
Introduction

Lived Borders

The Two Faces of the U.S.-Mexican Border:

Mobility and Settlement

One summer afternoon, as Don Fernando sat on the patio of his home to escape the day's heat, he remembered that his "laser visa" (border crossing card) for entering the United States was about to expire. Memories of times past filled his mind as he recalled the days when he had harvested cherries in the orchards of the Santa Clara Valley in the embrace of the California summer sun. Fifty years had passed since he was last deported and had decided he would not return to "American soil" but would remain in the border city of Tecate, where his parents had established a tortilla business.

Some days later he went to the U.S. immigration office in Tecate with his wife, Consuelo, and his oldest daughter, Angeles, to renew his visa. A week later he received a phone call notifying him of an appointment at the immigration office. Don Fernando was consumed with worry. What could be the matter? Perhaps he had failed to submit all the required paperwork or had not demonstrated sufficient income. On the day of the appointment, the family rose early, confused and worried that their visa renewals would be denied. They ultimately learned at the immigration office that immigration records showed Don Fernando had been deported in 1959. Fifty years had passed since he had last crossed the border to work as an undocumented laborer in rural California. In the intervening years he had built a small business, first a general store and then a stationers' shop, and had been crossing the border legally for many years using his border resident visa and, later, his laser visa. Now, at age

seventy-five and somewhat bewildered by the immigration official's questions about the deportation incident, he tried to recall the details the official sought, but he remembered only the sunny afternoons he had spent up a ladder, picking apricots or pruning peach trees. Meanwhile, Doña Consuelo and Angeles looked on, alarmed by the possibility that their visas would be denied. Then the immigration official called Doña Consuelo over and questioned her about the incident. She tried to remember but was unable to recall any details about where they'd been detained or where on the border they'd been deported. Her only recollection was that her second child had been born two months later. On hearing her few memories, the immigration official smiled and said, "So the two of you were detained together, already married. How romantic!" The interview ended then, and a few minutes later they were called over to have their documents stamped and to receive their laser visas, now valid for another ten years.

Don Fernando and his family are part of a subset of residents of the Mexican border region who have visas to cross into the United States. This family drama recurs throughout the border area, given that a permit to cross the border is a coveted object among border residents, and to the extent that it is issued selectively, it serves to differentiate and socially stratify the region's inhabitants. This differentiating mechanism operates among border residents, but also among people to the south of the border. For them, it is a powerful magnet that attracts flows of people to the border zone year after year, people who either settle on the Mexican side or cross into the United States as undocumented migrants.

The course that Don Fernando and his family have followed illustrates Zygmunt Bauman's conceptualization of the differentiating power of geographic mobility as a characteristic feature of modern-day globalization. The borderlands of nation-states have been transformed into spaces where diverse human flows converge with exceptional intensity. Nevertheless, while goods and capital enjoy an ever-increasing freedom of movement, people remain subject to an assortment of economic and legal restrictions. This means that mobility is not a homogenizing factor among the population but is instead a process of differentiation (Bauman 1999). Both the motivations and the conditions under which human mobility occurs express hierarchies linked to class, ethnicity, and gender: For some, itineraries are planned, predictable, and safe, while for others, movement is subject to risk and uncertainty, to the contingencies of passage. Among the differentiating factors that derive from mobility, gender has particular relevance due to the persisting association of the "feminine" with the domestic arena. A focus on gender uncovers the violence that exists within the intimate spaces of the home but that is also present in mobility and border crossing. Along with the construct of ethnicity-race, gender decisively influences the configuration of risks and opportunities in the life experience of the border.

When mobility connected to the search for employment reaches massive

proportions, uncertainty and risk seem to transform into a social constant that spills beyond the protagonists themselves to encompass their family members, the ones who remain behind and the ones who receive the migrants, as well as contacts and observers along the way. Paradoxically, this transposition of people that separates and uproots migrants from their homes arises out of a search for stability and security, generally via a better job and better living conditions. Therefore, we must look at not only mobility but also the processes of settlement, the mechanisms that accord stability to a population and create relatively anchored communities and that eventually can provide support to the influxes of new immigrants in border regions.

The U.S.-Mexican border, and especially Tijuana-San Diego, is an iconographic space for the movement of people between south and north and for the formation of new, culturally diverse border communities. This space allows us to reflect on the factors that afflict border regions linking asymmetrical country pairs in other parts of the world.

Three elements define what can be described as the structural condition of the border: adjacency, asymmetry, and interaction. A key moment in the history of asymmetry occurred in the nineteenth century, when Mexico lost nearly half its territory to annexation by the United States. Geographic contiguity facilitated the continued maintenance of commercial and family ties in the new border region, establishing the social bases for the intense cross-border interaction seen today. Over the course of the twentieth century, differences in the two countries' economic development, combined with their physical proximity, set in motion an unstoppable migratory flow from south to north. Perhaps the most telling indicator of the asymmetry of this interaction is the fact that more than five hundred migrants die and an unknown number simply disappear each year in their attempts to cross the border and find work in the United States.

Despite strong U.S. government restrictions on entry, tens of thousands of migrants succeed in crossing and merge into the army of undocumented workers who undertake the most onerous and poorly paid jobs in the United States. Others remain and settle on the Mexican side, find jobs, establish families, educate their children, and pursue lives that apparently are unattainable in their places of origin. Still others find a niche in the flourishing but dangerous activities that are emblematic of border areas: prostitution, human trafficking, and drug smuggling. The intense economic and social interactions across the border underpin the livings of millions of people who have made this border their home and the terrain on which they construct their life projects. The dialectic between mobility and settlement, between setting down roots and being uprooted, gives the region a sense of vitality, of constant renewal.

As the life stories contained in this book demonstrate, this structural framework is the milieu in which an extensive array of life options unfolds for the region's inhabitants. The structural frontier seeps into the life of each person differentially, depending on his or her particular circumstances, life

trajectory, and capacity for agency as they are linked to the structuring effect of social class, ethnicity, and gender.

Given the ample existing literature on what we term the structural condition of the border, in this book we explore a second dimension of the border, what we call the *lived border* or the *experienced border*. Drawing on the phenomenological concept of life experiences, which stems from reflections on life itself (Dilthey 1994, 41), the *lived border* encompasses the subjective experience of the border, its key referent the meaning of the border crossing between the two countries. In this subjective dimension we also find expression of the structural elements that historically have defined the border: adjacency, asymmetry, and interaction. Crossing experiences can be diametrically opposed to one another depending on the direction of crossing (northward or southward), legal status (legal or undocumented), and motivation (entertainment or employment). For example, illegality in border crossing is visible and problematic when the crossing is from south to north, but not so if it is in the opposite direction. According to Michael Kearney (2008, 81), crossing the border is a transformative experience because it alters the crossers' worth as they enter a classification system that changes the value of their attributes. That is, moving across this dividing line breaks the spatial continuity of life and repositions the subject in the social scheme, changing the value of his or her attributes and requiring the individual to adapt. The discontinuity and constant repositioning that occur in relationship systems with differentiated hierarchies become routine, and the region's inhabitants assimilate this discontinuity and incorporate it into their daily lives.

Within this fluid system of classification and hierarchization, a sharp shift occurs in the ethnic position of crossers into the United States as they are inserted into a set of relationships in which "national" becomes "ethnic" and influences one's position and value in the new society. In contrast, gender position seems to remain largely constant because "feminine" continues to be linked to the domestic and reproductive realms, though with important nuances depending on the ethnic-national configuration that predominates on each side of the border. In Mexico, ethnicity is associated with the indigenous-mestizo duality that took root during the period of Spanish conquest and colonization, while in the United States, ethnicity connotes race and is primarily based on national origin, a reflection of the importance of population displacements and migrations over the past two decades (Velasco 2010).

The Structural Border: Adjacency, Asymmetry, and Interaction

The border that separates Mexico and the United States runs for just over two thousand miles and is the most transited border in the world, with 350 million legal crossings each year. It is also the international frontier manifesting the greatest contrasts, given the profound asymmetry between the two neighbor-

ing countries. A practical definition delineates the border region as the area that includes the thirty-eight *municipios* (akin to U.S. counties) that lie along the border on the Mexican side and the twenty-five U.S. counties that abut the border with Mexico. This vast borderlands region contained some 12.2 million inhabitants in 2000, distributed almost evenly on the two sides of the border: 5.9 million on the Mexican side and 6.3 million on the U.S. side (Anderson and Gerber 2008).

In addition to historical and cultural differences that stem from the contrasting colonization processes in the two nations—one Protestant, the other Catholic—there are economic differences between the two countries, which have deepened over the course of the twentieth century. While the United States consolidated as the world's dominant economic power, the Mexican economy grew only modestly for forty years and then stagnated beginning in the 1970s, at the same time as inequality and poverty were on the rise. On the border, these differences are expressed tangentially as economic, social, and territorial discontinuity, a reality the border population encounters every day. This is why the descriptor that best defines the border zone is “the adjacency of difference” (Alegría 1989).

In large part because of this asymmetry, relations between the two nations were close during the final decades of the twentieth century. Economic relations advanced at a steady pace beginning with World War II, intensified with Mexico's economic liberalization in the early 1980s, and deepened even further with the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994. Under NAFTA, United States–Mexico trade rose substantially, to reach a value of US\$350 billion in 2008.

For Mexico, the rise in trade with the United States is explained in part by the growth of exports from transnational companies with operations in Mexico. These companies increased their industrial output by making major investments in their installations. Foreign direct investment (FDI) in Mexico, which totaled US\$2.6 billion in 1990, exceeded \$250 billion in the period from 1994 to 2008, and 47 percent went to the manufacturing sector (Contreras 2010). But there was also a sizable investment in agricultural exports, which dramatically altered Mexico's agricultural sector. Whereas Mexico was previously self-sufficient in food production and a food exporter, it was transformed into a food importer, now needing to purchase abroad 40 percent of the grains required for national consumption. In contrast, production and export of fresh fruits and vegetables accelerated to such a degree that in 2006 these products accounted for half the value generated by the agricultural sector and 93 percent of agricultural exports, most destined for the U.S. market (Echánove 2009). In sum, as Mexico tightened its economic ties with the United States, both its industrial and agricultural sectors underwent a radical transformation, privileging the external over the domestic market. These figures signal a relationship of dependency in both sectors, compromising not only Mexico's human resources but the nation's natural resources as well.

The principal point of contact between the two countries is the border region, the area where most transactions and interactions are concentrated. But interactions are concentrated even further at one extreme end of the border zone, in the Pacific coast states of California and Baja California. Forty-four percent of the border population of the United States lives in San Diego County, and 41 percent of Mexico's border population lives in the *municipio* of Tijuana (Anderson and Gerber 2008). Together Tijuana and San Diego form a binational zone of high economic, social, and population density, an area that typifies life along the border.

The city of Tijuana, with nearly 2 million inhabitants, is the largest urban concentration on Mexico's northern border. It has been called "the border of Latin America," given its position at the extreme geographic edge of the Latin American region, with the Pacific Ocean to the west and California, the most prosperous state of the world's richest nation, to the north. Tijuana is a young city, whose growth has been tightly linked to the California economy and the proximity of San Diego County.

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the vigorous California economy enabled Tijuana to develop a vibrant economy based on services linked to tourism, along with an expansive industrial sector devoted to the assembly of products for export. Tijuana also became the most important entry point on the border with the United States, not only for legal visitors and migrants but also for those entering clandestinely. Most recently, Tijuana has also been transformed into a primary arena for the illicit drug trade and the accompanying violent exchanges between drug cartels vying for control of the market—in addition to the bloody war that the Mexican government is waging against these criminal syndicates.

The establishment of maquiladoras (in-bond assembly plants) in Tijuana beginning in the 1970s brought a number of consequences, including a sizable expansion of the labor market, especially jobs for women. Between 1985 and 2000, the maquiladoras, most of which are subsidiaries or subcontractors of transnational companies, emerged as one of the primary sources of employment on Mexico's northern border. In Tijuana, more than eight hundred of these plants were employing nearly two hundred thousand workers at the end of 2000. Despite the decline in industrial activity caused by the economic crisis of 2008–2009, these assembly plants continue to be a major source of jobs in the city. Some of these positions are formal jobs with salaries above the national average,¹ but many *maquila* jobs are unstable and precarious, particularly those in small workshops or done at home.

Along with the expansion of its industrial base, Tijuana became the most visited city on the border and, in fact, one of the most visited cities in the world, with 22 million international visitors in 2006 (Bringas and Gaxiola 2010). In that same year, 29.4 million people entered the United States from Tijuana, for a total of nearly 50 million border crossings through Tijuana in 2006.

A characteristic feature of the tourism that comes to Tijuana is its short

duration, a time frame that reflects the legendary local permissiveness regarding the sale of alcohol to minors and the diversity and dynamism of the sex trade. This kind of tourism has been part of Tijuana's history since early in the twentieth century and was even present at the city's founding. Over the last decade, and especially since the terrorist attacks of 2001, tourism activity has waned, a decline visible in the pervasive emptiness of the fabled Avenida Revolución.

On the other hand, in the final decades of the twentieth century, Tijuana also became the most important crossing point into the United States, not only for tourists but also for migrants, with or without documents. Estimates suggest that in the early 1990s more than 40 percent of undocumented migrants entering the United States from Mexican territory were crossing via Tijuana–San Diego. In later years, heightened border enforcement led to a diversification in crossing points, shifting them eastward along the border. Domestic political pressures and a new urgency in the fight against terrorism combined to translate into an expanded presence of Border Patrol personnel and the emergence of new anti-immigrant groups in the borderlands.² This prompted migrants to alter their routes, which made the crossings riskier and more costly, but it had little or no effect on reducing undocumented migrant flows.

Despite the drastic measures implemented to dissuade illegal entry to the United States, Tijuana continues to be the chosen crossing point for a third of undocumented migrants and the most transited point for traffic in both directions. Part of this flow is accounted for by the fact that most migrants deported from the United States are returned to Mexico at Tijuana.

Finally, the surge in narco-trafficking in the region beginning in the 1990s reflects the new power of Mexican drug traffickers following the Colombian and U.S. governments' successes against the Colombian cartels. By the late 1990s, Mexican syndicates dominated the markets for cocaine, marijuana, and methamphetamines, giving them virtual control over the trafficking of drugs into the United States. The U.S. market for illicit drugs is enormous, with a value of between US\$6 billion and \$25 billion annually (Chabat 2002; González-Ruiz 2001). Though the Tijuana cartel has suffered severe setbacks in recent years, it continues to vie with the Sinaloa cartel for control of the city and to clash with the Mexican army, which has stationed soldiers in Tijuana on a permanent basis.

In contrast to the situation just two decades ago, Tijuana is no longer only a point for smuggling drugs over the border; it is now also a point of consumption, with a local market whose strength depends on the fluidity of cross-border drug traffic. In part because of rising drug production in Mexico but also because of the increasing difficulty of smuggling drugs into the United States, the cartels have moved to expand the local market, and domestic drug consumption in Mexico has risen accordingly. It is no coincidence that the main drug-trafficking areas are also those with the highest rates of drug use. A 2006 study found that 14.7 percent of Tijuana's population between the ages

of twelve and sixty-five had used an illicit drug at some time, a rate three times higher than the national average of 5.3 percent; next was Ciudad Juárez, at 9.2 percent (Brouwer et al. 2006).

These are the global, national, and local forces that have shaped the borderlands and the lives of the people whose narratives appear in this book. Thanks to the border region's asymmetrical integration, these forces coexist in contradictory fashion, as suggested by Lynn Stephen (2007, 311). Underpinning the research that gave rise to this book is the hypothesis that the structural border socially and politically differentiates and stratifies the population that lives in and passes through the region, precisely because of the juxtaposition of the three elements that best define this border—adjacency, asymmetry, and intense interaction—with historical roots that reach back far beyond the twentieth century. The book documents the different experiences of border life, depending on one's relationship with the border crossing, and postulates that the daily event of crossing sustains specific ways of life and subjectivities. The border crossing can be conceptualized as the nucleus of a tangled skein of events and social relationships that constitute an individual's life. Not all border residents cross the line, yet their lives are all constantly influenced by the structural factors associated with the presence of this political-administrative divide.

The Lived Border: Crossing from One Side to the Other

Experience of the border crossing can be analyzed using the concept of transit in three dimensions—temporal, spatial, and social—which assume meaning in a biographical framework. The time of crossing holds meaning in someone's biography depending on his or her life stage. The spatial dimension, like the temporal one, has a broad referent and assumes meaning in a person's biography in his or her itineraries of mobility—that is, places where the person has been or visited but especially where he or she has lived or resided. The social dimension ties the biographical frame to the individual's social attachments. In this way, the experience of transiting or crossing the border is framed within the biography of the individual as part of a social class or specific social category, as a man or woman, with a specific ethnicity, in a temporal and spatial dimension that extends outward to one's ancestors, one's contemporaries, and one's successors through a web of social relationships.

In the life histories in this book, the concept of transit refers to the life-experience itineraries involved in crossing the border, which individuals experience differentially depending on legal status, intensity of crossing (frequency and duration), and motivation for crossing. Not all who come to and reside in the Mexican portion of the border region cross the border. In Tijuana, more than half the city's population lacks documents to cross to the U.S. side, and though some individuals may attempt to cross clandestinely, it is clear that

many Tijuana residents have never crossed. Yet the possibility is always present as a more or less accessible option. Moreover, the flows of people and goods in both directions over the border are a prominent referent in the array of life options on the Mexican side and perhaps, though with less intensity, on the U.S. side as well.³

Viewing the border from the Mexican side as an opportunity, yet not crossing, is an irrefutable sign of the structural asymmetry that exists between the two countries. The perception that the U.S. side offers advantages not present on the Mexican side has structural foundations that are well documented and well established in shared understandings and in the narratives of the region's inhabitants. For example, current salaries in Mexico's *maquiladoras* are just a tenth of the industrial wage in the United States, and the quality of life is generally better in the United States as well. Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut (2006) note that international migration to the United States in some sense represents the triumph of a lifestyle. The narratives in this book reveal a kind of fascination with this lifestyle and the possibility of crossing the border and approaching that imagined well-being, but also a disenchantment stemming from the unattainability of these realities.

The book presents a set of ten life narratives by individuals whose common characteristic is living at the western edge of the border between Mexico and the United States. Most live on the Mexican side, in Tijuana. Yet, as these various cases reveal, these individuals' life trajectories are tied to both sides of the border. The heterogeneity of border lives is echoed in Pablo Vila's (2000) questioning of the viewpoint that dominated Chicano studies in the 1990s regarding the hybrid nature of border crossers, postulating a more complex heterogeneity in identities in the U.S.-Mexican border region. As portrayed in the narratives in this book, the border is not lived the same way if one lives on the northern versus the southern side, or if one crosses legally versus illegally. Crossing the border is not something that is generalized among all the region's inhabitants. While there is a fraction of the population whose lives unfold in a constant coming and going across the border, on both sides there are segments of the population whose lives are determined by the reality of the border but who live on only one side and rarely if ever cross the line.

The Schema for Presentation of the Cases

The presentation of the narratives follows a classification based on personal experience of the border crossing. In this set of cases we find a diversity of life experiences that can be organized along a continuum extending from people who live in Mexico and have never crossed the border to those who live on the U.S. side and also do not cross, even when crossing the border is a future possibility for some of them or, alternatively, an option now relegated to a nostalgic and distant past.

Our first step in selecting the cases was to construct a set of "ideal type"

profiles based on the literature and on our previous fieldwork on the Tijuana–San Diego border, the goal being to accurately represent the cultural diversity and varied social spheres that define life along this border. Once the profiles were drawn, we employed our extensive network of contacts to identify appropriate cases in the field and then conducted biographical interviews. Several cases were collected for each profile, and the most illustrative one was ultimately selected for inclusion. In addition to reflecting specific *types* of border experience, the chosen cases are significant because of the interviewees themselves, whose tremendously compelling life stories are incarnations of a drive to survive, of creativity, and of resilience across a range of social environments.

The logic that determines the presentation of the biographical texts conforms to the idea of narrative coproduction, in which the narrator coproduces his or her story jointly with the interviewer in a human and social interrelationship (Tierney 2000). Each chapter unfolds around the protagonist's recountings, organized with a series of questions that function as a connecting thread running through the narrative fabric. Other authors have employed this strategy (Gay 2005), which yields a life story reached through dialogue between the narrator and the listener and which acquires meaning within the specific context of each biography. Each narrative is preceded by a two-part introduction, which first traces the historical context for the respective life story and then sketches the specific situation in which the narrative was produced.

We have made an effort to go beyond the stereotypical images of Mexico's northern border, especially regarding the city of Tijuana, which is commonly portrayed as a point of passage dominated by insecurity, narco-trafficking, and the aimless wanderings of deported migrants. Admittedly, these phenomena are present, and they exert a significant impact on the history and current reality of the border, as is evident in the biographical narratives presented here. Nevertheless, it is essential that we take note of the ways of life that exist beyond the clandestine activities that are becoming increasingly widespread under the current economic conditions affecting both countries. By highlighting the other ways of life that are being pursued—within the law—in these same domestic, neighborhood, and city spaces permeated by clandestine activities, we are able to grasp the complete tapestry of border life. Our objective is to introduce the faces and the viewpoints of the people who live in the region and re-create it day by day as their place of residence, as a zone of daily crossings, as a mythical and determinant referent, as a space of aspirations, achievements, and tragedies.

In order to ensure the inherent unity of the narrative that each individual recounts of his or her life, we do not interrupt with our own interpretations. Even so, the stories as presented are not the original versions; they have been edited to enhance their accessibility to a broad audience and organized according to literary dictates that confer thematic and chronological coherence.

The Structure of the Book: Diverse Ways of Living the Border

The Border Never Crossed

The life experience of the border never crossed relates to residents on the Mexican side who have not crossed into the United States but whose lives are imprinted by the region's border identity. The three narratives that accord with this characterization are of migrant women, female heads of household, who work, respectively, in the agricultural, industrial, and service sectors. None of the three has crossed the border, but their lives are influenced by the effects of the adjacency and asymmetry characterizing Mexico's border with the United States through their participation in economic activities (agricultural and industrial exports, sex tourism) that are directly linked to the consumer market in California and the low cost of labor on the Mexican side. Migration is a constant in their lives, and the process of settlement, the attainment of housing for their families, emerges as a driving force in each case. As their narratives demonstrate, their jobs are not free from the traditional construct of the feminine ethic or the erotic/sexual ethic associated with the feminine in Mexico. At the same time, the migration of these women is linked with domestic and gender violence through a devaluation of the feminine and networks of sexual exploitation. The gender-ethnicity-race triad responds to the Mexican ethnic configuration in which indigenous people are devalued vis-à-vis mestizos or whites, and this correlates with the marginalized position of these women in the social structure. Rosalía's awareness of her indigenous identity contrasts with the lack of ethnic awareness we find in Elena and Rosa, whose origins place them outside the indigenous world.

Chapter 1 presents the life story of Rosalía, a thirty-eight-year-old Mixtec woman who is the head of her family.⁴ Her life is conditioned by her work in export agriculture. For Rosalía, the border emerges as a structural more than a subjective framework, given that the consumer market in California exerts a strong impact on the conditions of her work and, therefore, on her life and the lives of her family members. At the same time, the fact that she is a female indigenous migrant finds expression in her ethnic subordination. The exploitive conditions of agricultural work carry over into the lives of her children, and there appears little likelihood that their situation will change. Her hope is to return someday to her community of origin, ending her odyssey of migration to the agricultural fields on the border and her years of residence in workers' *colonias* (residential areas). In her narrative, a discourse of suffering and uncertainty is a matter of everyday life and is tied to the exploitive conditions of agricultural work and of migration itself.

Chapter 2 offers the narrative of Elena, a forty-nine-year-old woman.⁵ Her migration from southern Mexico marks the beginning of a family life linked to

Tijuana's urban growth and work in the maquiladoras, in the factories themselves and as an industrial homemaker, that is, someone who works in her own home but as a piecework employee for a maquiladora. The border is inherently present in the region's employment opportunities, the origin of industrial investment, and interactions with U.S.-origin managers and entrepreneurs. These are not the large maquiladoras linked to the huge foreign investments flowing into the region, but rather small workshops with limited numbers of employees, where women are employed for short periods or on a piecework basis. Maquiladora employment is situated against a backdrop of family life permeated with separation and abandonment, from infancy onward, yet this work, though unstable, remains a source of motivation and hope.

Chapter 3 presents the life story of Rosa, a forty-seven-year-old woman who has worked as a street prostitute for nearly twenty years.⁶ Behind the profession of prostitution we find a young woman who migrates from Texcoco, Puebla, a semiurban community in southern Mexico, fleeing domestic violence and reestablishing a family with herself as household head. The border that emerges in this narrative is sexual in nature, involving the clients who cross from north to south to obtain sex services. Work as a prostitute coexists with motherhood and the economic support of a family but always under the violent shadow of temporary partners. This double family life in the North and South, with sons in southern Mexico and daughters in the North, is cross-cut by a past in the place of origin and a present in the receiving destination. Solidarity among friends serves as an accessible resource with which to counteract the weakening or absence of family and community ties.

The Border as Backdrop

The second type of life experience of the border pertains to individuals who cross the border only occasionally but whose lives are structured around commercial transactions typical of border zones or who have transborder family ties. The narratives in this section correspond to two individuals, both migrants, who have crossed the border at some point in their lives but whose work trajectory is not defined by a daily crossing of the border. Nevertheless, their occupations depend on the context of transborder markets—in one case, U.S. tourists' affinity for Mexican curios and, in the other, the consumption of illicit drugs on both sides of the border. In both cases, family life is a source of worry and sadness but also a source of confidence and conviction. In these narratives, we once again find that the gender-ethnicity-race triad acquires special meaning within the Mexican context and in connection with the indigenous-mestizo distinction, in which being indigenous shapes the narrative of a woman street vendor while ethnicity is of minor importance for men. Violence permeates these narratives in different ways. In the case of the man it is because of the illegal nature of his work and the high risks associated with it; for the woman, violence has been present since childhood via discrimination

directed against her because she speaks an indigenous language and later, on the border, because of her indigenous identity, contrasted with Mexican and U.S. identities.

Chapter 4 portrays a lifestyle that is increasingly common worldwide, especially in border zones. Juan is a man in his forties involved since childhood in the cultivation of hallucinogens and with a job history of trafficking drugs and stealing cars.⁷ In his case, the border is a place for illegal employment in a dual marketplace, satisfying local demand on one hand and operating within the transnational logic of the worldwide narco-trafficking network on the other. This network, which generally exists outside the participants' awareness, orders the conduct of the drug trade above and beyond the narrow local and regional narco-trafficking networks, where our protagonist is a small player who tries to survive by contending with the logics of business, market, and government control.

Chapter 5 tells the life history of Ofelia Santos, an indigenous street vendor in downtown Tijuana who shows a marked ability to "read" the political environment, possibly because of her leadership position in the street vendors' association and her role as intermediary between her street-vendor colleagues and government officials.⁸ Like the other narratives presented in this book, her story involves migration from southern Mexico as well as settlement in a poor colonia, which she is able to achieve thanks to family and home community connections. The border emerges in diverse forms in her story—through the tourists with whom she interacts and through her husband's situation as a cross-border commuter working in greenhouses in California, and later through her children, who gradually make the move to California to work in agriculture, repeating a pattern common among this ethnic group, which is closely identified with fieldwork on both sides of the border, in the San Quintín Valley and in California.

The Everyday Border

The third type of life experience on the border incorporates individuals who have made the border crossing their primary means of economic survival and the stage on which their daily activities play out. This is the paradigmatic transborder experience: The crossing is the strategic resource that shapes these people's lives. Crossing the border, whether for legal or illegal employment, is a way of life. In these cases, the border is seen as an opportunity, not just for better earnings but also for a better life. The border displays two faces—the legal and the illegal—and both appear permeable thanks to mechanisms of corruption and collusion on both sides. Official policies on employment, immigration, and narco-trafficking are mere fictions in the lives of these individuals.

In Chapter 6, we find a life testimony in which the structural inequality that exists between Mexico and the United States translates into a life opportunity for Eloísa, a twenty-six-year-old woman whose family is dispersed on the

two sides of the border.⁹ In this narrative, the border becomes an opportunity for someone with the skills to take advantage of the salary differential between the two countries and with the specific gender and ethnic characteristics that lead Mexican women to be viewed as appropriate employees for certain kinds of personal care. Behind the central theme of the story, we also see the border as a way to escape gender abuse and domestic captivity. At the same time, this narrative reveals some of the workings of the vast web of narco-trafficking that exists in the border region and highlights the vulnerability of people who do not enjoy regularized immigration status in the United States.

Chapter 7 presents the life story of Porfirio, a forty-year-old undocumented migrant who moves constantly from one side of the border to the other.¹⁰ The experience of the border plays a central role in his life. The concrete act of crossing is matched in importance by the vigilance and patience he must practice in order to identify an appropriate crossing opportunity. His condition of being doubly undocumented, without legal status in either Mexico or the United States, keeps him in the interstices of the two nation-states, and he is subject to abuse in both countries. The border appears as a region of shadows and risk, where anything can happen to an undocumented migrant. Being inside Mexican territory offers no protection from police abuse, and the border zone is revealed as a space where human rights are suspended. Different legal statuses among members of the same family ultimately erode the social fabric: the inability to reunite with loved ones for lack of a border-crossing document, and obstacles to communication caused by differentiated meanings of gender roles.

Chapter 8 displays the reverse side of the undocumented immigrant coin, but entwined in the same youth culture in which young people seek life options that offer possibilities for maturity and fulfillment. The Mexicali Panther is a thirty-three-year-old with a transborder life history, having been born in Tijuana and raised in California.¹¹ Since childhood, he aspired to be a people smuggler, and a close relative later lured him into the drug trade, just like thousands of youths around the world. For the Panther, the border is in constant movement, and he must pursue and negotiate it in parallel with the eastward shift of the Border Patrol along the line. A people smuggler must always stay one step ahead to outsmart the border's enforcers. From another perspective, the border presents an opportunity for survival through the clandestine activities that flourish there thanks to border enforcement efforts themselves. Here the migrants are merchandise, "little chickens," to be sold, handed on to others, traded, or lost.

The Border Traversed

The fourth type of life experience of the border includes those who have traversed the border and established themselves in the United States with relative success. The final narratives in this book relate the lives of two people—one

a second-generation Mexican immigrant to the United States and one from the 1.5 generation (raised in the United States but not born there)—who are embroiled in a constant struggle to integrate into U.S. life, with its emphasis on legal status and advancement through effort. For these men, the border is the Mexican border they left behind, whether through their parents' crossing or in their own childhood years. For them, the border is cultural and political in nature and holds ambiguous valences for things such as personal warmth and systemic political corruption. The narrative of the process of regularizing residency and citizenship shifts between the state's legitimate use of violence in controlling national borders and the "patriotic conversion" of the individual. This conversion contradicts the nativist interpretation about the difficulty an immigrant confronts when adopting the vision of a U.S. national common good. Such a view is evident in the justifications these men offer about the benefits and rights accruing to newly minted citizens. On the other hand, it nonetheless supports the thesis inherent in a transnational focus, which holds that a sense of origin persists not only because of the nostalgia of one's emotional ties to one's ancestors but also because place of origin remains an element that defines one's existence when one is being classified as "Mexican-origin" or "Latino" in censuses and government offices.

Chapter 9 recounts the life of Emilio, a twenty-two-year-old member of the 1.5 immigrant generation, born in Mexico and raised in the United States.¹² His father is the U.S.-born son of a Mexican-origin family, and his mother was born in Mexico. His is the typical case of the successful young son of immigrants, with a promising future and a present of rapid assimilation to the values of American society. His border is the dividing line between backwardness and progress, and he holds a very negative view of the grime and corruption in Mexico, at the same time idealizing Mexican patterns of personal relationships infused with emotion and warmth. This young man's border, seen rising from the U.S. side, is infinitely fluid. Because of his U.S. citizenship, he can cross the border at will. The border is fluid in terms of mobility, but it is highly differentiated culturally.

In Chapter 10, we encounter the life story of Julius Alatorre, a Border Patrol official who was serving as his agency's spokesperson at the time of our interview; we can imagine, therefore, that we are listening to an official narrative of border enforcement.¹³ He is thirty years old and the California-born son of Mexican immigrants. This immigration official's border has two sides. On the Mexican side, people want to cross in order to achieve the American Dream. On the U.S. side, the official himself is part of that American Dream. His narrative is grounded in the machinery of order and the application of U.S. law on the border. His is not a fluid border; it is rock solid. His mission is to stop migration because it is illegal. He views the Mexican side of the border as dangerous, in part because of the drug cartels and kidnappings but also because his identity as a member of the immigration police makes him vulnerable. Yet the tone of his narrative reveals affection for all that is Mexican. This

fondness emerges from his interaction with his parents, and it filters into his view of undocumented migrants as “working people.”

The Conclusion situates this book’s contribution within the context of border studies, following Michael Kearney (2008) on the importance of exploring the relationship between geopolitical borders and sociocultural borders. Based on the thesis that the border constitutes a force for differentiation and social hierarchization, the typology outlined here is employed to order the individual cases in terms of their life experience of the border crossing. This analytical tool permits us to distinguish ways of life that are molded in various ways by the structural processes that constitute an asymmetrical border.

In the midst of the worldwide economic crisis, we have begun to discern some changes in the life dynamics of the borderlands. The economic recession in California and its effects on employment and housing can be traced in the return to Tijuana of some border residents who had taken mortgages and purchased homes in California. The economic crisis has also cast its shadow on the Mexican side, where some families fear they will be unable to put food on the table and would-be migrants continue coming to the border because the situation in Mexico is no better than in the United States. In the depths of this recession, illegal activities become an attractive alternative for thousands of people who want to work and earn, even given the risks and uncertainties that such endeavors imply. Crossing the border continues to be a recourse, a way to flee the crisis in a developing country even if it means one must then survive the crisis in a developed country.