

*MI CORAZONCITO SE QUERÍA
QUEDAR: EVERYDAY*
**TRANSNATIONALISM AMONG
UNDOCUMENTED MEXICAN
MIGRANTS IN THE USA AND
THEIR KIN IN MEXICO**

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Abstract

This thesis reports on an ethnographic investigation of the everyday lives of Mexican transnational families living in the USA and Mexico. It gives an account of how migrants and their families who stayed behind experienced and coped with separations and how they negotiated, maintained and continually redefined their family relationships and emotional exchanges. I look at, compare and analyse the experiences of undocumented migrants and non-migrants from both a small town and from a city, for whom migration was, respectively, a long-standing tradition or a fairly recent way of life.

The observations herein discussed draw from more than seven months of multi-sited participant observation and interview research in two locations in the USA – in Texas and California – as well as in both a small town and two cities in Mexico from where the immigrant cohorts originated (and to where some migrants occasionally returned). The participants were ‘snowballed’ from the families of two cohorts of first-generation undocumented Mexican migrants in these locations. These cohorts differed mainly in their demographic origin (rural/urban), social class (working-class/middle-class origins in Mexico), level of education (basic/high school and higher) and modes of crossing (entry without inspection/visa overstayers).

The social and cultural differences between the participants resulted in contrasting self-perceptions and meanings given to their everyday lived experiences as undocumented / ‘illegal’ migrants, to the efforts made for their loved ones, to their identities as ‘camouflaged’ migrants or as people living ‘ambivalent loyalties’.

The above named topics are analysed in the framework of transnational family life taking into account the interplay of gender relations, demographic origin, social class, level of education, use of social networks and undocumented status.

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Table of contents

List of abbreviations.....	i
Glossary	iv
List of tables and figures.....	v
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Thesis overview.....	4
1.2 Contributions of the research.....	8
1.3 Structure of the thesis	11
Chapter 2: Migrants’ integration, transnational migration and transnational families: conceptual and theoretical debates	14
2.1 The arrivals of newcomers	15
2.1.1 Very brief history of immigration to the USA	17
2.1.2 From assimilation to integration.....	20
2.2 Transnational Integration.....	24
2.2.1 The novelty	26
2.2.2 Transnational actors.....	27
2.2.3 Institutionalised transnationalism	29
2.2.4 Continuation of transnational practices with second generations.....	30
2.2.5 Transnationalism and integration	31
2.3 So... is this a study of transnational migration?.....	34
2.3.1 Transnational families	34
2.4 Summary	39

Chapter 3: Mexicans, Americans and Mexican-Americans: an overview of inter-group relations	42
3.1 First some clarifications... ..	43
3.1.1 Mixed identity	44
3.1.2 A little bit of history	49
3.2 Complex relations.....	56
3.2.1 Mexicans, Mexican-Americans and Chicanos	59
3.2.2 Spanglish, pochos and pochismos: the language of Chicanos.....	63
3.3 Cooperation and solidarity	65
3.4 Summary	67
Chapter 4: Methodological framework.....	69
4.1 Introduction	69
4.2 Methods, validity and generalisability.....	71
4.3 Sites and cohorts.....	74
4.4 Data analysis.....	76
4.5 Ethical considerations.....	77
4.6 Limitations.....	80
4.7 The role of the ethnographer	82
4.8 Immersion in the field	84
4.8.1 Sunville.....	84
4.8.2 Dallas.....	87
4.9 Fieldwork in Mexico	89
4.9.1 Ocuilan	90
4.9.2 Matehuala and Victoria	91
4.10 Leaving the field.....	94

Chapter 5: The places and the people: demographics of fieldwork sites..... 97

5.1 The problematic study of undocumented populations.....	98
5.2 General background of Mexico-US migration	101
5.2.1 The Bracero Programme.....	103
5.2.2 Immigration Reform and Control Act	105
5.2.3 Naturalisation and dual nationality	106
5.3 Extensions in length of stay.....	109
5.4 Hispanics and Mexicans in the United States.....	112
5.5 Mexicans in California and Texas.....	114
5.5.1 Sunville.....	118
5.5.2 Dallas.....	122
5.6 Matehuala, Ocuilan and Victoria: demographic data	126
5.6.1 Ocuilan	129
5.6.2 Victoria.....	132
5.6.3 Matehuala	135
5.7 Summary	137

Chapter 6: Integration, belonging and ambivalent loyalties contrasting experiences of Dallas and Sunville..... 139

6.1 Luis (Dallas).....	140
6.2 Melchor (Sunville).....	142
6.3 Integration to a diverse society.....	144
6.4 Diversity among Mexican undocumented migrants in the USA	145
6.5 Dallas: ‘they have to stop behaving as if they were still in Mexico’	146
6.5.1 Camouflaging	151
6.5.2 Spatial assimilation.....	153

6.5.3 Sources of appreciation	153
6.6 Sunville: ambivalent, situational and contradictory belonging	155
6.6.1 Morality	159
6.6.2 Gender matters.....	160
6.7 Summary	163
Chapter 7: Separation and emotional distance	165
7.1 Separations, absences and emotions.....	167
7.2 Emotional distance and ‘doing fine’	171
7.3 Relationship improvement due to geographical separation.....	181
7.4 Modes of staying in touch	184
7.4.1 Dallas.....	186
7.4.2 Sunville.....	189
7.5 Summary	194
Chapter 8: Those who stay behind: experiences of non-migrating kin.....	197
8.1 Perceptions in societies of origin over migration and migrants’ life.....	198
8.2 Positive, neutral and negative compensation.....	201
8.2.1 Positive overcompensation: ‘having a bad time’	203
8.2.2 Neutral perspective: ‘they have to put up with it’	206
8.2.3 Negative compensation: ‘that’s how life is over there, isn’t it?’	208
8.3 Positive changes after migration.....	211
8.4 <i>La Pasada</i> : the active and emotional involvement of non-migrants.....	213
8.5 The extended family	216
8.6 Relations with return migrants	218
8.7 Summary	221

Chapter 9: What does it mean to be <i>illegal</i>? views from the undocumented	225
9.1 Terminology and conceptualisations	227
9.2 Is it socially wrong?.....	230
9.2.1 Sunville: <i>los ilegales</i>	231
9.2.2 Dallas: discreet ‘undocumentedness’	234
9.3 The less difficult access to the ‘undocumentedness limbo’	238
9.4 A new immigration reform?	243
9.4.1 What to expect?	245
9.4.2 Legal status as a definer for settlement or return.....	249
9.4.3 Family reunification policy	251
9.5 Undocumented status and employability.....	253
9.6 Summary	258
Chapter 10: Conclusion	262
10.1 Main findings and observations.....	263
10.1.1 Integration, identity and undocumented status	265
10.1.2 Immigration reform	269
10.1.3 Social networks	270
10.1.4 Emotional exchanges.....	273
10.2 Limitations of this research	275
10.3 Recommendations for future research.....	276
List of References	280
Appendices	345
Appendix 1. Respondents.....	346
A. Dallas	346

Table of contents

B. Sunville	347
C. Ocuilan.....	348
D. Matehuala	349
E. Victoria	350
Appendix 2. Kinship relations in the Sunville-Ocuilan cohort.....	351
Appendix 3. Kinship relations in the Dallas – Victoria and Matehuala cohorts	352
Appendix 4. Lyrics of songs ‘Mojado’ and ‘Tres veces mojado’	353

List of abbreviations

BANXICO – Banco de México (Central Bank of Mexico)

CA – California (State of)

COLEF – Colegio de la Frontera Norte (Northern Border College)

CONAPO – Consejo Nacional de Población (National Council of Population)

DHS – Department of Homeland Security

EMIF – Encuesta de Migración Internacional en la Frontera Norte (Survey of Migration to the Northern Border)

ENADID - Encuesta Nacional de la Dinámica Demográfica (National Survey on Demography Dynamics)

ENEFNEU - Encuesta Nacional de Migración a la Frontera Norte y a los Estados Unidos (National Survey on Migration to the Northern Border and the United States)

ENMAU - Encuesta Nacional de Migración en Áreas Urbanas (National Survey on Migration in Urban Areas)

ETIDEU - Encuesta en la Frontera Norte a Trabajadores Indocumentados (Northern Border Survey of Undocumented Workers)

EWI – Entry without inspection

GATT – General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

HTA – Hometown Association

ICE – Immigration and Customs Enforcement

ICT – Information and Communications Technology

IME – Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior (Institute for Mexicans Abroad)

INEGI - Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (National Institute for Statistics and Geography)

INM – Instituto Nacional de Migración (National Institute for Migration)

INS – Immigration and Naturalization Services

IOM – International Organization for Migration

IRCA – Immigration Reform and Control Act

LA – Los Angeles, California

LAX – Los Angeles, California International Airport

N.A. – Not available

NAFTA – North American Free Trade Agreement

OAM – Oficina de Atención al Migrante (Office for the Attention to Migrants)

PCME – Programa para las Comunidades Mexicanas en el Extranjero (Programme for Mexican Communities Abroad)

SEDESOL – Secretaría de Desarrollo Social (Ministry for Social Development)

SEGOB – Secretaría de Gobernación (Ministry of the Interior)

SLP – San Luis Potosí (State of)

SRE – Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

STPS – Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social (Ministry of Work and Social Provision)

TX – Texas (State of)

UN – United Nations

US / USA – United States of America

USD – United States Dollar

Glossary

Coyote - Human smuggler

La migra – Term (slang) used to refer to Immigration Law Enforcement Authorities such as the US Border Patrol or Immigration and Customs Enforcement

Paisano – Term used to refer to a person from the same place of origin. Also it has a derogatory connotation to refer to peasants or individuals of a rural lifestyle.

Programa Paisano - The *Paisano* Programme started in the decade of the 1980s as a joint effort of hometown associations, religious congregations, businessmen and political leaders of the Mexican and Mexican American communities in order to reduce extortions and abuses perpetuated by civil servants (at federal, state and municipal levels) against Mexican and Mexican-American citizens at the moment of return to Mexico. It became officially sanctioned as a federal law on the 6th of April 1989.

Pueblo - Village

List of tables and figures

Tables

Table 1.	Number and gender of participants in each fieldwork site.....	7
Table 2.	Dates and sites of fieldwork.....	74
Table 3.	White and Hispanic/Latino origin population in fieldwork locations	117
Table 4.	Demographics of fieldwork sites at state and local levels.....	128
Table 5.	Perceptions over migrant kin’s life in the USA.....	202

Figures

Figure 1.	Intention to remain in the United States (percentages)	110
Figure 2.	Distribution of Mexican undocumented migrants’ educational attainment and English ability.....	124

Maps

Map 1.	Fieldwork Locations in the USA.....	117
Map 2.	Fieldwork Locations in Mexico.....	126
Map 3.	Durand’s Regions of Migration.....	127

Photographs

Photograph 1. Carmen, a friend (not a participant) and Lupita after a volleyball match.....93

Photograph 2. Sign inviting for the Pilgrimage to the Lord of Matehuala.....93

Photograph 3. Pilgrimage of US residents natives to Matehuala.....94

Photograph 4. *Marketa* El Campeón.....120

Photograph 5. Street in the Sunville neighbourhood.....121

Photograph 6. Respondents’ children at Halloween.....124

Photograph 7. Houses in Ocuilan.....129

Photograph 8. Main square in Ocuilan.....131

Photograph 9. View of Ocuilan.....131

Photograph 10. City centre of Victoria.....134

Photograph 11. Street in Victoria.....134

Photograph 12. Cathedral of Matehuala.....136

Photograph 13. Mexican and Central American Independence Celebrations.....158

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the summer of 2009 I arrived at Los Angeles, California International airport (LAX), in order to start the field research for this project. Weeks before flying, I arranged with Esperanza, one of the participants in this work, the details of my arrival and she kindly offered to pick me up at the airport. I had never seen her before and we did not talk about how we would recognise each other. After I had collected my luggage, I looked around the waiting room trying to figure out who was there to greet me. I saw a group of three people shyly standing next to the exit door, who seemed to be waiting for somebody. I approached them and found out that they were there to pick me up. They were Esperanza, Jorge and Melchor; they were very friendly and seemed to be glad to meet me.

Jorge drove for more than one hour before we arrived to Sunville, the place where I conducted fieldwork in California. When we arrived in the neighbourhood, I noticed that all houses looked very similar. The house where I stayed was small and clean, it had two bedrooms, one bathroom, a small kitchen, a table with four chairs and a big TV-screen mounted on the wall. I shared the bedroom with Esperanza, and only in that room were 2 beds; the other tenants slept on the floor laying down blankets and tidying them up when they got up. I shared house with Esperanza, Melchor, Benja (Melchor's son), Gladis (Benja's partner), her 3-year-old daughter, their 2-year-old son, and another man named Abraham.

As days passed by, I observed that in Sunville most of the places looked 'Hispanicised' and the most commonly-heard and commonly-displayed language was Spanish. Few people in the neighbourhood had some knowledge of English. I learned that all of my respondents had reached the USA either by crossing the desert with a *coyote* (people smuggler) or by using fake identity documents and deceiving US border officials.

I also learned that Esperanza, Melchor and Jorge had taken a risk to pick me up at the airport. Jorge drove to LAX without a driving license and they had borrowed a car. They were unfamiliar with the streets in LA and did not know the way from Sunville (Orange County) to LAX and back. They were scared to be inside an airport because they had heard stories of people been caught by *la migra* (US immigration officials) at the airport. (Had I known this, I would have looked for an alternative way to arrive in Sunville.) Jorge had a pickup vehicle of his own but drove rarely outside areas he knew well. I came to realise that most of my respondents did not feel safe to go to places they did not know well or to do things that could put their stay in the USA at risk. The undocumented status of the migrants in Sunville seemed to have marked their everyday lives and their ways of interacting with US society in every way.

Months later, I flew to Dallas, Texas; where I conducted the second part of my fieldwork. There, Lisa, her husband Luis and their three US-born children picked me up at the airport. I had not seen Lisa in many years, but I knew what she looked like and I did not have any trouble recognising her. They invited me for dinner to a Tex-Mex restaurant and later we arrived at their four bedroom house where they had prepared a room for me. I did not have to share with anyone else. They lived in a suburb where it was uncommon to see people walking on the streets, resting in their porches or getting together in their yards just to chat or relax as was commonly seen in Sunville. The landscape was dominated by privately-owned houses. It seemed very quiet in comparison with Sunville.

Lisa and Luis were also undocumented migrants, but they were not afraid about being at the airport, or about driving in the city. They both had driving licences. They usually went to shopping malls, grocery shops, restaurants and other leisure places that were not necessarily targeted at a Hispanic clientele. They seemingly moved about in the USA with 'normality' and not in the apparently permanent state of fear of people in Sunville. In their own words they 'camouflaged' themselves to pass unnoticed as undocumented migrants. However, they were much more discreet in talking about their experiences as

undocumented migrants during interviews. Admitting their irregular status was a delicate issue for them and for other migrants in this cohort.

The stories of my respondents in Dallas did not totally fit with the stereotype of undocumented migrant as the impoverished person usually from the countryside, crossing to the USA through the desert or across the river, who has dense and well-established social networks in the USA, and for whom migration to the USA is a sort of tradition or rite of passage. The Dallas participants were originally from cities in Mexico, and not from a small town as the people in Sunville. They had had authorised entries to the USA (and overstayed their visas), all had studied at least high school and all, except one woman, were proficient in English. Furthermore, they did not have widespread social networks formed by their kin or by people from their same place of origin. The experiences I had in Dallas differed greatly from those I had in Sunville.

Later, I conducted fieldwork in Mexico, albeit less intensely than in the USA, in the town of Ocuilan, State of Mexico with the relatives of the Sunville immigrants; in the city of Victoria, state of Tamaulipas with Lisa's mother and sister; and in the city of Matehuala, state of San Luis Potosi, with other urban-origin men and women whose relatives were also undocumented migrants in the USA.

These three Mexican locations had been marked to different extents by migration as will be explained in Chapter 5. Migration in Ocuilan was well established. As I was told, most families in the town had had, at some point in time, a family member who had been in the USA for work. Conversely, in Victoria, undocumented migration was not noticeable, widespread or longstanding, despite Victoria's being the capital city of a state that shared border with Texas. As a matter of fact, in the state of Tamaulipas, during the last years there has been a negative growth in emigration flows bound for the USA (Izacara Palacios 2009b). Amongst the middle class, to which Lisa used to belong when she resided in Mexico, it was a common practice to travel to

the Texas southern border for shopping or leisure activities. However, it was unusual to learn about individuals or families who had left for the USA to work undocumented. Finally, Matehuala, the third largest city of the state of San Luis Potosi, had historically contributed to migration flows since early in the 20th century and had consolidated solidarity networks that allowed for the perpetuation of migration, legal and undocumented (Durand 2005).

Regardless of these differences; families in all fieldwork sites recognised the hardships of living as undocumented migrants and the toll it had had on their familial relationships. Some acknowledged the efforts being made by the migrant relative in a positive light and proudly talked of their economic betterment and of their achievements. Nevertheless, others resented their relatives' departure, even after several years had passed, and blamed their relatives for being absent, limiting their familial responsibilities to economic contributions. I came to realise how migration was marked by ambivalence, contradictions and emotional oscillations.

The migrants and non-migrants of my populations were not extraordinary people. They were ordinary human beings with all sorts of virtues and flaws. They gossiped, argued, questioned and judged their family members. Yet, at the same time, they missed, cared for, worried about, suffered and made sacrifices and compromises for those they were geographically distant from. These complex and changing family dynamics that result from migration, with all their ambivalence and contradictions, will be studied throughout this thesis.

1.1 Thesis overview

This study is a work of qualitative research, sited in two settings in the United States and three in Mexico; with middle-class, urban-origin and working-class, 'rural'¹-origin undocumented Mexican migrants and their families in Mexico. I

¹ In this work I refer to the Sunville-Ocuilan sample as of 'rural' origin in order to simplify that Ocuilan is a small town and does not possess the urban character of all other fieldworks sites.

spent more than seven months doing fieldwork in Dallas and Sunville in the USA, and in Ocuilan, Victoria and Matehuala in Mexico. I employed the methods of open-ended, unstructured, in-depth interviewing and participant observation. A total of 52 people participated in this work, 22 men and 30 women (see Table 1). In Sunville, I interviewed 7 men and 7 women. In Dallas, 5 men and 5 women took part. In the town of Ocuilan, I conducted 13 interviews: 5 with men and 8 with women. In Victoria, I interviewed 2 women and in Matehuala the sample included 8 women and 5 men (See Appendix 1: A-E). Only adults took part in this study, with the exception of two teenagers, a young lady aged 16 in Sunville and an adolescent boy aged 13 from Dallas² (included in the overall count). The experiences of children are of a different order and not considered here.

Throughout this work, I have employed the term ‘undocumented migrant’ to refer to the migrant who left the country of origin to reside in another for which s/he did not have the necessary documentation to reside and/or work, regardless of an authorised/unauthorised entry. I consider that the term ‘undocumented migrant’ reflects, without political or emotional biases, that an individual lacks the necessary documentation to reside and/or work in a country to where s/he is not a citizen.

While the ‘rural’ label is debatable, I aim not to wade into the debates of peasantry and rural lifestyle. According to the United Nations (UN Statistics Division 2012), the distinction between urban and rural is not yet amenable to a single definition that would be applicable to all countries or, for the most part, even to the countries within a region. There is plethora of terminology and criteria that countries adopt according to their own socioeconomic reality to define what ‘rural’ is. In Mexico, the numerical limit for a population to be considered rural is 2500 inhabitants (Villalvazo Peña et al 2002). Nevertheless I believe that not only numerical factors should define a rural character, but also the economy (based on agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries and the like), a community lifestyle and levels of human development. Also, it must be said that the inhabitants of Ocuilan do not form part of an indigenous community (see Chapter 3, Section 3.1.1 for a brief discussion on indigenism); they do not speak an indigenous language or practise religious rituals associated to indigenous beliefs. They speak Spanish and their religious beliefs are by the most part Roman Catholic. (Chapter 5 provides a detailed discussion of fieldwork sites’ characteristics).

² In these two instances, permission was obtained from their parents.

The terms ‘non-documented’, ‘irregular’ and ‘unauthorised’ migrants also lack negative social and political implications of others such as ‘clandestine’ or ‘illegal’. In a strict sense undocumented migrants can have documents such as passports, (expired) visas, *matrículas consulares*³, birth certificates, forged identifications and the like; however these do not constitute documents which can be considered valid for employment and residence.

The terms irregular and unauthorised were not common use in the places where I conducted fieldwork, whereas undocumented was. Therefore, I favoured undocumented because it gives a more accurate representation of the experiences in the field. The word illegal, as will be detailed in Chapter 9, was commonly employed by the Sunville migrants to refer to themselves and in some occasions by the Dallas migrants to refer to other undocumented migrants. Nevertheless, in an attempt to step away from political biases, I have employed the term “illegal” only when quoting, either from existent literature or from the respondents themselves.

As will be detailed throughout this work, the experiences I lived and observed in the fieldwork sites were contrasting in many ways. Socio-demographic origin and social class had profoundly shaped the identities of migrants and their kin. Among the most noticeable disparities between them were the ways in which the migrants’ cohorts related to the US mainstream society, how they represented themselves and the frequency and modes of keeping in touch with their non-migrating kin.

³ The *matrícula consular* is an identification issued by the Consular Mexican representations to Mexican citizens, regardless of their migration status.

Fieldwork Site	Men	Women	Total
Sunville	7	7	14
Dallas	5	5	10
Ocuilan	5	8	13
Matehuala	5	8	13
Victoria	0	2	2
Total	22	30	52

Table 1. Number and gender of participants in each fieldwork site

However, there were also significant similarities between them. In all cases migration entailed great emotional costs for migrants and the family left behind. Migrants had distanced themselves physically (and in some cases also emotionally) from their relatives, from familiar surroundings and from their own culture. Yet, at the same time, migration had given them opportunities, which they claimed, would have been very difficult and unlikely to be achieved if they had stayed in their places of origin.

The undocumented status of migrants was in all cases, an obstacle for inclusion in the US society, to plan for the long-term and had marked their identities and ambitions. Undocumented status also limited them in travelling within and outside the USA. The latter, in conjunction with their demanding workloads, had also impacted in their relations with their family members left behind. Some had become closer and striven to stay in touch and to form part of the lives of their loved ones despite the distance; but others had indifferent and sporadic contact and emotional exchanges.

With respect to non-migrants, whether they were living in a town or in a city, they often held inaccurate and exaggerated ideas about the hardships and achievements of their migrant kin. Furthermore, they often had clashes with members of their extended families in regard to the use they should give to remittances or, in the case of women, about how they were expected to behave. Their transnational familial relations were constantly negotiated; tensions, agreements and understandings generally rose and fell.

Migration had been a defining event in the personal and familial histories of all persons who were part of this work. However, they did not all understand migration in similar ways, nor were they all similarly affected by it. Their personal experiences varied significantly, largely depending on the interplay of the respondents' gender, generation, social class, demographic origin and on the familial relationships that existed between migrants and non-migrants prior to migration. Nevertheless, the variations in socio-demographic origin between cohorts did not necessarily result in dramatically different experiences of migration in every case herein explored.

1.2 Contributions of the research

There is a vast and growing body of literature exploring Mexican undocumented migration to the USA. Academics trying to grapple with the complexity of the subject have studied its social, economic and political implications at macro and micro levels. In recent years, scholars have started to pay attention to the increasing participation of women and children in migration flows, to the changing patterns of circular migration to semi-permanent settlement and even more recently to the flows stemming from urban areas.

However, there still remains much work to be done. In relation to urban-origin migration, it has been acknowledged that its social dynamics and the use of transnational solidarity networks greatly differ from migration originating in small communities (Fussell 2004, Fussell and Massey 2004, Hernández-León 2008, forthcoming). Few studies have taken the intersections of gender with ethnicity, 'race', social class and education levels of migrants as their axes of analysis discussing how these factors create different outcomes in migrants' everyday lives (McIlwaine 2008, Datta et al 2009). In addition, little attention has been dedicated to social processes taking place in the intimacy of transnational families and particularly on the emotional and gendered

consequences of migration for both migrants and those staying behind (Boehm 2012). Furthermore, to my knowledge, there are no empirical studies that are based in multiple locales that expressly contrast and analyse the experiences of Mexican undocumented migrants and non-migrating kin of different socio-demographic characteristics.

Therefore, this research aims to fill a gap in the current literature as it analyses and compares socially-different cohorts, focusing mainly on family relationships, transnational emotional exchanges and perceptions of the self in relation with being undocumented. By having worked with both migrants and non-migrating kin, I particularly analyse how migration reconfigured the meaning of family ties, and how and to what degree migrants and non-migrants maintain themselves emotionally present in each other's lives or, in contrast, develop 'emotionally-distant' relationships. I aim to portray how migrants' relationships with their family members left behind and with those who surround them in the USA are dynamic processes, change with time, are to a large extent situational, and are at the same time greatly marked by migrants' undocumented status.

In this thesis I analyse and compare how the members of these transnational families valued and cared for their relationships with the US mainstream society in contrasting ways. In the following chapters, I will discuss among other observations, the following four main findings. Firstly, I examine how the urban-origin sample largely aimed to pass unnoticed as undocumented migrants and therefore 'camouflaged' themselves. On the other hand, migrants from Sunville had a problematic and fluctuating sense of identity and belonging which resulted in 'ambivalent loyalties' towards both home and host societies (Chapter 6). Likewise I study how members of transnational families could develop, for a variety of reasons, emotionally distant relations, but on the other hand geographical distance could also be used to improve interpersonal relations (Chapter 7). Closely related to this, is that non-migrants often constructed inaccurate and exaggerated collective and individual ideas about their migrant kin's life abroad (Chapter 8). In this respect, I have suggested the

typology of positive overcompensation, neutral perspective and negative compensation. Finally, I explore how the migrants from the town and from the city gave contrasting meanings to their illegal/undocumented status, regardless of inhabiting, what I have called, an “undocumentedness limbo”. These varying meanings affected the construction of hopes and expectations and their planning for the short and long term, especially in terms of settlement or return (Chapter 9). I study these and other everyday life situations occurring in undocumented transnational families taking into account the interplay of the social, economic and cultural differences between my respondents and gender relations.

The main research questions guiding this work were:

- How does the interplay of social class, demographic origin, literacy, social networks (local and transnational) and gender account for the construction of similarities and differences in the everyday lived experiences of migrants?
- How do these influence migrants’ aims and strategies for integration to the host country and shape the maintenance of transnational links with sending communities?
- How does their interplay account for the construction of transnational family life and emotional exchanges? Do transnational family relations and the emotional exchanges between migrants and those staying behind weaken, strengthen or are they merely reconstituted as a result of migration? How do both migrants and those staying behind cope with each other’s absences and physical separations?
- How do social class, demographic origin and transnational social networks impact in the meanings that undocumented migrants themselves give to their ‘illegality’ / ‘undocumentedness’ and in the construction of hopes and expectations for the future?

1.3 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into ten chapters. Chapters 2 to 5 provide a review of the literature concerning migrants' adjustment to societies of reception and transnationalism; Mexico's relations with the USA particularly in relation to migration; the methodological considerations relevant to this project; and a review of socio-demographic data of fieldwork sites. Chapters 6 to 9 discuss the empirical findings of this study paying special attention to migrants' social integration to the society of arrival, emotional exchanges across transnational families from the perspective of both migrants and those staying behind, and meanings of 'illegality' from the point of view of migrants themselves. Finally, Chapter 10 draws on the main findings of this research and considers possible implications for future projects.

In Chapter 2, I review the main debates surrounding theories of migrants' social integration to societies of arrival and discuss how migrants are engaged in transnational dynamics that keep them simultaneously linked to places of origin and destination. To this regard, I discuss how transnational migration has reconfigured the meaning of the family as an institution and how 'transnational families' have emerged as a result of migration.

Chapter 3 examines aspects of ethnicity, belonging, identity and identification of Mexicans in Mexico and in the USA and how these have influenced Mexican migrants' relations with Mexican-Americans and Chicanos. This chapter also provides a historical background of the formation of the mixed Mexican identity, product of the *mestizaje* or the blend between Spaniards and pre-Hispanic indigenous populations. It also pays attention to Mexico-USA bilateral relations and of Mexico's relations with its diaspora in the USA.

The methodological considerations of this qualitative research are discussed in Chapter 4. I discuss the data collection methods and give reasons for my choice of participant observation and unstructured interviewing techniques. I explain

how I gained access to the participants, how I overcame outsider boundaries, and I discuss ethical considerations and limitations for conducting this work.

Chapter 5 explores demographic data of fieldwork sites. I begin by discussing the challenges implicit in measuring undocumented populations. Subsequently I examine how both the *Bracero* Guest Workers' Programme (1942-1964) and the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act affected Mexico-USA migration and examine the current state of affairs of Mexican migrant flows bound for the USA. The chapter then moves on to exploring the demographic data (economic activities and contribution to GDP, ethnic distribution, among others) of the fieldwork sites in the USA and Mexico in general and, in particular, of the areas where this study took place.

The chapters that follow explore empirical findings emanating from my fieldwork. In Chapter 6, I contrast how the two cohorts of migrants differed in their strategies for social integration into US society and discuss with whom they were interested in having social interactions. I observed that, on the one hand, the Dallas sample thrived to 'camouflage' themselves, live 'normally and without fear' and pass unnoticed as undocumented migrants. The Sunville sample in contrast was not overtly concerned with fitting into mainstream US society and for the most part, their social interactions occurred only with co-ethnics. I discuss how class, gender, length of stay in the USA and transnational family relations to a large extent influenced paths for integration and identity construction for both cohorts.

Chapters 7 and 8 explore emotional aspects linked to the migration experience, for both migrants and those who stayed behind. In Chapter 7, I analyse how families developed, maintained and negotiated emotional bonds and emotional exchanges and coped with absences in diverse ways. I suggest the notion of 'emotional distance' to describe relationships in which migrants and their kin were satisfied with knowing that the others were 'doing fine', without further efforts to maintain an emotional intensity in their relationships. Also, I explore how different modes of transnational communication, such as telephone, email,

internet social networks or web-based live communication marked to varying extents the way and frequency with which migrants and non-migrants kept in touch and consequently how they kept mutually present in each other's lives.

Chapter 8 explores emotions from the point of view of those who stayed behind. I study their active and affective involvement in the construction of the migrant experience. Also, I discuss how non-migrants' perceptions and imaginaries of life abroad are not always accurate; sometimes non-migrants have an inflated concern about the well-being of their migrant relatives, while others they are indifferent or apathetic to their limitations and hardships. I suggest that the changes in the relationships and feelings of those who stayed behind can follow three general types of outcome, which I have named as positive, neutral and negative compensations. Subsequently, I examine the role that the migrant's extended family can play with other family members left behind, especially with the spouses of migrants. Finally, I explore the relations and adjustments return migrants negotiate with those who stayed behind.

In Chapter 9, I discuss the meanings attached to 'illegality' from the point of view of undocumented migrants themselves. I compare the way in which both cohorts represented and rationalised their 'illegality' or their 'undocumented status'. I observed how this was treated with delicacy and discretion in Dallas; and in Sunville with openness amongst friends, acquaintances and relatives. The latter largely stemmed from the rootedness of undocumented migration in societies of origin, as I could confirm while doing fieldwork in Mexico. Lastly, I discuss how the obstacles implicit in the undocumented status had shaped aspirations, hopes, expectations and limitations for both cohorts in similar ways.

Finally, Chapter 10 draws together the main themes of the thesis and the findings of the empirical chapters. Additionally, it makes recommendations for future research of this nature.

Chapter 2: Migrants' integration, transnational migration and transnational families: conceptual and theoretical debates

Migration has become a common feature of the contemporary globalised world. It has had direct impact in international, national, regional and local economies and political agendas and has affected the everyday lives of millions of families and individuals in sending and receiving societies, in developing and in developed regions.

International migration is much more than the movement of people across borders. It is a process in which multiple social entities are involved, such as the individual, the family, the community, the state, as well as economic and social forces in both sending and receiving societies. The fast pace of exchanges of goods, services and information and the relative ease for transportation and communication in the contemporary globalised world have influenced individual and collective ideas about the local and global; cultural values, and possibilities for human mobility and the construction of locality. All these have allowed migrants to build social relations and identities that connect them simultaneously to two or more nation states without the need to sever ties with places of origin (Basch et al 1994). These simultaneous links to societies of origin and reception have been studied under the rubric of transnationalism and transnational migration.

Transnationalism has become a fundamental concept for understanding contemporary migrant practices in a wide range of spheres of action. Yet, its broad scope of analysis turns it into a highly contested notion. In this chapter I will look at the controversies surrounding transnationalism, especially those in relation to migrants' social integration, looking at past and present literature about socio-cultural adjustments in societies of reception. I will argue that much of the literature on transnationalism has been over-celebratory in some

aspects while overlooking other aspects of migrants' everyday relations to the societies where they have arrived. Finally, I will examine some general aspects of transnational families. These topics will lay the groundwork for the analysis and discussion that will follow in the next chapters, particularly in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. In this chapter however, I will not make an exhaustive revision and discussion of integration, transnationalism and transnational families' literature, since in each of the following empirical chapters these issues will be revisited and discussed accordingly.

2.1 The arrivals of newcomers

In recent decades, migration has become more accessible and more common for a greater number of individuals in the world. According to the United Nations International Migration Report 2006, the number of international migrants in the world reached almost 191 million in 2005. By 2010 this figure reached 214 million people, and it was estimated that some 10-15% of international migrants were in an irregular situation (IOM 2010: 29).

International migration has been motivated by wage differentials between sending and receiving countries and the supply and demand for human labour power (Borjas 1987, McKenzie and Rapoport 2004). Destination areas for migrants have also been influenced by a history of colonisation, political intervention, cultural affinities and geographical proximity between sending and receiving societies (Faist 2000). Social and solidarity networks, as well as households and/or individuals have consolidated migration circuits and allowed greater number of migrants to reduce risks and costs associated with migration (Massey 1987, Portes 1997, Portes and Jensen 1989, Massey et al 1994, Morawska 2009)⁴.

⁴ The above cited scholars and particularly Massey et al (1993) have provided comprehensive analysis and criticisms to existing theories explaining migration. There is no need to repeat them here, especially because this is not the topic of discussion of the present chapter. In relation to theories explaining the Mexico-USA migration specific case, see Massey and Espinosa (1997) and Durand and Massey (2003).

Migration has become a prevalent characteristic of contemporary societies and its effects are more widespread and more evident than ever. Migrants change the societies in which they arrive and the societies they leave behind. Migrants produce economic transformations, influence the immigration policies of the country of destination and create culturally and ethnically diverse societies. It is on this last point that I wish to focus most of the discussion in the following pages.

Arrivals of immigrants either welcomed or not, have been the topic of much debate. In some cases migrants are ‘virtually indistinguishable’ from the mainstream society causing no great concern in the societies where they disembark (Castles and Miller 1998, Canada Annual Report to Parliament 2010). These cases generally, but not exclusively, occur when ‘hosts’ and ‘guests’ share religious beliefs, physical characteristics (such as skin tone), when migrants and natives speak a common language (or learn the destination country’s language) and when they have had planned and controlled entries (Castles and Miller 1998).

However, this has been for the most part the exception and not the rule. Political debate and public opinion have been dominated by the belief that immigrants have adverse effects over the employment opportunities of natives, lowering their wages, and taking unfair advantage of the welfare state benefits among other undesirable consequences (Brimelow 1995, Beck 1996). It has been shown that this is not necessarily the case (Borjas 1995, 1996; Card 2005; Anderson 2006) and the ‘evidence that immigrants have harmed the opportunities of less educated natives is scant’ (Card 2005: 1). Nevertheless, states in destination countries have generally adopted policies to limit the number of foreign citizens admitted to their countries. Also, some segments of the society have considered migrants to be a threat to national identity and culture (Brimelow 1995, Huntington 2004, 2004b). Furthermore, since the terrorist attacks of 2001, immigrants (especially those being, or perceived as, of Arab origin or Muslim creed, as well as migrants in irregular status) have been

associated with threats to national security and sovereignty of receiving states (Esses et al 2002, Poynting 2002, Cornelius 2004, Johnson and Trujillo 2007). Societies in destination countries are often fearful or reluctant to grant admission and participation to immigrants in social, political, economic and cultural terrains.

The ethnic composition of the USA, the country of destination of the migrants in this study, has been defined and redefined over more than three centuries, and shaped by different economic, historic, political and socio-cultural factors. The next section will briefly discuss the history of immigration to the United States. It is sketched very briefly, as space demands. While no claims are made for comprehensiveness, it is necessary to outline this background here in order to provide the historical context to the rest of the chapter.

2.1.1 Very brief history of immigration to the USA

The USA has received an unparalleled number of immigrants throughout its history, most recently from all corners of the world. There is no room to rehearse at length the history of ‘race’ and ethnic relations in the USA, nor is this my purpose⁵. However, in order to understand aspects of integration and transnationalism it is worth looking briefly at the formation of the ethnic and cultural diversity that today comprises the United States.

The history of immigration to what is now the United States began in the 17th century with the arrival of British colonisers. By the end of the 18th century among the non-slave, non-native population, an Anglo-Saxon majority populated the United States. More than three-quarters of this was from the British Isles, and the remainder were mainly from German, French, Dutch and Swedish origins (Perry et al 2009).

⁵ For an in-depth review of the history of immigration to the USA see Daniels (1991, 2002), Gerber (2011).

Other ethnic groups have arrived in the USA in different periods in time and for varying reasons.

Africans were brought as slaves to colonial North America as early as the 1600s with the slave trade. Over 200 years, African Americans were segmented at the bottom of the social hierarchy and even after emancipation they had no real opportunity for mobility (Parrillo 2003). Slavery was abolished throughout the USA as a result of the Civil War (1861-1865) and the Constitution was amended in 1868 to grant citizenship to former slaves and allow them to vote (Sanders 2000, Vorenberg 2001). Nevertheless, between 1877 and 1965 a majority of southern American states enforced a system of racial segregation and discrimination under the so-called 'Jim Crow' laws. These laws, for example, forbade intermarriage between African Americans and whites and ordered public and private institutions; such as schools, hospitals and business, the racial separation of its clientele (Tischauer 2012).

Chinese immigrants arrived in the USA in numbers from the first half of the 19th century during the California gold rush and were employed, mainly, in mining and as cheap labour for the building of railroads to the Pacific Coast. Smaller numbers of Chinese worked in agriculture, manufacturing, domestic work and service trades (Daniels 1991).

Hispanics started to settle in what today is the USA, in the 19th century after wars, cessions and exchanges involving Mexican, French and Spanish territories. Most of the US southwest and California were annexed after the Mexican-American War in 1848 (see Chapter 5). Later in 1898, after the culmination of the Spanish-American War, Puerto Ricans became US nationals.

There have been a number of Immigration Acts aimed at prohibiting or limiting the number of immigrants to the USA. Two of the most salient are the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and the Johnson-Reed Act (also known as the Immigration Act of 1924) (Gyory 1998). The former was the first immigration

law to ban the entry of individuals based on their 'race' or nationality (Daniels 1991, Min 2006). The latter established the country-of-origin quota, limiting to 2% the number of foreign nationals to be admitted to the USA (Eckerson 1966). The Immigration Act of 1924 and the country-of-origin quota it established remained the basic immigration law until 1965 (Daniels 1991).

For more than the first half of the 20th century, there was a widespread ideological and institutionalised racism, most noticeably against peoples of African ancestry. Ethnic minorities in general were disadvantaged in relation to the white society; they were underrepresented, and practically nonexistent, in government positions, academia, business and in the middle class in general (Massey and Denton 1993).

In the second half of the 20th century three nonviolent social movements challenged segregation, 'racial' oppression and discrimination; seeking to achieve social equality for ethnic minorities. These were the African-American Civil Rights Movement, the Chicano Movement and the American Indian Movement. With these movements, the US 'mainstream society' became considerably more open to cultural diversity, bilingualism and to a greater participation of ethnic minorities in the mainstream media, and in social, political and economic activities.

These Civil Rights movements opened the door for a major change in US immigration law: the 1965 Hart-Celler Act. This Act marked a radical change from previous immigration policies; it favoured family reunification and abolished the country-of-origin quotas so that immigrants from all countries could apply for settlement in the USA (Clark et al 2002). The ethnic and cultural landscape of the USA went through significant change, as unprecedented numbers of Asians, Latin Americans, Caribbean and people of other national origins joined the USA immigration flows in major numbers.

Over more than three centuries, different economic, historic, political and socio-cultural factors have defined and redefined the ethnic composition of the

USA. Through years of violent and nonviolent struggles, ethnic minorities have struggled for and gained civil rights and a measure of inclusion in social, cultural, political and economic arenas in the US.

However, interethnic tensions and divisions, and marked socioeconomic disadvantage based on 'race' and ethnicity still persist. Interethnic (and in some cases intraethnic)⁶ minorities' relations have been characterised by competition for limited resources such as jobs, housing and welfare (McClain and Karnig 1990, Mahler 1995, Waters and Eschbach 1995, Portes and Rumbaut 2006, Kim and White 2010). In the case of Hispanic immigrants (particularly undocumented ones), they generally enter a post-industrial society where for the most part, only unskilled jobs are available. Unlike earlier waves of immigrants, Hispanic undocumented immigrants generally have low average levels of formal education and high levels of poverty and lack the necessary skills to adjust easily to working in the USA and climb the socioeconomic ladder (Parrillo 2003, Portes and Rumbaut 2006; See Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion on Hispanics in the USA).

2.1.2 From assimilation to integration

As mentioned in the previous section, the society of the USA is one of the greatest recipients of immigrants in the world and hence one of the most culturally and ethnically diverse. Over the last century the USA has grown increasingly tolerant of maintaining cultural diversity and ethnic pride (Glazer 1997, Kivisto and Rundblad 2000). Today, it is practically unthinkable that a US President would publicly pronounce in the same tenor that Theodore Roosevelt, 26th President of the USA, did over a century ago advocating for assimilation, when saying that: 'There can be no fifty-fifty Americanism in this country... there is room here for only 100 per cent Americanism, only for those who are American and nothing else' (cited in Rumbaut 1999: 172). This phrase

⁶ Intraethnic is used to refer to the relations within the same ethnic category. Mexican and Mexican-American relations will be discussed in Chapter 3.

clearly reflected the feeling that Americans expected people arriving on their shores to adapt and fit into American culture, society, values and customs; while severing ties to their ancestral lands. This ‘assimilationist’ view widely persisted during the first half of the 20th century.

Park and Burgess and later Gordon were two of the most prominent scholars guiding academic debates about assimilation, accommodation, social relations and interactions of immigrants with the mainstream during the first half of the 20th century (Gordon 1964, De Wind and Kasinitz 1997, Portes 1997, Rumbaut 1997, Alba and Nee 1999, Gans 1999). However, during the second half of the 20th century, assimilation became increasingly unpopular because it implied the subordination of ethnic characteristics to cultural and social values of the native population (Glazer 1993). Assimilation, it was argued, imposed ‘ethnocentric and patronizing demands on minority peoples struggling to retain their cultural and ethnic integrity’ (Alba and Nee 1999: 137).

Several scholars (De Wind and Kasinitz, 1997, Gans 1999, Rumbaut 1999, Morawska 2004) tried to reconcile negative views surrounding assimilation arguing that this term had been misunderstood and misused, and tried to link this discredited concept by looking at the correlation of acculturation, ethnic retention, assimilation and ethnic reconstruction. Yet, the term assimilation could not wholly gain back its credibility. Yet as Glazer (1993: 134) observed ‘The word [assimilation] may be dead, the concept disreputable, but the reality continues to flourish.’

In its place, theories of multiculturalism and pluralism progressively gained recognition in academic and political circles. Multiculturalism advocated for immigrants’ participation in societal institutions, public recognition and social equality (Vasta 2007) and argued that immigrants’ original cultural patterns were an indispensable part of American society (Zhou 1999: 201).

In recent times, the debate has shifted to the concept of integration (and transnationalism, later discussed). Today we can find numerous academic

references, government and NGO reports, international and governmental commissions referring alike to the social, political and economic integration⁷ of immigrants. Yet, some vagueness in meaning surrounds the term. One reason is that the literature generally takes for granted what integration means and does not discuss what it specifically entails. As Vasta (2007: 6) observed, integration ‘can be a vague concept that can mean whatever people want it to(?) mean.’

This concept lies somewhere in between assimilation, multiculturalism and social inclusion. Migrants’ social integration has been used with different meanings and emphasis by diverse groups, ranging from no active discrimination and toleration, the acceptance of difference and diversity, to shared values and a sense of belonging with the society of arrival (Ager and Strang 2004).

For some, integration is a two-way process in which newcomers and the ‘host’ society’ are involved. Cashmore (1994 in Vermeulen and Penninx 2000: 3) for instance, describes integration as a ‘condition in which different ethnic groups are able to maintain group boundaries and uniqueness, while participating equally in the essential processes of production, distribution and government.’ The International Organization for Migration (IOM 2010: 57) pronounces in a similar tenor, defining integration as a two-way process ‘by which immigrants become accepted into society, both as individuals and as groups... involving immigrants and the society in the destination country... [taking] place both at the individual and collective level.’

In contrast, others like Worley (2005: 488) have argued that integration and multiculturalism, community cohesion and social integration, mimic and are

⁷ The concepts of integration and incorporation have generally been used interchangeably. The IOM, the UN, the *Journal of International Migration and Integration* and scholars like Vermeulen and Penninx (2000), Castles and Miller (1998) and Vertovec (2009) for instance employ the term ‘integration’. On the other hand, scholars like Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo (2002), Levitt and Jaworsky (2007), Levitt and Waters (2002), favour the concept incorporation.

‘(re)embracing older notions of assimilationism within a newer de-racialised language.’ Poynting and Mason (2008) also point out that multiculturalism policies have sometimes been designed to meet particular social and historical circumstances responding to political forces aimed at balancing social, class and ethnic inequalities. Likewise, King and Skeldon (forthcoming in Fokkema and de Hass 2011) see that socio-cultural integration refers to the cognitive, behavioural and attitudinal changes of migrants in conformity with the dominant norms of receiving societies. These involve relations of friendship, marriage and membership of various organisations.

Without question, immigrants have changed the scenarios of the societies into which they have arrived. In recent years, most contemporary societies, governments and institutions have become increasingly tolerant of ethnic and cultural diversity. Some countries, like the USA, provide bilingual-bicultural elementary education for children of immigrants aiming to assist them in the acquisition of English language proficiency. Also, a growing number of states allow dual citizenship and commemorate days of ethnic minorities’ heritage and pride, such as the *Cinco de Mayo* celebration for Mexicans in the USA. The ways in which migrants ‘integrate’ to the ‘dominant culture’ have substantially varied over the last decades. Migrants do not need to fully absorb or subordinate themselves to the norms and values of the receiving society and surrender their beliefs, customs and traditions for those of the place where they reside. Migrants can both maintain ties and be socially, politically, economically and culturally involved with societies of origin and residence.

Nevertheless, for the most part and to varying degrees, migrants are expected to adapt to the countries where they reside, albeit nowadays without the assimilationist rigour that prevailed for much of the 20th century. But to talk about integration as a two-way process falls short of the reality and is too optimistic about accommodating difference and diversity.

Vasta (2007) noted in this respect, that members of the existing (‘mainstream’) society generally do not undergo genuine procedural changes in values, norms

and behaviours. Generally, if migrants wish to participate in the societies where they have arrived, they need to learn the language, observe and adhere to a set of customs and values in order to achieve linguistic homogeneity and social order. Migrants' integration and participation in societies of arrival, however, is a very complex matter. (My observations to this respect of the cohorts I worked with are discussed in Chapter 6). Yet, concepts of assimilation or integration as a two-way process are often inadequate to analyse migrants' experiences in societies as diverse as the United States, where there is no monolithic 'American culture' (Foner 1997b. See Chapters 3 and 6). Migrants can today more easily live transnational lives (discussed below), yet, we should not assume that by living transnationally migrants are exempt from accommodating to social and cultural observances of the country where they reside.

2.2 Transnational Integration

As discussed above, most migration research during the 20th century focused upon the ways in which migrants adapted themselves to the places where they had arrived. Yet, it largely ignored the ways that they continued to look to their places of origin (Vertovec 2009).

Two decades ago, Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Szanton-Blanc (1992) argued for the need for a new conceptualisation for migration and migrants which included how these could maintain themselves actively involved in home and host societies. They noted that present-day migrants (whom they called 'transmigrants') did not have a permanent rupture, were not uprooted from their home countries and did not abandon old patterns of their original culture. They argued that transmigrants 'build social fields that cross geographical, cultural and political borders, take actions, make decisions, and develop subjectivities and identities embedded in networks of relationships that connect them simultaneously to two or more nation-states' (Glick Schiller et al 1992: 1-2, Basch et al 1994: 7). Transmigrants simultaneously engage within

the receiving society and the sending one and think of themselves as members of two (or more) societies (Glick Schiller et al 1992: 5).

This approach was rapidly in vogue and transnationalism was increasingly used to describe a plethora of religious, political, economic and socio-cultural practices (Vertovec 2003). Cano (2005 cited in Vertovec 2009) found that from the late 1980s to 2003 the number of articles keyworded with 'transnational' or 'transnationalism' published in the Social Sciences Abstract Database had gone from a handful to nearly 1,300; most of them in published in the second half of the 1990s.

Scholars however, soon began to criticise the novelty of transnationalism and its lack of a well-defined theoretical framework. Kivisto (2001) and Waldinger and Fitzgerald (2004) criticised the ambiguity and lack of spatial and temporal parameters of this term as well as its contribution vis-à-vis assimilation. Ebaugh and Chafetz (2002) said that the term had become a blurry, catch-all notion which made reference to globalisation, diasporas, transnational social fields, transnational communities, social circuits and binational societies; hence it had lost its analytical power. Portes (2001) claimed that transnationalism was only re-labelling what was already known under other terms. Mahler (1998: 74) was critical of Glick Schiller et al's 'discovery' of transnationalism and argued that this gave 'the false impression that transnationalism (even if limited to the study of transmigration) is an established field, when in fact it is a highly contested approach.' She argued that Glick Schiller et al's definition was of little assistance in evaluating the content, intensity and importance of transnational ties, as well as for establishing a typology of transnational actors.

The controversies awakened by this emerging field of inquiry prompted scholars to investigate and discuss many of the questions surrounding it in several core areas such as: how 'new' these practices and engagements were (Glick Schiller 1999; Portes et al 1999; Portes 2001, Basch et al 2008); the definition of transnational actors (Guarnizo 1997, Itzigsohn et al 1999, Levitt 2001); the continuation of transnational practices with second and future

generations (Rumbaut and Portes 2001, Foner 2002, Kasinitz et al 2002, Levitt and Waters 2002, Rumbaut 2002); the roles of nation-states in the maintenance of transnational practices (Roberts et al 1999, Smith 2003, Cano and Delano 2007), and the relation between assimilation and transnationalism (Guarnizo et al 2003, Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). The most relevant contributions in these respects will be reviewed in the next section.

2.2.1 The novelty

There is evidence that migrants in the past have also maintained links to their homelands. To various extents and to different degrees, they sent letters, goods and money; they were influential in political and economic matters and wanted their children and grandchildren to learn about the lands where they were born. According to Fournon and Glick Schiller (2001) transnational dynamics date back into the 19th century; however they were not seen as such (Smith 2003). Previous migration was rarely analysed as being systematically related and as producing new and interesting outcomes in both sending and receiving societies (Smith 2001: 40). Therefore, Smith (2003: 725) argues that the novelty of transnationalism lies in doing the ‘new analytical work by providing a way of seeing what was there that could not be seen before because of the lack of lens to focus on it.’

Glick Schiller (1999) and Basch et al (2008) have argued that transnational migration and transnational practices are not new. However, the paradigms and context of international migration have been significantly transformed because of, among other things, the restructuring of global accumulation and organisation of capital, global economic processes, the conceptualisation of nation-state, advanced communication technologies, and cheaper and faster travel.

Yet the novelty of transnationalism should not be exaggerated or biased (Foner 2001). Migrants have always maintained links to their homelands. However, advances in technology, the new global economy and culture, new laws and

political arrangements have in combination produced transnational connections that differ from those maintained by migrants a century ago (Castles 2006).

Much of the criticism on transnationalism is:

as if it were a new invention, a common assumption is that earlier European immigration cannot be described in transnational terms that apply today [...] Many transnational patterns said to be new, actually have a long history – and many of the sources of transnationalism seen as unique today also operated in the past. At the same time, much is distinctive about transnationalism today not only because earlier patterns have been intensified or became more common, but because new processes and dynamics are involved (Foner 2001: 36-37).

Portes (1999, 2001), while questioning transnationalism as a new field of inquiry, argued that what was truly original and justifiable as a new topic of investigation were the high intensity of exchanges, the new modes of transacting and the multiplication of activities that required cross-border travel and contacts on a sustained basis.

Transnationalism has indeed provided new insights in the understanding of contemporary migration. The focus on migration has come to include not only how migrants relate to the society of arrival but also how they simultaneously maintain links to the society of origin. Hence, it has invited new perspectives which reconceptualise meanings of home and of being away, of the ties that link societies of origin and destination and of migrants' adjustment, relations and of a simultaneous belonging to societies of origin and destination.

2.2.2 Transnational actors

Despite the growing body of research on transnationalism's novelty and extent, more elucidation was needed to define who should be considered transnational actors. Fouron and Glick Schiller (2001) argued that not all migrants are transmigrants. 'Transmigrants are immigrants whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state'

(Glick Schiller et al 1995: 48). Likewise, Portes et al (1999: 219) delimited the concept of transnationalism to occupations and activities that require 'regular and sustained' social contacts over time across national borders.

Nevertheless, research had demonstrated that only a small number of migrants participated regularly in transnational activities in the context of political, religious, or institutionalised arenas (Basch et al 1994, Portes 1999, Guarnizo et al 2003). What about those migrants whose everyday lives, identities and relationships did not depend, but were influenced and connected to transnational social fields? Could occasional, non-political or non-institutionalised everyday activities of migrants with their home societies (and vice versa) be considered transnational?

If only a small number of migrants and non-migrants live transnational lives, the theoretical importance of this approach to migration would be undermined (Smith 2001). In this respect, Faist (2000: 200, 239) argued that international migrants who partake in general transnational processes, albeit not as global players or as prototypes of a global lifestyle, can still inhabit transnational social spaces. There are migrants (like those of this study) whose daily lives do not 'depend' but are influenced by and embedded in transnational events and transnational practices and who belong to transnational families (discussed in next section).

As a response to the ambiguity surrounding transnational actors, Guarnizo (1997), Itzigsohn et al (1999), and Levitt (2001) proposed various categories for different levels and fields of transnational engagement. They analysed how migrants and their communities can become involved in transnational practices in a variety of areas (economic, political, socio-cultural, religious, etc); at different times, and change according to particular events. Itzigsohn et al (1999) differentiated the migrants' level of involvement in transnational activities as broad and narrow. Broad transnationalism refers to occasional participation and sporadic physical movement between the two countries and a low level of institutionalisation. Narrow transnationalism involves a regular

movement within the geographic transnational field, a high level of institutionalisation and continuous participation in transnational activities and organisations. As for Guarnizo (1997), he distinguished ‘transnationalism from below’ from ‘transnationalism from above’. Transnationalism from below is grounded in the daily lives, activities and social relations of everyday actors, while that from above is practised by states, multinational corporations, the media and other macro-level structures (Guarnizo 1997, Mahler 1998, Smith and Guarnizo 1998).

Later, Guarnizo (2000 in Levitt and Waters 2002, and in Levitt 2001) differentiated between core and expanded transnationalism. Core transnationalism should be understood as the activities that form part of the individual’s habitual life, are patterned and undertaken on a regular basis. Expanded transnationalism by contrast, is used to refer to migrants who occasionally take part in transnational practices, for instance as in situations of natural disasters or political crises. In this respect, Levitt (2001) proposed an intertwining of comprehensive and selective categorisations in connection with core and expanded transnational practices. She observed that some people can confine their core transnational practices to one sphere of social action and engage in expanded transnational practices with respect to another. Moreover, she expanded her analysis of transnational participation, using the same categories for those who stay behind.

The latter categories have been useful in analysing differences in the nature, intensity, frequency, sphere of influence and objectives of transnational practices. Hence, they can help us to better understand transnationalism’s limits and extents.

2.2.3 Institutionalised transnationalism

As discussed above, migrants’ transnational practices are performed not only through everyday activities or at household and community levels; but also by organisations, political and economic networks, financial institutions and

nation-states (Glick Schiller 1999). Several scholars, therefore, have studied migrants' transnational socioeconomic development, entrepreneurship and economic projects (Levitt 1997, Itzigsohn et al 1999, Landolt 2001, Portes et al 2002, Smith 2006, Faist 2008). They have documented how migrants' hometown associations, philanthropic networks, business-related people, organisations and diasporas have financed and/or facilitated works of public benefit in migrant sending communities; for example paving roads, public lighting, water supply, etc. In terms of transnational entrepreneurship, it has been observed that new industries of transnational trade have proliferated in the last few years (Ong 2008, Vertovec 2009). Migrants and return-migrants have established microenterprises in their towns of origin by selling goods bought in the USA (Itzigsohn et al 1999). Also, indigenous populations or local communities have also started transnational trade circuits selling handcrafts or items produced in migrant-sending communities to consumers in the USA (Kyle 1999).

States also play a fundamental role for the continuation of transnationalism, encouraging relationships between immigrant communities with societies of origin and with the government itself. In the Mexican case, the government has been a fundamental 'transnationalism from above' player in the formation, consolidation and proliferation of institutionalised transnational activities and hometown associations (Roberts et al 1999, Fitzgerald 2000, 2004; Smith 2001, Cano and Delano 2007, Imaz Bayona 2008). Over the last decades the Mexican government has allowed its citizens to hold dual nationality, to vote in federal elections from abroad, has promoted investments in home societies with programmes like '3x1', and has had a more proactive role in protecting populations living outside the national territory (see Chapters 3 and 4).

2.2.4 Continuation of transnational practices with second generations

A question which still remains open is the continuation of transnational practices among second and following generations. Some research has been done exploring this, yet there are no definite answers or consensus (Levitt and

Waters 2002). There are several factors which need to be taken into account to analyse the experiences of second generations' transnational practices. These include, but are not limited to, second generations' fluency in the parental language, their own parents' transnational engagements, the attachments they have developed towards their parental homelands and towards the country of reception; their own experiences of adaptation or discrimination and the positive or negative meanings they associate with their ethnic identities (Levitt 2001, 2002; Smith 2002).

There can be several aspects which may influence how second generations engage in transnational activities. For instance, Foner (2001) predicts that if first generations (the parents) retire in their birthplaces, children and grandchildren will make regular trips to visit them and hence be more likely to continue transnational practices. Kasinitz et al (2002) note that second generations might maintain links with their ancestral places of origin not necessarily because of a commitment to transnationalism referring to a simultaneous belonging to two societies, but as part of their 'ethnic identities' in the sense that they feel more affinity towards the parental homeland. Also, second generations might get involved in transnational practices in response to particular events like humanitarian or political crises (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). Portes (2001) conversely, has argued that, for many of the second generation, the country where they grew up will be indisputably home and the maintenance of transnational practices is likely to be a one generation phenomenon.

2.2.5 Transnationalism and integration

Despite the suggestions of scholars as Kivisto (2001), transnationalism has not become a substitute for analyses of immigrants' integration (or assimilation). Rather it has proposed a new focus to analyse migration through the multi-stranded social relations that link together migrants' societies of origin and settlement (Glick Schiller et al 1992). Research has demonstrated that the simultaneous belonging to two societies is not oppositional to migrants' taking

part in the society where they reside (Levitt 2001b, Itzigsohn and Giorguli Saucedo 2002, Smith 2006). Nevertheless, as Pedraza (2006) noted, the intertwining and shifts from concepts of assimilation/integration to transnationalism might be only useful to analyse the experiences of the first immigrant generation. Second and future generations will have different transnational and integration experiences which might call for a more appropriate term than ‘transnationalism’.

Transnational participation and migrants’ integration are not opposing fields of study. However, just as several decades ago most of the research focused on how newcomers fared in societies of arrival; today the predominant view is how migrants maintain transnational links in economic (Landolt 2001, Itzigsohn and Giourguli-Saucedo 2005, Portes and Rumbaut 2006), political (Roberts et al 1999, Guarnizo et al 2003, Smith 2003, Itzigsohn and Villacrés 2008), social-familial (Parreñas 2005b, Pribilsky 2007, Pedone 2008, Dreby 2009, Foner 2009) and religious (Gardner and Grillo 2002, Levitt 2009) arenas, and on second generations’ present and future (Levitt and Waters 2002, Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco 2002, Parreñas 2005, Suarez-Orozco et al 2008).

Transnationalism has argued that migrants maintain themselves simultaneously interconnected in transnational social fields with societies of origin and reception in a plethora of social spheres of action. Yet, transnationalism has blurred the study of how migrants relate with the society where they have arrived. A very thin line has been drawn between transnational life and integration. We have to be careful not to be over-celebratory and thus to miss the point that migrants, at least first generations, very often do not ‘integrate’ and actively participate with the society where they reside. (This point will be developed in Chapter 6). The study of the first generation is predominantly concerned with how migrants keep their feet in both worlds, but the ways in which they relate to the ‘mainstream’ society while doing so have been under-researched.

While it has been acknowledged that transnational participation does not impede immigrants' integration, we must not lose sight of the fact that migrants also interact with a mainstream society that very likely is not greatly influenced by transnational social fields in everyday life. Whichever way we see integration, either as a two-way process or as a renewed version of assimilation, we have to bear in mind that the society of arrival's culture, norms and values will be different from the migrants' original ones. I am not suggesting that we should look back and reconsider rigid old-fashioned ideas about assimilation. At present, and as it has been noted, migrants do not need to sever ties to home communities or to subordinate, acculturate, melt or 'Americanise' (in the case of migrants in the USA). However, we have to look at how migrants relate to the mainstream society without overemphasising how migrants relate to societies of origin, otherwise, we will run the risk of overlooking social dynamics and interactions.

Studies on transnationalism sometimes have been conflated with and overlapped with those on integration, and have emphasised the links with societies of origin. These have given place to the confusions and contradictions raised above in relation to migrants' links with societies of origin and their integration into societies of arrival. There needs to be a reconsideration of integration/transnationalism literature which looks at the transnational practices of first generations and which sees these two concepts as linked and complementary, while being aware of their limits and spheres of analysis. However the complementary or opposing views between integration and transnationalism very much depend on the theoretical inclinations and understandings of immigrants' links with the societies of arrival and origin. Both transnationalism and integration are concerned with where and how migrants position themselves socially, culturally and politically, with how they relate to societies of origin and destination, and with how they create and recreate their cultures.

2.3 So... is this a study of transnational migration?

As discussed above, transnational migration is still a field in formation. The academic discussion that has taken place over the last decades has helped to delimit its nature and contours. Scholarly debate clarified that transnationalism is not limited to institutionalised or political, economic and religious practices. Transnationalism can be present in a wide variety of aspects of the everyday life of migrants; it can take place regularly or sporadically and in private spheres of interaction. Migrants 'take actions, make decisions, feel concerns, and develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously' (Glick Schiller et al 1992: 2). Given this flexibility in its definition, it is not surprising that most of everyday migrant transnationalism (from below) occurs within families (Faist 2000), something which Faist (2000) termed kinship-based transnationalism.

This project, as detailed before, studies social dynamics occurring in the privacy of transnational families and much of the discussion that follows in the next chapters is about relations connecting transnational family members. For this reason, it is important to discuss and define how migration has changed the traditional views of the family giving place to transnational families.

2.3.1 Transnational families

Domestic relations and 'the institution of the family' as a traditional co-residential unit have gone through significant transformations during the last decades. The latter has occurred mainly because of increasing numbers of lone-parent families with male or female heads of households (Datta and McIlwaine 2000), same-sex parents, divorced-parent families, living-apart families, multigenerational families, and also migration (Widmer and Jallinoja 2008, Jallinoja and Widmer 2011). The family has been transforming to meet the needs of the economy and of individual self-realisation and autonomy (Muncie and Sapsford 1997).

As a result of migration, families are reconstituted, and challenge traditional views of co-residency and physical unity in several ways (Evergeti and Zontini 2006). The family is of vital importance for the migration experience.

[M]igrations are never entirely autonomous or disconnected from family. Migrants typically cross with family members and when they do not, their migrations are linked to kin in other substantive ways – people migrate to support family, to reunite with family, and/or with financial aid and social resources from family members (Boehm 2012: 33).

Families, as noted by Foner (2009: 3), do not have to be tied to a residential unit. Families, instead, are a kinship grouping, including people related by blood and by marriage. Nieves Rico and Maldonado Valera (2011) have a more inclusive definition of families arguing that families exist because there are human groups that intentionally and concretely constitute themselves – or try to – as families.

Pribilsky (2007: 20-21) argues that contrary to popular belief, families do not disintegrate because of migration. He argues that the value and the idea of the family itself has been strengthened despite (and perhaps because of) the challenges and strains placed on families by migration. Schmalzbauer (2008) also observed that some family members grew closer and developed a greater appreciation for their migrant relatives. Conversely, she noted that transnational family members become used to absences with the passage of time, being gradually less optimistic about family reunification.

Herrera Lima (2001: 78) was one of the first to articulate a definition for transnational families as those families, nuclear and extended, dispersed across national borders with a fluid geographical location, which develop work trajectories and projects and spend periods of time in one or another country. However, his definition did not include the non-migrant family members, who have a *non-fluid* geographic location (who are rooted or settled in one place, by choice or by force) but who nevertheless are embedded and influenced by

transnational practices. Schmalzbauer (2008) took into consideration transnational families' members staying behind, arguing that these may construct their goals and expectations in the context of cultural norms of the country where their migrant relatives reside, without the need to leave their homes.

Bryceson and Vuorela (2002: 3, 7) defined transnational families as 'families that live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely 'familyhood', even across national borders.' They explained that 'transnational families are constituted by relational ties that aim at welfare and mutual support and provide a source of identity.' However, in my fieldwork, I encountered some cases in which the value and idea of the family had not strengthened, and some family members had become 'emotionally distant' (See Chapter 7). I believe that families reconfigure, and have a constant negotiation of their affective ties, roles and responsibilities.

In this study, transnational families are understood as those families physically separated, that maintain links, a sense of commitment and responsibility, and that are influential in the everyday lives of other family members across borders.

The academic literature of transnational families is a recent and growing field. It has come to acknowledge, for instance, how familial relations are managed from a distance, studying the ways family members live a 'long-distance intimacy' (Parreñas 2005, 2005b), and dynamics of 'transnational mothering' (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997) and 'transnational fatherhood' (Bustamante J. J. and Aleman 2007). In these processes, parents live 'here and there' maintaining communication with children, disciplining, orienting, nurturing them, and providing economic means from abroad for their subsistence. Fathers and mothers, however, have different dynamics with their children and their carers because of their gender. These have been widely discussed (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997, Hirsch

1999, Pessar 1999, Parreñas 2005, 2005b, Bustamante J. J. and Aleman 2007, Pedone 2008, Boehm 2008b, Dreby 2009). Put briefly and generally, migrant mothers are typically blamed for abandoning their children, while migrant fathers are seen as fulfilling a provider role and responsibility. These differences will be dealt with accordingly and in greater detail in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

Likewise, there is a growing body of literature analysing intergenerational relations among family members, especially those about children's relations with their parents and carers, their discrepancies in values between the parents' original and the 'new' immigrant culture, or about children's concerns about the inability to meet parental expectations (Parreñas 2005, Rumbaut 2005, Foner 2009, Zhou 2009). Parents' expectations of their children are largely dictated by gender, of both the parents and the children. Usually daughters face greater scrutiny to behave according to the norms that were prevalent in the parents' society of origin at their time of emigration (Dion 2006). Issues of sexuality and dating (Espiritu 2003b, Kibria 2009), education and disciplining (Waters and Skyes 2009) as well as of ethnic retention or Americanisation (Zhou 1997, Pyke 2003) are amongst those which have received considerable scholarly attention. Similarly, young children and teenagers relate differently to their parents, influencing their migration/return decisions and demanding parental resources and affection through different means (Dreby 2007).

Also, numerous scholars have documented gender transformations and changes in status quo in spousal relations in transnational families for both migrants and those who stay behind (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991, Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, Hirsch 1999, Aysa and Massey 2004, Correa Castro 2006, Pribilsky 2007, Boehm 2004, 2008, 2012; Castellanos and Boehm 2008) and the ways in which transnational family networks are marked by gendered differences in power and status as well as the exploitative use that can be given to people who send remittances by those who live on them (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). As expected, there is no uniform pattern for these transformations. In general, however, migration results in more egalitarian gender relations between men

and women when both are income earners. In addition, it has been documented that men participate more actively in household duties in the absence of their mothers or spouses. On the other hand, non-migrant women assume new tasks, which would typically be considered men's responsibility, for example the administration of household finances. However, in some cases, when men and women are joined by their spouses or other female company, their relations tend to return to a traditional gendered division of labour (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, Boehm 2004).

Mexican transnational families can have multiple living arrangements with intricate generational and gendered relationships. There may be families in which the husband leaves for the United States, leaving his wife and children under the (open or implicit) supervision or care of his parents, his in-laws, his siblings, or other close family members. Other arrangements can be when adult children migrate with the purpose of providing for the parental household or towards the education and living expenses of younger siblings. Also, both parents can migrate, leaving children, generally female, under adult supervision; particularly of grandmothers, aunts, *comadres*⁸, or some other family members (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, Viruell-Fuentes 2006, Boehm 2008b, Dreby 2009).

The US-Mexico borderline and the undocumented status of migrants are of primary importance for understanding the formation of transnational families. Mexican undocumented transnational families, despite being challenged by the borderline, maintain relationships that transcend state boundaries. The construction of home and family and the constant negotiations of roles and responsibilities are transnational endeavours involving migrants and non-migrant kin (Levitt 2001, Foner 2009, Boehm 2012).

⁸ *Comadre*, literally 'co-mother'; *compadre* literally 'co-father' and *compadres* or 'co-parents' are the relationships that the parents and godparents of a child establish after the child's baptism. The relationship of *compadrazgo* implies a shared parenting responsibility towards the baptised child (*ahijado/a*: godson/goddaughter), hence it symbolises a lifelong relationship between *compadres*, parents and the *ahijado/a*.

Transnational families employ a variety of strategies to keep themselves linked and to negotiate roles and responsibilities over time and contexts. As will be analysed throughout this work, the dynamics of transnational families are complex and change in contextual situations, surrounded mainly by factors of gender, generation, social class and the existing family practices prior to migration.

2.4 Summary

In this chapter, I have attempted to give a critical appraisal of the theoretical, conceptual and definitional debates which are pertinent to my study in relation to migrants' integration to the host society, transnationalism and transnational family life.

I have started with a discussion of the literature relating to migrants' adjustment in societies of arrival and their relations with the mainstream. I have argued that while states and societies in general have become increasingly more tolerant of ethnic diversity, they are at the same time reluctant to grant full participation and admission to newcomers. Throughout the last century, scholars have largely discussed migrants' adjustments to the societies where they arrive, ranging from assimilationist models to more flexible views which recognise ethnic and cultural diversity and dual loyalties. The integrationist approach has aimed to accommodate difference and diversity between immigrants and natives in a variety of ways. However, there is no consensus surrounding this concept. Some scholars claim that it entails mutual accommodation while others hold that it is relabeling assimilation.

I have argued that the proponents of newcomers and immigrants' mutual accommodation have viewed the reciprocity rather too optimistically to grasp migrants' dynamics of adjustment, as it is migrants who generally have to

integrate to the mainstream rather than the other way round⁹. On the other hand, current integration views do not require migrants to conduct themselves according to the assimilationist rigour that prevailed during much of the 20th century.

Also, I discussed how transnationalism has suggested a different lens to look at migrants' experiences recognising the links between sending and receiving societies. Even though there was much criticism about its extents and novelty, the academic debate has established that transnationalism can be present in virtually every aspect of everyday life that links migrants and non-migrants in transnational social spaces.

The majority of transnational practices of migrants and non-migrants are performed within the familial arena. I discussed that transnational families are located in different residential locations but hold a common sense of commitment, responsibility and affectionate links across borders, are characterised by shared feelings and mutual obligations and their sense of belonging is framed in reference to home and host societies.

As will be analysed throughout the following chapters, transnational family relations are dynamic and shift according to different contexts and situations. However, transnational families cannot be viewed in isolation. There are many intricate and closely connected factors which need to be taken into account. In this study new insights and questions are raised when analysing the complex relations of transnational families in the context of migrants' 'illegality'/'undocumentedness' and factors of social class, demographic origin, gender and generation. Furthermore, special attention will be placed on the emotional aspects of transnational families and in how each side influences the everyday

⁹ However, several countries, including the United States, have aimed to recognise diversity and multiculturalism by providing, for instance, bilingual (or first-language education) or translators in courts. Scholars like Cole (2006) have advocated advancing International Human Rights law, particularly in cases of legal procedures in order to protect, strengthen and develop legal protection for immigrants.

life experiences of other family members across borders. The issues raised throughout this chapter will be dealt with in greater detail and in the context of my fieldwork and findings in the subsequent chapters of this work.

Chapter 3: Mexicans, Americans and Mexican-Americans: an overview of inter-group relations

When I was in my early teenage years, I travelled from Mexico City, where I used to live, to the city of Houston, Texas. I spent a summer living with an American family, aiming to improve my English skills. I remember I was surprised (and somewhat perplexed) by meeting Americans who identified themselves as Mexicans but who had never been to Mexico, who did not speak Spanish, and who were unfamiliar with Mexican history, geography and traditions. Moreover, I thought that some of them did not 'look' Mexican. I thought some of them identified as such only because of their surnames and/or out of a gesture of cordiality to have something in common with me and that they very likely might have identified differently in other settings.

Only later did I understand how the super-diverse (Vertovec 2007) society in which they lived had made them adopt the 'Mexican label' because of their ancestry (possibly dating back three or more generations), and that the American in their Mexican-American identity carried perhaps more significance. They could have also identified as Mexicans because, within US society, they 'fitted' into that category or because they felt some affinity towards what was Mexican. But I came to understand that their 'Mexican identity' did not necessarily have to be defined by the criteria I then held.

The reason I start this chapter with this account is to explore how a (bi)national identity, in this case Mexicanness, helps people imprint meanings as to who they are, where they belong and with whom they identify. This sense of belonging and identification may guide their practices and actions. During fieldwork and as will be discussed throughout this work, I observed patterns of estrangement between return migrants and their kin in Mexico (See Chapter 8). Also, I did observe different 'Mexican communities' in the USA with which migrants identified, and the diverse meanings that migrants gave to their sense

of belonging and identification. These were not the same for each cohort that I studied, despite the fact they were all Mexican (See Chapter 6).

In this sense, I want to discuss Mexico's relations with the USA, paying special attention to the contact that Mexicans, at both collective and political levels, have with US culture and society. I will explore the sense of belonging, identity and identification (Brubaker and Cooper 2000) of Mexicans in Mexico and Mexicans in the USA and argue that they do not always form part of the 'same current of thought'. Taylor (1991), one of the pioneers in researching Mexico-US migration, observed more than 80 years ago how Mexican migrants were culturally changed after being in the USA and how they consequently changed their communities of origin. Alarcón (1992: 314-315) noted how the contact that migrants had with US culture 'disrupt[ed] their native local, regional and even national cultures' in Mexico. Alarcón (1992) and Martínez (1977) termed respectively, the processes of *norteñización* and 'demexicanization' to describe the latter.

The discussion of empirical material that will follow in Chapters 6 to 9 deals with various topics for which it is important to understand the 'Mexicanness' of the migrants and non-migrants of my sample populations. However, it is necessary first to discuss some core concepts.

3.1 First some clarifications...

Nations, like individuals, at different points of their existence have gone through periods of self-discovery, vacillating and oscillating in the definition of whom and what they are. Mexicans have posed this question to themselves, finding no straight answers¹⁰. In a broad sense, Mexicanness can be understood

¹⁰ Several authors have made remarkable attempts to investigate matters of Mexican identity and culture exploring various crucial moments in Mexican history and formation; for instance José Vasconcelos's (1925) 'La Raza Cósmica', Octavio Paz's (1950) 'El Laberinto de la Soledad', Marta Arredondo's (2005) 'Mexicanidad versus Identidad Nacional'; Samuel

as an encompassing ideological, cultural and social construct which defines identity and affiliation. However, its definition is hugely complex.

Brubaker and Cooper (2000) noted that identity has had some key uses to comprehend self-understanding; sameness, boundedness and homogeneity among group members; individual and collective selfhood; and social or political action. Nevertheless, they have warned that identity tends to mean too much, is too ambiguous, fluid, multiple, constantly re-negotiated and is a word that has been over-used (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 3). Anthias (2002, 2008) proposed that identity has to be studied paying attention to spatial and contextual dimensions in order to be a socially meaningful concept. She coined the concept of ‘translocational positionality’ to explain that identity is not fixed, but context-dependent and time-related. Hence, identity is not free of shifts and contradictions; it is structured in the interplay of different locations relating to gender, ethnicity, race and class (Anthias 2008). This is particularly the case for individuals who have experienced migration.

To offer a definition of what is (and is not) *Mexicanidad* (or, in English, Mexicanness), ‘the culture of Mexico’, and ‘the identity of Mexicans’ is far beyond the scope of this work. My aim instead is to give a grasp of general trends of ‘Mexicanness’ and how this can be reconfigured because of migration to the USA.

3.1.1 Mixed identity

There is no clear starting point from which to study Mexicanness. The elusive quality can be traced back to Mexico’s indigenous civilisations, or to the encounters with Spaniards which culminated in the conquest of the Aztec Empire in 1521, or the formation of the Viceroyalty of New Spain in 1535. Or the starting point could be the first years of Mexico as an independent nation

Ramos’s (1936) ‘El Perfil del Hombre y la Cultura de México’; Cristina González Hernández (2002) ‘Doña Marina (La Malinche) y la formación de la identidad mexicana’, among others.

early in the 19th century, or the renewed Republic that emerged after the revolution early in the 20th century, struggling to have democratic institutions and greater significance on the global scene.

Arredondo Ramírez (2005) did not study Mexicanness from a single starting point. Rather she suggested that Mexicanness is formed by the intersections of ‘the origins, the sediments and consolidation’. For her, the origins should be understood as the encounters between Spanish and indigenous cultures. The sediments are the religious intermixtures of Spanish and indigenous religions which gave place to syncretised manifestations such as *guadalupanismo*¹¹ and Mexicans’ attitudes towards death. The consolidation is the formation of the Mexican nation and the corresponding ideologies, symbolic representations and feelings of national belonging. Samuel Ramos conversely studied Mexican identity from the perspective of a ‘feeling of inferiority’ of the Mexican. Furthermore, he noted that in order to get a better understanding of Mexican identity, one must bear in mind that there are diverse types of Mexicans. For instance he analysed bourgeois Mexicans, Mexicans of the city, indigenous Mexicans, Mexicans with exaggerated nationalism or others with a Eurocentric vision (Rovira Gaspar 2004).

The complex nature of Mexican identity and the lack of clarity of a starting point, make the definition of Mexican identity to be full of ambiguity, rejection and confusion. In this respect, Mexican Nobel Laureate Octavio Paz wrote more than fifty years ago:

The Mexican does not want to be either an Indian or a Spaniard.
Nor does he want to be descended from them. He denies them.
And he does not affirm himself as a mixture, but rather as an

¹¹ *Guadalupanismo* is the veneration to the ‘Lady of Guadalupe’ or ‘Virgin of Guadalupe’. It is a religious current of Roman Catholicism, which adores the manifestation of an indigenous-like image of Virgin Mary to Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin, an Aztec indigenous peasant, in the year 1531.

abstraction: he is a man. He becomes the son of Nothingness. His beginnings are his own self... (Paz 2005: 87)¹².

Mexicanness is undoubtedly influenced by its indigenous past. Yet the indigenous people are not always considered as forming part of the same 'Mexican' category as the rest of the Mexican population, the *mestizos*, born from the 'racial' mixing between Spaniards and the indigenous population. The Mexican Political Constitution recognises the 'pluricultural composition' of the Mexican nation, and legal egalitarianism for its citizens. Yet at the same time, it grants specific rights to indigenous populations (Constitución Política 2011).

In its Spanish meaning '*etnia*', '*grupo étnico*' '*identidad étnica*' and '*grupo etnolingüístico*' commonly refer to indigenous populations or to the condition of being indigenous (Bartolomé 2004). Ethnic identity in Mexico is defined by linguistic, social and cultural criteria. These are for instance, to speak an indigenous language, a sense of belonging to the local indigenous community, isolation from the 'mainstream' (*mestizo*) culture and observance of indigenous customs and traditions (Navarrete 2004). Indigenous people are seen as the 'ethnic' populations, the ethnic minorities¹³. However, after centuries of 'racial' intermixing, the indigenous do not dramatically differ in phenotype from *mestizos*. Therefore, the *Indio* (indigenous) categorisation is subject to change. Petersen et al (1980) argued that if an indigenous person learns the Spanish language, shifts from *huaraches* (sandals) to shoes, leaves peasantry for other type of jobs, and withdraws from the isolation of indigenous communities; that person will very likely stop being labelled as *Indio* and will be incorporated into the *mestizo* society. This, however, is to a certain extent debatable: while they may indeed be considered non-indigenous they still

¹² Octavio Paz's *El Laberinto de la Soledad* (The Labyrinth of Solitude) was first published in 1950. This was one of Paz's most remarkable works in which he discussed themes of Mexican history, culture and identity. The reference quoted above, published in the year 2005, is an English version of *El Laberinto de la Soledad*.

¹³ This is far more problematic, given that Mexico has a complex tacit system of social stratification. Skin tone, hair and eye colour denote to a large extent a person's worth and socioeconomic outcome. It is commonly the case that the more 'European-like', the greater the likelihood for better positioning in society (Alders 2010).

might be excluded from the mainstream *mestizo* social fabric and be considered part of a marginalised group.

The non-indigenous Mexican population is not considered '*étnica*' or part of an '*etnia*' (Beaucage and Cusminsky 1988; Bartolomé 1996); therefore, the bulk of the Mexican population (living in Mexico) for the most part is not concerned with their 'ethnic identities'. However, with migration these typically do turn out to be a matter of concern. Generally, Mexican migrants upon their arrival in the USA become aware of their 'ethnic' and minority status¹⁴ and of the 'ethnic' labelling of Mexican, Hispanic or Latino¹⁵ that is attached to them.

Mexican identity therefore is something which helps to place an individual within a group and to have a sense of identification with a collectivity. It is a matter for self and societal identification (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, Guibernau and Rex 2010). Also, it helps the individual to create an order in his/her own life. Therefore, Mexicanness provides a definition, an interpretation of the self that establishes in social terms what the person is (Guibernau and Rex 2010).

¹⁴ Hispanics have occupied a space in between African Americans and whites in the USA stratification system. However, since the late 1980s and early 1990s, the relative standing of Hispanics has declined and they have come to replace African Americans at the bottom of the class hierarchy (Massey 2009). Hispanics in the USA have generally the lowest education rates, high levels of poverty, and among the undocumented immigrant pool Mexicans and Central Americans make the highest numbers (Parrillo 2003). Yet, much competition persists between Hispanics and African Americans. Furthermore, broadly speaking, Hispanic and African American communities respectively have relatively little understanding of the social conditions each other group has faced. Latinos for instance know little about slavery and the civil rights movement, while many African Americans are unaware of the social inequalities in Latin American countries that have led Hispanics to seek jobs in the USA even without a visa (for a detailed analysis on African Americans-Hispanics relations see Gordon and Lenhardt 2007).

¹⁵ 'Hispanic' and 'Latino' are not common categories of identification in Mexico. There has been much questioning about the existence of a Hispanic/Latino identity and the accuracy of grouping different national origins into a pan-ethnic, 'one-size-fits-all' category (Lopez and Stanton-Salazar 2001, Petersen et al 1980). Latinos despite having several important commonalities such as language, a history of colonisation, a predominant common religion, and being developing countries, are far from being culturally homogeneous (Larrain 1994, 2005).

Mexicanness as ethnic identity, or as a collection of ethnic identities, is not something that ‘clearly exists out there in the world’ (Waters and Eschbach 1995: 421). Rather it is a multidimensional, arbitrary, shifting and subjective social construct. Mexicanness, like other national identities; is closely related to common ancestral origins, culture, national belonging, identity, self and societal identification, behaviour, language use, food practices, traditions and customs, political, economical and historical factors (Thernstrom et al 1980, McGoldrick et al 1996, Phinney 1996, Guibernau and Rex 2010).

Mexicanness therefore, can define sympathy or hostility towards other groups. However, a person’s self-ascribed affiliation might not always be the same as that ascribed by others (Horowitz 1985). For instance, an individual of Mexican ancestry in the USA can feel identification with the Mexican community. Yet that same person might feel unfamiliar and foreign in relation to Mexican society (in Mexico), which will likely consider that person to be too American, *pocho*, or *gringo* (see discussion in Section 3.2). These situations should be understood from the perspective of Anthias (2002, 2008) ‘translocational positionality’. Also, it should be seen in the context of a sometimes thorny history between Mexico and the USA and relations of jealousy and competition between Mexicans and Mexican-Americans (discussed below). The latter has taken place in combination with an ambiguous and situational solidarity and a sense of community and ‘peoplehood’ particularly in times of social unrest (Gurin et al 1994, Navarro 2005). Hence Mexicanness is not something that is fixed; it is situational, shifting and context-dependent.

Mexicanness in this work should not be understood in the same way Elsner (2002) did. For him Mexicanness resulted from the fusion of Mexican and American cultures. He argued that ‘Mexicanness is a “borderlands” perspective... where two or more distinct cultural-linguistic traditions meet and interact... . [This] interaction ... occurs at various levels: within its own factions, with the dominant culture, and with all sorts of other cultural currents in society...’ (2002: 3, 5). For Elsner, Mexicanness takes place in the USA-

Mexico borderlands but ‘does not manifest itself in the country of Mexico’ (Elsner 2002: 8), where instead *Mexicanidad* exists. Elsner (2002: 8) referred to *Mexicanidad* as the culture of Mexico lived in Mexico, but he did not go further into the discussion of it.

Unlike Elsner, throughout this work, I will use the word Mexicanness as the English version of the Spanish word *Mexicanidad* (in the same way Riding 2000 and Smith 2005 did). Unlike Elsner (2002), I believe that by living in a globalised world, Mexicanness is not only lived in Mexico itself. Mexicanness can be lived elsewhere and incorporated into some other variants creating for instance a Mexican-American culture or *Chicanismo* (discussed in section 3.2). However, in order to understand this, it is important to begin with a contextualisation of economic, political and historical factors that have shaped Mexico-USA relations and the views of their peoples.

3.1.2 A little bit of history

Mexico and the United States have ambivalent, complex, active and important bilateral relations. In words of Octavio Paz (2005: 357-358), Mexicans have seen the USA with a mixture of curiosity and disdain, admiration and enthusiasm, fear and envy. The ideas the Mexican people have about the USA are contradictory and emotional. Mexico through its history has detested, admired, wished to be closer, wished to be far away, sought for help, been cautious about, fought against and fought along with the United States.

Enrique Krauze (1997, 2006) in a brilliant historical account argues how Mexico has navigated in confusion towards the USA. Since the 1800s during Mexico’s first years as an independent nation, the liberals wanted to have a nation modelled on the USA. Later these feelings changed as Mexico and the USA confronted each other both secretly and openly in several wars. Mexico and the USA fought against each other in the Mexican-American War (1846-1848); later the USA was furtively involved in the Mexican domestic struggle

designated the Reform War (1857-1861), and afterwards in the coup d'état against President Madero in 1913.

The USA and Mexico had several moments of tense calm during the 20th century, especially during the Cold War; and gradually Mexico developed a stronger and more autonomous foreign policy (Navarrete 2006). Still, the influence that the United States exerted and continues to exert over Mexico in economic, political, historical, social and cultural aspects has made Mexico critical and suspicious towards its northern neighbour (Morris 2005).

The Mexican population living in the United States has often suffered the consequences of these ambiguous feelings. In Mexico it has been largely believed that those who have left the *patria* (fatherland) and have developed attachments towards the United States have forgotten their roots and underestimated their native culture (Durand 2005). According to Bustamante (1976), those who have emigrated have historically been considered second-class citizens and have been regarded in various manners with a sense of hostility and disrespect.

For several decades the Mexican government ignored the population of Mexican origin living outside Mexico. Gomez Quiñones (1976) documented how diplomatic representations were at least during the first decades of the 20th century, indifferent and inefficient at solving and addressing problems faced by compatriots living in the USA. These were mainly job abuses, violence and discrimination. Gomez Quiñones reported that diplomatic missions were often aware of these situations, but the Mexican government rather ignored, manipulated and even acted against its diaspora.

Furthermore, he noted that, at least since the beginning of the 20th century, bourgeois Mexicans in particular and Mexican people more generally have shown disdain for emigration. He argued that at the beginning of the 20th century there was only a superficial understanding of the causes of emigration (Gomez Quiñones 1976). Heredia Zubieta (2006) in a similar sense argued that

Mexican policy-makers were generally ignorant of, and misunderstood, the conditions and situations of Mexicans who migrated to work in the USA.

Durand (2005b), in his analysis of Mexican policy towards the USA, distinguished five historical stages that the Mexican government has had towards its diaspora. These stages describe how the government has fluctuated from indifference to concern and engagement with the USA and with Mexicans living in that country. Images of emigrants have passed from being traitors to being heroes in a period of just over one century.

Durand (2005b) noted that the Mexican government had a 'dissuasive stage' policy in the early 20th century in which it aimed to repatriate the Mexican citizens who were in the USA after this nation annexed Mexican territories in the mid 1800s. At the same time, the Mexican government discouraged emigration, arguing that the country would lose its best workers to the USA (Gamio 1930 in Alarcón 1992). Also, it considered as traitors those who opted to sell their labour power to the USA (Durand 2005b).

Later, while the Bracero¹⁶ guest worker programme was in place (1942-1964), the Mexican government adopted a 'policy of negotiation'. During this time, it supported the emigration of male agricultural workers. But after the Bracero programme was definitively terminated, the government adopted a different strategy and a new stage began (Durand 2005b).

In the 1970s, being unable to stop the massive numbers of Mexicans who still wanted to cross to the USA to work; a lenient *laissez-faire* approach was followed (Durand 2005b). This was also known as the 'policy of no policy' (García y Griego 1988 in Martínez Aguilar 2006). Its name reflects the fact that Mexico did not take any action to stop the flows of undocumented workers

¹⁶ The Bracero programme (1942-1964) was a guest worker programme in which Mexican male farmers could work temporarily in US agricultural fields. It was meant as a measure to alleviate the US labour shortage during the Second World War. For a detailed discussion of this programme see Chapter 5, section 2.1

going north and in practical terms abandoned Mexicans residing in the USA. Despite the general indifference towards the massive flows of undocumented migration, President Echeverria (1970-1976) engaged with the Chicano¹⁷ community aiming to broaden their knowledge and understanding with Mexico. He started a programme for the distribution of Mexican books to US libraries in cities with high concentrations of Chicanos, a programme of conferences with Chicano and Mexican intellectuals, funding for Chicano students to study in Mexican universities and funding for the production of films with strong Chicano content directed mainly at Mexican audiences (De la Garza 1981, Bustamante 1992).

In the 1990s the government, followed instead a 'damage repair' (Durand 2005b) strategy. During Salinas de Gortari's presidency (1988-1994) the Programme for Mexican Communities Abroad (PCME) and the Offices for the Attention to Migrants (OAM) were created (Freyer 2007). Also, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed thanks in part to substantial lobbying from Mexican-Americans in the United States. Likewise in 1993, the 'Programme 2x1' was created. This programme, born from the efforts of hometown associations of *Zacatecanos*¹⁸, later became nationwide and transformed into the 'Programme 3x1' (Longoria 2005). With the Programme 3x1, for every dollar that migrants' hometown associations send for works of social development in their places of origin (such as pavement, public lighting, drainage, green areas, etc.) federal, state and local governments contribute matching amounts. This programme hence has encouraged migrants to have transnational orientations by raising funds and mobilised remittances for the improvement of public facilities in their regions of origin (García Zamora 2005, Goldring 2005, González Gutiérrez 2006, Freyer 2007).

¹⁷ Chicano(s) is a term employed for US citizens of Mexican descent. There is, however, a political and ideological significance attached to this term. In the 1960s Mexican Americans embraced the Chicano label to assert their Mexican-American pride and defy the *gabacho* (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) discrimination against Mexicans (Muñoz Jr. 1989: 76).

¹⁸ Native of the state of Zacatecas.

In the period 1994-2000 the government officialised its transnational perspectives when President Zedillo argued that ‘the Mexican nation goes beyond its borders’ (*la nación Mexicana rebasa el territorio que contiene sus fronteras*) (Imaz-Lelong 1999). The Mexican government introduced several changes aiming to keep closer contact with its nationals residing abroad. The most important of these changes were the right to hold dual nationality and the creation of several national programmes to inform and to protect returning migrants from extortion within Mexico (*Programa Paisano*¹⁹, *Semáforo Fiscal*). Also, the government lobbied US authorities for the acceptance of the *matrícula consular*²⁰ as a valid form of identification, thus facilitating undocumented migrants to open bank accounts in the USA and reducing the costs of sending remittances (Durand 2005, González Gutiérrez 2006. See also Chapter 9.3).

Durand’s (2005b) last stage started in Fox’s presidency and is known as ‘the end of mirage’ (*fin del espejismo*). The Fox administration (2000-2006) continued with the above-mentioned programs aiming to keep active transnational ties, as well as a more active, aggressive and engaged foreign policy, yet recognising the ‘asymmetry of power’ between Mexico and the USA. In Fox’s administration the National Council for Mexicans Abroad was created, encompassing the joint efforts of 11 federal secretariats, as well as the Institute for Mexicans Abroad (IME) under the charge of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Lozano Ascencio 2005). In 2005, another major change took place when the Mexican Congress reformed the law in order to authorise Mexicans living abroad to vote in federal elections (IMR 2010). In addition, Presidents Vicente Fox and George W. Bush started their presidential terms with a notable climate of understanding and goodwill to advance an immigration reform (Castañeda 2007). However, the terrorist attacks in 2001 exacerbated negative views of immigrants, especially those of (or perceived as

¹⁹ For information on the history, mission, vision and objectives of *Programa Paisano* see: www.paisano.gob.mx

²⁰ The *matrícula consular* is an identification issued by the Consular Mexican representations to Mexican citizens, regardless of their migration status.

of) Arab origin and in irregular status, focused attention on border security, and relegated Mexico to a place far away from American priorities. Since then, the USA has implemented tighter security measures and indeed militarisation of the border (Johnson and Trujillo 2007). However, these measures, instead of putting off undocumented crossings, have had the effect of locking in the immigrants that are already in the USA, turning the pattern of circular migration into one of semi-permanent settlement²¹ (Durand and Massey 2003, Durand 2005b, Taylor et al 2011).

Felipe Calderón's government (2006-2012) has also aimed to have close relations with the Mexican diaspora, 98% of whom live in the United States, with the other 2% of whom are distributed throughout the rest of the world (IMR 2010). However, Mexico-USA relations are dominated by issues of national security for each of the two countries. A constant traffic of illicit drugs and weapons has over recent years unleashed a wave of massive violence in Mexico and strained bilateral relations. Mexico has been absorbed into a 'war on drugs' against the cartels operating from north to south and coast to coast (Carpenter 2009). Mexico's foreign policy has been of low profile and has encountered a very hesitant political will from its US counterpart (Montaño 2008). Under Obama's administration, individual US states have proposed a raft of strict anti-immigrant legislation (Hoy 2012). Moreover, deportations have reached record levels, being about 30% higher than the annual average during the second term of the Bush administration (Lopez et al 2011).

Nevertheless, the relations between Mexico and the USA continue to be active and important. Both countries share nearly 2000 miles of border, making Mexico the port of entry for most Latin American immigration, legal and undocumented, and one of the most transited and dynamic borders in the

²¹ According to the Pew Hispanic Center 2011 figures, of the more than 10 million unauthorised adult (aged 18 or over) migrants, more than 60% of them have resided in the USA for more than 10 years. The Pew Hispanic Center found that 35% of adult undocumented migrants had lived in the US for 15 years or more, 28% for 10 to 14 years, 22% for 5 to 9 years; and 15% for less than five years (Taylor et al 2011). For a detailed discussion on demographic trends and data see Chapter 5.

world. Nearly one million legitimate travellers and nearly a billion dollars worth of goods legally cross the border every day (US Department of State 2010). Roughly 80% of Mexico's total global exports of \$230 billion go to the US and more than half of Mexico's total global imports of \$234 billion are from the US (US Department of State 2010). The economies of both countries are almost dependent on each other. For Mexico, the USA is its most important trading partner, while for the USA Mexico competes for the top position with Canada and China (U.S. Census Bureau Foreign Trade 2011). Most importantly, the cheap labour of Mexicans in the USA produces huge profits for the US economy, while migrants' family remittances inject more than \$5 billion USD quarterly into the Mexican economy, averaging \$316.89 USD monthly per household (Banxico 2011).

Despite this closeness and interdependence, Mexicans in Mexico, broadly speaking, hold ambivalent and even contradictory feelings towards the USA. For several years one of the main research centres in Mexico City (*Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económica - CIDE*) has been conducting the national survey 'Mexico, the Americas and the World'²²; with political leaders as well as the general public. In this study Mexicans have been surveyed about, among other issues, their perspectives towards the United States. Mexicans have steadily responded with feelings of distrust (*desconfianza*) towards the United States. Nonetheless, the number of individuals responding that they felt distrust in 2010 (45%) was considerably less than in 2008 (61%). In 2008 the number of individuals who responded that they felt resentment (29%) or admiration (30%) was almost identical. In 2010, admiration was the most favoured answer (42%), while indifference (29%) and resentment (22%) took secondary places.

²² *Mexico, the Americas, and the World* is the only public opinion study on foreign policy to be carried out in Latin America. The survey is conducted every two years using a representative sample of the Mexican population and a group of leaders. The purpose of the project is to find out, measure and analyse the Mexican public and leaders' general opinions regarding several international issues and Mexico's expected role in confronting them (CIDE 2008).

Finally, the general points rating²³ given to the USA fluctuated in the last three surveys conducted in 2006 (74 points, with 100 being ‘very positive’ and zero ‘very negative’), 2008 (62.4 points) and 2010 (68 points) (Martínez I Coma and Lago Peñas 2008, CIDE, 2008, 2010).

These contradictory feelings from Mexico towards the USA are not surprising. To quote Riding (2000: xi), ‘Mexico and the USA are the most different countries in the world living side by side, where just a borderline contrasts ‘from wealth to poverty; from organization to improvisation; from artificial flavoring to pungent spices. But the physical differences are least important. Probably nowhere in the world do two neighbors understand each other so little.’ Mexicans and Americans have often not been able to understand each other, and have been unable to a large extent, to follow common interests and coordinate political agendas (Riding 2000, Heredia Zubieta 2006). Mexicans’ ambivalence, confusion and contradictions towards their own selves and towards the USA, have influenced the heterogeneity of, and divisions between, Mexican and Mexican-American societies. Their relations will be analysed in the following section.

3.2 Complex relations

It has been widely acknowledged that migrants create and recreate their original cultures when they are in contact with and influenced by the society to which they have arrived. Thomas and Znaniecki’s work *The Polish Peasant* has become a classic example to illustrate how a new cultural product emerged ‘partly drawn from Polish traditions, partly from the new conditions in which the immigrants live, and partly from American social values as the immigrant sees and interprets them’ (in Foner 1997: 260).

²³ This points rating measures the general opinion the respondents hold towards a country. Canada has steadily received the highest points rating among a list of 16 countries (CIDE 2008, 2010).

Mexicans have been an increasingly important part of the United States society for almost two centuries. The contacts, relations, exchanges and interactions between Mexicans and Americans have resulted in a blend of meanings and perceptions of Mexicanness; hence redefining culture and traditions, social identifications and affiliations in both societies of origin and reception (Martinez 1977, Taylor 1991, Alarcón 1992).

The social transformations in which Mexicans and Mexican-Americans have engaged and the new cultural products they have created have been studied from different perspectives and termed differently by various scholars. The Chicano Civil Rights movement of the 1960s gave birth to an ethnic identity and political consciousness: the Chicano (discussed later in section 3.2.1).

For the processes occurring in Mexico, Martinez (1977) studying the US-Mexico borderlands spoke of the cultural influence the USA has over Mexico as ‘demexicanization’ or *agringamiento*²⁴ (‘gringoisation’) of the border. He also noted how foreign influences have not always sat well with Mexicans and how ‘Yankee dollars’ have been associated with the causes of prostitution, gambling, drug use, drinking and a myriad of other social problems. Alarcón (1992) coined the concept of *norteñización* (northernisation) to describe the process of how migration had become institutionalised in the municipality of Chavindia, Michoacán in central Mexico. *Norteñización* referred to the process by which ‘communities have specialised in producing and reproducing international migrant workers by adapting their economic and social structures’ (Alaracón 1992: 306).

This process bore some similarities to what Kandel and Massey (2002) described as the ‘culture of Mexican migration’. Alarcón however, noted how

²⁴ In Argentina, as observed by Fernández (2010), the term *agringamiento* was used among indigenous peoples to describe the process of acquisition of an urban lifestyle, and the abandoning of an indigenous culture. The *agringamiento* manifested in language, dressing codes and more egalitarian divisions of household work. In addition, *agringamiento* was used interchangeably with the word *agrandamiento*, meaning to become bigger or greater.

the local culture of Chavindia had absorbed elements derived from the migrants' experiences in the USA. Yet these exhibited few elements of the US mainstream culture. This was mainly because migrants tended to mix with other Latinos and they resisted integrating permanently into the US society. Closely related to Alarcón's observations, Castro-Salazar and Bagley (2010: 30) referred to Mexican-origin peoples in the USA as being from '*ni de aquí ni from there*' (neither from here, nor from there). They discussed the 'sense of "otherness" that immigrants face on both sides of the border and... the multifarious contexts they have to navigate.'

In popular discourse, Mexicans (in Mexico) use the rather derogatory label *pochos* for those who have lost some part of their Mexicanness and who incorporate *pochismos* (later discussed) into their everyday language. Also the *agringados* ('gringoised') are those who have Americanised and become like the *gringos* (discussed below in Section 3.2.2). Hence, these social transformations have occurred not only in societies of reception but also in sending communities, because migration had followed, until recent years, a circular pattern of return²⁵ (Massey et al 1987). Moreover, they have occurred because the social implications of migration do not stop with political borders and they rather constitute a single transnational experience.

Therefore, all actors involved in the migration process – those who leave and return, those who stay in the country of origin, and those who migrated several generations ago and have settled in the USA – have changed the social, demographic, cultural, linguistic, economic and political scenarios of the societies where they reside and where they come from. All these actors have been influenced by cultural exchanges, redefining their approaches to work, children's education, spousal relations, gender roles and positions in the family, patriarchal and matriarchal codes, institutional participation, moral

²⁵ During the last decade however, because of stricter border controls, more expensive and dangerous crossings, the pattern of circular, return migration has turned into a semi-permanent settlement (Durand 2005, Durand and Massey 2003, Taylor 2011). See Chapter 5 for a lengthier discussion on the matter.

values, etc. The changes are certainly not always welcomed or embraced by all family members. Some see them in a positive light, while others reject and even condemn them (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Foner 1997, 2009; Levitt 2001; Falicov 2005b; Pribilsky 2004, Dreby 2009, see Chapters 6 and 8). However, the perspectives have been shaped by a myriad of historic, political, cultural and social factors (such as those discussed above).

For the purpose of this chapter, it is important to clarify that the embracing or rejection of Mexicanness and ‘demexicanization’, *agringamiento* and *norteñización*, have also created divisions. Mexicans living in the United States, including Mexican-Americans as well undocumented migrants, have not always had smooth relations between them and with Mexicans in Mexico. As mentioned above, many Mexicans generally hold ambivalent views towards the United States, towards Americans and towards Mexican emigrants and these ambivalences are to a large extent reciprocal. These relations will be explained in greater detail in the next section.

3.2.1 Mexicans, Mexican-Americans and Chicanos

In order to have a better grasp of Mexican relations with Mexican-Americans it is important to first clarify that within the Mexican-origin peoples in the USA there are some differences and divisions (Taylor 1991, Gurin et al 1994). Migrants, particularly undocumented, and the US-born of Mexican ancestry do not see themselves as part of the same group. This is not exclusive to Mexicans. Waters (1994) found that West Indian and Haitian Americans of the second generation aimed to distance themselves from first generations of the same countries. She identified three types of identities among the second generations: black American, ethnic or hyphenated, and immigrant identity. She noted that first and second generations had different understandings of their identities, ‘race’ relations and the opportunities they could achieve in the USA.

Among the Mexican-origin peoples in the USA, there are Chicanos, Mexican-Americans and Mexican migrants. According to Bustamante (1975, 1992), Mexican-Americans and Chicanos can be defined as the descendants of Mexican immigrants born in the USA and with a cultural orientation towards what is American. These groups seek access and participation in the social, cultural, educational, economic and political structures in the United States in conditions of equality and in the context of ethnic and political pluralism, and their national loyalty is to the USA. The difference between them is basically ideological and of self-representation. Mexican-Americans are those Americans of Mexican ancestry. Chicanos, besides their Mexican ancestry, possess a political consciousness of themselves as members of a historically and 'racially' oppressed group within the United States (Rinderle 2005). During the first half of the 20th century, as Mexican-Americans were increasingly segregated and marginalised, they 'transformed from aspiring immigrants into a self-conscious domestic minority, increasingly calling themselves not Mexicans but Chicanos' (Massey 2009: 68).

Mexicans (in Mexico) sometimes react to Chicanos or Mexican-Americans as people who have 'lost' their culture (Mindiola and Martinez 1992). Mexicans often see Mexican-Americans as not truly and authentically Mexican and believe that they reject their Mexican origins. Shorris (1992 in Richardson 2003) recounted how Mexicans and Mexican-Americans have learned over generations to look down on, to despise each other²⁶.

The Chicano has always been that other Mexican, or that other American that few ever recognized as being specifically either... The Chicano's capacity to be different, to be that elusive yet ever present 'otro' may be the very reason why he has never been able to wear the Mexican mask or the American mask well. The Chicano is truly the cultural correlative of that proverbial 'otro' that was always there, yet somehow never noticed (Davila 1973: 559).

²⁶ These attitudes have to be understood in conjunction with governmental policies, SUCH AS THOSE discussed above.

To complicate things further, after the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (see Chapter 5), large numbers of formerly undocumented Mexicans regularised their status and they and their offspring became US citizens or legal residents with full rights to residence and employment. As Mexican undocumented workers have continuously arrived in the USA, a gap was created. This gap brought divisions between those who were in the USA temporarily and those there permanently, as well as between those whose status and presence were legitimate and those who were illegitimately there (Gurin et al 1994, Bacon 2008).

Furthermore, the terrorist attacks of 2001 and the resulting obsession with national security brought about a socio-political climate of xenophobia especially directed against immigrants and foreign-looking people, who were seen as a threat to national security (Huntington 2004, 2004b; Tancredo 2006). This created a wide-spread sentiment of anti-immigrant racism. Mexicans and Mexican-Americans also suffered from this, regardless of their legal status (De Genova 2004, Castro-Salazar and Bagley 2010). These developments further accentuated differences between Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, *con* and *sin papeles* (with and without papers).

The divisions between Mexican-Americans and Mexicans can also be understood in the context of their marginalised group status (Massey 2009: 16). Mexican Americans (Mexican US permanent residents and naturalised citizens) are arguably excluded from a 'cultural citizenship' in the USA maintaining a limited kind of membership to the United States because of race and prejudice (Boehm 2012: 128). Mexican-Americans in general terms are worse off than African-Americans in education and socioeconomic mobility (Massey 2009). Yet, Mexican-Americans are more economically stable, affluent and educated than Mexican migrants in the USA. Immigrants from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala and Haiti are the most likely of all national origins in the USA to be unskilled or semi-skilled labourers (Portes and Rumbaut 2006: 20-22). Mexican-Americans also often have applied the word 'Chicano' pejoratively to identify lower classes. Rosales (1997: 251-252)

claims that Mexican-Americans have looked with disdain at uneducated poorer compatriots who do not transcend the working-class boundaries.

The mainstream US society typically treats working-class Mexicans and Mexican-Americans as part of the same category. Mexican-Americans believe that mainstream's discriminatory attitudes against Hispanics are largely based on ethnic and social class ambivalences. Mexican ethnicity is associated with menial jobs, low salaries, irregular entry to American territory, poor economic and human development as well as ambivalence about loyalty to the United States (Richardson 2003).

Also, as noted by Mahler (1995), among Hispanics of all origins there often are feelings of jealousy, egoism, competition and resentment. Mexican-Americans and well-settled migrants generally do not want to see that others succeed more than them. They particularly resent undocumented migrants who, after a short stay, have been able to get better jobs, earn better salaries, learn English, dress in better clothes, or simply achieve better positions than them.

Mexican-Americans have usually tried to differentiate themselves from Mexicans and from the connotations they carry. In general they want to distance themselves from the presumed idea and stereotype that 'all Mexicans are poor and arrive in the United States by swimming across a river rather than flying in a plane' (Melville 1988 in Rinderle 2005: 303). Mexican-Americans, to a large extent, hold Mexicans responsible for drug trafficking, poverty, laziness and inferior social categorisations associated with their national origin (Vila 1999). Also, the loyalties that Mexican immigrants feel towards Mexico often irritate Mexican-Americans who feel strong allegiances to the United States (Richardson 1999).

A further reason for their complex relations is based upon 'racial' hierarchies. As mentioned earlier, Mexicans are the product of a mixed indigenous and Spanish past. For centuries, the indigenous had to submit to the Spanish rule and domination. In recent times, as Mahler (1995: 103-104) explains, Latin

American migrants recognise that white Americans exploit them at work. But migrants 'are embittered [when] their compatriot equals take advantage of them... when their own people exploit them... [They enter into] a dog-eat-dog world.' Therefore, Mexicans resent it when other Hispanics in the USA have positions of authority over them.

3.2.2 Spanglish, *pochos* and *pochismos*: the language of Chicanos

Having now given a general idea of the relations between the several Mexican-origin groups in the USA, I will go on to discuss one feature of the identity of Mexican-Americans and of some migrants: Spanglish.

Language as the essential tool for communication has a fundamental role in the construction and expression of national and personal identities (Echavez-Solano and Dworkin y Méndez 2007). The sustained contact between individuals of culturally diverse settings has inevitably influenced and even transformed the way peoples communicate. Among Mexican-Americans (and Hispanic-Americans broadly speaking) Spanglish can be intrinsic to their hyphenated identities (Rothman and Bell 2005). Spanglish in its several variations (*Pocho*, *Dominicanish*, *Cubonics*, *Nuyorrican*, etc.) may be interpreted in different ways: as a pidgin, a Creole language, an interlanguage, or an anglicised Spanish dialect (Ardila 2005).

Spanglish has been greeted by some as an expression of the 'mixed culture' which Latinos are. 'Spanglish is what we speak, but it is also who we Latinos are, and how we act, and how we perceive the world. ... It is the active state of cultural mixing, a fertile terrain for negotiating a new identity' (Morales 2002: 3, 6). For Morales (2002) Spanglish, is a state of being and living in a 'multisubjectivity' which is closely linked with history and issues of 'race' and class. Guerra Avalos (2001) sees Spanglish as a cultural fusion which provides the opportunity to speak in two languages and the sense of belonging to two cultures. Spanglish has been celebrated as a third space of resistance which

represents the emergence of a new American language (Arredondo et al. 2003 in Castro-Salazar and Bagley 2010).

There is not one Spanglish, but many; issues of nationality, age, and class make a difference (Stavans 2000). Spanglish in its Mexican-American variation is known as Chicano, the people who speak it are known as Chicanos or *pochos* and its words are *pochismos* (Wilson 1946, Ardila 2005). Part of embracing a Hispanicised-US culture is to incorporate *pochismos* into the daily vocabulary. The use of *pochismos* acts as an element of distinction between those who do possess the cultural capital to understand them and novices; as well as between those who have been ‘north’ and those who have ‘only’ stayed in the society of origin (Taylor 1991). Expressions and words like *carpeta* (floor carpet/ Spanish *alfombra*), *aseguranza* (insurance/ Sp. *seguro*), *soda* (Sp. *refresco*), *parkear* (parquear) (to park/ Sp. *estacionar*), *marketa* (market/ Sp. *mercado*), *te hablo pa’tras* (I call you back/ Sp. *te regreso la llamada*), etc. denote a ‘linguistic acculturation’ to the everyday vocabulary of a segment of Mexicans in the United States.

However, the use of *pochismos* is not always seen in a positive light. In Mexico *pochismos* are seen as a corruption, contamination and deterioration of the Spanish language (Lipski 2007). Spanglish is barely recognised in the Spanish-only speaking world (Ardila 2005). Octavio Paz, Mexican Nobel laureate in Literature, referred to Spanglish as something abominable (in Stavans 2003). Spanglish speakers are labelled as verbally deprived, alingual, or deficient bilinguals (Acosta 1975: 151 in Lipski 2004). Spanglish is the tongue of the uneducated and growing lower class (Stavans 2003), the language of poor Latinos (Gonzalez-Echeverria 1997 in Lipski 2004).

Pocho in Mexico has long been a derogatory term. The Mexican *pocho* is doubly marginalised and looked down on as culturally inferior on either side of the border. The ‘pocho is too Mexican for the Anglos and too agringado for the Mexicans’ (Shorris 1992 in Shain 1999-2000: 678).

Non-migrants of my samples, in both urban and rural settings were critical of the use and adoption of these terms by their migrant kin. The reproof for *pochismos* by those who stayed behind was mainly based on the idea of a loss of Mexicanness of their migrant kin (See Chapter 8). Likewise, the respondents in Dallas had a similar approach and disapproved of their children if they mixed languages. For the Dallas sample, the use of *pochismos* was disapproved of because of the association of these terms with Latinos of lower levels of education and lower social class (See Chapter 6).

3.3 Cooperation and solidarity

There are many ways, however, in which Mexican-Americans and Mexicans are not so different after all and in which they maintain relations of mutual solidarity. Mexican migrants and Mexican-Americans very often live and work side by side; either in their neighbourhoods, workplaces, children's schools, and other everyday settings. It is increasingly common to find 'mixed status families' which include several generations of individuals of Mexican ancestry, Mexico and US-born, as well as US-legal and undocumented residents. These groups hold very similar views on moral values especially in relation to sexuality, gender roles and responsibilities for family members, parenting, and significant shared traditions and customs (Staton 1972, Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, Falicov 1996).

Mexican undocumented immigrants, because of their especially vulnerable status, also trust and depend on Mexican-Americans (see Chapter 9). Their relations are not only limited to what Mahler (1995: 79) termed the 'commodification of social relations'²⁷, but also in social mobilisation and joint political participation. Mexicans and Mexican-Americans have shown a great deal of cooperation and solidarity, particularly in times of social unrest. For

²⁷ Mahler, with this term, referred to relations in which people are willing to help each other with monetary loans, reinforcing social ties and reciprocity, but at the same time creating tensions, jealousy and disillusionment.

instance, in 1994 (Proposition 187, in California), in 2006 (proposition HR 4437) and in 2010 (Arizona Law SB1070), Latinos, regardless of their migratory status or generation, organised political mobilisations seeking to stop anti-immigrant legislation (Bloemraad and Trost 2008). These massive demonstrations were signs of an *hermandad Latina* (Latin brotherhood), in which these groups, despite their differences, acted together for common political and social objectives. In more transnational perspectives, Mexican-Americans were fundamental actors in shaping the change in policies of the Mexican government towards its diaspora in the USA. They have also been central in maintaining the high levels of trade interdependence and for the signing of the NAFTA.

Also, the Hispanic vote –with the arguable exception of Cubans (Coffin 2003)- has generally favoured the Democratic Party, based on the belief that it has shown a greater concern for Latinos, especially on the issue of undocumented immigration (Suro 2006, Taylor and Fry 2007, Lopez and Livingston 2009). Also, Latinos were decisive for the election of President Obama in 2008 (Shear 2011), in which 67% of the Hispanic electorate cast their vote for him (Preston 2008). Latinos largely supported Obama after he vowed to make undocumented migration a priority in his administration and promised to deliver immigration reform in his first year of presidency (Navarrete 2010). The political weight and influence of Latinos has also been recognised in 2012, an election year, after President Obama signed an executive order to stop the deportations of young undocumented migrants if they meet certain requirements (See Chapters 9.4 and 10.3).

The social relations of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans and legal and undocumented immigrants are not static, but dynamic. They are not only driven by competition or mistrust. These groups also have shared interests and a shared sense of identification, especially when facing hostile times. In some contexts, as discussed in the previous section, their relations are characterised by competition, but in others they show a great deal of cooperation and solidarity between them.

3.4 Summary

The ethnic composition of the United States has indisputably changed as a result of territorial annexation and more than a century of migration. Mexicans residing on either side of the border have also been influenced by new cultural understandings and affiliations. But, as I described with a personal account at the beginning of this chapter, the sense of belonging, identity and identification are not necessarily the same for individuals with a common ancestry.

This chapter has described how Mexico-US relations have been characterised by a love-hate relation, in which issues of historical intervention, politically opportunistic events, economic asymmetries, socio-cultural imperialism, and nationalistic pride, among other things, have been essential defining aspects. The self and other identifications among the groups here discussed, are dynamic and interactive processes in which societies of origin and reception, and government policies, have played an influential role.

Mexicans and peoples of Mexican ancestry have been influenced by a complex past. The conceptualisations each has of the respective other have resulted in shifting, contradictory and situational ways of interrelating. Mexican-Americans and Mexican migrants residing in the USA, despite their common ancestry, language, traditions, folklore, and religion, do not strictly share a common sense of belonging, identity and identification. Their relations have been marked by a fluctuating solidarity or competition; jealousy or camaraderie which take place in relational, eventful and dynamic terms. Also, their relations have been complicated by a mixture of social class, migration status, length of stay in the USA, plans for settlement or return, and a sense of belonging and identification to home and host societies.

As will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters, Mexicans often reject the *agringamiento* or 'demexicanization' of their return migrants. This is largely due to the history of domination and subordination of Mexico by the

USA and to the (sometimes exaggerated) cultural differences between both societies. On the other hand, Mexican migrants often aim to acculturate by using *pochismos* or by behaving *agringados* in their everyday life, aiming for social distinction from the Mexicans who have not experienced migrant life in the USA. Other migrants instead aimed to ‘camouflage’ (A concept which will be explained in detail in Chapter 6) and to distance themselves from the stereotypical images of ‘illegality’, poverty, exploitation, etc. that have been associated with Mexicans in the USA. They do so in a similar way to Mexican-Americans.

In sum, the situations that have been described throughout this chapter do not imply that Mexicans and peoples of Mexican origin are incompatible or live in permanent tension. Rather, the interactions between these groups and the non-migrants in Mexico have created and recreated cultural products and transnational exchanges, redefined interethnic understanding, transformed the feelings of Mexicanness and the perceptions towards the United States and its people.

Chapter 4: Methodological framework

In this chapter, I look at the methodological issues concerning how this research project was conceived, designed and materialised. I discuss the reasons for choosing ethnographic methods, how I recruited my respondents, the challenges I faced upon entering the field, how I built rapport and overcame outsiders' barriers. Also, I discuss the problems of validity and generalisability, including those faced by ethnography and research with non-random populations in general. After that, I discuss how I analysed my data using the grounded theory approach and how I developed categories from my engagement with the participants and from my fieldwork experiences. To finish, I reflect upon leaving the field and the relationships I formed with my participants.

4.1 Introduction

This project is comprised of qualitative research, sited in two settings in the United States and three in Mexico; with urban, middle-class origin and rural²⁸, working-class origin undocumented Mexican migrants and their families in Mexico²⁹. Over the course of seven months, I observed, conversed, interviewed, and participated with migrants and their families on both sides of the US-Mexico border. They allowed me to access their daily lives using ethnographic methods: participant observation, unstructured and semi-structured in-depth interviews. Numerous informal interactions took place in the migrants' and non-migrants' everyday settings.

The main reason for choosing ethnographic methods was my interest to understand, describe, analyse and theorise about the cultural meanings within

²⁸ See footnote 1 on the 'rural' character of Ocuilan in Chapter 1.

²⁹ For maps of fieldwork sites, see Chapter 5.

everyday life attached to undocumented migration for those who left and those who stayed behind. Qualitative methods are essential in order to grasp meaning. The methods of ethnography allow the best access to the meanings by which people organise and understand their everyday experiences. These methods allowed me to observe the social constructions, as well as transnational and community relations, that are inherent to the undocumented migration experience in the sites explored.

In my field research I observed daily interactions and relations between family members (those living in the same location and those located abroad), housemates and neighbours. In every site where fieldwork took place I had different experiences in terms of access, how my role was perceived, the ease or difficulty of 'snowball' sampling and the disposition of the participants. These all will be discussed in detail throughout this chapter.

The sample in every site included both men and women in order to understand the interplay between genders in relation to migration and transnational family life. I tried to see how men and women's interactions defined their experiences as individuals and as members of a community. While this was not a study that had gender as its primary focus of analysis, the importance of gender is not underestimated and throughout chapters 6 to 9 I discuss gender relations in a variety of settings and intersections.

Most of the interviews were conducted in my respondents' households. Nevertheless, some interviews took place at the houses where I stayed. Others were conducted whilst having a walk or while having dinner or other meals together. The times for conducting the interviews varied as my respondents' work shifts were not fixed. The interviews took place during my respondents' time off work. I wanted them to feel at ease and without time constraints. I always assured them of the confidentiality of our conversations, for strategic as well as ethical reasons; at a later stage I carried out research with their non-migrating kin in Mexico.

When I entered the field, I had two main aims. The first was to observe and distinguish the strategies that each of the migrant cohorts put into practice for their integration to the ‘mainstream’ receiving society. The second was to compare and contrast how the different demographic characteristics of my respondents, at both places of origin and destination, influenced their transnational family relations. Once I was in the field, however, my research scope broadened and my research interests transformed considerably, for example to include emotional aspects inherent in the migration process; I had been open to this possibility before entering the field.

I realised how the migration experience is profoundly shaped by emotional aspects, constructed both individually and collectively. For instance, I observed that the concepts of sacrifice and suffering were frequently present in the discourse of my respondents. Likewise, I noticed that the relations between migrants and non-migrant kin gradually cooled and family members therefore became ‘emotionally distant’ (a concept I explore in greater detail in Chapter 7). Furthermore, I realised how ‘illegality’/ ‘undocumentedness’ had different meanings for each sample and that this influenced their plans for the future, such as settlement in the USA or return to their places of origin. On becoming aware of the relevance of these categories, I added them to my analytical framework, consistent with the grounded theory approach.

4.2 Methods, validity and generalisability

In both US sites, ethnographic methods –unstructured in-depth interviews and participant observation– were employed. The interweaving of these two techniques, in addition to their providing a measure of ‘triangulation’, gave me a better understanding of what Hammersley (1992: 11) termed the ‘complex relationship between attitudes and behaviour’. I took into account not only what my interviewees externalised, but also my observations of their daily lives.

All of the field interactions and interviews were in Spanish; the native tongue of my respondents and also my own. The translations to English have been made by myself, trying to capture the same meanings and emphasis that the accounts have in Spanish. In the cases where this has been problematic, I have included in brackets what my respondents said in Spanish.

Undocumented migrants, owing to their status, are often sceptical about participating in research. Getting unwanted attention from authorities, and fearing that their practices and *modus vivendi* are revealed, are reasons for the complexity of accessing them. Studies of hidden or hard-to-reach populations raise a number of methodological questions usually absent from research with well-identified and less sensitive subjects. Perhaps the most evident is what Heslin (1972) has termed 'social visibility'. As undocumented populations have a low social visibility there is limited knowledge as to how and where to locate them. In addition, undocumented populations are beset by legal restrictions as well as by moral sensitivities; there are ethical considerations in gaining access to them.

Therefore, ethnographic fieldwork based on participant observation and unstructured interviews are helpful qualitative methods for the study of communities who are typically reluctant to participate in structured interviews and surveys. I used a chain of 'snowball' referrals to recruit a cohort of participants in each of the sites where this study took place. This technique is a reliable means for contacting hidden or hard-to-reach populations such as undocumented migrants (Faugier and Sargeant 1997). An advantage of snowball sampling is the apparently easier establishment of trust and development of rapport, as this technique involves a recommendation from a person who is previously acquainted with the new respondent, so that new respondents can relate to the interviewer with more confidence. Building rapport with the participants is an important factor in effectively gathering richer data. The drawback of snowball sampling (and of ethnographic research in general) is that the data gathered have more limited generalisability,

according to the specifics of the snowballing process and the characteristics of the cohort recruited.

The validity, representativeness and generalisability of ethnography have been problematic issues for qualitative researchers. Positivist claims generally call into question the validity of ethnography as it does not employ probability samples and statistics nor does it validate or refute hypotheses. When discussing validity, one must bear in mind of course, the intrinsic differences between qualitative and quantitative methods. To this respect, Maxwell (2002: 42) argues that:

Validity refers primarily to accounts, not to data or methods...
Validity is not an inherent property of a particular method, but pertains to the data, accounts or conclusions reached by using that method in a particular context for a particular purpose.

Similarly Popay et al (1998) argue that generalisation from a case study or a small theoretical sample is of a different order to the kind of generalisation that one can make from an experiment or a survey. Guba and Lincoln assert that generalisations in qualitative research are impossible since phenomena are neither time nor context-free. They offer instead concepts such as 'trustworthiness and applicability' (Guba and Lincoln 1981 in Morse et al 2002; and Guba and Lincoln in Schwandt et al 2007). Likewise, Gobo (2008) argues that representativeness and generalisability concern more general structures and are detached from individual social practices; and that the unrepeatable individual instances are not generalisable.

Horsburgh (2003) argued that situational, rather than demographic representativeness is what is sought in qualitative research. She defended the view that generalisability and transferability of knowledge are closely related.

It may be said, then, that generalizability in qualitative research refers to the extent to which theory developed within one study may be exported (K.M. Melia, personal communication) to provide explanatory theory for the experiences of other

individuals who are in comparable situations. This position is supported by the comments of Popay et al. (1998: 348) on the subject of generalizability who emphasize that, ‘...the aim is to make logical generalizations to a theoretical understanding of a similar class of phenomena rather than probabilistic generalizations to a population’ (Horsburgh 2003: 311).

Strict generalisation is not a goal of this qualitative research. I believe that individual social practices should be analysed in their particular time and space contexts. Nevertheless, I believe that my observations and findings are to a certain extent transferable, relevant and of use in future research on migration, especially in reference to transnational families, ‘illegality’/ ‘undocumentedness’ and emotions.

4.3 Sites and cohorts

This study was conducted in two settings in the United States and three in Mexico (see Table 2). A total of 52 people, 30 women and 22 men participated in this study. Twenty-seven participants were from a rural origin, while twenty-five from an urban origin. The time spent in the US was significantly longer and produced richer data. I explored with more detail the experiences of migrants compared to those of non-migrants. This approach suited better my research interests and purposes.

Location	Period
Sunville	1st August 2009 - 17 th October 2009
Dallas	18 th October 2009 – 4 th December 2009 25 th February 2010 – 14 th of March 2010
Ocuilan	5 th December 2009 – 22 nd December 2009
Victoria	1 st February 2010 - 6 th February 2010
Matchuala	10 th January 2010 – 31 st January 2010 8 th February 2010 – 24 th February 2010

Table 2. Dates and Sites of Fieldwork

I entered the field in August 2009 to conduct the first part of my research in a city I refer to as Sunville, in Orange County, California. I stayed in Sunville for approximately three months. Seven men and seven women participated in this study. Most of the respondents were natives from the same town of Ocuilan in the State of Mexico, some formed part of a same extended family, and all of them were recruited in the neighbourhood where fieldwork was conducted. With few exceptions, most of these participants were from a common place of origin and belonged to three different extended families. (See Appendices 1B, 1C and 2 for kinship relations of the Sunville-Ocuilan cohort).

The metropolitan area of Dallas, Texas (also known as the Dallas metroplex), was the other US site where I conducted research. I stayed at the Dallas location for two months, revisiting two months later for a period of almost three weeks. In this location one male teenager, four men, and five women from urban and middle-class origin took part in this study with in-depth interviewing and participant observation.

After being in the United States, I travelled to Mexico where I carried out the second part of my field research. (See Appendix 3 for kinship relations of the Dallas, Victoria and Matehuala cohorts). I conducted interviews in the town of Ocuilan, State of Mexico, with the relatives of the migrants residing in Sunville. Also, in the cities of Victoria, state of Tamaulipas with the relatives of one of my respondents living in Dallas; and in the city of Matehuala, state of San Luis Potosi, with relatives of undocumented migrants, located mainly in the cities of Houston and Dallas, Texas. Regrettably, owing to time and budget constraints I did not have the opportunity to interview the migrant relatives of the respondents in Matehuala (See Section 9.2 of this Chapter).

In the cities of Victoria and Matehuala the methodology employed was unstructured in-depth interviewing and, to a lesser extent compared to US locations, participant observation. A total of 15 interviews were conducted. In Victoria, I interviewed 2 women, and in Matehuala 8 women and 5 men. All of

the male participants in this group were return migrants. Five of these respondents had visited their kin in the United States on numerous occasions.

In the town of Ocuilan, I also conducted unstructured in-depth interviews and participant observation. The sample was formed by the non-migrating kin of the Sunville cohort, as well as by return migrants. I conducted 13 interviews, five with men and eight with women. It is noteworthy that none of the female participants had migrated to the United States and only one (Patricia) had visited her migrant mother (Esperanza) for ten days for leisure purposes using a tourist visa to enter the USA. Three of the male participants were return migrants. (For maps of fieldwork sites see Chapter 5).

4.4 Data analysis

The data analysis in this work follows the grounded theory approach formulated by Glaser and Strauss (1967). The categories employed in the subsequent chapters emerged from my engagement with the participants and from my overall experiences in the field.

When I entered the field, I aimed not to have any *a priori* assumptions; however I had general research questions and interests. Gradually, my experiences in the field allowed me to refine my research aims and particular objectives. I encountered many situations that would not have been possible to foresee in terms of accessing the field and building rapport but also in terms of research questions and problems. I had not formulated any hypothesis to be proved or refuted. This allowed me to have more freedom and a subsequent 'systematic discovery of the theory from the data of social research' (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 3). Therefore, fieldwork experiences suggested the conceptual categories to 'fit' empirical situations.

After being in the field and having gathered a great amount of information without a clear idea of how I would give sense to it, I read my field notes and

reflections several times, and listened and relistened to the interviews I had recorded. I approached my data with as much of an open mind as I could, being aware that there is no such thing as being 'intellectually empty-handed' (Geertz 1973). I went through an exploratory, self-questioning process. I reordered my data thoroughly and these gradually took more shape as I wrote drafts and formulated categories in a more analytical way. For instance I analysed not only how the migration experience can differ based on demographic origin and social class, but also I acknowledged how the emotional side of migration influences the everyday lived experiences of migrants in aspects such as integration to US mainstream and the meanings attached to 'illegality'. As Geertz (1973: v) stated 'first you write and then you figure out what you are writing about.' I believe that by these means I eventually achieved what Hammersley (1987) asserted was one of the main attributes of qualitative research, which is to produce theory grounded from the data and knowledge that can be transferable to other settings.

4.5 Ethical considerations

This was open research with no covert elements. I protected the identity and wellbeing of my respondents. I informed all my participants of the aims of my research and allowed and encouraged them to raise any question they wished. I emphasised that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any moment if they so wished. I ensured them of the confidentiality of their identity and of their anonymity. I have protected their identities by giving them pseudonyms. In the interviews where I used a voice recorder, I always asked for the consent to record our conversations and I did not switch on the recorder until my respondents had granted consent.

However, despite these considerations I encountered situations which were to some extent problematic. For instance, my participants did not always easily understand research in itself and my role of qualitative researcher. It was difficult for my respondents to understand how I could not have a 'real job' and

how, at my age, I could be a full-time student. Some wondered about the use and practicality in the 'real world' for this study. In this respect, I explained that a better understanding of the social realities that undocumented people experience on their everyday lives, allows policy makers to be more sympathetic, to act and legislate based on a more accurate and actual picture. Similarly, the general public could be more considerate and sensitive about migration.

I was previously acquainted with two of the participants of this study, one residing in Dallas, the other in the State of Mexico. This acquaintance did not, however, jeopardise the validity of fieldwork. I had not seen these two women for several years and we had lost contact. I still had to work in building the necessary rapport to achieve my research goals. From the inception of this study, I made clear my research purposes and my role of a researcher. Hence, I could ask questions without feeling intrusive or fearing I would put a friendship at risk. Thus, I could ask their stories, particularly those related to my research interests, without my or their 'feeling stupid' (Harkess and Warren 1993) or uncomfortable by repeating already known facts, as I did not know the answers they would give to my questions. Our previous acquaintance eliminated the strangeness between interviewer/ interviewee and the fact that they introduced me to other respondents was also a positive factor in building rapport with the rest of the participants.

I also faced some ethical dilemmas in the sense that my respondents sometimes expected me to disclose information and personal details that other participants had shared with me. This was particularly the case with the Sunville-Ocuilan sample, where local and transnational social networks were well established; but this happened also in the other cases such as in parent-children relationships among the Matehuala sample. My respondents asked me on a few occasions about what other participants had told me. I had to make very clear that I could not divulge whatever was confided to me about their personal lives. I could not betray their confidence. However, this is more easily said than done. I was aware that this could backfire and contaminate the researcher/

researched relationship. Yet there were methodological benefits to this ethically based discretion: the participants realised that I would not betray their own confidentiality in any way. Their trust and confidence was nevertheless not always straightforward. Some respondents initially talked only about positive aspects of their personal relations, both local and transnational. Yet gradually they opened to share more valuable and reliable information about their lives.

I did not offer any financial compensation to my respondents. Still, a form of reciprocity emerged between us. In Sunville especially, I was frequently asked to make telephone calls or face-to-face interactions and in shops to ask for, hire, or complain about services in English. I was also frequently asked for my opinion in a variety of matters, ranging from the trivial to more personal and significant. In Mexico this reciprocity developed in a different way. In Ocuilan, I was the person who brought news from their relatives and had some pictures to show. In Matehuala, when I interviewed the organisers of the '*Peregrinación al Señor de Matehuala*'³⁰, I bought from them a couple of T-shirts that were on sale to raise funds for this event.

Also in Matehuala, I experienced a particular form of reciprocity with Salome. She is the mother of a migrant who is imprisoned in Houston, Texas. She spoke to me about her daughter's case. With her account, I noticed that during her daughter's trial there were many irregularities in the observance of and adherence to International Law. Salome was also aware of a few of these irregularities. After her daughter's sentence was pronounced, she tried unsuccessfully to get some help from the Mexican Human Rights Commission.

I offered to contact the Mexican Consul in Houston to draw attention to her case in order to explore possible redress for her daughter. I contacted some friends of mine who are knowledgeable in International Law to get their

³⁰ This is an annual Catholic pilgrimage organised by Matehualans residing in Texas, by return migrants and by relatives of emigrants to the USA, in order to pray for the well-being of Matehualans in the USA and to give thanks for the favours and blessings received by God.

advice. I then wrote a letter to the Consul in which I detailed Salome's daughter's case. Nevertheless, after Salome read the letter she preferred to omit most of the irregularities that I had detailed. She feared her daughter would be in further trouble if her case were revisited. We reworked the letter and Salome only asked the Consulate for help in getting a special visa to visit her daughter in Houston. This petition was eventually denied.

I acknowledge that by being involved and participating in the daily lives of my respondents, I might have influenced my respondents' answers and behaviours. However, findings are created by the interactions between the participants, the researcher and the data (Guba and Lincoln 1995 in Horsburgh 2003). The prioritisation of some material, and consequent omissions, are based upon my research interests. Nevertheless, I believe this study reflects a truthful representation of the everyday lives of my respondents and that my findings and analysis remain accurate interpretations of the experiences in the field.

4.6 Limitations

As it commonly happens in research projects and especially those involving fieldwork, not all the events and interactions went according to what I had originally planned. I encountered different personal and practical situations that to varying extents limited this work. These however, were not significant and I dealt with them in various ways that meant I could carry on with my project as smoothly as possible.

At the initial stage of field research, I aimed to audio-record the interviews. However, I noted that audio-recording affected the spontaneity and richness of my respondents' answers. They often turned their attention and gaze to the voice recorder and acted shyly. At a later stage, I tried to conduct my interviews without a voice recorder, making fieldnotes straight after the interview had finished. This method proved to give better results, as my respondents were keener to talk about private aspects of their lives and gave

lengthier and more thorough, as well as more emotional, accounts. Additionally my respondents and I had many informal interactions. We cooked and ate our meals together, did the grocery shopping, went to religious services along with many other everyday activities. I was frequently invited to celebrations such as birthdays, christenings or barbecues. In these settings, an audio-recorder would have only hindered the spontaneity and naturalness of our interactions. I was seen as a friend, and was asked for my opinion in a variety of matters. As Everhart (1977) and Bourne-Day and Lee-Treweek (2008) have noted, respondents expect the researcher to have opinions; they want the researcher to be 'opened up', they want to know how s/he thinks and they will tolerate the researcher's opinion even if they disagree.

An additional limitation was that some of my respondents had false expectations about me. Some expected that I could help them in regularising their statuses. This happened particularly with the Sunville-Ocuilan cohort. They saw in me a person with higher education, knowledgeable about Mexico-US migration, hence they assumed that I would know ways to regularise their 'papers'. However, I made clear that I was in no position to help them regularising their undocumented status. I do not have any sort of legal credentials to help them in their cases, nor am I member of any organisation that protects migrants' rights.

In Dallas, I faced the limitation of transport. I was residing in a suburb in the Dallas metroplex. Public transport in suburban areas is practically nonexistent and I did not have a car of my own. I had to depend on my respondents to take me to the place where the interview was agreed and back to the house where I lived. In the other sites where I conducted fieldwork, I did not have this problem. My respondents most of the time lived walking distance from each other. In Mexico, this was also the case, and also in the Mexican locations I did have a car which I could drive if I needed to travel longer distances.

4.7 The role of the ethnographer

It is important to discuss how my role was perceived, given that, as noted by Coffey (1999: 6), the 'ethnographer's self affects every aspect of the research process, from conception to final interpretation'. I faced several limitations to building rapport, gaining trust and overcoming outsider's boundaries. For instance, some people were perplexed by the fact that I did not have an occupation they considered as 'paid work', nor was I looking for it, and that I was instead interested in knowing about their lives. However, as I explain below, I negotiated my transition from outsider to insider and overcame social class and education boundaries in various ways.

The outsider-insider boundaries I faced were sometimes blurred and susceptible to situational shifts. I felt my presence could be described by what Sherif (2001) has termed 'partial insider' or by Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) as being in the 'space between'. Researching people with whom I share national and ethnic origin, language, history, and general cultural practices, helped me to build a positive and rich rapport, and to obtain an insider status. By having the same national origin, my respondents trusted me with their experiences born from their irregular status, without fearing I would betray them. Fozdar et al (2009) discussed advantages and disadvantages of 'racial matching', 'researching the other', and insider/outsider statuses. Among the advantages of 'racial matching' was that trust, communication and understanding between researcher and researched do not need to overcome boundaries inherent to racial identification. Likewise, they argued that members of a shared ethnic group were more likely to produce 'valid' information than non-members. However, they also discussed that outsiders are able to notice insights that outsiders have taken for granted.

I found myself facing situations of both outsider and insider. I cannot claim I was an insider, but I was not an outsider either. The shared elements discussed above were without doubt points of commonality, but I think my respondents saw me beyond what Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009: 58) described as: 'you

are one of us, because I was not one of them' (them being those on the outside who do not understand us; in this case this could apply for white Americans or other US ethnic groups).

As will be later detailed in this chapter, I was often invited to social events and celebrations. Likewise I participated in household duties (cleaning, cooking) and shared the rent. Moreover, the fact that I lived away from my own family created empathy between my respondents and myself, because they also lived away from their families. Yet, I was different in many ways. My respondents knew the amount of time I had planned to stay in each location. They were aware that my stay was temporary. I was not a person who had migrated looking for a job. Moreover, my educational attainment, freedom to travel and my social class acted as elements of social distinction. Furthermore, in the town of Ocuilan, ancestry and kinship ties were highly valued. As I was not related by kin to any of my respondents, *Ocuilenses* in particular, found it awkward that I was interested in knowing about their lives.

There are advantages of not being a complete insider in a community. By being a not complete insider, my informants were open to talk to me knowing that what they confided to me would not be divulged. I believe it would have been very difficult and unlikely that respondents would have trusted me and shared intimate experiences in which other members of their families and communities played a central role if I had been part of their community.

In addition, as I have lived all of my life in urban locales, I could easily notice in the Sunville-Ocuilan cohort elements of community life such as solidarity, cooperation and close-knit networks³¹ which are quite distinct from urban cultures. In the urban sites where I conducted fieldwork, the observations of

³¹ The relations of kin between some of the participants also facilitated the close-knit networks characteristic to this circuit, however, not all participants belonged to the three extended families which participated in this study. For more detailed information on kinship ties of this sample see Appendices 1B, 1C and 2, and Chapter 5.5.1.

these elements were not straightforward, partly because of the intrinsic characteristics of cities; but also possibly because cities are not strange to me.

My position of young, unmarried woman, made some respondents assume protective roles towards me, especially those whose children were away from them. There was not a unique gender approach as to how men and women saw me. Most of the women who had left their children behind were caring for me as they had also experienced family separation. They also asked about how my own mother felt, as she lived in Mexico and I in Britain. Likewise, some men were caring, but were more cautious when showing their sympathy because it could be misinterpreted as romantic interest.

In general, I claim that my status shifted according to situations and events, and the binary classification outsider-insider is too restrictive for my fieldwork experiences and relations. My experiences cannot be oversimplified by being 'in' or 'out'. Most importantly, the rapport and trust established with my participants permitted me to elicit and to understand their experiences with a considerable degree of personal insight.

4.8 Immersion in the field

4.8.1 Sunville

I gained access to this community through the daughter of one of my main informants, who in this study is identified as Esperanza. I had met her daughter, Patricia, when she moved from Ocuilan to Mexico City in order to study at university³². She studied for only one semester at the same university where I studied my undergraduate degree³³. Unfortunately, financial struggles

³² Patricia had previously lived in the city of Toluca for high school study. Ocuilan has facilities for basic education only.

³³ I studied the first year of my BA in Mexico City, later on, I moved to the city of Victoria, state of Tamaulipas, where I completed my degree.

obliged her to suspend her studies. A semester later, she continued with her studies at the State of Mexico public university. This had the advantage for her of being closer to her hometown and of affordable state fees. During this time, Patricia's mother, Esperanza, emigrated from Mexico to the USA.

Years later, when this study was at the planning stage, I contacted Patricia, explained the purpose of my research and asked if I could make contact with her mother and her community. Patricia initially felt embarrassed that I would have a close look of how her mother lived and all the difficulties she faced. I explained that far from being an experience that should make her embarrassed, she could be a fundamental bridge for my understanding of the migrant experience and for bringing me the opportunity to study and write about migrants' lives. Patricia communicated my plans to her mother. Approximately two weeks later, Patricia contacted me to let me know that her mother was keen to take part in this study. She also gave me her mother's telephone number so that I could contact her directly.

I had never met Esperanza before entering the field. I first contacted her through telephone calls that started two months before commencing fieldwork. Through these telephone conversations, I was able to explain to Esperanza in greater detail the aims and scope of my research. Likewise, I enquired about a suitable date to start fieldwork. During our telephone conversations, Esperanza said she felt very excited about my visit. She said that I would bring a change to her life, which she found monotonous. She talked about looking forward to my stay, the places we would go and our activities together while I would be in California.

Building rapport was facilitated by the preparation that Esperanza, my gatekeeper and main contact, did voluntarily and unasked with potential respondents. Esperanza maintained positive relations with the rest of the community. Before my arrival she had informed the rest of the house tenants, and some of her friends and neighbours about my forthcoming arrival. She said

that a friend of her daughter would be living with them for the following months with the purpose of doing ‘school work’.

However, despite the good intentions, Esperanza’s communications were to a certain extent imprecise. They resulted in an unanticipated ‘false start’ which was later repaired without further complications. She had been saying that I would write a book about the lives of Mexicans living illegally in the United States. After I learned this, I tried to make clear that what I was going to write was not a book but a thesis. Regardless of the arguable similarity of both products, I wanted to give accurate and honest information to my respondents. Esperanza argued that the people of the *barrio* (neighbourhood) would not know what a thesis is, and that it was easier for everybody to understand that I would write a book. This could have been true, but I needed to make clear that the finished product, a thesis, would be something rarely accessed by people outside academia. Also, some informants might have thought that as participants to the stories told in a book (being a commercial product), they could look forward to a share of the royalties resulting from its eventual sale.

I shared a two-bedroom, one-bathroom house with seven other people: Esperanza, Melchor, Benjamin³⁴ (Melchor’s son), Gladis (Benjamin’s partner), their son and her daughter, and Abraham³⁵. I shared the amount for rent and bills in equal amounts with the other house tenants. Also, I participated in domestic chores of cleaning and tidying up. These chores were mostly a female responsibility. Grocery shopping and food preparation was also shared between Melchor, Esperanza and me. The rest of the tenants either did not eat in the house or prepared their food themselves.

After some weeks of living in the neighbourhood, I was often invited over for dinner by several families, and we not only shared food, but day-to-day interactions. These ranged from trivial experiences such as watching and

³⁴ Benjamin is used interchangeably with Benja

³⁵ For a detailed account of the characteristics of the Sunville neighbourhood and the other sites where this work was conducted, see Chapter 5.

commenting on soap operas or football games, to showbiz and entertainment programmes mainly *Sábado Gigante*, *Cristina*, shows like *Aquí y Ahora* or the Univision news.

I was also invited to celebrations such as children's and adults' birthdays, christenings, the anniversary of the Mexican Independence celebration, barbecues and *taquizas* (taco meals). An honoured experience illustrating how I had achieved social access in the community was when I was invited to participate in the Mexican and Central American Independence celebrations. For this occasion, Margarita, the neighbourhood manager, organised a party in her house. She asked the guests to contribute with prepared food, drinks or cash. When she invited me, she instead asked me a 'special favour'. She asked me to give a speech about the significance of celebrating the Mexican independence.

4.8.2 Dallas

I gained access to this sample through Lisa with whom I was previously acquainted from the time she lived in the city of Victoria, Mexico. We had lost contact for several years, but as we have common acquaintances I knew she was still living in Dallas, Texas. When this study was at the planning stage, I contacted her to ask if she would be interested in participating in my project. I explained the purpose and general aims and what her role would be. Without hesitation, she agreed to participate and invited me to stay in her house.

I arrived in Dallas straight after I had been in California, so I noticed contrasts between the two sites both immediately and dramatically. In this location, I was residing in a suburban, middle-class, non-'ethnic' suburb. I was living amongst one nuclear family. I did not have to share the room with anybody else. Despite my offering, I did not pay for rent or bills (the house where I stayed was owned and not rented). By residing in a suburb, I did not have the spontaneous contact with potential new respondents that I did in Sunville. As

there was no public transport serving this area, I had less freedom to move about.

For some days, I asked myself why I was there. Because of the lack of contacts, I was afraid of having too little data for this part of my project to have fruitful results. At times I felt anxious and uncertain about my role as researcher. Lee-Treweek (2000: 117) has noted that the researcher's own feelings towards his/her own self, researched subjects and the research environment are 'pivotal to the successful completion of one's work.'

Yet within days of arriving in Dallas, I started feeling more at ease because Lisa referred me to friends of hers that met the criteria I had established. Also, I started to help her out in her work cleaning houses and cleaning her own house. I felt I was less of a burden to her, especially because she had refused to charge me any money in terms of rent, bills or other expenses. Still, I sometimes felt uneasy about being heavily dependent on her to introduce me to new participants.

All of the respondents in this cohort had studied at least to high school level; therefore I was able to explain in greater detail the purpose of my research. I assumed, given their educational attainment, that they would be more enthusiastic to take part in my 'school work' than the Sunville sample. Surprisingly, they were not. Some expected completely structured interviews or questionnaires with multiple choice answers. Others underestimated the gains from participant observation. As a matter of fact, one participant asked me after I had interviewed him, if I was going to psychoanalyse him and make personality tests.

Amongst this sample, reciprocity between interviewee/interviewer was not evident. They did not 'need' me to communicate in English, nor did they see in me a person who could give an 'educated' opinion about current matters. However, on several occasions I helped Lisa to do the cleaning in the houses where she worked as a domestic. After this, if I had scheduled an interview,

she would drive me to the place where this would take place. Also by way of reciprocity, I gave some orientation to Abel, one of my respondents, as to how his son could apply for scholarships for postgraduate education abroad. I spent a number of weekends going to several places with Magdis, a live-in nanny who enjoyed my company and did not like to stay on weekends in the house where she lived.

It took me some time to understand the different social dynamics between the migrants residing in Sunville and those in Dallas. However, the overall experience produced interesting and unexpected findings that will be discussed in Chapters 6 to 9. The marked contrasts gave me a wider research scope, which allowed me to have a more analytical perspective and to refine my research interests: for example, in respect of different strategies of integration depending on social and educational background and also local cultures in the place of reception, or for understanding how migrants themselves interpret undocumented migration.

4.9 Fieldwork in Mexico

Solipsism or insider epistemology is related to the idea in which for describing a culture the researcher has to be like one in the community under study in order to know them. Solipsism assumes that only members of a certain group can understand that particular group. However, ethnography's mission very much resides in the representation of *others*. Its analysis relies on a certain critical distance, as well as the 'insider' understanding gleaned from immersion in the field. My shared ethnic and national origin, language, customs, traditions and practices situate me as somewhat 'like' my respondents, meaning that 'insider' understanding came more easily: my access to Mexican immigrants' lives was undoubtedly easier because of the fact that I am also Mexican. Yet I was also very much an 'outsider', from somewhere else, to whom things should be explained and not taken for granted. This status as a newcomer, from

a different background and milieu, also meant that I could ‘see’ anew, without taken-for-granted assumptions.

4.9.1 Ocuilan

My fieldwork in the town of Ocuilan, with the relatives of the Sunville cohort, was conducted over three weeks. My interest was to inquire about the impacts of their family members’ migration on the daily lives of these non-migrant kin. I was introduced to the community by Esperanza’s daughter, Patricia, who stayed with me for two days while she introduced me to most of my respondents. I stayed at Esperanza’s house, though none of her children lived in town. Her son lived and worked at a neighbouring town, and spent his weekends in Ocuilan, while Patricia lived in the state capital and went to the town only sporadically.

My research in the town went relatively smoothly, mainly because of the previous communication that some of the migrants in Sunville had had with their relatives, notifying them of my coming visit. Whilst doing fieldwork in Sunville I had explained to my respondents that a further element of my study would be conducting interviews with their non-migrating kin. Also Patricia’s status of insider helped me gain access rapidly to the community. After Patricia had left it was possible to do snowball sampling as my initial respondents introduced me to other inhabitants of Ocuilan.

At some households I was warmly welcomed. I had brought with me pictures of their relatives and of the place where they lived. Photo and video sharing as well as live means of communication were uncommon forms of contact amongst the Sunville-Ocuilan cohort (see Chapter 7). Some had not seen their relatives for long periods of time and were surprised at the physical changes they had gone through.

Some of my Sunville respondents, however, did not inform their kin about my visit. This was not a problem. Most of the people were open to talk about their

experiences after overcoming some barriers; for instance, my lack of ancestral relations with the inhabitants of the town. Ancestral ties were heavily valued, as explained earlier, and some of my interviewees tried to find some linkage between myself and the town, and were disappointed to learn I had none.

There was one instance in which two adults deemed they had nothing interesting to say. This was the case of Melchor and Justino's parents, Doña Elena and Don Clementino, who had a small grocery shop in town where I sometimes bought food and drinks. I approached Doña Elena saying that I had been in Sunville and had been living in the same place where her children lived. Surprisingly, she acted indifferently. Later, I asked her for an interview, which she refused, arguing that she had nothing interesting to talk about. Soon after I explained my interests, Doña Elena explained, with mixed emotions of anger, sadness and loneliness, that she had no contact with her sons and that after they had left for the USA, she very rarely knew how they were doing.

4.9.2 Matehuala and Victoria

After doing fieldwork in a small community where social encounters were frequent and social relations between the inhabitants were well established, I started research in two urban locations (see map and demographics of fieldwork sites in Chapter 5). Changing field site from a small community to cities presented some challenges for conducting fieldwork. Relations in urban areas were generally less personal, less intimate and the developing of social networks was hindered by the busy lifestyles of urban subjects.

In Victoria, I interviewed the mother and sister of Lisa, one of my main respondents in Dallas. Accommodation could have been arranged at either respondent's household, but I preferred to visit my respondents at their respective homes on several occasions for interviews, aiming not to make the respondents uncomfortable or feel that I was being intrusive, especially because as explained earlier, I sometimes felt I was a burden to Lisa (Dallas).

Undocumented migration remained a sensitive topic amongst middle-class Mexicans. During the interviews, I confirmed that admitting the ‘illegality’ of my respondents’ kin’s life experience was particularly conflictual. The mother of my main respondent in Dallas saw ‘illegal immigrants’ as completely different from her daughter. She questioned why I was interested in knowing about her daughter’s life if she is not like ‘the illegals’, and that she instead ‘lives like the Americans’ with the only difference that she had not been able to fix her papers.

The direct kin of the Dallas cohort respondents were geographically dispersed in various areas of Mexico. The respondents of this cohort had not created a process of chain migration within their families or communities. It was not possible in all cases to secure agreement from the migrating counterparts to interview their relatives in Mexico. Given that I could not interview the direct kin of most of the Dallas participants, I had to find a way to fill in this gap. Considering my interest in interviewing subjects of middle-class, urban origin and who had attained higher education; I conducted fieldwork in the city of Matehuala, in the state of San Luis Potosi. Here I had access to a gatekeeper who could introduce me to subjects meeting the criteria I had established.

I recruited participants through various modes. The main one was through a group of retired schoolteachers who got together in a public sports centre during weekday mornings.



Photograph 1. (Left to right) Carmen, a friend (not a participant) and Lupita after a volleyball match.

My gatekeeper introduced me to several of these retired schoolteachers whose children had migrated to different parts of Texas. Furthermore, I also recruited participants through the yearly pilgrimage made in honour of the *Señor de Matehuala*. Here, I met the organisers as well as the kin of other undocumented migrants living in Texas. Finally, I also included participants who were return migrants themselves as well as two women, who worked as domestics and had not reached higher education, but who had relatives residing in the USA.



Photograph 2. Sign inviting people for the Pilgrimage to the Lord of Matehuala



Photograph 3. Pilgrimage of US residents natives to Matehuala.
Photograph taken outside the Matehuala Cathedral.

4.10 Leaving the field

Since the planning stage of this project, I was aware that the time I would spend in the field would be limited. Due to time and budget constraints the period destined for fieldwork was planned, from its inception, to last from six to eight months. The experiences and the data gathered defined to a large extent the total duration of field research. My respondents were also aware of the limited time I had planned for fieldwork. My respondents would have possibly behaved and perceived me differently if I had had an indefinite stay. For instance, our interactions could have been less intense, or they could have found my presence tiresome.

For the last stages of field research, I believed I had reached what Glaser and Strauss (1967: 61) termed 'theoretical saturation'. The initial stage of my fieldwork was marked by huge discoveries; every experience was new. Later, the rate of discoveries gradually decreased, field notes became more repetitive. New data started to take the shape of a pyramid, getting narrower as time moved on.

However, unforeseen events in the US political agenda took place after I left the field. I refer specifically to the drafting and (provisional) approval of the anti-immigrant legislation SB1070 in Arizona and similar initiatives in several other states of the USA. There was no way that I could have predicted this while planning this project. Yet I am aware that the tense months preceding and the expectation of the consequences of this piece of legislation could have influenced the views, attitudes and answers of my respondents in a variety of ways.

Being in the field was an emotional experience. Having lived away from my country since 2005, I found it enjoyable and emotionally gratifying to be surrounded by compatriots. I was happy to live with people who understood Mexican culture and values, even if the significance attached to them varied between cohorts and varied also between my perspectives and theirs, to different degrees. This emotional engagement was undoubtedly a key part of the rapport that I was able to build and the confidence with which my respondents related to me. I have reflected carefully about whether it has unduly coloured my analysis of the daily lives of undocumented Mexican emigrants and their non-emigrant families, and I do not believe that it has. Leaving the field was also highly emotional. My respondents and I had formed positive relations. Having spent significant times, attending social events, sharing meals and daily interactions with the participants of this study, it was inevitable that relations of friendship developed. By leaving the field, I was confronted with mixed emotions as doubtless also were my participants.

I bonded with some respondents more than with others. During the months that followed my fieldwork I tried to keep in contact especially with those that I had been closer to. I did this not simply to follow-up on data that could be of use to my research, (though I certainly did this). I tried to keep in touch with them mainly because I felt a sense of gratitude. However, most of the relationships faded with the passage of time. Some months after I came back to the UK, transatlantic time differences, work commitments, and the impossibility of

maintaining internet contact with most of my respondents complicated my follow-up.

I occasionally kept in touch through Skype with some of the respondents in Dallas. The cohorts in Sunville and Ocuilan for the most part, did not make use of internet, had limited literacy levels, did not have fixed work shifts and typically lacked of spare time to maintain friendships and affective relationships, let alone long-distance ones. Some researchers like Smith (2006) and Hernández-León (2008) have been able to form and maintain long-lasting friendships with their respondents: some to keep a door open for future research, others out of friendship. However, for most researchers it is unusual to do so. I did not make any promises that I cannot keep. Yet, I would like to revisit in the future those who took part in this study, with or without research purposes.

As I indicate in the conclusion to this thesis, my empirical study of the everyday lives of undocumented Mexican workers in these US states took place before a plethora of highly contested and controversial state legislation aimed precisely at undocumented workers, beginning in Arizona in mid-2010 and extending across several states so far. It also took place before a shift in immigration policy in June 2012 which allows young undocumented migrants to stay temporarily in the USA without fear of deportation, likely reviving hopes for the enactment of a comprehensive immigration reform. It would be a rewarding future endeavour to revisit the field to observe the effects of these changes on the lives of my respondents and those who share their situation.

Chapter 5: The places and the people: demographics of fieldwork sites

‘The identity of a particular place is directly related to the people who inhabit it and as people bring particular places into existence, so, too, do places shape the people who inhabit them’ (Lattanzi Shutika 2008: 297).

The demographic context in which migration originates and where migrants settle in the country of reception is crucial for the understanding of the migration experience. Mexican migration to the US had been predominantly rural in origin, and only recently more attention has been paid to migration stemming from urban areas (Arias and Woo Morales 2004, Flores et al 2004, Fussell 2004, Fussell and Massey 2004, Hernández-León-2008). In addition, Mexican migrants had to a large extent performed agricultural labour in the USA. For the last decades, however, these trends have changed, and have come to include urban communities of origin and settlement, with the jobs that migrants perform becoming very diverse.

Migration originating in small communities is significantly different from that of urban areas, especially in its history and in terms of the construction, use and perpetuation of social networks at local and transnational levels. As has been noted, migrants and non-migrants from a small community and from urban origins participated in this research. Their experiences are studied throughout the following chapters of the thesis. However, before turning to that discussion, it is important to become familiar with the demographics of the sites where this study was conducted.

This chapter will be divided into two parts. The first will discuss the demographic data at a macro level, looking at the difficulties in studying undocumented populations, and will examine the historico-political events in both Mexico and the USA that have shaped recent patterns of migration flows and settlement, for example the Bracero Programme, the Immigration Reform

and Control Act (IRCA), as well as events of the 1990s such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the anti-immigrant legislation and the Mexican economic crisis of 1994. The latter will serve as background information and lay the groundwork for this chapter's second part. In the second part, I will look at specific information about the fieldwork sites (regions, cities or town) including economic activities, literacy rates, indices of marginalisation and the rootedness of migration within the area studied. This chapter aims to put into context the everyday experiences of both migrants and non-migrants that I will analyse throughout this work.

Part 1

5.1 The problematic study of undocumented populations

The International Organization for Migration reported that the number of international migrants had doubled between 1965 and 2000, from 75 million to 150 million in 2000 (Castles and Miller 2003). The increase has continued, and the estimated number of international migrants for 2010, was 214 million of whom some 10-15% were in an irregular situation (UN-DESA 2009: 1, IOM 2010: 29). Of course it is impossible to tell precisely how many international migrants there are, let alone the exact number of undocumented migrant populations, which is by its own nature complicated³⁶.

To estimate the number of undocumented Mexican migrants in the USA, some sources have relied on the number of arrests on the Mexico-US border, and there are fundamental problems with this approach. The number of apprehensions might include people who repeatedly attempt to cross the border, and every time they 'get caught' is counted as an arrest or apprehension, even if is the same individual. Also, it has been assumed that for every person caught, two or three gain entry without inspection to the USA, but

³⁶ Passel (2006) explains how the numbers of "unauthorized migrants" are estimated, taking into consideration migrants' mobility patterns within the United States, death rates, return rates and number of legalisations.

this is not necessarily the case (Bean et al 1990). Hofer (in Bean et al 1990) pointed out that when the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS³⁷) interrogated apprehended individuals, they gave unreliable, inaccurate and invented information, and thus much of the data obtained were useless.

Most surveys conducted in the USA as well as the US Census do not expressly ask people about their migration status (legal/undocumented). The US Census treats migration status as confidential; hence does not ask about this specifically. In surveys enquiring about migration status, the readers must be aware that respondents might not always give truthful information.

In addition, the data presented in some US sources sometimes group Mexican-origin (from Mexican descent) and Mexican-born people under the same category or do not differentiate between documented and undocumented. Also, among the undocumented, there are several categories: entry without inspection (EWI) and visa overstayers³⁸.

In addition, other studies group Mexicans under more general ethnic categories of 'Hispanic/Latino'. The US Census Bureau provides some information of the Hispanic/Latino-origin population as one single category. Grouped into this are Mexican, Central and South American, Puerto Rican and Caribbean populations. However, there are sharp differences between the national origins of these groups, including those who are US-born and born elsewhere, undocumented or legal residents, and US citizen or non-citizen³⁹.

³⁷ The INS ceased to exist in March 2003. The investigative and interior enforcement elements of the US Customs Service and the Immigration and Naturalization Service were merged to create the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is the principal investigative arm of the DHS responsible for border control, customs, trade, and immigration (ICE- DHS website).

³⁸ Mexican undocumented people are overwhelmingly EWIs, but most non-Mexican undocumented are visa overstayers (Warren and Passel 1987, Bean et al 1990). However, the latter category has been typically understudied and the data about visa overstayers are limited (Bean et al 1990).

³⁹ See footnote 13 in Chapter 3 on pan-Hispanic labelling.

In Mexico, likewise, there have been several sources of reference to determine the numbers of emigrants going to the United States. There is a vast literature studying Mexico-US undocumented migration. However, there is also a 'problem of sources' (Durand and Massey 2003) as demographers, geographers and other scholars estimating the number of migrants employ different methodologies, explore several geographic areas, and make use of different categories (for example 'region of origin' or 'region of birth') to investigate similar phenomena. Hence, the data and categories can vary from one source to another and change depending on the time, place and subjects of investigation.

In the 1980s the Mexican National Population Council conducted several surveys: the *Encuesta en la Frontera Norte a Trabajadores Indocumentados* – ETIDEU (Northern Border Survey of Undocumented Workers), the *Encuesta Nacional de Migración a la Frontera Norte y a los Estados Unidos* – ENEFNEU (National Survey on Migration to the Northern Border and the United States) and the *Encuesta Nacional de Migración en Areas Urbanas* – ENMAU (National Survey on Migration in Urban Areas) (Cantú Gutiérrez 1990). In 1992, the INEGI (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía* – National Institute for Statistics and Geography) created the *Encuesta Nacional de la Dinámica Demográfica* ENADID (National Survey on Demography Dynamics) which investigated fertility, mortality and migration throughout Mexico.

At the present time and since 1993 the Northern Border College (COLEF), the National Population Council (CONAPO), the Ministry of Work and Social Provision (STPS), the Ministry of the Interior (SEGOB), the National Institute for Migration (INM) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SRE) (all Mexican institutions) have joined efforts to conduct the *Encuesta de Migración Internacional en la Frontera Norte* – EMIF (Survey of International Migration in the Northern Border). In recent years, this survey has been the main source of reference, emanating from Mexican governmental institutions, that investigates migration flows to and from the Mexico-USA border. It takes into account four different flows to categorise migrants: flows originating in the

northern border (of Mexico), those originating in the USA, flows originating in the southern states of Mexico and those deported from the USA (Lopez Villar 2005).

To summarise, it can be said that the diversity of sources and the limitations described above make the study of undocumented populations daunting. Nevertheless, throughout this work, I have used data from national official sources of both Mexico and the United States. For the USA, I employed data from the US Census Bureau and for Mexico of the National Population Council (CONAPO) and the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics (INEGI). Likewise, I have used information from the Pew Hispanic Center and of several scholars like Douglas Massey, Jorge Durand and Jeffrey Passel who have made clear distinctions relevant to the study of specific national origins and their migration status. However, there will be situations in which specific background statistics needed to contextualise my data fully are not available or lack the specificity I aim for.

Having explained the limitations in studying undocumented populations, I will discuss the historical, political and economic events that have shaped Mexico-US migration.

5.2 General background of Mexico-US migration

Mexican migration to the United States has a long history, dating back to the 19th century and the ‘making’ of what today is the US-Mexico border⁴⁰. Undocumented migration was not an observable phenomenon until 1924 when the US government created the Border Patrol. Despite its creation, during the 20th and 21st centuries, the flow of Mexicans going to the US has been

⁴⁰ The US-Mexico border can be traced by three key dates, starting with the separation of Texas from Mexico (1836) and its subsequent annexation to American territory; followed by the acquisition of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah and portions of Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas and Oklahoma after the Mexican American War (1846-1848) and finally the purchase of “La Mesilla” (1854) consisting of territories in south-western New Mexico and southern Arizona (Martinez 1996).

uninterrupted and characterised for its unidirectionality, massiveness and the fact that these countries are adjacent to each other (Durand and Massey 2003)⁴¹.

For the last decades, the immigrant flows entering the US have been transformed in diverse ways. As explained in Chapter 2, the 1965 Hart-Celler Act marked a radical change from previous immigration policies. It favoured family reunification and abolished the country-of-origin quotas that had been in place since the 1920s, so that immigrants from all countries could apply for settlement in the USA (Clark et al 2002). It was expected that with this act, there would be new arrivals from Italy, Greece and other European countries, as families divided by previous restrictions were allowed to be united (Hirschman and Massey 2008). However the ethnic and cultural landscape of the USA went through significant change, as unprecedented numbers of Asians, Latin Americans, Caribbean and other national origins joined the USA immigration flows in major numbers replacing the formerly predominant European-origin migration to the United States. Before the 1950s, over 60% of immigrants were Canadian or European; this number dropped to 20% in the 1970s and to 15% in the 1980s (Bean et al 1990: 1, Chiswick 1986: 169, Clark et al 2002).

The political and economic events following World War II and the Cold War largely determined post-1965 migration patterns. Mexican undocumented migration rose after the Bracero programme was suspended (discussed below), Cuban migration after the Cuban revolution, Central American after the political and economic crises of the 1970s and Asian migration as a result of the war and regime changes in Indochina (Hirschman and Massey 2008).

⁴¹ In late April 2012 however, the Pew Hispanic Center reported that there had been a fundamental change in the net Mexican migration flow to the USA as this had stopped and perhaps reversed. For more information in this current patterns see section 5.3 (this chapter), and Chapter 10, section 3.

Focusing on Mexico-US migration, there have been several key events that have defined the current migration flows and areas of destination and settlement. The first one was the Bracero Programme (1942-1964) and the second one the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). Arguably, the 2001 terrorist attacks could be labelled as a key event for immigration (Castles and Miller 2003). These latter had a significant consequence beyond making entry more difficult, as undocumented migrants increased their lengths of stay and decreased the rate of return migration, precisely because of the greater difficulty to cross the border and enter the USA (discussed below in Section 5.3). These key dates will be further discussed in the next sections.

5.2.1 The Bracero Programme

The Bracero Programme was in place from 1942 to 1964. It aimed to cover, in a controlled manner, the shortage of US agricultural workers during World War II (Calavita 1992, Delgado Wise and Knerr 2005). Between 1947 and 1949, approximately 74,600 Mexican workers participated legally in the Bracero Programme, but it is estimated that more than 142,000 were hired directly by American employers without the proper documentation (Calavita 1992: 28-29).

After the end of the war, the programme remained popular amongst agricultural workers and employers. More than 445,000 workers were hired in 1956 and the numbers were never less than 400,000 per year for the rest of the decade (Calavita 1992: 141). The average number of workers entering the USA annually in the period 1951-59 was ten times higher than the number admitted during 1942-1947. In 1959, nearly 50,000 farms employed *braceros* with the vast majority concentrated in Texas, California, Arkansas, Arizona and New Mexico (Calavita 1992: 141). By the end of the programme some 4.5 million Mexicans had worked as *braceros* in the United States (Massey et al 1987: 43).

The Bracero Programme was extended three times in the 1950s causing little controversy. However, in the 1960s the extensions were marked by accusations

of exploitation and discrimination which resulted in the termination of the programme, despite the fact that neither farm owners nor the Mexican government wanted the programme to end (Calavita 1992). During the 22 years the programme lasted, the foundations for modern network migration were established, especially considering that the programme involved up to three generations of migrants. Therefore, it is not surprising that social networks were largely based on kinship, friendship and a common place of origin (Massey 1986). These networks permitted the exchange of information and assistance that is particularly helpful prior to migrating and during the initial stage of the settlement process. Thanks to the experience gained by being a *bracero*, these workers became familiar with US lifestyle and institutions. Mexican workers also established contacts with employers and with Mexican-American organisations and communities in the USA. In addition, the *braceros* organised labour unions, the most important being the United Farm Workers (Jenkins and Perrow 1977), and strengthened the American labour movement.

Even after the Bracero Programme finished, employers resorted to employing unauthorised labour. Basok (2000) documented how it was not uncommon for employers to continue to hire, regularly or not, former *braceros* as workers; and they even facilitated the migration of their kin. Workers were employed not only in agriculture but increasingly within more diversified sectors of the economy in both urban and rural areas (Calavita 1992).

Additionally, after the programme's culmination, massive numbers of Mexicans crossed the border with and without documents and settled in the United States. It is estimated that in the 1970s, the Mexicans legally residing in the US numbered 44,000 and this figure increased to 100,000 in 1981. The number of Mexican immigrants annually apprehended increased from 27,000 to 900,000 over the same period (Massey 1986: 103).

In this scenario, 87% of the US public considered that illegal immigration was either a 'somewhat serious' or 'very serious' issue. US lawmakers and ordinary citizens alike thought that their country had lost control of their borders and

that something needed to be done in regard to immigration (Bean et al 1990: 2). It took the US Congress over five years to discuss immigration reform, and it was not until October 1986 when it passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (Briggs 1986). Its effects will be discussed in the following section.

5.2.2 Immigration Reform and Control Act

In 1986 the US Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), also known as the Simpson-Rodino Act. IRCA sought to reduce undocumented migration through sanctions on employers hiring undocumented workers, an increased budget for monitoring the Mexico-US border, and legalisation of already-established immigrants who had been living in the US at least since 1982. IRCA facilitated immigrants' family reunification and legalised the status of nearly 3 million formerly undocumented Mexican immigrants (Bean et al 1990).

IRCA had both short and long-term consequences. In the years following IRCA some immigrants went back to their home countries after having 'fixed their papers', while some others travelled between the USA and Mexico only sporadically. Border patrol apprehensions dropped nearly 50% in the three years after the passing of the IRCA (Gonzalez Baker 1997).

However, IRCA also brought long-term changes in migration flows and settlement areas. After the regularisation of millions of former undocumented workers, Mexican families settled their permanent residence in the USA. More importantly, women travelling alone or with children began to participate more actively in the emigration flows, shifting the pattern from male to family-unit migration (Donato 1993, Ueda 1994). Moreover, migration resulted in more migration (the immigration multiplier) as other family members also migrated to join their relatives in the USA (Jasso and Rosenzweig 1986, 1989; Bean et al 1990, Imaz Bayona 2008).

The immigration multiplier (Jasso and Rosenzweig 1986; 1989) resulted in a reallocation of the immigrants' traditional destination areas in the US southwestern states and California to new destinations such as the states of Utah, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, Georgia and the Carolinas. Also, the places of origin in Mexico included gradually more urban areas and migrants increasingly included individuals with higher levels of education (Durand and Massey 2003, Zuñiga and Hernández-León 2005).

Even though IRCA was not exclusively drafted for Mexicans, this group was the greatest beneficiary. Mexicans accounted for two thirds of people of all national origins regularising their status (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, González Gutiérrez 1999, Orrenius 2001). IRCA also broke the 'illusion of impermanence' as societies of origin, destination, and the diaspora recognised that many Mexican immigrants would live permanently in the United States (González Gutiérrez 1993).

IRCA also had consequences in terms of cultural maintenance and identity. Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) for instance, analysed how after IRCA, a majority of immigrant families settling in the US did not conform to the rigid patriarchal traditions that were dominant in Mexico. These families, for the most part, instead adopted household arrangements with more equitable divisions of labour. A different example is a study that was conducted with almost 800 children in the San Diego area. This study, carried out nearly a decade after IRCA, asked about children's self-identity: 47.5% Mexico-born children of regularised migrants identified as Hispanics, Chicanos or Latinos and only a minority (36.2%) identified as Mexicans. Among the US-born children of Mexican parents, the numbers notably decreased as barely 8% identified as Mexicans (González Gutiérrez 1999).

5.2.3 Naturalisation and dual nationality

The 1990s saw several political events that shaped Mexico-US bilateral relations, especially concerning immigration. At the beginning of the 1990s

Mexico enjoyed apparent economic and social stability. It had recently become a signatory of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) as well as of the North American Free Trade Agreement with the United States and Canada (NAFTA). But by the end of December 1994, the country faced a serious financial crisis in which the Mexican Peso was devaluated by over 200%, soaring unemployment and a decline of the GDP of over 6% (Medina Núñez 1996: 130). In addition, the minimum wage for eight hours of work per day was an average of \$3 USD, while in the USA the minimum wage per hour averaged \$4 USD (Medina Núñez 1996: 131).

It was believed that NAFTA and the resulting proliferation of the *maquila* (manufacturing) industry along Mexico's northern border would accelerate and perpetuate rates of economic growth for the three signatory countries, would enhance the competitiveness of the region, stimulate development and assure social peace, and hence reduce the number of undocumented workers going to the USA (Coubès 2003, Smith 1997). However, the post-NAFTA Mexican economy has been characterised by light and shade, with low inflation and low budget deficit on the one hand, and on the other high rates of unemployment and a slow expansion of economic activity (Moreno Brid et al 2005)⁴².

With the Mexican economy in distress, undocumented migration rose again. Also with the Cold War over, the US treated migration as a threat, and 'immigrants came to be blamed for everything; from the high cost of welfare to the fiscal crisis of the social service system' (Durand et al 1999: 531). Therefore, in order to 'secure America's borders' and 'stop the illegal aliens' invasion' the US government implemented stricter border enforcement

⁴² For the last years, economic growth in Mexico has stagnated, averaging 3.5% per year or less than 2% on a per capita basis since 2000 (Portes 2006: 2). The Mexican economy has not grown fast enough to create sufficient jobs to provide employment for its increasing labour force (Moreno Brid et al 2005). Unemployment rates have been higher than when the NAFTA ~~the treaty~~ was signed; and half of the labour force is in the informal economy, a figure 10% higher than in the pre-NAFTA years (Portes 2006, Uchitelle 2007). From 2008 to 2010, the number of Mexicans living in poverty increased by 3.2 million, following the global economic crisis. This implies that around 46.2% of Mexico's total population (52 million people) live in poverty (World Bank 2012). During 2011, Mexico's economic growth was moderate and reached 3.9%. For 2012, it is expected to stay at 3.3% (World Bank 2012).

measures and deployed a higher number of border patrol agents (Nevins 2002). Between 1994 and 1997, the number of agents patrolling the border rose from 4,200 to 7,700 and the budget for border enforcement more than doubled (Orrenius 2001: 7).

States also took their own measures; Texas launched the operation ‘Hold the Line’, later California implemented ‘Operation Gatekeeper’, and months later Arizona followed with ‘Operation Safeguard’ (Nevins 2002). The anti-immigrant legislation wave would naturally follow. The State of California was the first to take action with the approval of Proposition 187 which sought to ban undocumented immigrants from receiving public health, education and welfare services⁴³. The anti-immigrant actions soon were taken at a federal level and in 1996 two pieces of legislation were approved: the Illegal Immigration Reform and Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA)⁴⁴ (Durand et al 1999).

The response taken by Mexicans living in the US to protect themselves from an anti-immigrant climate was to become US citizens (Durand et al 1999). Mexicans have long had the lowest naturalisation rates compared to any other national origin. By 1995, only 20% of eligible Mexican permanent residents in the US had naturalised, but in 2005, 35% had. In the period 1995-2005 the number of naturalised Mexicans increased by 144% (Passel 2007: ii).

In this scenario, in 1997 the Mexican Congress approved modifications to the Constitution to allow dual nationality. The Mexican government amended its nationality laws seeking to mobilise Mexican-American citizens to group into

⁴³ In 1995, this proposed law was found unconstitutional by a federal court, claiming that only the federal government can legislate on immigration issues.

⁴⁴ IIRIRA increased the number of border patrol agents, enhanced enforcement and penalties against human smuggling and document fraud, provided new grounds for exclusion and deportation and started an electronic programme of workers’ document verification among other measures to tackle undocumented migration (Fragomen 1997). PRWORA modified welfare legislation, creating significant barriers to access medical attention and limiting the ‘dependence on government benefits’ of needy families (Loprest 1999).

organisations in order to protect their rights. Also it aimed for its citizens to become able to influence and lobby on political and economic issues in the bilateral agenda (Durand et al 1999, IME 2004, Imaz Bayona 2008).

5.3 Extensions in length of stay

According to the United Nations International Migration Report 2009 (p. xix)⁴⁵, the United States is world's greatest receptor of immigrants, accounting for 42.8 million or 20% of all international migrants. This country is also the number one destination for Mexicans, as 98% of Mexican emigrants go to the USA (Durand and Massey 2003: 98-99). The Pew Hispanic Center (2009: 1) estimated in 2008 that 12.7 million Mexicans lived in the United States. Mexicans accounted for 32% of all immigrants; Filipinos were the second largest immigrant group with 5%. Among undocumented immigrants, Mexicans also led the list, making up for 59% of the whole unauthorised population (Pew Hispanic Center 2009: 1).

The Bracero Programme, the passage of IRCA, and economic and political conditions in both countries have facilitated and strengthened the trend towards settlement, consolidated social networks and increased the average length of stay in the USA. Massey et al (1987: 120-121) found that in 1982 over 40% of Mexican migrants stayed in the US for less than one year before they returned to Mexico, following a pattern of circular migration as they would engage in a subsequent trip in the future.

More recent findings suggested that in the period 1995-2005, the average length of stay had tripled (Zuñiga E. et al 2005: 9) and that the pattern had turned from circular migration into a semi-permanent settlement (Reyes 2004, see Graph 1). As of 2011 figures, the Pew Hispanic Center reported that 35% of adult undocumented migrants had lived in the US for 15 years or more, 28%

⁴⁵ The United Nations International Migration Report 2009 considers migrant labour flows, asylum seekers, refugees and estimates of undocumented workers.

for 10 to 14 years, 22% for 5 to 9 years; and 15% for less than five years (Taylor et al 2011).

The increase in the length of stay cannot be dissociated from other structural factors such as economic conditions in both Mexico and the USA and the subsequent employment opportunities available. Likewise, after the 2001 terrorist attacks, the USA implemented stricter security controls and border enforcement mechanisms, militarised the border and increased by almost 400% the number of border patrol officers deployed along its southern border (Durand et al 2005). Crossing the border became more difficult, more risky and more expensive. The foreseeable consequence to this heightened security was that undocumented migrants who ‘made it to the other side’ stayed for greater periods. Suro (2005) conducted a survey in which he found that undocumented Mexican immigrants’ intentions to remain in the United States overwhelmingly pointed towards an indefinite or permanent stay (see Figure 1).

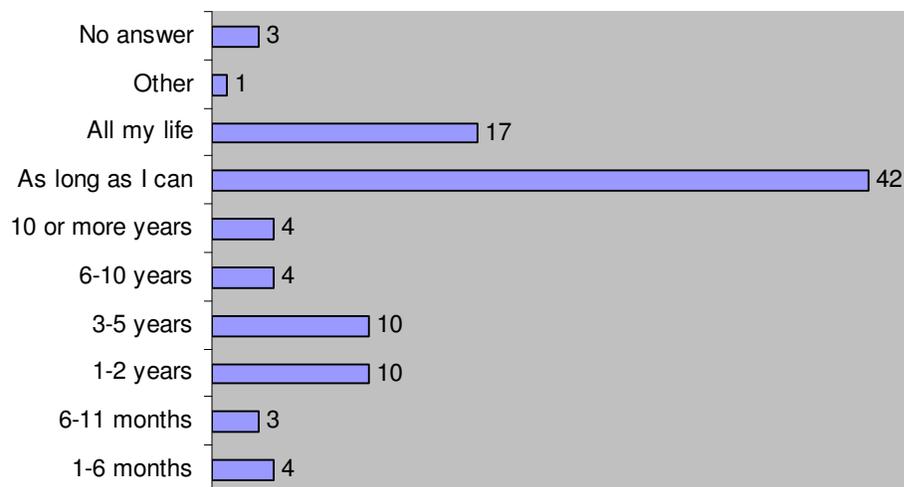


Figure 1. Intention to Remain in the United States (percentages)

Source: Suro (2005). Survey of Mexican Immigrants. Pew Hispanic Center.

In the last half of the most recent decade however, Mexican immigration has gone through significant changes. In 2007, it peaked at 12.6 million, stabilised for the two following years but has been declining slightly since 2010. In 2011, the Mexican-born population in the US decreased to an estimated 12.0 million

(Passel et al 2012: 11). As of 2011, some 6.1 million unauthorised Mexican immigrants were living in the USA, down from a peak of nearly 7 million in 2007. Over the same period, the population of authorised immigrants from Mexico rose modestly, from 5.6 million in 2007 to 5.8 million in 2011 (Passel et al 2012: 7). Most significant, is that after decades of uninterrupted flows, in 2012, the net migration from Mexico to the United States has stopped and may have reversed. This current pattern, according to the Pew Hispanic Center, may result from a weakened US economy, particularly in the construction sector, from heightened border enforcement, a rise in deportations, the growing dangers associated with illegal border crossings as well as broader economic conditions in Mexico and a decline in Mexico's birth rates (Passel et al 2012: 6).

In close relation to this decline, is that Asians⁴⁶ have replaced Hispanics as the fastest growing 'racial' group in the USA⁴⁷. June 2012 figures show that some 430,000 Asians, or 36% of all new immigrants, legal and undocumented, moved to the USA in 2010, compared with 370,000 Hispanics, or 31% of all new arrivals. In absolute numbers, the total population of Asian Americans—foreign born and US born, adults and children—numbered a record 18.2 million in 2011 (5.8%) of the total US population. By comparison, non-Hispanic whites are 197.5 million (63.3%) and Hispanics 52.0 million (16.7%) and non-Hispanic blacks 38.3 million (12.3%) (Pew Research Center 2012).

Part 2

In the first part of this chapter, I discussed some of the most relevant key events that have shaped emigration from Mexico to the United States. In this part, I will explore some general demographic data concerning the two US and

⁴⁶ Paul Taylor, executive vice-president of the Pew Research Center, explained in a radio interview that the Pew Research Center considers the national composition of Asians as formed of 6 main origins: Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Vietnamese, Korean and Japanese; and more than other 14 national origins. The 6 main national origins combined constituted some 83 to 85% of the total Asian population (National Public Radio, June 19, 2012).

the three Mexican sites in which this study was conducted. In the USA were 'Sunville' and the metropolitan area of Dallas; and in Mexico were the cities of Matehuala and Victoria and the town of Ocuilan. For both US and Mexican locations, I will first present demographic data at a regional level and then I will explore local information about the five specific fieldwork sites.

5.4 Hispanics and Mexicans in the United States

As Durand and Massey (2003) have pointed out, some migrants take the decision to go north by flipping a coin, especially considering that for many youngsters to go north is an adventure. However, what cannot be decided in such a way is where to go. The choice of destination for a migrant is based upon a group's or an individual's human and social capital (Portes 1998, Hirschman and Massey 2008). People go to where they have contacts, friends and family, where they can feel safe and where they are surrounded by people who can lend a helping hand. Most migrants follow in the steps of friends and relatives who can give advice in terms of border crossing, housing, employment, or simply offer friendship and company. Hence it is not surprising that there are often traditional areas for settlement of immigrant groups. For instance, Cubans have settled mostly in Miami; Puerto Ricans and Dominicans in New York and Philadelphia; Mexicans in Los Angeles and Chicago, to mention only the most salient (Massey 2008).

Hispanics are the largest ethnic minority in the USA. The 2010 US Census counted 50.5 million people identifying as Hispanics, making up 16.3% of the US total population. In 2000, Hispanics accounted for 35.3 million; which means a population growth of 43% over the decade (Passel et al 2011, US Census 2011). Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, New Mexico, New Jersey, New York and Texas are home to over three quarters (76%) of the entire Hispanic population in the USA. Even though Latino communities have dispersed throughout the American territory, these nine states were home in 1990 to 86% of the Latino population and 81% in 2000 (Passel et al. 2011: 2).

Hispanics have settled in traditional gateways but also in new areas of destination and their arrival and settlement have not always been welcomed (as discussed in Chapter 2 from a general perspective). Hispanic immigrants have transformed over the last decades the ‘racial’, cultural, linguistic, economic and political landscape not only of the traditional immigrant gateways, but of the entire USA. Hispanics, however, have been characterised by their low social mobility and low educational attainment. Hispanics make up nearly three in ten (28.6%) of the USA’s poor (Lopez and Cohn 2011).

Among Hispanics, Mexicans and people of Mexican ancestry outnumber any other Hispanic origin group living in the USA. In 2009, Mexicans numbered 31.7 million, accounting for nearly two-thirds (65.5%) of Hispanics living in the United States (Dockterman 2011). As of 2010, Mexicans again constituted the largest national group with 32.9 million, followed by Puerto Ricans (4.6 million) and Salvadorians (1.8 million) (Motel 2012, Dockterman 2011b).

Mexicans face a challenging socioeconomic scenario and important barriers for upward mobility. Mexicans among all Hispanics, have the lowest levels of school education. Only 9% of Mexicans aged 25 and older, compared with 13% of all US Hispanics, have obtained at least a bachelor’s degree (Dockterman 2011). Mexicans’ median annual personal earnings are below the US national average. Mexicans aged 16 and older earned on average \$20,000 in 2009; whereas the median income for the US population was \$28,900 (Dockterman 2011). The share of Mexicans who live in poverty (24%) is similar to the share for all Hispanics (23%), but considerably higher than the rate for the general US population (14%) (Dockterman 2011).

5.5 Mexicans in California and Texas

For historic, economic and political reasons Mexicans have settled traditionally in the US-southwest and California. Texas and California have been the first two preferred destinations in the USA for Mexicans (López and Stanton-Salazar 2001, Dockterman 2011). Only in the period 1900-1910 was Arizona the second preferred destination, while Texas was the first and California the third (Durand and Massey 2003).

The rapid and sustained growth of Hispanic populations in this region has been greeted by some, met with ambivalence by others and also resented by a large segment of the US population. On the one hand, natives in these traditional areas of immigration generally have experience interacting with newcomers and often have immigrant roots themselves, hence they are sometimes more tolerant to newcomers than those where migration is not commonplace (Massey 2008). Also, areas with large shares of immigrant populations have well-developed organisations (governmental and NGOs) to facilitate immigrants' integration to the society of arrival. It is no surprise that the largest concentrations of Mexican hometown associations are in the states of California, Texas and Illinois (Diaz Garay 2008, IME 2011). The same is the case with the location of Mexican consulates. Likewise, the massive pro-immigrant protests of 2006 had their epicentres in cities such as Los Angeles, Dallas, Chicago, New York, Washington D.C., Tucson and Phoenix (Johnson and Hing 2007).

On the other hand, the 'nativist population' of states with noticeable immigrant settlement has been the most proactive in suggesting measures to limit immigrants' rights, for instance modifications to the 14th Amendment of the US Constitution to deny birthright citizenship to children of undocumented immigrants (Petronicolos and New 1999). In addition, California voted in 1986 to make English the state's official language (Gutierrez and Zavella 2009). Furthermore, in 1994 Proposition 187 was approved, also in California,

denying access for education, welfare benefits and public health services for undocumented immigrants, except in case of emergencies. Arizona in 2004 passed the Proposition 200 which limited undocumented immigrants' access to public benefits and forced public servants to deny services to undocumented immigrants (National Immigration Forum 2004). More recently, in mid 2010, the state of Arizona approved the law SB 1070 which deemed it a misdemeanour for any individual not to carry identification documents which proved legal stay (temporary or permanent) in the USA (Arizona State Senate 2010), and authorised 'state and local officers to arrest without a warrant a person... they believe has committed any public offense that makes the person removable from the United States,... [and] require[d] officers conducting a stop, detention, or arrest... to verify the person's immigration status with the Federal Government' (Supreme Court of the United States 2012: 1)⁴⁸.

California and Texas remain as the top two destinations for Mexicans in the US (see Map 1). California tops the list and Texas follows second (Passel and Cohn 2011). Nearly one out of three Mexicans in the USA (36%) live in California, and one in four (25%) live in Texas (Dockterman 2011).

In the state of California, Hispanics and Asians are the largest ethnic/'racial' minorities (respectively). The former account for nearly 38% of the population, while the latter number 13% (US Census 2010 estimates). For the last four decades the non-Hispanic white population has seen a decrease relative to other ethnic groups. In the 1970s almost 80% of California residents were non-

⁴⁸ The US Federal Government filed suit against the state of Arizona in July 9, 2010, claiming its unconstitutionality given that immigration law and immigration policy are exclusive faculties of the USA Federal Government. The law SB 1070 did not go into effect in July 29, 2010; as it was scheduled. However, in June 25, 2012 the Supreme Court of the USA upheld the provision of Arizona's SB 1070, hence authorising Arizona's police to inquire into someone's immigration status if the officer has reason to believe that the person does not have documents to prove a lawful stay. The Supreme Court also reaffirmed the Federal Government's, and not individual states', responsibility for setting immigration law and policy (Supreme Court of the United States 2012, *The New York Times*, June 25, 2012). For a concise explanation of the SB 1070 see *The New York Times* Topics (2012); for a discussion on the unconstitutionality of the SB 1070 see Iglesias Sánchez (2010) and Chin et al (2010).

Hispanic whites (Reyes 2001). As of 2010, non-Hispanic whites made up 40% of the California population (US Census 2010 estimates) (See Table 3).

Los Angeles County has the largest concentration of Hispanic origin people in the state of California, numbering 48.5%, while non-Hispanic whites number nearly 29%. In Orange County, where this study took place, the proportion of people of Hispanic origin is second to that of the non-Hispanic white majority (44.1%). Hispanics are the largest ethnic minority, accounting for nearly 34%. Asians are the second largest ethnic minority, numbering 18%. African Americans constitute 1.7% (US Census 2010 estimates).

In the state of Texas, Hispanics and African-Americans are the largest ethnic and 'racial' minorities. Nearly 38% of Texas inhabitants self-identified as Hispanic, whereas nearly 12% reported themselves as African-American. Non-Hispanic whites accounted for slightly more than 45% of the total of Texas inhabitants (US Census 2010 estimates). These numbers show a slow but sustained growth of the number of Hispanics and a decrease of non-Hispanic whites compared to 2006 figures. In 2006, 48.3% of Texas inhabitants identified themselves as non-Hispanic whites; 35.7% were Hispanic; 11.4% were Black; and 4.6% fell into the 'other' category, which includes persons of American Indian, Asian and Hawaiian descent, among others (Combs 2008).

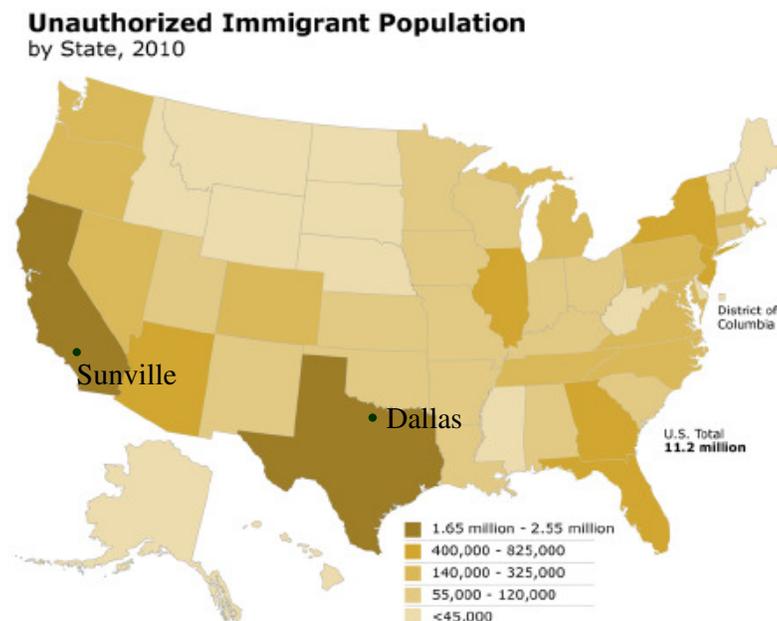
Location	Total Population	Non-Hispanic White	Hispanic/Latino*	Median Household Income
California	37 691 912	40.1%	37.6 %	\$ 60,883
'Sunville'**	109960	51.8%	35.8%	\$ 64,864
Texas	25 674 681	45.3%	37.6%	\$ 49,646
'Dallas'***	119 097	46.3%	30.0 %	\$ 69,599

Table 3. White and Hispanic/Latino origin population in fieldwork locations

Source: US Census Bureau. State and County Quick Facts. 2010 estimates.

* The terms Hispanic and Latino are used interchangeably in the US Census Bureau. Includes foreign-born population. People of Hispanic origin include Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, or some other Latino origin.

** The data correspond to the cities of Carrollton and 'Sunville', and not to the Counties of Denton (Tx.) and Orange (Ca.)



Map 1. Fieldwork Locations in the USA

Source: Passel and Cohn (2011). Unauthorized Immigrant Population: National and State Trends 2010

The two US locations where I conducted fieldwork, California and Texas, have strong historical, economic, political and socio-cultural ties to Mexico; where the Spanish language is widely spoken and in which Hispanics, and Mexicans in particular, are the largest minority ethnic group. The historical context and overall ethnic composition of a particular site provide the background to the everyday lived experiences of migrants, especially in respect of their interactions with co-ethnics and the rest of the US society.

5.5.1 Sunville

This part of my study was conducted in a place I have named Sunville (in Orange County, California). The research was with the migrants native to Ocuilan, in the State of Mexico⁴⁹. Sunville is a pseudonym. Only in this location did I choose to change the name, as my respondents felt vulnerable and did not want their place of residence to be identified.

The demographic data presented herein for Sunville refer to the city I have such named. But, throughout this work when I refer to Sunville, I mean the neighbourhood, given that most of the interactions occurred within this area. The workplaces of my respondents were not confined to the neighbourhood, nevertheless for the most part, their social life outside work was.

The participants in the Sunville cohort performed unskilled jobs, none had pursued higher education. For the most part, they had studied only basic education (primary and only a few cases secondary), and some had not completed it. Their knowledge of the English language was limited or basic, and all had crossed the border without inspection. Most of the people living in the *barrio* were previously acquainted because they shared a common place of

⁴⁹ Throughout this work I refer to Sunville-Ocuilan as a ‘circuit’ making reference to Rouse’s term of ‘transnational migrant circuit’. He coined this concept to explain how some migrants’ sending and receiving communities have become so closely woven together that there is a continuous circulation of people, money, goods and information that they have come to constitute a single community spread across a variety of sites (Rouse 2004: 30, originally published in 1991).

origin. In addition, within my sample, a majority of respondents belonged to two different extended families (see Appendices 1B, 1C and 2). This previous acquaintanceship and kinship meant that the residents in this place created a strong sense of community, where the divisions of public and private spaces were not very restrictive. Kinship ties could have resulted in less formal social arrangements and relations between the Sunville sample, however this was not necessarily the case. Four (2 men and 2 women), out of fourteen respondents were not related by blood or marriage to other respondents within the Sunville sample⁵⁰. In addition, the living arrangements were not in all cases organised by kinship ties⁵¹.

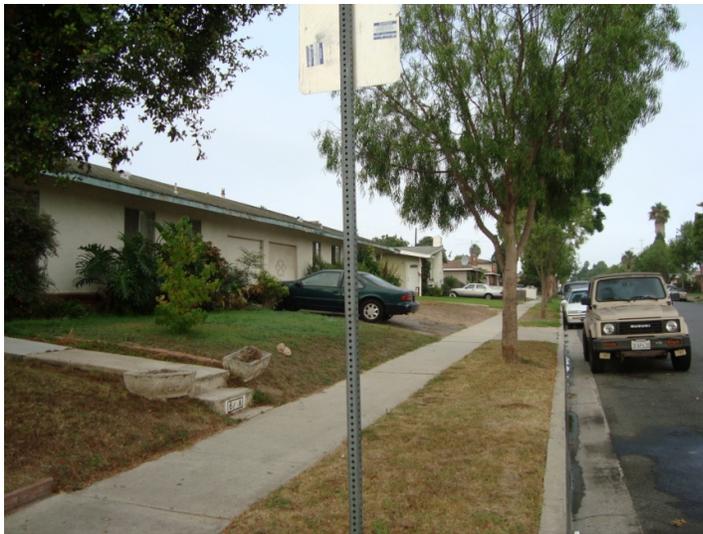
During the weekends, or in the evening after sunset, people would gather in their houses to eat, drink, watch television and talk. People in the neighbourhood would know of the celebration of a birthday, barbecue, or other sort of get-together. Invitations by the hosts were not strictly necessary, as ‘the guests’ would arrive at the house where the party took place, bringing food, drinks or, if the occasion merited, a present.

The neighbourhood was well connected by bus services. Likewise, it had within walking distance establishments such as laundrettes, butcheries, *panaderías* (bakeries), *fondas* (home style food for take away or sit in) and other small businesses. The largest of the shops in the neighbourhood was the

⁵⁰ Throughout this work, I reflect on the significance of kinship for the social relations and sense of obligation in a variety of settings within the Sunville-Ocuilan circuit and, to a lesser extent within the urban-origin respondents of the other 3 locales. The reason why my reflections on the significance of transnational kinship ties within the urban-origin respondents is not as extensive as with the Sunville-Ocuilan sample, is because I could not interview a significant number of urban-origin transnational families. I address this issue in more detail in Chapter 4, section 9; and in Chapter 10, section 2.

⁵¹ Justino, his wife Reyna and his daughter Cynthia lived in a same household. Melchor (Justino’s brother), Melchor’s son Benja and Benja’s partner Gladis did not live together with Justino, but they also shared the same household, although they lived with other people to whom they were not related. However in other cases, respondents who were indeed related by blood shared house with non-kin. That was the case for instance of Jorge and Lolo who shared a (garage) room and Lolo’s mother, Angela, shared house with people to whom she was not related.

Nearby the neighbourhood, it was common to see garage sales taking place on the sidewalks⁵⁴, generally outside the same houses and run by the same people. The items for sale included second-hand clothes and shoes, furniture, electronic appliances, automotive parts, and bric-a-brac in general. However, garage sales in the neighbourhood were not exactly based upon the discarding of goods. They were rather part of an informal, untaxed economy in which garage sales constituted a form of household subsistence. The vendors were at the same time buyers in garage sales which took place in higher income areas, buying in large quantities at cheaper prices. In general, everyday life in Sunville was characterised by a strong sense of community and conducted almost entirely in the Spanish language. Social interactions outside the confines of this area were uncommon, as will be detailed in Chapter 6.



Photograph 5. Street in the Sunville neighbourhood

⁵⁴ Most of the houses in the area did not have a lawn. The properties that had a garage generally used it as a living space or as storage rooms for gardening tools and construction machinery.

5.5.2 Dallas

I conducted the second part of my USA-based fieldwork in several cities in the proximity of Dallas⁵⁵ (in Denton County, Texas). In Dallas I conducted research with a cohort of urban, middle-class origin. This cohort had had authorised entries to the USA using tourist visas, which they overstayed. All of them had completed high school or university education. With the exception of one woman, these participants were proficient in English. Unlike the Sunville cohort, these respondents were dispersed in several areas of the Dallas metropolitan area and were, for the most part, not related by kinship (see Appendices 1A and 3). More than half were from the south-eastern tip of the state of San Luis Potosi. The rest were from several other cities in the north of Mexico (see Appendix 1A). Also, these migrants lived with their nuclear families. The exceptions were one divorced man whose children lived in Mexico, who shared a house with a Guatemalan he met in Dallas; and one unmarried woman who lived in her employers' house as a live-in nanny.

The informants in Dallas lived in suburban residential areas of the Dallas metroplex, at driving distances from each other. These suburban areas were for the most part occupied by residential developments where the informal economy, in contrast to the Sunville neighbourhood, was not noticeable. The Dallas cohort can be considered a minority in the sense of their residential choices and their socio-demographic characteristics. According to Jones-Correa (2008) 54% of non-Hispanic white population lives in suburbs, and 75% of the total suburban population of the USA is made up of non-Hispanic whites. Hence, those other than non-Hispanic whites (the Dallas cohort being

⁵⁵ My sample was not based in the city of Dallas, but in its metropolitan area, specifically in the Denton County, city of Carrollton. The demographic data herein presented is of Carrollton, the city where the family I lived with was based. Nevertheless, as explained in Chapter 4 (Methodology), my respondents were geographically dispersed and not based in one city only. Hence, the research with this cohort was conducted in the Dallas metropolitan area (also known as Greater Dallas or Dallas metroplex). For these reasons I refer to this cohort as the Dallas sample.

labelled as Hispanics⁵⁶) living in suburbs enter a context in which they can be classified as minorities.

Furthermore, the Dallas cohort's general characteristics (English language proficiency, higher educational attainment and suburban residence) corresponded to a minority of the Mexican undocumented immigrant population (see Figure 2). According to Suro's (2005) survey of Mexican undocumented population⁵⁷, only 37% spoke some English; 23% had attended high school, while 5% attended college (or higher).

It was practically indispensable to have a car to go anywhere outside the residential area in Dallas. Public transportation was infrequent and the nearest bus stop was not reachable at walking distance from the house where I was staying.

According to my respondents, the suburbs where they resided were populated by either a white majority or were ethnically diverse. I did not confirm the latter first-hand as it was unusual to see and to interact with neighbours. Nevertheless, I had a chance to see some of the neighbours when I went trick-or-treating with my respondents and their children (see Photograph 6) and it is fair to state that the ethnic composition of the neighbourhood where I stayed seemed predominantly white.

⁵⁶ The US Census Bureau considers race and ethnicity as separate categories. According to the US Census definition: "White" refers to a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa. It includes people who indicated their race(s) as "White" or reported entries such as Irish, German, Italian, Lebanese, Arab, Moroccan, or Caucasian' (Humes et al 2011). Hispanic or Latino on the other hand, is seen by the US Census as an ethnic category which comprises heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person's parents or ancestors before their arrival in the United States. Hispanic or Latinos may be of any race or races (Humes et al 2011).

⁵⁷ Roberto Suro of the Pew Hispanic Center, conducted a study in 2004-05 with nearly 5000 Mexican migrants while they were seeking an identity document (the *matrícula consular*) at Mexican consulates in the cities of Los Angeles and Fresno, CA, New York (NY), Chicago (IL), Atlanta, (Ga), Dallas (Tx) and Raleigh, (NC).

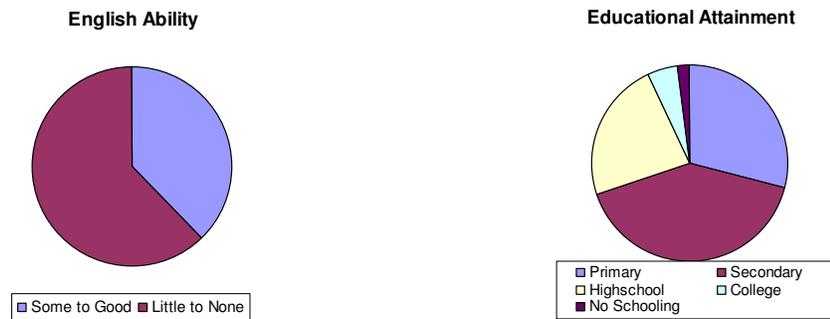


Figure 2. Distribution of Mexican undocumented migrants' educational attainment and English ability.

Source: Suro (2005). Survey of Mexican Immigrants. Pew Hispanic Center.

The suburbs where my respondents resided were located more than one hour's drive from the traditional area of settlement for Mexican communities in Dallas: Oak Cliff. I visited Oak Cliff to interview Mr. Tereso Ortiz, the president and founder of Casa Guanajuato, one of the largest Mexican hometown associations (HTA) in Dallas. Mr. Ortiz invited me to join the members of this HTA for the Day of the Dead celebrations, where they would have traditional food, folk dances and an altar exhibition. I extended the invitation to the people with whom I was living and to Magdis, the woman who worked as a live-in nanny. However, none of them wanted to go to Oak Cliff as they considered this place dangerous and far away. Given the limitations of transport, I did not attend this event. Instead, I joined my female respondents and their children for trick-or-treating.



Photograph 6. Respondents' children at Halloween

Some of my respondents' children were enrolled in primary schools with bilingual programmes. The latter suggested that the schools they attended served a significant population of Hispanic(-born) and Hispanic-origin children who needed help with learning the English language. Nevertheless, despite the assumed Hispanic concentration, 'ethnic' shops and places had not proliferated in the near proximities of the neighbourhood, where only a couple of Chinese and Mexican grocery shops could be found, ranging from small ones to chain stores like Fiesta-Mart. However, my respondents did not do their main shopping in Mexican stores, except for freshly-made tortillas and other specific products. They did most of their grocery shopping in supercentres such as Sam's Club, Costco, Wal-Mart and the like.

Everyday life in the two US locations where I conducted fieldwork differed dramatically, including most of the experiences that will be analysed throughout this thesis. In Sunville, friendship and kinship ties facilitated neighbours' familiarity with each other, and that the boundaries between public and private spaces were blurred. It was common for people to sit on the sidewalks using them as a sort of 'living room' or to walk into a party even if they were not invited first-hand by the hosts. In contrast, life in Dallas was more isolated, work-centred and there was no sense of community with the neighbours. The choice of suburban residence, far away from 'ethnic'

concentrations was a conscious strategy of the Dallas cohort, aiming to distance themselves from what is stereotypical of Mexicans in the US.

5.6 Matehuala, Ocuilan and Victoria: demographic data

The three Mexican sites where this study took place present important demographic differences in the size of their population, their contribution to the national GDP, their literacy rates and their contribution to the international migration flows (see Table 4 and Map 2).



Map 2. Fieldwork Locations in Mexico
A: Ocuilan **B:** Victoria **C:** Matehuala
 Source: Kalipedia-Santillana

The three sites belong to different categories of what Durand (2005) has termed the ‘new regions of migration’ (see Map 3). Durand classified Mexican migration to the USA in four different regions: historic, central, border and southeast. These divisions are based on geographic classifications (i.e. border region are the Mexican northern states forming the border with the USA, southeast those in the southeast of Mexico).



Map 3. Durand's Regions of Migration

Border: Baja California, Baja California Sur, Sonora, Sinaloa, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, Tamaulipas.

Historic: Durango, Zacatecas, San Luis Potosí, Nayarit, Jalisco, Colima, Aguascalientes, Guanajuato, Michoacán.

Central: Querétaro, Hidalgo, State of Mexico, Mexico City, Morelos, Tlaxcala, Puebla, Guerrero, Oaxaca.

Southeast: Veracruz, Tabasco, Chiapas, Campeche, Yucatán, Quintana Roo.

Source: Durand (2005). CMD Working Paper 05-02M

	Mexico (country)	SLP	Matuhuala	State of Mexico	Ocuilan	Tamaulipas	Victoria
Population 2010	112,336,538	2,585,518	91,522	15,175,862	31,803	3,268,554	321,953
Population of 18 years and more with higher education 2010	12,061,198	251,015	9,250	1,635,377	801	387,237	62,987
GDP (thousands of pesos) 2010*	8,481,446,846	156,561,931	N.A.	796,426,291	N.A.	296,187,606	N.A.
Estimated migrant population to the USA 2005 (of every 1000)	16 (national average)	27	N.A.	10	N.A.	12	N.A.
Estimated internal emigrants for 2005 (exits within Mexico)	N.A.	44,989	N.A.	300,042	N.A.	53,617	N.A.
Estimated internal immigrants for 2005 (entries within Mexico)	N.A.	40,208	N.A.	416, 778	N.A.	113,953	N.A.
Remittances sent to Mexico in 2008 (millions of USD)	25,148	759	N.A	2 096	N.A	512	N.A

Table 4. Demographics of Mexican fieldwork sites at state and local levels

Sources: INEGI (2010). México en Cifras

INEGI. Cuéntame. Información por Entidad.

Banxico 2009.

Durand and Massey (2003) p. 73-85.

Exchange rate as of July 20, 2012: £1= \$20.78 MXP

However, this classification was mainly based upon the shared attributes related to migration such as quantity, historical duration, and continuity of flows. For instance, in the historic region, migration is deeply rooted and the states that comprise the region have traditionally and historically participated in emigration flows. Despite the historic region's proximity to the central region, the states belonging to each have distinctive emigration attributes. This study was conducted in locations belonging to the border, historic and central regions. The main characteristics of each are respectively discussed.

5.6.1 Ocuilan

Ocuilan, in the State of Mexico, is the town where I conducted research with the non-migrating kin of the Sunville cohort (see Appendices 1C and 2). These respondents were from a rural origin, had attained basic education and were mainly dedicated to self-subsistence commerce, such as small grocery shops, selling prepared food or peasantry (see Appendix 1C).



Photograph 7. Houses in Ocuilan

The State of Mexico forms part of Durand's central region. Mexico-US migration from this region is relatively recent as Mexico City and its surrounding area had been the pole of attraction for internal migration within Mexico. US migration from here started in the *bracero* years, but with low rates. This region contributed only 1.3 *braceros* out of each ten (Durand and

Massey 2003). The State of Mexico surrounds most of Mexico City, and is characterised by its sharp contrasts. The State of Mexico is one of the top contributors to national GDP. However, of its 125 *municipios*⁵⁸, 26 have high indices of marginalisation⁵⁹, while 43 have very low indices (CONAPO 2005).

The *municipio* of Ocuilan has a high index of marginalisation and low higher-education rates (CONAPO 2005). It is important to note that the population the Mexican Census reported for Ocuilan (31,803 inhabitants) is for the whole *municipio*. The *municipio*, however, is divided into seven communities which are not adjacent to each other. Ocuilan is one of these communities, and its population reached approximately 4000 inhabitants.

Ocuilan's mild and humid weather make possible the cultivation of mushrooms, chrysanthemums, gladioli, carrots, oats, peas and broad beans. Livestock farming, especially of sheep and cattle, is also common. Ocuilan's economy is linked to a great extent to the Catholic sanctuary of Chalma. Chalma is located in close geographic proximity to Ocuilan; and has been considered a sacred town since the 16th century after the friars Sebastian de Tolentino and Nicolas Perea evangelised indigenous peoples.

⁵⁸ The government of Mexico is administratively divided into three levels: the federation, the state and the *municipio* (municipality). The *municipio* is the smallest administrative subdivision with its own elected government.

⁵⁹ The index of marginalisation measures populations' deficiencies and shortages in correspondence with their basic needs. The CONAPO estimates the index of marginalisation by a combination of four categories and nine indices: education (illiteracy rates and population with incomplete basic education), housing (households without running water, drainage, ground flooring and electric energy, as well as overcrowding), household income (working population earning up to two minimum wages) and population distribution (inhabitants in localities with less than 5000 people). There are five levels: very high, high, medium, low and very low (CONAPO Glossary, CONAPO 2005).



Photograph 8. Main square in Ocuilan

As of 2008, it was estimated that over 2 million pilgrims visited the sanctuary every year coming from various parts of the country (Macedo González 2008, Poder Edomex 2008). When pilgrims visit this sacred place, part of the ritual of sanctification is to offer flower crowns to the Lord of Chalma. A regular activity for women in Ocuilan was to make and sell flower crowns to the pilgrims and tourists who visit this place. Likewise, men and women from Ocuilan sold food to the pilgrims, mainly *barbacoa* (slow-roasted lamb) and broth.



Photograph 9. View of Ocuilan

Leisure activities in Sunville were varied and also gender-divided. Young men usually gathered around the main square during the evenings, to socialise and

to play sports such as basketball and football. It was not customary to have female audiences whilst a match was taking place. Women usually gathered in the kitchens, to cook and chat, with topics ranging from what happened in the *telenovelas*, to the economic difficulties and lack of opportunities, town gossip and the news that they have from their relatives up north.

5.6.2 Victoria

Victoria, in the northeast of Mexico, is the capital of the state of Tamaulipas. This city is located approximately 300 kilometres away from the border cities of the Rio Grande Valley, in Texas⁶⁰. Victoria's economy is primarily based on the assembling industry, on a heavy concentration of state bureaucracy, on commerce and on the service sector.

Tamaulipas, sharing more than 350 kilometres of border with the state of Texas, is one of the six states that comprise Durand's border region. This region is characterised by its economic prosperity, industrialisation and high levels of educational attainment. Out of the 43 *municipios* of Tamaulipas, Victoria and six others are classified as having very low indices of marginalisation. Conversely six of the 43 are classified with high indices of marginalisation (Conapo 2005).

The migration flows in the northern region are mostly internal, directed towards the metropolitan area of Monterrey, in the neighbouring state of Nuevo León and to the cities that share the border with the United States, such as Matamoros, Reynosa and Nuevo Laredo. The border region has a high concentration of floating population which is formed to a large extent of migrants who have unsuccessfully attempted to cross to the USA (Durand and Massey 2003). In addition, this region has a different and unique type of migration as documented by Mendoza (2009). She studied how inhabitants of the border, crossing on a daily basis, can have legal crossings using border

⁶⁰ The Rio Grande Valley is the area located in the southernmost tip of Texas. It lies along the Rio Grande, the river which separates Mexico and the USA.

crossing cards or tourist visas, but undertake paid employment in the USA, thus having legal crossings but unauthorised employment.

Migration to the United States in the border region is a recent and not very common phenomenon. The flows originating in Tamaulipas go mainly to the state of Texas and to a minor extent to the states of Florida, Georgia, Tennessee and North Carolina (Izcara Palacios 2009). Most of the Tamaulipas flows originate in the zone known as the 4th District, which are the *municipios* located in the south of the state, with the greatest marginalisation (Izcara Palacios 2009).

Since 2010, Tamaulipas has been in the news headlines because of the increasing drug-related violence, directed also against civilians. In 2011, more than 160 dead bodies of Mexican and Central American individuals, who had presumably been making their way to the USA, have been found in mass graves in *municipios* of Tamaulipas. The numbers of people who have died because of drug-related violence, however, are presumed to be much higher. In the entire country, official numbers report that more than 60,000 people have died (Mendoza Hernández 2011). In the first half of 2011, the state of Tamaulipas was categorised as the 6th most dangerous state of the country because of drug-related crimes (López 2011). How this will impact on the migration flows passing through and originating in this state is yet to be known.



Photograph 10. City centre of Victoria

In the city of Victoria, I conducted research with the mother and the sister of one of my main female respondents in Dallas (See Appendix 3). These two respondents were middle-class, married women; both had studied at university and had professional jobs (See Appendix 1E). They had US tourist visas and could cross the border legally.



Photograph 11. Street in Victoria

5.6.3 Matehuala

Matehuala, is the third largest *municipio* of the state of San Luis Potosi and along with the state capital and the *municipio* of Soledad Graciano, has a very low index of marginalisation. Thirty-seven out of 48 of the *municipios* of San Luis Potosi are classified as highly marginalised (Conapo 2005).

Matehuala, in the north-western tip of the state of San Luis Potosi (SLP), is part of Durand's 'historic' region of migration. More than half of the total Mexico-US flows originate in the historic region. However, the states that contribute the largest numbers are Jalisco, Michoacán, Guanajuato and Zacatecas. During the first decades of the 20th century, the majority of migrants from SLP went mainly to Texas and secondly to California, Illinois, Indiana and Michigan. This population was from very diverse backgrounds: middle and working-class, urban and rural origins, political exiles and railroad workers (Alanis-Enciso 2004). However, after the Great Depression in the US there was a massive return of migrants back to SLP.

During the *bracero* years, the historic region provided an average of 62.21% of the total flow and with IRCA over a million people from this region regularised their status (Durand and Massey 2003). This allowed for the formation and subsequent consolidation of solidarity networks for the perpetuation of migration.



Photograph 12. Cathedral of Matehuala

Matehuala has well-established transnational solidarity networks that allow for the continuation of migration flows, particularly those destined for the cities of Houston, Austin and Dallas. Documented and undocumented migration is widely spread amongst lower-middle and working classes. Hence the economy is highly dependent on remittances and migration to the United States (Alanis-Enciso 2004). Likewise, Matehuala's economy is based on commerce, services, the assembly industry and mining.

Matehuala was the second site where I conducted fieldwork with non-migrant and return-migrants of urban origin (See Appendices 1D and 3). The social class and educational attainment of this sample was mixed. Most of these respondents were retired workers (schoolteachers and one mining engineer), or managed their own businesses. However, within this cohort, were two women in domestic work and one man was unemployed at the time of fieldwork. Undocumented migration being a widespread practice amongst lower-middle and working classes here, it was not a sensitive or stigmatising topic for middle-classes as it was for the Victoria sample. These observations will be discussed in the following chapters.

5.7 Summary

The five sites where I carried out this research present similarities but also distinctive characteristics. In the US locations, both places have manifest Mexican presence. Yet, when looking at the specificities of the locales (neighbourhood and suburbs) the everyday interactions with the community are remarkably different. In Mexico, despite the urban character of Matehuala and Victoria, the sites had significant differences in their relations to the United States, in the rootedness of migration and the consequent transnational practices (from below and from above). The town of Ocuilan presented similarities with the neighbourhood in Sunville in terms of community construction and the creation of public and private spaces.

In this chapter I have presented an overview of the demographics of the countries, regions and locales where this research was conducted. I explored macro structural factors, discussing first the intrinsic difficulties and limitations for the study of undocumented populations, including the various sources, different methodologies, geographic areas, and categories in which data are grouped.

Likewise, I analysed how the Bracero Programme and IRCA shaped migration flows, and defined the traditional and new immigrants' areas for destination and settlement, which led Mexicans to become the largest immigrant group in the USA in the 20th century. The political, economic and social events which took place in Mexico and the USA in the 1990s laid the ground for a rise in undocumented migration and a renewed anti-immigrant sentiment especially in the traditional areas for immigrants' settlement.

The interplay of historic, cultural, political, geographic, and economic factors have made Mexican migration a constant flow, characterised by its complexity, massiveness and unidirectionality. Nevertheless, as will be seen throughout this work and as discussed in Chapter 3, Mexicans are hardly a unified mass. The

distinctiveness comes from multiple generations, having long-settled migrants and newcomers from different socioeconomic origins and circumstances in the US, legal status being perhaps the most influential. These diverse origins and circumstances undoubtedly influence every other aspect of the everyday lives of Mexicans in the USA.

This study focuses on the experiences of undocumented migrants of different origins and with different socio-economic outcomes. My purpose with this chapter was to give an idea of their places of origin and of their places of residence, as this will be fundamental to understanding the experiences that will be analysed in the following chapters.

Chapter 6: Integration, belonging and ambivalent loyalties contrasting experiences of Dallas and Sunville

Scholars have long been interested in observing migrants' relations with the societies in which they have arrived. In this work, as has been detailed earlier, this was also my interest. I wanted to observe how the two cohorts of migrants in the USA related with the 'rest of society' where they resided and in this respect there were several questions to be answered. I was not sure who that 'rest of the society' would be; I did not know if my respondents had frequent and active relations with the so-called 'mainstream society' and, more importantly, if this was their intent. Furthermore, I was interested in exploring the meanings given to their 'Mexicanness' and whether, after being immersed in US society, they rather had dual or fluid identities. I was aware that migrants' identity construction is a complex and sometimes contradictory process in which sentiments, attachments and loyalties make migrants oscillate between sending and receiving countries, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. Also, my experiences in the field made me aware that class, gender, length of stay in the USA, transnational attachments (especially at the family level), legal status, and the general surrounding context, greatly influenced paths for integration and identity construction.

Hence, in this chapter I will analyse how the Dallas and Sunville cohorts differed in their strategies for, and interests in, social integration, and how they experienced their identity and sense of belonging in diverse ways. In order to illustrate their differences in detail, I will first look at the personal stories of two of my respondents, one of each cohort; Luis from Dallas and Melchor from Sunville. In this way, I aim to show the contrasting backgrounds of my samples in order to lay the groundwork for the discussion that will follow throughout this chapter, and to convey a better grasp of the social realities of my respondents.

These two accounts describe the stories of two Mexican men who, like millions of men and women, have looked for better life opportunities in the United States. These two stories nevertheless illustrate two contrasting experiences. The preceding contexts, the motivations for migrating, the risks taken in border crossing, the conceptualisation of family relations and gender roles, the networks existing at places of origin and destination, the modes of self-representation, the strategies for mobility, the ambitions, aspirations and subsequent ways of life of these characters differed radically. Their cultural, social and economic backgrounds and present situations evidently impacted on their and their families' experiences. Even if both were of undocumented Mexican migrants, they deserve to be studied as different social phenomena.

6.1 Luis (Dallas)

Some months before Luis completed his degree as a veterinary surgeon, he met a group of ranchers from Texas who were participating in an equestrian exhibition in Victoria⁶¹, Mexico. They became acquainted and invited Luis to work for them in Texas taking care of their horses. At that time, Luis had not yet finished his university degree and did not take their offer, but he kept their contact details. After he graduated as a veterinary surgeon he was disappointed that he could not find a job in Mexico that met his salary expectations.

So he contacted the Texas ranchers and confirmed that their offer was still available. He thought about 'going north' for some weeks and decided that working in Texas could be a good chance to improve his English and make some money. He was aware he would not perform the job of a veterinary, but he thought he had little to lose. He thought that the risks were very small, as he would live on the premises at the ranch so he would not spend on accommodation, and would be out of sight of immigration authorities. He had a

⁶¹ Luis is originally from San Luis Potosi, but he studied his university degree in Victoria, Tamaulipas.

tourist visa, so he would not have trouble entering the USA. He was not yet clear for how long he would stay in the USA.

He decided to leave for Texas and when he started working in that ranch he realised that ‘all the other guys’ working there were ‘different’ to him. ‘They were all *paisanos*⁶²’. Luis did not converse a lot with them except for small talk. He never told them he had a university degree as he anticipated his co-workers would make fun of him if they had known. He sometimes felt sad and lonely, but he did not want to give up and return to Mexico.

After some months, Luis himself started to take the horses for equestrian exhibitions. On one occasion, he met a man who managed a veterinary hospital in Dallas. Luis told him he was a veterinary surgeon himself, and explored the possibility of working for him. Soon after, he started working in the veterinary hospital. With this job he felt he had reached a stable financial situation, and went back to Mexico to get married. Later, he and his wife started a life in Dallas. His wife, despite having studied at university as well, worked in Dallas as a domestic.

At the time of fieldwork, Luis had lived in Texas for nearly two decades, having worked in the same veterinary hospital for over 16 years. He lived with his wife and their three US-born children in a middle-class suburb outside Dallas. Luis regretted that his qualifications were not recognised in the US for work as a veterinary surgeon, even though he had the knowledge. He said he was happy living in the USA but missed being with his (extended) family in Mexico. He had not seen his parents in more than six years, since the last time he travelled with his family to Mexico. Even though he and his wife had US tourist visas, they did not want to take the risk of going to Mexico and not being able to cross the border back to the USA.

⁶² *Paisano* is a term used to refer to a person from the same place of origin; it is of common use amongst migrants. Also it has a derogatory connotation to refer to peasants or individuals of a rural lifestyle.

Luis has not created a process of ‘chain migration’ within his family and only one of his cousins (Mario) has migrated, also settling in the Dallas metropolitan area. Both Luis and his cousin are homeowners, have cars of their own and enjoy satisfactory living standards. Luis believed life in the US was not easy, that it was necessary to work long hours and to be prepared to perform any sort of job. He explained that a person could achieve a positive experience and satisfying results by working hard, speaking the language and ‘respecting and abiding by the rules of the country’.

6.2 Melchor (Sunville)

Melchor studied until fourth grade of primary school in Ocuilan after having learnt to read and write, and basic arithmetic and so on. Even though he liked going to school, his father did not allow him or any of his siblings to finish primary education. Instead Melchor spent his childhood and teenage years helping out with his father’s livestock.

Melchor lived in his parents’ household until he was 17 years old. He then moved to Mexico City where he worked in the distribution of automotive parts. He married a woman from Ocuilan and started a family. He lived in Mexico City while his wife and children stayed in Ocuilan.

Melchor and his wife Eva had four children. Eva did not do paid work and what Melchor earned was insufficient to raise a family and send their children to school. Because of this, Melchor decided to emigrate with the objective of giving his children school education, one of his greatest dreams. ‘I have always wanted my children to study. I don’t want them to end up like me. I hope they can be good people, educated’.

He decided to make the journey to Sunville, California, where two of his brothers and other acquaintances already lived. His brother Justino was well settled and ran his own floor-laying business. Melchor knew that with him, he

would have a place to stay, a secure job, and friends and relatives who would be able to orient him with ‘the way things work’ in the USA.

At the time of my fieldwork, Melchor had been in Sunville on two different occasions. Both times he had crossed the border through the desert with a *coyote* (people smuggler). Remembering how difficult it was to cross the border; even more the first time, was especially significant for Melchor. His account of crossing the desert was emotionally charged; transmitting fear, excitement, as well as a sense of relief and achievement.

The first time he crossed the border, he was part of a group of sixteen people. They walked through the desert for more than eighteen hours until a man, teamed with the *coyote*, met them in his van. To his surprise, he picked up only the women and children claiming not having enough space for everybody and promising to come back later for the men. Nevertheless, Melchor feared that he had been abandoned.

We did not want to let the *coyote* leave; we thought that once he was gone he would not come back. We had no water or food. The heat was the most intense I have ever felt in my entire life and we were all feeling very poorly. It seemed like we had been waiting for an eternity and the *coyote* did not show up. The rest of the men and I started thinking of walking into the motorway, so that we got caught by *la migra*⁶³. It was either getting caught or dying in the desert. We agreed that if the *coyote* had not come back by midnight we would go out to the motorway, get caught and deported. I was praying to God that whatever happened, we remained safe. I did not want to die, that was all I was asking for.

Melchor and the rest of the group were picked up later that night. After the *coyote* ‘delivered’ him to his brother, he stayed at his brother’s house. That same week, he started working together with his brother, installing laminated floors. Even though he did not know the trade, he did not find it difficult to

⁶³ *La migra* is a colloquial term to refer to US Immigration law enforcement authorities, such as the US Border Patrol or Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

learn. What he has found complicated is the uncertainty of the business, having a lot of work at times and none at others. However, Melchor remained positive.

We always work in beautiful houses, of very rich people. Some houses look like palaces. I ask to God that if in my next life he wants me to be an animal; I want to be pet of rich people like the ones we work for. I have seen pets that have their own sofas... Well, in some houses, the dog has its own room! I bet the pets eat better than me too, they are in the air conditioning all day and they get on the car of the masters when they go out. Oh, how I wish I had a life like that! With nothing to worry about...

6.3 Integration to a diverse society

For more than half a century migrants from diverse parts of the world, have arrived to make a living, either permanently or temporarily, in the United States. The USA is hosting migrants from an unparalleled number of different backgrounds that had not been seen before in its history. These migrants vary in their reasons for migrating, national origins, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, prospects for settlement or return and relations with the US society, as well as in the ways and extents to which they maintain links with their places of origin.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the integration of newcomers has been a constant concern for receiving societies, and there is no consensus as to how they should 'integrate' into it. In the United States, given its rich cultural diversity, there is not a single and uncontested definition of US culture and of what makes someone 'American'. Contemporary scholarly literature has acknowledged that US society, culture and identity are very diverse, far from being uniform, and have changed together with the history of the United States and the consequent transformations in 'race', class and gender relations (Daniels 1998, Williams 1998, Massey 2008). Acknowledging that the United States is a diverse society is indispensable when discussing immigrants' integration, as it has been frequently assumed that the 'host society' is an integrated or bounded one, to which an out-group should or must adapt (Freeman 2007).

Migrants themselves, in their relations with the so-called dominant culture, create social, cultural and economic transformations (Sanchez 1997, Gerstle 1999, Baker 2004, Portes and Rumbaut 2006). Migrants adopt some values and practices of the society in which they have settled, but reject others. At the same time, they lose (or practise less regularly) some traditions and rituals which were observed in their places of origin. In their place, they access and participate in some institutions of the host country. However, they are generally not admitted into all of them, especially if they are undocumented (Levitt 2001). Migrants can be integrated to varying degrees to the country in which they reside, while simultaneously maintaining connections and orientations to the country where they come from (See Chapter 2).

Undocumented migrants are typically segregated, discriminated against, have limited opportunities in the labour market and lower income levels than natives and authorised immigrants. These issues, however, have been discussed elsewhere (See Chapter 2). It is not my purpose to examine them here. Rather, the intention in this chapter is to explicate the divisions that are not so well known. During my fieldwork, I observed that the undocumented migrants of the two cohorts I worked with were differentiated by several factors, primarily on social class and demographic origin. Also, I observed how the migrants from Sunville especially, were not interested in their integration to the 'mainstream' and instead focused their efforts towards social recognition by their immediate social circles and from their relatives in Mexico. Moreover, the migrants of the Dallas cohort put into practice strategies for social distinction in similar ways to those used by Mexican-Americans, as discussed in Chapter 3.

6.4 Diversity among Mexican undocumented migrants in the USA

Having said earlier that there is not a unique and homogeneous 'US society', it is also important to say that there is also no monolithic culture when referring

to the ‘Mexicans’ living in the USA (see Chapter 3), nor to Mexican undocumented migrants.

There have been general stereotypes about this population. It is known that the majority of Mexican undocumented migrants work in sectors that require little or no formal education, are originally from impoverished areas of Mexico, have little prospects for upward mobility and are not proficient in the English language (Passel 2006, Terrazas 2010). Therefore, the stereotypes of Mexicans in US popular culture have usually been negatively marked, including a widespread culture of machismo and submissive female roles. The media has also played a fundamental role in shaping public attitudes and opinions towards Mexican migrants. Mastro and Behm-Morawitz (2005) analysed how when Latinos appeared in the US media they were portrayed as naïve underclass peons, abusive of welfare benefits, as sexually aggressive ‘Latin lovers’, related to criminal and unauthorised activities and as lazy and unintelligent people.

However, not all undocumented migrants, let alone all Mexicans, fit this imagined type. To a large extent, these stereotypes have helped the construction of a group identity for my sample populations; either by collectively rejecting them or by their being shared indicators of expected social standing in relation to others. As explained earlier throughout this work, the Sunville and Dallas cohorts exhibited important demographic variations; consequently their views towards integration and cultural retention were correspondingly diverse. Within my samples, I observed divergent attitudes towards everyday practices that were associated with gender, ‘race’, class and ethnicity. These will be further examined in subsequent sections of this chapter.

6.5 Dallas: ‘they have to stop behaving as if they were still in Mexico’

As detailed in Chapter 5, the Dallas cohort of migrants were from an urban, middle-class origin and to a large extent their socio-demographic

characteristics did not match with the bulk of undocumented migrants. Hernández-León (2008) has pointed out that the social dynamics of migration from cities are remarkably different from those of smaller towns and that middle-class urban-origin Mexican migrants in the USA have been scarcely studied.

Urban-origin migrants do not generally come from the poor uneducated ranks of the population, neither are they usually unskilled. Furthermore, they often enjoyed in their places of origin access to education and professional or semi-professional training. Migration from urban areas, if compared with traditional sending areas, is a more individualised process, grounded on personal and family decisions and where transnational activities are more selective, at times exceptional and lacking the characteristics of a diaspora (Portes 1997).

Urban migrants differ from those of communities with long standing out-migration traditions. The latter are more likely to maintain attachments to their kin and communities of origin and more likely to engage in a variety of transnational and community activities. Instead, the proportionately lower rates of out-migration and the weaker social networks prevalent in urban areas do not always allow for the developing of chain migration processes, unlike the emigration from small demographic concentrations.

These above-described conditions explain to a certain extent the formation of social networks, self-perceptions and relations with the 'mainstream' and ethnic peers of the Dallas cohort respondents. They did not refuse or see their Mexicanness as negative. However, they tried to distance themselves from the stereotypes of Mexican 'illegal aliens' that are prevalent in US popular culture. Moreover, they tried to mark a distinction between their ways of living their Mexicanness from the image that is generally portrayed of Mexican immigrants in the United States as impoverished, underdeveloped, inassimilable people.

For instance, Magdis (age 44), a live-in nanny, complained about how her former employers wanted to ‘teach’ her the way home appliances, such as the microwave oven or garden lamps, worked. She said her employers thought of Mexicans as people who did not know anything about technology. She complained that her employers thought of Mexicans as people who had ‘just come down from the hills’ (*nos tratan como si apenas hubiéramos bajado del cerro*), and objected that these stereotypes were not applicable to her.

This cohort was aware that their unauthorised residence and employment in the USA was not usually seen in a positive light by US citizens. Therefore, they made a conscious attempt to fit into the society in which they lived, to observe and adhere to the rules of the USA and they avoided doing things that they would not like somebody to do in their places of origin. For instance, Luis’s (age 44) way of relating with the host society was oriented towards a harmonious living (*convivencia*) with the US society and he condemned groups or individuals who did not make an effort to ‘integrate’ to the mainstream society. Luis’s actions were based on how he would expect an out-group to behave in his country.

I cannot imagine that what we [Mexicans] would remotely accept that a bunch of foreigners stay to live in Mexico... If in Mexico itself, the indigenous are treated badly; do you think Salvadorians or Guatemalans would be welcomed? Now, transfer that situation to here. Of course gringos are fed up. Yeah we mean a lot of economic advantages, that is clear, but let’s not give them more reasons for them to say negative things about us... These people [undocumented migrants] need to stop behaving as if they were still in Mexico and thinking they can do whatever they want. And I am not talking only of stopping when there is a red light⁶⁴... If someone comes here they have to work hard. One has to speak the language and respect and stick to the rules.

⁶⁴ In November 2009, a Dallas police officer pulled over a Mexican-origin female driver (Mrs. Ernestina Mondragón) who made an illegal U-turn and failed to carry her driving license. This event was on the news as the police officer also fined her for not speaking English. Luis made this comment in the context of being critical about this woman, especially because she had lived in the USA for nearly 30 years. Luis said people like her are a shame for the Mexicans who make a real effort to ‘live as they should’ (*vivir como se debe*).

In addition, this group rejected the discourse of victimisation and disadvantage present in the popular representation of ethnic minorities. While they were aware of the limitations of their undocumented status, they also believed that their departure from Mexico had not been forced and that their migration to the USA had been voluntary. Most of them migrated looking for better economic opportunities, which in different ways they had difficulty finding in Mexico. Others migrated looking for change in their personal circumstances. Nevertheless, none of these respondents had a history of migration within their families or thought that migration to the United States was the *only* possible way for upward mobility.

The Dallas cohort highly valued aspirations for upward mobility, willingness to learn the English language and the contact with the culture and society of the host country. They believed that these were elements for social distinction between them and the rest of migrants. They were critical about the bulk of undocumented migrants, whom they perceived as being generally content with sending money to their relatives in Mexico but who did not make any effort to familiarise themselves with and integrate to the host country.

One of the respondents most critical about unintegrated Mexicans was Mario (age 36). He arrived in the USA when he was 24 years old, having studied Civil Engineering in Mexico. He started working in Texas in the construction sector, installing fitted kitchens and painting. For the last six years and after having made enough contacts, Mario started to detach himself from his employer and began increasingly to do independent work. Today he runs his own business. Mario largely employed undocumented Mexican workers, but he was very critical about the way his workers lived.

They have no ambitions... For them it has been already something big to live here, to earn in dollars and to be able to send them to their families... they are not worried about learning English, they simply don't care. If they wanted to, there are plenty of options for learning the language, which in my view is the first step for being part of this society... They want to live

locked inside their copies of Mexico. After work, all they do is to sit down in front of the telly, watching Spanish-speaking programs, drinking beer, meeting their friends in their neighbourhoods and they just don't get in touch with anything that is not Mexico. They do not make any effort to adapt, integrate or come out of the replicas of Mexico.

Speaking the English language was seen as an essential step in order to live in the USA. The criticisms towards those who, after years of living in the USA, had not yet learned the language was not limited to the 'other' undocumented migrants, the ones who were different to them. Paola (age 39) was the only woman in this cohort who did not speak English. She was frequently criticised by her friends (my respondents) for her laziness and lack of interest in learning the language.

Paola worked cleaning houses. Her husband used to work in Dallas but after he was made redundant, he moved to Atlanta where he found another job. Paola did not know how to drive and depended on her neighbours or friends to take her to her workplaces. But when they were not available, Paola did not go to work. Moreover, as she did not speak English she needed her friends to explain to her employers the dates she could or could not go to work. Her friends argued that as long as she did not speak the language she would miss job opportunities. Furthermore, her friends argued that Paola had the time to take English lessons but that she instead preferred to stay at her home and watch television. Similarly her male and female friends thought that if Paola was not working regularly in Dallas she should move to Atlanta in order to limit the rent to one household only and to be of help to her husband. Moreover, some of her friends commented that if Paola were living with her husband he would pressure her to work on a more regular basis.

In addition, the urban origin of this cohort was an advantage for their easier adaptation to an urban lifestyle in the USA. Abel (age 46), said that for him it had been 'very easy to adapt' to his life in Dallas. Abel compared his current place of residence to the northern Mexican industrial hub of Monterrey, where he used to live. Abel thought that 'if you have been in big cities in Mexico you

have no reason for feeling weird or that you don't fit. Things [in Dallas] are very similar, except for the longer distances'. However, Abel saw his adaptation based more on geographical spaces rather than in social interactions. When I asked him if he felt he fitted into American society his answer was 'I don't feel different to them, but I don't know if I am integrated'.

6.5.1 Camouflaging

When I mentioned to Lisa (age 40) that I was somewhat surprised by how differently she, her husband and friends, behaved from what is routinely expected from undocumented migrants; she explained to me that they have learned to 'camouflage' themselves. She introduced me to 'camouflaging' as an everyday strategy for interactions and relations with the US society. She explained that her behaviour was in opposition to what she thought was characteristic of the mass of 'illegals'. For instance, she did not like her children to use hybrid words (*pochismos*) or for them to speak Spanish outside her household if there were non-Spanish-speakers present. She avoided going to 'ethnic' neighbourhoods, but overall she described her behaviour as 'living a normal life' and not 'living with fear'.

[W]e are not fearful of others; we are not afraid of talking to the neighbours and we are not hiding...Here if you don't act as if you are equal to the rest, they will eat you. If you let others treat you as if you were less, they will treat you as such... We try to have a normal life and I think we do live very normally.

She mentioned to me that she recently had to call the police because she accidentally drove over the gas pipes fearing that she had possibly caused a gas leak. She thought it would have been unlikely that a typical undocumented migrant would have called the police to check on their house. However, she explained that she knew the police would not check her immigration status because of this situation.

'Camouflaging' was a strategy that my respondents themselves put into practice to remain 'unnoticed' as undocumented migrants, disguising

themselves as 'normal'. My respondents aimed to look and act 'normally' and to avoid being associated with 'illegal immigrants'. This conscious move went beyond racial features and was rather based on behavioural strategies and modes of self-representation, including dress codes, residing in suburban areas and possession of automobiles and goods that denoted purchasing power. However, to a large extent they bought brand clothes, furniture and bric-a-brac in garage sales of wealthy neighbourhoods.

Lisa worked as a domestic, yet she saw her social life as independent to what she did for a living. Lisa as well as other women and men from this cohort had learned to adopt a 'pragmatic' approach about the fact that they had attained higher education or held skilled or semi-skilled jobs in their places of origin, and yet were working in low-paid jobs in the USA. They came to terms with this by thinking that the economic gains they could obtain in the country where they had migrated to were higher than those of their home country.

Tajfel's (1974) work of social categorisation and social identity explained how an individual's self concept derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group, together with the emotional significance attached to that membership. Implicit in this is that identity is defined also by the exclusion of other social groups. Even if this cohort, in realistic terms, did not form part of a legal residents' group, they perceived themselves as different to the bulk of undocumented migrants and therefore did not consider themselves as part of what is conventionally thought of the undocumented.

This strategy of camouflaging, albeit having worked to a certain extent for these individuals, would hardly be applicable at a collective level. Its underlying principles were social distancing from and rejecting of the cultural targets of nativist criticisms. Hence if camouflaging were a massively adopted strategy, the element of distinction would become blurred as there would be a less defined body from which to differentiate, distance from and act in opposition to.

6.5.2 Spatial assimilation

Massey and Mullan (1984), Massey and Bitterman (1985), Massey and Denton (1985), Cutler et al (2007) and Cutler and Vigdor (2008) are some of the scholars who have analysed how residential locations influence people's social and economic well-being, specifically in relation to minorities' assimilation experiences and socioeconomic advances. They have argued that health, quality of education, access to employment opportunities, exposure to crime and social prestige depend to a large extent on where one lives. Cutler et al (2007) concluded that it is beneficial for skilled groups to be isolated from the less skilled majority as this positively impacts on the skilled group's accumulation of human capital.

This Dallas sample aimed for a dispersion of their group members and for opening their contact with others than ethnic peers. None of the Dallas respondents lived in 'ethnic' neighbourhoods. For the majority of this sample, their residential choices were a conscious and planned move to have access to good schools for their children, safe areas, and areas that were not massively populated by ethnic minorities. What had been dissonant with these patterns was that their employment opportunities had remained limited to blue collar jobs because of their irregular migratory status and despite their educational attainment.

6.5.3 Sources of appreciation

This cohort's interactions with lower social classes were infrequent, nevertheless two of my female respondents, Emma (age 38) and Lisa, formed part of a church group in which they interacted with working-class Mexicans, Mexican-Americans and Latinos in general. This women's group met on a weekly basis at church for religious study and on a monthly rolling basis at the household of each group member for informal friendly gatherings.

In these groups, women of lower socio-economic status generally sought the advice and help of their better positioned acquaintances, whether for trivial queries or for important matters such as paying off debts, health issues, children's education and issues of marital life. On one occasion, Emma was approached by one of the church group women asking for help to pay off her rent or she would be evicted from her house. Emma asked other parishioners for clothes and unwanted items for donation and organised a garage sale in which all the profit would be for paying off this debt. The response in donations from the church community was positive and the money resulting from the garage sale greatly contributed to the cause.

Similarly a common acquaintance of Emma and Lisa sought their help when her husband had severely hit her and her children. Emma and Lisa advised her to notify the police. However, their acquaintance refused to do so, as she felt that she would be jeopardising her and her family's stay in the United States because of their irregular migratory status.

The fact that these interactions were framed by religious principles meant that my respondents' opinions towards the modus vivendi of these women, though still disapproving, were less so. Emma said that she felt pleased when people sought her help, but that she could not help others if they did not help themselves first.

I always have told people that they need to improve themselves (*superarse*). They came to this country to improve their situation, but this improvement should not only be economic, it should be a personal improvement, [in order to] become a better human being... These people cannot help their children with their school homework because they do not know the language. Work is their excuse, but if they dedicated three hours a week [to study English] they could be better parents by helping their children... I don't know if they like me to say these things to them or if they are annoyed by my comments, but I like to say things straight.

The Dallas respondents did not see their own Mexicanness negatively; rather they saw it in distinction from what is typically assumed of Mexican migrants

in the USA, particularly the undocumented. Yet, they differentiated themselves from undocumented Mexican migrants in diverse ways, the most evident being social class, English proficiency, non-‘ethnic’ area of residence, and educational attainment. They used this othering in both ‘inclusionary’ and ‘exclusionary’ (Canales 2000) manners. They excluded ‘the other’ undocumented migrants distancing themselves from what is stereotypically perceived of undocumented migrants, and they used their better economic positioning as an advantage in power relations with these others. Yet, they included ‘the other’ when they aspired for social recognition of lower-class compatriots, as it was illustrated with the cases of the women in the church group.

Ethnicity and nationality in common were not enough for the Dallas respondents to perceive themselves as part of the same group of undocumented Mexican migrants in the USA. Ethnicity, as earlier discussed is overtly problematic and fragmented. The attitudes and stereotypes associated with undocumented migrants in the USA were indispensable for the Dallas respondents’ strategies for integration, as they used the latter as behavioural indicators to act in opposition to.

6.6 Sunville: ambivalent, situational and contradictory belonging

After having examined the diverse strategies for integration of the Dallas respondents, in the following section I will discuss the everyday interactions of the working-class, rural-origin Sunville cohort. In contrast with the Dallas cohort, the Sunville sample was immersed in an ethnic neighbourhood where social relations outside the community were rare, not sought after and practically unnecessary. The Sunville sample, at first glance, could fit well into what Nelson and Tienda (1988) and Novak (1996) referred to as ‘unmeltable ethnics’.

Sunville respondents, owing to their limited knowledge of another language than Spanish, to their previous acquaintanceship and in some instances kinship, to their well-established social and solidarity networks, to their undocumented status and consequent distrust and suspicion towards strangers, and to the possibility of living their everyday lives within the confines of the neighbourhood; had infrequent social interactions with non co-ethnics and those outside their neighbourhood.

There were well-established networks of communication and specific venues which permitted the rapid and uncomplicated transmission of social and cultural capital. For instance, some respondents had established an informal economy and way of subsistence by providing transportation in their own cars to other neighbours and acquaintances who did not have a car. This was especially useful for domestic workers and babysitters who could not reach their workplaces by public transport. Also, women like Margarita (age 48), had adapted their households to provide eating areas to sell prepared meals. Her clients had access to her services only through a sort of 'minimum-term membership'⁶⁵. These venues were conduits for the transmission of information about employment opportunities, accommodation, as well as of local and transnational gossip.

As Mario, from the Dallas cohort argued in relation to his employees, these respondents spent their leisure time mainly socialising amongst co-ethnics and in their native language. Yet, their situation is not as simple as Mario might see it. Most of these respondents had a problematic sense of identity and were ambivalent as to where they belonged. This cohort had a dual frame of reference which influenced their identity and mode of self-representation. This duality affected their relations within Sunville and towards the USA, and towards Mexico and Ocuilan. However, these patterns were not collectively uniform.

⁶⁵ Margarita asked her clients to pay up-front for a minimum number of meals during a specific period of time. This way she ensured that she prepared sufficient food and that she would not be wasting groceries unnecessarily and having leftovers for following days.

Their views towards the USA and the 'mainstream' varied, were situational and were sometimes contradictory. Most of the Sunville respondents expressed gratitude, admiration and appreciation towards the USA. That country had given them the opportunity to achieve economic standards that were perceived as difficult, if not impossible, to achieve if they had stayed in their places of origin. They admired the USA for its tidiness, order, modernity, abundance in resources and opportunities, infrastructure and quality of life, among other things.

At the same time, they were aware that their limitations in language and legal status would not allow them to become full members of US mainstream society, at least not for the first generation. Some, however, aspired to belong and be able to participate in US society. Ana (age 49), an organiser for the 2006 mobilisations for migration reform, broke into tears when saying: 'I love this country, my children grew up here, we have made our lives here, but I can't avoid having mixed emotions and feeling resentment against this country. Here I am not free and my job and my efforts are not appreciated'.

There was no uniform reaction to senses of belonging and national identity. These could take various paths and respond to specific moments, surroundings and circumstances (Wise and Velayuthman 2006, Zimmerman et al 2006). Take the following example: to celebrate Mexican independence, Margarita, the neighbourhood manager, invited her neighbours to her house. On this occasion, the attendees talked about being proud of their origin and history, and recounted their homesickness, difficulties and challenges faced by being abroad. Some were dressed in national costumes or had national distinctive elements in their outfits. Similarly, the venue was decorated with folkloric elements, such as flags, sombreros and balloons matching the colours of the Mexican flag. However, this pride was rather ephemeral and a response to a fervour fuelled by the moment.



Photograph 13. Mexican and Central American Independence Celebrations

Contrastingly, in everyday life, Mexico was rejected and even cursed by some respondents. Gladis (age 23) complained about her ‘having had to be born’ in Mexico (*tuve que nacer en ese país*). She made clear that she would have preferred to have been born on US soil, so that she could have the rights and benefits that American citizens enjoy. Gladis’ partner, Benja (age 20) also wished the United States had conquered, bought, or invaded the whole of Mexico so that all of the country would be part of the USA. Benja thought that if this had happened, Mexico would have similar standards of living to the USA, and he would have a comparable economic situation to the ‘gringos’. Also, they felt they no longer belonged to Mexico because they had ‘progressed’ enough so that they could not fit any more into the Mexican way of life.

Mexico was frequently associated in the discourse of this milieu with poverty, socioeconomic inequality, corruption, ineffective governments, insecurity, and limited opportunities for economic improvement. Still, Mexico was often yearned for. Mexico was the origin of their customs, language, history and beliefs. For many, it was also the place where remaining family members resided; therefore a perennial emotional link persisted. Their efforts were oriented to meet the needs of the family members who had remained in Mexico. As documented by Aguis-Vallejo and Lee (2009) migrants who were

brought up in economic difficulties, such as those living in Sunville, retained a collectivist orientation and a strong sense of family obligation and responsibility for giving back to their poorer family and extended kin.

Most of the Sunville respondents were not concerned about fitting into the US mainstream society and were aware of their limitations for full membership of it, owing mainly to their undocumented status. Rather, they were interested in obtaining the social recognition from their immediate social circles in Sunville and from their societies of origin. They aspired to make it possible for themselves and their kin in Mexico to climb the socioeconomic ladder and consequently to have the recognition and respect from those they cared about. In the United States they had social, economic and legal limitations; in their places of origin they were instead socially recognised for their efforts and economic achievements.

6.6.1 Morality

My respondents had generally disapproving views towards US culture and society, especially when talking about children's education and family values. Parents largely condemned (im)moral attitudes and the lack of close family relations of (white) Americans. The principles, family ethics and values that, according to my interviewees, characterised Mexican society were considered superior. In this sense, first-generation migrants agreed that their 'ethnic' morality was preferable to 'deviant' American family life. Parents largely preferred their children to be brought up in Mexico, away from a corrupted US society. Melchor, for instance, preferred that his daughters (living in Ocuilan) would not come in contact with a US culture he considered morally-wrong. For those whose children were living in the USA, parents strove for future generations to maintain their (Mexican) original customs and traditions. Issues of gender were of crucial importance for this, being mainly manifested in parents trying to safeguard the virginity, or being overcautious about, their daughters' sexuality.

Cynthia, Reyna and Justino's US-born teenage daughter, nevertheless held more flexible views towards the society in which she was growing up. Furthermore, she believed the situations her parents were fearful about, happened not only in the USA, but also in Mexico.

At school there are girls who have got pregnant when they are 14 or 15 years old but not too many. A lot of guys and girls smoke and some say that others are involved in drugs. But I think that those guys have no role models, I think that their families are separated or that they are left to do whatever they want. I don't think this situation only happens in America, I think that in Mexico it happens too. [It happens] in cities mainly, but as my parents come from a small town (*son de un pueblito*), they get afraid easily and think that here all is full of malice.

Mexicans by no means, have been the only groups confronted by these dilemmas. Stepick et al (2001), Espiritu (2003, 2003b, 2009), Kibria (2009), Zhou (2009), among others have amply discussed intergenerational divergent views towards children of migrants' education and issues of cultural dissonance (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). First and subsequent generations, as has also been discussed by the above-named scholars, do have different paths for assimilation, acculturation and integration. Discussing the latter, however, is beyond the scope of this work. Nevertheless, intergenerational clashes have long included discrepancies between parents and offspring in dating and sexual attitudes which have influenced migrants' paths for integration in the new society. Second generations are especially implicated in forging new ethnic identities and in more general processes of integration for themselves, their parents and their offspring (Mahler and Pessar 2006).

6.6.2 Gender matters

As documented by Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994), Pessar (1999, 2005), Parreñas (2005), Boehm (2004, 2008, 2012), among others; gender plays a key role for conceptualisations and emotional attachments towards home and host societies. Women typically feel more positively attached to their lifestyle in the United States than to the one they had in Mexico. This is largely because women

acquire a greater sense of economic independence, are subject to less rigid moralities and less evident power imbalances between the sexes, also they experience a sense of liberation and a redefinition of femininity.

In general, these patterns apply to the female respondents of this cohort. Esperanza (age 56) for instance, felt that in Sunville people did not judge her about having remarried and later separated because her second marriage did not work out. People in Ocuilan used to gossip about her, but her own children (also living in Mexico) were the most critical about Esperanza's situation. Reyna (age 38) enjoyed economic success which was recognised in Sunville and Ocuilan alike. In Sunville she helped her husband Justino with managing their construction-related business. She helped him out with calculating overall gains and expenses of each work and to determine the salary to be paid to Justino's employees⁶⁶. In Ocuilan, she was able to financially assist her remaining family members. Also Reyna and Justino had built one of the biggest houses in Ocuilan which was proof of their financial stability. Margarita (age 48) felt that she had reached a state of self-realisation after being the first woman in her family to leave the home town and who did 'something different'. Moreover, she had reached a position of authority within the neighbourhood in Sunville as she was the neighbourhood manager. Angela (age 52) believed that by having being both a housewife and a worker in the USA, she had been able to provide an example of responsibility and perseverance to her children. She was proud that she had raised *gente de bien* (good people).

On the other hand, migration had a different meaning for men and their male identities. Scholars have discussed how, in societies with long out-migration traditions, migration can be a pathway for masculinity, a rite of passage to manhood and a sort of moral and social obligation to demonstrate men's ability to provide for their families (Pessar 1999, 2005; Kandel and Massey 2002,

⁶⁶ Justino's employees did not receive a fixed salary and they were not paid until Justino had calculated and deducted his own expenses such as construction material, petrol for his vehicle, food and accommodation (if they needed to stay on-site overnight), among other things.

Boehm 2004, 2008; Mahler and Pessar 2006, Broughton 2008). Migrant men redefine their male identities by undertaking domestic chores which, in places of origin, were traditionally performed only by women. For men who are employed in food preparation cleaning, washing dishes, or similar jobs, they are arguably and paradoxically 'feminised' in their workplaces (Boehm 2004, 2008). However, men often justify their taking up of traditionally-viewed female jobs, reiterating that, as migrants, their employment opportunities are limited; at the same time, they come to recognise the physically challenging nature of these occupations (Datta et al 2009).

Amongst my sample, men whose immediate and extended family members resided in the place of origin generally aimed for a more speedy return to their homelands and were occasionally troubled by divided sentiments and loyalties between places of origin and residence. Melchor (age 44) expressed nostalgia over being at home and away from his wife and children; however he 'knew [he] was more useful' by earning dollars. Jorge (age 29) said he was grateful for the economic opportunities he had in the USA, but he was concerned he would not be able to reach a similar standard of living if he returned to Mexico. Also, he missed having a family life and the more relaxed lifestyle of Ocuilan. Some other migrant men valued the economic rewards they had achieved in the USA, while at the same time demonstrating with national symbols their attachments to places of origin. Lolo (age 26), for example, had tattooed the name and coat of arms of Ocuilan on his arm and upper back. Jorge and Justino (age 40) had stamps on their cars of images of the Virgin of Guadalupe, of their Mexican football teams and of the Mexican flag. They mentioned it was likely they would have not done the same in Ocuilan.

In general, conventional ideas about migrants' integration, acculturation and ethnic retention might not be as simple and straightforward as Mario (from the Dallas sample), for instance, might assume and oversimplify. Migrants' identity, sense of belonging and processes of integration, even for those living in ethnic neighbourhoods and whose social relations are primarily with co-ethnics, are very complex, situational, contradictory and dependent on a

plethora of resources and elements such as class, gender, sense of community and family cohesiveness as well as cultural, legal and economic barriers.

6.7 Summary

The first generations of whichever waves of migration have struggled to become full members of the societies in which they have arrived. First generations are often confronted with barriers for relating with the host society, such as not speaking the same language, having a different scale of values and beliefs, being positioned and perceived (self-perception as well as outside labelling) as subjects of discrimination or subordination. Newcomers are typically troubled with an identity and belonging dilemma in which they hold ambivalent sentiments towards both countries of origin and residence.

In this chapter, I analysed how the Dallas and Sunville cohorts negotiated their everyday relations in the societies where they resided. Class, origin, educational attainment, the maintenance of transnational relations and gender all played a fundamental role in the meanings and paths for integration, identity and sense of belonging. Similarly, the social context from which the migrant came, as well as the surrounding context in the place of residence were decisive for future economic and social moves. I exemplified the latter with the contrasting stories Luis and Melchor.

Migrants from both cohorts presented contrasting differences that were mainly based on the accumulation of social, cultural and human capital and on the ways these were used for the relations with the mainstream society and with ethnic peers.

The sample in Dallas made conscious uses of strategies for incorporating to the mainstream by ‘camouflaging’ and distancing themselves from Mexican stereotypical behaviours and ethnic residential concentrations. My findings are consistent with Shinnar’s (2008) observations on Mexican immigrants who are

negatively socially perceived in US society. She suggested that Mexican immigrants who react to stereotyping and discrimination employ three different mechanisms to cope with their devalued social identity. These are individual mobility, social creativity and social competition. It could be said that the Dallas respondents practised these three mechanisms, though through different everyday life strategies than the ones Shinnar observed. Their 'individual mobility' made reference to how migrants aimed to dissociate themselves from a group with which they shared ethnic, cultural and national origins. Their 'camouflaging' strategies could fit into what Shinnar referred to as 'social creativity' as they tried to secure a positive self-identity by finding different dimensions to evaluate themselves in relation to other groups. Finally, their ambitions for upward mobility and for integration into the mainstream society were indicative of an implicit 'social competition' with the rest of Mexican undocumented immigrants, in which they aimed to be better than them.

On the other hand, Sunville migrants' social interactions with the 'mainstream' US society largely differed from their Dallas counterparts. Sunville migrants had rather sporadic interactions with the 'mainstream' and for the most part considered social exchanges unnecessary. Nevertheless, they had developed a fluid and sometimes contradictory identity and sense of belonging towards home and host societies. These were as Rouse (2004: 31) termed, 'bi-focal' depending on situations and contexts of power relations, economic achievements and opportunities, the economic and political situation of the sending society, as well as gender and parental roles at societies of both origin and destination.

Regardless of these differences, owing to their undocumented status, both cohorts of migrants were often denied full access to and membership of institutions, and equal opportunities in the job market, or were not able to exercise political and social rights reserved for citizens and/or legal residents. These observations will be discussed in the following chapters.

Chapter 7: Separation and emotional distance

Migration is a process highly charged with emotion. Migrants and their families staying behind enter into a process in which they have to learn to live with each other's physical absences. They have to adapt to new family dynamics in their everyday lives. They have to cope with new surroundings (structural and ideological), new responsibilities, and often to redefine their familial roles. However, the study of emotions has, until recent times, been overlooked in the social sciences, and the sociology of migration is no exception.

Barbalet (2002) and Svasek (2005) have both noted that for most of the twentieth century social scientists assumed that rational thinking was necessary and sufficient for the development of scientific knowledge, emotions had therefore gone unrecognised in the scientific discourse. In recent decades, however, social scientists have begun to focus on the role of emotions both as innate, universal human characteristics and as cultural constructs in social life (Svasek 2005). Hochschild (1975) explains that sociologists have neglected studying emotions scientifically, because as sociologists, they belong to the same society as the subjects who are studied, hence feelings and values are also shared. However, she warned that social reality would be poorly understood if sociologists neglected to study feelings and emotions. She also suggested that social scientists should not ignore the physiological elements of emotions, just as natural scientists should not see emotions just as 'motored by instinct' (Hochschild 1998: 11). Lutz and White (1986) similarly discussed how emotions had been scientifically relegated in the social sciences. Emotions had been treated as biologically constituted, occupying more natural and psychobiological provinces of human experience. Social scientists, they argued, saw emotions as relatively uniform, uninteresting and inaccessible to their analysis. Bendelow and Williams (1998) argued that emotions are often still seen as the antithesis of reason, objectivity, truth and wisdom. They

pointed out the necessity to rethink the relation between knowledge and emotion and to construct conceptual models that demonstrate the mutually constitutive (and not oppositional) relation between knowledge and emotion. Considering the latter, it is not surprising that the study of emotions in the context of transnational migrant families is a recent and growing field.

Skrbis (2008: 236) notes that emotions had been simply seen ‘as a convenient and occasional resource called upon to explain certain peculiarities of transnational family life’. He argues that emotions instead ‘need to be seen as constitutive part of the transnational family experience itself’. In transnational families, migrants and those staying behind are separated by distance, but linked by bilateral emotional ties, or by what Wise and Velayutham (2006) call ‘transnational affect’. Members of transnational families have to go through adaptations and to learn to live with the physical absences of one another over time. Herrera-Lima (2001), Levitt (2001, 2002), Suarez-Orozco et al (2002), Wolf (2002), Boehm (2004, 2012), Parreñas (2005), Baldassar (2007), Dreby (2009), Foner (2009), Menjivar and Abrego (2009), Zhou (2009) are some of the scholars who have started to explore the social links, patterns, relations and family dynamics occurring in the privacy of migrants’ households, especially of those living in the United States⁶⁷. Their studies have analysed events and processes that take place in the privacy of immigrant transnational families, such as intergenerational tensions, acculturation and identity issues, meanings of home and gendered provision of care, among others.

Further research is called for to build on these understandings, to explore how emotional exchanges shape the migration experience in the privacy of transnational families’ dynamics, and how they can change over time, affecting the renegotiation of gender roles and authority positions. Hence, in this chapter, I explore how emotions in intra-family relations are linked to and influence the migration experience for migrants and those staying behind. My analysis is based upon two broad topics, namely the handling and consequences of

⁶⁷ Baldassar (2007) is an exception in the above mentioned list of authors, as she studied transnationalism of Italian migrants in Australia.

absences resulting from migration; and the consequences of different modes of transnational communication within transnational families.

In the first part, I study how absences that result from migration are dealt with among family members using Pauline Boss's (1999) 'ambiguous loss' theory. I examine and illustrate how transnational family members gradually became 'emotionally distant' as a result of prolonged (and often indefinite) absences and ambiguous losses. Likewise, I discuss how with the passage of time, economic goods and remittances become a substitute for affection and emotional exchanges. Finally, I look at the flipside of absences, by arguing that separations can also result in improved personal relationships.

In the second part of this chapter, I examine how technology has helped transnational families to deal with physical absences and compare and discuss the consequences of maintaining familial links through telephone (mobile and landline), or through internet technologies such as email and internet-based social networks.

Part 1

7.1 Separations, absences and emotions

Migration has become a feature of contemporary societies, giving rise to a growing number of transnational families. These families, separated by distance, develop, maintain and negotiate emotional bonds and emotional exchanges and cope with absences in diverse ways (Baldassar 2007). However, the very nature of migration often makes members of transnational families live in continuous ambivalence. Migrants typically go through 'adjustment, settlement, nostalgia, a shattered sense of belonging, renewal, loss, discrimination, abrupt endings, new beginnings and new opportunities, all potent sources of emotions' (Skrbis 2008: 236).

In addition, migration can have destabilising effects in the family, creating particular pressures on family relationships and generating interfamilial conflicts, particularly if there were pre-existing tensions between family members (Sluzki 1979). Migration involves considerable costs that are rarely deeply considered at the moment of departure. These entail not only economic disbursements, but emotional, health-related and physical costs (Suarez-Orozco C. 2005). As Lee-Treweek (2010: 207) argued, the emotional costs of migration

can include feelings of loss of the usual emotional order of their country of origin, stress and anxiety, worry about those left at home and sadness at unfulfilled dreams, either in their old lives or post-migration. On the positive side, there may be feelings of aspiration, hope, camaraderie, supportive friendships and a pride in one's achievement in settling in a new place.

Within the intrafamilial context, the emotional costs of migration are not necessarily distributed equitably among family members. The unequal distribution of affect can be directed and performed by migrants or non-migrants alike. Baldassar (2007) noted that there are cases of transnational families who provide support and emotional exchanges to certain family members but not to others. Migration can create admiration and recognition for some; while for others it can mean abandonment, uncertainty and differences of opinion or tensions. These emotions can be directed towards and experienced by both migrants and non-migrants staying behind.

Transnational families, despite being separated by distance, generally retain expectations and obligations among their families to keep in touch (Baldassar 2007). However, it is not always possible, or desired, for family members to be present and to take part in each others' lives. Families wishing to 'stay in touch' need to invest substantial time, skills and effort. Because of a lack of spare time, lack of resources, aloofness, or other reasons; this is not something which all migrant families are willing and/or able to do (Baldassar 2007).

Some migrants can be praised for the emotional and physical sacrifice entailed in migration while others can be blamed for the family's physical separation. Some might be seen as heroes or brave entrepreneurs while others can be seen as villains or victims. Parents may be seen as either hardworking or as abandoning their children. And children can have relationships with their parents either showing their gratitude or becoming distant and practically strangers (Levitt 2001, Falicov 2005b, Parreñas 2005, 2005b; Rumbaut 2005, Baldassar 2007, Dreby 2009, Zhou 2009).

Scholars analysing by gender and generation the emotional costs of migration and family separation have generally agreed that mothers who leave their children behind are the ones who are blamed more heavily for family abandonment (Parreñas 2005). Mothers are also the ones who have to invest most time and resources to keep a healthy relationship with their families. Migrant men, either parents or children, on the other hand, are rarely stigmatised for 'the abandonment' of their families and are allowed (and sometimes even expected) to be 'emotional parasites' (Parreñas 2005) who rarely demonstrate their emotions. As Baldassar (2008) found, being a 'good' parent or child tends to be associated with how closely linked and actively mutually involved the family members' lives are felt to be.

In addition to the gendered differences as to how family members stay in touch, experience separation, and miss those from whom they are separated, Baldassar (2008) noted that transnational families manifest their emotions of 'missing' and 'longing for' people in at least four different ways. These four key ways were through words or discursively, physically or through the body, through actions or practice and through the imagination or ideas.

Furthermore, when family separations are inconclusive, and when the timeframe for family reunification is unclear, migrants and those staying behind tend to create mental constructions of the life and realities of the people they are not physically with (Boss 1999, 2007). These mental constructions will be followed up and further explained in Chapter 8. Pauline Boss (1999)

coined the concept of ‘ambiguous loss’ to understand the absences resulting from migration, when a person is present in the memories of others but is physically absent⁶⁸. She claimed that, in ambiguous losses, separations remain unclear and family members live paradoxically between absence and presence. They can occur at extreme levels of disaster or simply in everyday life (Boss 2007: 107).

Falicov (2005), following Boss’s (1999) ambiguous loss theory, explained that these losses are characterised by an uprooting of a system of meanings that provided familiarity with a physical, social and cultural environment (Falicov 2003: 283, 284). Also she argued that the losses resulting from migration are both larger and smaller than the losses of death. She claimed that they are larger because they bring with them losses of all kinds. The migrant’s family, friends, native language, rituals, and homeland are left behind in the society of origin. Migrants therefore experience a ‘cultural mourning’ (Ainslie 2005). Not only people are mourned, but also culture itself, which is inseparable from the loved ones with whom it is associated. Yet migration losses are smaller because all that provided familiarity in the migrant’s everyday life is still alive, only not currently reachable or present (Falicov 2005). Migrants and their families always have the possibility to fantasise about eventual return or reunion. Furthermore, migrants rarely migrate toward a social vacuum. Making use of their social networks, they tend to go to where they have friends and relatives (Durand and Massey 2003); hence they do not necessarily relocate to completely alien surroundings.

As I will explain in the discussion of my observations, migrants and non-migrants often coped with separations by eventually ‘becoming used’ to people’s absences. This becoming accustomed occurred at both places of origin and destination, temporarily or in the long-term, and without necessarily going through abrupt separations or tragic situations. This phenomenon, to which I refer as ‘emotional distance’, will be discussed in the next section.

⁶⁸ Boss (1999) also uses the concept of ambiguous loss when a person is physically present but psychologically unavailable, for example persons with mental illnesses.

The ways in which my respondents coped with absences and separations depended to a large extent upon individual families and relationships as well as the pre-migration familial relations within a household. Moreover, issues of gender and generation also played an important role. Social class and demographic origin were not decisive as to how migrants and non-migrants of my different cohorts felt and coped with the physical absences of their family members.

7.2 Emotional distance and ‘doing fine’

The migrants and non-migrants of my samples, being challenged by distance, by regular access to internet-based live communication (see Part 2 of this Chapter), by demanding workloads and a lack of spare time, along with their undocumented legal status and the consequent limited ability to travel; rarely manifested their emotions physically between them. However, they did so in the other three ways that Baldassar (2008) enumerated: discursively, practically and in the imagination. They kept contact through telephone conversations and by the sending and receiving of remittances and presents and others through internet media (see Part 2). They also continually imagined the everyday lives of their kin on the other side of the border (see Chapter 8).

However, I observed that independently of the contact maintained discursively, through actions and imagination; some migrants and their kin seemed to be satisfied with or resigned to knowing that the others were ‘doing fine’, without further efforts to maintain the emotional intensity of their relationships. This social phenomenon, to which I refer as ‘emotional distance’ occurred mainly as a result of being resigned to or content with sporadic emotional contact. The links between those who stayed and those who left were instead routinely limited to economic remittances in order to demonstrate and affirm the commitment, responsibility and links between the two parties.

The notion of ‘emotional distance’ has been previously employed in similar tenors by other scholars. Zhou (2009: 38) made reference to ‘emotional distance’ when explaining that Chinese ‘parachute children’⁶⁹ become used to living away from home and feel more emotionally distant from their parents’. She described situations in which children became detached from their elder family members, and the communication between children and their parents and grandparents became a matter of routine along with a decreasing frequency of telephone calls over time.

Similarly, Parreñas (2005) discussed ‘the gap’ that developed between migrant parents and their children in which distance in time and space weakened intergenerational relations. She argued that temporal and geographical separation breed unfamiliarity within transnational family life. She noted that children of migrant mothers felt abandoned and expected their mothers to suffer for them and to demonstrate the suffering. On the other hand, children saw their absent fathers as fulfilling a ‘good provider’ role. Furthermore, she pointed to how it was socially acceptable for men to become ‘emotional parasites’ who rarely communicated with their children.

The above-mentioned works studied the emotional distance mainly from the point of view of the children. Parreñas (2005) did not investigate how parents experienced ‘the gap’. Likewise Zhou (2009) explained emotional distancing as an occurrence between children and older generations, but did not explore this in other familial relations.

Looking at spousal relations, Hellman (2008) discussed the indifferent and infrequent communication women from Veracruz (Mexico) maintained with their migrant husbands in New York. These women admitted having only a vague idea of the place where their migrant husbands resided and of how much

⁶⁹ ‘Parachute children’ are a highly select group of foreign students aged 8 to 17 who have arrived to the United States (or elsewhere), mostly from Asia, to seek education there elementary or high schools. As the name suggests, they have been dropped off abroad to go to school on their own (Zhou 1998: 683).

money they earned. Similarly, Hellman found an open tolerance towards male infidelity as long as men did not fail to provide economic remittances. Migrants also sometimes restricted the information they shared with their families staying behind. Kyle (2000 cited in Parreñas 2005) discussed how Ecuadorian male migrants in New York and Europe consciously limited the information they shared with their wives in Ecuador about their everyday lives abroad. They did this as a strategy of gender control, especially in relation to issues concerning their sexual life and fidelity.

In my fieldwork I observed that some migrants and non-migrants rarely communicated events which were out of their routine conversations during their telephone calls. Also, the responsibility to maintain contact between transnational family members largely fell on the migrants and not on those who stayed behind. The migrants were for the most part, the ones who called, texted via mobile phone, and, of course, who sent economic remittances to their kin in Mexico. This situation arose mainly from the migrants' variable work schedules and the cheaper prices of telephone calls from the USA to Mexico (see Part 2).

Several participants in this study (from both urban and rural origins) held sporadic communication with their kin and made do with knowing whether the others were 'doing fine' assuming that 'no news is good news' and that 'bad news travel fast'. I have termed these 'emotionally distant' relations. These happened more frequently amongst transnational families whose communication was infrequent and limited to telephone and conventional mail. They happened between parents and children, migrants and their respective parents and in spousal relations.

I observed that in transnational family relations, men were generally content with fulfilling their roles as breadwinners and seemed uninterested in inquiring about aspects such as children's school performance, children's dating practices, or private family life situations. Men migrants generally preferred not getting involved in problematic family situations. Migrant women in

contrast, generally made substantial efforts to stay involved in the everyday lives of their non-migrant relatives including, of course, the emotional aspects. Non-migrant women, who did not take the initiative to contact their migrant relatives, could also fall into emotionally distant relations for a variety of reasons. In addition, non-migrant female participants (wives, mothers, daughters) seldom communicated information which could cause concern to their migrant relatives. These women often thought that their male migrant relatives had 'enough' to worry about in their everyday lives as undocumented workers. The non-migrants generally claimed they did not need to give their migrant relatives further reasons to be worried.

Also, regardless of the socio-demographic origin of my respondents, emotionally distant family members also compensated for the lack of affection by economic remittances, as will be detailed later. This finding is not new. Levitt (2001) observed how some Dominican migrants in Boston fell into a vicious cycle of showing affection mainly through the sending of goods and money. Correspondingly, the beneficiaries, initially indebted and grateful, gradually took the remittances for granted. This ultimately resulted in a lack of interest in emotional exchanges.

In order to illustrate an instance of an emotionally-distant transnational family, I will discuss Melchor's (Sunville, age 44) and his family's case. Melchor, as detailed in Chapter 6, left his country lifestyle in Ocuilan when he migrated for the second time to Sunville. His wife and all but one of his children stayed in Mexico. In Sunville, he shared a house with (among others) his son Benja and with Esperanza (to whom he was not related by kin), both from Ocuilan. Some houses away lived his brother Justino together with his wife Reyna and their three US-born children. Also his nephew Jorge, Lolo (not a relative), as well as some other relatives, friends and acquaintances from his hometown, lived nearby. Melchor's wife and children in Ocuilan lived in close proximity to relatives of Justino and Jorge. These transnational close-knit networks linking Sunville and Ocuilan allowed for the rapid communication of events occurring on either side.

Melchor called his wife and children every time he made a money transfer because he got ten minutes of free telephone calls to Mexico. These telephone calls generally occurred every four weeks and he usually limited his conversations with his family in Ocuilan to these courtesy minutes. In Sunville, he did not have a landline, nor did he have a mobile phone. He rarely bought prepaid telephone cards, but did so when he needed to communicate without delay and personally and not through secondary sources. In this case, other residents of both Sunville and Ocuilan played key roles for the transmission of information of events and occurrences happening in either community. Melchor's family in Mexico rarely attempted to contact him. When they did so, they called Justino's house either leaving him a message or asking Melchor to call back to Ocuilan.

Despite the infrequent communication Melchor sustained with his family in his home town in Mexico, they had developed an ambiguous mixture of emotions; such as indebtedness, indifference and empathy. Melchor was typically uninterested about what happened in Ocuilan within his family. His role was mainly that of breadwinner and he was unconcerned about private or intimate events of his wife and children.

The sacrifice that he, as the migrant, made for the benefit of the family had strong effects on how his family thought of him. Melchor's daughter, Gilda (Ocuilan, age 23), felt a sense of debt and gratitude. This was mainly because of the fact that her father had left for California to 'give them school and education'. Therefore, she felt she had to put into practice her father's advice as he was the person who was away from the family.

Despite the gratitude Gilda and her siblings felt towards their father, Melchor's family in Mexico, taking advantage of his lack of curiosity about family events, rarely communicated to him important occurrences in the household. For example Eva (Ocuilan, age 41), Melchor's wife, had been working for several months without him knowing about it. Eva had not told Melchor about this as

he had a firm conviction that women should dedicate themselves to their families and households.

Eva: He [Melchor] didn't know that I work. But as the children had grown up, I didn't need to be in the house all day and it was a little extra money. Sometimes he sent me less because he said he had not worked. He said things [mainly referring to the economic and work situation in the USA] were very difficult and he couldn't send me more.

Gabriela: How did he find out?

Eva: He could not cover all the expenses we had. The kids needed more money because they were studying and it was very difficult for him to send us more. So I told him he shouldn't worry too much, that I had some money saved because I had been working. At the beginning he got upset but then as he had too many expenses he felt obliged to let me work (*se vio en la necesidad de dejarme trabajar*).

Another example of the vague communication in Melchor's family was the case of Gilda's party. After she finished Normal school, Melchor sent money, on top of the monthly remittances, in order to throw a party for her. Gilda was the only person, let alone the only woman, in the family who had completed higher education. At the time of interview, however, four months after Melchor sent the money and five months after Gilda's graduation ceremony, the party had not taken place. The money was instead used for making repairs to the house. Nevertheless this was never communicated to Melchor:

Gilda: Here we cannot save with what he sends... we cannot spend on extra things. The money is meant for my siblings' school and for the groceries and the normal stuff. There are many things which we have not been able to do... So I talked with my mum and we spent it on house repairs. We covered a hole in that wall, painted the walls, and bought other stuff. I didn't think we were in a position to spend it on a party.

Gabriela: Will you say this to your dad?

Gilda: No. I don't think he will ask.

It is noteworthy that Gilda and Eva did not think it was necessary to tell Melchor that they needed money to repair house because they did not want to make him worried. Eva was happy to contribute to the household income and to have an activity that made her feel of benefit to her family. She had not told

about this to Melchor because she knew he would not like that she, being his wife, had undertaken paid employment. Nevertheless, Eva justified her taking up a paid job in terms of having fulfilled her primary role of housewife, having raised a family and keeping the house clean. She also hoped for Gilda, her daughter, who had just finished Normal school, to find a job soon. This was a way for Eva to take comfort in the fact that that she would no longer be the only working woman in her family.

The communication within this family was generally limited to enquiring if 'things were fine'. In both of the above-named situations neither Gilda nor Eva thought that Melchor would learn about Gilda's never-held party or Eva's employment through the gossip flowing between Ocuilan and Sunville. They strongly believed that Melchor was not interested in matters of this nature and they did not expect him to enquire about these events.

Non-migrant members of this family had become used to Melchor being the one to contact them. They rarely tried to call him unless it was a matter of urgency. Moreover, they did not share information with him, apart from their routine conversations, unless he asked about it. Gilda and Eva argued that he had enough responsibilities with working abroad and they did not want give him more reasons to worry. Both parties had fallen into a routine in which Melchor fulfilled his parental responsibilities by remitting money and his family had got accustomed to receiving money in exchange for not making him worried. This situation can be closely related to what Parreñas (2005) described of men being emotional parasites whose involvement in their families is limited to fulfilling a breadwinner role. Also, she argued that fathers, even when physically present, remain largely emotionally absent from their children's lives, something that did not commonly happen between mothers and children (Parreñas 2005b). Furthermore, Melchor's family in Mexico accepted and expected that he would not get involved in matters that transcended his role as wage earner.

In a slightly different tenor and as mentioned earlier, migrants could become emotionally distant by substituting pecuniary for emotional exchanges. Still, it must be said that migrants and their families fell into an 'emotionally distant' routine not only out of contentment with knowing that the others were doing fine. In some families that were not necessarily uninterested in each others' lives, the emotional distance was a means of coping with their ambiguous losses or with particularly difficult times. The emotional distance helped migrants to adapt to their realities of living away from their kin.

Mario (Dallas, age 36), for instance, had not seen his parents in more than eight years. Owing to his undocumented status he was not free to travel to Mexico to see them. Neither could his parents visit him in Dallas. There was a period when Mario's father was very ill. Mario, according to Karla (Dallas, age 33), his wife, started to feel apathetic towards family life, going out with his wife and child or calling his family in Mexico. Conversely, during his father's illness, Mario remitted more often to the parental household and sent presents with a greater regularity than he usually did.

Karla did not see Mario's increased expenditure on her in-laws in a negative light. However, she noted that most of the times the price paid to send the products to Mexico was greater than the cost of the presents themselves. After Mario's father recovered from his illness, Mario gradually went back to remitting with the same frequency as before.

However, the material substitutes for affection are not always of a temporary nature. In some cases the emotional distance affects family life with more profound consequences. Also, the efforts that one side can make towards positive affective exchanges are not always reciprocated. One case illustrating this is that of Esperanza (Sunville age 56) and her daughter Patricia (Ocuilan, age 29). Esperanza is a widow and mother of two. She and her children had troubled relationships before she migrated. After years of separation, their problems had lessened but were not entirely resolved. Both of Esperanza's children finished their university degrees and had stable jobs in Mexico.

Nevertheless, Esperanza sent money and presents to them on an irregular basis. Esperanza was also the one who called and sent text messages to her children most of the time. The contact and efforts were not reciprocal; Esperanza's children rarely attempted to contact her. Instead, they were sometimes annoyed by her efforts to be in touch with them, as the following extract from an interview with her daughter Patricia illustrates.

Sometimes my mum calls when I am doing other things and I don't feel like talking to her, but if I tell her it is not a good time she gets upset... I don't call her because I don't know when she is working, sleeping or off work. She works crazy hours, she changes shift very often and I can't keep track of her schedule... There have been times when she calls me only to complain about things happening to her and sometimes she spoils my mood with her problems. I mean, what does she want me to do? I don't know the people she talks about and I can't solve whatever she is going through.

Patricia felt alien to her mother's everyday life and unsympathetic about listening to her mother's situation. Patricia did not feel that sense of indebtedness and gratitude that was felt by other respondents. Moreover, this state of affairs was seemingly not of a temporary nature. Patricia and Esperanza had had strained relations before Esperanza's migration. After her departure these did not improve and instead they became more distant.

The pre-migration familial situation is in most cases of crucial importance to understanding family separations and transnational relations. Esperanza and her children, as explained, had tense relations prior to her migration and in fact their problems were to a large extent the reason why Esperanza left for Sunville. While the pre-migration experience is crucial in understanding their current state of affairs, this alone might not explain their negative affective relations. It is important to take into account the gendered roles of mothers in the migration process.

Esperanza was the only migrant woman (in both cohorts) who had children and who was not married (she was a widow, who later remarried and separated).

She had had the economic responsibility for her children since they were infants. Although they were not strictly economically dependent on her at the time of fieldwork, during her first years as a migrant worker, she often sent them money to help them with their expenses while they studied at university. Esperanza, as a widow and transnational mother, had not only to fulfil breadwinning responsibilities, she was expected to provide care and affection and to nurture the emotional well-being of those she cared about, even if confronted by geographical distance (Parreñas 2001).

Migrant fathers, unlike migrant mothers, have generally the main (and often exclusive) responsibility of accumulating savings (Bustamante and Alemán 2007) and of remitting economic resources to their families in Mexico, something Mummert (1992: 10) typified as ‘paycheck fathers’. Mothers, in contrast to fathers, typically feel responsible for the emotional security of their children after their own migration and they generally do not pass down their gender and familial responsibilities to other family members (Parreñas 2005b).

Esperanza’s attempts to forge positive emotional transnational bonds with her children might be explained by her (conscious or unconscious) attempts to live up to the ideology of ‘intensive mothering’⁷⁰ (Hays 1996). According to Hays, intensive mothers give ‘unselfishly of their time, money and love on behalf of... [their] children’ (Hays 1996: 97). Esperanza could have been trying to pay for the emotional costs of separations in migrant families, such as guilt for having left her children behind (although they were both young adults) and craving for more positive relationships with them. Esperanza aimed to live up to her mothering responsibilities and forge positive affective exchanges with her children, even though these were not reciprocated.

⁷⁰ In Chapter 8, section 2.3, Esperanza’s son details how after his mother left she has attempted to act as ‘mother-hen’ therefore reinforcing the idea of Esperanza’s ‘intensive mothering’.

7.3 Relationship improvement due to geographical separation

It is important to note that not all transnational families, fall into 'emotionally distant' relations either temporarily or in the long term. Geographical distance can, in contrast, be used advantageously for conflict resolution or for the improvement of family relations. I observed that physical separation can sometimes alleviate tense relationships between family members and have positive effects in transnational families' relations and in perceptions of the self.

To illustrate a case of improvement in family relations I will look at Lupe and Tony's spousal relations. Lupe (age 29) is a domestic worker in Matehuala. Before her husband Tony left for Houston, they had recurrent clashes mainly because of the unequal division of labour within their household. Lupe felt she had an overload of work when combining her duties as a wife and mother with those of her paid employment. Lupe became upset regularly when she arrived home and saw that Tony had been sleeping while she had been working. However, she felt that the relationship with her husband improved after he left for Texas.

My husband worked the night shift, but I hated to see him in bed at 4 [pm] when I came home from work. I wanted him to do something during the day. I thought that if he woke up around 12 or 1 [pm] he would have slept enough. I arrived home and he wanted me to be with the same energy he was, but he had just woken up, while I had been on my feet since the early morning. We argued very often and I thought that it was good when he told me he would leave...

At the beginning I kind of missed him but at the same time I was happy not to be worried any more about cleaning the house and cooking for him, or getting up at four in the morning when he came back from work and wanted to eat. Things got easier for me. He did not help with the kids before, so after he left I still had to drop them at school, pick them up and take care of them in the evenings. But then I was free to spend the evenings with my mum, or visiting my sisters. If I wanted, I bought only tacos or a hamburger to eat. Before I could not do that, because *el*

señor wanted a proper meal with beans, rice, warm tortillas and meat. The kids can eat anything, so it only mattered what I wanted...

Lupe felt mixed emotions; she missed her husband and yet she was satisfied with her renewed sense of freedom. During the interviews she acknowledged that thanks to her husband's remittances they were able to pay off debts, buy home appliances and a van. At the same time, Lupe's perception of her own skills and capabilities was enhanced. She became aware that she could look after her family self-sufficiently. Moreover, she remarked that her husband's absence was not an impediment to her role as a mother and provider. Also, she adopted a more active role as the administrator of household resources.

Abel's (Dallas, age 46) story illustrates the second case, that of seeking change to improve personal well-being and self-esteem. Abel, like Esperanza (Sunville), also started his own migration experience leaving behind a problematic familial ambience. Abel left for Texas after he was made redundant from his job and just after his divorce. But whereas Esperanza had distanced herself geographically from fractious relationships, Abel sought renewal after relationships – both conjugal and employment – had broken down. He migrated without having a clear idea of his length of stay and without knowing what to expect in terms of job prospects and financial stability. His priority was rather to alleviate the depression he was going through.

I never thought it was difficult to come here. I had come here before plenty of times as a tourist. But it was hard to start, mainly because of my age. People do not see you in the same way they see a young person. You also do not have the same energies and are not as intrepid. My age did not help me... I started to work in a restaurant and I was so busy that I did not have time to think about my problems. My defence was just to walk over the adversities and not to think of them. I tried to think that what I was going through were not problems, just different situations in my life.

After he found himself in a new land, with new friends, new surroundings and overall a new way of living, he felt more at ease with himself. During the interview he explained that migration had been a cathartic experience as he had freed himself from a problematic situation and from a sad family ambience. Abel explained that after he found a job, a place to live and settled down in Dallas he felt better with himself. Abel did not have strained relationships with his children in Mexico. Yet, he claimed that after ‘recovering his self-esteem’ he has been an example for his children in the sense that ‘no matter the adversities, you have to struggle in life and lift yourself up’ (*no importan las adversidades, uno debe luchar en la vida y levantarse*).

These cases show that the relations existing at both a personal/individual level and within a family prior to migration can have meaningful consequences as to how migrants and their families staying behind will handle and maintain their emotional exchanges. As shown with the case of Lupe and her husband Tony, their marital problems lessened with their separation. Tony’s role as income-earner became clearer and more palpable. Also, Lupe’s workload due to the unequal gendered division of labour in her household was reduced. Moreover, she felt more independent and more satisfied with her roles of mother and administrator of household resources.

Self-perception can also be important as to how migrants feel in relation to their families staying behind. For instance, Abel felt he was a better example for his children after he overcame his depression and carried on with his life. On the contrary, problematic family situations prior to migration can aggravate tense familial relations and be a fertile ground for ‘emotional distance’ as described in Esperanza’s case.

Nevertheless, the ways transnational family members will handle their relations and cope with absences, separations and ambiguous losses are not written in stone. While the pre-migration family ambience is important for how transnational family relations are cultivated, migrants and non-migrants can be

confronted with several reactions, depending very much on their gendered roles and self-perceptions and intergenerational relations.

I observed that the urban or rural origin of my respondents was not a condition for families to fall into emotionally-distant relations. In the following section, however, I will discuss how social class and literacy influenced the ways migrants and non-migrants kept in touch and how this had consequences for their transnational affective exchanges.

Part 2

7.4 Modes of staying in touch

Transnational families communicate to varying degrees across distance and national borders. They can keep contact through traditional modes of communication such as telephone, postal correspondence and remitting goods across borders through '*correos*' (informal paid personal couriers). Also, new technologies have to a certain extent transformed the way and frequency in which migrant families keep in touch. Internet, mobile telephone communication, web-based live-time communication and cheaper, more accessible and faster transportation permit easier and more intimate connections and heighten the immediacy and frequency of migrants' contact with their sending communities (Levitt 2001). The use of these modes of communication has helped migrants and their remaining kin in unprecedented ways to feel closer, and momentarily to surpass virtually, geographical distances and political borders.

Internet, mobile and telephone communication have become increasingly accessible and more affordable, enabling transnational family members to be actively involved in everyday life and partake in everyday decisions across borders in fundamentally different ways from in the past (Levitt 2001: 22). Internet has made the world smaller by enabling everyday togetherness across

national borders and by letting discourses and images travel quickly between different regions of the world (Goel 2008: 291).

In the second part of this chapter, I discuss how the modes of communication that my participants used to keep in touch influenced their transnational affective exchanges. In my fieldwork I observed that my respondents made use of different modes to stay in touch with their family members across borders such as telephone, internet technologies and personal couriers (*correos*). The different ways of maintaining contact undoubtedly influenced transnational family relations, affecting the way ambiguous losses were handled, as well as feelings of caring for the family or abandonment.

Different modes of communication were used to varying extents between migrant and non-migrant cohorts. Factors such as social class, gender, demographic origin and literacy rates, played a crucial role for the use of communication technologies, particularly internet. As argued by Wilding (2006) differential access to the internet perpetuates old forms of inequality and at the same time contributes to the construction of new forms of inequality. Similarly Parreñas (2005b: 318) claims that:

The experience of transnational communication can be distinguished by one's social location in the intersecting and multiple axes of social inequalities (gender, class, rural versus urban families, and so on) (Glenn 2002; Lowe 1997). For instance, transnational communication requires access to capital and its frequency depends on the resources of individuals (Sassen 2000)

On the one hand, most of the respondents in the Sunville-Ocuilan cohort did not know how to use computers and did not have internet connection. Conversely, they had better established social networks which facilitated the communication of occurrences at either place. On the other hand, the Dallas cohort's personal social networks were less extended but most of the respondents made frequent use of internet; specifically e-mail, social networking sites such as Facebook and real-time webcam communication,

especially Skype, to keep in touch with their kin in their places of origin. The ways in which each cohort used modes of communication will be discussed in the following sections.

7.4.1 Dallas

The Dallas cohort often used telephone communication as well as computers and internet to keep in touch with their families in Mexico. They all had computers at home and for the most part, they kept in touch regularly with their friends and relatives mainly through email, mobile phones and social networks such as Facebook. These modes of communication had made them feel closer to their family members residing abroad. These technologies were commonly used for the communication of everyday events. Additionally, I observed that in two families video-sharing turned into a way 'to be almost there' at family gatherings such as birthday celebrations and, on one occasion, a wake.

Luis and his family in San Luis Potosi is one of these cases. Luis and his parents maintained regular phone communication averaging at least one telephone conversation every week. However, for more than six years Luis had not physically seen his parents except in photographs. Luis's parents did not have tourist visas and Luis's siblings had travelled only on one occasion to Dallas. Despite their regular telephone communication, Luis missed his family.

Luis's wife, Lisa, who was a regular user of internet technologies, arranged with Luis's nephews in Mexico a webcam-based live conversation in which Luis's parents would be present. Lisa organised this meeting as a birthday present for her husband, who seldom used the internet due to his lack of spare time. Luis's nephews became enthusiastic about the idea and gathered more relatives for this occasion. Luis's siblings, nephews and nieces were also present for that birthday video-call. This birthday present turned into a memorable experience for all of Luis's family.

Not only did Luis see his family, but he was also able to show them around his house, and give them a glance at how he lives. Moreover, his children sang 'Happy birthday' together with family members they had not yet met personally. Since this event, 'cybernetic meetings' became a regular activity for Luis and Lisa's families in Mexico. They agreed to convene a web-based meeting whenever there was a celebration in which the family got together, so as to make the others part of it.

The second case is that of Magdis. Because of her undocumented status, Magdis was not able to travel outside the USA. At the time of fieldwork, she and her family in Mexico were planning her parents' 50th wedding anniversary. Magdis contributed economically to pay for the party and she together with her siblings chose over the internet the present they all gave to their parents. Magdis was excited about the celebration but regretted she was not able to travel down to the party. As a means to cope with this situation, she sent her parents a short video in which she said some words to wish them happiness for the years to come. This video was shown the day of the party and was a way of making Magdis and her family feel they were part of this celebration. Later on, Magdis' siblings sent her back another video with shots of that party and of her parents and other family members sending her their greetings.

Being able to physically meet and see family members residing in distant places, even if sporadically and temporarily, allows for the forging of bonds and for bringing a clearer idea of the other person's life and circumstances (Baldassar 2007). Ambiguous losses among those who are able to physically see their relatives, as was the case in Luis's and Magdis's families take a different meaning. Being able to see and to be seen, including persons and surroundings, assure to those who are physically separated that they continue to form part of the lives of the others. As Greschke (2008: 280) noted particularly in the context of migration, the availability of distance-shrinking technologies becomes fundamental in terms of maintaining links between sites of physical being and sites of emotional belonging.

Physical co-presence and face-to-face conversation are crucial to patterns of social life that occur 'at-a-distance'... Mutual presencing enables each to read what the other is really thinking, to observe their body language, to hear 'first hand' what they have to say, to sense directly their overall response, to undertake at least some emotional work... Such social obligations to friends or family are essential for developing those relations of trust that persist during often lengthy periods of distance and even solitude (Urry 2003: 156, 163).

Likewise, according to Nowicka (2008), internet-based exchange platforms play a fundamental role in the creation and continuation of social interconnectedness and the emergence of significant links between individuals previously acquainted.

The above-mentioned experiences have eased feelings of nostalgia and of missing family members that result from physical separations. Even though these technologies do not replace co-presence, they have been feasible means for taking part in the lives of others, either for special occasions or for everyday interactions, hence reducing the negative aspects of family separation and allowing for the maintenance of emotional bonds.

The rest of the Dallas sample had not made webcam live communication a norm for special occasions with their family members in Mexico. All of these respondents reported making use of the telephone to call their families in Mexico. Nevertheless, to varying degrees they made use of mobile texting and internet technologies such as e-mail, Facebook and Skype.

Abel said he talked with his children at least once a week but exchanged emails with them more regularly, and connected to Facebook on an almost daily basis. Emma had a mobile phone with internet access and whenever her mobile phone was switched on, she automatically connected to Skype. Also she had a Facebook account but rarely accessed it. Paola and Ruben communicated with each other (Ruben worked in Atlanta and only when he did not have to work he travelled to Dallas) and with their respective parents and siblings in Mexico via telephone, however Paola claimed 'to know' about her family in Mexico

through her daughters. Her daughters communicated regularly with their cousins in Mexico through Skype and logged in to Facebook at least once a day. Karla and Mario were the only people in this cohort who did not use internet technologies (or receive information gleaned from them by third parties) on a regular basis. They instead resorted to telephone calls to converse with their respective parents and siblings in Mexico.

At the time of fieldwork Skype had not become a widespread tool for communication between these respondents and their families in Mexico. It was reserved mainly for planned encounters that were charged with emotional intimacy as in Luis and Magdis's cases. However, Skype was also a means for being inexpensively and more easily reachable as in Emma's case.

The communication that flowed through Facebook was characterised by being in the public domain and therefore typically lacking an 'intimate' or private nature. Nevertheless, Facebook allowed my respondents to know about 'relationships statuses', hobbies and interests, and to share photographs of social events attended, holidays, school achievements, among other information without necessarily interacting first-hand. In addition, Facebook kept them linked not only to their kin but to friends and acquaintances in societies of origin and of settlement.

Facebook and Skype were means for knowing and letting others partake in special as well as everyday life events. These internet technologies allowed planned or casual interactions and online social encounters and produced different emotional exchanges and everyday interactions with varying degrees of intimacy.

7.4.2 Sunville

The respondents in Sunville maintained communication with their families and friends in Ocuilan mainly through telephone: mobiles for the most part, and landlines to a lesser extent and by making use of the well-established social

and kinship-based networks linking both communities. Among the Sunville-Ocuilan cohort, telephone was the most commonly used mode of communication. In contrast, internet was not widely used. In general, this cohort was unfamiliar with the use of computers and internet communication technologies. In the neighbourhood, only Cynthia (age 16; Justino and Reyna's daughter) regularly accessed the internet, had an email account and was familiar with the use of computers and internet. Margarita (age 48), the neighbourhood manager, used the computer for work purposes. She had an email account but did not use it to keep in touch with her parents and siblings in her place of origin because they did not have a computer. She rather resorted to telephone calls to keep in touch with her family in Mexico. Esperanza had a computer in her house but did not know how to use it. Melchor and Jorge had bought computers and sent them to their relatives in Ocuilan for private home use. They both assumed computers would be helpful for school homework of their relatives in Mexico. However, they were unsure the computers were indeed used and they themselves did not know how to use computers.

During fieldwork, the people with whom I shared house became curious about the use of computers because they saw that I regularly used my personal computer for email, and for video-communication through Skype, among other uses. Esperanza, Melchor, Benja and Gladis asked me to teach them how to use the computer and especially internet communication technologies, and so I did. While they were initially fascinated, they soon lost interest. Esperanza and Melchor did not know how to use a keyboard and argued that they were too old and unskilled to learn. But the four of these participants argued that learning how to use a computer would be significantly time-consuming. Furthermore, they assumed that they would not be using computers to communicate with their families in the hometown. They assumed that people in Ocuilam would not know how to use computers and would not have internet access. They did not try any more to learn about these technologies⁷¹.

⁷¹ Benja was interested in becoming familiar with computers not only or primarily for transnational communication purposes. He seemed genuinely interested and curious in becoming PC-literate and standing out from the crowd. However, he often had no spare time to

When I went to Ocuilan I was prepared to find a town without computers and internet access. While for the majority of households and families this was true, in two cases I was surprised to find a different scenario. Melchor's and Esperanza's respective children were familiar with the use of computers and had access to internet.

Gilda, Melchor's daughter, started accessing the internet when she moved to the city of Cuernavaca, in the state of Morelos to study in the Normal school. After she relocated to Ocuilan, she hired internet in the house where she lived. Patricia, Esperanza's daughter, purchased a computer for her personal use after she started full-time employment in the city of Toluca. Her brother Pepe, on the other hand, did not have a computer of his own but made use of internet from his workplace. Nevertheless, none of them maintained internet communication with people living in Sunville. Amongst my entire Ocuilan sample, these were the only respondents who regularly used computers.

Neither the people living in Sunville, nor those living in Ocuilan had inquired if their counterparts at the other side of the border made use of internet communication. Gilda was surprised when I asked if she had internet communication with people living in Sunville. She said she would not expect them to have the time and knowledge to access these modes of communication.

This cohort's low interest in becoming acquainted with the use of computers and internet can be partly explained by the relative ease of maintaining links through other modes of communication, especially by telephone and word of mouth. The well-established networks in the community allowed for both sides to be informed of local occurrences through secondary sources such as friends, relatives and acquaintances.

sit in front of a computer and familiarise himself with its use. He worked most of the time and when he arrived home he rather wanted to rest and watch television.

In both Sunville and Ocuilan some people acted as transnational interlocutors communicating the events occurring in one side to the other side. Reyna (Sunville) and her mother Doña Guille (Ocuilan) were usually the bearers of these roles. In Ocuilan, Doña Guille had regular contact with a considerable number of the inhabitants of the *pueblo* because she and her husband owned a small grocery shop. Mrs. Guille saw the clientele on a regular basis and was well informed of the local news. In Sunville, Reyna and her husband Justino had numerous social connections in both places and had helped many people with their arrival and settlement.

Inhabitants of either community had on several occasions resorted to them in order to reach or communicate with other members of the neighbourhood. For instance, when Esperanza's mother passed away, her children and siblings did not have Esperanza's contact details, so they instead called Reyna and asked her to tell Esperanza what had happened. Similarly, when Paco (Jorge's brother) had a car accident, his mother called Reyna in order to reach Jorge. Melchor had never purchased a mobile phone because he knew that if someone from the *pueblo* or from Sunville wanted to reach him, they could call to Reyna and Justino's house (Melchor, Justino and Jorge lived only a few houses apart from each other).

It is not surprising that women (and not men) played the roles of transnational interlocutors within their families and communities. Parreñas (2005b) found that migrant mothers entrusted their non-migrant daughters (or migrant daughters entrusted their non-migrant mothers) with the administration of remittances and other household resources. This relationship of trust (and given responsibility) between mothers and daughters did not exist in the relationships with sons, fathers, male partners or other extended family members. Parreñas' findings are also consistent with Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila's (1997) who have argued that mothers remain more closely emotionally involved with their children by being both 'here and there'. Parreñas (2001) found that mothers, more than fathers, struggle to amend losses, separations and geographical distance by regularly keeping in touch with the families they left behind.

However, the well-established social networks alone do not explain the Sunville-Ocuilan circuit's unfamiliarity with computers and internet technologies. The limited accessibility to internet is closely related to the low levels of development and the marginalisation of Ocuilan (see Chapter 5). Social inequalities are reflected in a lack of infrastructure, cultural capital and material resources that make familiarity with internet technologies difficult. There is ample scholarly evidence discussing how 'the digital divide' is closely associated with income, 'race', ethnicity, geographical location, literacy and age, to mention the main factors of social inequality in this respect. It is generally agreed that there is a direct correlation between higher income level, higher literacy, urban location, and 'white' ethnicity to an easier access to internet in households and schools (Haddon 2004, Wilding 2006, Chakraborty and Bosman 2008, Livingston 2010). At the same time, computer, internet and mobile phone use are less prevalent among older people (Livingston 2010).

In Mexico internet is not yet available to large segments of the Mexican population. In 2008, 7.1 million households (out of approximately 25 million) had a computer, and 56% of these had internet access (INEGI 2009). The total number of internet users in 2008 was 27.1 million people (INEGI 2009b)⁷². Similarly in the USA, according to the Pew Hispanic Center, Latinos making regular use of internet were not numerous. Only 29% of Latino adults in the USA had a broadband connection at home and only 32% of Spanish-dominant Hispanic adults made use of internet (Fox and Livingston 2007).

The extensive use of the telephone among the Sunville-Ocuilan participants is consistent with what the Pew Hispanic Center has found, that telephone is the most used method of communication among Latinos in the US (Livingston 2010, Lopez and Livingston 2010). Telephone calls between Mexico and the

⁷² The total population of Mexico as for 2010 was estimated at 108 396 211 (CONAPO-*Indicadores demográficos 1990-2050*) and the number of households as for 2005 was of over 24 million, with an average of 4.2 people per household (INEGI 2005).

USA have accounted for the greatest share of all international calls for both countries.

Calls from Mexico to the USA... comprised over 80 per cent of all Mexican calls abroad... In turn calls from the USA to Mexico now account for the largest destination of all outgoing American telecommunications having increased 171 per cent between 1995 and 2001... [I]t is highly likely that the number of telephone calls between members of migrant families comprises a significant share (Vertovec 2004: 220).

A study of this size must be circumspect in making any generalisations about the reasons and consequences of different modes of communication and internet usage (or unfamiliarity) and its consequences. Nevertheless, the ways and frequency with which both cohorts of migrants communicated with their families in Mexico has to be understood in relation to several social and economic aspects. These are, for instance, the existence of social networks linking places of origin and destination, access and affordability of various modes of communication, familiarity and knowledge of internet technologies as well as having the time and the will to dedicate to staying in touch.

7.5 Summary

Immigrant family life is influenced by economic conditions and opportunities in societies of origin and destination. However, emotional factors doubtless also shape family life across borders. Yet only quite recently have scholars started conceptualising and debating the influences, impacts, meanings and social changes attributable to emotions in migration and family dynamics. Transnational family relations, including the emotional exchanges taking place in migrants' households, are a largely unexplored issue, mainly because of their private nature. These relations 'are filled with inconsistencies and contradictions and shift in different contexts and over time' (Foner 2009: 8). In many, probably most, transnational families, there is a mixture of cooperation and caring, and their members often have different and even conflicting interests, priorities and concerns (Parreñas 2001, Foner 2009).

Family relations play an essential role in the migration experience. However, transnational families cope with distance and separations through different ways. In some households, family members will maintain active and strong transnational relations. However, other families will act in isolation or without taking the others' opinions very much into account. Migrant family members, at both places of origin and destination, can get used to physical absences, ambiguous losses, and sporadic communication and emotional exchanges. Some of these families will cope with their ambiguous losses or difficult familial situations through falling into a dynamic I refer to as 'emotional distance'; hence having cooler, infrequent and unfamiliar relations. Still, not all families fall into an 'emotionally distant' dynamic because of indifference, apathy, or lack of interest.

Families may also resort to sending presents and money for the maintenance of their transnational relations. Material goods symbolise and materialise the sense of responsibility and concern that the migrant has towards his/her family. Yet these can gradually become substitutes for affection. Family members can conform with and content themselves with fulfilling their respective duties of being providers or receptors of economic resources, care and support; depending on which side of the border they stand. Some beneficiaries will feel gratitude (Rumbaut 2005) towards their migrant relatives, but others will reject the migrants' efforts to maintain emotional exchanges. This very much depends upon the pre-migration family situation and on the ability and efforts invested from both migrants and non-migrants. And on GENDER!

The modes that migrants and non-migrants use to keep in touch also have significant consequences. Telephone conversations or technologies that permit face-to-face and real-time interactions are central for maintaining and strengthening bonds. The importance and cohesiveness of social networks linking societies of origin and destination should also be considered. The Dallas and Sunville cohorts had different resources and access to technologies and social and community networks. They each maintained contact with places

of origin to varying degrees, resulting in emotional exchanges of a different order. Yet these exchanges were largely gender-guided. Mothers generally aimed to keep stronger and more intimate emotional attachments, especially with their daughters, mothers or sisters. These efforts could persist even if they were not reciprocated.

It is quite demanding to maintain close relations when family members are geographically separated. Transnational families pose numerous challenges to the development of close family relations. Maintaining emotional connections within transnational families requires a great investment of time and effort for both migrants and non-migrants. These include the risk of emotional distance, unfamiliarity between family members which eventually leads to ambivalent relations, overburdening with care responsibilities, strained spousal relations and the danger of inadequate parental guidance.

Distance certainly changes the dynamics of familial relations, but it does not need to hamper emotional exchanges and the provision of support. Family relations can be maintained over time and across geographical separations. Even more, distance can ease tensions between transnational family members, and can also help to improve individual self-perceptions. Migration and separations can also help individuals and families to live amicably and harmoniously.

Chapter 8: Those who stay behind: experiences of non-migrating kin

'Migration is not an experience that belongs solely to those who leave their countries. The protagonists... include those who leave, those who stay and those who come and go for generations to come' (Falicov 2005b: 400).

Migration studies have largely focused on the economic, political and social consequences of migration in the receiving countries and on the lives of migrants in the receiving societies. While there is also a considerable body of literature about the impact of migration on communities of origin, this has mainly focused on the economic change, poverty reduction and development that result from remittances. Much less attention, however, has been devoted to the social impacts of migration on the migrant's family left behind, on those who had no wish, no opportunity or no possibility to migrate. Yet, it is important to acknowledge the role of those who stay behind as they are as embedded in the migration process as migrants themselves (Kothari 2003, Pedone 2003, López Montaña and Loaiza Orozco 2009).

The literature on transnational families and family networks has acknowledged the family's role in the society of origin for the initiation and continuation of migration, as well as the use and management of remittances for the alleviation of poverty and for economic development. However, social research on the impacts of migration on the family members left behind is more recent and has been mainly limited to women's empowerment and the bringing-up of children in the absence of one or both parents. Little attention has been devoted to the relations that bond both parties, those who left and those who stayed, and how the ideas and impressions that one side has of the other are not always accurate, fair, realistic and/or based upon first-hand information.

Those who stay behind are the focus of this chapter. Herein, I study their perceptions and imaginaries of life abroad and analyse the changes in family

dynamics that they go through while their relatives are away. I suggest that the changes in the relationships and feelings of those who stayed behind can follow three general types of outcome. The first is when non-migrant family members overestimate the successes and sacrifices of the migrant relative. The second is when non-migrant family members see the migrants' efforts with empathy but without an inflated concern. The third is when the relations between migrants and non-migrants become strained to the point of rejecting the efforts made by the migrant relatives, resulting ultimately in indifference and apathy.

Also in this chapter, I study the active and emotional involvement that non-migrant family members played for *la pasada* (crossing the border) of their migrant relatives. Likewise, I examine positive changes in family dynamics that migration brings about for those who stayed behind. Subsequently, I discuss the role that the extended family plays for the arrangements taking place in societies of origin following emigration. Finally, I explore the relations and adjustments return migrants negotiate with those who stayed behind.

8.1 Perceptions in societies of origin over migration and migrants' life

Popular discourse on migration and its consequences is ambiguous, polarised and diverse (see Chapters 3 and 9). In the process of migration, families undergo profound transformations that are often complicated by extended periods of separation between loved ones (Falicov 2003, 2005b).

The societies and individuals who have been touched by migration are part of the transmission of 'ideas, behaviours, identities, and social capital that flow from receiving to sending-country communities' (Levitt 1998: 926). Levitt (1998) has termed these exchanges 'social remittances'. These are particularly important in the lives of those who stayed behind, as they shape community and family identity and bring the impacts of migration to the fore, bringing a sense of familiarity with the (largely only imagined) everyday life of the

migrant. Social remittances however, can get distorted for a variety of reasons. The recipient and /or the receiver might fail to send or to listen to messages and prefer the imagined conceptions of life abroad. This has perpetuated an inaccurate and often 'overcompensated' opinion (discussed below in Section 8.2) of the migration experience.

Stories about the life in the north abound, and range from happy stories filled with contentment, successes and accomplishments, to miserable accounts of hardships, limitations, exploitation, isolation and even death. Those who stay behind are, of course, influenced by these accounts. They are often fearful that their migrant relative will, at some point, neglect them, forget the homeland, form a new family, get engaged in emotional relations or sexual adventures, consume drugs or have an immoral lifestyle or become unfamiliar or incompatible with the life he or she had before migrating.

Non-migrants, especially those who are not able to visit or see their migrant relatives, often imagine the way their migrant relative lives. How are these images constructed? The answer is neither unique nor straightforward. However, especially in communities where migration is deeply rooted in community life, non-migrants largely base their perceptions over their kinfolk's life abroad on the communication between the two parties (see Chapter 7), on stories of other migrants and of return migrants, and on the accounts of other families touched by migration, as well as on the general perceptions of life abroad.

In societies where migration is not so commonplace, non-migrants rely more on the accounts of their relatives and acquaintances and in the mass media. Contrary to what happens in societies embedded in migration, less extended social networks do not facilitate the development of a uniform collective image of life in the United States or the rapid communication of events and gossip occurring on either side of the border (Fussell and Massey 2004). This does not mean that non-migrants residing in places where migration is not a widespread

phenomenon are unaware of the conditions, limitations, and everyday difficulties undocumented migrants have to face.

Scholars studying Mexican migration stemming from urban areas (Arias, 2004, Flores et al 2004, Fussell 2004, Fussell and Massey 2004; Hernández-León-2008, forthcoming) largely agree that the use of social networks greatly differs between urban and rural settings. While urban origin migration has seen an exponential growth (Durand and Massey 2003), cities provide anonymity; hence the networks for transmission of information, mutual solidarity and social remittances are not widespread.

Yet the images and perceptions that non-migrants hold of life abroad share similarities whether they originate in a town or in a city. Leyva and Caballero (2009) conducted a study with wives of migrants in both urban and rural settings and found that the majority of wives staying behind (80%) thought that their husbands had a bad time being migrant workers in the USA, but were doing better than if they had stayed in Mexico (*la pasan mal, pero les va mejor*). This bad time referred to the dangers of crossing the border, harsh working conditions, discrimination, lack of health services, being away from family members and a limited sense of freedom because of their undocumented status. On the other hand, doing better made reference to better earnings and, interestingly, to the possibility of their husbands having several sexual partners without them finding out.

Return migrants also play a fundamental role in shaping perceptions over life abroad. However, their accounts are not always accurate. As observed by Pedone (2003) with Ecuadorian migrants in Spain, return migrants often lied about the challenges they had to face or the type of jobs they performed. Also Datta et al (2009) noted how migrants from diverse international backgrounds exaggerated about how much money they would be able to earn and save living in London when compared to the wages in their home countries. Within my sample, return migrants recognised that for a while they preferred not to talk about the hardships they had to face living as undocumented migrants in the

USA. Rather they made reference to the greatness and modernity of American cities. Migrants, especially men, aimed to give an impression of success at the initial stage of their return. It was rare that return migrants portrayed an image of failure as that would have implied a personal defeat. Only later did they unfold the negative as well as the positive aspects of their experiences.

As discussed in the previous chapter, some migrants live in continuous ambivalence, idealising and rejecting both host and home societies. Their achievements and limitations make them oscillate between happiness and sadness; frustration and joy (González Calvo 2005). These contradictory sentiments undoubtedly influence non-migrants' perceptions over their migrant relative's life abroad and their familial relations across borders. Non-migrants, especially those who are not able to visit or see their migrant relatives, construct in diverse ways their collective and individual images of how their migrant relative lives. This will be analysed in the following section.

8.2 Positive, neutral and negative compensation

As noted in Chapter 7, the emotional distance that could develop between the migrants and the remaining kin could result in unclear ideas of the life experiences of the other person. The sporadic communication between those who left and those who stayed further contributed to forming unclear ideas about life in the USA. In general, the remaining kin's collective imaginaries could be grouped in those who believed their kin were suffering, concealing bad times (positive overcompensation); those marked by ambivalence who believed life in the US was hard yet their relatives' migration had improved their lives (neutral perspective) and those who believed that the migrant should have been aware of the privation and adversities and put up with them (negative compensation) (See Table 5).

Positive Overcompensation	Neutral Perspective	Negative Compensation
Non-migrants exaggerate (real and imagined) hardships of migrants. Sense of guilt and compassion. Reluctance to believe in migrant's well-being.	Balance between difficulties of migration and improvements to economic situation. Migration seen as a shared responsibility.	Tense and distant relations between migrants and non-migrants. Sense of anger/ abandonment against migrants for having left the familial household.

Table 5. Perceptions over migrant kin's life in the USA

Source: Author's elaboration.

Suarez-Orozco C. et al (2002) in their study of parent-children reunification found similar outcomes. In the first, children felt abandoned and responded by detaching from the parent that left and in turn they felt more attached to the carer. In the second, both parents and children reported feeling like strangers. Parents found it difficult to exert control over their children whom they saw as ungrateful and children felt ambivalent towards the parents. In the third, the parental guilt resulted in overindulgence of children, creating inconsistencies and a continual pattern of rejection and counter-rejection. Similarly, Parreñas (2001) suggested that Filipina migrant domestic workers coped with separations in different ways, either by commodifying love (giving their children all sorts of material goods), by 'pouring love' onto those they looked after, by repressing the emotional tensions, or completely denying the emotional costs of migration.

During fieldwork, I observed that non-migrants, regardless of their urban or 'rural' residence, often exaggerated either the suffering, adversities and hardships; or the successes and accomplishments the migrant had gone through or achieved. In contrast, gender and the pre-migration interfamilial relations had a central role in defining how the non-migrants thought of and imagined the lives of their migrant relatives and of the worth of physical (as well as emotional) separations.

8.2.1 Positive overcompensation: 'having a bad time'

Falicov (2003, 2005b) and Rumbaut (2005) have discussed that non-migrants who think that their migrant kin sacrificed themselves in order to improve the lives of those who stay usually develop a sense of guilt and compassion. My findings are consistent with this. I observed that some non-migrant women regardless of their social class, demographic origin and level of education, exaggerated their migrant relatives' hardships and believed their life was characterised by a negative ambience. For the most part, they believed that their male or female relatives sacrificed themselves in order to provide a better life to them, who stayed behind. The sacrifices of migrants gained greater significance and worth for the non-migrants when the former went through difficult times. Those who stayed behind were reluctant to believe their migrant relative's life was not permanently marked by adversities.

For instance, Cristina (Ocuilan, age 49) thought that Jorge (Sunville, age 29), her son, lived in a semi-permanent state of sadness and fear. She thought that his life was worse in Sunville than in Ocuilan.

I think that his life there is very sad, it must be the same, maybe worse than here because there he doesn't see anybody. He doesn't have his family and friends around. I think he is locked inside all the time because he must be afraid.

Cristina also showed concern over the impression that, as Jorge had been working in the USA in order to pay off the family debts, he 'ha[d] not done anything for himself'. Particularly, she feared that Jorge would not find a good woman to marry.

I don't know what he thinks or what he wants. I don't know when he wants to come back... But look at his cousins, they already have families, some have bought *terrenitos* (small pieces of land) or have their assets (*patrimonio*). And what does he have? Nothing, and he is getting old and the best is pretty much chosen...

Interestingly, Cristina was unaware of Jorge's social and romantic relations during the time he had lived in California. Cristina learned from Lorena, her daughter-in-law, that Jorge had had a girlfriend in California only when I enquired about this. She had believed that Jorge had not had any relationships during his stay. However, Lorena (Ocuilan, age 24), intervened to correct Cristina after she said that her son had not had a girlfriend in all the years he had been abroad. Likewise, Cristina felt more at ease after I showed her some pictures of her son and her brother-in-law in Sunville. She seemed to be glad after seeing that her son was *bien gordo* (chubby). Still, it is likely that Cristina continued to believe her son was suffering and sacrificing for the sake of the family in Ocuilan. It seemed as if she preferred to construct images of hardship and difficult times rather than ones in which her son was having a 'normal' life.

Hortensia⁷³ (Matehuala, age 60+) experienced a similar situation. During the initial period following her son's departure, she did not entirely believe he was all right. However, as opposed to Cristina, she constructed these ideas based on what she saw in the television news and not on other migrants' accounts. She thought her son had to live hiding away from immigration authorities' constant harassment of Mexicans. Her concerns were largely based upon 'racial' prejudices. She felt more at ease after her son told her that because of his fair skin tone he generally passed unnoticed by US authorities.

Seeing [on the news] that so many bad things were happening over there how could I not get worried? And even if I heard him on the phone and he said he was better than here, I couldn't avoid getting worried. But then I had to learn. And he also told me that he didn't look suspicious; that the police [*sic*] were after the *morenos* (brown-skinned)...

Among the women who participated in this study, it was especially mothers who had a positive over-compensatory approach towards their migrant

⁷³ At the time of fieldwork Hortensia's son, Sergio, had just returned to Matehuala. He had been in the city for less than one month. Hortensia's account is from relatively recent memory and her descriptions of how she imagined her son's life abroad can be accepted as accurate.

children. In the cases described above, mothers made victims of their male children and were reluctant to believe in their well-being. The mothers of migrant women experienced this positive overcompensation by seeing their migrant daughters as enhanced persons, with superior capabilities and achievements. They recognised that their condition of women pursuing migration made them especially courageous, determined and brave.

For instance, Doña Guille (Ocuilan, age 56) and Clara (Ocuilan, age 33) were the mother and sister respectively of Reyna (Sunville). They thought of Reyna as a woman who got ahead with anything that got her on her way. Reyna, unlike the majority of migrant women in her home town, did not migrate to join her husband or in his company. Instead, Reyna migrated on her own when she was 19 years old to try her luck in the USA. Doña Guille and Clara both seemed to be very proud that Reyna had pursued migration 'just because she is very brave' and recognised that emigrating as she did is 'not easy at all, otherwise everybody would do it'.

Lisa, living in Dallas, is another case of positive overcompensation. Her mother Isabel (Victoria, age 64) and her sister Alondra (Victoria, age 43) saw Lisa through an enhancing lens. Alondra thought her sister was the bravest of her siblings, and saw her as a 'determined and audacious person who pursued her dreams'. Also, Isabel saw her daughter as superior to women employed in domestic service in Mexico.

She is very serious with her work. I admire her... She is not like the girls here [in Mexico] that pretend to work, but do not really clean. She does it to perfection putting a lot of effort into everything she does.

In addition, Isabel and Alondra seemed to categorise their migrant relative differently from the general images attributed to both undocumented migrants and domestic workers. For them, the status of Lisa as a domestic worker in the USA could not be compared to the status of domestic workers in Mexico. As discussed by Margolis (1994) and Piore (1979), a migrant's social identity is

not necessarily bound up in his/her job. There can be a sharp distinction between the identity attached to work on the one hand, and the social identity of the immigrant on the other.

8.2.2 Neutral perspective: ‘they have to put up with it’

The second category I observed was that in which non-migrants did not exaggerate in either a positive or a negative way about the opportunities and adversities of life in the USA. They rather believed that their migrant kin had to put on a brave face and live with the hardships of life abroad. In general, the difficulties expressed by migrants were related to the high costs of living in the USA, demanding workloads, missing the family, lack of familial care during times of illness, and risky job prospects as a result of the US global financial crisis.

The non-migrants who fell into this category had not gone through tense and abrupt separations. They had rather talked with their migrant kin about the purpose and general objectives of ‘going north’ such as saving goals (to pay off debts, to acquire goods or to buy a house), or had defined times for return (such as the completion of children’s’ education). This did not necessarily imply that non-migrants in the positive overcompensation or negative compensation categories had to go through sudden or problematic separations or did not have clear objectives for their trips. Yet it was characteristic of the families in the neutral perspective category to have had a more defined plan of action.

In addition, these non-migrants believed that migration entailed good and bad consequences for all actors involved and not only for the migrants. They saw the migration experience as a shared responsibility, in which those who left and those who stayed had to go through periods of adjustment in order to achieve the whole family’s betterment. The men and women in this category did not think that it was only their migrant kin who was making a sacrifice for the sake of the family, as they also saw themselves as ‘doing their part’.

Laura (Matehuala, age 55) recounted that she herself had a difficult time when her husband was away and believed that if she had to struggle and overcome the difficulties, her husband also had to get ahead with his. For instance, she had several disagreements with her parents-in-law as to how to raise and educate her two daughters without her husband's help. Furthermore, by being left alone, Laura started challenging the status quo in gender relations and changed her views about how to educate her daughters.

[By being alone] I became a very strong and quite a bitter woman too. Well I don't know if I was strong but I gave that impression. I started to question old-fashioned ideas. I saw that the education my parents gave me was not the only way... I opened my own beauty salon not paying attention to my in-laws... They said I would be spending my time working instead of taking care of my daughters... I taught my daughters not to give a damn about what people say and not to stay quiet when they are not happy with something or someone.

Lupe (Matehuala, age 27) thought that her husband had migrated because that had been his wish. Lupe believed that he had to put up with (*tiene que aguantarse*) the challenges and high costs of living in the USA. At the same time, Lupe recognised that after her husband's departure she has been the one taking care of their children.

Gilda (Ocuilan age 23) is the daughter of Melchor (Sunville age 49) who migrated in order to provide education for his children. Gilda thought her father was making sacrifices for the benefit of the whole family, yet she did not make a victim of him. Rumbaut (2005) noted that children of immigrants, aware of being the reason for the migration of their parents, retained a sense of guilt and an obligation to achieve success for their future. Gilda experienced such an obligation, but not guilt. She felt a sense of debt and a responsibility to obey her father's advice. She felt sympathy for him as he was the person who was away from the family. However, she thought of herself and her siblings as hard-working students who would not let their father down.

Nicolás (Matehuala, age 33) does not illustrate the case of somebody who stayed behind, but that of a return migrant. Nevertheless, he also believed that migration was a shared responsibility with pros and cons for both migrants and non-migrants. At the time of fieldwork, he had recently returned to Matehuala after having worked in a restaurant in Houston, Texas. He acknowledged that his migration experience in the USA would have not been possible without the help of his wife. To begin with, he thought that his visa application was approved because his wife herself already had a tourist visa: she had often been to the USA and she was related by kin to US citizens. (Nicolás had tried unsuccessfully to obtain a visa on two different occasions before being married.) However, his wife's role did not end with her aid for his visa approval. Nicolás recounted how after they vacationed in Texas, she supported Nicolás's wish to try his luck in the USA and look for a job. His wife's relatives offered their house for Nicolás to live there and helped him find a job. Moreover, Nicolás appreciated that his wife had to drive back from Houston to Matehuala on her own and had to take care of their two little children at the same time. Nicolás recounted that working in the USA was an experience with ups and downs, in which he had to work shifts of over 15 hours every day and that he often felt discriminated against. However, he said that his wife's support and her efforts to raise and educate their children, had been very important for him to cope with the difficulties he went through.

8.2.3 Negative compensation: 'that's how life is over there, isn't it?'

The cases discussed above have been of situations in which the non-migrants either see their migrating kin through a positive overcompensation lens or who believe that their kin have to adapt to their new lives in the US, with their pros and cons. However, transnational family relations can become strained, leading to indifference. As Foner (1999: 257) argued, families are 'not just a haven in a heartless world, but a place where conflict and negotiation also take place.'

The case of Esperanza (Sunville age 56) and her children Pepe and Patricia (Ocuilan, ages 31 and 29 respectively) discussed earlier in Chapter 7, illustrate

a rather exceptional case of troublesome interfamily relation. Their most serious problems started prior to Esperanza's migration when she remarried, after being a widow for over twenty years. These worsened because her criticised Esperanza over her failed marriage. marriage did not work. For these reasons she decided to migrate to the USA. Geographical separation and time eased their tense relations; however their problems were not entirely resolved for either side. Both of Esperanza's children were young adults when she left. However, they both complained about and rejected her attempts to provide care and support.

Owing to her very heavy workload, Esperanza had only one morning and one night per week when she could sleep over four hours a day. She had unhealthy eating and sleeping habits, which were detrimental to her wellbeing. She looked emaciated, had lost weight, had recurrent headaches and was constantly in a bad mood. Her housemates were worried about her and advised her to reduce her workload. They argued that Esperanza did not need to have such a heavy workload as her children were not economically dependent on her. Esperanza stopped remitting regularly some years ago, as both of her children had steady jobs. Only occasionally and spontaneously did she send them money or goods.

Esperanza's children in Mexico were aware of her workload; however they did not consider this a matter of concern. I asked for Patricia's and Pepe's opinions on the matter in separate interviews. Both saw their mother's workloads as normal.

Patricia believed that 'that's how life is over there, isn't it? They work the whole time, huh?' Patricia's answer demonstrates how she thought that the life of a migrant should be primarily dedicated to working, without spare time for leisure activities, taking a break or for feeling at ease. Furthermore, Patricia did not take her mother's problems seriously. She was detached from and uninterested about Esperanza's life.

My mum likes to portray herself as a martyr, she wants us to feel pity for her... She wants to make a soap opera out of her life. She blamed her failed marriage on us; she said that she left because of us... Then she complains very often that she has to work a lot, she complains about her workmates, she complains that she is the only one who cleans the house, she complains about everything... .

On the other hand, Pepe believed that his mother 'is a very strong woman and she can face any challenge that presents itself in her life'. Pepe's apparent optimism about his mother's capabilities rather showed a lack of involvement with Esperanza's situation. Conversely, Pepe recounted that before his mother left she did not pay attention to everyday household duties or his and his sister's personal issues and needs, such as what they ate or how they fared at school and work. Now, after years of separation, as he saw it, his mother wanted to act as a 'mother hen' (see Chapter 7 section 2 on 'intensive mothering'). Yet Esperanza's efforts made Pepe and Patricia dubious about and rejecting of their mother's serious concerns.

When we talk she says to me that she would like to be here to prepare my food, wash my clothes, and take care of me. I have said to her 'Don't bullshit me, mum. Don't make a fool of yourself. We both know you are not like that' (*no chingues jefa, que te haces güey. Los dos sabemos que no eres así*)... I think she has a strong need for affection.

In a less extreme tenor, Doña Teresa (Ocuilan age 60), apparently had an 'emotionally distant' relationship with her sons Justino and Melchor (Sunville, ages 40 and 44 respectively). When I asked her for an interview she initially refused and explained that she did not know anything about her children's lives. Later, she said she rarely received money or phone calls from them. Most importantly, Doña Teresa felt alien to her son Justino and that she occupied a less important place for him than Doña Guille (Justino's mother-in-law). Doña Guille received remittances regularly, was more frequently in touch and had better relations with the kin in California. Doña Teresa was mostly concerned and upset about the fact that this state of affairs was popular knowledge. When Justino started to send money from Sunville to build a house in the town, he

and his wife Reyna trusted Doña Guille to supervise the construction. Doña Teresa and her family were not taken into account. This was largely due to the fact that Reyna preferred her mother (and not her mother-in-law) to take the responsibility for such an enterprise.

8.3 Positive changes after migration

In the previous section, I discussed the relations between migrants and non-migrants based on the imaginaries of everyday life in the USA. In this section, I will explore non-migrants' perceptions and reconfigurations of themselves and their migrants as individual beings. For instance, women staying behind believed that their migrant relatives had a greater appreciation of the family union. Likewise, they believed that male migrants in particular had grown more responsible, independent and had learned while in the USA to appreciate the effort that is entailed in domestic work. Besides the tangible economic benefits from remittances, there were also socio-cultural changes in transnational family dynamics and roles.

Pribilsky (2004) observed how women in the absence of their migrant husbands felt alleviated of their husbands' jealousy or controlling behaviour. Likewise, women would adopt leadership roles in the community ranging from catechism classes to political representation posts. Also, Mancillas Bazán and Rodríguez Rodríguez (2009) noted that after migration women 'allow' themselves to be more sociable and feel more able to participate in decision making for both conjugal and familial relations.

My observations from field research are consistent with this. Lupe (Matehuala, age 27) saw herself more as capable of bringing up her children alone. Mrs. Hortensia (Matehuala age 60+) believed that it had not been worthwhile in terms of economic gains that her son Sergio (Matehuala, age 38) left for Texas. Nevertheless, she thought her son had learned to love life. Gilda (Ocuilan, age 23) thought her father had become less macho and cared less about what other

people said. She was delighted that after her father had migrated, he had become more flexible towards female employment. She was especially glad because her mother (Eva, age 41) had been able to undertake paid employment; she had never worked while Melchor (Sunville, age 44) lived in Ocuilan.

In addition, there were also changes in non-migrants' own self-perceptions and their relations with their relatives. Angelica (Matehuala, age 60+) was very closely attached to her two daughters and grandchildren. After they left for Dallas she went through a period she described as 'depressing and not wanting to live'. However, she felt better after she learned that her daughters were faring well economically and that they had become more like sisters by helping each other out. Angelica mentioned she had learned to live her life independently from the life of her daughters and grandchildren and that now she had more of a life of her own.

Laura (Matehuala, age 55) recounted how before her husband left she felt insecure about his fidelity, as her husband was very outgoing and flirtatious with other people and very serious with her. Laura grew confident of her husband's love and commitment to her during his absence: 'I believe he had his adventures, but I am sure I am the one he loves and that he loves me a lot...'

Return migrants, as well, experienced a reconfiguration of self-perceptions and capabilities. Susana (Matehuala, age 44) a return migrant, commented that she became lazy whilst she lived in the USA because there 'everything is so easy' [referring mainly to household duties]. She nevertheless argued that she was not lazy any more since she lived in Mexico. Susana was particularly critical of women in the USA. She argued that *las Americanas* (American women) leave their children to be educated by the television, do not cook, only warm up microwave food and do not scrub the clothes but only spray chemicals to remove stains. Nicolas (Matehuala, age 33) believed that there were more important things in life than making money. Moreover, he cherished that in Mexico he was free and did not need to be hiding.

8.4 *La Pasada*: the active and emotional involvement of non-migrants

Having discussed non-migrants' perceptions of life abroad and the positive changes as individual beings that non-migrants can go through, I will explore the role that non-migrants play for one decisive moment of the migration process: *la pasada* [crossing the border]. Migrants and non-migrants alike in my sample populations talked with great emotion about the difficulties implicit in crossing the border. Crossing over had a major significance because it had been the start of the journey, but overall the commencement of a new life. *Cruzar la línea* [to cross the line] was the first major challenge migrants faced and a moment of great concern for those who stayed behind. Either crossing with a *coyote* (human smuggler) or with a tourist visa (later becoming a visa over-stayer); non-migrants of working and middle classes, of urban and 'rural' origins, shared the view that crossing the border was difficult and risky and a time of great concern.

Having a tourist visa or hiring a *coyote* was not a guarantee for crossing over to the United States. There were numerous stories of people who, despite having hired a *coyote*, were caught by the *migra* and had to go back, or who despite having had a valid visa did not get the 'permission' for entry (officially known as the I94 Arrival-Departure Record)⁷⁴.

Those who stay behind are involved actively and emotionally in a number of ways in the migration process. Non-migrants endeavour to help their migrant relatives, making use of their social capital for instance when getting counterfeit documents and by learning from other people's experiences and 'recipes for success' in making it to the *otro lado* (the other side).

⁷⁴ The I94 form is the document issued to non-US citizens and non-US residents who go beyond the US border zone and that shows the date of arrival to the US as well as the 'admitted until' date.

The kin who stayed behind got involved in the crossing stage in a variety of ways, active and emotional. Some claimed to suffer as much as the migrants themselves because of the anguish they went through by not knowing the migrants' whereabouts. Others, like Eva (Ocuilan), Laura and Lupe (both from Matehuala) were the ones who, besides the concerns related to their migrant relatives' well-being, had to communicate and explain to their children about the departure of a family member; in these three cases the father. When the non-migrant kin got actively involved in the process, the estimation of hardships entailed in migration was more accurate and less exaggerated than the accounts of people who had only imagined this event.

Three cases of practical involvement of non-migrants are those of Isabel (Victoria age 64), Lupe (Matehuala age 27) and Carmen (Matehuala age 55). Isabel is the mother of Lisa (Dallas age 39), an urban-origin migrant. Lisa and her husband Luis have lived undocumented in Dallas for over a decade (nearly two decades). When Lisa and her husband went to Mexico, they used their tourist visas to enter back to the USA. However, in order to go beyond the border port of entry, they also needed to obtain the I94-Form at the border. This document is issued at the discretion of the US border agents. However, getting this permission is not straightforward, as the border agent judges if the applicant has sufficient reasons to return to the home country.

Isabel recounted that the times her daughter and family visited Mexico she had to obtain counterfeit documents that gave the impression that Luis and Lisa worked in Mexico. Given that one of Lisa's uncles ran his own company in Victoria, Luis and Lisa were registered as his employees, paying pensions and other contributions. Furthermore, on their national identity card their home address was Isabel's home address in Victoria, in order to make easier to have recent utilities suppliers' bills. Isabel also joined them on their trips to Dallas and she went back to her house in Mexico some days later. She believed her accompanying them helped them not only to give the impression of visiting the USA for tourist purposes, but that it also meant emotional support for them not to get nervous whilst being interviewed to obtain the I94-Form.

Similarly, Lupe, the wife of a migrant, got actively involved in this stage as she had to pay the *coyote* when her husband Tony crossed over to Houston. Lupe and Tony gave their car to the *coyote* as part of the payment. However, they agreed with the *coyote* that they would not give him the car keys until Tony called Lupe, notifying his safe arrival. The night Tony left, Lupe parked the car in front of the *coyote's* house as a warranty of payment. She believed that in case Tony would not be able to call her, the *coyote* would look for her in order to get the car keys and the rest of the money. However, a few days later Tony could communicate with her. Lupe went to the *coyote's* house where she had the chance to talk with him about how *la pasada* (the crossing) went. This made Lupe feel more at ease, especially as she herself had never attempted to cross over.

Likewise, Carmen, a retired school-teacher, tried to help her son obtain a tourist visa so that he could cross over more safely. Several years ago, her son left school and migrated to Houston, Texas. Afterwards, he returned to Matehuala but wanted to go back to work in the US. However, given that he had never worked in Mexico or been in a Mexican school for several years, he did not have any document that could help him with his visa application. Carmen had a tourist visa, therefore she thought that if she accompanied her son to the US consulate she could convince the consulate staff that she wanted to take her son for holidays to the USA. Carmen also enrolled him in a short course to give the impression that he was undertaking education in Mexico. However, her efforts did not have the expected results as her son was denied a visa. She ultimately helped him to pay for the *coyote*.

The non-migrants who did not take an active role, played a faithful or spiritual role in aiding their relatives. Women in particular, talked about having prayed and lit candles asking to God for the safe crossing and well-being of their migrant kin. The impossibility to take a more active role limited them to these spiritual bonds, but these were considered also significant and important.

8.5 The extended family

The extended and in-law family (hereafter extended family) can play an important role in the daily life of the non-migrant relatives who stayed behind. The extended family can provide emotional support during the period of adjustment following the departure and throughout the whole duration of the migration experience (Reyes 2008).

As migration in both urban and rural areas has been predominantly male, women left behind respond in various ways to the absence of their spouses. Some wives undertake employment, and therefore rely on the extended family to take care of children. In some cases the woman moves to their parents' or in-laws' house (Aysa and Massey 2004). In general, a family's post-migration arrangements might include a closer or more frequent contact with and reliance on the extended family.

However, the extended family can also be a source of conflict. Foner (2009: 8) noted that in immigrant families there is a mixture of cooperation and caring and that transnational families' relations 'shift in different contexts and over time.' Ruiz Sánchez (2008) noted that in-law family members can go through tense relations in their power struggles, especially in relation to decision-making. López Montaña and Loaiza Orozco (2009) analysed how grandparents in their role of caretakers of children left behind were often contradicted. On the one hand they were grateful for the economic benefits resulting from migration. But on the other, they considered that the social costs of migration, such as parental absence or estrangement between parents and children, were very high. At the same time, grandparents largely shaped their grandchildren's opinions, including what they could expect from their own parents. Their opinions were not always welcomed by the migrant parents themselves. Also, as noted by Pribilsky (2004) with Ecuadorian families, tensions between extended family members were caused because parents and in-laws monitored wives left behind and often assumed chief roles in safeguarding the honour of

the family. Wives left behind disliked their vigilant attitudes and strove to achieve autonomy.

As I observed during fieldwork in both urban and rural areas, conflict across in-law and extended families arose mainly from resentment because of the economic improvement of some family members. It was common, especially for my female respondents to complain about their extended family members' jealousy about their greater solvency and their acquisition of material goods. Sometimes the extended family took advantage of the latter and created tense situations.

Laura (Matehuala) had several tensions with her siblings after Jesus, her husband, left for Texas. Before her husband's emigration Laura and her siblings had agreed to contribute to their parents' subsistence in equal amounts. As Laura and her daughters moved to her parents' house after Jesus left, she started to contribute in larger amounts to the parental household. However as Laura's siblings saw that she had more money because of the remittances she received, they asked her to contribute more. She was then paying 50% of the expenses and the other four siblings shared the other 50% between them. Nevertheless at a later stage, two of Laura's siblings complained of financial difficulties. For a while, they stopped giving money to the parents, putting all the responsibility onto Laura.

Lupe (Matehuala) also spoke about how her mother-in-law emotionally blackmailed Lupe's husband, asking him for money to buy medicines. Lupe believed her mother-in-law was not ill and that she used the money in some other way. Furthermore, when her mother-in-law talked over the phone with her son (Lupe's husband) she implied that Lupe was irresponsible with money. Conversely, Lupe resented that her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law were critical of the way she spent money. Her extended family would gossip about her if she bought clothes or other items for herself or her children.

Doña Teresa's (Justino and Melchor's mother) feelings towards Doña Guille, her son Justino's mother-in-law (a case that was discussed earlier in this chapter in section 2.2), also illustrates how the handling of financial resources between extended families can create relations of competition and jealousy. A different case involving the extended family was that involving Reyna, Justino (her husband) and her brothers-in-law in Sunville; and Reyna's mother, Doña Guille and Justino's sisters-in-law in Ocuilan. When Justino's brothers (Melchor and Jorge's father⁷⁵) first arrived in Sunville they stayed at Justino's and Reyna's house. However, after a month or so of Justino's brothers living there, Reyna resented that her domestic duties and expenses had been multiplied. According to Reyna, Justino would not ask his brothers to move out, despite her uneasiness. However, after Reyna spoke to her mother, Doña Guille, to tell her how she felt, she spoke to the wives of Justino's brothers. After this, the wives urged their husbands to leave Reyna's house. This triangulation of information led to tensions that went beyond national borders.

Interestingly, with the exception of the last case described above; these women rarely confronted their extended family in order to express their dissatisfaction. Likewise, they did not communicate to their migrant kin how they felt and rather resigned themselves to those situations.

8.6 Relations with return migrants

The social implications surrounding return migration are vast and complex, yet in this section I aim to focus briefly just on the relations between return migrants and those who stayed behind.

The institution of the family has been idealised to such a point that family conflicts have to a large extent been neglected and family reunification after migration has been supposed to be harmonious (Fresneda Sierra 2001). Yet,

⁷⁵ Jorge's father was no longer residing in Sunville at the time of fieldwork.

when return migrants are back to a day-to-day interaction with their societies of origin, they experience what Gmelch (1980) termed 'reverse culture shock'. Return migrants and those who stayed often (but provisionally) feel alien in relation to each other (Suarez-Orozco C. et al 2002).

The changes brought about by the return of a long-absent person range from joy to dissatisfaction and need for adjustment. After the period of excitement that results from the encounter of a member of the family not seen for a long period, a sensation of boredom or even nuisance can take place for those who were accustomed to living with the migrant's absence. Parents and children and spouses have to go through periods of re-acquaintance and rediscovery. Often children see the person who took care of them in the absence of the migrant parent as the authority figure and take a while to recognise the return migrant as one (Dreby 2009). The carer is generally a woman; the wife of the migrant or the children's aunt, grandmother or godmother. Return migrants therefore feel jealous of the carers and feel their children do not appreciate the sacrifice that was made for their sake (Suarez-Orozco C. et al 2002, Reyes 2008).

Migrants generally return to a status quo within their families that is different from the moment they left. This might have changed for a number of reasons. For instance, new members of the family might have been born, or those who stayed may have formed new friendships. Children have grown up, gone to school and formed a character and personality that can be alien to the returned migrant. Family members can be strangers as they have been absent from each others' lives and the relations between them had been largely based on the sending of money and goods or maintained by telephone calls and other media. In the case of spousal relations, non-migrants could have got accustomed to autonomy, independence and to the responsibilities of taking care of only those who stayed (Aysa and Massey 2004). Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) has widely discussed gender changes that result from migration, in which migrant men have an increasingly active participation in household duties alongside their migrating spouses. The arrival of return migrants can in diverse ways upset a

familial system, therefore members of transnational families have to go through periods of adjustment and negotiations.

Within my sample, women sometimes complained that their husbands compared the way things were done in the USA and Mexico. Women often saw their husbands were *muy desperdiciadores* (waster) of food, money and items they still considered to be in good condition, such as clothing and household goods. Eva (Ocuilan age 41), Melchor's wife, felt uncomfortable when Melchor, after recently returning from the USA, started to accompany her to do the grocery shopping. She disliked that he tried to encourage her to buy more food for the family, arguing that everything in Mexico was very cheap. Eva had got used to what D'Aubeterre (2001) has named 'long-distance conjugality' (*coyugalidad a distancia*). Eva was especially uncomfortable with Melchor's transgression into a field that she considered hers and in which she was usually joined only by other women. Yet, she never mentioned to him her discomfort and instead waited until 'this passed' (*a que se le pasara*). Melchor was confronted by a conflicting masculinity in which on the one hand, he was active in traditionally-female domains, and on the other he aimed to exercise his masculinity and authority by having a say in the way the household income was spent.

But these clashes were not limited to male-female relations. They also existed among relations between women, motivated by jealousy and implicit power relations sustained on dual citizenship, bilingualism and differentials in purchasing power. Lorena (Ocuilan age 24) – Jorge's sister in law – felt that when her US-born cousin Cynthia (Sunville age 16) – Justino and Reyna's daughter – visited Ocuilan 'she was too much of a princess' who seemed not to like spending time with them. She believed that when she and other cousins and friends invited Cynthia to the town fair, Cynthia behaved as though she were afraid that the games and rides would not be safe enough. 'She was expecting that the fair here was like Disneyland and she did not enjoy herself' (Lorena).

Gilda (Ocuilan age 23) – Eva and Melchor’s daughter – said that she thought of her cousin Cynthia as a spoiled show-off (*presumida*) who boasted about having nice clothes and of being able to speak two languages. Cynthia has visited her relatives in Ocuilan only once. During this visit, her cousins did not appreciate her as they felt Cynthia aimed to undermine them only because she is American (*quería hacernos menos nomás por ser gringa*).

A different example is that of Sergio (Matehuala, age 38) who at the time of fieldwork had just returned to Matehuala. While he was living in Dallas his spousal relations deteriorated to the point that he and his wife (who had stayed in Matehuala) decided to separate and cut off contact. After four years of working undocumented in several jobs he returned to Matehuala. Upon his return he started living at his mother’s house. Sergio did not only have to adjust to living again in Mexico, but also he had to get used to living together with his mother and not any more with his wife and their daughters. Sergio had been in Matehuala for just over three weeks at the time of interview, therefore his process of adjustment was at a very early stage. Sergio was not unhappy about the attention he received from his mother, materialised in things such as meals and a clean house, but he admitted feeling ‘weird’ at times especially because had got used to being independent and autonomous.

Despite the initial complications, in most cases the disruptions and destabilisations taking place after family reunification or familial visits return to ‘normal’ over time (Suarez-Orozco C. et al 2002). Return migrants and those who stayed behind eventually learn to live side by side and to understand and adapt (or readapt) to their own and others’ roles and responsibilities (Pribilsky 2004).

8.7 Summary

International migration has become a process with profound implications for family life. Migration has socio-cultural implications for the lives of both migrants and those who stay behind. These implications do not stop with

national borders and instead they form part of a single transnational experience. For those who stay, the stereotypes and ideas associated with life in the USA, including racial relations, discrimination, exploitation and risks associated with living undocumented all play a part in the construction of imaginary conceptions of the lives of migrants in the US. These conceptions however, are not always accurate or close to the migrants' realities.

In this chapter, I have prioritised the analysis of one side of this transnational experience. I focused on analysing the experiences of the family members who stayed in the country of origin. As I have tried to show, the perceptions over the migrants' lives abroad, the relations that are maintained between those who leave and those who stay and the cultural consequences of having lived abroad are complex, ambivalent and at times contradictory. Transnational individual and social lives and their effects are 'inconsistent, patchy in one place or another, good for some, bad for others, short-term or long-term' (Vertovec 2009: 53).

The images and perceptions of life abroad, for both urban and rural non-migrants, are multifaceted and often exaggerate either the suffering, adversities and hardships or the accomplishments and successes the migrant has achieved. The positive, negative or ambivalent compensation keep a close relationship with the effort the migrant relative is doing on *el otro lado* ('the other side') and with the quality of the transnational relations at a family level.

When migrants and the remaining kin maintained sporadic communication, those who stayed behind generally had unclear ideas about the everyday lives and experiences of their relatives in the USA. Also they were more likely to have a 'positive overcompensation' or a 'negative compensation' approach. Yet, the way spouses and parents and children responded to migration were diverse and depended not only on gender or their intergenerational relations, but also on the relations that they had cultivated between them.

In most cases, migration brought about economic improvement and positive social changes, particularly for women who challenged traditional paradigms. Yet, at the same time, migration could create tense situations between family members. These situations often existed between migrants and non-migrants who were left alone with new responsibilities and who were concerned about the migrant's well-being. The tensions could also exist among those who stayed behind, especially in their relations with the extended family. They were often jealous of the others' economic betterment and critical of the use given to remittances. Furthermore, there could also be tensions with return migrants who had upset a familial state of affairs. These were more often than not of a temporary nature, until both the return migrants and the kin who had stayed behind adapted to each other's living together.

The socioeconomic and demographic differences that existed between the participants of this study did not make a noticeable difference to these processes. The urban and rural participants shared patterns for constructing their imaginaries of life abroad, had commonalities regarding the involvement of the extended family and similar experiences with return migrants. Both urban and rural cohorts were concerned about the risks associated with living and working undocumented in the USA. Both cohorts rationalised and made sense of their concerns following the categories of compensation I have here suggested. Both urban and rural non-migrants often exaggerated either the suffering, adversities and hardships or the accomplishments and successes the migrant had achieved. However, it is noteworthy that only women fell into the 'positive overcompensation' category. Conversely, I found both men and women who could be categorised as adopting the 'neutral perspective' and the 'negative compensation' patterns.

Immigrant family relations are fundamental in shaping the whole migratory process. Family members can transform the migration experience and delay or prompt return. Nevertheless, the changes in family dynamics that resulted from migration do not end when the migrant returns to the society of origin. A period of readjustment between all family members involved will inevitably

follow and create a new status quo. The contradictions of migration will also surface at this stage when both migrants and non-migrants balance the positive and negative consequences of the migration experience. Migrants and non-migrants have to learn to readjust, to re-acquaintance and to negotiate their roles and positions within the familial system.

Chapter 9: What does it mean to be *illegal*? views from the undocumented

Throughout this study, I have discussed several aspects of the everyday lives of undocumented Mexican migrants in the United States. Their status had defined to a significant extent their everyday lives in terms of incorporation, identity, sense of belonging, social interactions and their links with places of origin. Their lack of documentation to live and work in the USA had considerably marked their migration experience, starting from the moment in which they left their homelands attempting to cross over to the USA, to finding a job, or interacting with other social groups in the United States, among other things.

The immigrant experience per se is a matter of abundant sociological research, but migrants' illegality/ 'undocumentedness' requires further reflection and analysis. The literature exploring undocumented migration is vast, however, this has largely focused on giving solutions to the 'problems' derived from it. Portes (1978) noted more than two decades ago, that a large body of the literature is thought of as for an audience of decision-makers and discusses policy-implications of employing undocumented immigrants as well as either stricter or more flexible border enforcement measures. This tendency has not significantly changed.

More perspectives have come to the forefront analysing the role of the states - sending and receiving- and the manners in which they respond, and recommendations as to how they should respond. A large body of literature is concerned with addressing the short and long-term economic, political and social consequences of immigration -skilled and unskilled- in host countries (Borjas 1994, Dustman and Preston 2004, Johnson 2007). Nevertheless, the analysis and conclusions of these studies have little or no discussion about the way undocumented migrants see their roles in the economy and politics of the country in which they reside. Only recently, have some scholars attempted to

dissect the meaning of ‘illegality’ from the point of view of the undocumented migrants themselves (Rouse 1992, Hagan 1994, Rodriguez 1999, De Genova 2002, Córdova-Plaza 2005, Núñez-Madrazo 2005, Skerritt-Gardner 2005).

In this chapter I aim to contribute to filling that gap by discussing the significance of migrant ‘illegality’ or ‘undocumentedness’ from the point of view of undocumented migrants themselves. My objective is neither to study the legal, political, nor economic implications of a ‘broken immigration system’, nor to argue for or against undocumented migration. Rather it is to describe and analyse how the undocumented migrants of my samples saw their ‘illegality’ and what it meant to them in their daily lives. How did it feel to be an *illegal*? Did they believe that by living undocumented they were doing something wrong? What did they expect in terms of regularising their status? How would regularisation affect their lives? I also aim to explore the sentiments of hope and expectation ‘for better times to come’, ‘for an amnesty’, for a reform’ or simply ‘for living without fear and the need to hide from authorities’.

First, I will start with a succinct reflection on the various terms used to refer to these populations and a brief examination of their implications. Secondly, I will analyse the differences in how both Dallas and Sunville cohorts perceived their undocumented status. Thirdly, I will discuss how the services for undocumented immigrants have become less inaccessible as a result of the increasing numbers of population with irregular migration status. Fourthly, I will explore how a prospective immigration reform would affect the lives of my sample populations and discuss the possible reasons for their different expectations. Finally, I discuss the relation between ‘undocumentedness’/ ‘illegality’ and the impediments for better employment opportunities.

9.1 Terminology and conceptualisations

Despite undocumented migration not being a new phenomenon, there is not a unique term to refer to undocumented populations either in political, academic or everyday life arenas. Using a specific term has implications in the conceptualisation, understanding and representation of these populations (Fassin 1996, Lakoff and Ferguson 2006, Paspalanova 2008). The use of a specific term much depends on the audience and purposes of a particular discourse.

Official international documents usually employ the terms ‘non-documented’, ‘irregular’ and ‘unauthorised’ migrants. Since 1975 the United Nations has requested all of its organs and special agencies to use the term ‘non-documented or irregular migrant workers’ to define ‘those workers who illegally or surreptitiously enter another country to obtain work’ (UN Resolution 3449). In the United States, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) makes use of the term ‘unauthorized immigrants’⁷⁶, but also employs negatively-charged terms and concepts such as ‘illegal presence’, ‘loss of legal status’ and ‘violation of the Immigration and Nationality Act’⁷⁷.

In US public opinion, media and right-wing political discourse, the term ‘illegal alien’ is the most widely used (Carmichael 2010, Carmichael and Burks 2010). Terms such as ‘illegal alien’, ‘clandestine’ and ‘wetback’ are also of common use in public debates and opinions with a rather derogatory tone. The lack of a precise terminology is ‘symptomatic of deeper problems of intellectual –and ultimately political orientation’ (De Genova 2002: 421). The

⁷⁶ The US DHS defines ‘unauthorized resident immigrant population’ as all foreign-born non-citizens who are not legal residents of the United States, who entered without inspection or were admitted temporarily and stayed past the date they were required to leave (Hoeffler et al 2010).

⁷⁷ The unauthorised presence and work in the USA of an immigrant is not considered a felony, but a misdemeanour, therefore the unauthorised presence in the USA is a civil and not a criminal offence. In 2005 and 2010, US Representative James Sensenbrenner (HR4437 Bill) and Arizona Governor Jane Brewer (SB1070 Arizona law) respectively attempted unsuccessfully to change the law to make undocumented migration a felony.

term ‘illegal alien’ is largely linked in the public mind to crime (Palidda 1999). Hispanics as previously discussed constitute a large share of the ‘illegal alien’ pool in the USA. But contrary to popular opinion, it is estimated that the involvement of Hispanic immigrants in crime is less than that of US citizens (Hagan and Palloni 1999).

Because many immigrants to the United States, especially Mexicans and Central Americans, are young men who arrive with very low levels of formal education, popular stereotypes and standard criminological theory tend to associate them with higher rates of crime and incarceration. The fact that many of these immigrants enter the country through unauthorized channels or overstay their visas often is framed as an assault against the “rule of law,” thereby reinforcing the impression that immigration and criminality are linked (Rumbaut and Ewing 2007).

Public opinion and political discourses regarding Mexican undocumented migration to the USA have typically been politically charged and marked by two contrasting views either favouring or opposing this issue.

In Mexico these individuals are called “migrant workers” and they are viewed in such a positive light that their family members are openly proud of their achievements. In the United States, they are called “illegal aliens”; they are viewed in a very negative light, almost like a plague invading from outside and where the citizens of the United States are made the victims (Bustamante 1998: 820).

On the one hand, ‘illegal’ immigrants are considered as harmful to the economy; they are blamed for creating an economic deficit, for fiscal drains, as abusers of welfare, for costing the government more than they pay in taxes, and their purported association with crime. There is abundant material pleading for stricter border enforcement, analysing the economic consequences of hiring ‘illegal’ workers and demanding greater political efforts to tackle and control this ‘problem’. There are also non-economic manifestations of opposition to immigration; for example racism, xenophobia and milder to extreme forms of nationalist sentiments (O’Rourke and Sinnott 2006). On the US-Mexico border, there has been an increase in the number of US border agents, in

conjunction with border-security projects for the construction of a fence⁷⁸, ditches, and other physical barriers. In states such as Arizona and California, and more recently in Georgia and Alabama, undocumented residents have been excluded from some public-supported services and welfare programmes, and in Alabama from attending public universities (Alvarez and Butterfield 1997, Rodriguez 1999, Lee et al 2001, *New York Times* September 28, 2011). An ongoing debate has been the plan to deny citizenship to US-born children of undocumented parents (Klawonn 2010, Redmon 2011).

On the other hand, there is also a considerable amount of material focusing on the vulnerability and lack of civil rights of undocumented workers, of their difficult access to health and public services, and on the physically demanding jobs they perform. Undocumented migrants are seen as low-cost labour that sustains the host country's economic wealth; tolerating abuses, exploitation and discrimination. Popular discourse in Mexico has also argued that undocumented immigrants are victims of a system that is not able to offer them development opportunities in their homelands. Basok (2010: 97) argued that “‘illegal’... [migrants] are deprived of the “right to have rights”... they are policed, harassed, exploited..., denied political voices and access to social protections and benefits and excluded from the social fabric.’ The media generally talk about migrants when these face violence, discrimination, exploitation and social vulnerability (Agustin 2003, Salgado de Snyder et al 2007). The church has also been an important space for the dissemination of information about immigrants' vulnerability, sometimes transcending the religious arena as a political actor (Coutin 1993, Espinoza 1999, Odgers-Ortiz 2003, Rivera-Sánchez 2007).

⁷⁸ In September 2006, the House of Representatives passed the resolution ‘Secure Fence Act’ to build a fence along the US-Mexico border. The fence would have a high-tech surveillance system with cameras and radar. This initiative was to a large extent a response to terrorism fears. However, there is no evidence of terrorists entering the USA through Mexico, nor there is evidence of any need, from a national security standpoint, to fear immigration from Mexico (Johnson and Trujillo 2007). In January 2011 the construction of this fence was cancelled after completing border coverage of only 53 miles (CNN, January 14, 2011).

In recent years, US-based civil rights organisations and advocacy groups like the National Council of la Raza, the League of United Latin-American Citizens, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund, among others; have gained voice and aimed to balance public opinion and political action favouring Latino groups. They have worked to promote their civil rights, education and equality in the USA. These organisations are largely composed of Hispanic-origin US-citizens.

9.2 Is it socially wrong?

Despite the negative views associated with ‘illegal’ immigration, undocumented immigrants rarely see themselves as criminals, as harming the US economy or doing wrong to the society. While there is generally a consciousness of its being ‘against the law’, undocumented migration is rarely seen as a crime or as morally unacceptable by undocumented migrants themselves. Far from doing wrong and from being a burden to American economy, undocumented migrants generally see themselves, not as a problem, but rather as part of a solution to both Mexican and American economic situations.

During my fieldwork, I noted dissimilarities between the Dallas and Sunville cohorts about their sensitivity regarding the use of terms ‘illegal’ and ‘undocumented’ and of the uses of social networks to get along as an undocumented migrant. Their differences were related closely to the migrants’ social class and to how rooted migration was in their communities in the sending society. For the most part, when undocumented migration was widespread in the society of origin, migrants and their kin were not ashamed of their illegality and could talk openly about this. On the contrary, when undocumented migration was not common in the society of origin, it was less likely that this would be considered a viable way of life and at the same time migrants perceived their undocumentedness as a delicate matter. These

contrasting views will be developed and further discussed in the following sections.

9.2.1 Sunville: *los ilegales*

As has been noted throughout this work, Ocuilan had a long out-migration tradition and was a community where cumulative causation (Massey 1990) had taken hold. In addition, the social interactions of the migrants in Sunville, as detailed in Chapter 6, were mainly among co-ethnics and with people who were aware of their ‘illegal’ migration status. To be an ‘illegal’ in Sunville did not carry connotations of shame or guilt. Neither men nor women found it problematic to admit their ‘illegal’ status. My respondents in Sunville labelled themselves ‘illegal’ or ‘*mojados*’⁷⁹ (*estoy aquí de ilegal, me vine de ilegal, estamos de mojados* – ‘I’m here as an illegal’, ‘I came illegally’, ‘we are wetbacks’), went to ‘places for illegals’ and made conscious distinctions between ‘the illegals’ and the ‘Americans’, ‘gringos’ or ‘*con papeles*’. This self-labelling was used, however, only amongst friends, relatives and acquaintances.

Take for instance, the following example. A common leisure practice amongst my respondents was to go shopping at the swap meet (affectionately referred to as *el suami*). Here it was possible to find second-hand and new items as well as pirate versions of clothes, music, movies, beauty products and knick-knacks. There were two swap meets at similar driving distances. The swap meet my respondents frequented was known amongst them as *el suami de los ilegales* (swap meet for the illegals [*sic*]). The other swap meet was known as *el suami de los gringos* (swap meet for the gringos). This division was based not on the

⁷⁹ The term *mojado* became of common use in Spanish as the translation of the derogatory word ‘wetback’. However, in Spanish it does not carry the negative connotations of wetback. In popular culture, *mojado* is used as a colloquial non-derogatory term for undocumented migrant. Examples of this are Ricardo Arjona’s song ‘Mojado’ and the *migracorrido* (*norteño* songs making reference to stories of migrants) of Los Tigres del Norte such as ‘Tres veces mojado’ (‘three times wet’). These songs, far from condemning undocumented migration, narrate the emotionally and physically difficult journeys of undocumented migrants (to read the lyrics in Spanish of these songs, translated into English by myself, see Appendix 4).

legal status or citizenship of those who visited these places, but on the ethnicity, class and purchase power of the clients. The ‘swap meet for the ‘illegals’” resembled a *tianguis* (market in Mexico), where some of the stands consisted of a simple piece of cloth on the ground or a table with walls made up of interconnecting metal poles, covered by plastic roofs to protect from the sun. Most of the stands however, were permanently established with galvanised iron rooves and shelves for displaying products. The prices were not displayed and could be known only by asking the vendor; also it was possible to bargain. The ‘swap meet for the gringos’ charged an entry fee of \$1.50 USD per person. Those who only wanted to look around were put off by this restriction. This market offered a large variety of new as well as second-hand products. These premises in some areas had air conditioned, cemented ceilings and floors, and none of the stalls were improvised.

A further observation was that most of the migrants of the Sunville sample described experiences that showed a sense of triumph related to their ‘illegal’ crossings. Some were proud of having deceived a border official when ‘crossing the [border] line’ (*cruzarón por la línea*) using fake documents, or by having controlled their nerves and anxiety when being questioned at the border by immigration officials. Some gladly remembered the lines that the *coyotes* (smugglers) had instructed them to memorise for their interviews with the border officials, even years after they had crossed. Likewise they remembered the names, places and dates of birth of the person they claimed to be in the counterfeit crossing documents. Others thought they had passed a sort of ‘test’ by having survived the harsh conditions of crossing through the desert withstanding extreme temperatures, hunger, thirst, natural dangers and the ever-present risk of being caught by *la migra*. Men typically talked about these experiences with a sense of pride, as if having crossed the border and arrived to Sunville had been a test for their masculinity in which they had succeeded. Women on the other hand, recognised their suffering and talked about the pains and risks faced, considering themselves as lucky and/or blessed after having reached their destination.

The team-work implicit in crossing was also highly valued. This was expressed either in consensual decision-making, in sharing food and drinks or by ‘giving a hand’ to others who were in greater need of physical aid. Men were especially content if they had performed a protective role for children or women who collapsed due to the high temperatures or starvation, even though they had met only while crossing the desert. Being successful in these situations reinforced the self-esteem of the undocumented. Some respondents also took into consideration the asymmetries in power and wealth between the US and Mexico, to feel more triumphant. They boasted about how they had been smarter than the well-trained border agents and had fooled the high-tech and expensive devices to detect ‘illegals’.

Furthermore, undocumented migrants prided themselves for *always* having an alternative to whatever new border enforcement measures the USA implemented. This came into discussion after talking about the fence that was being constructed on the Mexico-USA border. None of my respondents in Sunville and Ocuilan thought this would stop or deter immigrants. Some mocked this fence by making comments such as ‘if they’ll build a fence, then we’ll dig a tunnel’, ‘if they build a 20 metre high fence, the next day we will have a 21 metre tall ladder’ or by saying that *Ocuilenses* had already started to train for pole vaulting.

The perceived success was also closely linked to an attitude of perseverance, as shown by the next passage:

The person who wants to come, is going to come. It does not matter if one has to try two, three or ten times. It does not matter if one has to go back all the way, again and again (Tommy, Sunville, age 22).

Despite the assumed determination, the flow of Mexican migrants to the US has shown a sharp decline in the number of new arrivals since 2008 (Passel and Cohn 2009). More recent figures show that the net migration from Mexico to the USA as of April 2012, had come to a standstill and maybe even reversed (Passel et al 2012).

Furthermore, there was a sense of pride, in those migrants who had accumulated enough social and cultural capital, about the best practices to get along as an undocumented worker. For instance, Don Cucaracho⁸⁰ had gained the community's respect by knowing where to contact the 'best providers' of counterfeit documentation and by giving advice about what to do when facing problems at work.

However, the sentiments that living undocumented created were rather mixed. The pride described above did not temper experiences of exploitation, vulnerability, fear, discrimination, loneliness and nostalgia. Yet, these feelings were not externalised straight away, and it was easier to communicate occurrences which brought joy and content rather than those which brought anger, disappointment and anxiety (Fernandez et al 2000). The expression of negative emotions was directly related to weakness, whereas emotional detachment was related to strength. Moreover, for men in particular, it was important to feel that an achievement had been attained; to admit defeat and weakness devalued masculinity (Bird 1996).

9.2.2 Dallas: discreet 'undocumentedness'

As described throughout this work, the Dallas and Sunville cohorts perceived their undocumented status through a different lens. The Dallas cohort did not boast about their achievements in having deceived the US immigration controls. I noticed that they did not use the term 'illegal' to refer to themselves or their status. This is consistent with the observations in Chapter 6.5, where I discuss how the Dallas respondents saw themselves as different from the 'bulk' of illegal immigrants. As detailed in previous chapters, this entire cohort had had an authorised mode of entry (with tourist visas), and most had US-issued

⁸⁰ I did not have the chance to interview Don Cucaracho. Esperanza tried to contact him but he pleaded not to have time for an interview. However, he was regarded as a reliable middleman, who had helped newcomers as well as more veteran inhabitants of Sunville. He did not reside within the *barrio*.

driving licences (see section 3 of this Chapter). In general, these respondents saw the topic of illegality with caution, sensitivity and in a particular family, even with secrecy. The delicacy with which they treated their status was aimed at protecting themselves.

Luis and Lisa were the heads of households who treated their status with extreme discretion. To them accepting that they lived undocumented in the US was problematic and they did not refer to themselves in any of the terms commonly employed. Rather, they talked about living in a 'difficult situation', of their 'hopes for their situation to improve' or for 'better times to come'.

According to Lisa and Luis, their children were unaware of their undocumented migration situation. They had three US-born children, one boy aged 13, and two girls aged 6 and 3. They argued, however, that as their son Bernardo (age 13) was growing older; it had become increasingly difficult to keep their status undisclosed from him. Lisa's family in Mexico was also reluctant to communicate to him any aspect related to Lisa and Luis's migration status. This difficulty became clearer after Bernardo had gone to Mexico for holidays with his grandparents on several occasions. The last time Bernardo was in Mexico, he went back to Dallas very eager to travel to Mexico with his parents and siblings. However, they did not make the trip as a family. Lisa and Luis refused to tell their son the true reasons for not going to Mexico. They claimed instead not to have time off work and to have many other expenses which made it impossible for them to travel to Mexico.

Similarly, Lisa described how Bernardo went through a period in which he asked his parents why they did not work in professional jobs if they had higher education. They explained him that they would need to spend time and money validating their Mexican degrees in order to meet US standards. Moreover, Lisa explained to Bernardo that her work as a domestic was well paid and had many advantages over other types of work such as relatively flexible working

hours⁸¹. She tried to make a point by arguing that her friend Emma⁸², who had also undertaken higher education, similarly worked cleaning houses.

Yet, Lisa and Luis's case was a rather isolated one. While it was commonplace within this cohort to treat their undocumented status with discretion; the rest of these respondents were not as reserved within their families. Paola and Ruben had three Mexico-born teenage daughters. Their oldest was 17 years old and the other two were 14 and 13; they were all aware of their parents' undocumented status and they were undocumented migrants themselves. The other couple, Karla and Mario had one US-born child who, at 4 years old, was too young to comprehend migration status. Therefore, Lisa and Luis's discretion could have also been linked to Bernardo's young age and his role as oldest brother. They had not disclosed to any of their children of their status, they feared that Bernardo would not treat this matter with the same discretion they did and they did not want their son to feel 'used' as an 'anchor child'⁸³.

Most of the respondents in this cohort had not witnessed firsthand the deportation of friends or relatives. They did not usually fear of raids. The way they represented themselves (as discussed in Chapter 6) suggested a very blurred connection to 'illegal' immigration. Among this group, all the women worked in domestic work, thus had no need to demonstrate work permits to their employers. By working in privately owned houses, they were in a close and 'safe' environment, away from immigration controls. In the case of men, Luis and Abel had fake social security numbers and believed their employers were unaware of their irregular status and they deemed it unnecessary to let them know this. Mario ran his own business in the construction sector, and had no employer to report to. Only Ruben, who worked in construction; said his employer and co-workers knew he did not have a work permit. However, he

⁸¹ Moreover the women in this cohort (domestic workers and one babysitter) often received presents from their employers ranging from clothes to furniture and home appliances.

⁸² Emma is legally residing in the US after marrying a US-citizen and has some years of higher education and professional experience in Mexico.

⁸³ 'Anchor child' is a term to refer to a US-born child of immigrants who is expected to sponsor the regularisation of the parents' (or other family members) migration status.

did not feel different from his co-workers because where he worked ‘nobody had papers’. With the exception of Ruben, the lack of papers of the Dallas respondents did not seem to have significant impact as to how they perceived themselves as undocumented workers. They could work in relatively safe environments or without the constant fear of deportation and raids.

Despite the apparently ‘distant from illegality’ *modus vivendi* this cohort aimed to have, they also performed practices that belonged to an undocumented life. The most evident was the limitation on travelling outside the USA. Even when some respondents still had valid US tourist visas, none of them wanted to leave the USA and go through a difficult and risky process when attempting to enter again. Having a tourist visa did not guarantee entry to the USA, as it will be illustrated below with Paola’s daughter case.

Paola’s daughter travelled to Mexico to decide whether to enrol in high school in Texas or Mexico. She stayed in Mexico for a month looking for schools and spending some time with her grandparents and extended family. When she was at the airport in Monterrey, Mexico before boarding the plane back to Dallas, she showed her passport and visa and could board without a problem. Nevertheless, she had problems when she arrived in Dallas. The migration officer at the airport questioned her about the purpose of her trip and did not believe the story she had prepared. She said the purpose of her trip was to visit some friends and that she would stay for two weeks only. Yet, she did not have any document to demonstrate that her permanent residence was in Mexico or that she was a student there. She said her parents also lived in Mexico but did not have her parents’ payslips. After this, she was sent to a room for secondary inspection. She was not able to demonstrate that her permanent residence was – allegedly – in Mexico. The officers, fortuitously, did not have records that she had already been living in the USA for several years. For these reasons she was denied entry and sent back to Mexico. As she wanted to return to Dallas with her parents, she asked a schoolteacher, who was a friend of her mother’s, to give her a letter. This letter stated that Paola’s daughter was a student

enrolled in the school where she worked. A week later she crossed by land and did not have further problems in entering the USA.

One more example of undocumented life in Dallas was that my respondents, lacking medical/dental coverage or deeming these services too expensive, went to a dentist, a graduate from a Mexican university, who travelled regularly to Dallas. This dentist used a tourist visa to enter the USA. A friend of hers, residing in Dallas was in charge of keeping a registry of her patients and their needs. She then coordinated with her in Mexico the most suitable dates for her to practice in her Texas office and informed the patients of the dates when she would be in town. This dentist had an office equipped with surgical instruments and brought the medicines with her from Mexico, as it was not possible for her to prescribe in the USA.

In most cases, the Dallas respondents were not very open about their strategies for living undocumented. They seemed uncomfortable about discussing this during the interviews. As discussed in Chapter 6, this group avoided contact and links with other undocumented migrants or with Mexicans of lower social class and were ambivalent as to how they saw their own integration into the US dominant culture.

Having discussed the differences on perspectives that the two cohorts of US migrants in this study had about their 'undocumentedness', I will examine how being undocumented had become an increasingly widespread practice. The latter had resulted also in less difficult access to services and practices for undocumented populations, something I refer to as the 'undocumentedness limbo'.

9.3 The less difficult access to the 'undocumentedness limbo'

In 1994 Hagan published her observations about a Maya community in Houston that went through the immigrant legalisation process in the USA after

the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). Among her observations, Hagan described processes in which the formerly undocumented increasingly legitimised their presence in the USA. The process of legitimisation included opening bank accounts, paying taxes, learning the English language and obtaining valid social security numbers (Hagan 1994: 132). This process initially awoke in her respondents sentiments of fear and distrust towards US institutions. However, as the number of individuals and families legitimising their status increased, the fear and distrust weakened.

Rodriguez (1999) noted over a decade ago a pattern of 'autonomous migration' of Mexican undocumented migrants in the USA. He argued that Mexico-US transnational communities had challenged the status quo of borders, making them 'increasingly irrelevant... as if the border did not exist' (Rodriguez 1999: 29). He discussed how undocumented migrants acted autonomously of state controls and broadened their bases of action across nation-state boundaries, influencing their places of residence at the same time as they maintained links to their societies of origin.

[A]utonomous migration means more than unauthorized ("illegal") border crossings: it means a community strategy implemented, developed, and sustained with the support of institutions, including formal ones, at the migrants' points of origin and U.S. points of destination... [F]amilies and other community institutions adopt autonomous migration as an approved course of action for social reproduction (Rodriguez 1999: 29-30).

These two scholars noted situations in which undocumented migrants were increasingly legitimising their presence in the host countries, regardless of state controls. These processes were visible more than 15 years ago.

In the last two decades the number of unauthorised migrants in the US has tripled. In 1990 it was estimated as 3.5 million; now it is estimated as being over 11 million, even though the number of undocumented workers declined in 2008 (Passel and Cohn 2009, 2011). These figures show that living undocumented in the US has become an increasingly widespread practice. For

this reason, undocumented migrants' needs have also become less inaccessible. For instance, undocumented migrants can obtain driving licences in the states of Washington and New Mexico (Clark, *Fox News*, February 2011; Frosch *New York Times*, January 2012). Nationwide it is possible to obtain car insurance without proof of legal residence and without a driving licence. Furthermore, some banks and retail shops can open bank accounts and give credit and loans (including mortgages) without demonstrating regular migration status. Many of the signs of legitimisation that Hagan (1994) described were, at the time of fieldwork, attainable for larger segments of the population. Most importantly, they were available without exclusion based on migratory status, making undocumented migration, as Rodriguez (1999) noted, more autonomous from state controls.

In the Mexican case in particular, the '*matrículas consulares*' (identification cards issued by the Mexican consular representations) have been a valid form of identification, despite opposition from some US states' security departments. This document makes it possible to keep records of populations that would be very difficult to follow with conventional methods. As described by Irazuzta (2009) the *matrícula* facilitates the formation of a collective anonymity for Mexicans into a diaspora. The *matrícula consular* has enabled undocumented Mexican migrants to open bank accounts and in certain states to obtain driving licences (Bruno and Stors 2005).

The use of social networks, as well as the greater accessibility to services has facilitated a 'less clandestine' life for undocumented migrants. One of the most valued documents for this is a US-issued driving licence, which is *de facto* used as a US national identification. Most US states now require documents restricted to citizens and persons with 'legal presence' in the US⁸⁴, therefore possession of a driving licence almost automatically implies an authorised status (Lopez 2004-5).

⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the restrictions on obtaining this document have become increasingly greater. Some pro-immigrant groups have tried fruitlessly to persuade lawmakers to issue driving licences without asking for proof of legal residency; their efforts however have faced contentious opposition (Frosch, *New York Times*, February 2012).

In addition, drivers in the USA no longer need to be in possession of a US-valid licence to insure their cars. Newspapers, television adverts, fliers and posters widely advertise car insurance without driver's licence. These advertisements are largely directed to the Hispanic sector, are written or spoken in Spanish and employ images of people with a prototypical Hispanic physical appearance.

The respondents in my sample in Dallas, with the exception of Paola, had Texas driving licences. It was not until 2008 that the state of Texas started to require proof of legal residence to issue this document. This US-issued, US-recognised, document marked a further element of distinction of what is typically regarded as 'illegal'. The Texas driving licence had a symbolic significance in 'legitimising' the stays of my respondents, thus reducing their vulnerability and fear about having contact with US institutions.

Conversely, the state of California has required proof of legal residence for nearly a decade in order to issue driving licenses. Respondents in the Sunville sample invested great effort and economic resources, and used their social capital to obtain this document. To achieve this, they had to embark on a process which started with contacting friends residing in the state of Washington in order to get utility bills with a state address⁸⁵. Later, they travelled to the state of Washington to take the theoretical and practical examinations. For this purpose, it was common that those who had passed the examinations aided new applicants with the procedures and possible questions.

In the Ocuilan cohort, Benja, Jorge and Melchor had been unable to obtain their licences. They claimed that their failure had been due to their limited proficiency in English. Yet they drove around Sunville on an almost daily basis. Some women in my sample also drove without driving licences.

⁸⁵ People from Ocuilan and neighbouring towns have typically settled in three main areas in the US. These are Sunville in California; a neighbouring city to Denver, Colorado and an agricultural town in the state of Washington.

However, they generally did so only if a man could not drive them to their destination. For women it was more common and socially acceptable to admit fear about being stopped by the police or about committing an infraction.

In general, the massive numbers of undocumented people residing in the US has had relatively beneficial effects on the undocumented themselves by granting them easier access to services such as through US recognised identifications (even if this has become more restrictive in recent years), access to clandestine health services, implicit protection from employers, and access to bank accounts, loans and credit. All of this, in conjunction with social networks for the exchange of information and mutual protection, has made 'living in the shadows' a less shadowy lifestyle.

This relative loosening⁸⁶ had taken place in part because undocumented populations have formed a community which they can feel part of, independently of their [sometimes ambivalent] senses of belonging and identification with the US or Mexico (see Chapter 6). This 'undocumented community' did not exclude those *con papeles*. Their membership was actually sought after in order to access information and social spaces reserved for the 'legals'. *Con papeles* were of course more likely to help and be empathic to the *sin papeles* if they themselves had been through the transition from illegal to legal. The 'undocumented community' of the Dallas sample was less numerous when compared to Sunville. This was largely because the Dallas migrants were more discreet and reserved when talking about their irregular status.

However, taking into account Rodriguez's (1999) and other arguments about transnationalism (focused not only on undocumented migrants), undocumented migrants do live 'extra-legal' aspects of their everyday lives, in which state controls mean little practical limitation. As Hagan (1994) noted, undocumented migrants resort to social networks to implement survival strategies so as to face the restrictions implicit in their status, recomposing work forces and settlement

⁸⁶ The loosening I refer to applies only for those who are already residing in the US. Border control and enforcement has, on the contrary, become stricter.

spaces. However, it has become easier over time to implement them, as social networks, institutional and political actors local and transnational have become widespread and identifiable.

9.4 A new immigration reform?

In 1986, the US Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) aimed at curbing undocumented migration to the USA. As discussed in Chapter 5.2, IRCA sought to achieve the latter through sanctions on employers, increased border enforcement and a legalisation programme for undocumented migrants already in the US (Donato et al 1992). These migrants had to meet specific provisions to obtain legal US residence and subsequent citizenship. Nearly 2.7 million people were granted amnesty, including two million Mexicans (Orrenius and Zavodny 2003).

The discussions by policymakers regarding a new amnesty for the undocumented migrants currently living in the US are sometimes dormant and, at other times, are a heated issue. Positive and negative discourses, possibilities and expectations vary according to political, social and economic circumstances. The political agenda along with heightened media coverage towards immigration, can dictate perceptions amongst the US public about advantages and disadvantages of migration (Dunaway et al 2007). The state of the US economy largely regulates these changing moods. Economic recessions and crisis stimulate anti-immigrant sentiments while a booming economic situation can generate sympathy towards immigrant labour (Citrin et al 1997).

According to the Pew Research Center, immigration was a low to mid-tier issue for public opinion in the 2007-2009 period. A Pew Research poll conducted in autumn 2008 found that immigration was ranked 11th place in a list of 13 issues. Economy, jobs, energy and health care topped the list (Keeter 2009). The public interest in immigration was high when ex-President G. W. Bush tried unsuccessfully to push an Immigration Reform and proposed a

Guest Workers Programme in 2004 and heightened as the debate over immigration reform in 2006 intensified (Johnson 2007).

In 2010 public attention turned once more to immigration as the Arizona Law SB1070 was being discussed, later approved but weeks later suspended by a federal judge. Late in June 2012, however, the US Supreme Court upheld SB 1070's provision to authorise the police to check the migration status of people they stop or arrest (Supreme Court of Justice of the United States 2012, *The New York Times- Topics* 2012).

Also in June 2012, immigration issues made the headlines again after President Obama signed an executive order to stop the deportations of young undocumented immigrants (up to 30 years old) who arrived in the USA before age 16, who have lived for at least five years in that country, who are high school graduates or military veterans and who have a clear criminal record. This policy does not automatically grant legal residence nor a path to citizenship, but it does allow these young immigrants a 2-year reprieve from deportation and gives them the chance to apply for a work permit (Preston, *New York Times*, June 2012; Wallsten, *The Washington Post*, June 2012). The Pew Hispanic Center, estimated that up to 1.4 million children and young adults could potentially benefit from this new policy. This figure represents about 12% of the 11.2 million unauthorised immigrants as of 2010, according to an estimate by the same Pew Hispanic Center. Some 70% of the 1.4 million potential beneficiaries are from Mexico (Pew Hispanic Center Release, June 15 2012).

Both these moves have come just months before the November US-presidential elections. Hispanics and non-Hispanics hold varying views regarding immigration legalisation and enforcement measures. Among Hispanics, US-born and born elsewhere, there is no consensus of 'what to do' with undocumented migrants. As of 2011 figures, the Pew Hispanic Center National Survey of Latinos reported that 59% of Hispanics disapproved of the way the Obama administration handled deportations of unauthorised immigrants. A

majority of Hispanics supported paving a path to citizenship; some 46% said both better border security and enforcement and a path to citizenship should be given equal priority when it comes to dealing with illegal immigration, while 42% thought that Obama's administration should provide a path to citizenship for immigrants without stricter border enforcement (Lopez et al, December 2011).

Despite these views, the issue of undocumented migration remains to be addressed. President Obama and some Democratic Representatives such as Nydia Velazquez (N.Y.) and Luis Gutierrez (Ill.) as well as Sen. Bob Menendez (N.J.) have vowed to 'fix the broken immigration system'. For several years the Democrats had seen no substantial results in this, and it was not until June 2012 that President Obama signed an executive order that will permit young migrants to remain in the US under certain conditions. The migrants of Sunville and Dallas, being aware of the volatility and uncertainty surrounding immigration policy, had had to varying extents recurring expectations for new comprehensive immigration reform. This is analysed in the following section.

9.4.1 What to expect?

This section will discuss my respondents' long-held imaginaries; hopes and expectations regarding immigration reform. These hopes and expectations have been sometimes high and at other times low, depending mainly on the country of destination's political moment and economic situation, as earlier mentioned. The illusions, hopes, expectations, imaginaries, beliefs, etc. of becoming legal were, to a large extent, what motivated my respondents' accounts. At the time of fieldwork, however, there was no proposal from the US Congress, Senate or Executive; on the path to immigration reform legislation.

Before the executive order signed by President Obama in June 2012 to stop the deportations of young immigrants, the 1986 IRCA had been the last immigrant legalisation programme effected in the USA. The prospect of a new amnesty

had led migrants to be familiar with specific elements of immigration law, expecting to find similar requisites to those of 1986 (Cornelius 1989). However, among my sample populations, it was not possible to talk about a unique group view about hopes and expectations for migration reform. Undocumented migrants regardless of their social class, education and place of origin, gave different meanings as to how regularisation would affect their lives and not all expected or believed a regularisation programme would happen. Migrants' marital status and the location of their spouses and children, their intentions for settlement and return, issues of identity and belonging, the number of family members left behind, the quality of relations between communities of origin and destination, as well as gender were factors that greatly influenced hopes and expectations regarding a reform of immigration law. Regardless of positive, hesitant or negative views about reform, this was an issue which remained in the collective imaginary of undocumented populations.

Those who hoped for a reform had been waiting and preparing for long periods, several for over a decade. Part of the preparation involved keeping documents that could prove their employment and residence in the United States, such as rent receipts, payment slips, social security numbers, bank statements or any other document that proved the length of their stay. They relied to a great extent on what they had learned from the 1986 regularisation programme and in unapproved legislation proposals. They hoped that when 'their turn comes', the prerequisites would be similar.

Contrary to other aspects that have been analysed in this work, the Sunville and Dallas samples showed similarities as to what they expected in relation to migratory reform and how this would influence their lives. For instance, legal status was seen as a definer for settlement or return. Also there were mixed views as to the role of President Obama and his endorsement for an amnesty. Closely related to this, was the link between the economic recession and migration reform, as will be discussed at greater length below.

The fact that current US President Obama campaigned in 2008 to promote and support an immigration bill, to make immigration a priority in his government and to fix the broken immigration system, brought hope for change during his presidency. Moreover, Obama's being the son of a Kenyan citizen and having immigrant relatives himself also created empathy among Latinos who believed he would have a better understanding of the immigration issue.

At the time of fieldwork, Obama had served in office for less than one year, and he had not delivered any meaningful progress in relation to immigration reform. Additionally, the US was going through a serious financial recession. Few believed that he would indeed be able to keep his immigration reform vow in the time he promised. Yet only a minority believed that nothing in favour of undocumented immigrants would take place.

Abel (Dallas age 46), was one of the few to argue that Obama 'inspire[d] trust' in him. He admitted to have hopes in Obama because of Obama's personal history.

Until very recently I was curious to learn about him. I started reading a book about his life and I was greatly impressed. I believe that he will be able to change things deeply in this country. I believe he will put a human face in politics, that he is concerned about the people...

However, most of my respondents believed that because of the economic recession, a regularisation programme was unlikely.

It is very unclear. The Senator Luis Gutierrez has done a lot, but I understand that this does not depend on one person, not even on the President alone. But let's see... When Bush dealt with this, the coverage was massive. This time we have not yet reached that momentum. With the crisis Obama faced a lot of opposition and certainly it was not the best timing to attempt a radical change. I have listened to specialists saying this, and I believe it too. Now it is not the best time. (Magdis, Dallas, age 44).

Others based their expectation on lessons learned from past experiences. For example, Mario (Dallas, age 36) compared the current economic situation to that he lived through during the Clinton years.

I do not place any hope on politicians. I think this is going to continue the same way it is now. I do not have any hope because I believe that there is nothing that politicians can do.... I had a lot of hope with Bill Clinton. The economic situation was much better; we lived much better. Now is terrible... So the best that an undocumented can do is to adapt, to get on the train, on the lifestyle of this country, the lifestyle of Anglos...

Lisa was especially moved when she remembered how in 2007 the Senate refused to approve a reform which would have allowed undocumented migrants to become regular residents (after paying a fine) and pave a path for citizenship.

I remember I was at work [cleaning a house] and I had the TV on. Jorge Ramos was broadcasting live and saying 'this person voted for' [the proposed bill on immigration], 'this against' and so on. He was saying 'we only need a few votes more' but as the voting continued he started saying 'this does not look good'. It was very hard. Luis called to my mobile before the voting closed and said 'that's it huh?' [*¿ya valió eh?*] We both stayed silent and I started crying.

Despite their disappointments, Lisa and Luis remained hopeful and enthusiastic. These feelings had on several occasions prompted them to misread any progress in matters related to immigration. Their network of friends and acquaintances who knew of their undocumented status regularly alerted them to watch particular television programmes in which immigration was discussed or debated. As the social network of undocumented people in the Dallas cohort who knew about their undocumented status was rather small, and characterised by its secrecy, the chances to discuss and enquire about immigration were sporadic and limited. This in the end resulted in having limited chances to discuss their doubts, concerns or expectations.

Luis held ambivalent views. He said he had believed in the past that something would change, and that he did not want ‘to lose hope’ (*perder la esperanza*). However, he thought it was rather difficult for the government to sponsor migration reform for the time being. ‘It is just not the time. There are other priorities like the health reform and we are just coming out of an economic crisis.’

The economic recession also had shaped the perceptions about immigration reform. During an informal conversation, the men who worked with Justino said they believed that this crisis was intentionally provoked by the US government as a means for getting rid of the undocumented workforce. They explained that the adverse economic climate was deliberate. They believed that a chain reaction would be unleashed, starting by a crisis in the housing market, which would result in scarce opportunities for construction workers. Being unemployed or with reduced workloads and considering the costs of living in the USA, construction workers would struggle to stay, being forced to go back to Mexico and deterring others from crossing the border. They explained their views in which the government expected undocumented workers to have a voluntary exit. This way, the US government wouldn’t face a direct confrontation with Latinos, which would ultimately lead to losing the Latino vote at the next election.

This view was also shared by women, also living in the *barrio*.

Obama has secret deals with the very powerful men, those who run the economy of this country. The raids have gone down because he agreed with the powerful to invent a crisis and so that the illegals go back to their countries, but it is all an invention. When they decide that the number of illegals is the number that they want, they will magically solve this problem (Angela, Sunville, age 52).

9.4.2 Legal status as a definer for settlement or return

Those who thought of settling permanently in the US were the most inclined to hope for regularisation. Settlement in the US however, was not everybody’s

goal and it was perceived differently depending on the various cases. For some it implied severing ties with the home country. Others saw in it the option to go back and forth freely. These perceptions depended greatly on the ties existent with the place of origin, place of residence of spouse and/or children and with senses of identity and belonging, to Mexico, to the USA, or to both.

Having little or no attachment to the place of origin made people less motivated for return. Hence little was at stake in migration reform. There was neither urgency to return, nor a great concern for a change to allow freedom of movement across borders.

Abraham (Sunville, age 41) was a single man with no children, and no living parents. He had a sister residing also in California, but he only sporadically visited her. His homosexuality had distanced him from his sister. He had few people to feel emotionally attached to in either Mexico or the US. Abraham had two different jobs and worked six days in each, having only one morning and one evening free per week on different days of the week. Abraham was undecided about his plans for the future. However, Abraham did not want to return to Mexico until he had acquired legal status in the USA. He believed that the US government would legalise the undocumented simply because they are too numerous, and he wanted to get regular status in order to travel freely between the two countries. 'Sooner or later they will grant legal status... I am not in a hurry. I can wait until that happens, no matter how long it takes.'

Esperanza (Sunville, age 56) had ambivalent and changing views towards wanting to stay in the US. She felt that if she returned to Mexico, she would be out of place. Both of her children had made their own lives in Mexico. Her adult son lived in the house that was hers and she did not want to ask him to leave, neither did she want to share with him. Her daughter lived in the state capital. Even though Esperanza occasionally felt nostalgia for her life in Mexico, she believed it would be difficult for her to return and settle, she was unsure what her role would be. She thought the less inconvenient decision

would be to stay in Sunville. However, she kept some hope in Obama bringing about change.

I will wait until Obama has served in office for his first term... I think that if he doesn't legalise us in the four years he has, he won't be allowed to legalise us later... I would feel like a fool if I go back to Mexico and some time later Obama announces that amnesty is going to take place. Also it would be very difficult for him to be re-elected as the Latinos would not vote for him again.

Also, the return-migrants interviewed in Mexico saw a close connection between a migration reform and settlement and sense of belonging.

When I took the decision to come back, my housemates told me to wait because there was a lot of news on the television about a reform. But I thought 'and for what?' I see things very difficult. There are a lot of people without papers, and not everybody is going to get a chance; maybe only those who have money, because the application is going to cost a lot. And I also thought that I do not want to live there. I am from Matehuala, I am not from there (Ignacio, age 29).

Jesus (Matehuala, age 57), another return migrant, thought similarly. Jesus was living in the United States during the years that followed the passage of the IRCA. However, he was not interested. He was not sure of his eligibility but he had decided to work in the United States only temporarily while he saved money for his daughters' education.

Lupe (Matehuala, age 29) did not want her husband even to consider applying for amnesty if the possibility presented itself. She claimed that if her husband were interested in applying for a regularisation programme she would think that he no longer wanted to return to their life in Mexico.

9.4.3 Family reunification policy

Among my sample, Justino (Sunville, age 40) was the only person who had been in the US at the time the IRCA legalisation took place and who was still in the USA with irregular status. Yet back then, he did not file his application

to regularise his status. Justino saw in the legalisation a costly process in terms of time and money. Moreover, he had no intention of remaining in the US for a long time. Perhaps most importantly, Justino had little knowledge of how to apply and at that time lacked a social network of friends or acquaintances that could encourage him to pursue his regularisation.

I did not think I would stay here so long, I used to think that I would be only for some years... I know life would be easier if I had papers. Before, I could go back and forth without a lot of trouble, not like now. I also did not like the idea of giving so much information to *la migra*... Now I have to wait until my daughter is old enough so that she can legalise me and my wife. It is only a couple of years more. If we have been like this for years, why can't we wait some more?

Justino is careful not to mention the fact that he did not apply for regularisation in front of Reyna – his wife – as this has previously brought confrontations between them. She believed that Justino had a chance to apply and because of laziness he did not do it. Yet, it would have been unlikely that Justino was eligible considering the length of time he had been in the USA.

When Reyna gets upset about this, I don't know what to say. What is so bad about our life? She has everything, she lives well, and we live much better than most of the people around. What we cannot do is to travel back to visit our relatives, and I know that is tough ... But there is nothing we can do now except to wait.

Reyna arrived in Sunville years after the deadline for regularisation had passed. Now, Justino and Reyna's hopes for regularisation lay in their children filing an immigration petition for them. They have three US-born children. Cynthia is 16 and they plan that when she reaches the legal age of 21 years, she will 'sponsor' their legal residence.

Their situation is shared by Lisa and Luis and Mario and Karla in Dallas and by Benja, Gladis and Margarita in Sunville within my sample, but by many more besides my respondents. The family reunification programme accounts for two thirds of permanent immigration to the US each year (McKay 2003).

Based on US family reunification policy, US citizens can petition for their parents under certain conditions. US immigration policy has given priority to the reunification of family members. Over 80% of visas for new immigrants to the USA are allocated to spouses, parents, children and siblings of US citizens under the provisos of the family reunification policy (Jasso and Rosenzweig 1986). Undocumented entries, however, face important restrictions and under current legislation they are banned from entering the US for a period of ten years.

9.5 Undocumented status and employability

Among my samples in the USA I found those who had counterfeit social security numbers and those with no work permits such as domestic workers and nannies and business-owners like Justino and Mario. In this section, I will describe how their status had affected their employment opportunities and ambitions as well as the relations with their employers.

Most of the men within the Sunville sample worked with Justino laying laminated floors and doing general carpentry work. Justino was evidently aware of their status. According to him, his employers only rarely asked if he and his team had '*papeles buenos*' (work permits). Their irregular status was, most of time, taken for granted by employers without causing further problems. However, there had been occasions in which the lack of documents had impeded them in obtaining job opportunities. Melchor, Benja and Jorge tried to obtain a job with another contractor and in the Home Depot shop. They tried for the latter during a period in which they were discontented with Justino. They were concerned about the amount of money they were receiving and because Justino had not been able to find more work. However, their efforts were fruitless. They became disheartened when they were asked for references and for a valid social security number.

Most of my female respondents (especially in the Dallas cohort) worked as domestics or babysitters; hence they did not in practice need to prove their permission to work. However, in some cases women worked in the formal economy (using a fake social security number). None of these had expressly communicated their immigration status to their employers. Reyna (Sunville), for instance, assumed her employers were aware of her lack of work permit. Reyna worked at night, cleaning the facilities in a school. She rarely had contact with other employers and did not think she should be worried about raids.

Esperanza's (Sunville) case was a little different. She worked in the food preparation department of a grocery shop catering to costumers with high purchasing power. On one occasion, without notice or consultation, she was not scheduled for work for the coming week. Because of this, she believed she had lost her job and wanted to talk to the department manager to enquire about her situation. This, however, was not easy for her. The department manager did not speak Spanish and the person who usually interpreted for her did not have common working hours that could suit the three of them. However, Esperanza spoke to the manager only to discover that she had not lost her job, but that she had been taken off the schedule as an inspection from Immigration and Customs Enforcement was scheduled for any day of the following week. Esperanza, like other employees, did not go to work for that week, but had their jobs back after the inspection was carried out. She became certain that her employer knew of her status. She was grateful to her boss for having protected her from Immigration authorities (and certainly he protected himself too); however she said she would not expressly inform her employer in her second job of her undocumented status.

Being undocumented is generally experienced as an obstacle to better employment opportunities. Yet, Emma (Dallas age 38), the only respondent who had legalised her status, had not changed her job after legalisation. Emma was able to regularise as she married a US citizen. She had met her husband through working for him, cleaning his house. However, although she had legal

authorisation to work in the formal economy, some years of high school education and work experience as a secretary in Mexico; she worked as a domestic, cleaning houses. She reasoned that she made more money and had more freedom as a domestic than if she had a different job.

As discussed in Chapter 6, most of the respondents in the Dallas cohort tried to separate their identity as workers from the life they had outside work, and performing unskilled labour was to a certain extent a vexed issue. Mario, Lisa and Luis had tried to revalidate their Mexican university degrees in the USA. Still, for different reasons, none of them had been able to do so. Luis wanted to have his degree validated. However, this was not feasible as he would have needed to stop working full-time in order to attend medical school. He argued that they could not afford to have his salary halved.

Lisa was the only person who had actually taken action to get a professional job –as a teacher in a nursery. Nevertheless, she could not complete the process because of her irregular migration status.

I was very excited and we had already started thinking that after a couple of years we would have saved enough so that Luis could also start [the process of revalidating his degree]. I had passed the first stages and was about to take the health examinations. But then, the person [secretary] asked if I had *el seguro bueno* (a valid social security number) because they would check them. I told her I did. But I never went back.

However, regularisation did not always mean the possibility of having a professional job. Mario (Dallas) tried in one occasion to validate his Civil Engineering degree, yet he gave up. He argued that the paperwork and costs involved were not worthwhile.

Not having papers has not stopped me from starting my own business. I think that if I had everything in order, I could grow much more and get better contracts. But for now, I have this and I am proud of what I have done.

Regularisation was also seen as the possibility of free travel and of conducting business between the US and Mexico. Within the Sunville group, Angela, Margarita and Tommy thought they would stay working in the US while at the same time travelling regularly to Mexico. In Mexico they would work together with their family members, selling items bought in the US such as toys, clothes and household appliances.

Melchor (Sunville) thought that he would settle back into Mexico and travel regularly to the US. Melchor studied only four years of primary education; however he would make use of his skills and social capital to set up the business he 'dreamed' of. Before migrating he worked in the sale and distribution of automotive parts in Mexico.

I would set up a business selling spare parts. I know a lot about cars, and even more about the American ones like Ford and Chrysler. Here people stop using their cars when they are still in perfect conditions. In the *yonkes* (junk yards/ auto dismantlers) they give parts away or they can be bought at very cheap prices. In Mexico I know a lot of people to whom I could sell this. I would make a lot of money.

However, some migrants did not see in regularisation a gateway to better employment opportunities. Abraham (Sunville, age 41), for example, thought that if he would be able to regularise his migration status, he would not look for a different job. Yet, he hoped for regularisation and saw in it the possibility to have the option to travel freely

I do not know [how to do] anything else. I am very old to learn [a new job]... If everybody gets papers, then everyone is going to have the chance to get something better and at the end everyone is going to be in the same place they were at the beginning.

Ocuilenses did not conceive that education and undocumented migration could go hand in hand. For many of them, working in the US has enabled the remaining kin to afford education in Mexico. Migrants expected that with better education their children would also be able to obtain better employment without the need to migrate.

Agustin (Ocuilan, age 65) was the father of what he described as ‘the few families in Ocuilan who did not have any children working in the US’. Despite having been a migrant himself he was proud that none of his children had pursued migration and explained that this had been possible because he and his wife had given school education to their children.

All of our children are professionals. One is a secretary, the other two are engineers. They studied in the Polytechnic. They are all working, earning more than minimum wage, and they have started... Thank God our children never considered the idea of going north, and I am very sure that was because we gave them education.

In close relation to education and migration is the case of Esperanza and her son Pepe. Pepe is a school teacher and after he got his US tourist visa approved, he considered going to California to try his luck for a year as he had the option to ask for a sabbatical year without losing his post. Yet, Esperanza condemned her son’s ill-conceived attempt to migrate and considered this was ‘insulting’ to her.

It is just not fair! I did not want them to have their [tourist] visas to come here to work. I want them to be able to travel and visit me, but I want them to have a life in Mexico, not here. I know we are not rich, but what they do [in Mexico] is according to their profession...

You have heard me talking of them; everyone has heard me, when I say that my children studied university. Imagine if they come here, working as gardeners, or with Justino, or babysitting; everyone would make fun of me. They would laugh and say ‘ha-ha, Esperanza’s children, the professionals are doing the same as we do.’

I don’t want them to be asking for a fake social security number, to lie, to be at risk with the authorities, to do everything this way. No. They do not know how we have to live here. It is awful and I do not want that for my children.

They are only thinking about the money... I don’t want to see my kids cleaning houses or taking care of elderly people, changing nappies, working in the yard, in construction. Those are the only kind of jobs that we can get. Besides if they come here and get caught, they will never be able to get a visa again.

If Pepe insists on coming here for work, I will ask Justino to take him to work [for him]. But I will ask him to be the meanest, to

put him doing the hardest tasks, not to give him a single break, to make him carry the heaviest materials, to shout at him, to humiliate him, to be hurrying him to finish the job and that he is all the time on his knees... I bet that in two days maximum he would give up.

It is likely however, that Esperanza considered this insulting and did not want her child(ren) to emigrate to the USA because of two more reasons. The first is that her own effort and sacrifice would be diminished because during her first years as a migrant she sent money for her children's education, therefore, if they ended up working in the same type of jobs that other migrants who had not studied higher education, her efforts would seem less important. The second, is that she perhaps feared she would become less respectable among her Sunville friends and acquaintances since her child(ren) would not be working in professional jobs.

In contrast to the instances describe above, I observed that the non-migrating family members as well as the return migrants of the Matehuala cohort were generally not confronted by pursuing migration, even if they had several years of school education. In the Matehuala cohort were three female retired school teachers and they all had supported their children's migration. In addition, Jesus, a return migrant, had been an undocumented worker himself, even though he had studied mining engineering.

It has been generally assumed that less formally educated and unskilled people pursue undocumented migration. However, undocumented migrants are of very diverse profiles. The way they see their experiences, limitations, deviant behaviour, hopes and expectations are also diverse but depend not only on social class and level of education, but on time of residence in the US, ties with places of origin, personal and professional aspirations and the social links and networks in both places of origin and destination.

9.6 Summary

Immigrants' 'illegality' is a controversial issue; there are positions opposing it and others demanding the recognition of the value and economic contributions of the underpriced immigrant workforce. There will be those who are against any sort of amnesty or regularisation programme for the millions of undocumented migrants currently residing in the US and those who will passionately pursue this end. There will also be those in the middle who will be indifferent, in so far as their lives remain unaffected.

In the case of Mexico-US undocumented migration there are contrasting views in each country, starting with the terms employed to refer to these populations. In the USA, the dominant view is that 'illegal aliens' are harming the economy, taking jobs away from citizens and taking advantage of a generous system of welfare. In Mexico, conversely, it is considered that the 'migrant workforce' undertakes significant risks to cross over to the US, and once there suffers exploitation and discrimination, takes the most physically demanding and worst-paid jobs and goes through significant hardships in order to earn money to send to their places of origin.

Independently from these views, the fact is that undocumented status marks the everyday lives of those who by choice or by necessity live this way. The marks this leaves are as complex and heterogeneous as the views and perceptions surrounding the matter, as I observed in my fieldwork. For one cohort, 'being an illegal' carried a connotation of pride and victory in knowing how to deal with US institutions and regulations. For the other, their status was to be treated with discretion and even secrecy.

The massive numbers of undocumented migrants who are already in the US has resulted in a relative disentanglement from state controls, and they have become skilled in manoeuvring and implementing strategies that are outside the law. Migrants themselves have gradually learned how to manage the limitations that their status implies and to live in a sort of 'undocumentedness limbo'. However, the perception of these strategies being deviant is practically nonexistent among the undocumented themselves.

While border enforcement has grown stricter, services within US locales have become less inaccessible and more identifiable. Social networks and intergroup relations have been of vital importance in achieving this. The limitations for employment opportunities are also of relative significance and implications, as has been discussed.

I noted that the issue of a reform in immigration law remains an everyday concern, and that there was not a uniform view about this being possible. In both groups, there were respondents who were optimistic, distrustful, disillusioned, expectant and impatient. However, immigration reform was constantly present in the collective minds of the undocumented.

Generally speaking, a migration reform package would influence settlement plans and legal status would translate into freedom of movement across international borders. However, the ways in which such a reform would affect the lives of these migrants are perceived differently, depending overall on social networks and links with places of origin and residence, marital status and the spouse's place of residence, length of stay in the USA, and having US-born children. Those with stronger links to Mexico, shorter stays and whose family members resided in Mexico were less likely to consider immigration reform a priority.

In this chapter I have tried to illustrate diverse perceptions and emotions attached to being undocumented as well as to hoping for status regularisation. I briefly discussed how politics, economics, the media and other social factors shape social perceptions to a great extent and influence political outcomes affecting undocumented populations. It is undeniable that the overall experiences of being undocumented significantly define the social interactions with the host society, as well as aspirations and possibilities for social mobility and the maintenance of transnational links with families and friends in the place of origin. These all also help to explain other important aspects such as issues of identity, sense of belonging and integration.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

This study set out to analyse the everyday lives of Mexican undocumented migrants in the USA and their non-migrating kin in Mexico; exploring aspects of migrants' sense of identity and integration to US society; transnational family relations including family separations and emotional exchanges for both migrants and those staying behind; and finally perceptions of undocumented life of two socio-economically different cohorts.

There are other studies focusing on transnational family relations of Mexicans in the USA, but these studies do not, as the present thesis does, expressly compare and contrast the experiences of Mexican undocumented migrants in the USA of urban and rural origins and of different social classes and levels of education. By focusing on multiple sites and working with different cohorts of migrants and their families left behind; this study provides an insight into how the intertwining of class, gender, demographic origin and undocumented status shape the everyday lived experiences of transnational families.

This thesis pursued at least four interconnected themes. Firstly this research focused on the private nature of transnational family relations, considering how transnational family ties are constantly negotiated, are filled with ambiguity and contradictions and respond to specific situations. Secondly, I studied how the different social attributes of my respondents, such as social class and demographic origin; impacted on their individual and collective identities, sense of belonging and integration to US mainstream society and(/or) their belonging to their places of origin. Thirdly, I analysed the emotional side of migration within transnational families, focusing on both migrants and those who stayed behind, exploring the different perceptions and imaginaries attached to family separation and how migrants and non-migrants maintained emotional links to each other. Finally, I explored how my respondents saw and gave different meanings to their 'illegality/ undocumentedness' and discussed

how these meanings and perceptions influenced their construction of hopes, expectations and their short and long-term plans, both as individuals and as members of transnational families. I

As has been detailed in the thesis, my participants were comprised of two migrant cohorts – in Dallas, Texas and in Sunville (pseudonym), California – and three non-migrant cohorts in Mexico, in the cities of Victoria, Tamaulipas and Matehuala, San Luis Potosí and in the town of Ocuilan, State of Mexico. These cohorts had different social attributes; namely social class; mode of border-crossing, level of education, English proficiency, and demographic origin. I have offered in the thesis an analysis of how the interplay of the above-named characteristics with both undocumented status and, to a lesser extent (since others have concentrated on this), gender, result in similar or contrasting experiences for migrants and their non-migrant family members.

Before turning to the discussion of the main findings of this project, I should emphasise that this study does not aim to be representative of, or of general applicability to Mexico-USA undocumented migrants and their transnational relations. Still, my observations can be cautiously extrapolated to other settings comparing migration of different socio-demographic backgrounds, to studies analysing the private subjectivities and emotional experiences of transnational families and to scholarship exploring the meanings of illegality for migrants' everyday lived experiences and for their transnational family relations.

10.1 Main findings and observations

At the micro level, transnational families, including those who leave and those stay, are shown in this thesis to be fundamental to understanding the motivations, consequences and social dynamics of migration. The relations between members of transnational families do not exist in isolation, multiple factors and interactions between migrants and their sending communities as well as between migrants and the host society define the everyday experiences

of transnational families. The occurrences that take place in transnational families, such as the mutual sense of responsibility and commitment, the negotiations and redefinitions of gendered roles in the household, the development and maintenance of spousal and parent-children relations across borders, among others; have gained considerably more importance in migration scholarly literature (Levitt and Waters 2002, Parreñas 2005, Foner 2009, Boehm 2012), and this thesis builds upon these understandings.

Inconsistencies, contradictions and situational events⁸⁷ occurring on either or both sides of the border are constantly present in the private relations of transnational families (Sluzki 1979, Pribilski 2004, Svasek 2005, Dreby 2009, Foner 2009, Skrbis 2008, Boehm 2012). Through attention in this thesis to the everyday lives of undocumented migrants and their non-migrant family members, I have shown how they can be confronted with sentiments of loneliness, abandonment, nostalgia, overwhelmed by new responsibilities and roles. Migrants can become disheartened by performing low-paying and/or low-skilled jobs, by facing difficulties in achieving their savings targets, by being discriminated against or relatively marginalised from the mainstream society, by the high emotional costs implicit in their separations and unfamiliar surroundings, by the limitations implicit in an ‘illegal’ status or by not meeting their ambitions in the timeframe they had envisioned, among other reasons. Conversely; migration can represent an exciting journey and life option, the gate to a modern lifestyle, economic independence, social recognition, and (especially for men from long out-sending communities) simply an adventure that ought to be lived.

During the course of this research, I observed that these sentiments and inconsistencies most of the times, were manifested in diverse ways depending on the social class and demographic origin of the participants. Nevertheless, in other situations, gender and level of education defined the outcomes and

⁸⁷ The situational events I refer to were generally outside the control of migrants and included, for instance, macroeconomic variations, changing opportunities in the job market, and immigration legislation as well as political fluctuations.

reactions to the multiple facets of migration. The main findings and observations are discussed below.

10.1.1 Integration, identity and undocumented status

The different social characteristics between the Sunville and Dallas cohorts entailed significant differences in their respective ways of integrating into US society and in their respective sense of identity, identification and belonging. In addition, their urban or rural origins, social class, level of education and accumulation of social capital, could produce different outcomes in how undocumented migrants maintained transnational links and links within the society where they resided.

In general terms, the migrants from the Dallas cohort were originally from cities in Mexico, came from a middle-class background, had completed at least high school education, all (except one woman) had enough knowledge of English to be able to communicate fluently, and all had crossed the border using tourist visas which they overstayed. They had not hired *coyotes* and hence faced the dangers of being smuggled through the US-Mexico border, such as starvation, extreme heat, dangerous animals, extortion by organised criminal groups, being caught by US border patrol, among other risks. In addition, the majority of participants in this group had Texas-issued driving licences, which symbolised a legal US official identification and de facto legitimate ties to the host society.

They possessed enough economic means and social and cultural capital to distance themselves from the negative stereotypes attached to Mexican ‘illegal’ immigrants, such as being lazy, uneducated and inassimilable. Also they avoided ‘ethnic’ working-class concentrations and disapproved of their children using *pochismos* (language mixing, see Chapter 3.2.2) or speaking Spanish if there were non-Spanish speakers present. Yet, they acknowledged (and did not deny) their own Mexican origins and felt a sense of commitment towards their family members residing in Mexico. The Dallas migrants instead,

in order to incorporate themselves into US society, 'camouflaged' (see Chapter 6.5.1) themselves as living 'normally' aiming for their undocumented status to pass unnoticed. They 'camouflaged' by distancing themselves from the stereotypes of Mexican 'illegal aliens' that are prevalent in US popular culture, and by differentiating themselves from the bulk of undocumented migrants and the negative connotations which characterise them. They were critical of immigrants who had not learned to speak English or who, they perceived, made little or no effort to 'come out of their replicas of Mexico' (Mario).

The Dallas sample was aware of the social and economic advantages of their more privileged social class and education. They used these advantages to aim for higher social standing than that attributed to the bulk of Mexican 'illegal' immigrants. However, for these migrants it was not easy to admit and talk about their 'irregular' status. These migrants perceived themselves as socially distant and distinct from the general stereotypes and negative social identity attached to Mexican 'illegal' immigrants, therefore they did not use this label for themselves. Their 'undocumentedness' remained a sensitive topic and they treated this issue with discretion and precaution, in some cases even between family members.

The migrants from Sunville, on the other hand, came from a community with well-established solidarity networks based on kinship and a common place of origin. They had crossed the border after walking through the desert with the help of *coyotes*, or hidden inside the boot of a car or using fake documents. For the most part, their knowledge of English was limited to a few words and remained at a basic level. Sunville migrants' social lives outside work were generally conducted within the confines of the neighbourhood and with co-ethnics.

They generally held ambivalent loyalties and sentiments towards both Mexico and the USA. In some cases, they felt proud of their Mexican origins; in others, they felt more identified with the USA; and in other situations they felt resentment towards both or either countries. They were grateful towards the

USA and held their economic achievements in great esteem, at the same time they resented that in the USA they could be exploited, denied inclusion and participation in the mainstream society, not move about freely, among other basic rights. On the other hand, Mexico was yearned for and missed; Mexico and specifically Ocuilan was the place of their origins and their culture and for most of them, where their families resided. Yet, at the same time, some of them wished they had been born in the USA rather than in Mexico, so that they could automatically enjoy of the privileges and rights of American citizenship. Nevertheless, for the most part, they were not concerned about their integration or belonging to a US mainstream. They were aware that their limitations in language, legal residency and employment, along with their ethnicity and class; would not allow them full inclusion in the US mainstream. Therefore, they cared more for being recognised and acknowledged by the people in their sending communities and by those who were their immediate contacts in places of destination.

In terms of the meanings attached to ‘illegality’, the Sunville migrants openly referred to themselves as *ilegales* or *mojados* and frequented places they claimed to be targeted at a clientele of ‘illegals’. Some proudly talked about how they had deceived or been smarter than US officials when crossing the border. Being an ‘illegal’ did not carry connotations of shame with people whom they trusted (being these generally limited to co-ethnics, kin and friends). At the same time, Sunville migrants were cautious not to go to places they did not consider safe, where they could be seen as suspicious and where they thought *la migra* could ‘catch’ them.

Regardless of the socioeconomic and cultural differences between the Sunville and Dallas participants, both had experiences which fit into what I named the ‘undocumentedness limbo’. With this term, I made reference to how it has become relatively less difficult for undocumented people to legitimise their presence in the countries where they resided. To varying degrees, migrants of both samples could obtain identifications (such as *matrículas consulares* or US-issued driving licences) and access health services or obtain loans and

credits without proof of legal residence. However, migrants' social and cultural capital as well as the existing legislation of the states of residence of each sample meant a difference to the services and identifications they could aspire to. Some would only be able to obtain documents issued by Mexican institutions, therefore perpetuating their limited participation in US mainstream. Conversely, others would be able to obtain US-issued identification which represented a de facto legal US residence.

Both Dallas and Sunville cohorts differed radically in their self-perceptions as undocumented migrants and in their ways of relating to US society. Nevertheless undocumented status had kept most of participants of both cohorts stagnated in low-paying, low-skilled jobs. The majority of participants of both samples were employed in domestic work, babysitting, construction, food preparation and the like; regardless of their class of origin or level of education.

The migrants of middle-class background from Dallas, in contrast to the Sunville sample, felt to varying degrees that their professional ambitions had been truncated. Being employed in low-skilled jobs was not always easy to come to terms with, remained a sensitive topic and was not straightforwardly recognised. However, they largely saw their social identities as not bound up to what they did for a living, but rather defined by social interactions outside work. They aimed to have and display goods that denoted purchasing power. The women of this cohort (more than the men) generally bought brand-name clothes and accessories, even if these were bought second-hand.

But the professional ambitions were not necessarily linked to the level of education attained. Interestingly, in each cohort there were two 'entrepreneurs' who had started their own businesses, each in the construction sector. One of them was Justino from Sunville, who had studied only basic education, and the other was Mario, living in Dallas, who had completed a university degree in Civil Engineering. An advanced level of formal education was not a

prerequisite set up a business; nor did it preclude working in low-paying/low-skilled employment.

10.1.2 Immigration reform

Migrants of both cohorts, to varying degrees, were confronted by the limitations implicit in their undocumented status and often mentioned or made reference to hoping for immigration reform, for change enabling them to travel freely, or for better times to come. Most of the Dallas and Sunville participants thought that a favourable change in US immigration law would remain unlikely unless there was an improvement in aspects such as the US general economic situation, an end to the housing crisis, and a reduction in the high numbers of undocumented workers.

Migrants of higher levels of education generally seemed to be more informed and to have more detailed knowledge of the political scenario of the USA and of the bilateral US-Mexico relations. Nevertheless, migrants with lower levels of school education were far from ignorant of the USA economic crisis, of the political weight of the Latino vote or of President Obama's electoral promises in relation to immigration.

Gender, marital status and the presence of children influenced how these hopes were constructed. Migrants with immediate family members (spouse and children) residing jointly in a household were more likely to be interested in following news related to immigration reform and to expect that a change in legislation would occur. Parents with US-born children held the hope that, if immigration reform would not take place, their US-born children could petition for them under the 'family reunification policy', to legalise their remaining in the USA.

A possible immigration reform would affect in various ways the long-term plans of migrants and their families, especially those related to settlement in the USA. In the case of two of the Dallas respondents, a change in status would

also mean better work prospects, including the validation of their university degrees and their consequent inclusion in the US job market as professionals in their fields.

A small number of respondents (including return migrants interviewed in Mexico), particularly men, were not especially concerned about the possibility of an immigration reform. For the most part, married men whose children and wives resided in Mexico generally thought that if an immigration reform took place they would not apply for legalisation; and that regardless of this possibility, they would return to Mexico to join their families. They thought that a regularisation in their migration status would not bring substantial modifications to their plans for work or settlement in the USA. These respondents were reluctant to spend their savings in the regularisation process, to invest time in a process they assumed would be lengthy and to disclose information to US authorities.

Social class and demographic origin did not make a significant difference as to what both cohorts expected in relation to immigration reform. Migrants with higher level of school education generally held more up-to-date information about political shifts in relation to an immigration reform. Nevertheless, regardless of the literacy level, migrants could either be expectant or hesitant about an immigration reform and what this would mean for future plans.

10.1.3 Social networks

As numerous scholars have discussed, social networks linking communities of origin and destination are essential for the perpetuation of migration flows. These networks are valuable sources of social capital prior to and during the migration process, counterbalancing the challenges and disadvantages that migrants can encounter in the host society.

As previously mentioned, most of the migrants from Sunville were originally from Ocuilan, a community with long out-migration traditions. More than half

of the Sunville-Ocuilan cohort were previously acquainted or related by kin, so they had well established social and family migration networks. It was common for migrants to know about employment opportunities and accommodation before leaving for Sunville. Likewise, once settled in Sunville, migrants and their non-migrant kin could rapidly learn about events and gossip occurring on either side of the border.

I observed, however, that migrants and non-migrants of the Sunville-Ocuilan circuit were sometimes reluctant to communicate events in their private lives. The reasons behind this were primarily driven by gender and household roles. Men in general, were content with fulfilling breadwinner responsibilities and rarely communicated other sorts of information to their families. In turn, those in Mexico often limited their communications to the migrants to mundane events and avoided talking about problematic situations or events that could cause concern to the migrant workers. Take for instance the fact that Jorge's mother did not know about him having had a girlfriend, or that Melchor did not know that his wife had undertaken paid employment and that his daughter invested the money originally destined for her graduation party in making repairs to the house where she lived with her mother and siblings.

Likewise, the events taking place in one community could inadvertently influence the relations between members of the other community across the border and create tense relations, both between members of the same locale and transnationally. An example of this is, the case of Doña Teresa (Ocuilan) who felt jealous that her son Justino (Sunville) had entrusted his mother-in-law, Doña Guille (Ocuilan), to supervise the construction of his house in Ocuilan. A further case is that of Reyna (Sunville) who felt upset because her domestic workload had multiplied since her brothers-in-law moved in to her household. As a consequence the non-migrant kin of Reyna and of Reyna's brothers-in-law in Ocuilan had a period of tense relations between them.

The social networks of the Dallas sample covered, in practical terms, the same function of the Sunville-Ocuilan cohort. They were a venue for sharing

information about employment opportunities, or for the discussion of news related to prospects for legalisation. However, given that the respondents from the Dallas sample were originally from various cities within Mexico, their transnational social networks did not link sending and receiving communities in a comparable way to the Sunville-Ocuilan circuit. The networks of the Dallas migrants were newer, less extensive, had not turned migration into a 'self-perpetuating' process (Massey et al 1994), had not triggered more migration and were not primarily based on kinship ties and a common place of origin.

In addition, this cohort's motivations to migrate were, from the beginning, considerably different from those of the Sunville migrants. The majority of the Dallas respondents had migrated because of a lack of employment opportunities and competitive salaries in the Mexican job market; and two women in this group had migrated to join their migrant husbands.

In contrast to Sunville, migration was not driven by communal traditions or as a rite of passage. In addition, based on the accounts of the two non-migrant family members I interviewed in Mexico who were directly related to a Dallas respondent (Lisa's mother and sister), undocumented migration was not perceived as pursuable lifestyle. These women rather encouraged the pursuance of higher education and working in qualified jobs.

However, as I detail in the section of this chapter on limitations of this research, I did not have the opportunity to interview a considerable number of non-migrant relatives of the Dallas migrants. Therefore, my observations in respect of the uses of social networks among urban-origin middle-class-origin migrants remain somewhat limited. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the social networks of migrants and non-migrant of the rest of the Dallas sample followed similar patterns to those of the Sunville-Ocuilan circuit.

10.1.4 Emotional exchanges

The relations between undocumented migrants and their families staying behind are doubtless complicated by physical separations and by an irregular migration status. Children can feel abandoned, parents can feel guilty, spouses can become distant, uninterested and apathetic and affection might be shown and/or perceived mainly or only through economic remittances.

In contrast with other findings in this research, in this case social class and demographic origin did not make significant differences as to how migrants and non-migrants felt and coped with the physical absences of their family members. The emotional side of migration was largely constructed independently of urban or rural origins; however, literacy and gender played an important role as to how migrants and non-migrants kept themselves emotionally linked or 'emotionally distant'.

During the course of this research, I observed that separations between family members could lead to 'emotionally distant' relations. Emotional distance meant that migrants and non-migrants could become used to sporadic emotional contact or could content themselves with knowing that their relatives across the border were 'doing fine'. Emotional distance was a means to adapt, temporarily or for the long term, to living away from loved ones or to coping with particularly challenging situations.

Men in general were more inclined, in comparison to women, to keep emotionally distant relations with their children, spouses or parents. Men who had fulfilled their breadwinner responsibilities were generally not expected to express their affection in non-pecuniary ways. Migrant and non-migrant women, on the other hand, normally strived to be emotionally present, especially for their children, even if their efforts were not reciprocated.

Conversely, I also noted how separations could lead to the improvement of affective relationships between migrants and those who stayed behind,

alleviating tensions and unresolved conflicts. Similarly, separations could also result in enhanced self-perceptions, especially for women who were left alone. They could become aware of their self-sufficiency and their own skills and capabilities, for instance in raising a family or in household administration without the physical companionship of their husbands.

In a slightly different tenor, the ways in which non-migrants, both of urban and rural origins and working and middle classes, imagined how their migrant relatives lived their everyday lives followed similar patterns. I found that their perceptions of undocumented life were often unclear or inaccurate and followed three general outcomes that I have termed 'positive overcompensation', 'neutral perspective' and 'negative compensation'. The non-migrants in the 'positive overcompensation' category overestimated the successes and sacrifices that the migrant relative made for them. I found that women, and not men, fitted this category. Those with a 'neutral perspective' were empathetic to the sacrifices the migrant made, but at the same time they saw that migration was a shared responsibility in which both those who left and those who stayed had to adjust and adapt to new surroundings and responsibilities. Finally, non-migrants in the 'negative compensation' category had for the most part tense or indifferent relations with their migrant relatives and often rejected or failed to acknowledge the efforts made by their migrant relatives. Both men and women fitted into the last two patterns.

As a final point, I observed that, with level of education and social class, defined to a large extent the ways and modes in which migrants and non-migrants stayed in touch. Those with higher levels of schooling were more likely to use e-mail, chats, web-based live communication such as Skype and to share photographs through social internet-based networks such as Facebook. People with basic education were generally unfamiliar with the use of computers and internet technologies. Instead, they resorted to traditional modes of communication, namely telephone, both fixed and mobile, and the use of *correos* (personal couriers).

Age, as mentioned, was also important in defining migrants' and non-migrants' modes of communication. Younger interviewees (less than 30 years old) of both urban and rural origins were, for the most part, familiar with the use of information technologies, though they did not typically communicate with members of their families residing abroad, particularly with mothers or fathers, through internet-based media. Among the interviewees of more than 60 years old, only Isabel (Victoria, Lisa's mother) was a frequent user of the internet. In addition, those who resorted to using internet for sharing photographs and for web-based real-time communication felt that they could take part in the lives of their relatives residing across borders in closer and more intimate ways than those provided by telephone conversations.

As has been detailed, the Dallas and Sunville cohorts had different modes of staying in touch. The former had resources and access to technologies that the latter were unfamiliar with. However those from the Sunville-Ocuilan circuit had strong social and community networks that kept them linked across borders. Each of these cohorts maintained contact with relatives residing abroad through different modes and with varying regularity and these differences, in consequence, could influence the quality and intimacy of their emotional exchanges.

10.2 Limitations of this research

In reviewing the literature for this study it became apparent that research exploring the flows of Mexican undocumented, urban-origin, middle-class background and educated people is still limited. A limitation of my study is that I had the opportunity to interview only non-migrant women, but not men, of a middle-class, urban-origin, highly-educated (high school or more) background and who were from a society where migration had not taken hold. I interviewed men and women of an urban origin and middle-class background in the Matehuala cohort. However, Matehuala, in contrast to Victoria, was a city with long out-migration history. In Matehuala, migration to the USA (legal

and undocumented), was a widespread social phenomenon and the economy was highly dependent on remittances.

I found that the Matehuala interviewees openly talked about the migration experiences of their relatives; undocumented migration was not to be treated with discretion or delicacy. In addition, the respondents who had completed higher education, being for the most part retired schoolteachers, did not try to dissuade or discourage the emigration of their relatives. Differently from the women interviewed in Victoria, the respondents in Matehuala did not treat their relatives' migration with discretion or shame.

As previously mentioned, I found that Mexican undocumented migration stemming from urban areas is significantly different from that originating in small communities. It is likely that the extent to which migration is rooted in a specific urban locale can influence how migration is conceptualised as socially acceptable and worth pursuing or by contrast as a socially disapproved of choice of life.

10.3 Recommendations for future research

This research has raised several questions in need of further investigation.

As I explained, the nature and dynamics of social networks in all fieldwork sites were distinct and undocumented migration stemming from urban areas was notably different from that originating in small communities. The literature exploring urban-origin migration is recent and still very limited. Further research in this field is needed, specifically analysing under which conditions undocumented urban-origin migration of middle classes triggers more migration, when and how social networks strengthen and consolidate and if eventually 'a culture of migration' in sending areas develops and takes hold. Future studies could investigate how the motivations to migrate are constructed in communities where undocumented migration is not a widely extended

phenomenon, taking into consideration literacy rates, marital status, age, social class, and intergenerational relations among other factors.

In relation to gender, an interesting endeavour certainly would be to work with a more comprehensive cohort of male and female non-migrants of urban origin, middle-class and educated to high school level or higher, and to compare the gender differences of urban settings with and without out-sending migration traditions.

I found that migrants and non-migrants' level of education influenced their frequency for using transnational internet-based communication. Given that internet and mobile devices are becoming increasingly accessible in small towns and urban locales, for younger and older generations, it is worth exploring if any changes in the patterns mentioned above take place, especially among older generations. If more migrants and non-migrants make use of internet technologies, it is worth documenting their possible consequences for transnational family life and their impacts in their private relations and emotional exchanges.

A further element worth exploring in future studies is that my observations took place before a major change in the patterns of Mexican migrant flows bound for the USA. In April 2012, the Pew Hispanic Center reported that after more than 100 years of uninterrupted inflows, the net migration from Mexico to the USA had come to a standstill and maybe even reversed (Passel et al 2012). In close connection to this, the political scenario in the USA in relation to immigration has suffered transformations since I conducted fieldwork in 2009-10. Thirty-six states have drafted a raft of strict and highly controversial anti-immigrant legislation (Lacayo 2012). In addition, under the Obama administration, deportations have reached record levels, being about 30% higher than the annual average during the second term of the G.W. Bush administration and about double the annual average during George W. Bush's first term (Lopez et al 2011).

Finally, for both the USA and Mexico 2012 is an election year. In Mexico, Enrique Peña Nieto of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the party that ruled the country for seven uninterrupted decades until it was ousted from power in 2000, was declared president-elect early in July. Peña Nieto will start a one 6-year presidential term in December 2012. The USA will decide its future in November. Therefore, Mexico and the USA's respective political, social and economic scenarios might be transformed, further affecting immigration policy and as a result immigration flows (positively or adversely). Two first signs of political moves affecting immigration have already taken place. The first one, President Obama's executive order to allow young immigrants to request temporary relief from deportation and apply for work permits. The second, the Supreme Court of Justice decision regarding the Arizona law SB 1070 in which officers conducting a stop, detention, or arrest are required to verify the person's immigration status with the Federal Government (Supreme Court of Justice of the United States, 2012).

It will be worth documenting whether and how transnational family relations will be affected, given a new socio-political scenario. Areas for further research could include, for instance, whether social networks will weaken as a result of the new migration patterns and whether the meanings attached to undocumented migration are altered in some way because of immigrant legislation changes mentioned above. In addition, given the record number of deportations and voluntary returns of migrants to their homelands, future research should focus on aspects of identity and the integration into Mexican society of the children of returned emigrants. For any such an exercise, it is useful and important to concentrate on undocumented migrants' everyday experiences, taking due account of their emotional life in transnational familial relations.

Throughout this work I have highlighted the constant contradictions that members of transnational families negotiate in their everyday relations, in both private and public spheres of social interaction. Yet, these shifts are also largely influenced by state controls and policy changes. It is not possible to

predict whether more favourable or adverse transformations will take place and how they will affect migrants and their transnational families. However, it is likely that their everyday lived experiences will continue to be profoundly shaped by class, legal status, gender, previous and current access to resources such as school education and social networks; and by the nature and quality of exchanges between sending and receiving societies.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Respondents

A. Dallas

Dallas, Texas						
Name	Marital status	Place of Origin	Age	Years of residence in the USA	Children	Current Occupation
Luis	Married to Lisa	Rio Verde, SLP	44	19	One son 13 and two daughters of 6 and 3. All US born	Veterinary clinic assistant
Lisa	Married to Carlos	Victoria, Tamaulipas	40	17	One son 13 and two daughters of 6 and 3. All US born	House cleaning
Bernardo	Single. Carlos and Lisa's son	Dallas, Tx	13	13	None	Student
Magdis	Single	Rio Verde, SLP	44	14	None	Live-in nanny
Emma	Married to US citizen	SLP, SLP	38	16	One son 10 years old. US born.	House cleaning
Abel	Divorced. Ex-wife living in Mexico with children	Monterrey, N.L.	46	5	One daughter 19. One son 23. Living in Mexico.	Food delivery and barman at night club
Paola	Married to Ruben	Valles, SLP	39	5	Three daughters. Ages 17, 12, 5. All Mexico born	House cleaning
Ruben	Married to Paola	Rio Verde, SLP	44	7	Three daughters. Ages 17, 12, 5. All Mexico born	Roof insulation
Mario	Married to Karla	Rio Verde, SLP	36	12	One son 7. US born	Construction.
Karla	Married to Mario	Jerez, Zacatecas	33	9	One son 7. US born	House cleaning
Men	5					
Women	5					

B. Sunville

Sunville, California						
Name	Marital status	Place of Origin	Age	Years of residence in the USA	Children	Current Occupation
Justino	Married to Reyna	Ocuilan	40	21 Interspersed periods	Three. Ages 16, 6, 2. All US born	Construction
Reyna	Married to Justino	Ocuilan	38	19	Three. Ages 16, 6, 2. All US born	Cleaning in a school
Cynthia	Reyna and Justino's oldest daughter	Sunville, Ca.	16	16	None	High school student
Esperanza	Widow of 1st husband, separated from 2nd husband	Ocuilan	56	7	One son (Pepe) 32, one daughter (Patricia) 29. Both living in Mexico	Food preparation at a chain store
Melchor	Married to Eva. Justino's brother.	Ocuilan	44	5+4	Four children. One son living in Sunlake	Construction
Benja	Melchor and Eva's son	Ocuilan	20	3	One son.	Construction
Gladis	Benja's partner	Ocuilan	23	5	One daughter 3, one son 1 year old.	Household duties
Jorge	Clementina's son. Melchor and Justino's nephew	Ocuilan	29	6	None	Construction
Lolo	Angela's son. Not blood related to Melchor and Justino.	Ocuilan	26	8	None	Construction
Margarita	Married. Husband and children living in Sunville.	Aguascalientes	48	23	Two. Ages 16 and 13.	Property manager and selling breakfasts in her household
Angela	Separated. Lolo's mother	Ocuilan	52	5	Two. Ages 24 and 20. Daughter living in Tennessee	Baby-sitting at her house and sales of nutritional products
Tommy	Single	Ocuilan	22	3	None	Longshoreman at furniture shop
Ana	Married. Husband and children living in Sunville.	Jalisco	54	32 Interspersed periods	Two.	Gardening store production team. Organiser for the 2006 protests.
Abraham	Single	Morelos	41	4	None	Cleaning in a shopping mall and in a market
Men 7						
Women 7						

C. Ocuilan

Ocuilan, State of Mexico						
Name	Marital status	Place of Origin	Age	Years of residence in the USA	Children	Current Occupation
Years of residence only applicable if respondent is return migrant						
Patricia	Esperanza's daughter	Ocuilan	29	N. A.	None	Promoter of governmental economic benefits for farmers
Pepe	Esperanza's son	Ocuilan	31	N. A.	None	School teacher
Agustin	Esperanza's 1st husband's brother	Ocuilan	65+	7	Four. Three sons one daughter. All living in Ocuilan.	Retired
Gilda	Melchor's daughter	Ocuilan	23	N. A.	None	Unemployed at time of interview
Eva	Married to Melchor	Ocuilan	41	N. A.	Four children. One son living in Sunlake	Cleaning of health clinic
Guille	Married to Jose. Reyna's mother	Ocuilan	56	N. A.	Two daughters. One living in Sunlake, one living in Ocuilan.	Grocery shop
Jose	Married to Guille	Ocuilan	58	N. A.	Two daughters. One living in Sunlake, one living in Ocuilan.	Grocery shop
Clara	Reyna's sister	Ocuilan	33	N. A.	One son aged 3, one daughter aged 1	Household duties
Teresa	Justino and Melchor's mother	Ocuilan	65+	N. A.	Eight children. Two sons living in Sunlake. Six children living in Ocuilan.	Grocery shop
Paco	Jorge's brother	Ocuilan	32	4	One daughter aged 3.	Driver for a food transporting company
Lorena	Paco's wife	Ocuilan	24	N. A.	One daughter aged 3.	Household duties
Enedino	Married to Cristina. Siblings: Melchor, Justino. Children: Jorge and Paco	Ocuilan	54	4	Three children. One son living in Sunlake, son and daughter living in Ocuilan	Agriculture
Cristina	Married to Enedino. Children Jorge and Paco	Ocuilan	49	N. A.	Three children. One son living in Sunlake, son and daughter living in Ocuilan	Household duties
Men 5						
Women 8						

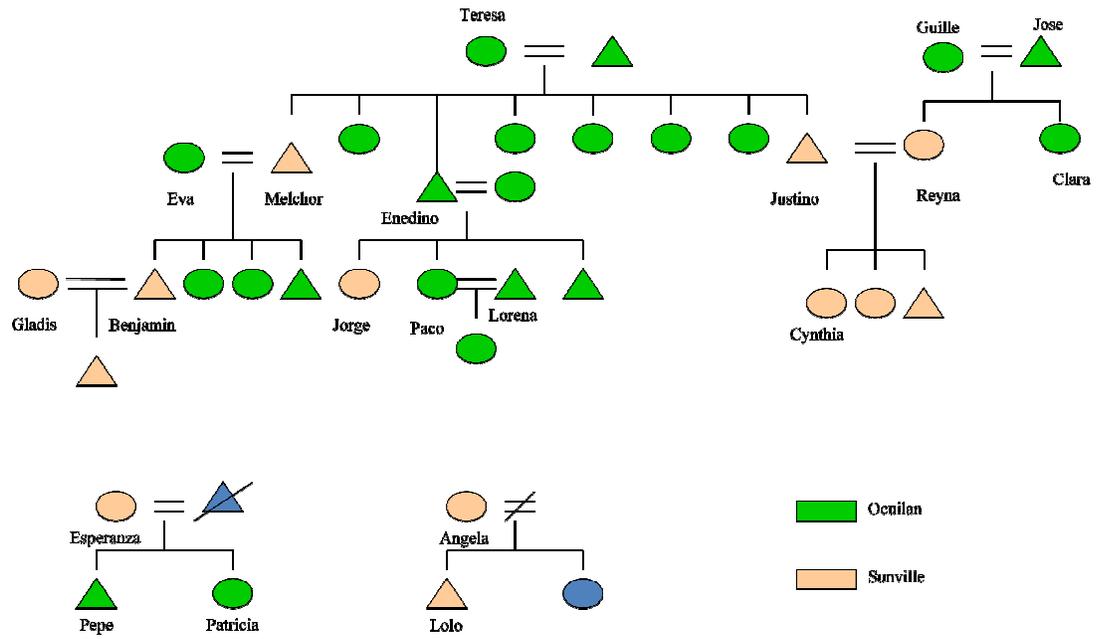
D. Matehuala

Matehuala, San Luis Potosi						
Name	Marital status	Place of Origin	Age	Years of residence in the USA	Children	Current Occupation
Years of residence only applicable if respondent is return migrant						
Jesus	Married to Laura. Return migrant	Matehuala	57	7	Three daughters. All living in Mexico	Retired mining engineer
Laura	Married to Jesus.	Matehuala	55	N/A	Three daughters. All living in Mexico	Hair dresser and stylist
Lupe	Married. Husband and sister living in Houston, Tx.	Matehuala	29	N/A	One son aged 5, one daughter aged three	House cleaning
Maria Salome	Married. Lupe's mother.	Matehuala	54	N/A	Four daughters. One living in Houston.	House cleaning
Sergio	Separated. Return migrant.	Matehuala	38	3	Two daughters. Teenagers.	Unemployed at time of interview
Hortencia	Married. Sergio's mother.	Matehuala	60+	N/A	One son, one daughter.	Retired school teacher
Nicolas	Separated. Return migrant.	Matehuala	33	4	One son aged 6, one daughter aged 5	Gym instructor
Susana	Separated. Return migrant.	Matehuala	44	6	One daughter aged 14	Office cleaning
Angelica	Widow.	Matehuala	60+	4.5	Two daughters, one son. Son is US-born	Taxi owner, leases taxi to driver.
Eduardo	Single. Return migrant.	Matehuala	34	3	None	Final year law student and lawyer's assistant
Nacho	Married. Return migrant.	Matehuala	29	4	One daughter aged 1	Construction
Lupita	Married	Matehuala	56	N/A	Two daughters living in Dallas without documents. One daughter living in Matehuala	Retired school teacher and second hand shop owner
Carmen	Son and daughter living in Houston	Matehuala	55	N/A	One daughter and two sons. Son and daughter currently living in Texas	Retired school teacher
Men	5					
Women	8					

E. Victoria

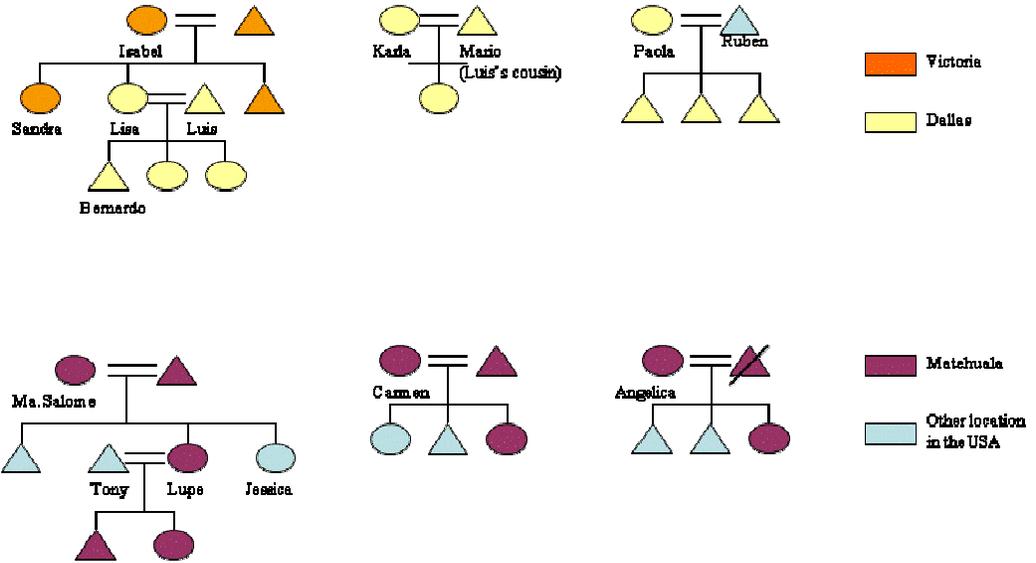
Victoria, Tamaulipas						
Isabel	Lisa's mother. Married	Victoria	64	N/A	Two daughters, one son.	University lecturer
Alondra	Lisa's sister. Married	Victoria	43	N/A	Two sons.	Private dentist consultation and housewife
Men 0						
Women 2						

Appendix 2. Kinship relations in the Sunville-Ocuilan cohort



Tommy, Margarita, Abraham, Ana did not share any kinship links between them or with the families detailed above.

Appendix 3. Kinship relations in the Dallas – Victoria and Matchuala cohorts



Appendix 4. Lyrics of songs ‘Mojado’ and ‘Tres veces mojado’

Song: “Mojado”

Composed by Ricardo Arjona.

Performed by Ricardo Arjona

Empacó un par de camisas, un sombrero,
su vocación de aventurero, seis consejos, siete fotos, mil recuerdos,
empacó sus ganas de quedarse,
su condición de transformarse en el hombre que soñó y no ha logrado.
Dijo adiós con una mueca disfrazada de sonrisa,
y le suplicó a su Dios crucificado en la repisa el resguardo de los suyos,
y perforó la frontera, como pudo.

Si la luna suave se desliza, por cualquier cornisa sin permiso alguno,
¿Por qué el mojado precisa comprobar con visas que no es de Neptuno?

El mojado tiene ganas de secarse,
el mojado está mojado por las lágrimas que bota la nostalgia,
el mojado, el indocumentado,
carga el bulto que el legal no cargaría, ni obligado.
El suplicio de un papel lo ha convertido en fugitivo,
y no es de aquí porque su nombre no aparece en los archivos,
ni es de allá porque se fue.

Si la luna suave se desliza, por cualquier cornisa sin permiso alguno,
¿Por qué el mojado precisa, comprobar con visas que no es de Neptuno?

Mojado, sabe a mentira tu verdad, sabe a tristeza la ansiedad,
De ver un freeway y soñar con la vereda que conduce hasta tu casa.

Mojado, mojado de tanto llorar sabiendo que algún lugar,
te espera un beso haciendo pausa desde el día en que te marchaste.

Si la luna suave se desliza, por cualquier cornisa sin permiso alguno,
¿Por qué el *mojado* precisa, comprobar con visas que no es de Neptuno?

Si la visa universal se extiende el día en que nacemos y caduca en la muerte,
¿Por qué te persiguen *mojado*?
si el cónsul de los cielos, ya te dio permiso.

He packed a couple of shirts, a hat, his vocation of adventurer, six advices, seven pictures, a thousand memories. He packed his desire to stay, his willingness to become the man he had dreamed of being but that he has not been able to become. He said goodbye with a grin faking a smile. He begged to his God, crucified on the shelf to look after his loved ones. And he perforated the border, as he could.

If the moon smoothly slides through any cornice without permission,
why does the *mojado* need to prove with a visa that he is not from Neptune?

The torture of a paper has made him a fugitive.
He is not from here because his name does not appear on the files.
He is not from there because he is gone.

The *mojado* craves to dry up, the *mojado* is *mojado* (wet) because of the tears shed by nostalgia.
The *mojado*, the undocumented, carries the bulk that a legal would not carry, even if forced [to do so].

Mojado, your truth tastes like a lie, your anxiety tastes to sadness.
You see a freeway and dream with the road that drives you home.

Mojado, *mojado* (wet, wet) because of crying so much, knowing that somewhere a kiss is awaiting for you. [A kiss] that has been standing by since the day you left.

If the universal visa is granted the day we are born and expires with death, why are you chased after *mojado*? [why?] if the consul of heaven has already given you permission.

Song: "Tres Veces Mojado". (Three Times a Wetback)

Performed by: Los Tigres del Norte

Composed by Enrique Franco.

Cuando me vine de mi tierra El Salvador
con la intención de llegar a Estados Unidos
sabía que necesitaría más que valor;
sabía que a lo mejor quedaba en el camino.

Son tres fronteras las que tuve que cruzar
por tres países anduve indocumentado;
tres veces tuve yo la vida que arriesgar.
Por eso dicen que soy tres veces mojado

En Guatemala y México cuando crucé...
Dos veces me salvé que me hicieran prisionero
el mismo idioma y el color les demostré
¿cómo es posible que me llamen extranjero?
en Centroamérica dado su situación
tanto política como económicamente
ya para muchos no hay otra solución
que abandonar su patria tal vez para siempre.

El mexicano da dos pasos y ahí está,
hoy lo echan y al siguiente día está de regreso.
Eso es un lujo que no me puedo dar
sin que me maten o que me lleven preso...

Es lindo México pero cuánto sufrí
atravesarlo sin papeles es muy duro
los cinco mil kilómetros que recorrí
puedo decir que los recuerdo uno por uno.

Por Arizona me dijeron: "Cruzarás",
 y que me aviente por el medio del desierto.
 Por suerte un mexicano al que llamaban Juan
 me dio la mano que si no estuviera muerto.

Ahora que al fin logré la legalización
 lo que sufrí lo he recuperado con creces
 a los mojados les dedico mi canción
 y los que igual que yo son mojados tres veces.

When I came from my land El Salvador aiming to reach the United States, I knew I would need more than courage. I knew that maybe I would stay on the way. I had to cross three borders, I was undocumented in three countries, I had to risk my life three times; that's why people say I am three times a *mojado*. The Mexican takes two steps and is there. He is kicked out today, and the next day he is back. That is a luxury I cannot afford. I can get killed or arrested.

When I crossed in Guatemala and in Mexico I saved myself twice from being a prisoner. I proved [I could speak] the same language and [I had] the same colour [skin tone]. How is it possible that they call me a foreigner? In Central America, given their economic and political situation; there is, for many, no other way than to leave the fatherland; maybe forever. Mexico is nice, but I suffered so much. To cross through it without papers is very hard. Of the five thousand kilometres I travelled, I can say I remember every single one of them. In Arizona I was told "you will cross over" and throw myself into the desert. I was lucky that a Mexican named Juan lent me a helping hand, otherwise I would be dead.

Now that I am finally legalised, what I suffered has been returned with interest. I dedicate my song to the *mojados*, and to those such as myself, who are three times *mojados*.