and industrialize, instead of investing in and developing Mexican agriculture to employ campesinos in their place of origin. Mexico's divestment of the countryside made itself clear with the exodus that would follow the transition to neoliberalism.

The Impact of Neoliberalism

Released in 1984, two years after the inauguration of neoliberal president Miguel de la Madrid, "Jaula de Oro" by Los Tigres del Norte maintains the distinction of being the very first album to obtain the number one position on the Billboard Regional Mexican chart.¹²³ The song popularity has inspired two movies, in 1987 and 2013, and a television series in 1997. The corrido gave the Norteño group an international audience and has remained one of the most popular and recognizable Mexican groups even today. "Jaula de Oro" obtained such success because it described the situation and the sentiments of a new generation of Mexicans who found themselves having to leave their country for the United States. The song describes the reality for many Mexicans who no longer have sources of economic support in their native Mexico. In the last two stanzas, Los Tigres sing,

¹²³ "Regional Mexican," *Billboard* 97, no. 26 (June 29, 1985), 58.

De mi trabajo a mi casa
yo no sé lo que me pasa
aunque soy hombre de hogar
casi no salgo a la calle
pues tengo miedo que me hallen
y me puedan deportar.

De que me sirve el dinero
si estoy como prisionero
dentro de esta gran prisión
cuando me acuerdo hasta lloro
y aunque la jaula sea de oro
no deja de ser prisión.

From work to my home
I do not know what is happening to me
even though I am the head of my household
I hardly go out
for I am scared that they find me
and then deport me.

What is money good for
if I am like a prisoner
inside this grand prison
when I remember I sometimes cry
even though the prison is gilded
it remains a prison

“Jaula de Oro” focuses on the experiences of undocumented immigrants, signaling a change from the institutionalized migration that occurred during the previous wave of transnational migration under the Bracero Program. The first stanza describes a sentiment common among this generation of undocumented immigrants, that of being unable to leave home due to fear of deportation. The immigrant in question feels that they can only comfortably travel between home and work. This feeling of insecurity is reinforced in the subsequent stanza, where the migrant questions the value of the higher wages earned through migration if living in the United States is comparable to imprisonment. The lyrics explain the title of the song clearly, in the eyes of many Mexican immigrants, the United States is a gilded cage, a prison filled with wealth. For many Mexicans, migrating to the United States was not a favorable or desirable reality. They experienced suffering and unhappiness, especially if undocumented. Their experiences clash with the agential model projected onto migrants, where migrants are projected as having choice. For this undocumented generation, leaving for the United States was not a favorable situation. The freedom that the U.S. claims to project and maintains is central to its existence did not exist for undocumented immigrants.

Transnational migration has been an option for rural Mexicans looking for economic opportunities since the turn of the twentieth century, and many rural Mexicans have exercised that option to better their economic situations. But the mass migration to the U.S. in the late twentieth century was distinct from the transnational migration that was already occurring prior to neoliberalism. Some migrants found the U.S. as a good substitute for internal urban migration following the Bracero Program, especially in the years just prior to the neoliberal transformation. Then Mexico's economy began to deteriorate in the 1970s and went into full-fledged crisis in the 1980s and 1990s. Despite the fact that the economic restructuring after 1982 specifically targeted parastate entities in urban areas, it was detrimental to Mexican workers all over the country, regardless of geographic background. Because rural people depended on cities economically, the effects of the economic and political reforms reverberated to the countryside. So bad was the crisis that, from 1982 to 1989, nine out of ten Mexicans found themselves in a state of poverty.¹²⁴ While scholars like to attribute the massive rural migration to the United States to the privatization of ejidos, or communal land, not all communal lands were privatized, and many communities that continue to maintain this form of land tenure also produce some of the highest rates of migration.¹²⁵ Likewise, while it is indisputable that the flooding of the Mexican market with cheap U.S. agricultural products may have made it more difficult for rural Mexicans to sell their products on the market, it was not the most

¹²⁴ Carlos Tello, "Combating Poverty in Mexico," in *Social Responses to Mexico's Economic Crises of the 1980s*, U.S.-Mexico Contemporary Perspectives 1 (San Diego: University of California, 1991), 58.

¹²⁵ Gustavo A. Flores-Macías, "NAFTA's Unfulfilled Immigration Expectations," *Peace Review* 20, no. 4 (December 2008): 435–41; Manuel Pastor and Carol Wise, "State Policy, Distribution and Neoliberal Reform in Mexico," 1.

critical element to their exodus for the United States.¹²⁶ Rural Mexicans had been struggling to subsist from their agricultural production prior to neoliberal restructuring, but the economic crises forced migrants to abandon the cities as economic support for the more distant, dangerous, and uncomfortable United States.

The impact of neoliberalism in the countryside reflects the significance of urban areas to rural Mexican communities, not only in historically migrant-sending states, but throughout the entire nation. Because neoliberal reform brought about a change in domestic migration first, rerouting urban migrants to the U.S, we see a change in the regions that produce transnational Mexican migrants.¹²⁷ Mexican migration to the United States was not a new phenomenon, but this change in the migrant's place of origin demonstrates a distinct phenomenon from previous forms of mass transnational migration from Mexico. Before, mostly Mexicans with historical connections to transnational migration would migrate to the United States. But because urbanization encompassed all of Mexico, and Mexican cities attracted migrant workers from all of Mexico's states, all domestic Mexican migrants were affected by the decline of urban areas following neoliberal restructuring. Mexicans from states with no major historical connection to transnational migration now found their ability to find economic relief in cities compromised and had to follow the footsteps laid by Mexicans with historical ties to transnational migration. Mexicans from areas outside of the historical migrant-sending region had to employ the networks established by their northern and central Mexican

¹²⁶ Manuel Pastor and Carol Wise, "State Policy, Distribution and Neoliberal Reform in Mexico," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 29, no. 2 (May 1997): 419–56; David Bacon, *Illegal People: How Globalization Creates Migration and Criminalizes Immigrants* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009).

¹²⁷ Wayne Cornelius, "Los Migrantes de la Crisis: The Changing Profile of Mexican Migration to the United States," in *Social Responses to Mexico's Economic Crises of the 1980s*, U.S.-Mexico Contemporary Perspectives 1 (San Diego: University of California, 1991), 157.

paisanos for their well-being leading to the rise of non-traditional Mexican migration, especially from the south and indigenous parts of Mexico.

Flight

Francisco Perales Rayas was one such central Mexican migrant. He recalled a time before the neoliberal restructuring of the early 1980s, when he could rely both on transnational and urban migration for his and his family's economic wellbeing. Perales Rayas was born in 1943 and raised in Jalpilla, Guanajuato, which he described as having "No plumbing, no floors, no beds, and no running water," a place where people "would bathe when it rained, when the stream had a current."¹²⁸ Because of the overall poor economic conditions in his rural village, working outside of their hometown has been an important strategy for the economic wellbeing of his family since he can remember. Despite being an ejidatario, a communal land owner, his father was never home to do farm work. Instead Perales Rayas and his siblings took responsibility for tending his father's lands in order to avoid losing them while his father worked away in the railroad, and at one point, as a Bracero until Mexican officials discovered his employment as a railroad worker and banned him from the program. He never received money from his time as a Bracero. Yet despite having sources of income, Perales Rayas and his family grew up poor in a village populated by abode houses like his own, one in which sleeping on dirt floors was not uncommon.¹²⁹ This led Perales Rayas to continue his parents' strategy; he left behind the agricultural work that dominated his surroundings. He argued

¹²⁸ Francisco Perales Rayas, Interview by Author, August 2014, Jalpilla, Guanajuato.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

that people from his community had two options: remain in poverty or leave their community. He chose to leave.

When I inquired about his experiences migrating to the U.S, Perales Rayas interrupted and first told me about his experience migrating to Mexico City. He argued that migrating and working in Mexico City helped clothe and feed his family back home and that it was essential if they wanted to send siblings to school. In his community most people faced difficulties buying basic necessities such as clothing and even sending children to school was costly and therefore unusual. Migration to Mexico City proved vital to Perales Rayas. He initially left for the capital in 1964, at 21 years old. In his interview, he recalled the Tlatelolco Massacre, which occurred four years after his first trip to the capital, describing the bloodied streets by a bus station that he used during that time period. Perales Rayas recalls earning approximately 15 to 20 pesos a day working in construction, which compared favorably to the 4 daily pesos Perales Rayas would have earned working in the countryside. Ten years later, he made his first trip to the U.S. to work in the California, and later, Arizona cotton fields like his father had before him. After his trip to the U.S, he integrated transnational migration into his migratory routine. He recalls spending almost the entire year outside of his home village. In a typical year, six or seven months were spent working in Mexico City, three months in the United States, and the remaining two or three months home in his village. He says he never really had a break; even when at home Perales Rayas helped in the harvest of the communal land whenever possible. Despite having worked harsh jobs such as construction and sewage maintenance, Perales Rayas remembers working in Mexico City fondly. He enjoyed the close proximity to his place of origin and the ease of travel between the

capital and his rural home. The year that Miguel de la Madrid was inaugurated was the last year Perales Rayas ever migrated to Mexico City for employment. He worked for a state owned gas distributor, and he lost his job when people were laid off due to fraud. Presumably, this was part of the restructuring that occurred under de la Madrid. Perales Rayas never returned to Mexico City again.

Another migrant, Ismael Olalde, of no relation to María Olalde from Rosales, recalled his youth spending days out in the mountains away from other people, herding goats and sheep during the day, and sleeping in secluded rocky caves at night. He was also a campesino and native of La Presa, Guanajuato, and like many other future Mexican immigrants, grew up in poverty and was unable to go to school.¹³⁰ Despite his family's poverty, he remembered this time favorably, and attributed the end of his lifestyle to the encroachment of enclosure, that is to say, the fencing of lands that were historically accessible to the general public. Olalde, however, when asked how he ended up migrating to the United States, began his story not with his move for the United States but his time in Mexico City. Olalde told me about how the migration networks that were in place in his town brought him to Mexico City first. The main motivator for this migration was not his family, but a close friend of his. Like many Mexican men, Olalde initially found work in construction and later in a plastics factory. Olalde got married and started a family in Mexico City and worked in the factory for over thirty years before finally leaving for the United States in 1993. Despite leaving Mexico in the midst of the crisis, Olalde maintained that he was unaffected by the crises and that it was not the primary reason for his departure. He argued that the reason for his departure from Mexico City was the

¹³⁰ Ismael Olalde, Interview by author, Jalpilla, Guanajuato, December, 2014.

increasingly unhealthy environment of his workplace, and told me of a how the chemicals in his workplace had a detrimental effect on his health. Feeling terrible, he went to the doctor who told him that he had one year of life left if he continued to work in the factory.¹³¹ Olalde described an environment dictated by the neoliberal politics of deregulation that allowed companies to work people in conditions detrimental to their health. Other scholars have identified the negative health effects of deregulation in the countryside in rural areas, but forget that the politics also extended to the city and effected the most vulnerable, who also tend to be Mexicans of rural origins.¹³² Olalde's decision to leave was seemingly unconnected to Mexico's structural transformation, but in reality his declining health was a symptom of Mexico's deregulatory position, one that would attract greater investment in manufacturing after the exiting of the state from the sector.

Thus, while it may be the case that the specificities of the political maneuvering occurring in Mexico City at the time was unknown by many rural Mexicans relying on urban areas. It is clear that many of these workers immediately felt the effects of national, structural reform. It was in the midst of this period of austerity, deregulation, decentralization, and privatization that many rural Mexicans who had relocated to urban Mexican areas lost their jobs.¹³³ Even those who had yet to migrate to the cities noticed the opportunities formerly promised by Mexican urban areas disappear. This caused a change in destination. Once again, rural migrants from the historical sending states found

¹³¹ Ismael Olalde, Interview by author, Jalpilla, Guanajuato, December, 2014.

¹³² David Bacon, *The Right to Stay Home: How US Policy Drives Mexican Migration* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013).

¹³³ Manuel Pastor and Carol Wise, "State Policy, Distribution and Neoliberal Reform in Mexico," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 29, no. 2 (May 1997): 419–56.

themselves seeking to better their economic prospects by migrating north to the United States. But this time, these migrants from states such as Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacán, and Zacatecas were followed by their *paisanos* from states with few historical ties to transnational migration. Urbanization provided a major outlet for rural Mexicans from all over the country to advance their social and economic standing and its decline signaled the need to find a new source of support. Many of these migrants had connections to the countryside, but identified with and had lived most of their life in the city. Scholars sometimes address the emergence of urban migration to the United States, but these migrants were not entirely city dwellers.¹³⁴ Many were rural migrants living and working in the cities, who lost their jobs or struggled in the face of a declining economy, and took to the United States like other rural migrants in their surroundings.

Despite living and spending most of his life in Mexico City, Javier Soto told me that life was difficult prior to migration. He was born in rural areas of the state of Mexico, but his family moved to Mexico City where he spent most of his childhood and young adult life. Soto lived in Mexico City's infamous *vecindades*, which he described as extremely constrained and overcrowded, where one room in the home could be shared by multiple families. Growing up in this environment, he was only able to attend school through middle school, and had to work consistently from the age of twelve.¹³⁵ He spoke of very little social mobility and a lot of poverty, similar to how rural migrants described life in the countryside. But although life was difficult in the Mexican capital, he recognized the more pronounced struggle that existed in rural areas. At one point, he

¹³⁴ Fernando Riosmena and Douglas S. Massey, "Pathways to El Norte", 18.

¹³⁵ Javier Soto, Interview by author, Grand Prairie, Texas, December, 2014.

recalled living in the Mexican countryside when his mother decided to move back to her home village. He described his parent's place of origin as very poor place with very few opportunities, stating, "Eran muy pocas las oportunidades allá en la provincia. A veces tenía que cortar yerbas, haciendo trabajo de albañearía. Yo no tenía un pedazo propio de tierra, algo que digiera, esto es mío. Nada más trabaja para alguien más. Nomás teníamos lo más limitado. Lo más necesario."¹³⁶ Rural life was lacking for Soto, something he attributed to the fact that he was unable to own land. Being from outside of the town, Soto was not an ejidatarios, could make no claim to the land, and thus was relegated to working it for others, a position that provided very little pay.

Dissatisfied with rural life, Soto moved back to Mexico City where he met his future wife, a migrant from rural Guanajuato working in the city. After they married, they moved to live with his wife's family in Guanajuato, where Soto was able to see how immigrants from her community came back with more financial security and wealth than those who stayed, which convinced him to try his luck in U.S. as well. Although Soto is not from a traditional migrant-sending state, he was able to observe migrants returning from the U.S. and this ultimately motivated him to leave for the U.S. He realized it was impossible to advance socioeconomically if he stayed in Mexico, where he said most people subsist with only the most basic necessities. Having lived in the U.S. since 2003, Soto and his family have been able to live more comfortably, and when comparing his childhood in Mexico City to that of his children in the U.S., he says, "Fue algo que yo veo ahora, nada que ver. Sé que ahora no tienen todo, pero a comparación con mi niñez,

¹³⁶ "There were very few opportunities outside of Mexico City. Sometimes you would work weeding, other times as a construction worker. I did not have my own land, something I could call my own. I always worked for someone else. Our possessions were limited. We only had bare necessities."

ellos tienen mucho. Uno sueña con tener una casa, uno carro. Allá, yo nunca pensaba que iba a llegar a tener un coche.”¹³⁷ Soto is satisfied with his decision. In Mexico, he never believed he would be able to have a car, much less a house of his own. In Texas he has both, and although he recognizes that his children do not have everything that they could possibly want, they have a much more comfortable life than what he left behind in Mexico. Although Soto is not from a traditional migrant-sending state, he was able to observe migrants returning from the U.S. which ultimately motivated him to leave north. The mass migration following neoliberal reform turned transnational migration from a regional phenomenon to a national one. But it was not only Mexican policy that motivated people to leave en masse. Changes in the U.S. policy also facilitated this transition.

Four years after de la Madrid began Mexico’s societal transformation, the Immigration Reform and Control Act of gave undocumented migrants in the US the ability to reside in the United States legally and extended the possibility of eventually becoming citizens. In conjunction with evaporating opportunities in Mexican cities, IRCA attracted a great amount of attention from rural communities, especially from community members fed up with the separation that migration entailed. IRCA increased migration by allowing migrants to bring over family members legally, but with the tradeoff of a more militarized border. Because of this increased militarization, immigrants found it increasingly difficult to enter the United States, as previous gateways were blocked by increasing border patrol, which in turn, also raised the rates for

¹³⁷ Javier Soto, Interview by author, Grand Prairie, Texas. August 2013; “What we have today is incomparable to back then. I know my children don’t have everything today, but compared to my childhood, they have everything. People dream of having a house or a car. Over there, I would never have imagined one day owning a car.”

contracting *coyotes*, or human smugglers. Since 2006, the War on Drugs made crossing into the United States without documents unfeasible. More traditional forms of transnational migration, cyclical and seasonal, became almost impossible for many rural Mexicans who were unable to afford rates demanded by smugglers. Because those who had been legalized by IRCA had the ability to bring their families with them to the United States, it made permanent settlement in the United States by these immigrants a more socially and economically sound decision. Many Mexicans of rural origin who were seasonal migrants to either the U.S. or Mexico City eventually found themselves immigrating and settling in the United States instead.

Rural Mexico Today

The contemporary Mexican countryside has better infrastructure and more commodities than in the 1980s and 1990s, but most of this growth has been a result of migration. Because not all people or families can migrate, rural communities have grown unequally. Even as a whole, rural communities remain significantly poorer relative to today's migratory destinations. This reality has remained constant through both the ISI and neoliberal periods, with change in destination occurring only as a result of an inability to satisfy the desire for socioeconomic stability through urban migration. The economic recession that occurred as a result of austerity and mass privatization meant fewer social services and increased unemployment for Mexicans residing in the capital. This made the prospect of worthwhile employment in urban areas for rural Mexicans a more distant possibility through the early years of the neoliberal period, but the idea of searching for work in cities remained in the Mexican consciousness. Similar to how historical transnational migration networks facilitated contemporary transnational

migration, historical urbanization is facilitating a return to cities by rural Mexicans in light of recent obstructions to transnational migration. Mexico remains in the process of neoliberal transformation, but the relationship between the US and Mexico has evolved in a way that has hampered the ability of many rural Mexicans to continue looking to their northern neighbor for economic opportunities. The economic crisis of 2008, along with increasing militarization of the border, deportation on an unprecedented scale, and the borderland insecurity stemming from the US-funded drug war have all more than discouraged undocumented migration to the United States. Some nonetheless have managed to make their way to the U.S. indirectly by means of the aforementioned Immigration Reform and Control Act, but their recent migration sheds light on contemporary developments in rural Mexico.

Patricia and Juana are both young mothers currently living between the United States and Mexico. Both come from impoverished ejidatario families where their economic situations were so dire that they were made to work from an early age instead of attending school. While initially this work consisted mostly of helping with agricultural activities, by the time they were twelve and thirteen, they were encouraged to travel to the city to work and contribute to their families' income.¹³⁸ Both women eventually married migrant men who had been undocumented but had been granted legal migration through IRCA, which eventually provided them access to documented migration as well. Despite both enjoying their ability to move and work between the two countries, their initial experiences were also marked by rural to urban migration. They identified a gendered dynamic in both rural to urban and transnational migration. First

¹³⁸ Juana Rosales, Interview by author, Rosales, Guanajuato, December, 2014; Patricia Angeles, Interview by author, Rosales, Guanajuato, December, 2014.

migrating to Mexico City, Patricia recalled working for her aunt in Mexico City, “I was twelve years old. With an aunt, they sent me to work with her when I was twelve. I worked in her house, taking care of her children and cleaning her house. I came back when I turned sixteen.”¹³⁹ Patricia went back because the aunt with whom she had lived and worked accepted an opportunity to move to the United States. It was much longer after she returned to her community that she once again left for an urban area, but this time she went to Celaya, Guanajuato. Here she did the same type of labor, domestic work, until she married and worked in agriculture with the support of her migrant husband.¹⁴⁰ Juana, also migrated to Celaya to do similar work as Patricia, and she argues that there was gendered divide in migration patterns. Rural men typically worked in construction while women were employed in domestic services. Juana asserted that this gendered divide applied both to the United States and Mexican urban areas in previous periods of migration, but with the most recent decrease in transnational migration, the women and men who migrate have resumed work in different locations and doing different types of jobs. Juana observes, “people still go to the cities, but not for cleaning. They aren’t employing people in cleaning anymore, instead they work in construction with the men. They clean up after the construction workers. All the women are working in construction now. All the wood, leftovers, get cleaned up by rural women. Queretaro is the primary destination right now, all the people from Rosales are working in Queretaro right now, women, children, and men. Necessity has pushed women to now share the

¹³⁹ Patricia Angeles, Interview by author, Rosales, Guanajuato, December, 2014

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

workplace with men. Most women are now working with construction workers.”¹⁴¹ She argues that not only have destinations for rural Mexicans changed, but also how they work and when. Initially, it redirected a surplus rural labor force to the United States. After satiating the United States with cheap Mexican labor, the state policies of decentralization came into effect, in which we can now see increased regional investment and the growth of regional manufacturing which have spurred growth in regional Mexican cities. Mexico City has lost primacy for this new generation of rural to urban migrants, who now prefer regional cities due to proximity and greater opportunities. The rapid investment and growth in these regional cities provides enough work for both men and women in construction, breaking down former gendered divisions within the labor force and concentrating them in similar infrastructural projects. As regional investment grows in these historically peripheral states, we can expect to continue seeing more regional, decentralized urbanization and the manifestation of commuting as a practice in rural areas, which was formerly a difficult endeavor due to limitations in transportation from rural communities.

In the case of these two women from rural Guanajuato, the need to leave their place of origin was always present in their lives. Through their stories, we can see how changes in the national policy has moved rural Mexicans to change their destination in favor of what they find most beneficial. Their stories are not unique. Many rural Mexicans from central and western Mexico have found their conditions unacceptable throughout the twentieth century, to the point where they found it necessary to leave their place of origin for the possibility of upward social mobility. Mexican migration from the

¹⁴¹ Juana Rosales, Interview by author, Rosales, Guanajuato, December, 2014

countryside, then, has not been arbitrary. It has been a product of economic and political policies that have pushed and directed Mexicans out of the countryside. At times this has been explicitly intentional, such as the case of state repatriation and Bracero recruitment. At other times it has been indirectly, such as with the economic restructuring of the late twentieth century. Regardless of the time period or the most popular destination for any given region, one constant remains throughout this century: there is a sense of socioeconomic depravity and immobility in the Mexican countryside. This has pushed people in search of socioeconomic opportunities wherever they can find them.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Considering that the Republican frontrunner for 2016 presidential candidacy has mobilized millions of Americans by calling Mexicans immigrants “rapists,” “criminals,” and their U.S.-born children “anchor babies” –all while arguing that he will “...build a great, great wall on our southern border of the United States” at Mexico’s expense –it becomes clear that immigration from Mexico remains a sensitive topic for many Americans on both sides of the issue and border.¹⁴² But in reality, immigration from Mexico should be a non-issue for the belligerently conservative Republican voter since Mexican immigrants today are actually more likely to return to Mexico from the United States than vice-versa.¹⁴³ Yet despite the fact that more Mexicans are leaving the U.S. willingly, not to mention the fact that undocumented immigrants have been deported at a greater rate under the Obama administration than under any other president in the history of the country, nativists remain enraged with their imagined invasion of undocumented Mexicans immigrants.

This widespread concern with the Mexican presence in the United States can be understood by looking at early records of Anglo-American thought regarding Mexican personhood. Even before the Mexican-American War, U.S. congressmen engaged in intense debates over the annexation of Mexican lands, and specifically, what was to be done with the people who inhabited those lands. One would imagine that the discussion

¹⁴² Rebekah Metzler, “Trump: Mexico Will Pay for Wall Because I Say so,” *CNN*, August 5, 2015, sec. Politics; Will Heilpern, “Trump Campaign: 11 Outrageous Quotes,” *CNN*, February 23, 2016, sec. Politics.

¹⁴³ Tara Bahrapour, “For First Time since Depression, More Mexicans Leave U.S. than Enter,” *The Washington Post*, 2012.

would revolve around the logistics of conquest, but instead, elected officials were primarily concerned with the threat that integrating a large number of Mexican people into the nation would pose to the conservation of racial purity and the maintaining of white supremacy for the foreseeable future. Essentially, Anglos wanted the greatest amount of Mexican land with the least amount of Mexicans.¹⁴⁴ Anxieties regarding the presence of Mexican people posed to Anglo society and culture have not only remained in place for over a century, but has also motivated many scholars, and even more importantly, the media, to center their narratives around Mexican issues solely on international migration from Mexico to the United States.

This focus on transnational migration by the media has, in turn, divorced the national discussion in the United States from the reality of life for people in Mexico. Instead of focusing on Mexican migrants and their experiences, scholars have taken their cues from headlines and imposed a narrative that begins with the migrant's departure for the United States. Rural Mexicans, their experiences, and their motivations for migration are then typically left out of the discussion. The failure to fill this gap by both academics and journalists allows Mexican immigrants to be characterized as individuals who have made a very conscious choice to cross into the United States without documents. Instead of recognizing and acknowledging larger, structural changes that push people from their homes for a new destination, the Mexican immigrant is depicted as a person who has chosen to break U.S. law. Because the political and economic policies and the conditions that produce conditions that motivate rural Mexicans to migrate are ignored, Mexicans

¹⁴⁴ Laura Gomez, *Manifest Destinies: The Making of the Mexican American Race* (New York: New York Press, 2008).

are portrayed as people who willingly break the law, as criminals by their very existence in the United States. The narrative behind the action is lost and becomes irrelevant. This is where I have made an intervention.

Some scholars have explored the origins and destinations of Mexican migration. They have documented the conditions and experiences that may motivate migration. They answer the important questions: Where do Mexican migrants come from, and where do they go? What was their occupation prior to moving north? What is their occupation now? All of these lines of inquiry have been thoroughly addressed. However, the question as to how Mexican migration has evolved over time remains relatively under-researched, and when combined with the focus on the United States, the narrow viewfinder has led many scholars to overlook urbanization as an integral part of Mexican migration. By looking at sources from Mexico that capture the perspective of migrants – such as the personal testimony, baptismal records, marriage certificates, corridos, and political cartoons – it becomes clear that migration to the United States has not been as central to the rural Mexican experience as many scholars and the U.S. media have suggested. Without a doubt, international migration has at certain periods defined part of the rural Mexican experience, but evidence spanning a century shows us that many rural Mexicans felt compelled to leave their places of origin due to economic circumstances and had little desire to leave their families and livelihoods behind. Because cities have historically provided more economic opportunities for rural Mexicans than the countryside, urban areas have been the primary destination for rural Mexicans throughout the twentieth century.

Rural Mexicans have made up the vast majority of Mexican migrants from the nineteenth century to today and have overwhelmingly favored urban migration since the Porfiriato. Before strong migration networks to the United States were formed, these migrants were connected to cities by President Porfirio Diaz's newly minted railroad network. This same infrastructure, which was mostly put in place to facilitate the extractive nature of Mexico's economy, incidentally connected rural Mexico to the rest of the world and facilitated travel for Anglo-American contractors looking to fill labor shortages that resulted from war and discriminatory immigration laws in the Southwest.¹⁴⁵ But immigration to the United States was limited throughout the early twentieth century, and those who did leave their places of origin were more likely to travel to Mexico's ancient capital or border cities to try their luck with the small but growing industry developed by Diaz's foreign investors. But the turn of the century proved too much for the Porfirian government to weather. The Mexican Revolution disrupted the lives of people in every niche of the country, regardless of class. Rural Mexicans were especially affected and were the largest actors in the uprising. Many *campesinos* chose to fight, but others who felt threatened or had suffered enough from the violence and disorder made use of the growing migration networks to make their way to the United States. This northward movement was temporary. After the Revolution, millions of Mexicans were repatriated by the U.S. with the political support of the post-revolutionary Mexican state. Back in Mexico, many of these migrants and others in their communities remained in need of employment. Unable to migrate to an increasingly hostile United States, they made their way to Mexican cities at unprecedented rates. The

¹⁴⁵Alma García, *The Mexican Americans* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2002), 21.

Bracero program eventually reestablished the U.S. as a major destination for rural migrants, but the movement of people to Mexican urban areas far surpassed those going northward to the United States. Mexican movement from rural to urban areas was so large that it transformed the Mexican capital into one of the largest cities in the world. Urbanization during this period is not unique to Mexico, but its significance to rural communities is largely overlooked in scholarship that addresses Mexican migration.

This push to the cities during the mid-twentieth century was critical to the development of contemporary Mexico; it was a landmark event in Mexican history. Cities provided opportunities for all Mexicans and transformed Mexico from a primarily rural and agricultural nation into a modern, industrial nation with a growing consumer culture and a burgeoning middle class. Most importantly, urbanization, unlike transnational migration, provided opportunities for all Mexicans, including those from the most impoverished regions in southern Mexico, not only those from traditionally migrant-sending states. This period has been dubbed the “Mexican Miracle” by Mexican historians and economists due to the impressive growth sustained by the country for a period of over thirty years. But the economic policies of nationalist development by means of import substitution industrialization proved a short term solution for the larger structural problems in Mexico. While rural Mexican workers sustained their families through their labor in cities, sending whatever economic support they could back home, ultimately urban spaces continued to grow at the expense of the countryside. Despite the fact that its rhetoric and state building projects revolved around a rural Mexican identity, the Mexican state divested in its agrarian regions. Poverty remained rampant, as urban migration and remittances only allowed rural areas to survive, but not prosper. When

these sources of employment were compromised by the economic crisis of the 1980s and the economic restructuring that followed, Mexico's rural communities had to once again search for new sources of sustenance.

The collapse of Mexico's nationalist development was more far reaching than previous instances of interruption; Not only were rural Mexicans from traditional migrant-sending states interrupted, but also migrants from southern states that did not have strong historical ties to transnational migration. Scholars have identified a trend within the last wave of transnational migration from Mexico in which migrants were increasingly came increasingly from regions outside of the traditional sending states.¹⁴⁶ Migrants came, instead, from regions of Mexico with few historical ties to the United States. Rural Mexicans from the south and other non-sending states became ever more reliant on Mexican cities for their economic survival during the Mexican Miracle, and just like their more traditional migrant counterparts, also took to transnational migration when their networks were interrupted by neoliberal restructuring. The Mexican Miracle produced urban migrants out of all of rural Mexico, and eventually, transnational migrants when the cities failed to deliver economic support.

Mexico's last wave of transnational migration brought millions of Mexican workers and families to the United States. It changed the cultural and demographic composition of the United States, exacerbating anxieties that the Anglo community held towards Mexicans for over a century. These anxieties pushed the United States to militarize its southern border, making it costlier for people to cross into the United States without documents. At the same time, U.S. policies have supported the militarization of

¹⁴⁶ Fernando Riosmena and Douglas S. Massey, "Pathways to El Norte", 18.

its southern neighbor and a campaign against drug trafficking, which have cost Mexico over a hundred thousand lives. As a result of these policies, the border has become both militarized and dangerous, making crossing extremely difficult, risky, and costly in recent years. Not surprisingly, Mexican immigration to the U.S. has fallen to nearly zero. It is no longer feasible for many, and for others it is simply impossible. But the countryside remains in need of economic support, and not surprisingly, rural Mexicans have once again taken to Mexican cities for survival. The dynamics of urban migration, like transnational migration before it, have changed significantly over the years, each wave taking different characteristics than previous movements. Nationalist development has been left behind, and with it the centralization of the economy, making regional urban spaces, with increased foreign investment, more significant than they have been historically. Infrastructure has improved, making commuting from rural local urban areas more feasible than long term trips to Mexico City. Occupations are no longer as rigidly gendered as they were historically, a general trend of gendered relations moving in a more progressive direction. Anglo-Americans imagine that Mexican communities remain dependent on the United States today, but the reality is that rural Mexicans have gone through migratory cycles and move to wherever they can best obtain economic opportunities during any given period. Interviews reveal that today rural Mexicans return to cities in their own nation.

Despite changes in culture and in practice, rural Mexico has remained unchanged in the sense of economic inequality. Today, rural Mexican communities continue to feel the effects of national Mexican policies. The war against drugs has had a tremendous impact on migrant-sending communities. Like cities, rural villages are also now plagued

by violence. Instead of stemming crime, the militarization of the country seems to have exacerbated it, or at least, brought to the surface, what had been previously relegated to the shadows. Instability has spread to the countryside, to the point where even my personal safety was a concern while conducting research in rural communities.

Comparing this instability with the last time Mexico was engulfed in such violence, the Mexican Revolution, it makes sense to predict an increase in migration to the U.S. But the War on Drugs has made militarization on both sides of the border a reality, one that no longer allows historical forms of migration to take place. Unfortunately, poverty continues to define rural Mexico. It continues to motivate rural Mexicans to actively find ways to maintain themselves and their families. For now, this means rediscovering urban migration as a solution. But, unfortunately, it has also meant an escalation in crime and drug use. The War on Drugs has proved to be a self-fulfilling prophecy: In the attempt to attack crime, it has created more of it. So if American citizens were truly concerned with crime spilling into the United States, they should realize that investing billions in constructing a wall between the two countries would only aggravate the problem. Instead, taking that money and providing economic opportunities or financial assistance in rural Mexico would be a much more effective approach. Unfortunately, leaders from both countries find this unacceptable as it would eliminate rural Mexico as a static source of cheap labor, something both Mexicans cities and the United States have exploited for over a century.

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