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Affective Life, Mobility and Unity in U.S.-Mexico Transborder Families

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AFFECTIVE LIFE, MOBILITY AND UNITY IN U.S.-MEXICO TRANSBORDER FAMILIES

A Thesis

By

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ABSTRACT

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There has been abundant research on transnational families and their lived realities, but most of this research focuses on analyzing family relations across long distances. This thesis examines transnational life at the borderlands and develops new frameworks for understanding family unity and separation. Using concepts from the sociology of emotions, I find that economic and opportunity inequalities structure much of transborder life and that the emotional work different family members do for the sake of their family unity is largely based on mobility privilege and the idea that the U.S. is economically better off, even as the relative poverty between family members on both sides of national divide may not be as large as imagined. From concepts in affect theory, I argue how family relations are embedded in environmental spaces which shape their emotional dispositions toward each other. Finally, I argue that more research on intergenerational and extended transborder family is needed to better understand the power that social and financial capital have on the structuring of families across the divide over time.

DEDICATION

Para mi tía Mini,

who diffuses burdens with her lightness of heart

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I want to thank my family for being patient with me as I finished this thesis, even though half the time they questioned the half-reliable employment I held through it. Thank you to my mother who has always supported my education, and who was at one point betting to drop $10,000 on another degree for me. I want to thank Dr. Ruiz for providing the structure I needed at times, and for having the patience to stick with me as I slowly cooked this project over the course of many seasons. I want to thank Dr. Zavala for being a mentor and a voice of comfort; Dr. Lomelí for her wisdom. I also want to thank Kelly Helton and the Graduate College at UTRGV for their grace and assistance in completing this thesis. Thank you to all UTRGV faculty who have challenged me and supported my growth. Finally, I would like to thank the families that sincerely devoted their time to this project. Thank you very much.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

At the end of my undergraduate degree, I had the growing premonition that I had to come back to South Texas to resolve something in my heart. After four years of college in Connecticut, I wanted to refamiliarize myself with the transnational spaces I had grown up in after being away from them for so long. For what *exactly*, I wasn't sure. I did know, however, that I wanted to reconnect with my family, and that I wanted to relearn and reinhabit the way of life down here, now as an adult. I wanted to use my potential for mobility across the US-Mexico border (as a US Citizen) to engage a critical and reflexive lens that would allow me to examine how transnational families maintain their integrity across a border that is meant to divide. Staying reflective about my own mobilities and desires for connection with my *own* family deepened my understanding of the experiences of the transnational families I interviewed for this thesis. I was also motivated to conduct this study by my political potential to travel between two states. By exercising my mobility, I wanted to see how I could change or act differently—feel differently—in the transnational fields my family, and many others, have been forced to mediate their lives and relationships through. So, to state the obvious, this thesis is deeply personal. What follows is a research project that attempts to answer the questions my feelings brought me to. I "followed" the feeling (or affect) to somewhat satisfying completion.

In his manifesto for the U.S.-Mexico divide, Roland Rael (2017) imagines how border wall architecture can be imagined and constructed differently to produce new social scenes and atmospheres. He draws up a binational movie theatre in which citizens on both sides of the divide can watch a film in peaceful coexistence. In another sketch, he imagines the border wall

as an enormous, miles-long xylophone. Through the flexibility and near triviality of architectural design, Rael makes ironic the intense militarization and the varied rhetorics of difference that surround the symbolic U.S.-Mexico border today. What Rael's manifesto also suggests is that a reorganization of material reality, however simple or complex, can have profound effects on the everyday lives of border residents and on a whole squadron of ideas surrounding the border—the meanings of difference and community, nationalism, the right to migrate, the right to refuge, identity and belonging, to name a few.

This thesis is a focused study on the emotional/affectual life of transborder families living in the south Texas-north Mexico borderlands. The analyses presented here are attuned to the specific ways that transborder actors sense their material and emotional realities as they strive for a cohesive life across borders. I use conceptual and theoretical tools found from the sociology of emotions and affect theory to communicate an understanding of transborder life as I have felt it in my interview data and fieldwork

This thesis does not intend to provide a final word on emotional life across the border. Instead, it wishes to communicate the unique challenges that transborder families face, and it hopes to provide initial theorizing on how emotions or affect may be modulated by greater material and political realities at and across the border. Additionally, by looking for the ways families struggle for binational integration within their family structures, I acknowledge the immense "borderwork" they engage in to 'blur boundaries' (Rumford, 2014). I believe the transborder family is one of the many transnational institutions capable of integrating binational political interests and that they have a right to fight for a common sense of the future, even though scholarship points to the opposite observation (Alegría, 2000). Ultimately, this is a thesis empathetic to the experiences of transborder families who do the hard work of boundary blurring work.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of transnational families encompasses a heterogeneous field of research that examines the experiences, dynamics, and challenges faced by families who maintain connections across national borders. This interdisciplinary inquiry delves into many topics, ranging from the socio-economic implications of migration on family structures to the emotional and psychological effects of separation and reunification. Scholars of transnational families investigate how they negotiate and maintain relationships, identities and cultural practices in the face of geographical distance and cultural differences. In the wake of global pandemics, scholars also examine the role of communitive technologies in mediating connection in transnational families. In the context of global mobility and interconnectedness, the study of transnational families illuminates the complexities and intersections of various forces shaping contemporary family experiences.

Transnationalism in the Borderlands

The term transnationalism is inherently linked to processes that unify, connect, and preserve relationships across borders. As formalized by Basch et al. (1994:7) the definition of transnationalism states that immigrants "take action, make decisions, and develop subjectivities and identities embedded in networks of relationships that connect them simultaneously to two or more nations" (cited in Márquez & Romo, 2008:22). Thus, a transnational social field is a space created by the consistent interchanges between a sending and receiving community, which may

allow transnational actors to function in both places simultaneously (Levitt & Waters, 2002). It is important to note that the theoretical perspective is applied to a variety of different relationships. For example, transnationalism can represent the relationship between states and the citizens living beyond their borders (Waldinger & Fitzgerald, 2004) and between parents and their non-migrant children (Salazar Parreñas, 2005), but it can also represent the creation of new relationships through hometown associations (Orozco & Garcia-Zanello, 2009), overseas voting (Fitzgerald, 2012), and economic transactions (de la Garza & Lowell, 2002).

Transborder or Cross-Border Families

While the transnational framework is inherent in the present study, it does not fully account for the complexity that is present for transnational families living in borderlands regions, which house a unique version of transnational life. To make the distinction between long-distance transnational family interactions and the more immediate context for transnational families at the borderlands, I will make use of the term "transborder" family.

Transborder families live in an immediate borderland geography where accessibility to the adjacent nation is heightened even as international borders are meant to function as barriers. Borderland regions are characterized by a consistent and concentrated exchange of people, ideas, commerce, and culture, which makes transnational living more accessible to more individuals living on both sides of the divide (López, 2020). However, some scholars argue that the two adjacent regions do not necessarily share a common political agenda nor a common vision of the future (Alegría, 2000). For transborder families, the need to cross can also be "tied to family responsibilities–visiting relatives, caring for elderly parents, or attending social events" and work obligations can also dictate these circumstances (Marquez, 2008: 172). Due to geographic proximity, transborder families can also accumulate social capital on both sides of the national

divide, resulting in unique family formations (Ochoa O'Leary, 2017). This observation can be tied to more general trends in transmigrant movement motivated by financial and social opportunity which can be leveraged to maximize individual and familial advantage (López, 2020). Border-crossing activity is also linked to more urgent needs, such as medical care, which for migrants without official documentation can represent a "morality of risk"(Nuñez & Heyman, 2007; also see Castañeda, 2023). More generally, the border region houses informal cross-border networks, which indicate strategies of resourcefulness, and which may play "a vital role in poor border residents being able to make ends meet" (Ortiz-Gonzalez, cited in Marquez, 2008: 180).

Mobility and Economic Asymmetries between Mexico and the U.S.

In the study of transnational and transborder families, it is important to consider the historically formed economic inequalities which characterize the region (Ruiz, 1998; Ayala Gaytán et al., 2008; Velez-Ibañez, 2017). These are the conditions which force many of the binational lives discussed above. Additionally, mobility privileges between Mexican nationals and U.S. citizens vary greatly: "When a Mexican wishes to cross the border to the north, he must apply for a visa, for which he must prove financial solvency, the fact that he lives permanently in Mexico and has no criminal or terrorist record, while a resident of the United States can cross into Mexico without no need any formalities or to show any documents" (Ortiz & Contreras, 2014). Of course, these mobility asymmetries structure transborder family dynamics. For example, involuntary transnational families, in which the deportation and forced immobility of a family member creates an unexpected transnational social field, can introduce a host of emotional challenges for feelings of family unity (Berger Cardoso et al., 2016).

While much of the foreground analysis that the present thesis provides focuses on emotional family dynamics, it is also forced to consider family unity from a political ecology perspective by considering the interrelationships between economic inequalities and the multiple mobilities at the border, which result in unique configurations of border life. In other words, this thesis dives into analyses that consider how mobilities are embedded in a context of economic inequality across borders and in the transborder family unit. Moreover, while accessibility to a binational geographic context connotes various emotional possibilities for the transborder family (for example, greater intimacy, unity, cohesion, and satisfaction), the differentiated mobilities of family members within transborder networks greatly shape these dynamics and emotional realities. Hence, greater family intimacy, unity, cohesion and satisfaction are not guaranteed, although the increased geographic proximity may predict otherwise.

Understanding Transborder Family Configurations

The transborder family can take on many different configurations—nuclear and extended (Bustamante, 2013), couples (Schueths, 2015; López, 2020), single-parent migrant families, intergenerational and extended-kin families. An important concept in this thesis is the value of familism. Familism has been used an analytical framework to conceptualize the relationship between extended and nuclear families: "In very general terms, familism, as a solidarity network, aids in the reproduction and maintenance of family life by providing economic, emotional, and parental support to family members, nuclear and extended alike (Esteinou, 2007: 324, cited in Bustamante, 2013). Bustamante (2013) conceptualizes familism as a value-resource which transborder families make use of for assistance in, for example, childcare. The concept of familism also blurs the lines between the nuclear and extended families: "Yet, because relations in these families are fluid and dynamic, '…the line between nuclear and extended families is

often blurred in Mexico" (Canak & Swanson, 1998, cited in Bustamante, 2013). Newman (2009) understands extended families to be those family members who do *not* live in the same household unit of a nuclear family, and this thesis mostly follows that understanding, but it also remains attentive to the fluidity of family dynamics to get a better sense of the emotional every-day life of transborder families.

The Emotional Lives of Transnational Families

As Arlie Hochschild writes: "So it is no easier to speak these days of a 'typical sociologist of emotion' than it is to speak of a 'typical' sociologist" (Hochschild, 1997: 3). So it is that there are many theoretical frameworks for the study of emotions in social life (see the edited volume by Bendelow & Williams (1998) for a sampling of the breadth of research). Briefly, however, social studies of emotion have tended to be omitted from scholarship due to its historical opposition to rationality, which in Western thought have been representative of masculine and feminine binaries (Anderson & Smith, 2001; Bondi, 2005). Hence, the origins of social science research in emotions begins with methodological discussions that contest this rationalist impulse in academia (Sharp, 2009).

Many scholars have considered the emotional lives of transnational families. Skrbis (2008) outlines some of the ways emotions have been co-opted into studies of transnational family life. One major way of framing family unity is through the concept of emotional labor and co-presence. On the concept of emotional labor, Skrbis (2008) argues emotional labor is a consistent aspect in transnational life, and that, in fact, there seems to be an almost "natural fit between the concept emotional labour and the notion of transnational family because it allows the generation and maintenance of kin connection to occur across space and time" (Skrbis, 2008: 237).

Other emotional accounts of transnational life are often found in gender scholarship. For example, Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila (1997) describe transnational mothering as an organization and reconstitution of motherhood that attempts to overcome the temporal and spatial distances borne from migration. This activity can become "intensive mothering" (Hays, 1996), a gendered form of emotional labor in which mothers attempt to overcompensate for their physical absence. Similarly, in her study of transnational families from the Philippines, Salazar Parreñas (2005) describes specific qualities of emotional life between migrant mothers and their children. For example, the migrant children of these families tend to feel closer to their mother, reporting greater feelings of abandonment for their mothers than for their fathers, for whom they often feel a "gap" in emotional closeness. The gap refers to "this sense of discomfort, unease, and awkwardness that children feel toward migrant fathers" (Salazar Parreñas, 2005: 71), and it also communicates a larger feeling of unfamiliarity in the family unit due to the transnational context. The articulation and naming of unique relational feelings within transnational or transborder families is something this thesis is preoccupied with (see the section on Emotion, Affect and Language in this literature review). I also contend with the fact that: "Families are not homogenous units; instead, 'women, men and children of different sexes do not experience their families in the same way" (Thorne, 1995, cited in Salazar Parreñas, 2005: 93). In the context of transborder families along a borderlands geography, the heterogeneity can become even more complex as feelings are attached and caused by the asymmetry of mobility and the economic context of inequality in the region. Again, this thesis aims to investigate the emotional realities of transborder families by considering their family configurations of mobility while also considering the economic context of inequality.

Skribs (2008) also characterizes emotional life for transnational families through the concept of ’co-presence,’ which will also be an important concept in the current study on transborder families. Co-presence is a feeling of communality that is felt between transnational family members even in the distance. This feeling is intensified when transnational families come together to participate in social events such as weddings, birthdays and cultural festivals. The ‘co-presence’ is strengthened when transnational families come together to participate in social events such as weddings, birthdays and cultural festivals. Thus, the feeling gained from participating in these rituals is a feeling of ongoing intimacy, even after the transnational families split again into their corners of the world.

Emotion work and Borderwork

While emotional labor and co-presence are great terms to describe the emotional lives of long-distance transnational families, I do not contend that they are sufficient alone for the description of life across the physical borderlands. In the transborder context, methods in emotional geographies which are attuned to spatial ways of being and feeling are relevant. Emotional geographies broadly emphasize the articulations of emotion in space or within webs of relationality (Davidson & Milligan, 2004). Historically speaking, emotional accounts of experience are aligned with post-structuralist and feminist frameworks of subjectivity that emphasize the discursive in marginalized experiences (Sharp, 2009). Considering the marginality of transborder families who must live between two nations, this thesis nods to post-structuralist and feminist frameworks, especially in the way that Rumford (2014) describes the notion of ’borderwork,’ which involves "the activities of ordinary people - and their differentiated privileges - in envisioning, constructing, maintaining and resisting borders" (cited in Ozguc and Burridge, 2023: 2). In this way, notions such as ‘emotional labor’ and ‘co-presence’ can be

considered 'borderwork,' as they describe the labor associated with efforts of maintaining family integrity despite the hegemonic power of nations and their borders. What is most important, however, is that emotions are not "occasional resources called upon to explain transnational life – instead, they need to understood as constitutive of the transnational family experience itself" (Skrbis, 2008: 242). This last point about the "constitution" of emotional life sets up well an introduction and discussion on a term related to emotion—affect.

Affect

There have been more recent theoretical developments in the concept of *affect* that this thesis will also utilize in addition to the emotional conceptual tools borrowed from existing scholarship on transnational families. There are multiple strands of scholarship that take up affect theory and any reader of affect should keep in mind the different historical contexts and philosophical assumptions they each call to mind.

According to Thrift (2008), there are three (overlapping) traditions that theorize about affect. The first is a broad phenomenological tradition that conceives of affect simply as embodied emotions. This phenomenological tradition is aligned with the perspectives in the emotional geography scholarship previously mentioned for their emphasis on *bodily* experience, where the body is the site of emotional experience (Davidson & Milligan, 2004). The second tradition uses a psychoanalytic frame, which attempts to redefine our relationship to the unconscious (see Figlerowicz et al., 2016; Philo & Parr, 2003). The third tradition is a philosophically framed perspective inspired by the ideas of Spinoza, Deleuze, and Massumi. In this tradition, affect is understood as having a virtually infinite capacity to 'affect and be affected.' This tradition contributes to "landmarks of an 'ontological turn' in part of philosophy and the social sciences that although highly diverse and debated in itself, is characterized by

challenging the central position of human being in most of Western thought; by the notion that agency should not be understood as intentional action, but rather as 'efficacy' that is distributed across assemblages of human and non-humans..."(von Scheve, 2018: 43). As such, affect theory tends to be intertwined with discussions on the posthuman, in which ways of "being affected" are not limited to human interactions but also other organisms and materialities more broadly (see Ozguc & Burridge, 2023 for posthuman perspectives of "borderwork").

What all these approaches to affect have in common is their attempt to "rethink our definitions of subjectivity, expression and first-person experience, as well as the forms of insight to which these kinds of experiences might give rise" (Figlerowicz et al., 2016: 158). Or, as Thien (2005) describes it: "That is, affect is used to describe (in both the communicative and literal sense) the motion of emotion" (Thien, 2005: 451).

So Then, Emotion or Affect?

The differentiation between affect and emotion can be considered a pragmatic contrast between research perspectives:

> "Where the focus is on emotion, the interest lies with consolidated patterns of affective relatedness viewed from the perspective of persons or collectives and their articulated self-understanding (e.g., in terms of established emotions concepts such as anger, shame, fear or sadness, and the discursive practices that draw on and further stabilize these categories. Where the focus is on relational affect, the research interest concerns dynamic situatedness and processes of becoming; ontogenetic dynamics that are formative of subjects and their emotional orientations, yet often escape reflective capture by those involved, at least initially (Slaby et al., 2019: 5).

Furthermore, Davidson and Bondi (2011) argue that the performativity of language should be engaged in emotional and affective geographies: "our words necessarily 'translate' ideas and experiences from one context to another, and we need to consider the impacts and implications of such translations on experiential phenomena that should always be understood relationally, and in context" (Davidson and Bondi, 2011: 597). Similarly, Anderson (2014) suggests that, in considering the expansive definition of affect, we should think about the work definitions do. Rather than scrutinize analytical distinctions between terms such as emotion, affect, and mood, Anderson (2014: 12) argues we should allow the different terms to act as 'sensitizing devices' to attune us to specific types of relational feeling. For example, he considers the terms "structure of feeling" (a term explicitly elaborated by (Williams, 1977) and "affective atmospheres" as provocations to communicate a variety of ways to sense being in the world. In this thesis, I also make heuristic use of the terms structure of feeling, affective atmospheres, and affective architectures (see next section) to describe multiple ways of living in the transborder family context. In other words, I use these terms as provocations in my analysis to become sensitized to how affective-material realities mediate the transborder family experience.

Affect, Space and Border Studies

I have discussed each of the practical emphases that research on emotions and affect have. How has affect been theorized in the study of transnational or transborder families so far? Some scholars have taken up ambitions to theorize the interplay between affect and transnationality (Wise & Velayutham, 2017). However, Wise and Velayutham (2017) theorize the relationality of affect for long-distance transnational families, hence their concept of 'vectors' (inspired by work on affect by Massumi) which they use to think about how the actions of transnational communities or family members point—with different magnitudes—toward

their homelands or families abroad. While this is somewhat applicable frame for examining transborder families, I contend that these lines of affect stretching from one place to another are too simplistic in the borderlands geography, which is mediated by a different set of conditions, some of which have been discussed above (i.e. mobility privileges, socioeconomic contexts and family configurations).

Other borderlands affect studies have considered the experiences of deported men in Tijuana (Galhardi, 2023) and on 'affective atmospheres" of narcoviolence terror in borderlands prostitution zones (Luna, 2018).

Thesis Outlook

Having considered the multiple relevant dimensions from which to critically consider the conceptualization of the unity and separation of the transborder family (i.e. the asymmetry of mobility and economic relations, through multiple family configurations, and greater affective forces at the borderlands), this thesis contends that each transborder family represents a unique product of these political, socioeconomic and emotional/affectual conditions. Future work could work to disaggregate these dimensions, but I begin that work in this thesis.

While the spirit of this thesis is largely exploratory in trying to find new frameworks from which to consider the transborder family, I had some guiding questions, mainly: How do transborder families maintain a meaningful sense of unity? How do emotions inform us of this dynamic or pull toward cohesion? How do the different mobilities and legal statuses within transnational families contribute to transborder emotional life? Does the physical act of border-crossing through border points of entry play into dynamics of family unity? What else might work against these feelings of unity.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Research Assemblage

All participants recruited were part of a transborder family network in and around the areas of the Rio Grande Valley in south Texas and in northern Mexico, largely between and around the cities of Reynosa and Matamoros. Each research participant either crossed the border to see family members or was often visited by at least one border-crossing family member. The transborder family, hence, assumes a network in which there is some degree of cross-border mobility.

I conducted 13 interviews with members of at least 11 local transborder families over the course of 5 months. I interviewed 4 men and 9 women. Of the men, 2 were married. Of the women, 6 were married, 2 were widowed or divorced, and 1 was single. I conducted 10 of these interviews in-person and 3 online over Zoom. Each interview averaged about 54 minutes, with a range of 25 min – 1 hr 54 min. As a long-time resident of the South Texas borderlands, I made use of my social networks to begin snowball sampling. Three of the interviewees were recruited by snowball sampling. I interviewed acquaintances who trusted in my research process and volunteered their time and energy.

The zones of interest in the current study consist of Cameron County and Hidalgo County on the U.S. side and the urban zones in the municipalities of Matamoros and Reynosa on the Mexican side. I also interview people living in rural *ejidos* in the outskirts of the municipalities (see Figure 1). Out of my 13 interviews, 7 reported direct contact with relatives in ejidos. The names of ejidos will also be provided pseudonyms given the risk to confidentiality. Direct

contact with relatives in the more developed urban areas of Matamoros, Reynosa and Valle Hermoso was reported by 4 interviewees, although others also reported some movement into the urban spaces of these municipalities.

I conducted semi-structured interviews (See Appendix A for Spanish interview schedule; Appendix B for English). Probe questions sometimes veered away from the interview schedule to explore a feeling or narrative a bit more deeply or to clarify an emotion expressed. All interviews were transcribed and the transcriptions were saved in the researcher's password protected online drive. The researchers' phone was utilized to audio-record the material. All audio files of interviews were saved in a password-protected online drive, whereupon the phone file was destroyed. All audio files will be deleted in 3 years.

Ethics

Approval from UTRGV's Institutional Review Board for Human Subject Research was secured before recruiting participants and collecting data. The risk to participants was expected to be minimal, but participants were assured of their voluntary participation: they could stop the interview at any time and skip questions they didn't wish to answer. Voluntary participation was assured by signing an agreement to consent form, which was presented in either English or Spanish to each participant. Anonymity was not possible at the time of interview, but confidentiality was achieved through the use of pseudonyms in this and every other report. Some interviews I conducted online over Zoom. In these cases, camera usage was not enforced to provide a comfortable online space to conduct the interview. Finally, data was stored securely in a password-protected online drive. All research data and materials will be permanently deleted from the online drive after three years.

I made sure that each interview was a safe space to share about some vulnerable experiences with the border, including death, murder, and deportation. I made sure to remind the

interviewees that they were not obligated to share information they didn't wish, and that they could stop the research at any point if they wished. This made for an emotionally safe environment where I could receive their experiences and co-construct or perform an interview that was respectful and sometimes even empowering for the interviewee (Ezzy, 2010).

Approach to Analysis

As stated above, the interview was semi-structured to allow fluidity of expression. Following methods in emotional geography and in qualitative research centering emotions, I conceptualized the interview as a co-creation of emotional expression and mutual understanding (Ezzy, 2010). While I performed coding that guided my analysis, I did not follow any particular protocol. Instead, I placed an emphasis on the rolling emotional nature of the interview to inform me of intense feelings and particular emotions, making sure to confirm with the participants interpretations of their feelings as much as I could (Bondi, 2005).

Limitations of Analysis or Reflexivity

This thesis is also in agreement with methods in which a reflexivity about the research process serves as an analytic tool (Ezzy, 2010). As a regular transborder actor myself, I carry my own intuitions about transborder life and hence this research may reflect emotional findings that I as the researcher resonated with specifically. Someone else conducting the same interviews may produce a different presentation of the emotional and affective life for transborder families. However, my partly insider perspective provided much valuable insight.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

"That There's a Way": Privileged Mobilities Contributing to Family Unity

Mobility across the border is an important dimension from which to begin an analysis of the social cohesion of transborder families and their emotional life. Mobility, after all, allows for meaningful and physical connections to take place. I speculate and find that as the number of cross-border mobile actors within the transnational family unit increases, the seemingly greater ease the transnational family experiences in its connection. Compared to the rest of my participants, I found that Renata and Paulina formed part of transborder families who had relatively greater mobility privileges, which helped their sense of family unity.

I start my analysis of mobility with Renata. Renata is a 59-year-old woman living in El Palomo, a rural ejido in the outskirts of the municipality of Matamoros, Tamaulipas. She lives a comfortable transnational life and has had a long history of crossing the U.S. Mexican border. Renata has held a visa practically all of her life, which has helped her become acquainted with the U.S. through various vacations she took with her family as a young girl. She also shares how she has seen the increase in U.S. border restrictions for border-crossers. She has utilized at least three different kinds of visas in her lifetime. When prompted to provide an account of her border-crossing history, she said:

> **Renata**: Desde que era niña, toda la vida, nadamás que antes... yo pasaba con un documento que se llamaba Forma 13, que uno iba con su mama incluída. Y luego

después, cuando cumplías 15 años, había un documento que se llamaba Tarjeta Local, o sea, ya venía tu foto, ya eras individual, pero luego ya dejó de existir la Tarjeta Local para que se hiciera la visa láser, que ahora bien te la checan con un láser cuando pasa y todo está como más controlado. Entonces todo eso ha existido y yo lo he vivido todo.

Translation: Since I was a girl. My whole life, just that before... I would cross with a document that was called Forma 13, where one would cross with their mom included. And then later, when you would turn 15 years old, there was a document that was a called Tarjeta Local, in which you had your own photo, you were an individual, but then the Tarjeta Local ceased to exist for the laser visa, that they very well check with a laser and it's all like more controlled. So all of that has existed and I have lived through it all.

We will see that Renata's rather easygoing transborder experience stands in stark contrast to the narratives that will be introduced later. Renata's account of her own border crossing history points to changes in border infrastructure and the way access to more privileged forms of mobility have diminished. Villegas (2013) argues that racialized discourses on migration have played a part in the contemporary moment of border crossing control and surveillance. That Renata's history of transborder mobility starts early in her life could well suggest the laxer immigration control at the time. In this thesis, I do not examine these changes, but am aware of the changing mobility regimes which transborder families are subject to: "The degree to which borders between two states are open or closed relates to their historical context, level of economic integration or dependence, and other more localized border factors, such as urban settlements and categorization of border populations living in border regions" (Boehmer & Peña, 2012).

According to Renata, it is a privilege to be able to cross the border to see your family because there are so many factors that could impede the connection. She tells me the crucial thing about maintaining transborder connections is that "there's a way." As she tells it:

> **Renata**: La disponibilidad también de ir. Que hay manera. Hay gente que se puede querer mucho pero si no tiene Visa, o no tiene dinero, o no tiene camioneta que cruce... Hay diferentes factores, pero a nosotros no nos impide nada.
>
> **Translation**: It's about the possibility of going as well. That there's a way. There are people that can love each other very much but if they have no visa, or have no money, or don't have a car to cross over with... There are different factors, but for us, nothing impedes us

Renata's response points the precarious nature of border crossing mobility. Money, transportation and legally legitimate ways of crossing are needed to facilitate feelings of family unity or closeness. Later, I will demonstrate how these factors becomes hindrances for other families, especially for those families who lack greater mobility privileges in their transborder network. Throughout the interview, I am warmed by how Renata speaks of the strength of her family unit. Renata has a small and close transborder network consisting of her son and two siblings living on the U.S. side. She notes that they are all financially independent and that they all lead their own lives. Although she lives alone in Mexico in El Palomo, she does not go 15 days without seeing any one of them. She tells me she crosses to visit her family every week, and her son usually visits and stays with her over the weekends. The multiple mobility privileges within Renata's transborder network seemed to predispose her transborder family to be a close, well-integrated and regular transborder network, in which the economic asymmetries of the border are not right away apparent as a factor structuring their transborder family life. In other

words, I didn't register any dramatic interdependences between her family members living on either side.

Renata humorously shares that the only 'conflict' her transnational family experiences is that they're not closer together because of her refusal to move to the United States, even though her family encourages her to make the move. As she explains:

> **Renata**: Mi familia quiere que yo me vaya a vivir a Estados Unidos, arreglar mis documentos para irme a vivir allá. Pero mientras que yo pueda mantener mi vida aquí... no me interesa. Por lo pronto, no tengo intención.
>
> **Translation**: My family wants me to go live in the U.S., fix my documents to go live over there. But while I can sustain my life here... I'm not interested. For the moment, I don't have that intention.

After I inquired Renata on this strong stance, I found that three things are keeping Renata from moving to the U.S. The first is her business, which she runs by herself and occasionally stocks with U.S. merchandise. She admits that her business affords her great freedom on the Mexican side. She can go on vacation when she wants, and she is her own boss. If she were to move to the U.S., she would lose the business and her autonomy. Second is her land ownership of farm land as an *ejidataria*. On these lands, she grows cotton and sorghum, which she then sells. Private land ownership is common in ejidos, but neoliberal trends in the 1980s and 1990s have increased corporate predation due to the potential of ejido land for urban development (Schumacher et al., 2019). Third, is that she is surrounded by people she loves in her ejido of El Palomo. The ties to community she has in El Palomo also act as affective forces that maintain a transborder field with her family in the U.S. From Renata's perspective, I appreciate how a sense

of family unity is also predicated on notions of independence and lifestyle choice. Renata's account of family unity suggests that dramatic forms of financial interdependence, which I will introduce in the next section, can create strained feelings of obligation and overall hurt the possibility for a smooth transborder family life.

What I also appreciate from Renata's account of transborder life is that while she is embedded to some degree in the economic asymmetries between Mexico and the U.S. (e.g. as a business owner who shops in the U.S. for merchandise to sell in her Mexican store), her transborder family unit is not necessarily caught up in this interdependence, at least in a dramatic way. In other words, the hegemonic economic inequality between Mexico and the United States did not play an overt role in her family dynamics (as it did for other families I interviewed). So, Renata's account sets up a hypothesis for future investigation: the degree of financial independence/interdependence between members of transborder families predicts more positive atmosphere of family unity by minimizing feelings of obligation.

For Renata, one of the benefits of good mobility and financial independence is having the *choice* to stay in Mexico, where she can keep her employment (i.e. run her business), maintain a satisfying connection to her community in El Palomo, all while still having access to her U.S. family nearby. Renata's case provides an interesting contrast to long-distance transnational families, who must on the one hand, confront the emotional challenges of connecting with family over long distances, and on the other, make decisions that often sacrifice family unity for the economic benefits of long-distance transnationalism. Overall, Renata's case demonstrates how the conditions for a "best of both worlds" experience is achievable, although precariously so, considering the various requirements needed: mobility, financial independence or stability, and emotional intimacy nurtured by regular visits.

In this section, I have discussed the conditions needed to achieve a "best of both worlds" transborder experience. The ingredients making up this experience seem to be related to: the possibility of transborder mobility for *various* family members, the desire to strengthen family bonds (i.e. familism), and financial and material wealth. However, it also seems that the anchoring of transborder life is also a consequence of ties to land or community. Renata not only has her businesses and land to look over, but she is also surrounded by people she loves, neighbors she's known her whole life in El Palomo. Her ties to community keep the transborder field alive. Renata's social and financial capital on the Mexican side keep her satisfied in place.

Economic Asymmetries, Perceptions of Relative Wealth, and Familism

I have pointed to literature describing the historical development of economic inequality at the U.S.-Mexico borderlands (see pg 5 in this thesis). Much aligned with the literature, I find some families whose lives are bifurcated by the border as they seek opportunities to maximize their advantage. For example, Nestor had to make the difficult decision to leave his wife in Reynosa to look for work in McAllen when he received his U.S. residency documentation.

> **Néstor**: El estrés de la transición cuando le dije a Susana [su esposa] que ya recibí mis papeles, me voy a vivir a McAllen. Como que nos frustramos los dos y nos dio sentimiento porque literalmente nos veíamos todos los días y pues ya me fui para allá para buscar trabajo y casa. Y 'bueno ya no te voy a ver más que en los fines de semana.' Fue tristeza, frustracion y nostalgia
>
> **Translation**: The stress of the transition when I told Susana [his wife)]that I got my papers, that I'm going to live in McAllen. We both got frustrated and we felt a lot of feelings because we would literally see each other every day and well I went over there to

look for work and a house. And 'well, I'm not going to see you except on the weekends now.' It was sadness, frustration and nostalgia.

Similarly, Beatriz lives a family life that is bifurcated by the border. Her husband is a U.S. citizen who works 2-3 weeks at a time in the United States, so he is away a lot. Beatriz currently cannot cross to the U.S. She is a Mexican national and is attempting to apply for a visa. Beatriz is also raising her first child, and she admits that the long distance and separation caused by the border has made her role as a mother more intense.

Beatriz: Es muy distinto a cuando no está a cuando esta [su esposo]… Es bonito cuando ya está aquí. Yo me relajo. Siento bonito y me relajo… y cuando no esta es como que siento cien por ciento la cargo yo, nadamos yo.

Translation: It's very different when he's not here compared to when he's here (her husband)… It's nice when he's here. I relax. I feel good and I relax… and when he's not here it's like I get 100% of the weight of me, only on me.

Beatriz's and Nestor's experiences represent some of the separation challenges that transborder couples must go through on a daily basis (see López, 2020). While these couple or family dynamics are created by the economic inequality between the United States and Mexico, I find other ways in which this inequality shows up in transborder family dynamics. I find that family relatives living and working in the U.S. are likely to feel an expectation to help family relatives living in Mexico.

For some of my interviewees, it seems that these expectations are strong and perhaps even cause for disassociation from those family members who hold those expectations. For

example, Miles, who lives in the U.S. shares that it's difficult to connect to his Mexican family particularly for this reason. He says:

> **Miles**: Mexican family thinks that family that lives in America has more, and that they should contribute more to family things. They tend to ask a lot of money, ask for money...That's kind of a deterring [reason], where I'm like 'oh, I don't want to go because I know they're going to ask for money' or I'm going to feel guilty [for not being able to help]. Sometimes I just don't want to do it.

Melissa, who also lives in the U.S. with her husband expresses a similar sentiment.

> **Melissa**: Como yo vivo acá en Estados Unidos, me ven como que todo está bien conmigo, que yo tengo problemas. Viene mi hermana y me dice "Que estabas haciendo" Digo "Estaba limpiando la casa." Dice, "Ay, ¿tú qué limpias?" como que yo no limpio. Siempre me han visto como que todo perfecto, no tengo problemas, nomás porque vivo en Estados Unidos. Como dice mi esposo, "Piensan que la tenemos hecha aquí" pero no saben lo duro todo lo que tiene que trabajar y todo lo que tenemos que hacer
>
> **Translation**: Because I live over here in the United States, they see me as if everything is alright with me. My sister comes to visit and asks me "What were you doing?" I say, "I was cleaning the house." She says, "Yeah right, what do you clean?" as if I didn't clean. (laughs). They have always seen me like everything is perfect, like I don't have problems, just because I live in the United States. It's like my husband says, 'They think that we have it made here' but they don't know how hard we have to work and everything we have to do.

These perceived differences in wealth seem to be cause for division or at least grounds for a lack of understanding. Whatever the actual circumstance of any transborder family, it seems that there is an inclination to believe that family members living in U.S. are well off and financially stable. However, this perception could be illusory, as one of my interviewees suggests. When I asked Galilea at the end of our interview what else she felt it was important to say about her transborder family experiences, she pointed to this mismatch of expectations. She shared with me:

> **Galilea**: No creo que entienden... La familia en México, la gente en México en general, piensan que nosotros trabajamos y ganamos bastante. Pero ya cuando en una ocasión le explique a mi prima mis gastos mensuales, se asustó. And she's like "Oh yo pensé que serían menos gastos."
>
> **Translation**: I don't think they understand… Family in Mexico, people in Mexico more generally, they think that we work and make a lot of money. But on one occasion when I explained to my cousin all of my expenses, she was surprised. She was like 'Oh, I thought your expenses would be less…'

For Galilea, the expectation that family in the U.S. is better off financially than family in Mexico is something that needs to be relativized, as she took the time to do with her cousin. Still, for others, the economic inequalities between family living in Mexico and the United States is something that requires some micromanagement. For example, Roel, a U.S. citizen living in the U.S., shared with me how new technological gadgets, such as a new phone, can signal to Mexican family members his greater relative wealth. Roel says he has tried to be discreet around his Mexican family when he gets a new phone because he doesn't want to make them feel bad with a display of wealth. Peculiarly, Galilea shares a similar anecdote. She explains how a

Mexican family member might immediately ask “Can I have your old phone?” when they see an American family member with a new phone. In both of these examples, the expectation of a prosperous life in the United States seems to be something that must be emotionally managed.

In this section, I have considered how the asymmetry of economic conditions across the border translate into transborder family dynamics. It seems there is a general understanding among transborder family members of the greater poverty in Mexico. However, it should be noted that I only heard this type of comment from family members living in the U.S. This at least suggests that U.S. family members feel an obligation (that could be felt as guilt for some) to help family members in Mexico due to economic context. For some family members, though, the reality of inequality needs to be relativized. Overall, this section points to a research gap that should look at the lived and relative economic inequalities in the transborder family.

The Burden of Priviliged Mobilities

I have so far discussed how financial pressures to contribute to family members living in Mexico. Now I will describe pressures put on mobility and how these may even compound with the financial pressures discussed above. In this section, I point out a couple of ways that family members with mobility privileges can experience pressures or even emotional burdens as they act toward the coherence of the transborder family unit. I argue that privileged mobilities are often accompanied by feelings of obligation. Because of the asymmetry in mobility privileges across the U.S.-Mexico border between Mexican nationals and U.S. citizens is in favor of U.S. citizens (Van Haren & Masferrer, 2024), I find that these “mobility burdens” often fall on U.S. family members.

I first introduce Moises to demonstrate the expectation that is placed on U.S. family to visit family in Mexico due to their mobility privileges. Moises is a Mexican national who, like Renata, lives in the ejido El Palomo in the outskirts of Matamoros. When I asked Moises to provide me a history of crossing the border, he said:

> **Moisés**: ¿O sea en realidad, la mía? es visa de turista. Y pues yo tengo desde el 2001 trabajando y nunca había solicitado una visa. Se puede decir que a mí nunca me intereso cruzar…. porque en realidad no me interesaba. Y como los familiares que viven en Estados Unidos pueden venir pa'ca, entonces por eso nunca tuve la necesidad de tramitar una visa.
>
> **Translation**: So, in reality, mine? It's a tourist visa. And well, I have been working since 2001 and I had never applied for a visa. You could say that I was never interested in crossing… because in reality it didn't interest me. And because the family that lives in the United States can come over here, so then that's why it was never necessary that I apply for a visa.

Moises' response points to a dependence of connection that hinges on the mobility of relatives living in the U.S., who often have greater mobility privileges. Later in the interview, Moises tells me he was only forced to apply for a visa in 2014 when his brother living in the U.S. passed away, but he remained adamant that otherwise he wouldn't have ever applied for one.

Emotional Labor and Privileged Mobilities

Next, I will introduce Moises's sister, Melissa, who lives in the U.S. with her husband. Melissa first came undocumented to the U.S. at the age of 14. Later, through her marriage with her U.S. citizen husband, she was able to get her residency documentation. Currently, she is the only family member out of her siblings and parents who lives in the U.S. As we will see, it seems

her position in the U.S. had been the source of a lot of emotional work. For example, Melissa recounts the traumatic death of her mother on the Mexican side. The caregiving responsibilities seemed to fall on her due to her location in the United States and the expectation of a generally stable life in the U.S. from Mexican family members (discussed in the previous section).

In the time leading up to her mother's death, Melissa describes how she had to hide her emotions when she interacted with her family members living in Mexico. She had to 'be strong'. Melissa tells the way she felt her experience:

> **Melissa**: La muerte de mi mamá. Me recuerdo que ese tiempo fueron 6 meses que supimos del cáncer. Entonces me la pasaba casi allá [en México], pero iba y venía. Nos tomábamos turnos con mis hermanas, para yo poder estar acá con mis hijos.... Y emocionalmente también el gritar acá [en Estados Unidos]. Cuando estaba allá como que no podía mostrar mis emociones. Tenía que ser yo la fuerte. Todas se quebraban pero intentaba yo de ser la fuerte [en México], porque así me miraban mis hermanos. Venia acá [a Estados Unidos] para gritar y llorar y para agarrar fuerzas y para de nuevo ir a estar allá con ella.
>
> **Translation**: The death of my mother. I remember that by that time it had been 6 months that we knew about the cancer. So, I would spend most of my time over there (in Mexico), but I would go back and forth. I would take turns with my sisters, so that I could be over here [in the U.S.] with my children... And emotionally, the screaming over here [in the U.S.]. When I was over there [in Mexico], it was like I could not show my emotions. I had to be the strong one. Everyone would break down, but I tried to be the strong one because that's how my siblings would see me. I would come over here [to the U.S.] to scream and cry and gain strength to go back once again and be with my mother.

I then asked Melissa why she had taken on this 'strong sister' or 'strong daughter' role. She tells me that her mother's death was not the only time she had done this. She tells me another story involving her brother living on the Mexican side. When her brother fell sick, Melissa's family in Mexico called for her help:

> **Melissa**: "Me hablan de México y me dicen "Tu hermano está mal, está enfermo. Ya lo llevamos para acá en Matamoros. Quieren que se interne, pero si lo internamos, Melissa, va a ser mucho dinero y no tenemos. O si lo metemos en un seguro de no sé qué dice—ya ves cómo nos pasó con mi mamá que los tienen en el piso, que no tienen ni cama. Entonces mi esposo me escucha y dice que me lo traiga y que lo interne en Harlingen. Entonces como que siempre era yo que tomaba esas decisiones. De ser yo la fuerte y de ayudarlos y de buscar la salida y como le hacemos."
>
> **Translation**: "They call me from Mexico, and they say 'Your brother is not well, he's sick. We already took him to Matamoros. They want to take him in, but if we do that, Melissa, it's going to be too much money and we don't have any. Or if we put him on an insurance... you know what happened with mom, they have them on the floor, they don't even have a bed.' So, then my husband overheard me, and he tells me to bring him so that he's hospitalized in Harlingen (in the U.S.). So, it has always been like it's me who has had to make those decisions, to be the strong one and help them out, and to find the way out or the solution."

Because of Melissa's greater economic resourses in the United States compared to her Mexican siblings, she becomes a bedrock of support who can supposedly better handle the burdens of family emergencies such as the ones shown here. The sickness and death of Melissa's mother and her brother's poor health episode show how responsibility and emotional burdens

were relayed to those who are supposedly well equipped to take on them. In this case, this meant that those with mobility privileges and those who live and work in the U.S. because of their seemingly greater wealth. Because of Melissa's privileged position within her transborder family, she took on the large emotional labor in making difficult decisions involving healthcare, finances and making time to support the family on the Mexican side.

To again demonstrate how mobility privileges are often charged with, or predispose, feelings of obligation and guilt, I introduce Roel and his parents. Through my interview with Roel, I learn that he has undocumented relatives (aunts, uncles, and cousins) living on the U.S. side at the same time that he has grandparents living on the Mexican side, in an ejido called Las Azucenas. He notes the difficult mediating responsibilities toward family unity that are placed on his parents, who are U.S citizens and hold mobility privileges. This burden could also be interpreted within the framework of familism, in which the family takes a central role and the interdependence of its members is emphasized.When I asked Roel about the support system in his transborder family context, he notes how the mobility and citizenship privileges of his parents specifically placed a burden on them to do the emotional borderwork of uniting family across the border. He said:

> Roel: "It's funny that you bring that up because it's usually my parents that are the ones that are providing the support for the families here (in the U.S.) and there (in Mexico), and it's kind of hard because I look at my parents and I'm just like "You guys have to take care of yourselves. You can't always be giving, you know, I know they're your family and you're better off now than when you were younger, but you still have a family to take care of like you have all these bills, and you have us—I mean this is when I was

younger, right. My parents were the support system for our other family members... like financially... They would pay bills or buy groceries..."

Roel's parents seem to take on supportive and mediating roles for their transborder family by virtue of their privileged mobility as U.S. citizens and their relatively greater economic opportunities. They seem to take the brunt of the efforts to connect and support their parents living in Mexico. Roel describes the unintentional fragmentation of the transborder family due to the different mobilities.

Roel: "I mean I guess the dynamic—and it's not like it's anybody's fault—but I think a lot of family here (in the U.S.) gets together and a lot of the family over there (in Mexico) gets together, only because of, that... it's not that they do it intentionally. But it's just because the family that we have here, you know, most of them are undocumented so they can't cross over (to Mexico), so like if we hang out with family here it's not because we're alienating them, you know. So we would try to do our best to like, you know, gathering family here equally as we would do over there because most of our family over there, they can't cross over here either because they're not able to get visas... We had to find a balance of like who to associate with when and where, like 'okay, this weekend we're going to hang out with this family and do this, and next weekend we'll go to Mexico and we'll go to this celebration,' you know?"

With family relatives on both sides of the divide being relatively immobile, Roel's U.S. citizen parents take on large commitments to maintain social cohesion and work against the fragmentation of their transborder family configuration. The accounts presented in this section so far have suggested that those transborder family members with mobility privileges tend to carry on the burden of disconnection, which predisposes them to greater levels of emotional labor. I

have also suggested that mobility privileges and economic inequalities can sometimes compound dramatically, as we have seen in Melissa's case. In the next section, I explore gender, another dimension from which emotional labor can arise.

Finally, I will introduce the account of Anita and Marta to finalize my discussion on the burden of privileged mobilities. Marta is a U.S. citizen born in Florida. Through her employment as a migrant worker in Florida, she met her husband with whom she had her first daughter, Anita. After about a year more in Florida, the family moved to Brownsville, Texas. Suddenly, Marta's husband (Anita's father) was deported to Matamoros sometime while Anita was still in school. A difficult back-and-forth life began after the deportation. With the immobility of her husband now living in Mexico, Marta takes on a more painstaking role in her "involuntary" transborder family (Berger Cardoso et al., 2016). So that her daughters could have a relationship their father, Marta makes sure to take her daughters to see their father every weekend. This amounted to an enormous emotional labor for Marta, Anita and the rest of the family. The border crossing life was stressful. As Marta describes it:

> **Marta**: Otra cuando estaba haciendo frio. Yo sufrí. Yo sufría con mis hijas. Cuando cruzábamos porque bien temprano te tenías que levantar. Y también nos levantábamos a las 4 de la mañana, las levantaba a ellas.. Esperar en el puente cuando teníamos frio, en la lluvia (*llora*). Eso era algo sentimental. Te quedas '¿porque tengo que hacer esto?' pero pues that was our life -- back and forth, back and forth.
>
> **Translation**: It was another thing when it was cold. I suffered. I suffered with my daughters. When we would cross because we had to wake up really early. And we would wake up at 4 am, I would wake them up... Wait at the bridge when we were cold, in the

rain (*cries*). That was something sentimental. You're left to wonder 'why do I have to do this?' but well that was our life—back and forth, back and forth.

When I asked Anita about her life during this back-and-forth period of her life, she shared with me:

> **Anita**: My experience was more confusion. Because we weren't really told much. I didn't know why he got deported. I didn't know why we had to be picked up early Friday after school. We were just very whatever my parents said we did. So it was more confusion than anything else. And that confusion became the new normal because it happened every weekend, it became a pattern and after the pattern, it became a lifestyle, so it was just something I got used to. So it was never like "oh my gosh yes, we get to see my dad again, blah blah blah"

She then pauses to reflect on the transborder lifestyle she used to have. She describes it as "bittersweet."

> **Anita**: Now, it is bittersweet. Sweet because we were able to have a relationship with my dad. Bitter because I didn't have as many opportunities as others because of that situation of having to visit him all the time.

For Anita, efforts toward family unity (however emotionally laborious for Marta) meant loss of opportunities on the U.S. side. She laments not being able to partake in as many extracurricular activities in high school as she would have liked. Unfortunately, Anita's father passed away due to complications with alcohol addiction. It was then that Anita's back and forth lifestyle stopped. As she describes it, there were no more obligations across the border. Anita shares with me how this change in obligations plays out in regular family interactions now:

> **Anita**: That changed when my dad died. Yeah. Like now, if I'm over there, we're over there for a weekend and we already told everyone that we're going to stay for the weekend, if at any moment I'm like 'I don't want to be here' I can always just come back (to the U.S.). Cuando antes, a huevo me tenia que quedar/When before, I had to forcefully stay.

Anita's father's death changed her family dynamics. Suddenly, there aren't obligations anymore. Suddenly, there is a choice to be had in her transborder family dynamics. Now, she chooses to disassociate with some family members she may had felt obligated to show up for when her father was still alive. When I asked Anita if there were any relatives who she *doesn't* see often, she shared with me:

> **Anita**: I don't see my dad's siblings—tios and tias. My relationship with them isn't very significant, at least not to me. Now as a grown-up they seem to me very fake... Before I didn't have a choice to hang out with them, but now I choose not to. Just because our relationship was always toxic... I would always watch how they would talk about my mom, how they would treat my dad, and you know we were raised to like "calladita te ves mas bonita"--you sit down, you stay quiet, you just listen—so we would listen *a lot*. And now as a grown up, I fail to see how I can have a healthy relationship with someone that expresses themselves in such a negative way about people that I consider very close to me.

The large feelings of obligation that seemed to exist when her dad was alive have now seemed to dissipate. Her family is no longer an "involuntary" one. At the end of the interview, when I asked Anita if anything else was important about her experience, she said:

Anita: “Don’t let your world revolve around having to visit one family member just because they messed up. Um, but that’s just my personal experience. I know some people enjoy their lifestyle, but I don’t know if they enjoy it because they have a choice to or because they didn’t have a choice. I didn’t have a choice.”

Marta and Anita’s case demonstrates the painful consequences of not having a choice in transborder living. The lack of mobility forced on Anita’s father through his deportation also meant a lack of choice for Marta and Anita and the rest of their family, who were forced to live a stressful and involuntary back and forth life across the border. This involuntary arrangement involved large feelings of obligation and emotional labor, which seemed to rub against personal autonomy.

In this section, I introduced large accounts from Melissa, Roel, and Anita and Marta. Each of these cases showed how privileged mobilities took on the brunt of helping keep the transborder family’s sense of unity. I showed how these efforts exerted by those with mobility privilege tend to involve great emotional labors. This is not to exclude the experiences of those who are left behind or who have less mobility privilege. For example, we saw how Beatriz’s childrearing responsibilities are heightened when her husband is away for work in the U.S. In this section, I also showed how emotional labor may be compounded when those who have mobility privileges are also expected to contribute financially to family living in Mexico. We see most clearly with Roel’s parents, whose U.S. citizenship made them sources of support for undocumented family members living in the U.S. and for family living in Mexico. Overall, this section continues to elucidate how the asymmetry of mobility privilege and economic opportunities between the U.S. and Mexico play a role in transborder family dynamics.

Mexico or the United States? Choice in Transborder Living.

I have already discussed how economic and mobility asymmetries maintain transnational social fields for the transborder families I interviewed. This was most dramatically observed in the deportation of Anita's father. Now, I turn to another dimension from which to examine the separation of the transborder family. Throughout my interviews I found larger cultural attitudes or forces that kept the transborder social field alive for the transborder family. These cultural attitudes reflected preferences over living in one country over the other. For example, when I asked Nestor if he felt he belonged more to Mexico or the United States, he shared with me:

> **Néstor**: Si pudiera elegir donde vivir, viviría en México. El estilo de vida es muy diferente aquí que allá. En Estados Unidos estas encerrado en tu casa y si sales es para gastar dinero, porque vas a las tiendas, a comprar. Es gastar dinero en todos lados. El estilo de vida aquí en México… pues aquí está más familia, amigos, conocidos.... Aquí te puedes salir y te vas caminando a la casa de tu vecina y convives y allá no.
>
> **Translation**: If I could choose where to live, I would live in Mexico. The way of life is very different here [in Mexico] than over there [in the U.S.]. In the United States, you're shut in your house, and if you go out it's to spend money because you go to the stores to buy. It's spending money everywhere. The way of life here in Mexico… well here there's more family, friends, familiar faces… Here [in Mexico] you can go out and walk to your neighbor's house and you can hang out and not over there [in the U.S.].

He said he would prefer to live in Mexico because of the culture there, but because of the better economic opportunities in the Unites States, he has decided to work and live there (while visiting his wife in Mexico over the weekends). I observe a similar sentiment in my interview

with Paulina. However, Paulina's response also points to the critical role that financial and social capital play in the perseverance of transborder life. In Paulina's response, we can appreciate how her and her husband's financial and social capital might be a formidable factor returning them to Mexico to spend their end of life.

> **Paulina**: Yo tengo muchas amistades allá porque toda mi vida la he vivido allá, nada más los 24 años aquí. Entonces, yo estoy allá y no me falta con quien irme... Si, no es que allá es otra cosa. De hecho, dice mi esposo ya terminando con mi último hijo, nos vamos a regresar a Matamoros… Si, tenemos casa allá, y la hemos estado arreglando. Le hicimos alberca. Entonces él quiere regresarse allá. Él es feliz en Matamoros.
>
> **Translation**: I have many friendships over there because my whole life I've lived it over there, only 24 years over here [in the U.S.]. So, when I'm over there, there are so many people I can see… Yes, over there [in Mexico] it's something else. In fact, my husband says that when we're done raising our youngest son, we're going back to Matamoros… Yes, we have a house over there, and we've been fixing it up. We built a pool for it. So, my husband wants to go back. He is happy in Matamoros.

I want to note here as well that 7 out of my 13 interviewees reported a fear of going to Mexico because of the potential for violence there. It seems that the threat of narcoviolence could be an affective force or atmosphere (Luna, 2020) that shapes the way transborder life is practiced. I also found examples of "fatalismo" (Zapata Roblyer & Grzywacz, 2015) in the way certain actors navigated their transborder lives. Fatalismo can be described as a resigned acceptance to reality. For example, Paulina expresses how her husband has adopted a fatalistic mindset when the topic of Mexico's danger comes up.

Paulina: Pues este como le decimos, porque los muchachos [hijos], “ya no vayan que está muy feo el cruce” ... Ellos son los que a veces se molestan—mis hijos--“no vayan que está muy feo, porque ves todo el puente y que se vienen los indocumentados, y que balaceras. Pero mi esposo dice “como quiera tenemos que ir, y si no va a pasar algo, nos puede pasar aquí o nos puede pasar allá” Entonces hazte cuenta de que ya nuestra mente está abierta de que “pelea que te toca, te va a tocar.”

Translation: Well, like we tell them, because the boys [her sons], “don't go anymore because the crossing is very ugly…’ They are the ones who sometimes get upset—my children— “don't go, it's very ugly, because you see the whole bridge and all the undocumented people, and then shootings. But my husband says "We still have to go, and if something is not going to happen, it could happen here or it could happen there."

While Paulina’s children (U.S. citizens) fear for her safety, her husband, who as we have seen wants to return to live in Mexico after they finish raising their last child, adopts a fatalistic mentality that death is certain on any side of the divide. Out of my 13 participants, 6 of them cited a fear of the violence or danger of living in Mexico. However, not all interviewees felt the same way. For example, Maria makes a point about how Mexico is “sold” to us in the media, suggesting perhaps how discursivity or rhetoric can have an additive effect on fears felt in the borderlands.

María: Los medios dicen que México está muy inseguro. Luego le mando mensajes a mi familia y dicen “todo está bien.” Como el medio nos vende México. Es triste.

Translation: The media says that Mexico is very unsafe. Then I communicate with my family [in Mexico] and they say “everything is okay.” How the media sells us Mexico. It’s sad.

In this section, I discussed how differences in ways of life between Mexico and the United States play a role in decisions over choosing where to live. For some, like Nestor, the way of life in Mexico is preferable to the United States, but because of the better economic opportunities available in the U.S., he has chosen to move there with his parents and visits his wife in Mexico over the weekend. For others, like Paulina and her husband, Mexico's way of life is also preferable and their potential choice to live there (in late life) s facilitated by the fact that they hold property there and that they would have plenty of social life to enjoy there. Paulina's account demonstrates how transborder life can be flexible given the right conditions of mobility and financial capital. However, it also seems that the looming threat of narco-related violence is also strong and limits the interactions that could be had with family in Mexico. Closer ethnographic approaches studying the relationship between the perceived threat of narcoviolence as it relates to cross-border living needs more examination and research. Overall, more careful attention to the ways all of these factors intersect should be taken in future studies.

The Contingency and Reproduction of Transborder Social Fields

So far, I have shown how the transborder family must bargain inequalities of economic opportunity across the border and negotiate the mobility privileges that differ across their transborder family members. I have also discussed how larger cultural differences between ways of life in Mexico and the United States signal strong affinities to place and resistances to acculturation. In this section, I will examine the transborder family's changes and continuities over time.

I find that the difference and relationship between nuclear and extended families is crucial to analyze changes and continuities in the transborder family. When I asked Xitlali if the border has created a sense of uncertainty in her plans for the future or her family, she said:

Xitlali: Porque para nosotros eso sería el apego de andar allá, pero para nuestros hijos, ya es como que ellos dijeran "¿qué necesidad tenemos ir?" Van porque vamos nosotros los grandes.

Translation: Because for us, that would be the attachment of being over there, but for our kids, it's like if they said "what need do you have to go?" They go because we the older ones go.

In this response, Xitlali points to a trend that I see in my other interviews as well—that there are generational differences in the attachment had in the transborder family field. Paulina makes the same observation in her own children.

Paulina: Mis hijos están muy bien aquí (en Estados Unidos). Pero mi esposo dice que ojalá que el día que fallezcamos, valoren todo lo que hemos hecho allá porque cree que ni le van a hacer caso a las cosas de allá.

Translation: My children are doing good here [in the U.S.]. But my husband says that hopefully the day we die they appreciate everything we've done over there because he thinks that they won't even pay attention to the things over there [in Mexico].

As we saw in the previous section, Paulina and her husband have a house in Matamoros they are currently renting out. They have built a pool for it and are even considering moving there after they finish raising their last child. However, the connection to Mexico seems to be weak for Paulina's children. The continuity of a transborder life seems to be doubtful for Paulina and her husband. Before the writing of this report, I did not have the chance to interview her children for their point of view, but future studies will be more careful to seek these opinions out.

I find that nuclear families that are separated by the border tend to be the strongest bridge between the two sides. Here, the definition of the nuclear family is limited to relations to siblings, parents, spouses and/or children. Additionally, the constituent members of the transborder family need not live under the same household. Only two of my interviewees, Nestor and Beatriz (see previous sections), reported a transborder life where they lived in the same household with their spouse even though not completely because of times away from each other due to employment. Relations to aunts, uncles or cousins are considered part of extended family relations.

Although it seems that nuclear family relations are the most influential in creating a need to live a transborder life, the role of extended family members should not be neglected. For example, I find that extended family, especially as they participate in family gatherings, is important in creating larger atmospheres of family unity. Roel reminisces and somewhat laments the decadence of the large reunions his family used to have in Mexico in his grandparents ejido of Los Mismos:

> **Roel**: I mean I hope that at some point we can always get back together like we used to, but like at this point like I said, you know, the family members that are my age they're already married, they have kids and you know, when we would go over there, it was because our grandparents, the older family members, those were the ones that brought everybody together and because they're not alive anymore, you know, we don't have that anchor anymore that brings us all together, so I think over the years, we're not going to get together like we used to anymore...

In this case, I am considering Roel's connection to his grandma to be an extended family relation. These notions of a bigger family which are rather nostalgic seem to hinge on key family

members. Throughout my interviews, I found how the death of older family members could also mean the weakening of a strong transborder field. Relation to extended family members become increasingly more estranged as key family members that would join disparate parts of the extended family pass away. Therefore, it is important that we consider how some family members have considerable influence in feelings of family unity. For example, Anita suggests how her dad's mom, her grandma, was a key family member that united the family. This account could also suggest the gendered lines by which notions of family unity are felt.

> **Anita**: My grandma's house, that was the place to go. When my dad was still alive and we would cross the border, we would always stop by my grandma's house first. Everyone would. Every Friday afternoon, ahi estaban todos. And they're making themselves food with her groceries, or drinking in her patio, or watching a movie with her, or drinking coffee with her, or going to the tiendita [store] for her cigarettes, you know that was the place. And right now, it still is.

So far, I have considered how conceptions of family unity need to consider the role of extended family members. Now I want to consider how transborder family relations can be reproduced through marriage and reinforced through the socialization of children. In this section I more formally introduce Maria. Maria was born in Round Rock, TX, but spent her early childhood in Mexico in an ejido called Las Arpas, in the outskirts of Matamoros. After finishing her pre-K schooling in Las Arpas, her family moved to Brownsville, TX just across the border from Matamoros to complete kindergarten. Now, she has completed high school, is working on her bachelor's degree and has found work as an ESL teacher, which is a job she finds fulfilling, especially because she sees herself in some of her students who are going through similar experiences she has. Maria met her husband in Las Arpas, the ejido where her parents are from.

Now, she and her husband have bought a property in the United States, very close to where her parents live.

> **María**: Creo que donde estén mis papas es donde yo quiero estar. De hecho, mis papas viven en San Benito [Estados Unidos]. Yo sigo viviendo ahí con ellos por ahorita. Pero de hecho mi esposo y yo compramos un solar cerca de mis papas. Y yo al principio le había dicho a mi esposo "No, no vamos a comprar ahí, o sea vámonos, ¿vamos a otro lugar" y me dice "A donde te quieres ir? ¿Te quieres regresar a México o te quieres quedar en Estados Unidos?" Y cuando me lo puso así, uy, no me quiero regresar a México por la razón de que mis papas batallaron mucho a tener a mis hermanos y a mi aquí, a darnos una vida aquí. Y regresarme a México es como que, no estaba en mis planes. Pero dije bueno, vámonos a otro lugar, no aquí, lo mismo en La Paloma, y dijo "No no no, vamos a quedarnos aquí por la razón de que tu están muy apegado a tus papas y no te quiero quitar eso" y este creo que también tengo esa responsabilidad que soy la mayor de todos y hasta le digo a mi papa, "acuérdate quien te va a cuidar de viejo" Por eso, donde sea que estén mis papas, ahí quiero estar.
>
> **Translation**: I think that where my parents are is where I want to be. In fact, my parents live in San Bentio. I still live there with them for now. But in fact my husband and I bought a lot near my parents. And at the beginning I had told my husband "No, we are not going to shop there, that is, let's go, let's go somewhere else" and he told me "Where do you want to go? "Do you want to return to Mexico or do you want to stay in the United States?" And when he put it like that to me, oh, I don't want to return to Mexico for the reason that my parents struggled a lot to have my brothers and me here, to give us a life here. And returning to Mexico is like, it wasn't in my plans. But I said well, let's go

to another place, not here, the same in La Paloma, and he said "No no no, we are going to stay here for the reason that you are very attached to your parents and I don't want to take that away from you" and this I think I also have that responsibility that I am the greatest of all and I even tell my dad, “remember who is going to take care of you when you are old.” That's why, wherever my parents are, I want to be there.

Through my interview with Maria, I find that a large atmosphere that pervades throughout her experiences in her transborder life is that of community. She shares how she used to know every kid at her school in Mexico because they were all her friends and neighbors.

María: en México… pos conocía a todos, verdad, porque fui a una escuela muy chica que los niños de ahí todos eran, o si no eran mis primos eran niños de amigos de mi papa, todos se conocían. Era un pueblito muy chiquito. Todos se conocían. O sea, si había fiestas infantiles los fines de semana, ahí estaban mis amigos de la escuela.

Translation: In Mexico... well, I knew everyone, right, because I went to a very small school and the kids were all from there, or if they weren't my cousins, they were kids of my dad's friends, they all knew each other. It was a very small town. They all knew each other. I mean, if there were children's parties on the weekends, my friends from school were there.

She mentions that she doesn’t want to move back to Mexico, as that would be undoing the efforts that her parents went through to living in the U.S. However, her husband is going to school in Monterrey, and she also has an extended network of people from her original hometown in Las Arpas because her husband is also from there. In fact, their families spend a lot of time together. The large feelings of family and community in these small rural town are strong

affective forces for these ejidos. More research on the nature of family unity emanating from rural ejidos could be done.

In this section I have considered how transborder family unity or the desire for such depends on the specific relation from which we examine these. For example, nuclear family relations (siblings, parents and children) tend to be characterized by strong feelings of duty and attachment while extended family relations (those to aunts, uncles, and cousins) can have weaker holds on the maintenance of the transborder family. Still, it is noted that some family members can bridge many parts of an extended family together. These tend to be the older relatives, but women seem to have great influence in creating these feelings of family unity as well. These points could be explored further in future studies. Finally, I find that senses of unity could also stem from community driven populations living in ejidos, like Maria's family. Further research could also be conducted along these lines.

Affective Architecture of the Border: The Stress, Costs and Inconveniences of Border Crossing Wait-Times

In this section, I will explore how the border can be conceptualized as an affective architecture (e.g. Adey, 2004) that plays a major role in how transborder family members are shaped to relate to each other. Here, the concept of "structure of feeling" can become a useful term to help us be sensitized to emotional life along and through this architecture. Crossing the border takes mental effort, preparation and calculated timing. When I asked Anita what is difficult about maintaining her transborder family connections, she shared with me:

> **Anita**: Making time, it's not "I want to go see my sister and then come back." It's not like a 1-hour thing or a 2-hour thing. It's like: Tengo que cruzar el puente; I have to get

money; Tengo que cambiar dinero; If we're going to eat, we have to know we have enough money for that; And then we have to come back en la fila; And get the money for the puente; Make sure my car has gas; Make sure my car is good so no me quede tirada on the other side; It's like literally a road trip even though it's just like 20 minutes away..."

Similarly, Marta shares the meticulous orchestration needed to plan a family event together with her step-children in Matamoros because of the long lines at the border points of entry.

Marta: Se juntan en una sola casa de uno de ellos y ahí hacemos el convivio... se reúnen todos porque como te digo el tiempo se va de volada, y nomas yo les digo "hey, I gotta go back" a cierta hora porque son tres horas en el puente. Voy a cruzar a media noche so nos juntamos en una casa todos y convivimos, cenamos y ok bye bye, cada quien pa' su casa…Esta vez que fuimos... el sábado pasado, y ya mi hijo tenía la cena hecha cuando cruzamos pa' las siete. Ya tenía la carne asada.

Translation: They get together in a single house, and it's there that we have the gathering... they all get together because as I tell you, time flies by, and I just tell them "Hey, I gotta go back" at a certain time because it's three hours waiting at the bridge. I'm going to cross at midnight so we all get together in a house and spend time together, have dinner and "ok, bye bye." Everyone goes to their own house... This time we went... last Saturday, and my son already had dinner ready when we crossed at seven. He had already grilled the meat.

Marta is frustrated by the long lines at the border. She mentions to me how she's part of Facebook groups that commiserate over the long lines. Marta wants change, and she says that

others do to. The coordination that Marta and Anita must think through to cross to meet their family members points to the emotional labor placed on those who have mobility privileges, but on a larger scale, it points to the orchestration of division created by the bureaucratic and executive actions by the U.S. Border Patrol and its related divisions. Transborder families, although near to each other geographically, are actually further apart due to the manipulation of time by the border points of entry. Nestor summarizes the power of the border patrol to contort space and time well:

> **Néstor**: Pues más que nada es por la distancia… es complicado por la distancia, que realmente no está muy lejos... O digamos se complica por la manera en el tiempo y distancia son controlados por los puentes los horarios de los puentes.
>
> **Translation**: Well, more than anything it is because of the distance... it is complicated by the distance, which really is not very far... Or let's say it is complicated because of the way time and distance are controlled by the bridges and the schedules of the bridges.

In this section I have suggested that the border's long wait times at its points on entry predisposes interactions of convenience between family members. In other words, the border's tight and sometimes seemingly unyielding regulation of movement across the border distorts time and space. These increased spatial and temporal distances seem to increase the emotional labor required of mobile transborder actors who try to see their family counterparts. This manipulation of space and time is yet another burden on transborder families who are already struggling over the mobility and economic asymmetries discussed previously

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This thesis has considered the emotional life of a politically marginalized group, the transborder family. My analyses focused on the emotional and affective dimensions of life for these families. I examined the way mobility privileges, especially in the way these are asymmetrically distributed across Mexican and U.S. citizens (Villegas, 2013), are charged with unique emotional burdens in the context of the transborder family. Specifically, it seems that U.S. citizens and residents more often take on the responsibility of connecting with their family members living on the Mexican side than do Mexican nationals for their U.S. family counterparts. From a cultural perspective, this could be a consequence of familism, or the commitment to familial interdependence and support. Conceptualized in this way, familism becomes a double-edged sword, one that can be a "value-resource" (Bustamante, 2013) but also a source of emotional burden. However, a crucial point is that this burden could be lifted to a large degree if visa restrictions were eased for borderlands resident who face specific mobility restraints. Policy changes for visa acquisition could improve the lives of transborder families by not only decreasing the emotional burdens on those currently with mobility privilege, but by allowing other transborder networks to form and support the struggles of the transborder family.

I also found that the asymmetry of economic opportunities heavily structured some of the transborder families I learned about. These were mostly couples who had their lives bifurcated by the border due economic opportunities in the U.S. This has been noted by some scholars before (see Lopez, 2020). However, intense bifurcation did not apply to all families I learned about—some families, like Renata's, lived a 'best of both worlds' transborder life. This "best of

both worlds" reality seems to be the result of two things: 1) various privileged mobilities within the transborder family network, and 2) stable financial employment or capital for all transborder family members involved. If these are satisfied, then the relations are less likely to be characterized by feelings of burden or obligation, which include the time, labor, and costs incurred within the family network to meet those obligations. We can see quite the opposite of Renata's experience in Marta and Anita's account. The deportation of Anita's father created deep feelings of obligation to keep the family unit connected or unified. Fortunately, the proximity of Marta's husband living in Matamoros made it possible for Anita to have a continuous relationship with her dad, but she still describes the experience as "bittersweet," explaining how a relationship with her father meant a loss of opportunities in the U.S. In this case, the restricted mobility of her father meant obligation for her and her mother, Marta. Overall, examining the role of mobility in the maintenance of transborder family unity highlights how burdens of disconnection are often asymmetrically distributed.

In a broader cultural sense, I found attitudes toward ways of life in both Mexico and the United States to be determining factors in the maintenance of familial transborder fields. For example, we saw how Nestor wishes for his wife to come live with him in the United States. However, Susana, Nestor's wife, isn't interested. Life in the U.S. is characterized by my research participants as "fast paced" "competitive" and "busy" whereas Mexico is described as "relaxed" "open" and "neighborly." These differences are significant enough to determine one's choice over where to live, and hence seem to play a role in the structuring of transborder life, perhaps even just as strongly as mobility. After all, implicated in "mobility" is the choice to remain in one place as well. In addition, social capital (in this research: participation in social clubs, friendships and family, and ties to community or neighborhood) seems to be an 'affective force'

which can determine the transnational life of the transborder family. For example, we saw how Paulina and her husband have been living in the U.S. for the past 24 years, and yet, wish to move back to Mexico after raising their last child. Considering this family's trajectory, having had the opportunity to become U.S. residents and then citizens, suggests that if more mobility privileges were granted, then greater choice over where to live could be had. As some of my participants expressed, not everyone wants to live in the U.S. long-term. Rather, it is the economic necessity borne from the economic asymmetry that characterizes the transborder region that forces many to attempt to sustain a transborder life from the U.S. While it is beyond the scope of this research, policies could work to better alleviate the pressures of economic inequality in the region through better integration.

In this research, I also found the threat of narco-related violence to be an affective force which can shape transborder family life. Although some, like Paulina's husband, wish to live in Mexico despite the threat of narco-related violence near the Texas border, others cannot stomach it, and this fear can inhibit connection to family on the Mexican side. Indeed, for some of my participants, experiences with narcoviolence in Mexico motivated their escape to the United States. However, the mismatch between lived reality and what media representation of narcoviolence says should be examined more closely.

I also considered the relationship between nuclear and extended families in the transborder family. Past research (e.g. Bustamante, 2013) has made use of the term "familism" to conceptualize the relationship between nuclear and extended family members, but I find the term to be too broad for any fruitful analysis. Instead, I propose that we study family relations by examining the unique ways that a particular person is embedded in the larger family context. In other words, each family member should be considered for their unique viewpoint because not

every family member (wife, husband, child, grandmother, etc.) experiences the whole of the family in the same way (Salazar-Parreñas, 2005). Following this approach, I found that nuclear family relations (siblings, parents and children) split across the border tend to be characterized by stronger feelings of obligation, burden and attachment while this is less so the case for relations involving extended family (those to aunts, uncles, and cousins). Still, it is noted that some family members can bridge many parts of an extended family together. These tend to be the older relatives, but women seem to have great influence in creating these feelings of family unity as well. Admittedly, the current research could be bolstered by interviewing more members of the same transborder family to get a better sense of the commitments and spatiality across the divide that characterizes their dynamic.

Another line of research that could be followed is the relationship between communities, such as those I found in the rural ejidos, and the unity or prosperity of the transborder family. For example, in the case of Maria, I found that family unity was embedded in a larger community in her ejido. The tight-knittedness of Maria's ejido community is still felt today as many of the *ejidatarios* now live in the U.S. There seemed to have been social capital that supported the difficult decisions to move to the U.S., resembling a sort of informal hometown association (Orozco & Garcia-Zanello, 2009). Through this example, we can observe a transnational embeddedness facilitated by social capital. The variety of these social capitals can be explored in future research.

Along with my analyses on mobility and their role in family unity, I also explored how the long lines at border wait times can add emotional labors on those actors who must cross the border points of entry. I conceptualize these as architectures of affective control which add

another layer of emotional labor on top of the emotional labors already structured along the mobility and economic asymmetries that characterize the borderlands.

Overall, I have considered how transborder families are made, remade, undone, cease to exist and are reborn. These processes are complex and ongoing, and I propose that longitudinal studies and intergenerational studies of the transborder family should be conducted. This research should also want to be attentive to the forces of social and financial capital and historically contextualize these as much as possible. Future research should also be critical of the mobility regimes which have historically produced the transborder families we see now so that we can appreciate what effects these have had on transborder families and across their generations and, more importantly, how we can intervene.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

(Spanish Interviews)
Calendario de entrevistas (semiestructurado)

Las preguntas de esta entrevista actuarán como guías para el progreso de la entrevista, pero la entrevista puede desarrollar un aspecto emocional de la vida transnacional más profundamente que otros. Esto depende del intercambio de los participantes.

PRIMERA PARTE

Introducciones: Muchas gracias por aceptar a participar en mi estudio. Me llamo Aaron y soy estudiante de maestría en la universidad de Texas del Valle del Rio Grande. Estoy haciendo un estudio sobre las familias transfronterizas, o, simplemente, las familias que mantienen conexiones a través de la frontera.

Objetivos del estudio: Me interesa estudiar los afectos dentro de las familias transfronterizas. Los afectos son estructuras de emociones que pueden deslazarse a través de varios miembros de la familia. Pero los afectos también pueden ser las formas en que anticipamos nuestra realidad. Los afectos son esas energías extra-psíquicas--ubicadas en la socialidad de objetos, personas y lugares--que nos guían, quizás desvíen, en nuestro navego de la vida.

Me interesa ver cómo la frontera (the border) figura estos afectos dentro de su contexto familiar transfronterizo. Me interesa ver el movimiento y la disposición de las emociones. Para mí es importante estudiar este ritmo de vida en la frontera. Este estudio me ayudara a ver como la arquitectura de la frontera afecta la dinámica dentro de su familia y como se inscribe la vida emocional dentro de las estructuras nacionales, políticas, e históricas.

Entiendo que asuntos sobre la familia cambian según la circunstancia discutida, así que no tenga problema haciéndome aclaraciones.

SEGUNDA PARTE

Información básica, marca de tiempo:

1. Empecemos con cosas básicas. ¿Quién es usted? Su edad. ¿Está casado/soltero?
2. ¿Tiene hijos? ¿Dónde están sus padres? ¿Dónde están sus hermanos?
3. ¿A quién más incluye en su familia? No es necesario que sean de sangre.
4. ¿Dónde vive? ¿Con quién vive?
5. ¿Dónde *ha* vivido? ¿Puede proporcionarnos plazos y motivos para cambiar de ubicación?
6. Si desea mencionar detalles sobre ocupación o situación de vivienda, por favor comparta
7. ¿Algo más sobre ti? Detalles personales. ¿Pasatiempos, peculiaridades, etc.?

Sondeando el Afecto

8. ¿Cuán fuerte es su conexión al otro lado? Del 1 al 10 si le es más fácil medir de esa manera.
9. ¿Le puede dar a esta intensidad una cualidad o carácter? Puede mencionar emociones o ideas más específicas.
10. ¿Algo más que quiera decir antes de seguir con las próximas preguntas?

Información sobre el cruce de fronteras, marco de tiempo:

11. ¿Podría decirme su estatus migratorio? Si hubo un cambio de estatus (por ejemplo, de residente a ciudadano), explique el motivo/motivación/deseo del cambio, ¿Cuáles motivos? Además, ¿qué sintió al final de ese cambio de estatus migratorio? Si está pensando en hacer un cambio de estatus migratorio, ¿por qué?
12. Si cruzas la frontera, ¿por qué/cuándo cruzas la frontera? Si no cruzas la frontera, pero te visitan personas que sí lo hacen, ¿por qué/cuándo cruzan la frontera para verte?
13. ¿Puede proporcionarme un historial de su actividad de cruce de frontera? ¿Cuál ha sido su experiencia?
14. ¿Me puede decir quizás una historia multigeneracional sobre el cruce de fronteras y su familia?

Si usted cruza la frontera...

15. ¿hay emociones o sentimientos específicos que surgen durante el proceso de cruce de la frontera? ¿Sientes algo de que OTROS [en tu familia] tengan que cruzar la frontera por ti u otra cosa?
16. En su contexto transnacional... ¿siente que lleva el peso de la desconexión? En otras palabras, ¿se siente total o mayormente responsable por el grado de conexión que tiene con los miembros de su familia o campo transnacional? ¿A que le debe esto?

Manteniendo la conexión

17. ¿Cuáles son algunas formas en que usted y los miembros de su familia transnacional se mantienen conectados? (sondeo de esquemas)
18. En su perspective, como impacta la mobilidad de la
19. Más allá de la familia, ¿qué otras cosas (personas, objetos, oportunidades, sentimientos, cualquier cosa que se te ocurra) te unen al otro lado?
20. ¿La tecnología ayuda o solamente pronuncia la separación para los miembros de su familia? ¿De qué manera? ¿Por qué es el caso así con usted y sus familiares?
21. ¿Con que frecuencia usa comunicaciones digitales con sus familiares? Escala de 1-10 si eso le ayuda. ¿Depende en la persona?

Separación

22. ¿Hasta qué grado se siente usted estar separada de su familia? ¿De escala 1-10 si le ayuda?
23. ¿A que le debe usted el grado de separación?
24. ¿Cuáles son los desafíos emocionales que experimenta a consecuencia de la separación de frontera?
25. ¿Hay algo que le preocupa sobre esta separación?
26. ¿Esta separación es "normal" o es dolorosa?
27. ¿Puedes compartir alguna experiencia relacionada con el impacto emocional de reencontrarse con su familia después de haber sido separados?

Interacciones de Familia Especificas

28. ¿Cuáles son los miembros de su familia que viven a través de la frontera a quien se siente más apegado?
29. ¿Con que frecuencia ve a sus familiares? A alguna persona/lugar que visite más que otras?
30. ¿Hay miembros de tu familia con quien le gustaría estar más apegado? ¿Por qué? ¿Que la limita?
31. Ahora quiero que consideres lo contrario, ¿hay familiares que tiene del otro lado y que no ve? ¿Por qué no?
32. ¿Cómo describiría la atmósfera emocional dentro de su familia [transfronteriza]? En otras palabras, digamos, ¿cual es la energía que se siente? ¿Cuáles son las emociones dominantes (o experiencias afectivas) que usted y los miembros de su familia experimentan? Puedes mencionar personas específicas.

Encuentros Especificos

33. ¿Puede recordar una experiencia o evento emocional específico que haya tenido un impacto significativo en usted o en los miembros de su familia? ¿Cómo afectó tus relaciones o tu dinámica?
34. ¿Puede compartir alguna historia de resiliencia y adaptabilidad frente a los desafíos que presenta la frontera?

Sentido de la familia

35. ¿Cómo define personalmente el concepto de "unidad familiar" dentro del contexto de su familia transnacional? ¿Cómo describiría la unidad de su familia? ¿Cómo le gustaría que se viera?
36. En su perspectiva, ¿que cosas contribuyen a la unidad familiar y que cosas contribuyen a la descomposición de la familia?
37. ¿Crees que tu familia está más o menos unida debido a la realidad de la frontera? ¿O crees que realmente no importa?

Sentido de familia/lugar/pertenencia

38. ¿Cuál es tu sentido de pertenencia a un lugar? ¿A dónde pertenece? ¿Cuándo pertenece a algún lugar? ¿Con quién perteneces? (pregunta post-humana).

Responsabilidades y gestión de emociones

39. ¿Qué responsabilidades, si las hay, comparte con su familia al otro lado de la frontera? ¿Es difícil cumplir?
40. ¿Su familia se comparte dinero u otras cosas? ¿Quién da y quien recibe estos recursos? ¿Por qué?
41. ¿Existe un sistema para distribuir estas responsabilidades/cosas? ¿Están todos de acuerdo o hay alguna fricción?
42. ¿Qué es lo fácil y lo difícil de mantener estas conexiones?

Entre Naciones

43. ¿Dónde ocurre la mayor parte de la dinámica familiar? México o EEUU? ¿A qué atribuye esto?
44. ¿Dónde está presente usted?
45. ¿Acaso la dinámica familiar cambia dependiendo del contexto? O sea, la dinamia es diferente en México que a lo que ve en Estados Unidos? ¿Como?
46. ¿Usted se siente ser más parte de México o de Estados Unidos? ¿Hubo algún momento en su vida en el que esto cambió?

Otras preguntas

47. ¿Encuentra su familia apoyo dentro de comunidades o redes transfronterizas más grandes? ¿Cómo influyen estas conexiones a su experiencia a través de fronteras?

Incertidumbre y cambio, marco de tiempo:

48. ¿La frontera ha creado una sensación de incertidumbre en los planes o decisiones futuras de su familia? ¿Qué le preocupa?
49. ¿Cómo visualiza el legado emocional/familiar de la frontera para las generaciones futuras de su familia?
50. ¿Tiene alguna esperanza para el futuro de su familia?

Polizas/Política (preguntas opcionales)

51. ¿Cómo afectan las preocupaciones sobre la seguridad fronteriza y las políticas de inmigración la sensación de seguridad y bienestar de su familia?
52. ¿Tiene alguna esperanza o aspiración de cambios en las políticas o percepciones relacionadas con la frontera que impactarían positivamente el bienestar emocional de su familia?

53. ¿Cómo afecta la representación de temas relacionados con la frontera en los medios/noticias y el discurso público las experiencias y percepciones emocionales de su familia?
54. ¿Cree que la sociedad en general comprende con precisión las complejidades emocionales de las familias transfronterizas? ¿Qué podrían entender mejor?

Reflexión, marco de tiempo:

55. ¿Qué conocimientos o lecciones ha adquirido sobre la dinámica emocional de las familias transfronterizas que le gustaría compartir con otros?
56. ¿Cree que conducirá sus relaciones transnacionales de manera diferente después de esta entrevista/conversación?
57. ¿Hay algo más sobre tu experiencia que creas que es importante?

Muestreo de bola de nieve, marco de tiempo:

58. ¿Cree que alguien más en su familia estaría interesado en participar en este estudio?

(English Interview)

(Interview Schedule (semi-structured)

The questions in this interview will act as guideposts for the progression of the interview, but the interview can develop one emotional aspect of transnational life more deeply than others. This depends on the participants' sharing.

Introduction: Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in my study. My name is Aaron and I am a Master's student at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. I'm doing a study on cross-border or transborder families—simply, families that maintain connections across the border.

Study objectives: I am interested in studying the affects found in the transborder family and in the border itself. Affects are structures of feeling that can connect various family members or objects in a relational arrangement. But affects can also be the ways in which we anticipate our reality. Affects are those extra-psychic energies--located in the sociality of objects, people, and places--that guide us, perhaps divert us, in our navigation of life.

I am interested in seeing how the border shapes these affects within the cross-border family context. I am interested in seeing the movement and arrangement of emotions. For me it is important to study this rhythm of life on the border. This study will help me see how the architecture of the border affects the dynamics within your family and how emotional life is inscribed within national, political, and historical structures.

(I am probing for affective schemas, basically—thanks Dr. Bostic. I am searching for what these families attach themselves to—yes, obviously other members of their family/humans--but also nonmaterial things. Like others, I want to argue that affects and emotions are embedded in and flow with remittances, objects and gifts, letters, phone calls, and text messages, return visits, and transnational symbolic fields" (Wise and Velayuthum 2017).

Basic Information

1. Tell me basic things about yourself. Who are you? Your age, Are you married/single?
2. Do you have children? Where are your parents? Where are your siblings?
3. Who else do you include in your family? They don't have to be blood-related.
4. Where do you live? Who do you live with?
5. Where *have* you lived? Can you provide time frames and any reasons for changing location?
6. Occupations? -- If you want to mention details about occupation or living situation
7. Anything else about yourself? Personal details. Hobbies, quirks, etc.?

Engaging Affect (we are starting abstractly)

8. How strongly do feel connected to the "other side"?
9. Can you give this feeling a quality? You may mention more specific emotions or ideas.
10. Anything else you want to shortly mention before we move on to the next questions?

Border-crossing Information

11. Could you tell me your immigration status? If there was a change in status (for example, from resident to citizen), explain the reason/motivation/desire for the change, what reasons? Also, what did you feel at the end of that change of immigration status?
12. If you cross the border, why/when do you cross the border? If you don't cross the border but are visited by people who do, why/when do they cross the border to see you?
13. Can you provide a history of your activity cross the US-Mexico border? Tell me about your experiences crossing the border.

If you cross the border...

14. Are there specific emotions or feelings that come up during the border crossing process? Do you feel any way about OTHERS [in your family] having to cross the border?
15. Do you feel you carry the burden of disconnection? In other words, do you feel wholly or mostly responsible for the degree of connection between members of your transnational family or field?

Staying connected

16. What are some ways you and the members of your transnational family stay connected? (probing for schemas)
17. Beyond family, what are other things (people, objects, opportunities, anything you can think of) that attach you to the other side?
18. Do you think digital communications help to blur the boundaries in your family's interactions and emotional experiences? Or do they moreso pronounce your separation?
19. What is the frequency of your digital communication? Scale 1-10 if that helps.

Separation

20. On a scale 1-10, how separated do you feel from your family on the other side of the border? Why?
21. What are the emotional challenges that arise from this separation?
22. Does anything worry you about this separation?
23. How does the fact of separation affect your relationship with your family members? Is this separation "normal" or is it more pronounced because of the border or your immigration status?
24. Can you share any experience related to the emotional impact of being reunited after being separated by the border?

Specific Family Interactions

25. Who are the members of your family across the border that you feel closest to?
26. How often do you see them? Is there a place/person you see the most?
27. Are there any family members that you would LIKE to be closer to? Why? What is holding you back?
28. Now I want you to consider the opposite, is there family on the other side that you *don't* see? Why *don't* you see them?
29. How would you describe the emotional atmosphere within your [cross-border] family? What are the dominant emotions (or affective experiences) that you and your family members experience? You can mention specific people. What is the—let's say *emotional vibe*—with each person?

Specific Encounters

30. Can you recall a specific emotional experience or event that had a significant impact on you or your family members? How did it affect or change your relationships or the dynamic?
31. Can you share any stories of resilience and adaptability in the face of the challenges that the border imposes?
32. Can you share any cases that have created challenges or tensions?

Sense of Family

33. How do you personally define the concept of "family unity" within the context of your transnational family? How would you describe your family's unity? What do you wish it looked like?
34. Do you think your family is more or less united due to the reality of the border? Or, do you think it doesn't really matter?

Sense of family/place/belonging

35. What is your sense of belonging to a place. Where do you belong? When do you belong? And with who do you belong? (posthuman question).

Responsibilities and Emotional Management

36. What responsibilities, if any, do you share with your family across the border?
37. What items or money does your family circulate? As far as you're aware. How? Why?
38. Is there a system to distribute these responsibilities? Is everyone in agreement or is there some friction?
39. What is easy and what is difficult about maintaining these relationships?

Between Nations

40. Is the dynamic of your family in Mexico different from what you see or experience in the United States? Where does most of the family dynamic happen? Where are **you** present? Across borders or in one country more than another? What do you attribute this to?
41. Do you feel like you are more a part of Mexico or the United States? Was there ever a moment in your life when this changed?

Other questions

42. Does your family find support within cross-border communities or networks? How?

Uncertainty and Change

43. Has the border created a sense of uncertainty in your family's future plans or decisions? What worries you?
44. How do you envision the legacy of your cross-border family's cohesion/connection for future generations of your family?

Policies/Political Questions (optional)

45. How do concerns about border security and immigration policies affect your family's sense of safety and well-being?
46. Do you have any hopes for changes in border-related policies or perceptions that would positively impact your family's emotional well-being?
47. How does the representation of border-related issues in the media/news and public discourse affect your family's experiences and perceptions, if at all?
48. Do you think that society at large accurately understands the emotional complexities of cross-border families? What could they understand better?

Reflection

49. What insights or lessons have you gained about the emotional dynamics of cross-border families that you would like to share with others?
50. Do you think you will conduct your transnational relations differently after this interview/conversation?
51. Is there anything else about your experience that you think is important?

Snowball sampling

52. Do you think anyone else in your family will be interested in participating in this study?

VITA

Aarón A. Adame Sosa received his undergraduate degree in Molecular Biophysics and Biochemistry from Yale University and his Master of Science in sociology from his hometown university, the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. Beyond his interests in the U.S.-Mexico border region, which he has explored in this thesis, he is also interested in political philosophy, emotions and affect, cultural theory, environmental sociology, and technology studies.

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