1

Dislocation

What one earns only gets you to "mediovivir."

—ELIAS

While . . . not[ing] the substantial drop [20%] in real income over the past few years, success on the inflation front was likely to require continued firm wage restraint.

—IMF DIRECTOR N. WICKS, *JULY 30, 1984*

Near the entrance to Soyataco, Tabasco, a sleepy rural town ensconced in lush tropical flora, Don Pablo speaks to me in front of the house he built from his earnings in the United States. Don Pablo made his first trip to the United States in 1961 and vividly described the conditions in Soyataco that pushed him to leave.

> In that time, Tabasco was very backward. To get to Jalpa from Soyataco you had to walk. It took about four hours. Also, there was no work because of the flooding. The floodwaters used to reach all the way to the primary school that is right across the road.
>
> I was a *campesino* and farmed corn and beans, took care of bulls and pigs. But this terrain is very low and cannot sustain the growth of farm animals. I had to go all the way to Capaculcho to earn 5 pesos a day. I only had school until the second standard. There was no school really at that time.

Like millions of his compatriots, Don Pablo was pushed to migrate to the United States by harsh economic conditions in his home community. The themes he points to—lack of infrastructure, lack of support for agriculture, and lack of access to education—are ones that reverberate in the stories of his neighbors and of those in other rural towns more than fifty years later. Due to the time period in which Don Pablo migrated, he was able to make the journey with authorization from the U.S. government. But U.S. immigration laws would change in the coming decades, transforming many journeys like Don Pablo's into unauthorized ones.

Whether authorized or not, Don Pablo's journey and those of the other migrants in this book are part of a larger story of racial capitalist relations between the United States and Mexico driven by specific economic policies that act to benefit U.S. and Mexican elites and to extract resources, including human resources, from towns like Soyataco. Based in racialized characterizations of people like Don Pablo as "backward peasants" in need of modernization, these policies construct economic gaps in migrant communities that dislocate people from their home communities and displace them into industries where their labor benefits large corporate interests. The policies and practices that dislocated Don Pablo included divestment from agriculture and infrastructure spending, which had begun in the 1950s but accelerated in the 1980s, dislocating millions of Don Pablo's compatriots. At the time Don Pablo migrated, he was one of hundreds of thousands of Mexican farmworkers displaced into large commercial farms in the United States by the Bracero Accords. By the 1980s, women and men across Mexico were dislodged from their homes by neoliberal economic reforms prescribed by international banking institutions like the IMF and supported by the U.S. Treasury Department and the Mexican governing elite. These reforms—known as structural adjustment—involved fiscal austerity, privatization of state-owned industries, and market liberalization. Imposed on Mexican communities by the IMF and the U.S. and Mexican governments, structural adjustment would widen inequities in public support for agriculture, infrastructure, and education; flood the Mexican economy with foreign-owned manufacturing plants; and suppress wages across various labor markets. As the narratives in this chapter demonstrate, these policies and the continued adherence to neoliberalization in the decades that followed would propel people to leave an economically diverse set of home communities, cementing migration as part of the structure of racial capitalist relations between the United States and Mexico.

That migration is part of the structurally unequal economic relationship between the two countries has long been acknowledged by an interdisciplinary and international set of scholars examining Mexican migration.[1] The U.S.-based Chicano Studies scholars and historians Gilbert González and Raúl Fernandez trace the U.S.-Mexico relationship to the 1870s to formulate Mexican migration as "a transnational mode of economic colonialism" by the United States.[2] Examining more recent dynamics, the Mexican social scientists Raúl Delgado Wise and Humberto Márquez Covarrubius describe Mexico-U.S. migration since the 1980s as an "expression of the growing asymmetry that characterizes contemporary capitalism."[3] Similarly, the U.S.-based sociologist Tanya Golash-Boza theorizes that migration is part of a "neoliberal cycle of global capitalism" that both propels people to migrate and undergirds U.S. deportation policy.[4] Golash-Boza focuses her analysis on the deportation side of the neoliberal cycle, which, she demonstrates, maintains hierarchies of race.[5] This chapter merges these insights on race, colonialism, and capitalism by using the broader framework of racial capitalism. Through migrant community narratives, the chapter demonstrates that migrant dislocation is structurally bound up with the racial capitalist relationship between U.S. and Mexican elites, on the one hand, and more marginalized Mexicans who are racialized as inferior, on the other. Migrant community members do not use the terminology of racial capitalism explicitly, nor do they identify capitalism's incarnation as neoliberalism or U.S. colonial endeavors directly. Rather, they refer to the specific economic gaps that caused them to leave their home communities, gaps that can be traced to larger political economic structures built by international banks and the U.S. and Mexican elites to benefit one set of actors and dislocate others.

DISLOCATION IN ACTION

In the decades after Don Pablo migrated, waves of neoliberal reforms gutted economic structures, destroying livelihoods and transferring resources, including human resources, to large corporate interests in the "north" (northern Mexico, the United States, and Canada). These reforms reached into every community in Mexico whether rural or urban, Indigenous or non-Indigenous. The narratives in this book take place in four geographically, demographically, and economically distinct areas, yet the patterns they convey are remarkably similar (tables 1, 2). Soyataco, where Don Pablo is from, is in a tropical floodplain near the Gulf coast of Mexico. The other Tabascan town profiled is Chiltepec, a coastal village on the Gulf coast that was once supported by fishing. Across this northern part of Tabasco, the landscape is lush and green, with smooth paved roads. As one approaches the sea by road, the densely packed tropical forest is clouded with plumes of black smoke from the nearby oil refineries. Due west is the Mixteca region of Oaxaca, from which another set of interviewees hailed. Here the landscape is largely hilly and arid, with occasional specks of green interrupting what otherwise seems like earth hardened against life taking hold. Journeys by road are long here as they wind up and down hillsides and are pockmarked by frequent cracks and holes. Moving north, the varied communities of Tlaxcala include those that are urban, like San Francisco de Tetlanohcan (Tetlanohcan), which climbs a steep volcanic hill, and those that are rural, like Sanctorum, with its the wide, flat valleys. Both Tetlanohcan and Sanctorum are dotted with large nondescript buildings housing maquiladoras. And Tetlanohcan houses what seems like an overabundance of *abarrotes* (grocery stores). Finally, the nearby communities of Ozolco and San Pedro Cholula, Puebla, are small and large urban areas, respectively. Like Tetlanohcan, these *poblano* (of or from the state of Puebla) towns are nestled into Mexico's central volcanic mountain range. Roads in these parts of Tlaxcala and Puebla are well paved but slow as elevations rise. They are connected by highways that move from stunning mountain vistas to crowded intersections. As I would learn during my time in these communities, these landscapes were only partially natural. The black smoke looming over Chiltepec, the gray-brown earth of the Mixteca, and the ever-present haze wrapping the hillsides in Tlaxcala and Puebla were largely constructed.

Demographically, the three regions differ largely along the lines of indigeneity and diversity within Indigenous groups. Tabasco has a very small Indigenous population, with about 18 percent of the population identifying as Indigenous and

TABLE 1 Demographic, Economic, and Migration Rates in Communities

	Tabasco	Oaxaca	Tlaxcala	Puebla
Migration rate, 1980–89	Very low	Medium	Very low	Low
Migration rate, 1990–99	Very low	Medium	Medium	Medium
Migration rate, 2000–2009	Very low	High	Medium	Medium
Poverty rate, 1980–89	Low	High	Medium	High
Poverty rate, 1990–99	Low	High	Medium	High
Poverty rate, 2000–2009	Low	High	Medium	High
Leading economic activity	Mixed—agricultural/small business	Agricultural	Mixed—industrial/small business/agriculture	Mixed—agricultural/small business
Community organization present, 2012–17	None	FIOB founded 2004	CAFAMI founded 2007	CAFAMI expansion 2016
Number of 3x1 projects, 2013	0	35	7	20
Indigenous population, 1980–2017	1.7%	21.6%	3%	11.7%

SOURCES: Migration rates: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI), "Tendencias y características de la migración mexicana a los Estados Unidos," 1990, 2000, 2010.

Poverty rates and leading economic activity: Consejo Nacional de Población, "Índice de marginación por entidad federativa y municipio," 1990, 2000, 2010.

Indigenous population: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI), Tabulados básicos, 1990, 2000, 2010.

TABLE 2 Similarities in Reasons for Dislocation across Communities

	Tabasco	Oaxaca	Tlaxcala	Puebla
Poverty rate 2000–2009	Low	High	Medium	High
Leading economic activity	Mixed—agricultural/small business	Agricultural	Mixed—industrial/small business/agriculture	Mixed—agricultural/small business
Reason for dislocation #1	Lack of work (n = 18)	Lack of work (n = 13)	Lack of work (n = 14)	Lack of work (n = 9)
Reason for dislocation #2	Pay for education (n = 7)	Pay for education (n = 5)	Pay for education (n = 7)	Pay for education (n = 1)

Indigenous languages barely registering on the Mexican census.[6] This is in sharp contrast to the Mixteca region where 100 percent of interviewees identified as either Mixtec or Triqui in a state where the official Indigenous population is 35 percent.[7] Tlaxcala's Nahuatl-speaking Indigenous population is measured at 3 percent, but this hides a wide variation in communities.[8] For example, Sanctorum, Tlaxcala, has a Nahuatl population that is likely close to the state average. However, the other

Tlaxcaltec locality profiled in this book, Tetlanohcan, is 43 percent Nahuatl-speaking, and 100 percent of those interviewed in that municipality are Nahuatl Tlaxcaltecs.[9] In Puebla, the communities visited are also Nahuatl speaking, though they identified as Mexica, an importance difference with Tlaxcaltecs discussed further below. Officially Nahuatl speakers make up 11 percent of Puebla's inhabitants, but the number identifying as Indigenous is closer to 30 percent.[10] All of the interviewees in Ozolco identified as Nahuatl, as did the majority of those in Cholula.

Finally, the various towns had very different economic profiles as evidenced by their "marginalization" rates. "Marginalization" is a term used by the Mexican government to measure an aggregate set of economic indicators, including rates of educational attainment, illiteracy, and lack of access to basic necessities like running water, light, and flooring in housing.[11] Rates of marginalization range from "very high," indicating a widespread lack of these basic resources, to "very low," indicating the presence of most of these resources in a majority of households. Areas of very high marginalization are generally correlated areas with a significant population that speaks an Indigenous language, but within the communities profiled, this differed significantly among Indigenous groups. For example, the Mixtec and Triqui populations make up the vast majority of people living in the Mixteca region of Oaxaca, and the marginalization rates here are considered "very high."[12] This lack of basic necessities is visibly present in the villages profiled in this book. A number of houses had dirt floors and lacked indoor plumbing and electricity. In addition, many migrants reported having to leave school or being unable to pay for schooling for their children. This stands in contrast to Tlaxcala, which has a large Tlaxcaltec population but rates as having a medium level of marginalization.[13] Medium marginalization was evidenced by most households having indoor plumbing and finished floors but varying access to electricity and educational achievement. In an even more stark contrast, the municipality of Tetlanohcan, Tlaxcala, has a low marginalization rate despite its large Indigenous population.[14] This low marginalization rate was evident in the houses that mostly included finished floors, indoor plumbing, and electricity. In nearby Puebla, the relatively smaller Nahuatl community had a high rate of marginalization.[15] This was evident in the smaller dwellings some of which had dirt floors and no direct connection to running water. The smallest Indigenous population was in Tabasco, which, like Puebla, is considered to have a high level of marginalization.[16] Despite these differences, the top two reasons for migrating cited by all of the migrants discussed in this chapter were lack of work and cost of education (table 2).

The lack of work affects virtually all sectors of their local economies, from agriculture to manufacturing to services. The dearth of available jobs in agriculture and the instability of jobs in the manufacturing and service sectors were due to the mix of economic policies that made up the neoliberal incarnation of ongoing racial capitalist relations. Touted by international institutions like the IMF, the U.S. Treasury Department, and U.S.-educated Mexican elites as "efficient," neoliberalization was decidedly disdainful of small agricultural and industrial producers. Neoliberal policies imposed cuts to agricultural supports and social spending like education, encouraged foreign investment, and intentionally suppressed wages. As the remaining sections of this chapter outline, migrants' dislocation can be traced to these policies and in particular to three specific practices: divestment from small producing agriculture; investment in a low-wage, contingent manufacturing sector; and intentional wage suppression to offset inflation. The implementation of these economic reforms distributed resources to large multinational agricultural and manufacturing companies while choking off supports for small producers and businesses. The effects of these reforms were exacerbated by the intentional suppression of wages across all sectors of the economy, leaving little chance of making a sustainable living in large numbers of Mexican communities. These practices overlapped with a fourth vector of economic abandonment. When parents sought to educate their children, increasing their options to thrive, they were faced with cuts to education spending, which, like the policies disfavoring small business and wage earners, were prescribed by the IMF the U.S. Treasury Department and accepted by the Mexican elites governing the country. These policy changes continued to deepen over the decades, causing more and more people to experience the dislocation that Don Pablo experienced in the 1960s. In addition to Don Pablo's story, this chapter relates the stories of several migrants, family members, and community organizers from various parts of Mexico and demonstrates the ways in which successive incarnations of racial capitalist policies dislocated them from their home communities.

Divestment from Agricultural Supports

One of the most devastating reforms engaged in by the Mexican government during the 1980s was the reduction in supports to small agriculture. Racialized by Mexican elites as "backward peasants," small farmers saw supports for their produce diminish and wages for their labor suppressed. As a result, millions of Mexicans were dislocated from their home communities and displaced into large agribusinesses in northern Mexico and the United States. One of these small farmers was Don Margarito Santos (Don Santos). Don Santos spoke to me from the offices of FIOB in Santiago de Juxtlahuaca, Oaxaca. Juxtlahuaca, or "Jux" as it is called by county residents, is one of the county seats in the Mixteca, a region that encompasses the southwestern Mexican states of Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Puebla. The Mixteca is made up of 189 municipalities, ten of which are among the poorest in Mexico.[17] Several Indigenous groups live in the Mixteca region, including the Zapotecs, Mixtec, and Triqui. Don Santos and others interviewed in this region were all Mixtec or Triqui and spoke Spanish along with their mother language.

According to Don Santos, 50 percent of the people in his hometown of Laguna Guadalupe de Yucunicoco migrate to the United States "because there is no work": "The work there is you don't even make $100 [MXN] a day [the equivalent of

US$10] farming the milpa—corn, beans, and *chilacayote* [a kind of squash]. We do farm but only enough for us to eat. We invest more in the farm than we harvest." Don Santos could identify the exact years when the pueblo's out-migration rose. "There stopped being enough work in the pueblo in 1986–87, and that is when migration from the pueblo really began," he said. He migrated for the first time in 1987, because, he says, quite bluntly, "there was work there." He then added, "Not because they [U.S. growers] paid more but because there was work, period."

When Don Santos indicated that 1987 and 1988 were the years that migration "really began," he indirectly referenced the long history of out-migration that preceded the 1980s but accelerated in that decade. A leading scholar of the region, the anthropologist Michael Kearney, has noted, "The Mixteca has *never* seen any improvement in its economic infrastructure as a result of external investments—government or private."[18] One of the most crucial of these external investments was irrigation to help access nearby groundwater. However, instead of investing in irrigation that could allow small farmers in this area to flourish, the Mexican government engaged in massive public spending beginning in the 1960s to help irrigate and otherwise develop new large commercial farms in the border states of Baja California, Sinaloa, and Sonora.[19] Resources from Mexico were supplemented by a combination of U.S. businesses and food distributors that invested in the development of fruit and vegetable farms in northern Mexico to supply the U.S. market.[20] The decision to invest in the northern regions of Mexico was clearly beneficial to the United States as transportation costs across the Mexico-U.S. border were lowest. As a result, farms in these border states saw a huge increase in public investment for infrastructure, totaling nearly 50 percent of agricultural expenditures by the late 1970s.[21] As barriers to foreign investment were removed, U.S agribusinesses moved quickly to capture the Mexican food production and processing markets, owning about a third of such businesses by 1975.[22] These public and private investments of resources in large commercialized farms and food processing centers stand in stark contrast to the paucity of support for small farmers like Don Santos who, as he noted, "invested more in the farm than [they] harvest."

These conditions dislocated people who, following the path of financial resources, migrated seasonally to the industrial farms of Sinaloa and Sonora to work as wage laborers. Many of Don Santos's neighbors also migrated there. One of his Triqui neighbors, Doña Nancy, was only eight years old when she began working in Sinaloa's tomato fields. She migrated with her parents, part of a pattern of entire families recruited to work the northern fields. Large agribusinesses specifically recruited poor Indigenous families like Doña Nancy's based on racialized notions that they would not complain about the relatively low wages and harsh working conditions.[23]

The pattern of internal migration soon shifted to international migration in the 1980s, when, as Don Santos explained, "migration from the pueblo really began." This wave of migration was spurred by IMF- and U.S. Treasury–led interventions that changed the face of Mexican agriculture, social services, and business and wage structures. The interventions came as a response to a sharp decline in oil prices in 1982 that left Mexico in a financial crisis. Although the Mexican government initially resisted international assistance, the weight of the crisis eventually forced it to accept the conditional support of U.S. and international banking institutions.[24] The United States initiated a bailout by paying the Mexican government $2 billion to shore up the petroleum and agricultural industries.[25] In the next few months, a more permanent arrangement was reached with the IMF involving a number of loans and attached conditions.[26] Later in the decade, Mexico began to receive loans from the World Bank that were similarly conditioned on a set of economic reforms prescribed by that agency.[27]

Mexico agreed to these conditions in a series of Letters of Intent sent from the country's Finance Ministry to the head of the IMF.[28] Despite the appearance of involvement by the debtor country, the contents of such letters are highly controlled by the IMF's executive board, and certain terms must be addressed both in the letter and by the government in its policies.[29] Moreover, the IMF executive board is widely known to be controlled by the United States, particularly the Treasury Department, meaning that the conditions set are the imposition of U.S. Treasury policies on foreign governments in exchange for much-needed assistance.[30] Thus, Mexico's agreement to the conditions for the IMF loans was an agreement to continue to serve U.S. interests.

The conditions imposed by the U.S. and the IMF involved the three pillars of economic reform mentioned previously: fiscal austerity, privatization of state-owned industries, and market liberalization. These measures, known as structural adjustment, were predetermined conditions imposed on any country seeking loans from the IMF or the World Bank. Specific measures included sharp decreases in government supports for economic sectors such as agriculture (fiscal austerity measures), privatization of so-called inefficient public enterprises, the elimination of trade barriers, decreases in price supports, and the deregulation of industry (market liberalizations).[31] The IMF saw agricultural spending cuts as key to fulfilling the austerity goals it set out for the Mexican government as a condition of its loans.[32] The Mexican government duly responded, stating in its 1986 Letter of Intent that it would "eliminate . . . unjustified subsidies," reduce public expenditures, and reduce the number of public entities.[33] These promises translated into a reduced public role in provision of credit, commercialization of crops, price supports, and subsidies. As a result of these combined cuts, agricultural investment in small farms dropped by 85 percent between 1980 and 1989.[34] These deep cuts had a decidedly negative impact on southern states such as Oaxaca.[35] In addition to the fiscal austerity measures, market liberalizations that opened Mexican agriculture to foreign competition caused a sharp decline in crop prices, including the price of corn, which was cultivated ubiquitously in the Mixteca.[36] Price decreases, translated as wage or profit decreases for people like Don Santos, combined with bottomed-out public support to dislocate Don Santos and many others from their home communities.

The village of Sanctorum, two hundred miles due north of Laguna, is one of the few truly rural areas in the otherwise densely populated state of Tlaxcala. Even here, small assembly plants dotted the horizon before the landscape turned to flat farmland. Isaís is a farmworker who has made many trips to Canada under that country's farm labor program. He made his first trip in 2000 for a variety of reasons. He explained the reason that was chief among them: "My father and I were day laborers. But we only earned about 80 to 100 pesos a day. We could not get credit to buy our own land."

Isaís's inability to obtain credit resulted from another IMF-prescribed fiscal austerity measure that required reducing the availability of subsidized loans.[37] President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1987–93) enthusiastically supported the measure and systematically downsized the national bank, National Bank for Rural Credit (BANRURAL), shifting existing BANRURAL loans to the private market.[38] As a result of these changes, government-subsidized loans to farmers fell sharply in the 1990s.[39] By 1992, private commercial lenders became the only option for small farmers seeking a loan to buy seed, fertilizer, or equipment. However, small farmers were not attractive borrowers in a commercial setting because of their low profit margins and relatively unpredictable crop yields.[40] The shift from public to private lending, according to one economist, was a "critical blow" to small farmers like Isaís, "whose relatively low profit margins and high-risk exposure make them unattractive credit risks for commercial banks."[41] Indeed, the privatization of credit has resulted in only 15 percent of Mexico's farmers having access to credit, of which the majority are large- and medium-scale farms.[42] Even if private lenders were willing to work with small farmers, it is unlikely that these farmers would have been able to afford the exorbitant interest rates private banks charged.[43] When Isaís said, "We could not get credit," he was expressing the frustration of 85 percent of Mexican farmers and likely a larger proportion of small farmers like himself.

The economic gaps experienced by small farmers were exacerbated by two overlapping events in 1994: a second economic crisis in Mexico and Mexico's entry into NAFTA with the United States and Canada. The economic crisis resulted in a massive devaluation of the peso and another round of loans from the United States and the IMF conditioned on further neoliberalization measures, including even deeper cuts to public spending and privatization of additional industries.[44] NAFTA, in turn, resulted in all three trading partners eliminating tariffs on imports and encouraging foreign investment. For Mexican farmers engaged in corn production like Don Santos and Isaís, this meant placing their unsubsidized products in competition with subsidized grain producers from the United States and Canada. The elimination of tariffs resulted in U.S. corn, in particular, flooding the Mexican market, reducing overall prices and driving many small farmers out of business.

The Mexican government attempted to address the worst of these consequences with a series of programs directed at extremely poor households.[45] Beginning with PROGRESA under President Ernesto Zedillo (1997–2002) and later named Oportunidades (2003–14), the programs transferred cash directly to households that met the criteria for extreme poverty if these households fulfilled certain education and health preconditions.[46] The approach was novel and held promise as it seemed to target the poor more directly and to give recipients control over expenditures.[47] However, most of the migrant families interviewed had not participated in either program. Isais and other migrants indicated that they had tried to participate but were told that they earned too much. In the Mixteca region of Oaxaca, mothers indicated that the program's requirement to attend health appointments were structurally impossible as a health care worker only visited the area once a week. Thus, it is not surprising that assessments of the effectiveness of direct cash transfers found that while it reduced levels of extreme poverty, it did not have a significant impact on overall poverty rates.[48] In fact, overall poverty rates were slightly higher in 2014 than they were in 1994, at the beginning of the crisis.[49]

It is also not surprising, then, that those who found themselves feeling the brunt of NAFTA's impacts on crop prices and competitiveness while also unable to qualify for social programs continued to find themselves dislocated from their lands in search of sustainable earnings. In fact, in many parts of Mexico, dislocation accelerated in the wake of NAFTA and further IMF interventions. In Oaxaca, out-migration increased 300 percent from the mid-1990s through 2005,[50] and in Tlaxcala, it increased more than 150 percent in the same period.[51]

The conditions that spurred Don Pablo's journey in the 1960s and Isais's first trip forty years later trace a long history of divestment from agricultural supports for small farmers raced as "backward" and therefore unworthy of public support. Their losses corresponded with gains for corporate agriculture in the form of public support and elimination of trade barriers. Multinational corporations such as Maseca, Bimbo, Cargill, Bachoco, PilgrimsPride, Tysson, Nestlé, Lala, Sigma, and Monsanto came into Mexico, gaining profits and market share while Don Santos and his compatriots were abandoned and left.[52] Ironically, many of these women and men who were dislocated by the distribution of resources ended up working in fields similar to their own in the United States or Canada. Thus, their labor was distributed in a way that benefited corporate agricultural interests over the communities from which they hailed.

Divestment from Manufacturing Support

A similar distribution of labor and wealth accumulation was constructed in the manufacturing industry. In the 1960s, at the same time that Mexico was diverting resources to U.S.-facing agricultural centers, the country also began to invest in maquiladoras. These manufacturing plants take components made largely in the United States, make them into finished products—from automobiles to

T-shirts—and then export them to the United States for sale by U.S. retailers. By 1967, there were fifty-seven maquiladoras located in the border cities of Tijuana, Nuevo Laredo, Ciudad Juárez, Mexicali, and Matamoros.[53] Eighty percent of these plants engaged in assembly or parts production for U.S. companies.[54] The industry expanded in the next decades, fueled by U.S. customs rules allowing for duty-free import of items manufactured abroad from U.S.-based raw materials and by decreased protections against foreign investment. One of the places that the industry expanded to in the 1980s was Tlaxcala.

Many maquila workers in Tlaxcala come from San Francisco de Tetlanohcan. Due to its location in the sierra, Tetlanohcan is hilly. The main plaza is located about halfway up the main hill. Farther up the hill is the Nahuatl barrio of Santa Cruz, which has some adobe homes as well as some more recently built two-story *migra casas* (migrant homes). "Nahuatl" refers to both an Indigenous ethnic group and the language they speak. It is the dominant Indigenous group in Central Mexico, where Tetlanohcan is located, and includes descendants of the Aztec Empire and their longtime adversaries in Tlaxcala, the Tlaxcaltecs.

At the base of the Santa Cruz barrio, I meet Irena, a Nahuatl woman whose husband has been in the United States for several years. Irena is one of thousands of women who at one time worked in one of many sewing factories that were part of the Malintzi Industrial Corridor near Tetlanohcan. Tlaxcaltecs like Irena were attracted to this work because it paid better than other work in the area. "The work is paid by the piece," Irena explains. However, like most maquilas, the Malintzi plants did not offer job stability. "They cannot give me more regular hours," said Irena of the shifts she was able to get. She goes on to tell me that between her hours at the sewing maquiladora and her husband's hours at a different maquiladora farther away, the couple wase making $1,700 MXN a week, decidedly less than the $5,000 MXN needed to meet basic necessities such as rent, food, utilities, clothing, and school expenses for their family of five. The depressed wages and unstable hours led Irena's husband, Efraím, to migrate in 1998 after they had their first child. While Efraím was in the United States, the maquiladora that Irena worked at closed, mirroring a nationwide contraction of that industry due to even more depressed wages in other parts of the world. When I met Irena in 2013, she was trying to sell her Nahuatl embroidery at local markets and fairs. However, what had once been a revered skill had fallen out of style in the era of fast fashion. Efraím had been back and forth to the United States since 1998 and had remained there since his most recent trip in 2007.

Irena's and Efraím's experiences reflect the displacement of Mexican-owned industry that concentrated on a Mexican market with U.S. owned maquiladoras that generated unstable, low-paying work and whose profits were realized by U.S. corporations. Until the 1980s, the Mexican government subsidized its domestic textile industry through supports for domestic enterprise and price supports in the domestic market.[55] These supports greatly assisted the textile industry in Tlaxcala, considered among the best clothing makers in the country. However, regulations put in place in 1972 to protect Mexican industry were reinterpreted during the Salinas administration to allow for complete foreign ownership of certain Mexican businesses and to increase the share of foreign investment allowed in others to greater than 49 percent.[56] Thus, a more diverse array of U.S. companies was now able to look to Mexican assembly plants as a way to reduce costs.

It was during this expansion in the 1980s that maquiladoras opened in large numbers in Tlaxcala. In particular, clothing retailers based in California saw a tradition of fine sewing and clothing production in Tlaxcala and decided to invest in maquiladoras there to assemble clothing bound for the United States.[57] These investments included maquiladoras in the Malintzi Industrial Corridor where Irena worked. During the time that Irena worked in these factories, the amount of products made in Mexico and bound for Los Angeles went from 10 percent (in 1992) to 60 percent (in 1997/98).[58] During this same time, the percentage of people from Tlaxcala displaced into the United States jumped by five times.[59]

By 1997, 80 percent of maquiladora owners were U.S. companies.[60] For these companies, the maquiladoras reduced overhead expenses and increased profit margins.[61] They also allowed for what the political economist Raúl Delgado Wise calls an "indirect exportation of labor or, alternatively, the disembodied exportation of the Mexican work force without requiring the workers to leave the country."[62] Maquiladoras are an isolated step in a larger supply chain that neither controls the products made nor benefits from profits earned. They buy raw materials from abroad, usually from the same companies that seek the final products. Maquiladora workers then assemble products such as automobiles or clothing for wages. Finally, the finished product is exported to be sold by the usually U.S.-based company that owns the assembly plant. This method of production allows companies to benefit from labor without having to import it, thus Delgado Wise's reference to an "indirect exportation of labor."

For workers like Irena and Efraím, wages in the maquiladoras was higher than what they could find elsewhere in Mexico. However, as Irena explained, the jobs were unstable. U.S.-based companies seeking to maximize profits found even lower waged labor in Central America and Asia. In addition, Tlaxcala's physical location far from the U.S. border did not offer as clear a geographic advantage as the plants located just south of the United States.[63] Moreover, due to pressure by U.S. companies looking to improve their profit margins and another economic crisis in 1994, the Mexican government froze wages during the last half of the 1990s.[64] As a result, worker's wages were reduced to subsistence levels.[65] This instability forced Efraím to begin migrating in 1998. Unsurprisingly, given the low wages and instability of the job market, Efraím's journey was part of a large uptick in Tlaxcalan out-migration in the 1990s. Thus, the indirect exportation of labor described by Delgado Wise eventually became a more direct pattern of unauthorized migration to the United States for many maquiladora workers.

While maquiladoras represent a significant part of the manufacturing sector, the most significant good extracted from Mexico (other than its people) is oil. On the Gulf Coast of Mexico, the sleepy seafront town of Chiltepec, Tabasco, is part of the municipality of Paraíso (Paradise). Paraíso is an ironic name for a town from which the black plumes of smoke can be seen at all angles. The smoke is a reminder of Tabasco's main industry. According to the Chiltepec's *delegado* (mayor), José Luis Sánchez Domínguez, oil was found on the Tabascan coast close to Chiltepec in 1979. After this, "the PEMEX [Petroleos Mexicanos, or Mexican Oil] boom started," said Sánchez Domínguez, "but skilled labor was imported from other states—Tamaulipas, Veracruz, and Campeche—to control the power of the oil workers' union." Moreover, profits from the oil were increasingly realized overseas. The once-nationalized oil industry, PEMEX, was opened to foreign investment in the 1980s and privatized in line with the IMF prescriptions of the era.[66] By 1997, U.S. and British investors such as Halliburton, Shell, Exxon, and BP owned large shares of PEMEX.[67]

Due to Tabasco's dependence on oil revenues for income, the state's governors, from Enrique González Perdrero (1982–87) to Andrés Rafael Granier Melo (2006–11), instituted regulations with the interests of these foreign investors in mind.[68] One such regulation from the 1980s was the prohibition on shrimping by farmers in the coastal town of Chiltepec because it would interfere with the oil drilling operations.[69] In addition to prohibiting local fishing, the state government stopped supporting the shrimp barge cooperatives financially, thus decimating the once-thriving shrimping industry in the town.[70] Thus, local employment and viability actually decreased after PEMEX arrived. Delegado Sánchez Domínguez decried these policy changes: "The situation of these workers [shrimp farmers] now is terrible. There is no retirement, no insurance, no unions who help them, and no benefits that come with the work. They simply work, earn money, and that is it."

This decreased level of employment in Chiltepec meant that people were ready to go to the United States when employers began recruiting in the area in 1989. One of these people was Serena, whom I met in the restaurant that she was trying to keep running on Chiltepec's small coastal boardwalk. Serena was a housewife when a cousin of her husband's mentioned that U.S. employers were specifically looking for women to train and work as *jaiberas*, or crab cleaners. Normally, Serena would not dream of migrating, especially on her own, but her husband had little work due to the evisceration of the local shrimping industry. However, she was convinced to migrate both because of economic need and because of the recruitment efforts of a U.S. seafood company. Like the California clothing retailers that located their maquiladora workers in areas historically known for sewing, the crab companies of the southeastern United States turned to areas like Chiltepec where traditional shrimping and crabbing were destroyed to fill their workforce. Serena became part of a massive movement of women from Chiltepec and other parts of Tabasco to the United States.

Intentional Suppression of Wages

When migrants like Serena, Don Santos, and Irena refer to the low wages for work in the fishing industry in Chiltepec, Tabasco, or the agricultural sector in Laguna Guadalupe de Yucunicoco, Oaxaca, or the maquiladoras outside San Francisco de Tetlanohcan, Tlaxcala, their diminished earnings can be mapped precisely onto the sectors of the economy that saw a loss of government support and intentional wage depression due to the demands of the IMF.

Lowering wages in all sectors of the economy was a key strategy advocated by the IMF and implemented by the Mexican government in the 1980s and 1990s. The IMF argued that compensation needed to be suppressed (alongside other measures) in order to keep inflation down and ensure that products were competitive for export.[71] The Mexican government wholeheartedly adopted this approach, even casting labor union demands for pay increases as "attacks on the country."[72] By 1983, the Mexican government had adopted the recommendations of the IMF to depress wages placing "a substantial share of the . . . burden" of reforms designed to reduce inflation on workers.[73] But IMF officials were not satisfied. In the same meeting minutes that delineated the policies that the Mexican government was willingly undertaking, IMF board members expressed concern at what they saw as the Mexican government's efforts to slow earnings losses in 1984.[74] These concerns translated into a promise the next year to peg any wage increases to productivity increases rather than a cost of living adjustment.[75]

The policy of intentional wage suppression in some sectors while also emphasizing world market competitiveness had mixed results.[76] Some industries became more successful, and some members of the middle class and elite were able to rise up the economic ranks.[77] For others, particularly in rural areas, real earnings plummeted during this period.[78] The economist Nora Lustig found that overall real wages dropped by a staggering 40 to 50 percent between 1983 and 1988.[79] In the maquiladora sector, compensation contracted less sharply, but there were still losses of 26 percent during these years.[80] For other manufacturing jobs, wages dropped by closer to 36 percent.[81] In agriculture, the patterns were slightly different because income is based on output. In the early years of structural adjustment, before cuts in subsidies and price supports took full hold, agricultural income rose slightly.[82] However, once these cuts went into full effect, agricultural output declined, and incomes were reduced by over 30 percent.[83]

Moreover, wage suppression continued to be a strategy well into the 1990s and 2000s, as Mexico sought to keep its place as a producer of exports to the United

States.[84] In particular, the Mexican government has kept payments to maquiladora workers low in order to ensure a continued comparative advantage for U.S. companies.[85] Overall, wages in Mexico plummeted after the peso crisis in 1994 and did not begin to recover until 2006. Irena and Efraím felt the effects of these cuts, and Efraím eventually migrated as a result. Even after 2006, the pace of wage recovery has been slow. As of 2014, real earnings (adjusted for inflation and cost of living) had increased slightly over their 1994 nadir and only barely surpassed wages from the pre–structural adjustment era.[86] The minimum wage, impacting many people like Irena and Efraim, actually dropped by almost 20% between 1994 and 2015 and unemployment increased during the same period.[87] Thus, Efraim has had to remain in the U.S. in order to help his family survive and to help his children invest in their futures.

Divestment from Education

Another key feature of IMF-prescribed fiscal austerity measures was cutting public spending on social programs. Between 1983 and 1988, spending on education and health care dropped precipitously, with cuts totaling 29.6 percent and 23.3 percent, respectively (figure 5).[88] This was despite ample empirical evidence at the time that suggested that education and health care spending was the key to increasing productivity.[89] In the education arena, this resulted in the reduction in payroll for teachers, reduced availability of materials, and school buildings falling into disrepair.[90] The reduction in education spending was accompanied by higher school dropout rates, particularly in rural areas, likely due to the need for young people to work and contribute to household income.[91]

Even when funding for education increased in the late 1980s and 1990s, it was still far below levels needed to ensure access to education for the population (figure 7).[92] Moreover, the IMF advocated for the decentralization of education from the federal government to the states.[93] This led to uneven development in which states with a higher income were able to spend more while education in states with lower incomes or with other priorities suffered. Decentralization had particularly negative impacts on southern rural states such as Tabasco and Oaxaca whose low revenues meant there was little to allocate to supplementing federal funding for education.[94]

It is no wonder then that paying school fees was the most common reason cited by U.S.-bound migrants from Soyataco and Chiltepec, Tabasco. Serena's main reason for migrating with authorization in 1997 was to pay for the education of her children. At the time, she had three children, ages twenty-one, nineteen, and twelve. And while she had an immediate need to pay for college fees for her eldest child, she continued to migrate for twelve years to pay for the other two children.

About an hour away from Chiltepec in Soyataco, Elias also found himself ensnared in the migration cycle because of the cuts to educational support. Elias

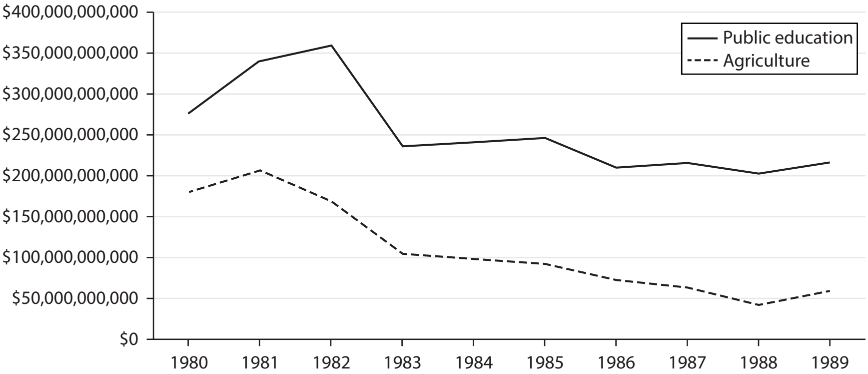

FIGURE 5. Mexico Public Spending, 1980–1989.

migrated without authorization in 1999, 2003, and 2006. In total, he spent nine years in the United States, returning for good in 2008. When asked why he left the first time, he said:

> Look, there is a great inequality between what one earns and the cost of the *canasta basica* [basic goods, necessities]. What one earns only gets you to *mediovivir* [his own phrase but translated as "half living"]. But as for why I left, point number one was to give an education to my children.

In 1999, Elias's kids were sixteen, fourteen, and twelve. Elias went on to explain that the lack of a high school in Soyataco meant that he had to pay for a taxi to take his oldest to and from the nearest school in Jalpa. The taxi cost $20 MXN a week, about 2 percent of his weekly income of around $1,000 MXN at the time. On top of that, the school fees were about $400 MXN a semester, a figure that was lower than the taxi fare but still substantial for a family that only earned about $4,000 MXN a month.

Elias made multiple trips to the United States to continue to pay for his children's education. Each time, he remained for several years and returned home to see his family for a brief few months. Once his children had all graduated from high school, Elias returned in 2008. He was very clear that he would not migrate again, having completed his goal. Since Elias's return, a high school has been built in Soyataco. However, it is a semiprivate high school requiring fairly high fees. Thus, it would be no surprise if educational costs continue to spur migration from Soyataco to the United States.

Five hundred miles to the southwest, in the Mixteca region of Oaxaca, educational access is even more scarce. Elfego and Ricardo describe the lack of educational facilities in two different Mixtecan villages over several decades. Though Elfego first migrated in 1985, before he had children, once the children were born, he was determined to educate them so that they could make a sustainable living in Mexico. By the mid-1990s, Elfego and his wife sought to send all four of their

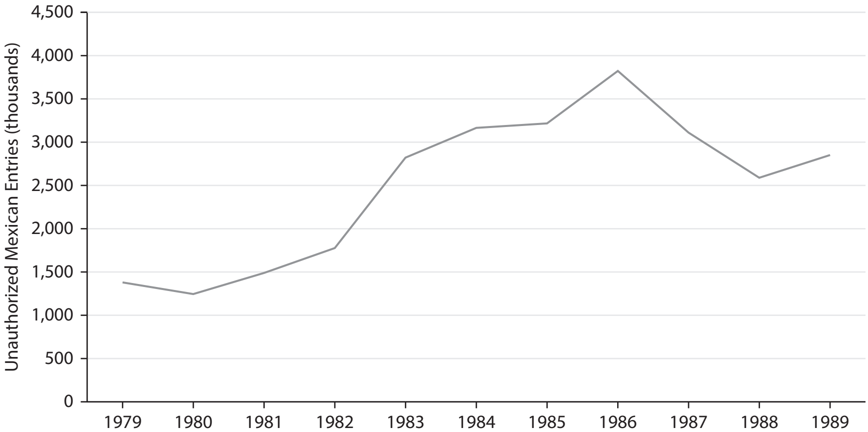

FIGURE 6. Unauthorized Mexico-U.S. Migration, 1979–1989.

children to school. According to Elfego, "They had to go to Tecomaxtlahuaca, and we had to pay for books, the subscription fee, for internet that they used at the school, etc. But with the money I made in the U.S., I was able to educate all four of my children through *secundaria*."

In Mexico, the basic educational system is divided into three parts: *primaria*, or elementary school (grades 1–6), *secundaria*, or middle school (grades 7–9), and *preparatoria*, or high school (grades 10–12). Finishing preparatoria is the equivalent of finishing high school in the United States. Thus, when Elfego says that he educated his children through secundaria, he was indicating that, even with migration, he could not afford to help them obtain a high school diploma. He explained, "They would have to go to Santo Domingo Tonalá [about two hours away] for preparatoria, and we just could not afford it." It was this lack of a local school that led his eldest son to migrate.

A similar pattern unfolded in Ricardo's family, who lived in the nearby town of Santa María Natividad. Ricardo and Luna, his wife, migrated in 2004. By then, he had experience traveling back and forth across the border. Ricardo first migrated in 1990, when he was just thirteen years old. "I went out of necessity," he said. "I was not in school. There was a primaria in our town but no others. And anyway, after that [primaria], in my time, kids went into the fields to help their parents. You had to look for work."

The need to leave school at a young age was fairly typical for children in extremely poor families like those in the Mixteca. Engaging the entire family in collective work has been part of the Mixtec economy for centuries.[95] But it was also due to a jarring lack of resources stemming from decades of economic abandonment in the region. As Ricardo said, "People live on their own power because the government does not make it to them. We invited the government to come, but they didn't visit us. There has never been a visitor from the government here."

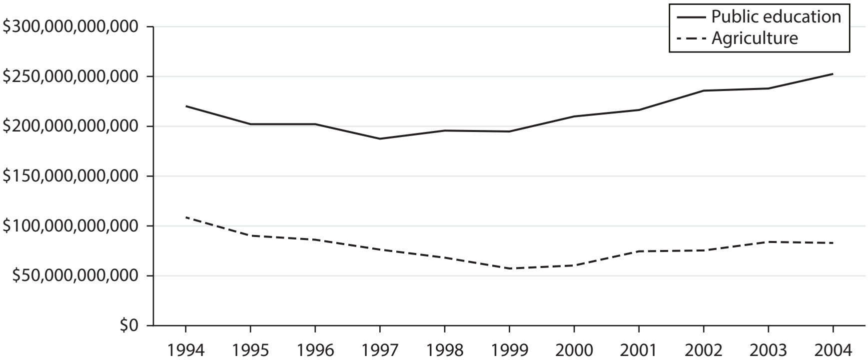

FIGURE 7. Mexico Public Spending, 1994–2004.

When Ricardo says that the "government does not make it to them," he is making a point about both historical context and present-day realities. As other observers of the Mixteca have noted, the Mexican government has never invested in infrastructure, development, or other projects there, including schools that are accessible and affordable to the local population.[96] A 2019 assessment of educational attainment found that rural southern states like Oaxaca continue to have a lower capacity to educate their residents and higher disparities in educational funding.[97] In fact, Ricardo goes further to indicate that the officials from the government have not even appeared in the Mixteca to see what living conditions were like and to understand the profound abandonment felt in this region.

Even in relatively richer states like Tlaxcala and Puebla, funding for education has concentrated on the development of private schools.[98] Thus, even in Tetlanohcan and Sanctorum, Tlaxcala, a significant number of families decided to have a member migrate to pay for the cost of education. Elísabet is the mother of six children in Tetlanohcan. She and her husband, Rodolfo are both Tlaxcaltec and speak Nahuatl and Spanish. When their eldest child, Manuela, was entering secundaria, the family decided that Rodolfo needed to move to the United States to earn money for her school fees. Rodolfo left in 1998 and spent twelve years in the United States without returning. However, when his mother became ill, Rodolfo had to return, which meant that some of Manuela's younger siblings could not complete their education. When I spoke with Rodolfo in 2013, he was trying to raise the money for a return trip to the United States. The construction work that he had done before 1998 had dried up, and work in the nearby maquiladoras was intermittent and did not pay enough. Rodolfo and Elísabet wanted to send their younger children to the newly opened bilingual school that would teach them Nahuatl. The school was opened after a long campaign by their community to recapture the Nahuatl language and Tlaxcatec traditions. However, having been developed in the time of neoliberalism, the new school

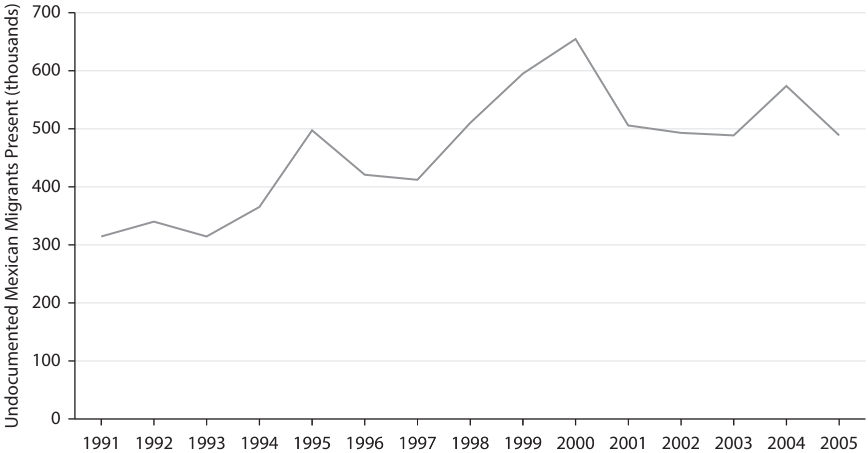

FIGURE 8. Mexico-U.S. Migration, 1991–2005.

was semiprivate, requiring tuition as well payments for books and uniforms. This placed the school out of reach for the family without Rodolfo's earnings from the United States.

The combined effects of cuts to education spending, suppression of wages across different economic sectors, and the distribution of resources to large corporate agricultural and manufacturing enterprises overlapped to construct a set of economic conditions that squeezed communities like Tetlanohcan, Soyataco, and Laguna Guadalupe de Yucunicoco. This newly constructed economic landscape, built on years of repression of Indigenous communities, exacerbated colonial practices with new forms of economic domination that left people like Rodolfo, Elfego, and Serena earning less but having to pay more for basic services whether they lived in urban, rural, or semiurban settings. Facing a constricted set of choices, more and more people entered the migration cycle in any way they could, whether or not their journey was legally authorized. As a comparison of figures 5 and 6 and 7 and 8 indicates, the dislocation caused by economic policies occurred on a large scale, impacting communities well beyond those profiled here, and persisted for decades.

A MIGRANT COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE ON AUTHORIZED VERSUS UNAUTHORIZED MIGRATION

Rodolfo's inability to pay for his children's education led him, like so many others, to seek to enter the United States without authorization. Tellingly, the authorized journeys discussed in this book were made for the same reasons as the unauthorized ones. Isaís left Sanctorum, Tlaxcala, with authorization to help pay for his children's education around the same time that Rodolfo first left Tetlanohcan without authorization to pay for Manuela's secundaria. Similarly, in Tabasco, Serena left Chiltepec with authorization to help pay for her oldest to continue working toward his bachelor's degree around the same time that Elias left to help pay for his children to complete high school in Soyataco. In Oaxaca, Don Santos migrated both with and without authorization to help pay for his children's education while Elfego made numerous unauthorized journeys to educate his children. For all of these migrants, the need to fill gaps in public education funding overlapped with the inability to make a sustainable living due to cuts in agricultural, manufacturing, and banking supports.

Thus, from the migrant community perspective, the legality of a particular migrant's trip was subordinate to the forces dislocating them from their home communities. This was evident in the way migrants talked about their decisions to leave. When asked how they made their journeys, the vast majority of migrants simply said, "Me fui" (I went), and then mentioned the year they left or their destination. To discern whether the trips were made with or without authorization, more pointed questions were necessary. The responses to these questions were matter of fact, whether it was "Me fui contratado" (lit., "I went with a contract") or "Me fui mojado" (lit., "I went wet," referring to the historical method of crossing into the United States via the Río Bravo/Rio Grande).[99] But it was clear that all of the migrants were much more concerned about the conditions that were compelling their decision to leave. Rodolfo, Efraím, Isaís, Don Santos, Elfego, Elias, and Serena all spent much more time talking about the problems they faced paying for their children's education and the inability to make a sustainable living from agriculture (in the case of Isaís, Don Santos, and Elfego), manufacturing (in the case of Rodolfo and Efraím), or other industries. Thus, the migrant community perspective suggests that debates on immigration in the United States that focus on the distinction between authorized and unauthorized migration do not capture what migration actually is.

Legality did matter more for women, as many women indicated that they were not willing to risk the dangers of an unauthorized journey. For some, like Irena, this meant applying for permission to visit the United States and return. Irena was emphatic that she would not migrate without authorization even if it could help the family save more. "Migration [without authorization] is not for women," she said. "Some do it, but, no, it's too dangerous." For those who did make one unauthorized journey, subsequent journeys were ruled out. For example, Luna was clear that when she crossed the border in 2004, she went with other people "to feel protected." When we spoke in 2013, Luna said that she did think about returning to the United States, but then, she said, "I remember the journey," referring to its difficulty. And finally, Serena only considered migration as an option because she was able to obtain a visa for temporary work. Even when deciding not to make unauthorized journeys, women focused on the dangers they would encounter on the route to the U.S. border, not the risk of arrest or detention by U.S. border authorities. Like their male counterparts, they centered the needs of their families and community rather than the possibility that they were violating U.S. laws.

All of the migrants who reported making unauthorized entries acknowledged that their actions violated U.S. law. As Don Santos said, "One knows that a country has its laws." "But," he continued, "a person also has to do what he needs, what his family needs." In other words, Don Santos conveyed that his behavior was not subordinate to or less important than the law but that the law and his family's needs were on the same level. His response is consistent with other studies that have shown that decisions of unauthorized migrants to violate the law are made in part based on the perceived legitimacy of the law they are violating.[100] In Don Santos's case and in the case of many other migrants who entered the United States unlawfully, U.S. rules were considered legitimate but no more legitimate than the need to support their families.

Moreover, as the next chapter reveals, the dislocation of migrants like Don Santos benefited U.S. employers who sought unauthorized labor and public and private U.S. immigration enforcement interests that profit from the demonization of Mexican migrants. This follows a long historical pattern traced in the next chapter of importing Mexican labor into agriculture, mining, and other industries while simultaneously illegalizing their journeys. Some of this historical pattern has included authorizing Mexican labor, like the Bracero Program. However, much of this history has evinced a trend and even desire to employ those without authorization and simultaneously profit from immigration enforcement mechanisms. As the next chapter details, several sectors of the U.S. economy have a strong, ongoing preference for unauthorized labor while other sectors profit from trying to control that labor's movement. This has resulted in a pattern of permissions and prohibitions in U.S. implementation of immigration policies designed to maximize profits made from migrant workers while demonizing the people crossing into the United States. Thus the migrants are in some ways reflecting U.S. policies. They know that the migration is technically against the law but also that it is necessary—for them and for their destination country.