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Legal Permanent Migration, Strategic Il/ legalization, and Intergenerational Social Mobility in a Transnational Migrant Farmworker Community

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Legal Permanent Migration, Strategic Il/legalization, and Intergenerational Social Mobility in a Transnational Migrant Farmworker Community

Jennifer A. Cook, PhD
University of Connecticut, 2017

This dissertation traces the circular migration of a unique population of rural Mexican farmworkers between Guanajuato, Mexico and central Connecticut over a six-year period. Capitalizing on the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, many of these men were able to obtain U.S. legal permanent resident status, and thus became able to legalize not only their own immigration status, but also that of family members. This allows a unique opportunity to examine the impact of legal status on the migration patterns of Mexican farmworkers.

Three themes emerge in this study. First, a robust transnational network has developed which facilitates continued labor migration. By mitigating the dangers and uncertainty of illegal migration, the network allows flexibility in choosing when and where to migrate for work. The network is bolstered by close, personal relationships between workers and employers, guided by a moral economy which promotes trust and reciprocity, and results in substantial economic and socio-emotional benefits for the workers and their families.

In addition, as legal immigrants, the farmworkers in this study are able to apply for legalization for their family members. The dissertation examines the family dynamics involved in deciding whether or not to legalize children, uncovering complex and unexpected rationales driven by local cultural logics about gender, migration and work.

Finally, the dissertation examines the impact of remittances from legal migration on status hierarchies and class subjectivities in the transnational space linked through the network.

Jennifer A. Cook – University of Connecticut, [2017]

The addition of migrant wealth disturbs the traditional status structure in the sending community, creating tensions within and between families.

I conclude by arguing that Rio Secans' networking, legalization, and migrations strategies produce incremental but important gains that may ultimately produce intergenerational improvements to the wellbeing of Rio Secans and their families.

Legal Permanent Migration, Strategic II/legalization, and Intergenerational Social Mobility in a
Transnational Migrant Farmworker Community

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A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
at the
University of Connecticut

[2017]

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2017

APPROVAL PAGE

Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation

Legal Permanent Migration, Strategic II/legalization, and Intergenerational Social Mobility in a
Transnational Migrant Farmworker Community

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Introduction

In some ways, anthropology is a discipline concerned with the rigorous, scientific telling of stories – stories of the human condition, historical or contemporary, with the goal of enlightening, or coming to a better understanding of, our present, and perhaps, our future. The project elaborated in these pages is my contribution to that endeavor based on my ongoing, multi-year, multi-sited ethnographic engagement with a transnational network composed of Mexican men (and, to a lesser degree, women) who migrate to the U.S. for seasonal work, their spouses, children, extended family and community members, and the Connecticut farmers who employ them. In this dissertation, I tell their stories, with the goal of informing our understanding of a timeless and yet very pressing global and national issue – transnational labor migration.

In acknowledging that the work of the anthropologist is a form of scientific story-telling, one must also acknowledge that there is a *story-teller* – an individual with a particular social position and point of view. To tell the story of this network, then, it is essential that I first tell a bit of my own story. Below I explain the ways in which my personal intellectual development has been interwoven with the various developments of this ethnographic work. I also hope that this autobiographical prelude may be helpful to some student readers, as it speaks to the ways in which an ethnographic project can evolve over time.

I grew up in the town of Windsor, Connecticut, in a large home owned by my parents, who are highly educated professionals. During most of my childhood we lived in the more affluent, suburban side of town, which was largely populated by upper-class white residents. Growing up in Windsor in the 1990's and early 2000's, on my way to school I frequently passed large fields where tobacco was grown, as these fields immediately abut several main roads in the northern part of the town. The Luddy Taylor Tobacco Museum, which features a series of

photographs, artifacts, and descriptive narratives about the history of Connecticut's tobacco industry, is within walking distance of my childhood home. Windsor's agricultural history is a point of pride for many long-time residents, some of whom have personal experience picking tobacco during summer breaks from school during their teenage years, or have relatives who have worked in the fields. Few white locals work tobacco today, however. Many Windsor residents who grew up near the red barns where the tobacco was cured often fondly (or not so fondly, depending on personal preference) recount the way the sweet-sour smell of the curing tobacco wafts over parts of the town during the autumn months. The stark white tents which cover vast tracts of Windsor's farmland (and facilitate the growth of the shade tobacco¹) are eye-catching objects that are often explained to visitors as "fun facts" about the town.

Windsor's imagined agrarian history, represented in stories of hard-working small family farmers and "bootstrapping" white youth earning spending money as part-time field workers, comes into direct conflict with the current reality of the industry. Today, the town's tobacco workers are overwhelmingly foreign-born migrant workers, coming primarily from Mexico and Jamaica, with smaller numbers of Puerto Rican workers, either recruited from the island or from communities in Springfield and Hartford. Because the tobacco-producing section of the town has historically been populated by white residents, and the increasing diversity in the area comes primarily from East and South Asian-American and immigrant populations, the brown bodies of overwhelmingly male, Spanish-speaking, poor and working-class Latino tobacco laborers often draw the curious gaze of white residents.

¹ Connecticut's tobacco farmers specialize in growing shade tobacco, a delicate variety of the crop originally produced in Sumatra and used to wrap fine cigars (Boynton 2007). Although the crop is naturally ill-suited to Connecticut's temperate climate, in 1899, American farmers began duplicating Sumatra's tropical climate by using extensive white nets to encase their fields. With the nets, farmers can control the temperature and humidity under which the plants grow (Glasser 2005). Farmers adopted this technique to avoid being driven from the market by tobacco grown in Sumatra.

I grew up hearing my fellow Windsorites express troubling feelings about the annual influx of foreign workers. Windsor residents often encounter tobacco workers in a shopping plaza near the farm housing barracks, where they sometimes go to cash their paychecks, send money home, and stock up on supplies. White women, in particular, often express discomfort when encountering large groups of the men, who are perceived to “leer” at them while they shop. A former high-school co-worker once told me she had been chased on her bicycle when she rode by the farmworker housing on her way to work. Police make routine passes through the housing at night, and rumors abound that the men are violent, sexually predatory drunks to be avoided at all costs. A Facebook network connection from my high school graduating class once posted that he had seen “2 Mexican tobacco workers beating the shit out of each other” on the side of a main road in town. Twenty-eight people “liked” the post, and three Windsor residents made comments highlighting the racialized, criminalized, dehumanized perspectives some town residents have about this population. “Good thing they grow shade tobacco over there, if it was broad leaf there’d be machetes nearby,” said one, suggesting that violence is inherent, natural, or inevitable for the men employed in the tobacco industry. “Those guys are so annoying. I almost hit one of them last week,” said another. The last simply stated “Damn luchadors.”

I share these anecdotes not to suggest that they represent any kind of truth about who Windsor’s tobacco workers are. Rather, they reflect the ways in which they are portrayed as a dangerous “other” in terms of their class-based, racialized identities as immigrant laborers. Of course, not all Windsor residents have such demeaning perspectives on tobacco workers. Typical responses to their presence range from fear, to annoyance, to – at best – ambivalence. As a college student studying international development, I reconsidered the narratives I had heard while growing up, and was perplexed by the contradiction they posed. The tobacco industry

seemed to be such an essential factor in the perpetuation of the town's agrarian imaginary, but the current labor force that made the industry possible was perceived as, at best, an unwanted inconvenience, and at worst, a racialized threat to the town's integrity. Based on my interest, I developed, applied for, and was awarded a Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship by my undergraduate institution, the University of New Hampshire, and embarked on three months of volunteer work and exploratory qualitative research with farmworkers at several Connecticut farms. This work produced an undergraduate thesis examining the narratives of Jamaican, Puerto Rican, Mexican, and Central American men employed on tobacco and diversified produce farms in Connecticut, exploring an array of themes related to life and work. It compared the relative social, legal, and economic positioning of these distinct groups, their treatment by employers, and their ruminations on the quality of life they experienced while working away from home. The project, while broadly concerned with humanizing Connecticut's farmworkers and combatting the harmful negative stereotypes held by Windsor residents, also led me to a new area of inquiry. During interviews at one farm in the town of Aldenboro² in central Connecticut, I learned that all the employees on farms in the area were from the same part of Guanajuato, Mexico. At the time, this information barely caught my attention.

After a year working outside of academia, I enrolled in the Latin American Studies Master's program at the University of Connecticut, with the intention of expanding my work with farmworkers in Connecticut and examining the role played by migrant social networks in Connecticut's agricultural labor force. I hoped to learn more about the interpersonal relationships among migrant farmworkers which helped them arrive to Connecticut, to find work, and to gain access to other kinds of resources and knowledge. I returned to the farm where I had met workers

² All names of towns, cities, farms, and individuals in this dissertation are pseudonyms, except where otherwise noted.

who reportedly hailed from the same home town in Guanajuato. This time, I inquired further about migration from their town, “Rio Seco,” and I was fascinated by the commentary of one worker, Guillermo. From the hilltop where we sat during my interview, we could look out over a few miles of Aldenboro’s farmland. Gesturing to several locations on the horizon, he said:

Look. Just around this area here... there is one farm on this side here, it’s called Sunrise Orchards. Then over here is Sampson Orchards. Then over here is the farm that belongs to the Chesters ... And... that’s three... then over here is the Burton apple orchard... then over there is Mancini Farms... No, there are many!

He went on to estimate that in all, somewhere around 200 migrants from “Rio Seco,” were employed on farms in Aldenboro, and explained that the workers had achieved a significant degree of control over the labor force. He also explained that most of the workers in Aldenboro returned to Rio Seco each December to spend time with their families, and to partake in the local festivals.

Inspired by multi-sited studies of migration, and driven by curiosity about the transnational linkages between Guillermo’s hometown and my home state, I resolved to visit Rio Seco during the winter of 2012³. I made contact with Guillermo, who invited me to visit with his family and helped me set up interviews with several Rio Secan migrants. After visiting Rio Seco it became obvious that defining the population as “migrant farmworkers” only addressed one limited aspect of their identity. The men were fathers, sons, brothers, uncles, fathers-in-law, and godfathers. These relationships linked them to each other (indeed, many Connecticut workers are linked to each other by kinship as well as by their employment relationships), and so they

³ I took a rather roundabout path to get to Rio Seco. When I first started this project I was restricted in my ethnographic friendships with the men by my race, gender, and class positioning, and our polite conversation felt insufficient to try to finagle an invitation to their home town. I was also uncomfortable with the prospect of potentially violating gendered norms of social interaction, so I connected with a development organization, Fundación Comunitaria del Bajío, which helped to facilitate my first fieldwork trip to Guanajuato. Given my tenuous connections to the community, during my first fieldwork trip I stayed in a town about an hour away from Rio Seco. On my later trips I stayed with members of the Rio Seco-Connecticut network.

seemed important to understand as far as the study of immigrant networks was concerned. But I also knew that these relationships linked them to spouses, children, and extended kin and community networks at home in Rio Seco. Coursework and conversations with graduate school colleagues and professors helped me to reframe my research, and to enter into dialogue with literature on gender and family dynamics, including transnational fatherhood.

Refocused on this new area of inquiry, I took a second fieldwork trip in December of 2014, this time staying in the center of Rio Seco with the family of a Connecticut migrant. On the evening of the very first day I arrived to Rio Seco, I met Suzy, a three-month-old U.S. citizen who was living full-time in Mexico with her mother, a “green card holder” or legal permanent resident. Meeting Suzy and others living in families with a range of U.S. legal statuses in Mexico led me to consider the role legal U.S. immigration status plays in the lives of these families – a crucial topic which ultimately became the driving force behind my dissertation proposal, and was the primary area of focus of my final three-month fieldwork trip in December-March, 2015-6.

~ ~ ~

The main goal of this dissertation is to paint a more “fully human” picture of the transnational lives of Mexican migrant farmworkers in the United States. In order to accomplish this, I have organized the dissertation into six chapters. Chapter One, “Labor Migration in a Global World: Research and Methods” locates the dissertation within the interdisciplinary literature on global migration, and describes the project’s methodological approach. Chapter Two, “Roots and Routes: Tracing the Network in Space and Time,” describes the historical development of the Rio Seco-Connecticut network, and places it within the context of the broader history of Mexico-U.S. migration. In Chapter Three, “Good Workers and Friendly Farmers: The Moral Economy of Farm Work in Connecticut,” I examine the complex personal

relationships which have developed between Connecticut farmers and Rio Secan farmworkers in the last 20 years, and argue that a moral economic approach is best for understanding these relationships. Chapter Four: “Strategic II/legalization and Legal Permanent Migration” examines the process through which Rio Secan families decide whether or not to “legalize” the U.S. immigration status of their family members, whether and when to migrate, and the resulting consequences of these decisions for family dynamics in Rio Seco. Chapter Five: Migrant Money, Social Status, and Social Change in Rio Seco and Beyond” analyzes the repercussions of legal permanent migration on incomes, social hierarchies, and class-based subjectivity in Rio Seco and transnationally. I conclude by arguing that Rio Secans’ networking, legalization, and migrations strategies produce incremental but important gains that may ultimately produce intergenerational improvements to the wellbeing of Rio Secans and their families.

Chapter One - Labor Migration in a Global World: Research and Methods

This dissertation is, on the one hand, a traditional ethnography about individuals wrapped up in social processes that are intensely *local*. The story contained here is historically and geographically *particular*. A chance confluence of legal, political, economic, and social factors led to some men from a small isolated community, deep in the heart of rural Mexico, to venture across the geopolitical border between their country and another. They made *individual choices* to engage in particular kinds of labor migration based on the economic circumstances they found at home, and collided with a particular political moment in the United States which led to their legalization.

On the other hand, this cohort of men, their families, and their broader community are engaged in social processes that reflect *global* patterns. Their experiences are embedded within a global political-economic system which produces (and exacerbates existing forms of) inequality and violence, which in turn generate massive migrant flows from the global South to the global North. It is important, then, to contextualize the story of the Rio Seco network by situating it squarely within the ever-expanding body of anthropological work on “the global.” In the sections that follow, I briefly review the main agenda of the anthropology of globalization, and situate migration studies – broadly defined - within it. I then examine the historical development of theories of international migration, with a focus on the way migration theorists discuss the relationship between macro-level structure and the individual agency of migrants. I conclude by considering the particular location of this dissertation within the anthropology of globalization and migration – specifically, at the intersection of the bodies of literature focused respectively on

temporary labor migration, transnational families, and im/migrant il/legality⁴. Finally, I explain my methodological approach.

Migration studies in the anthropology of globalization

The anthropology of globalization is broadly concerned with a few primary goals. First, it is concerned with developing new theoretical frameworks for understanding the rapidly increasing interconnectedness of the world's political, economic, social, and cultural spheres, which has been produced by rapid advances in communication and transportation technology and infrastructure. This endeavor focuses on understanding the varied nature of the manifestations of globalism in different contexts, as well as assessing the drivers of globalism and its consequences on human wellbeing. Second, anthropologists of globalization aim to figure out how to apply old (as well as develop *new*) methodologies to study global processes. This has become a particularly important focus of anthropologists, given the discipline's historical roots in localized research with what were seen to be isolated or "bounded" cultural groups. From an

⁴ I use several different terms to refer to the kinds of international mobility described in this dissertation. Following Willen 2011, I use the terms "im/migrant" and "im/migration" when emphasizing the fluid, shifting nature of im/migrants' actual im/migration practices, and to avoid the assumption of permanent relocation connoted by the use of the terms immigrant and immigration. I also opt for this more flexible construction given that the body of U.S. law referred to as "immigration law" refers not only to the entry and exit of "immigrants," (those who have access to a pathway to citizenship) but also the entry and exit of "non-immigrants" (those who do not, without an "adjustment of status") (I explain these legal distinctions more fully in Chapter 5). I find that when speaking in general terms, "im/migration" captures this fluidity more accurately. I use immigration and immigrant typically to refer to those with the intent to "immigrate" to the U.S. – with a degree of permanency. I use "migrant" and "migration" to refer to what most Rio Secans do, in part because most of them do not intend to "immigrate" (permanently relocate). When speaking specifically of the Rio Secan context, I occasionally use the term "emigrant" to refer to the experience of *leaving* Rio Seco (as opposed to the continuity of mobility implied in the use of the term "migrant.") Also, following many migration scholars (ie. Coutin 2003, De Genova 2002, Willen 2007), I use the term "il/legality" to refer to both illegality and legality as two sides of the same coin. This term, despite its distasteful, dehumanizing use in anti-immigrant rhetoric, is useful in discussions of the experience of having/not having legal status. For a succinct explanation of the varying perspectives on the use and misuse of the term, see Martinez 2009). Later on, I use "il/legalization" to refer to the processes through which im/migrants may become "legal" or "illegal," referring to both the social/political construction of illegal status (in the sense that illegal status is a phenomenon created by domestic law, rather than the actions of any individual or group of migrants), and the fact that the granting of legal status (legalization) and denial of legal status ("illegalization,") are strategies deployed by Rio Secan parents in their pursuit of intergenerational social mobility.

engaged or applied perspective, anthropologists of globalization are concerned with *doing something* with the knowledge they produce about globalization. In some cases, this means predicting, understanding, denouncing, and/or attempting to mitigate or resist the injustices that have been/are being/will be produced by globalization. In other cases, this means capitalizing on the advantages of globalization, including life-saving technological advances and increasingly efficient communications systems, in the hopes of improving the lives of those with whom we work.

One key area of inquiry in the anthropology of globalization is the study of global flows of people – what Hylland Eriksen calls “mobility” (2014). The speed and ease with which people can move from place to place has accelerated, both in theory and in practice, due to advancements in communication and transportation technologies. There are three main “streams” of mobile populations in the contemporary “globalized” world: 1) North-South migrants, typically members of a global elite, who engage in professional work (i.e., diplomats, corporate representatives, aid workers) or leisure (“ex-pats,” tourists, and retirees) in the global South; 2) South-South migrants, a numerically larger group including refugees and economic migrants seeking marginally better economic or social conditions in nearby countries (including, in Hylland-Eriksen’s description, the residents of refugee camps); and 3) South-North migrants, a group which may include war and environmental refugees but also include “economic migrants” of many backgrounds, drawn (like the Rio Secan migrants discussed here) by labor needs in the “Global North” and pushed from their countries primarily by economic underdevelopment (Hylland Eriksen 2014). Of course, each of these broad conceptual groups contains tremendous diversity both within and between them, in terms of national origin, country or countries of destination, socio-economic status, race-ethnicity, and cultural, religious, and linguistic identity.

Depending on these variables, and the particular historical, political-legal, socio-economic context of their departure and reception, individuals in each of these streams may have dramatically different migration realities. Hylland Eriksen (2014), for example, uses an anecdotal comparison of a rich tourists and a traumatized refugees to demonstrate how mobility can take drastically different forms in a globalized world.

Although the interdisciplinary field of “migration studies” is now seen as inherently linked to the sociocultural study of globalization, this was not always the case. Concern with the study of migration emerged in contemporary anthropology in the 1950s and ‘60s, when ethnographically-oriented researchers in Latin America and Africa witnessed increasing rates of rural-urban migration (Kearney 1986; Brettell 2000; Horevitz 2009; Gardner 2013). During this time, anthropologists and sociologists studying migration explained these movements using the framework of modernization theory, the dominant contemporary model of understanding economic development. Modernization-style approaches to migration suggested that migrants were “progressive types” (Kearney 1986) who, aware of their presumed “backwardness,” hoped to overcome their traditional lifestyles by moving to the city and bringing back “modernity” to the countryside. According to this model, based in neoclassical economic theory, migration can be explained through an examination of the “push” and “pull” factors that motivate individual migrants, as rational economic actors, to make a “cost-benefit” analysis about whether and when to migrate. Migration scholars drawing inspiration from modernization theory tended to be preoccupied with the degree to which such migrants and immigrants could integrate, adapt, or assimilate to their destination societies (Kearney 1986; Brettell 2000; Horevitz 2009; Gardner 2013). This was true of anthropologists in particular, given the discipline’s (now widely

critiqued) historical dedication to the linkages between culture and place (Gupta and Ferguson 1997).

The application of modernization theory to migration has been thoroughly critiqued, as have its implications for the broader field of development studies (Bernstein 1973; Jaquette 1982; Escobar 2002; Ferguson 1994). One theory which emerged in response to these critiques is dependency theory. Based in neo-Marxism, dependency theorists argue that migration is driven by an unequal distribution of power between nations disparately impacted by the colonial encounter. Far from agentive decision-makers, migrants are understood as pawns in an exploitative international capitalist system which facilitates the funneling of resources, including labor, from the world's poorest to the world's richest. World systems theorists proposed a similar but slightly more complex relationship between the world's rich (core), intermediate (semi-periphery), and poor (periphery) nations (Wallerstein 1976). Both approaches critiqued modernization theory's neglect of historical-structural factors, and its narrow focus on microeconomic/psychologicistic questions of individual choice (Kearney 1986).

Dependency theory and world systems theory constituted important advances in the anthropology of migration, in that they highlighted the macro-level, historical, and structural factors generating international flows of economic migrants. But anthropologists struggled with applying the hallmark of their discipline – ethnographic fieldwork – to such macro-level theoretical perspectives. Critics were also concerned that such theories depended too rigidly on the nation-state as the supreme organizer of social, political, and economic life. Scholars of globalization increasingly argued that the nation-state was becoming obsolete – social life was becoming disembedded, deterritorialized, as the world experienced “time-space compression” (Harvey 1989; Hylland-Eriksen 2014). These concerns spurred the development of one of the

most influential theories in contemporary migration studies: transnationalism (Glick-Schiller et al. 1992; Basch et al. 1994). As originally developed, the concept of “transnationalism” suggests that advances in communication and transportation technologies enable international im/migrants to construct, grow, and maintain robust social ties to their homelands, despite being physically absent for long periods of time (Glick-Schiller et al. 1992; Basch et al. 1994). In other words, “globalization makes ‘borders’ obsolete” (Horevitz 2009:753), and transnational migrants create “transnational social fields” (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004) that enable them to live in and between spaces – simultaneously both “here” and “there.” Originally, transnationalism was used to explain ethnographic observations of migrants involved in binational political involvement (Smith 1994; Goldring 2002; Smith 2005) and economic development initiatives in their home communities (Fitzgerald 2006, 2008), but later grew to incorporate issues related to gender and family in transnational perspective (see below). Critiques of transnationalism have noted that for many migrants, particularly those on the lower end of the global socio-economic spectrum, national borders are far from nonexistent. On the contrary, geopolitical borders are very real in their capacity to regulate entry and exit, and can have serious implications for migrants’ ability to physically cross borders and to maintain transnational “lifestyles” with feet in two countries. Indeed, the contemporary moment could be described as a period of the reassertion of borders, particularly in Europe and the U.S.

Despite these critiques, transnationalism continues to be a useful concept for thinking about the ways in which “the global intersects with the local in the experiences of individual agents” (Fitzgerald 2006: 3) As such, transnationalism has widely been accepted as a “perspective... [which] allows researchers to see transborder ties that were invisible to the

assimilationist scholars of earlier generations” (2006:12), rather than as a predictive “theory” (Fitzgerald 2006).

Until recently, much migration research has focused (as did much anthropological research more broadly) on the experiences of men (Brettell 2000). Modernization theory’s emphasis on rational economic actors, for instance, typically privileged the perspectives of male migrant “heads of household,” and anthropologists’ early focus on rural-urban labor migration led to a predominant concern with men’s labor migration experiences. As Brettell (2000) puts it, “If women were considered at all, then it was as dependents and passive followers of the initiating male migrant” (2000:109). Eventually, migration scholars began to acknowledge in their scholarly work that women also participated in labor migration, and that the number and proportion of women migrating for wage labor was steadily increasing, in a process referred to as the “feminization of migration” (Donato et al. 2006; Gabaccia 2016). Simultaneously, feminist scholars pushed back against methodologies and analytical perspectives that privileged the voices, experiences, and perspectives of male migrants. These shifts resulted in a massive surge in interest, particularly among women scholars, in women’s migration experiences (Donato et al. 2006). Later critiques pushed migration scholars even further, encouraging them to eschew gender binarisms focused on comparing men and women migrants’ experiences, in favor of perspectives that consider *gender* more broadly – as a social construction embedded in local contexts, and as a “way of structuring power” (Donato et al. 2006). In other words, the focus of such scholarship shifted “from men to women to gender” (Green 2012).

Agency and Structure in the Anthropology of Migration

One major difference among the theoretical approaches described above is the way in which they conceptualize the relationship between “structure” and “agency” in migration

experiences. In broad terms, “agency” is understood as “the human capacity to exert some control over the conditions of one’s existence” (Gomberg-Muñoz 2011:9), or “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn 2001:112). Modernization theory falls heavily on the side of individual agency in its proposition that migrants, as rational actors, simply assess their options and decide accordingly what they will do with their lives. Dependency theory, in contrast, portrays migrants as “a dependent tail wagged by the capitalist dog” (Kearney 1986:344) – their agency is all but irrelevant given the immense forces producing their exploitation.

Transnationalism, as originally defined, entailed another pendulum swing in favor of migrant agency – migrants transcend geopolitical borders through their maintenance of social ties.

Feminist theories of migration have settled on both sides of the debate – some preferring to focus on the ways in which “gendered geographies of power” (Mahler and Pessar 2001) disempower women in most migration circumstances, where others focus on the ways in which migration transforms gender dynamics in sending communities (Pedraza 1991).

Today, migration scholars continue to debate the degree to which migrants have control over their circumstances. But there are some commonly accepted understandings about the relationship between structure and agency in international migration. At the macro-level, we know that labor migration is driven by the expansion of the global capitalist system. As Portes and Walton (1981) write, “sustained labor migration requires the penetration of the political and economic institutions of the dominant unit- nation-state or region – into the subordinate one. This penetration creates imbalances between sectors and institutions of the subordinate unit, which lead eventually to labor displacement” (1981:31). Furthermore, research has shown that national immigration policies can have significant (and sometimes unexpected) impacts on the direction and duration of migrant flows, as well as the lived experiences of the migrants who are

subject to them (Durand and Massey 2003). At the micro-level, we know that although migrants are subject to these structural forces, they may also shape both their own individual experiences and outcomes, and ultimately the structures themselves, through their own intentional and unintentional efforts. Scholars have also examined the many factors which may increase or decrease migrants' capacities to exercise agency, including the "context of reception" (Menjívar 2000), structural vulnerability (Holmes 2013; Quesada et al. 2011), liminal legal status (Hellgren 2012), and the existence of social networks and social support systems (Gomberg-Muñoz 2011).

In this dissertation, I take these macro-level structures as a given feature of the global system in which migrants exist, while focusing specifically on the micro-level of migrant agency exhibited in social networks. This approach follows the broader theoretical perspective of scholars like Ortner (2006) and Baer et al. (2013). Building on the work of Giddens (1979), Bourdieu (1977), and de Certeau (1984), Ortner (2006) proposes a framework which conceptualizes agency using several metaphors, including "serious games" (2006: 129) and "projects on the edge of power" (2006: 142). Ortner suggests that the challenge of the anthropologist interested in the relationship between structure and agency is to consider agency as "structurally embedded," and structures as "intention-filled," in order to "recognize the ways in which the subject is part of larger social and cultural webs, and in which social and cultural "systems" are predicated upon human desires and projects" (2006: 12). She writes,

It is not about heroic actors or unique individuals, nor is it about bourgeois strategizing; nor on the other hand is it entirely about routine everyday practices that proceed with little reflection. Rather it is about (relatively ordinary) life socially organized in terms of culturally constituted projects that infuse life with meaning and purpose. People seek to accomplish valued things within a framework of their own terms, in their own categories of value. (2006:145)

Similarly, in their discussion of the critical medical anthropological approach to individual agency, Baer et al. (2013) write

“issues of power, inequality, oppression, exploitation, and the like create the social environments within which the individual level is actualized and intimately contributes to the social shaping of individual experience, the social construction of human bodies, and the social production of potential pathways of personal action.” (2013:58)

In following these approaches, I maintain a sensitivity to both the nuances of migrant agency *and* a critical stance toward the structures that guide and constrain their opportunities. This construction is well-suited to the task at hand – the analysis of Rio Secans’ social network, their legal migration strategies, and prospects for escaping the intergenerational cycle of precarious migrant labor.

Labor Migration, Transnational Families, and Im/migrant Il/legality

This dissertation is situated at the intersection of three specific bodies of literature within the anthropology of migration: labor migration, transnational families, and im/migrant il/legality. I briefly address the major themes of each of these literatures here, focusing primarily on studies in the U.S. Latin America context (with a few exceptions where U.S. literature is less well-developed, or where other international examples prove to be particularly useful).

Labor Migration

Given the historical origins of the anthropology of migration, anthropological literature on international labor migration is extensive. For the purposes of this dissertation, there are three main areas in the anthropology of labor migration which are most important: 1) the impact of socio-economic and politico-legal positioning of migrant workers on their structural vulnerability; 2) the impact of transnational social networks, including employment networks, on

migration and work experiences; and 3) the specific political economic dynamics of seasonal agricultural labor migration in the United States. I will address each in turn below.

A significant body of scholarly work has been dedicated to studies of the socio-economic and politico-legal positioning of migrant workers. This body of work is characterized in part by a number of important studies focused on structural vulnerability and im/migrant worker health. In the U.S. context, for instance, Quesada et al. (2011) argue that Latino immigrant workers suffer a “conjugation of economic exploitation and cultural insult” (2011:340) driven by their positioning in the lowest rungs of the U.S. labor market and their status as cultural and racial others. This social positioning can become compounded with other factors of vulnerability, including illegality, to result in pernicious acute and chronic health problems and workplace injuries (Walters et al. 2004). In *Fresh Fruit Broken Bodies* (2013), Seth Holmes demonstrates that the positioning of indigenous Triqui migrant farmworkers at the bottom of the ethno-racial hierarchy on berry farms in Washington state results in profound disadvantages in accessing quality health care, as well as direct bodily harm. Other scholars have considered the ways in which structurally vulnerable migrants may be capable of improving their lives despite their marginal position, through entrepreneurship (Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009) or through the support of social networks (Gomberg-Muñoz 2011; Hagan 1998; Menjívar 2000).

The study of im/migrant social networks has also produced a significant body of scholarship. Scholars have investigated the degree to which im/migrant social networks may facilitate migration processes (Massey et al. 1987), impact im/migrant legalization processes (Coutin 2003), and influence im/migrant destinations (Hagan 1998). Massey et al. (1987) suggest that relationships of kinship, friendship, and “paisanaje” (1987:140), or shared country origin, are most important to facilitating international migration in the Mexican context, in that they

create a “social infrastructure that enables movement on a mass basis” (1987:5) and reduce the costs associated with migration. Migrants become “enmeshed in a web of reciprocal obligations” (1987:5) that help network members to migrate as well as to find work. Others have focused on the role of networks in facilitating im/migrant employment (Gomberg-Munoz 2011; Balderrama and Molina 2006), or in gaining access to other resources, including information, social services, and financial support (Garcia 2005; Fisher et al. 2004). Still others have focused on the ways in which migrants draw on social networks to gain social or emotional support, and for assistance with the integration process in their new societies (Menjívar 2000). Scholars have also investigated the ways in which migrants use networks to find work, and may construct networks based upon employment in a common workplace or industry (Gomberg-Munoz 2011; Waldinger and Lichter 2003).

Given the unique positioning of the industry and its workers, it is also important to consider the specific political-economic context of agricultural labor in the United States. Farm labor is one of the most precarious forms of work available in the contemporary U.S. This is far from a “natural” occurrence – although some aspects of the agricultural industry make it inherently hazardous. The structural vulnerability of U.S. farmworkers is a distinctly *man-made* phenomenon. A legal phenomenon some scholars refer to as “farmworker exceptionalism” (Luna 1998) has produced long-standing gaps in labor protection laws for agricultural workers. When the National Labor Relations Act was first passed in 1935, it included a clause that excluded agricultural and domestic workers from the protections granted to other workers, a measure which some scholars argue was based on the desire to protect racially-based plantation production systems in the southern United States (Perea 2011). Many of these gaps continue to this day, and the legal protections that do exist are poorly enforced, in part due to the strength of

the agricultural industry lobby. As a result, farmworkers are poorly protected from wage and hour violations, often do not have collective bargaining rights, and frequently work in conditions that violate worker health and safety standards (Luna 1998). A number of scholars have examined the working conditions, migration patterns, social networks, and health disparities of farmworker populations (Holmes 2013; Schmalzbauer 2015; Balderrama and Molina 2006; Duke 2011; Scheder 1988; Smith-Nonini 2013).

Transnational Families

A second body of literature relevant to this dissertation is the interdisciplinary scholarly work examining the impact of transnational migration on kinship forms – addressed most directly in the literature on transnational families. Based on the central tenets of theories of migrant transnationalism, that “physical absence is compatible with social presence and participation” (Carling et al. 2012: 192) literature concerned with transnational families broadly addresses “how the parent-child relationship is practiced and experienced within the constraints of physical separation” driven by migration. As such, it examines the common patterns and distinct experiences of “transnational parenthood” (Carling et al. 2012), including “transnational motherhood” (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997) and, more recently, “transnational fatherhood” (Dreby 2006; Parreñas 2008; Schmalzbauer 2015) as well as “transnational childhood” (Orellana et al. 2001), all of which are understood to occur when a parent or child leaves her/his family, usually to engage in international labor migration.

This body of research emerged from feminist critiques of migration studies denouncing the overwhelming focus on men’s experiences as labor migrants. The concept of transnational motherhood was first elaborated by Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997) in reference to situations in which “Latina immigrant women... work and reside in the United States while their

children remain in their countries of origin” (1997:308). Their analysis, which focuses on the experiences of Latina immigrant women domestic workers in Los Angeles, suggests that transnational motherhood is an “alternative construction... of motherhood,” in which transnational mothers “are blazing new terrain, spanning national borders, and improvising strategies for mothering” (1997:309).

In conjunction with the shift in focus from “men in migration” and “women in migration” to “gender in migration” (Donato et al. 2006), literature examining the phenomena of transnational fatherhood emerged. Modeled after earlier work on transnational motherhood, “transnational fatherhood” describes family situations where men are “fathering from a distance,” and is typically used to refer to situations where fathers have migrated and left their children behind in order to pursue economic opportunities abroad. Many scholars writing on transnational fatherhood have focused on the extent to which different configurations of parental migration challenge or reaffirm traditional gender roles (Dreby 2006; Parreñas 2008). Dreby (2006), for instance, finds that mothers and fathers have fundamentally distinct (and unequal) experiences as transnational parents in the context of U.S.-Mexico migration. According to Dreby (2006), these differences are based in the rigidly-defined roles prescribed for men and women (and therefore, mothers and fathers) according to traditional Mexican gender ideology. Similarly, Parreñas (2008) finds that women’s migration challenges the gendered division of labor, whereas men’s migration “abides by gender-ideological norms such as male breadwinning” (2008:1057). When Filipino men migrate for work, Parreñas suggests, they are less able to maintain emotional intimacy with their families than women are as migrant mothers due to gendered norms of parenting behavior. This refusal to “adjust their performance of

fathering to accommodate the needs created by distance” (2008:1057) causes what Parreñas and her informants refer to as a “gap” in familial intimacy between fathers and children.

Since these earlier works, numerous scholars have engaged in in-depth ethnographic scholarship investigating a number of aspects about transnational family experiences, including transnational care arrangements (Carling et al. 2012; Schmalzbauer 2004), the impact of national legislation on transnational family separation and reunification (Dreby 2010, Menjívar et al. 2016) class dimensions in transnational parenting practices (Carling et al. 2012; Menjívar et al. 2016; Schmalzbauer 2008), the transnational parenting experiences of migrants in particular labor niches (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Parreñas 2001, 2005, 2008; Shmalzbauer 2015; Pribilsky 2007), transnational childhoods (Orellana et al. 2001) and the role of information technology and social media in transnational family communication (Madianou and Miller 2014, Wilding 2006) in a variety of transnational contexts.

Im/migrant II/legality

In the context of migration studies, “illegality” is typically used to refer to a particular political and social positioning in which migrants are constructed as residing in a country “without permission”. Despite popular representations, illegality is a socially constructed status generated by domestic policies which demarcate certain migrants as “legal” and others as “illegal,” rather than a naturally existing characteristic. “Illegal” populations are produced by the collision of two contradicting trends in global economics and national immigration policy regimes. Despite the global economic trend toward increasing trade liberalization, the almost unfettered flow of capital, commodities, and financial transactions, states continue to restrict, encumber, and manipulate the movements of *people* through restrictive im/migration policies. In other words, the overwhelming trend has been the increased restriction of the movement of people, even as economic flows are increasingly deregulated. Policies ostensibly intended to

“protect” the “imagined community” (Anderson 2006) of a nation’s citizens from the myriad threats presumably posed by the arrival and continued presence of “foreign” people, whether they be “forced” or “economic” migrants, proliferate in a number of global contexts (Chavez 2013). In other words, both “illegal” and “legal” migrations are produced by the collision of global migrant flows with state-based systems for regulating entry and exit into/out of the nation (Martinez 2009). In this dissertation, I use the term “il/legality” to refer to the ways in which these national policy structures create both categories of “illegal” migrants, as well as myriad categories of “legal” migrants.⁵

Illegal status can be generated through a variety of pathways. In 2005 in the U.S., for instance, between 25% and 40% of unauthorized migrants were “visa over-stayers,” having violated the terms of a visa. In other words, a significant proportion of the undocumented population in the U.S. entered legally, despite the overwhelming public and political focus on clandestine border crossers, otherwise known as “EWI’s” (based on their having entered without inspection) (Passell 2006). Since illegality fluctuates with changes to national and international legal regimes, the legal status of individual migrants must be considered as a potentially fluid, rather than static, state – one which a migrant may attempt to impact through his or her own actions over the course of a life time (Willen 2007, De Genova 2004).

Anthropologists and sociologists have made important contributions in advancing our understanding of the social construction and lived experience of migrant illegality (Willen 2007, De Genova 2004, Bacon 2008). This research suggests that migrants may have a variety of responses to being designated as “illegal.” In *Legalizing Moves*, Bibler-Coutin (2003) describes the legal and extra-legal processes through which undocumented Salvadoran migrants worked to

⁵ Temporary Protected Status, DACA, H-2A, and “Legal Permanent Resident” are a few such legal statuses in the U.S.

gain legal (and “semi-legal”) status in the United States. Salvadorans, who were ineligible for the blanket amnesty-style relief offered to Nicaraguans through the Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act (NACARA), had to devise other strategies to legitimize their presence in the U.S. Salvadorans submitted applications for IRCA amnesty provisions and political asylum, in some cases doing so despite knowing they were ineligible, as a way to ‘buy time’ in the United States. They also redefined the meaning of Temporary Protected Status and temporary work authorizations by asserting these permits as evidence of their legitimate presence (despite the fact that they had no legal pathway to permanent residency or citizenship through these avenues). Thus, despite their exclusion from “fully legal” status, Salvadoran migrants found ways to portray themselves as belonging in the United States.

Chauvin and Garcés-Mascreñas (2014) suggest that “illegal” immigrants in Europe engage in similar practices in their attempts to become “less illegal” (2014: 426), as they prepare for future opportunities to legalize their status. For instance, undocumented migrants intentionally avoid committing crimes, pay taxes judiciously, construct and maintain relationships with employers (for potential employment-based legalization), and work to keep “the same constructed identity over time so as to build a consistent [paper] trail for legalization” (2014: 426). In other cases, this may mean constructing multiple personal histories as way to diversify their opportunities for legalization. For instance, Chauvin and Garcés-Mascreñas describe a French study in which “a migrant constructed two different administrative identities with two separate paper trails based on hopes of either getting refugee status or benefiting from employment-based legalization programs” (2014: 428).

Some research suggests that migrants may actually opt to migrate illegally, due to economic structures that yield higher wages and/or greater flexibility for undocumented workers,

and restrictive immigration policies which limit (particularly poor, working class) migrants' alternatives. In the case of the U.S, for instance, federal-level wage control mechanisms regulate the wages of "legal" guestworkers contracted through the H2-A program, meaning that in some cases H2-A wages may be lower than unregulated wages offered to undocumented migrant workers (Schmalzbauer 2015). On the other hand, migrants may be pushed to sacrifice the higher wages associated with illegality in order to fulfill other strategic goals. In her study with temporary H-2A workers in Montana, for example, Schmalzbauer (2015) finds that H-2A workers chose to migrate through the more restrictive, lower-paid guestworker program, rather than as undocumented workers, as a way to guarantee their safe return to their families. As such, "choosing their labour status is a strategic balancing act between their duty to provide and their desire to be with their families" (2015: 218).

Other research suggests that migrants may manipulate their residency patterns to get around legal immigration restrictions. In a study amongst Danish citizens married to "unpermitted" foreigners, for example, Rytter (2011) finds that couples opt to reside across the border in Sweden. However, they take advantage of the freedom of transnational movement allowed in the European Union, and continue to work and engage socially in Denmark. In each case, migrants make complex decisions about what strategies to deploy to achieve material (economic) and immaterial (family or community) goals in light of the local conditions they encounter.

Contributions

This dissertation builds on these bodies of literature, and fills several important gaps. First, much recent research regarding labor migration has focused on the structural vulnerabilities of migrants in precarious work situations. This important work provides much

needed context, and helps to explain why precarious labor migration persists generation after generation. However, there has been relatively little focus on the micro-level strategies migrants use to “make ends meet” in difficult circumstances. In this dissertation, I examine two key questions that address this gap: 1) What are the factors that create the opportunity for farmworkers (and other marginalized populations) to exercise agency and work toward improved wellbeing? 2) Is it possible for marginal migrant laborers to escape the intergenerational cycle of precarity, and what are the conditions that would make this feasible? I also address a more specific gap that is a symptom of this focus on macro-level structural vulnerability: a lack of research into the complexity of migrants’ relationships with employers.

Second, while we now know quite a bit about the impact of illegality on multiple dimensions of migrant lives, and the ways in which illegality can impact migrant subjectivities, the experience of *legality* has drawn less attention. Research that has been done in this area focuses primarily on temporary non-immigrant statuses, including Temporary Protected Status or “TPS” (Coutin 2003) and, more recently, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (“DACA”) (Gonzales et. al 2014) in the U.S.⁶. This dissertation examines the experience of legality in the lives of legal permanent residents, whose semi-permanent status enables them to eventually seek U.S. citizenship. It answers several important questions, including: What is the social meaning of legal permanent resident status in the lives of migrant laborers and their families? How does legal status impact migrant identity and subjectivity? What is its material impact? Under what circumstances do migrants opt to utilize the “pathway” to citizenship by becoming naturalized citizens? Furthermore, I suggest that these questions are particularly important in the case of migration by poor and working class Mexicans, who have been virtually excluded from most

⁶ Gomberg-Munoz’s recent book, *Becoming Legal* (2016), is a notable exception.

legal immigration opportunities. How, we must ask, does legal status intersect with particular forms of class subjectivity in transnational context? Finally, given the current political climate, does a “pathway to citizenship,” the rallying cry of many pro-immigrant activists, really eliminate migrants’ economic and legal vulnerabilities?

Methods: Ethnography across borders

While much of the Rio Seco network-specific data I draw on in this dissertation comes from my more recent research, carried out from 2012 to the present, my general knowledge about the experiences of farmworkers in Connecticut is informed by a much longer, almost eight-year-long history of engagement. I have been working with Connecticut’s migrant farmworker population in research and volunteer capacities since the summer of 2009, when I first worked as a volunteer medical interpreter at the weekly mobile Migrant Farmworker Clinic run by the University of Connecticut Area Health Education Center.⁷

During that summer, I also carried out semi-structured interviews with 18 migrant farmworkers I met through my volunteer work, and conducted interviews with three farm management representatives – one from Dempsey Orchards (discussed extensively in this dissertation), one from a Connecticut tobacco farm, and one from a containerized plant farm. I spent a full work day shadowing farmers and workers at a Connecticut tobacco farm, and I interviewed the Department of Labor’s State Monitor Advocate for Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers. The data from these early research experiences served as the basis for my senior undergraduate thesis.

⁷ <http://www.publichealth.uconn.edu/migrant-farm-worker-clinics.html>

Since my first engagement with migrant farmworkers, I have spent countless hours with migrant farmworkers at several farms in central Connecticut. Most workers I have come to know first met me in my capacity as the coordinator of an English program I developed, coordinated, and taught for five summers, although many of them now know me also as an anthropologist, as I conducted an additional 26 interviews with farmworkers on three different farms in Connecticut during my Master's research in 2012⁸. As a life-long resident of Connecticut, I have lived in direct proximity of Connecticut's farmland (and, of course, its farmworkers) for most of my life. I was fortunate enough to be able to pursue my PhD in Connecticut, a mere 30 minutes from one of my field sites. Taken together, my life-long experience as a resident of central Connecticut, and my long-term research and volunteer engagement with the state's farmworkers, have given me a tremendous methodological "leg up," so to speak. When I decided to embark on a multi-sited ethnographic dissertation project encompassing fieldwork in both Connecticut and Rio Seco, I felt confident that it was feasible, despite the well-documented challenges of multi-sited work⁹ (Marcus 1995; Falzon 2016).

⁸ My research has been supported through a number of small grants provided by several sources. My undergraduate research was supported by a Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship provided by the Hamel Center for Undergraduate Research at the University of New Hampshire. My Master's fieldwork in Rio Seco was supported by a Tinker Graduate Field Research Grant (2012), awarded by El Instituto: Institute for Latina/o, Latin American and Caribbean Studies at the University of Connecticut. My dissertation fieldwork in Rio Seco has been supported by two Summer Research Fellowship travel grants awarded by the University of Connecticut Department of Anthropology (2014 and 2015), and a Graduate Research Grant from UConn's El Instituto. I was also fortunate enough to receive generous funding to support the writing of this dissertation, including a Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship from the UConn Graduate School and a Dissertation Writing Fellowship from UConn's Department of Anthropology. The support of each of these institutions has been indispensable as I have pursued this project over the years.

⁹ Multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995) has proven to be particularly useful in scholarly work attempting to understand the transnational lives of migrants in a variety of contexts. An "adaptation" of traditional ethnographic research methods, multi-sited ethnography "quite literally follow[s] connections, associations, and putative relationships" (Marcus 1995, 97) in order to study complex global phenomena. Multi-sited ethnography "moves from its conventional single-site location... to multiple sites of observation and participation that cross-cut dichotomies such as the "local" and the "global," the "lifeworld" and the "system"" (p. 95). As such, it is well-suited to the study of ideas, objects, and people who are in motion.

Although Connecticut's farmworkers are diverse in their national origins, my focus here on Mexican migrant farmworkers is strategic, in that it reflects an understanding of the historical shifts in Connecticut's farm labor work force. Agriculture in the United States currently is dependent upon Mexican workers; approximately 75% of the country's agricultural labor force was born in Mexico (Carroll et al., 2005). This choice also reflects changing demographics in Connecticut.

My engagement with the Rio Seco-Connecticut network in particular began in 2012 when I was carrying out ethnographic research for my Master's thesis on migrant farmworker social networks. After meeting two workers from Rio Seco who were linked into the network, I decided to visit Rio Seco. In total, I made three fieldwork trips to visit the migrants' home town of Rio Seco, Guanajuato in 2012, 2014, and 2015, where I conducted formal interviews with migrants and their families¹⁰. I spent a total of five months in Rio Seco during those three trips, engaging in ethnographic interviewing and participant observation in and around town. I timed my fieldwork trips to Mexico strategically in order to coincide with the time of year when many Rio Secan migrants return home to visit their families and participate in the community's annual "fiestas decembrinas," the nine-day festival period preceding Nochebuena, December 24th, the day when the community celebrates Christmas. The fiestas decembrinas are characterized by nightly masses, community gatherings ("*posadas*") and a variety of live music performances, which culminate in a final concert featuring a "big-name" Mexican band that frequently draws thousands of attendees from all over the states of Guanajuato and Querétaro. Many migrants return to Mexico during this period to participate in the annual festivities, but also to engage in family celebrations. Before, during, and after the Christmas holidays, there is a flurry of

¹⁰ I also made a short visit to Rio Seco in December of 2016, but did not explicitly conduct fieldwork during that time.

weddings, birthdays, quinceañeras, baptisms, communions and other celebrations, as local Rio Secans take advantage of the migrants' homecoming to include them in important family events. During this time, English can be heard in the central plaza, as many families who have relocated more permanently to the U.S. bring their U.S.-born children to visit the community.

During my time in Rio Seco, I immersed myself in local life. For all but five weeks¹¹ of my fieldwork in Rio Seco, I lived in the municipal capital and a nearby rancho, El Mecate, in the homes of two Connecticut migrants and their families, who agreed to take me in. Given the timing of my visits, I was frequently invited to weddings, baptisms, and other celebrations. On the one hand, the explosion of social activity in the mid-late December period facilitated the development of social connections with residents, as people spend a lot of time socializing in public spaces and celebrating family milestones during the holiday season. On the other hand, I am aware that the environment changes significantly when the holiday season ends, as some migrants begin to return to the United States and the town returns to its usual rhythm. In order to balance my ethnographic view of the town, then, I stayed long after the holiday season during my final field trip. I saw for myself the way life 'slows down' significantly in the town in late January and February, after the burst of social energy during the fiestas is expended¹².

Given that my initial research focus was on the role of social networks in facilitating transnational migration, my strategy for recruiting participants consisted primarily of "snowball" or "purposive" sampling (Bernard and Gravlee 2014). Despite my extensive network connections, a few gatekeepers and key informants were essential in helping me arrange

¹¹ During my first (3-week) field trip I stayed in a town about an hour bus ride from Rio Seco; during my last field trip I lived in a private apartment just outside the municipal capital for two weeks.

¹² Even though I stayed until the end of February, most migrants still remained in Rio Seco for the duration of my trip. As such, I was not present during what residents describe as the "slowest," "saddest" time of year – the summer, when the town loses many of its men to transnational migration.

interviews with potential participants. Given the geographic distribution of the population of Rio Seco¹³, my “follow the network” strategy ultimately led me to conduct interviews with residents of just five of the municipality’s 70-some ranchos. The precise reasoning for this becomes clear later on when I discuss the particularities of the local socio-economic landscape in Rio Seco. Rather than a limitation of the study, I suggest that this regional distribution is better understood as a finding – the “Rio Seco-Connecticut” network is limited in its geographic reach; its expansion restricted by a number of social and economic factors.

Furthermore, although I spent the majority of my time in Rio Seco in or near the municipal capital and a few of the surrounding “ranchos,” I was also able to visit a number of surrounding communities, including both those connected to, and disconnected from, the “Rio Seco-Connecticut” network. I made numerous visits to the family homes of migrants who work in Connecticut, as well as those who work in Nebraska, Texas, and California, among other destinations. I attended a government-sponsored “herbolaria” (herbal medicine) class with the wives of a number of transnational migrants, and accompanied Rio Secans on countless social visits in a number of communities. I was given several informal educational tours by the wives of two migrants, who brought me to see local landmarks and to visit with contacts they had in the nearby indigenous communities in and around Los Corrales (discussed below). I conducted a formal interview with a primary school teacher in Los Corrales who is widely considered to be the town’s informal historian, and had several informal conversations with a few key older townsfolk with extensive knowledge about Rio Seco’s history.

Perhaps some of the most important experiences I had in terms of understanding the complexity of the local context were four trips I took in 2016 to visit rural communities located

¹³ See Chapter 2: Rio Seco, Guanajuato for more discussion of the local landscape

on the extreme margins of the municipality. First I was invited to visit a Connecticut migrant whose family home is located in La Violeta, a rancho of fewer than 20 people a two hour drive up into the mountains (I describe this community in greater detail below). I also accompanied one of my hostesses, the wife of a Connecticut migrant, on outreach work she was doing for the municipal department of education in two other extremely isolated communities, Los Garambuyos (in the plateau region) and El Chical (in the mountains). Each took more than two hours to reach over treacherous roads. In order to reach El Chical, we hiked an hour into the mountains because erosion of the dirt roads made them impassible (insert photo). I also attended a mass in Llano Blanco, a lower-altitude plateau community about an hour's drive from the town center. These visits were instructive, in that they demonstrated both the power and limitations of migrant social networks. The difficulties I encountered in traveling to these communities are indicative of their utter geographic isolation. But I was surprised to find that in each of these three ranchos, I met family members of Connecticut migrants; the mass in Llano Blanco was attended by several Connecticut migrants themselves. These experiences provided invaluable context for understanding the internal heterogeneity of migration networks, and the broader Rio Secan population.

During my first two field trips to Rio Seco in 2012 and 2014, like many ethnographers in the beginning stages of research, I conducted interviews with those who I could access most easily. Unlike many female researchers, however, my first contacts were not established with local women. On the contrary, those who I knew best were the men who engaged in transnational migration, many of whom had also been my students in the English class I taught. But as my research questions matured, I felt it was essential to incorporate the voices of the family members of Connecticut migrants. If I hoped to understand not just the working lives of men, but

also the gendered dynamics of transnational family life and the family-based legalization process, I had to hear from the other half of the equation – women. But how could I facilitate interviews with women, if all of my contacts were men? I felt uncomfortable with the prospect of marching up to a migrant contact's house and asking to speak to his wife – *alone*. Somewhat stumped, I remembered that I had done some interviews in 2015 where wives joined in the conversation, adding contextual information and occasionally their opinions. I hypothesized that interviews with spousal pairs would help me to understand the reasons why families decide whether or not to pursue legalization. Furthermore, interviews with spousal pairs reflects a household-based approach to migration research, which has been asserted by a number of migration scholars as a useful way to consider the linkages between the microeconomic concerns of individual families and the macro-structural forces driving broader patterns of international migration (Kearney 1986; Brettell 2000).

I was concerned that the gendered power dynamics between husband and wife in the household might prove to be a stumbling block. Would women feel free to speak their minds? Would men speak freely and truthfully with their wives listening? In practice, however, I found spousal interviews to be illuminating. Women were remarkably candid in spousal pair interviews. As I discuss later, in some cases women openly expressed their displeasure with and openly critiqued choices their husbands had made. I imagine female interviewees may have perceived me as a more “sympathetic” ear given my identity as a woman.

Another advantage of the spousal pair strategy was the fact that men appeared to be more comfortable being interviewed with their wives present. In general, it seemed that men “loosened up” more quickly during spousal pair interviews compared to individual interviews. This may have been due to a feeling that the stress of being “in the spotlight” was distributed amongst the

two of them. Although some clearly felt comfortable with the “story-telling” style of conversation entailed in ethnographic interviews, others were preoccupied with answering my questions appropriately and providing accurate information, including key dates and precise locations in their migration histories. In spousal pair interviews, men frequently looked to their wives to fill in the specific dates of when they left and returned, and women often interjected these dates using their children’s birth as reference points. In addition to incorporating women’s perspectives through spousal interviews, I also spent much of my informal personal time with women in the community. In the future, I plan to continue to involve women in my research by working with the female contacts I have developed throughout my research to engage women in individual interviews as well.

In all, during the portion of my research specifically dedicated to my dissertation, I completed 40 interviews, of which 22 were conducted with spousal pairs. In three of these interviews, one or more of the couple’s children also participated in the conversation. Importantly, while I focused on spousal pairs as the unit of analysis, I also paid close attention to intergenerational dynamics in extended families. Many of my interviewees are related to each other, through varying degrees of kinship, fictive kinship, and other social ties. In several instances I interviewed members of two generations of a single extended family.

During my Rio Seco fieldwork, I quickly learned that migrants aren’t the only members of the network who visit Rio Seco during the fiestas decembrinas. Aldenboro farmers have a long history, going back over 10 years, of making visits to Rio Seco, a town that is decidedly *not* a typical tourist destination. On my second and third field trips, I was able to interact with and observe the owners of two Aldenboro farms during their annual visits to Mexico, and I spoke

with farmers and workers about these visits on several occasions. These encounters are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

In addition to my fieldwork in Rio Seco, I engaged in participant observation in and around the Aldenboro, Connecticut farming community in order to better understand migrants' working lives. I organized a program to provide English language instruction to Rio Seco workers, conducting 6-8 week sessions of weekly classes during the summers of 2013, 2014, and 2015 which allowed me to develop rapport with workers. As I earned their friendship, the workers invited me to social events, including excursions to the New Haven, Connecticut taco trucks and local Mexican restaurants, as well as informal gatherings held at the workers' housing. This engagement with Rio Secan workers also helped me gain rapport with some of the local farmers, who appreciated the pro-bono services I was offering to their workers. I also conducted informal and formal interviews with one of the local farmers and a white female employee, and observed farmers' workplace and social interactions with workers over the course of five summers (2012-2016). I also made two visits (in 2015 and 2016) to visit with Rio Secans living in California's San Joaquin Valley, so I was able to see the local context of this node of the network (though I did not conduct fieldwork there). In moving in, around, an in-between these layered field sites, and encountering the internal heterogeneity of the Rio Secan migrant community, I was forced to view "the field" as "not simply a geographic place waiting to be entered, but rather a conceptual space whose boundaries are constantly negotiated and constructed by the ethnographer and community members" (Fitzgerald 2006, p. 4).

This transnational, multi-sited strategy yielded a number of important benefits. In addition to helping me to build rapport with the farming and migrant communities, my presence in Rio Seco allowed me to interview migrant workers in a setting where they were able to be

more comfortable and candid. By strategically timing my fieldwork trips and returns, I participated in a wide range of social events, interviewed and interacted with a variety of network actors and community members, and ultimately gained a sophisticated understanding of the transnational lives of Rio Secans. I was able to witness about the daily lives of workers and farmers in Rio Seco and Connecticut, as well as the more emotional periods of departure and arrival experienced by migrants (and their employers) each year.

Chapter Two - Roots and Routes: Tracing the Network in Space and Time

In order to understand Rio Secan migration to Connecticut, we must first consider the broader history of Mexico-U.S. labor migration.¹⁴ For the purposes of this dissertation, I focus on a series of political and economic factors and policy shifts after the mid-1900's which produced the sustained circular migration and permanent settlement of Mexican migrants we see today.

In 1942, the United States and Mexican governments entered into a bilateral agreement known colloquially as the "Bracero Program," which aimed to facilitate the temporary migration of Mexican men in response to war-time labor shortages in the U.S. and rural poverty in Mexico. Mexican officials hoped that the men participating in the program would learn to become more efficient "modern" farmers, which would in turn lead to the modernization and expansion of the country's agricultural industry. The U.S. government, in turn, hoped to take advantage of a flexible group of laborers who could be sent away quickly once war-time shortages ended. Over the 20-year period the program was in operation, more than 4.6 million work contracts were issued, primarily to men living in Mexico's "breadbasket" region, where Rio Seco is located (Cohen 2011).

Although the program ended in 1964, U.S. demand for inexpensive labor persisted and massive seasonal migrant flows continued into the 1980's, facilitated by migrants' social networks (Massey 1987). During this period, the widespread influx of Mexican migrants was understood as a potential threat to the country's economic and social well-being, so the U.S. government opted not to officially authorize these migrations. As a result, what were once federally sanctioned migrations became "illegal". In the years following the end of the Bracero Program, many migrants continued to enter the United States, despite their lack of legal

¹⁴ For a detailed consideration of the roots of labor migration between Mexico and the United States, see Overmyer-Velazquez's edited volume, *Beyond la Frontera* (2011).

authorization, drawn by ties to employers established during the Bracero program. Due to the relatively lax border enforcement policy during this time, migrants hoping to cross the border “without authorization” were able to do so relatively easily, and with relatively little risk or financial cost.

This changed, however, after increasing public concern over the so-called “flood” of “dangerous” Mexicans prompted politicians to support more restrictive approaches to border security in the 1980s and 1990s. The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) instituted a series of changes to border enforcement policy, including employer sanctions for the hiring of undocumented workers and the expansion of Border Patrol forces (Durand and Massey 2003). In addition to these restrictive measures, IRCA also provided a one-time “amnesty” for some 3 million qualifying undocumented migrants, 80% of whom were Mexican nationals (Calavita 1992). This measure was intended to address the “illegal migration” problem by essentially documenting the undocumented. IRCA was followed by Operation Gatekeeper in 1994, which facilitated the expansion of physical barriers to border crossing, including the construction of a border fence and the installation of floodlights for improved border surveillance. As these enforcement measures were rolled out, it became increasingly difficult for migrants to cross the border without detection in the urban centers which had previously facilitated most border crossing (Durand and Massey 2003).

Research shows that these policies had several concrete impacts on migrant flows. First, to avoid capture, migrants began to cross in ever more remote destinations, making the process more risky and more costly (De León 2015). The incidence of migrant deaths on the border increased threefold after Operation Gatekeeper in 1994 (Durand and Massey 2003). Second, although Mexican migration patterns had historically consisted of temporary, short-term circular

flows, migrants without authorization began to stay for longer periods of time - sometimes several years- before returning to Mexico. Migrants found that in order to cover the debts they incurred due to the rising cost of border crossing, they had to work for longer periods of time in the U.S. They also limited return migration in order to minimize the risk of bodily harm posed by the hostile physical environment in remote smuggling corridors, and the presence of gangs and drug cartels operating on the border (De León 2015).

Third, while most Mexican migrants before 1986 traveled primarily to “traditional destinations” (established labor markets in California, Texas, and Illinois), increasingly restrictive immigration enforcement policies in the 80’s and 90’s pushed many migrants to seek out new destinations. These shifts were driven primarily by some of IRCA’s unexpected effects. Many employers hiring large numbers of undocumented workers found themselves burdened by the requirement that they process I-9 forms for every employee, a provision instated under IRCA. As a result, employers transferred these administrative costs to their workers by lowering wages. Employers also began to use labor brokers to hire workers indirectly in order to protect themselves from the potential penalties they could face for hiring undocumented workers under IRCA. This shift also contributed to the erosion of wages for both undocumented and authorized workers. Declining wages, coupled with increasing anti-immigrant hysteria, led growing numbers of migrants – particularly those who achieved legal status under IRCA – to seek better conditions in other states, particularly the Northeast and Southeast U.S. (Durand and Massey 2003).

Meanwhile, the social and economic factors driving emigration from rural Mexico persisted. Although the Mexican economy had rapidly expanded in the 1960’s and early 1970’s in a boom driven by international trade income, the international recession and plummeting price

of oil in the early 1980's devastated the country (Martinez 2011). At the local level, land reforms had failed to produce economic prosperity in rural areas, and economic stagnation combined with a growing population produced a labor surplus. These challenging economic circumstances, combined with the existence of extensive social networks linking Mexican communities to U.S. employers, made migration for work seem like an irresistible opportunity for many men (and, to a lesser extent, women) struggling to provide for their families.

The Roots of Migration from Rio Seco

The story of migration from Rio Seco fits neatly within this broader timeline. As far as most current residents can remember, the first migrants from Rio Seco traveled to the United States in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s as participants in the Bracero Program. Like many Braceros, Rio Secan contract workers continued to migrate to the United States to work with their former employers, and many eventually invited their brothers, sons, nephews, and other male family members to work with them in California – this time without authorization. Although most Rio Secan Braceros have now passed away, I interviewed one man who participated in the program during its final years, and many of the men I interviewed were the sons or grandsons of former Braceros who initially migrated with to California in the early '80s to work in the tree fruit industry of the San Joaquin Valley, where Rio Secans had established robust network connections.

As fortune would have it, a “cohort” of Rio Seco men were eligible for legalization through the Special Agricultural Workers provision (SAW) of the IRCA in 1986, and gained “legal permanent resident” status. This “amnesty” legalized the transnational, itinerant way of life of many Rio Secans, permitting them to engage in seasonal migration between Mexico and

the U.S. Thus, these men ultimately became “legal permanent *migrants*, ” rather than permanent *residents*, as the legal title of their status suggests.

In addition to this cohort of men who were able to legalize, there are significant numbers of Rio Secan men and women who continue to engage in undocumented migration, and others who have acquired other kinds of legal permissions, including temporary work visas through the H2-A and H2-B programs¹⁵. “Pioneer migrants” (Massey et al. 1987) have been crucial to each stage in the evolving history of Rio Secan transnational migration. Many Rio Secan former Braceros, who had been recruited to work primarily in California’s Central Valley, maintained their ties to local labor recruiters (referred to as “mayordomos”) after the program ended and used these connections to recruit the next generation of Rio Secan farmworkers. A few enterprising Rio Secans mobilized their social and economic capital to become mayordomos themselves, serving as middle-men between workers and farmers.

After the IRCA legalization, Rio Secans who had been successful with their applications began to consider other possibilities beyond the seasonal migration between Rio Seco and California that had become their way of life. A small number decided to settle down in the United States, submitted applications to legalize their spouses and children, and rented homes in the Central Valley. A few of these families and their descendants still live there, within about a 20-minute radius of each other. Like many other Mexican migrants during this period, others decided to leave California to seek opportunities elsewhere. Rio Secans established employment connections in the construction industry in San Antonio, Texas and the meatpacking and

¹⁵ These differences in legal status are partly due to the historical pattern of underdevelopment found in different areas of Rio Seco. For instance, during the earliest stages of Rio Secan migration to the U.S., Rio Secans living in the most remote areas (see below description of Rio Seco local context) had little access to financial resources, and lacked access to the migration networks present in town. As a result, would-be migrants from these areas were delayed significantly compared to their counterparts in the cabecera.

landscaping industries in Omaha, Nebraska. In each of these locations, there are small numbers of Rio Secans who have established (semi-)permanent residences, as well as men and women who continue to engage in seasonal migration.

Today, the U.S. destination which draws the largest number of Rio Secans is Connecticut. The story of how this node of the network got established has become somewhat of an “origin myth” for Rio Secan migrants, with a few variations and contradictory versions. The version I describe here is the one most Rio Secans tell when asked. A man named Emanuel appears to have been the first migrant to become established in central Connecticut. Having found work for himself in the local agricultural industry in a town I’ll call “Walchester,” he sent for a few close relatives and friends to join him. Upon their arrival, this first group of Rio Secans found themselves in dire conditions. As Beto, an early Connecticut arrival recounted,

I was in the San Joaquin valley for ten years, in the state of California. Then from there, I got tired of the work because every day it was the same. Every day it was the same... Well I got tired of it because every day we had to use a ladder. Every day, a ten-foot ladder. Ten feet. And climb up into the tree. So then I decided to change. My friends came by and told me, “Let’s go to Connecticut!” I said “And what? What am I going to do there?” “No, well, we’re going to go look for work.” I said “Ok! I’ll go. I’ll go with you guys.” And that was in... 95. But I had some problems with my papers so I didn’t go that year. I waited and I told my friend that was taking me, I said, “You know what? I can’t go with you now. Because I have a few small problems. But the next year I will go.” And how lucky! (*Y que bueno*) ... that I stayed a year longer... because... when they arrived over there, which was in... in the year of 95, that they arrived there... 94 or 95? They didn’t have anywhere to stay (*No tenian a donde llegar*)... Upon arriving to Connecticut... they slept in their cars, in a few vans that they had with them, that’s where they stayed. I don’t know for how long... Until they found an apartment to live in. That’s how they got situated (*Fue como ellos se acomodaron*). And the next year, I arrived over there.

When the men first arrived, they worked in agriculture in the town of Walchester. Soon after, Emanuel brought the men to Aldenboro, to work at Dempsey Orchards, a small family-owned farm that produces a variety of tree fruits, berries, and row crops, and also produces and sells

secondary products, including jams and pies. Following California's predominant model of managing farm labor, Emanuel attempted to set himself up as a mayordomo, by suggesting that Dempsey hire the men as members of his crew, allowing him to charge a fee for the service. Managers at Dempsey Orchards, however, found no need for such a service given the small size of their operation, and hired the men directly.

During the first few years that the Rio Secan men started to come to work at Dempsey Orchards, they worked alongside several Jamaican H2-A workers. But the farm quickly shifted its entire farm labor workforce to men from Rio Seco in order to overcome the costs associated with the H-2A program.¹⁶ Dempsey encouraged the Rio Secan workers to recruit more workers, and as the farm expanded, so did the population of Rio Secans employed seasonally in Aldenboro. Reflecting on his early years in Aldenboro, Beto explained:

And that's how we started to arrive... then we started... to look for work for more people, and yes, we started to bring people from Rio Seco. For this reason, this... area over there, of Aldenboro, and the surrounding areas, there are a lot of people from here, from Rio Seco, because we brought a big group. And this group brought others. So over there now there are people... *lots* of people from this area, Rio Seco.

Today, Rio Secan migrants continue to come to Connecticut, recruited through their interlinked social networks and attracted by what are perceived to be better working conditions and wages compared to other states. Through network connections to other area businesses, Rio Secans have become the predominant labor force in the local agricultural and landscaping industries.

Most of the Rio Secans employed in Connecticut are men who engage in annual seasonal migration between the U.S. and Mexico while their wives and children stay in Rio Seco. There is, however, a growing population of seasonally employed women as well as permanently

¹⁶ According to farm management, the H-2A program was incompatible with the farm's small size and diverse production processes.

immigrated spousal pairs and children who have come to call Connecticut home. Those whose financial resources and legal status enable them to travel relatively freely across the international border typically return to Mexico during New England's coldest winter months (which is also the holiday season in Rio Seco). Like many undocumented Mexicans, Rio Secans without legal status typically stay in the U.S. for several years before returning to Mexico in order to minimize the risks and costs associated with the increasingly dangerous border. Although Rio Secans of many ages migrate to the United States, this dissertation focuses primarily on the cohort of men who were legalized under IRCA in the late 1980's and their family members, most of whom are now in their 50's.

Rio Seco, Guanajuato: The Sending Community Context

Rio Seco is a rural municipality located in the northeastern corner of the state of Guanajuato, Mexico, populated by approximately 18,000 inhabitants as of the 2010 Mexican census. Geographically, the whole municipality covers approximately 150 square miles. The vast majority of the municipality is covered by mountainous terrain, but the center and surrounding ranchos are located in a large river valley at around 1700 meters (5580 feet) in altitude. The municipality is made up of more than 70 communities, called "ranchos" by locals. The commercial and political center of the town is also called "Rio Seco," and it is referred to in local parlance as the "cabecera." The cabecera has by far the largest population in comparison to the other ranchos, with just over 2000 people, and the vast majority of the municipality's population lives in the areas immediately surrounding the cabecera. There are a number of ranchos (with populations ranging from just a few people to a few hundred people) located far into the

mountains, many of which lack paved roads connecting them to the rest of the municipality¹⁷.

The main two-lane highway that runs through Rio Seco and connects it to nearby towns was constructed about 30 years ago, a development which opened up Rio Seco to greater cultural influence from outside the municipality and increased out-migration.

On the whole, Rio Seco remains severely underdeveloped. As of 2005, just over 70% of children between the ages of 6 and 14 could read and write, a percentage that made it one of the worst performing municipalities in Guanajuato. About 65% of houses in the municipality had running water, a little over half had an adequate toilet system, and only about 40% of houses had proper waste water drainage. On all of these figures Rio Seco performs significantly below the state and national averages.

Although the municipality is categorized as “rural,” and municipal-wide statistics indicate underdevelopment, Rio Secan lifestyles vary significantly depending upon where a person lives in the municipality¹⁸. The cabecera, for instance, is best described to the outside observer as a bustling small town. Despite being ranked by the Mexican government as a zone of “medium” marginalization, its 2000-some residents enjoy fairly high quality public services, including reliable electricity, consistent running water, and efficient sewer systems. The cabecera

¹⁷ This information comes from reports and publicly accessible data published online by several Mexican government institutions, including SEDESOL, Mexico’s Secretaría de Desarrollo Social (Secretariat of Social Development). SEDESOL’s website can be found here - <http://www.gob.mx/sedesol>, but the specific source has not been included here so as not to reveal the actual name of the municipality.

¹⁸ When this cohort of men first left Rio Seco in the 1980’s, the local socio-economic context was radically different. Things changed particularly quickly since the construction of the main highway through town which connects it to two nearby municipalities and San Rafael – which happened only around 30 years ago, in the early 1990’s. Prior to the construction of the highway, Rio Secan communities were connected only by dirt roads and footpaths. Most homes had no electricity, plumbing, or running water at that time. The family members of Bracero migrants had to travel half way to San Rafael in order to speak by phone with their loved ones in the United States. Eventually, the local government offices in the cabecera installed a single telephone line, which made communications abroad considerably easier (but still very costly). Government-sponsored infrastructure development was quite limited until relatively recently; I have met numerous Rio Secans who speak fondly of the various development projects, including roads and bridges, which they planned and carried out with migrant remittances and cooperation from community members.

is populated primarily by prominent Rio Secan families with old money, merchants who have been successful in establishing businesses, and the most financially successful migrant families. Given the high level of economic and infrastructural development, residents of the cabecera and the immediate vicinity can live relatively “cosmopolitan” lifestyles. Life for town center residents is simple compared to urban and international standards— there are no movie theaters, malls, or dance clubs, but they have access to a variety of foods, resources, technologies, and media, and may be connected to the internet on an hourly basis if they so desire. Cell phone and internet service can be inconsistent, but are significantly more reliable in the cabecera than they are in the surrounding communities. There are many “brick and mortar” shops and service providers in town, which are typically small operations run out of store-fronts installed in family homes that provide specialized products and services. There are stores dedicated specifically (and respectively) to selling groceries, snacks, dairy products, fruits and vegetables, raw chicken, cooked chicken, raw beef and sausage, tortillas, bread, cakes, clothing, underwear, shoes, paper products and gifts, bootleg movies and music, plastic products, appliances and furniture, cell phones and air time, alcohol, hardware and building products, wood for construction, and glass for windows. In terms of the local service industry, there are small businesses dedicated to hair cutting, funeral services, bicycle repair, car washes, auto repair, internet and computer services, floral services, notary services, and dental and medical consultations, among others. There are also a number of small restaurants, which also typically specialize in a particular kind of cuisine – including most commonly carnitas (pork meat fried in lard served with tortillas and pickled chiles), pizza, and American-style food (i.e., hamburgers). In addition to these brick and mortar stores, there are also many individuals who have taken to selling products on the street in stationary or mobile vendor stands, referred to as “puestos.” At these puestos, one can purchase

tamales and atole (a hot beverage thickened with corn flour), elotes (grilled street corn topped with lime, mayonnaise, shredded cheese, and chile powder), and gorditas (flattened balls of corn masa fried and filled with beans and sautéed meats, vegetables, and cheese and topped with fresh salsa). Every Sunday, there is a weekly market in the center of the cabecera where many of these local businesses sell their products. Sunday markets draw large numbers of people from the surrounding ranchos who take advantage of the lower prices to purchase their weekly groceries and enjoy the time to socialize with friends and relatives. Families walk, take the local taxi service, or ride the “flecha,” the local bus service, to get to- and from- the markets.

“Life in the rancho”

Although the populations are often quite small, and there are no obvious geographic or political borders between them, Rio Secans understand each of the official communities in the municipality to be distinct social units. In some cases, residents are capable of naming all of the main families in their rancho by surname; in other cases, residents might be able to name each individual member of the community, depending on population size. Aside from the cabecera, there are only two ranchos with more than 1000 inhabitants. Eight have between 500 and 1000 inhabitants, sixteen have between 200 and 499 inhabitants, and the rest of the ranchos are populated by fewer than 200 people. More than 30 officially recognized ranchos have fewer than 50 people. Many of these ranchos are economically and socially integrated with each other, so the people living there experience themselves as being amongst a larger population. But many of the least populated communities are located in the mountains or remote plateau regions, and are quite isolated – some communities consist of members of only one or two families.

To speak of the Rio Secan “community,” in the anthropological sense, can mean very different things depending on the context. For example, locally, “going to Rio Seco” means

going to the cabecera, and residents consistently use the individual names of ranchos to discuss locations. Furthermore, economic and social ties to the cabecera vary dramatically from rancho to rancho, roughly based on geographic proximity. Infrastructural development is also quite uneven throughout the municipality; it is possible to conceive of the level of development in and around Rio Seco in terms of a series of concentric ovals (Figure 1), in which those closest to the center, and those directly located on the highway, have more and better services and infrastructure, while those farther away from the center and the main road tend to be underdeveloped.

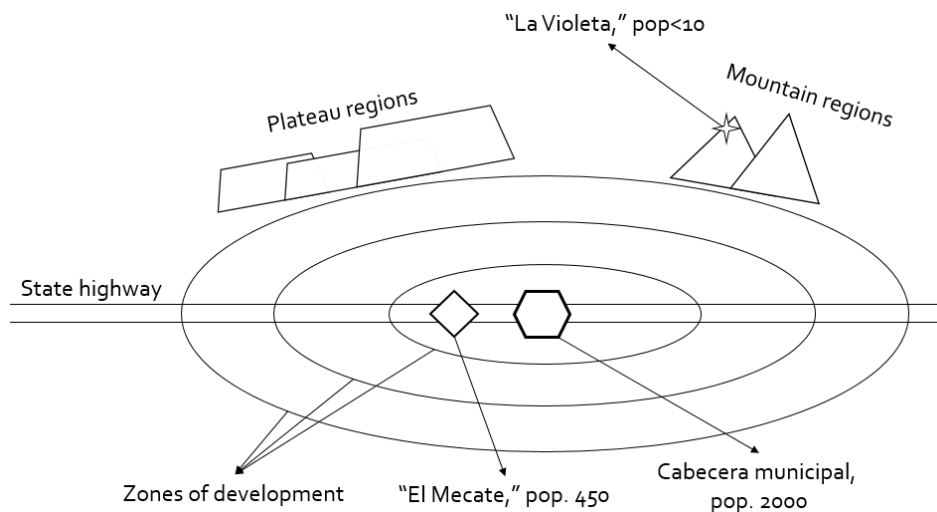


Figure 1

Indeed, life “in the rancho” is quite different from life in the cabecera municipal, even in those ranchos which are geographically quite close to the center. “El Mecate,” for example, is a valley community of around 450 people, located a 2-3 minute drive (or 20-30 minute walk) from the cabecera. There are two small grocery stores, with limited provisions, a small chapel, and two internet cafes. El Mecate is categorized as an area of “high marginalization;” close to 9% of the rancho’s inhabited homes lack running water, 43% lack drainage, 8% have no electricity, and 31% have no toilet. The poorest residents of El Mecate rarely leave the community, despite

being so close to the cabecera municipal. Most households have at least a small garden, and some own or work agricultural land in the river valley below, planting and harvesting seasonal crops (typically peanuts). Those with resources, on the other hand, may go to the cabecera on a daily basis, and as far as San Rafael or Querétaro on a weekly basis. A number of residents in El Mecate work in San Rafael's factories, and given their location on the main highway running through the municipality, they are able to take advantage of the bus service provided by their employers. Children from El Mecate attend school in the cabecera, though the next rancho over has its own small primary school due to its slightly larger population. El Mecate also has its own "cancha," a concrete basketball court with stair-style stadium seating and a tall metal roof. Small-scale events are typically held at the local chapel and the cancha, as opposed to in the center of town, although based on personal preference, residents of El Mecate may also hold weddings or other events in the cabecera. Given its prime location near the center, El Mecate was one of the first ranchos to send migrants to the United States during the Bracero Program, and many families in El Mecate continue to have transnational migrant connections.

Ranchos on the extreme periphery of Rio Seco face different realities. La Violeta, for example, is a community comprised of under 20 people, located high up in the mountains, at just over 2200 meters (7200 feet) in altitude. It takes close to two hours by road to get to the entrance to La Violeta from the cabecera, due to the condition of the roads. In the immediate vicinity of the cabecera, the roads are paved with asphalt, but they degrade significantly the further away from Rio Seco one drives. Cobblestone paving has been installed in some areas, often by local residents who are given construction materials by the municipality, but there are numerous places where the cobblestone abruptly stops and gives way to dirt roads that resemble clay dust. Particularly in these areas, a four-wheel drive or otherwise high clearance truck is required to

navigate the route, as the dirt roads in the higher altitudes are often eroded by rains, leaving deep, almost impassable ruts. Residents of these remote areas survive by engaging in subsistence farming and rearing herd animals. Luis, a Connecticut migrant that lives in this community, hikes for hours through the mountainous forest every day to graze a herd of cattle he purchased with his remittances. Every other year, residents of these high altitude areas collect pine nuts for sale in the surrounding areas and the towns below. Infrastructure and public services are extremely limited in these remote communities. In La Violeta, for example, six of the seven inhabited households have no running water, none have sewer drainage, two lack electricity, and five lack toilets. Internet service is completely unavailable in this area, and cell service is extremely limited. Luis, for example, explained to me that he knows of one particular spot where he can stand in order to receive service on his cell phone – it is a ten-minute walk from his home. People living in ranchos like La Violeta rarely travel down into the valley to the town center. Luis, given his income from transnational migration, has a truck and as such can travel once a week to Rio Seco proper, but spends most of his time in his family's homestead in La Violeta. While some of these remote ranchos are relatively close to one another “as the bird flies,” very few of them are connected by roads, and residents wishing to go from one rancho to the other are better off hiking than driving to do so. There are extremely high rates of out-migration from these rural areas, both to nearby cities (most of Luis' siblings, for example, have moved permanently to Querétaro), as well as to the United States.

In-between the extremes of the central valley ranchos and the isolated sierra communities, there are many other ranchos with distinct ways of life which vary dramatically depending on geographic location, type of terrain, level of infrastructural development, and population size. Despite this diversity, virtually all of the ranchos in Rio Seco are classified by

the Mexican government as either “high” or “very high marginalization” due to their underdevelopment. This underdevelopment is one of many factors driving out-migration, both domestically and internationally.

Ties outside of Rio Seco

Despite the extensive economic activity in the cabecera, and surrounding communities, there are a few things which Rio Secans must seek from outside the town center. The nearest gas stations are 30 minutes away from the town center, in two bordering municipalities. Enterprising Rio Secans have established numerous informal gas distribution businesses along the highway that runs through the town – but this practice is illegal, and prices are higher than those offered by official Pemex gas stations. There are a number of services and products that are unavailable or more costly in Rio Seco in comparison to the nearest small urban center, San Rafael; many Rio Secans take the 45-minute trip on a weekly basis to purchase cheaper food and other products at the weekly markets. San Rafael also provides a source of formal employment for Rio Secans; a number of electronics and other factories located in and around the city recruit workers from Rio Seco, and provide daily transportation to- and from- Rio Seco for employees. Rio Secans’ geographic imaginary also incorporates the city of Querétaro, which is the closest large city to the town¹⁹. Of the Rio Secan children who are able to attend university, many do so in one of the many quality institutions of higher education in Querétaro. Querétaro has also drawn many semi-permanent migrants from Rio Seco – a number of families have at least one family member that works there during the week and returns to Rio Seco periodically for holidays or on the weekends (the 1.5-hour drive makes it inconvenient for a daily commute). The family of one of

¹⁹ It takes almost twice as long to reach the state capital, Guanajuato City, in part because the route takes travelers through winding roads over mountainous terrain.

the more economically successful migrants, for example, owns two small apartments in the city outskirts, one of which provides rental income, and the other of which housed their daughter while she attended university. These economic connections have bred strong social linkages between Rio Seco, San Rafael, and Querétaro.

Although Rio Seco is the seat of the municipal government and the center of economic activity, its cultural dominance is challenged by a nearby community, Los Corrales. Though technically part of the Rio Seco municipality, Los Corrales is home to a significant population of people who identify as indigenous Otomí, and has been officially designated by the state of Guanajuato as an indigenous community.²⁰ The local indigenous delegation is headed there, and Rio Secans identify it as a culturally distinct place despite the phenotypic similarities in the majority of the population, a practice that is typical for Mexico (Nutini 1997; Nutini and Isaac 2009). The population of Los Corrales (approximately 700) is much smaller than that of Rio Seco's, but the town's yearly festival in late January rivals Rio Seco's in attendance and vibrancy. Social connections in the valley region of Rio Seco revolve roughly around these two economic and cultural centers.

Rio Secans in Connecticut: Small Farming in the Connecticut River Valley

In the national imaginary, Connecticut is typically not considered one of the U.S.'s main agricultural producers. But the Connecticut River Valley's fertile soil and flat terrain make it highly suitable to agriculture, and the region has a long history of agricultural production. One of

²⁰ Historically Rio Seco was populated by indigenous Otomí-speaking peoples. But while Los Corrales has been a center of Otomí cultural and linguistic revitalization efforts, residents of other ranchos, particularly those from the cabecera, tend to eschew personal connections to indigeneity, despite the fact that Otomi was still fairly widely spoken just one generation back. For example, the octogenarian parents of a few of the IRCA beneficiaries I know "used to speak" Otomí, according to their children. In 2010 there were just over 2,000 Rio Secan residents over the age of five years who reported speaking an indigenous language, making it the state's third largest population of indigenous language speakers (Sociodemographic profile of Rio Seco, produced by SEDESU, 2012).

the state's largest and most well-known agricultural exports is tobacco (Lopez et al. 2010). The long history of tobacco production in the Connecticut River Valley has earned it the nickname, "Tobacco Valley" (Hladky 2008). Connecticut's tobacco farmers specialize in growing shade tobacco, a delicate variety of the crop originally produced in Sumatra and used to wrap fine cigars (Boynton 2007). Although the crop is naturally ill-suited to Connecticut's temperate climate, in 1899, American farmers began to use netting to duplicate Sumatra's tropical climate. By using extensive white nets to encase their fields, farmers can control the temperature and humidity under which the plants grow (Glasser 2005). The leaves are sent to the Dominican Republic to be used as cigar wrappers, or "binders," and must be undamaged and unblemished in order to fetch their full market value. As a result, Connecticut's shade tobacco crop has remained largely unmechanized and highly labor intensive, depending upon a significant influx of seasonal farm laborers during the summer months (Hladky 2008).

Alongside the tobacco industry, farmers of other agricultural products have also persisted in Connecticut. Farms in Connecticut produce a wide range of crops and products, including grains and beans, potatoes, vegetables, berries, orchard fruits, and greenhouse and nursery products, as well as meat and dairy products (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2012).

Rio Secans in Connecticut work primarily in the agricultural and landscaping industries, especially with small, family-owned businesses employing between one and thirty workers²¹. Some of these employers are highly specialized (one farmer exclusively grows tobacco), whereas others are quite diversified, producing a variety of fruits and vegetables. Several Aldenboro farms have farm stands where produce is sold directly to the public, others sell produce at

²¹ There are two larger nurseries which employ small numbers of Rio Secan workers, typically during the winter months. Some central Connecticut Rio Secans who live year-round in Connecticut also work at these larger nurseries.

farmer's markets around the state, others invite the public to engage in "Pick-your-own"-style harvesting, and still others sell primarily to wholesalers.

Rio Secans can be conceptualized as part of a relatively recent trend in the history of Connecticut's agricultural labor supply. In the early 1900's, the manpower necessary to run Connecticut's farms was supplied by local white residents—mainly unemployed women and children. Migrants began to fill this role as early as World War I, when tobacco farmers' primary source of labor came from African American migrants from the South. During and immediately after World War II, the farmworker demography shifted again, as the nation began to recruit Jamaicans and Puerto Ricans in the 1940s through contract and guestworker programs (Glasser 2005; Gabany-Guerrero, 2008). Mexicans and Central Americans are a more recent source of labor for the state.

Today, Connecticut's farm labor force is a multi-ethnic blend of some 7,000-20,000²² Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Jamaicans, and smaller numbers of Central Americans, in large part because of the history of organized labor recruitment (Duke, 2011). While there is no state-level data available for Connecticut, my ethnographic work indicates that the undocumented make up

²² Estimates vary because there is no good source of data to determine how many farmworkers are in Connecticut. This estimated range comes from the UConn Migrant Farmworker Clinics (http://publichealth.uconn.edu/MFWC/MFWClinicBrochure_13.pdf). Determining more detailed information about Connecticut's farmworkers does not seem to be on the CT Department of Labor's agenda, as a 2012 Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Outreach report uses another local NGO's statistic of 7,000 and states, "CTDOL references these estimates because we cannot determine these numbers based on our own resources. Connecticut is not a significant state in regards to MSFW." <http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/progsupt/jobsvrce/msfw-outreach.htm>. While Connecticut certainly does not have as many farmworkers as California, Connecticut's migrant farmworker population is significant in that it sustains the state's agricultural industries. A 2010 study conducted by the University of Connecticut Department of Agriculture and Resource Economics and the Connecticut Center for Economic Research finds that the Connecticut agricultural industry "has a critical, significant impact on the economy of Connecticut in output, jobs, and the quality of life: \$3.5 billion in output, 20,000 jobs, and significant social benefits and ecosystem services" (Lopez et al. 2010: 5). Furthermore, the fact that many of Connecticut's migrant farmworkers are undocumented makes them a particularly vulnerable population which deserves special attention. Much more comprehensive investigation of the size and characteristics of the state's farmworker population is needed.

a significant proportion, if not a majority, of Connecticut's agricultural workers outside of the Rio Seco network. It is estimated that a slight majority (53%) of the nation's farmworkers are undocumented (Carroll et al., 2005)²³.

A proportion of Connecticut's farmworkers also arrive on H-2A visas. The H-2A program was modeled after the Bracero program to facilitate the recruitment of agricultural workers from outside of the U.S. (Calavita 1992). Farmers who want to hire workers through the H-2A program must first prove through a complex labor certification process that they cannot find local labor to fill the needed positions, and that the hiring of foreign workers will not adversely affect local wages. H-2A visas are nonimmigrant visas, and as such, give foreign workers authorization to work in the United States, but only for a specific period of time (less than one year), and only with the employer who petitioned for the visa (Farmworker Justice, 2013). There are small numbers of Rio Secans who are recruited through the H2-A visa program.

The historical shifts in Connecticut's population of agricultural workers reflect the shifting social incorporation and economic prospects of each group. Agricultural jobs have typically been filled by the most marginal members of the labor market – as white women, African Americans, and Puerto Ricans, respectively, have gained leverage in the labor market, each population has shifted out of farmwork and into other arenas of employment– typically those with better working conditions and wages. This pattern is driven by a phenomenon referred to as “agricultural” or “farmworker exceptionalism,” which has produced long-standing gaps in labor protection laws for agricultural workers. When the National Labor Relations Act was first passed in 1935, it included a clause that excluded agricultural and domestic workers from the

²³ This number comes from a 2005 report by the National Agricultural Workers Survey, or NAWs, administered by the U.S. Department of Labor (Carroll et al. 2005). This percentage is a figure estimated from surveys with agricultural workers done between 2001 and 2002. More recent data from the NAWs has only been distributed to the public in “raw” form, and the 2005 report is the most recent available publication on the survey's data.

protections granted to other workers in order to protect racially-based plantation production systems in the southern United States (Perea 2011). Many of these gaps continue to this day, and the legal protections that do exist are poorly enforced, in part due to the strength of the agricultural industry lobby. Farmworkers are poorly protected from wage and hour violations, often do not have collective bargaining rights, and work in conditions that commonly violate worker health and safety standards (Luna 1998).

Despite the historical undesirability of farm work, many Rio Secans (including those with legal status) continue to seek employment in agriculture. On the one hand, this is due to lack of work experience, English language skills, formal education, and network ties outside of agriculture. On the other hand, Rio Secans feel they have been able to minimize some of the main drawbacks of agricultural work by establishing themselves in Connecticut. Connecticut is attractive to Rio Secans in part because their working conditions and wages are markedly better than elsewhere in the country. Rio Secans who work in Connecticut indicate that they are able to save more money in Connecticut in comparison to other destinations, and say that they experience less discrimination in Connecticut than they do in other nodes of the network – notably California and Texas. While there is no state-level data available on the average wages of farmworkers as a whole, wages for H-2A workers in Connecticut are some of the highest in the country. In 2012, the prevailing hourly wage for 53 Connecticut farms was \$10.56. Wages for comparable job descriptions in other states were as low as \$7.25²⁴. Beyond the obvious benefit of Connecticut's higher wages, some Rio Secans have also forged close ties with their

²⁴ This information was collected through a visual examination of H-2A wage statistics provided by the Department of Labor's Foreign Labor Certification Data Center Online Wage Library, accessible at <http://www.flcdatcenter.com/CaseH2a.aspx>. Most 2012 H-2A applications listed a prevailing wage above \$7.25, but a majority were \$2-\$3 below the wages available in Connecticut. Wages for "Agricultural Equipment Operators" and other similar positions tended to be significantly higher, perhaps due to the skill set required to carry out these jobs.

employers, which enable them both to “work better” and to “live better” during their time in Connecticut. In the chapter that follows, I examine these relationships at length to demonstrate the role they have played in shaping Rio Secans’ migration experiences.

Chapter Three - Good Workers and Friendly Farmers: The Moral Economy of Farm Work in Connecticut

On a bitterly cold night in mid-January, I joined Ana Gonzalez and her family as they celebrated Ana's *quinceañera*²⁵ on the outdoor concrete basketball court in Rio Seco. Ana was dressed in a beautiful poofy ball gown, and I watched as she glided across the dance floor gracefully fulfilling her responsibility of greeting guests as they arrived. The room was decorated with balloons and streamers, and several tables were set up on the left side of the space for Ana's closest family and friends to sit. A DJ entertained guests with a light show and a mixed playlist of popular music from the U.S. and Mexico. Seated at the head table with Ana's immediate family were two important guests - Tom and Susan Carpenter, owners of a small farm in central Connecticut. The seasonal employers of Ana and several of her family members, Tom and Susan had been asked to serve as "*padrinos*,"²⁶ or financial sponsors of the event.

Mid-way through the evening, I watched as the Carpenters' contribution was acknowledged during a ceremonial "waltz," a time-honored Mexican party tradition in which the sponsors and the honoree and a partner dance together in pairs in the center of the dance floor. After Ana's parents and several family members were called to the dance floor, the DJ called Tom and Susan to the floor. Despite some initial confusion, Ana and her brother guided Tom and Susan to join them on the dance floor, and the couples swayed to the music awkwardly until the DJ called the names of another couple.

²⁵ A coming-of-age celebration for girls, practiced in many Mexican and Mexican-American communities (Dávalos 1996)

²⁶ "Padrino" is a Spanish word used to refer to a godparent – a Catholic tie of fictive kinship forged through the *compadrazgo* system. In the context of a *quinceañera*, "padrino" has a slightly different meaning. The *padrinos* of a *quinceañera* or other celebration are financial sponsors of a particular aspect of the party. They may pay for the alcoholic beverages, photographer/videographer, or DJ, for instance. A typical *fiesta* of this type in Mexico, therefore, has multiple sets of *padrinos* who make the celebration possible (Nutini and Bell 1980).

The waltz of the *padrinos* is, on the one hand, a form of public recognition and thanks for the financial support contributed by the sponsors. On the other hand, it also functions as a public demonstration of the host family's social ties. It is both a ritual of reciprocity, and a display of social interconnectedness. From the vantage point of the existing scholarly research on farmworkers in the U.S., the notion that farm owners would play such a significant role in a worker's family celebration – and that they would travel all the way to rural Mexico to do so – is extraordinary. Indeed, when I first learned that Connecticut farmers like Tom and Susan were engaging in transnational visits to workers' home town in Mexico, I assumed that they must be doing so for some purely strategic purpose, narrowly guided by a desire to maximize their economic gains. Perhaps, I thought, this was a new (and rather disturbing) form of labor control or recruitment. But as I spent more time with Connecticut farmworkers and their employers, I learned that the story was more complicated. For instance, a farmer once explained to me that a local man had approached him during a visit to Rio Seco, asking if there was work available in Connecticut for the coming season. As he shared this story with me, the farmer laughed and said that he told the man to talk to Polinar, one of his long-time workers. He had no impact over worker recruitment, he said.

By the time I attended the quinceañera described above, it had already become very clear to me that farmers were not visiting Rio Seco in their capacity as “bosses.” Rather, their role during these visits was more akin to that of a diplomat on an international delegation. Through their visits, farmers hope to develop and maintain relationships that cross multiple social, geographic, political, and economic boundaries. This observation led me to understand the network, and the forms of social engagement taking place within it, as a moral economic system linking farm owners and workers. The notion of moral economy has been developed in

anthropology to refer to the ways economic systems may be based on more than just narrow economic factors but also include people's cultural understandings of goodness, fairness, and justice (Götz 2015). In this chapter, I examine the inner-workings of the moral economy of this transnational social network, paying close attention to the way it produces "good workers" and "friendly farmers," who work to maintain harmonious work and personal relationships in order to preserve the mutually beneficial impacts of the network. In the sections that follow, I examine the political economic and industry-specific factors that have made it possible for a moral economy to emerge in farmer-farmworker relationships, before turning to an in-depth examination of the strategies workers and farmers use to maintain these relationships. Ultimately, I conclude that the personal relationships between farmers and workers in the network have resulted in concrete improvements of farmworkers working and living conditions, which in turn have contributed to the overall wellbeing of workers and their families.

Labor relations in U.S. Agriculture and Beyond

The imagined U.S. agrarian lifestyle in which a white male farmer engages in the daily operation of his farm with the help of his wife, children, and a few cherished farm hands, is all but extinct. Since the early 1900s, agricultural businesses have been incentivized to follow (neo)Fordist models predicated around increased efficiency, streamlining, specialization, and the reduction of labor costs through the deployment of mechanical and chemical technologies (Lobao and Meyer 2001; Troughton 2005). Farm businesses have become increasingly consolidated into large-scale agricultural corporations which aim to dominate U.S. and global food production through the vertical integration of supply chains and through contract-based

production²⁷. Today, the vast majority of the U.S. food supply is produced by massive corporate agribusinesses, while small farms account for just a fraction of total production (Lobao and Meyer 2001). In some cases, the owners and upper-level managers of agricultural businesses may never set foot on the land where products are grown and harvested. While significant manual labor is still required, family and community labor networks have been replaced by multi-layered hierarchical networks of labor brokers, also called “crew leaders” and “mayordomos,” who are often responsible for the hiring, paying, evaluation, and dismissal of farmworkers (Balderrama and Molina, others). In such arrangements, farmworkers rarely come to know, and in fact may never even lay eyes on, the owners or upper-level managers of the companies where they work.

The structural factors impeding relationships between farmers and workers are exacerbated by perceived differences in class status, racial/ethnic identity, nationality, legal status, and language. Because farm work is physically exhausting, poorly compensated, and dangerous, low-level agricultural jobs tend to be filled with some of the nation’s poorest, most structurally vulnerable im/migrant workers (Holmes 2013; Duke 2011). The rigid class- and race-based organization of labor, the hazardous nature of the work, low wages, and lax legal protections for (particularly undocumented) farm laborers result in a seemingly endless cycle of marginality (Holmes 2013, Luna 1998, Perea 2011). Some 50% of U.S. farmworkers are undocumented immigrants, and the vast majority are of Mexican or Central American descent (Carroll et al. 2005), with growing populations of workers migrating from indigenous regions of Mexico and Central America (Holmes 2013). Farm owners and operators are almost exclusively

²⁷ In some agricultural industries, like hog farming, farmers sign contract agreements with large corporations who agree to buy a portion or all of the farm’s production of a given commodity. The purchasing corporation, in turn, resells the product, often at significant markup, and/or in a new (more processed) form (Troughton 2005).

U.S.-born whites (USDA 2012). Racial biases and perceived cultural differences can foster inter-group tensions and stereotypes, which in turn exacerbate the hierarchical stratification of farm labor along ethno-racial and gendered lines (Holmes 2013; Duke 2011; Benson 2012). In some U.S. contexts, management roles may be held exclusively by Mexican Americans with U.S. citizenship and white teenagers, who possess relative class, legal status, and racial privilege, while workers occupying marginal legal and ethno-racial positions are rarely promoted to higher levels of management (Holmes 2013).

Given these structural and demographic characteristics, social networks and employer-employee networks in the agricultural industry tend to be highly stratified along class and ethnic lines. Migrant farmworkers typically have stronger horizontal ties –to their peers, co-workers, or co-ethnics, than vertical ties – connections with those of a higher social status (Putnam 2000; Balderrama and Molina 2009). Interpersonal dynamics between farmers and farmworkers can be strained, adversarial, or even violent, as the history of farmworker labor organizing in the U.S. country has shown (Mitchell 2010; Benson 2012).

Though close personal relationships are rarely found in the existing scholarship on labor relations in the agricultural industry, they are the subject of significant discussion in the literature on another immigrant-dominated industry, domestic work. Domestic workers are individuals who are paid to provide a variety of services, including cleaning, cooking, and childcare, typically in the private homes of their employers. The specifics of such work arrangements vary widely, from “live-in” arrangements, where the domestic worker lives in the home of the employer, providing daily services to the family, to arrangements where a number of workers are employed by a company who sends them to work in multiple homes during a given day. Given the low wages and low occupational status associated with domestic work, these jobs tend to be

occupied by (predominantly female) immigrants, many of whom have liminal legal statuses (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001).

Research on domestic work indicates that employees in this industry often develop close personal relationships with their employers due to the workers' presence in the home, and the one-on-one employer-employee structure of much of the industry (Tappert and Dobner 2015). A key question in studies of such relationships is the degree to which they facilitate either the empowerment or the exploitation of workers (Lan 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Tappert and Dobner 2015). For instance, some scholars suggest that close personal relationships between domestic workers and their employers are highly exploitative in nature. According to this argument, although employers may describe domestic workers as being "like family," they are never fully incorporated into kin relations, and this "almost kin" distinction can serve as a tool of manipulation, as some of domestic workers' responsibilities are re-framed as "labors of love." This results in a weakening of the employee's position to negotiate working conditions and wages (Hagan 1998). In other cases, relationships may take less exploitative forms, including "maternalistic patronage" (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001) and "strategic personalism" (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2004; Lan 2003; Bickham-Mendez 1998). According to Hondagneu-Sotelo, maternalistic relationships between domestic workers and employers are characterized by "a unilateral positioning of the employer as a benefactor who receives personal thanks, recognition, and validation of self from the domestic worker" (2001: 172). Personalism, in contrast, is "a bilateral relationship that involves two individuals recognizing each other not solely in terms of their role or office...but rather as persons embedded in a unique set of social relations, and with particular aspirations" (2001: 172).

In such cases, relationships are best understood in the context of an industry-specific moral economy. As mentioned above, the concept of moral economy refers to the ways economic systems may be based on more than just narrow economic factors but also include people's cultural understandings of goodness, fairness, and justice. The concept, as defined by Cheal (2015), refers to "a system of transactions which are defined as socially desirable (i.e. moral), because through them social ties are recognized, and balanced social relationships are maintained" (2015:15). Specifically, the objectives of a moral economic system may include "the accumulation of symbolic and social capital, social cohesion of a group, or long-term stability of an economic system" (Näre 2011: 400).

Few, if any, studies of contemporary agricultural labor relations have applied a moral economic framework, perhaps in part due to the fact that moral economies are seen as most likely to be strongest in small, face-to-face communities where the sense of mutual obligation based on personal relationships can be fostered through regular interaction (Näre 2011). The contemporary political economic organization of agriculture, and its domination by large-scale agribusiness and multi-layered, subcontracted labor forces, means that a moral economic framework is an unlikely choice for scholars hoping to understand agricultural labor relations. Although Connecticut's farms face many of the same pressures to consolidate and mechanize their production as agricultural businesses elsewhere in the United States, a few aspects of Connecticut's geography have delayed the demise of the state's small-scale family farming industry. Connecticut's climate, characterized by hot, humid summers and harsh winters, provides only a small window (roughly between May and September) in which most crops can be grown. To deal with seasonal ebbs and flows in production, many small farms have opted for diversification (for instance, selling fruits and vegetables in the summer, pumpkins, squash, and

apples in the fall, and Christmas trees in the winter). The delicate fruits and vegetables produced on many small farms in Connecticut must be picked and packed by hand, and shipped and delivered to farm stands and grocery store clients quickly in order to minimize damage and deterioration. Consequently, Connecticut's farms have remained relatively small, and while they do hire migrant workers, they typically do not rely on crew leaders to organize their work forces. These structural features created the conditions necessary for the emergence of a moral economy, which in this case is mediated through a transnational social network.

Good Workers, Strong ties: The Rio Seco Sphere of Influence

When the Rio Secan men arrived in Connecticut in the mid-1990s, Aldenboro-area farmers were struggling to find a flexible, but *legal* workforce that could serve their labor needs. As owners of family-owned farms engaged in the small-scale production of a diverse variety of agricultural products, Aldenboro farmers found the existing labor resources —both local and foreign— to be untenable. The H-2A program, which allowed them to recruit workers from Jamaica and other countries, proved to be too expensive and over-regulated for their needs. The first wave of Rio Secan men had experience with agriculture, legal work authorization, and a willingness to come and go seasonally as agricultural production ebbed and flowed. One farm decided to end recruitment through the H-2A program in favor of hiring the Rio Secan men. The arrangement worked so well that the owner of Dempsey Orchards asked the men to invite more workers to come to Connecticut, and soon other local employers made similar requests. Today, some twenty years later, a robust transnational network continues to link Rio Secan migrants to Aldenboro-area employers.

In addition to facilitating Rio Secan employment, the network has also generated close working relationships between farmers and workers, which are maintained through intangible

and material reciprocal exchanges. Because of the small-scale, diversified nature of the agricultural industry, Aldenboro's small family farms have a relatively flat managerial hierarchy. Consequently, some Rio Secan men have been able to move into positions of authority, and they now play an integral role in the functioning of the Aldenboro farms. As one farmer put it, "Ninety percent [of] the real day-to-day... farming practices is done by the [Rio Secan] men." The most senior Rio Secan workers operate relatively autonomously at work, only receiving periodic directions from the farm's upper management. Farmers allow them this independence because workers know their respective roles in the smooth functioning of farm operations, and have proven their loyalty. At one farm, for example, some Rio Secan workers are tasked with bringing produce to farmer's markets around the state. These workers operate almost entirely independently – from selecting and harvesting the produce they plan to sell that day, to gassing up the van with farm credit cards in their names, to driving to the market and setting up the stand so the produce looks appealing to customers, recording sales, holding cash intake, and reporting profits back to the farm management. At larger markets, Rio Secan market workers may bring along a "helper" – typically a local white teenager or college student – who, despite his or her citizenship status and relative class and racial privilege, works under the supervision of the Rio Secan worker. Rio Secan market workers even engage in small-scale buying and selling of produce with other local farms in order to increase the variety of products they can offer at market. These economic transactions are done independently, with only occasional inquiry, minor direction, and virtually no immediate supervision from the farm's upper management. Rio Secan workers in Aldenboro also manage the spraying of crops, supervise piece-rate pickers, and communicate with pick-your-own clients. At one farm, one senior Rio Secan worker manages several aspects of daily operations, and can frequently be seen traveling around the farm on a

four-wheeler or using his English skills and lively personality to mingle with clients at private events.

Having established themselves as a trustworthy workforce, Rio Secan workers have become the “go-to” resource for Aldenboro farmers to find new workers as labor needs increase. When a farmer needs additional labor, either during or in-between the growing seasons, he or she will ask a Rio Secan worker to find someone. The worker will put out a call through the network, either specifically targeting a person he has in mind - perhaps a family member who has already requested an opportunity to come work in Connecticut, or he may “ask around.” Similarly, a worker hoping to invite a relative or friend to join his farm’s workforce may ask a more senior worker for permission to recruit him, or go directly to the farm owner to make the request. New recruits may come from other farms in Connecticut, from Rio Seco, or from other branches of the network in other states (i.e. California or Nebraska). Potential hires who are unknown to senior workers, or who have earned a “bad reputation” (i.e. as a “lazy guy” or “drunk”) may be rejected by the senior workers. In this arrangement, senior Rio Secan workers are the ones who make decisions about whom to hire. The farm owner’s approval of a prospective new hire is a “rubber stamp” of the network’s recommendation. Current workers who want to invite a friend or family member must first get the person approved by the senior Rio Secan workers.

Speaking about the network’s control over recruitment and hiring, a long-time Rio Seco farmworker named Guillermo noted,

Here the boss first takes our opinion into consideration. Because if they go [directly] to her, she won’t accept them... If he is a friend of ours, he will come... If he is not a friend, he won’t come... This year starting in March there were a lot of bosses that came here... [If their usual workers don’t show up], the bosses go looking. They make their rounds to see if there is anyone that wants to work. Now we can accommodate them on whatever farm. Wherever they are missing one.

Guillermo's comment illustrates the power workers have over the hiring of new employees. It also highlights the fact that senior Rio Secan workers have established ties beyond the confines of their individual workplaces. Experienced workers have an extensive network of "diagonal" ties – connections to an array local employers, including other farms, landscaping companies, greenhouses, and other seasonal employers in central Connecticut. These connections are produced primarily through local farmers' practice of sharing labor resources. Farmers with a labor shortage may invite workers currently engaged in full-time employment at another area farm to work additional hours in the afternoons. Workers often take advantage of these opportunities, which they call "*horas extras*" ("extra hours"), particularly when an unexpected event back home requires additional funds.

After their initial hiring, new workers remain subject to the authority of the network as they undergo an informal probationary period during which they must prove their worth by working hard on the job and avoiding interpersonal conflict. Each time a new worker is invited to work in Aldenboro, the person who invites him takes a risk, as badly behaved workers reflect poorly on those who invited them. If the hire is successful, the network's relevance is reaffirmed, and the trust between workers and local employers is reinforced.

The network's informal recruitment procedures curate a work force of Rio Seco's most responsible, hardest-working men, who take their obligation to help maintain the group's reputation (and resulting privileges) seriously. But its power doesn't end there. In order to maintain the good reputation Rio Secans have worked so hard to create, all workers are expected to adhere to strict standards of behavior during their free time. One way this is accomplished is through "*el aceo*," the cleaning of the farm-provided housing. At one farm, for example, workers have developed a highly organized system of cleaning and cooking. Two people sign up to clean

the house each week, and the schedule rotates throughout the season. “We are organized. We keep everything very clean,” one worker explained. We have “everything very controlled,” including the cleaning of the house, he said, which is “very organized, very clean – as much as possible.” During my fieldwork in Connecticut, I noticed that workers at this farm consistently obeyed the cleaning schedule. When I invited workers to attend social outings with the ESL class, for example, those who were tasked with cleaning that week stayed home to comply with their cleaning responsibilities; no special exceptions were made. I have entered the housing at this farm on multiple occasions for social gatherings, and the kitchen and living spaces are always very clean. This is a striking indicator of the power of the network, particularly given the fact that migrant farmworker housing is so often in disrepair due to employer neglect (Vallejos et al. 2009; Rothenberg 1998).

Workers are expected to follow strict norms of behavior even when “letting off steam” in the evening hours. Network norms permit the drinking of alcohol, but workers who opt to drink are expected to be “*tranquilo*” (“calm”) and respectful of their housemates while doing so. As one worker explained, “If I drink a beer I have to be careful with my words. I could offend one of my friends... it’s better if I don’t drink.” Workers who violate these standards of behavior are castigated through subtle, indirect means. One worker, employed in Aldenboro a few years ago, who I will call Francisco, routinely drank excessive amounts of alcohol after work, often keeping his co-workers awake into the early morning hours. One evening Francisco damaged some farm property in an alcohol-fueled incident, and the employer decided to restrict all workers’ privileges in response. Even though Francisco had been invited to work in Connecticut by a close relative, his other co-workers found his behavior unacceptable. Indeed, Francisco’s transgression was quite serious. Not only had he disrespected his coworkers, but he had also jeopardized the

trusting relationship that other workers had worked for years to craft with their employer.

Guillermo, Francisco's former co-worker, explained, "because of him we are all paying, because before we weren't restricted like we are now... Yes, he works well, but... on the other hand he is very problematic." Accordingly, Francisco was "tolerated" by his coworkers until the end of the season, at which time a tacit agreement was made by senior workers that he would not be invited back the following year. In an interview, the farm owner explained to me that the workers had handled this situation independently of the farm's upper management. As in many small-scale societies, social control among the workers was maintained through personalized mechanisms like gossip and, ultimately, shunning. These practices police worker behavior and reinforce the shared value of hard work which is central to the moral economy of the network.

In return, farmers reward workers' hard work and loyalty not only with their trust, but also by providing extra material benefits to workers. For instance, some Aldenboro farm owners provide workers with rent-free housing and other amenities (including laundry facilities and wireless internet), allow the relatively unrestricted personal use of farm vehicles, and even pay for workers' flights to- and from- Connecticut at the beginning and end of the working season. The provision of such benefits is highly atypical in agriculture - elsewhere, farmers charge for such services, or they are not available at all. But in Connecticut, they are an essential piece of the moral economic framework guiding relations between farmers and workers. On the one hand, these "perks" serve a strategic purpose for farmers. Farmers who engage in such practices may be more likely to keep the long-time workers they have trained, and to attract the best new workers the network has to offer. But farmers also see these extra benefits as a way to comply with one of their obligations as participants in the network – the demonstration of gratitude for workers' loyalty.

The provision of extra benefits also reflects a maternalistic sense of sponsorship that many farmers feel towards their workers. Providing extra benefits makes farmers feel good, because they see these acts as a form of assistance which ultimately supports the improved quality of life of workers' families back home in Mexico, whose poverty and rural isolation they perceive to be tragic. One farmer, for instance, commented to me that she feels a personal sense of moral achievement knowing that the money she has paid to Rio Secan workers has contributed to the construction of better housing, and to the education of her workers' children. As I discuss in more detail below, some farmers survey new developments in workers' homes and businesses when they visit Rio Seco – a practice that is tied to this sense of sponsorship.

Workers consider the added benefits provided by Connecticut employers to be a major advantage of working in Connecticut through the network, in that they enable them to save, and ultimately send home, considerably more money than they can in other states. Indeed, they often engage in “job talk” both over the phone and on annual return trips to Mexico, during which they compare the relative benefits and drawbacks of their respective employers. Extra benefits provided by employers feature prominently in such conversations, and workers often use them to entice others to join them where they work. But unlike farmers, workers do not see these benefits primarily as expressions of farmer generosity. Rather, they conceive of them as gestures of farmers' appreciation – tokens of gratitude given to them in exchange for the vital services they provide for farmers, who have seen their farms expand and thrive in the years since the arrival of the first Rio Secan workers. When discussing their work, Rio Secans highlight the myriad ways in which they have supported the expansion of their respective employers' businesses, noting that their hard work has increased farm profits, expanded the customer base, and/or improved crop quality. This is not to say that they do not feel gratitude towards farmers – rather, they

typically portray these relationships as mutually beneficial partnerships, rather than one-sided sponsorships.

Perhaps due to these divergent understandings of the motivations underlying worker-farmer relationships, tense moments occasionally arise as the two groups try to “do right” by each other, according to the rules of engagement in the prevailing moral economy. Newer workers are particularly prone to making missteps and offending the sensibilities of their employers. In one case, a worker who was offered higher pay at another local farm left his current employer abruptly without communicating with the owner. While quitting without notice is quite common in low-level “at-will” agricultural employment scenarios nationally, this worker’s departure was seen as abandonment by his employer – and an obvious betrayal of the standards of engagement he expected his workers to follow. When I spoke with the farmer after the incident, he expressed his disappointment that the worker had left without saying “Thank you,” a form of reciprocal good will he expected in exchange for the opportunity he had given the worker.

Another form of reciprocity in which farmers engage is the (albeit limited) expression of political solidarity. Some Aldenboro-area farmers have begun to engage in local-level activism pushing for immigration reforms that would support the continued and expanded migration of Rio Seco men and women. In 2014, several farmers hosted a community meeting in Aldenboro to discuss the difficulties faced by migrants crossing the border and working illegally in the United States. The meeting, which was held in the basement of a local church, was attended by 30-40 community members, including several local farmers, a white farm employee engaged in humanitarian efforts regarding undocumented immigration, and one Rio Secan worker. The white employee gave a brief presentation about a recent volunteer trip to the U.S.-Mexico

border, where she provided humanitarian aid to migrants engaging in clandestine border-crossing. She concluded with an emotional plea to the audience for their support of comprehensive immigration reform in order to alleviate the suffering such migrants, including some of her coworkers, endure. Her presentation was followed by some skeptical comments from community members concerned about “illegal” immigration, at which point a few local farmers stood up and expressed the difficulties they have in finding “good, legal” workers. One farmer became visibly emotional when she recounted the story of a favorite worker who had died while trying to cross the border several years before. During a previous interview, this farmer expressed to me the feeling of loss she experienced after this worker’s death. As she pulled his picture off a bulletin board in her kitchen, her eyes welled up with tears. “We lost one,” she said. “He never made it – they found his remains five days later. *Mi niño* (my little boy).” The only consolation she has, she explained, is when she visits Rio Seco, where she is able to visit the business this worker built for his family with the money he earned while working on her farm. For this farmer, the motivation to express political solidarity was not only strategic, in that it could stabilize her labor force. It was also a deeply personal and moral consideration, as she advocated for a safer way for her most trusted workers to come to Connecticut.

Fraught Friendships: Close Encounters in the Social Borderlands of Connecticut and Rio Seco

Rio Secan workers manage their behavior in order to maintain their reputations as good employees. In exchange for their loyalty and hard work, farmers trust their workers to go about their jobs relatively autonomously, express political solidarity, and provide extra “perks”. But as the opening anecdote suggests, relationships between workers and farmers go far beyond the realm of work-related concerns. Over time, experienced Rio Secan workers and their employers have come to know each other’s personalities, personal and family histories, hobbies, and other

details about the minutiae of each other's daily lives. They have established intimate social relationships that reflect an unexpected degree of interpersonal connection.

The complex social dimensions of these relationships are revealed in moments of encounter that bring workers and farmers into contact in ways that challenge the supposed "natural" economic order of labor relations. Although farmers' visits to Mexico are perhaps the most poignant example, these moments of encounter also take place in Connecticut. Given the proximity of worker housing to the residences of the employers (in some cases, separated only by a few feet), members of both groups frequently "run into" each other after work, and they also interact during social events. During the work season, farmers occasionally host holiday parties and other informal social gatherings, to which workers are often invited. The limited, awkward interactions in these settings demonstrate the tensions emerging as workers and farmers negotiate close ties that cross significant social distance.

One evening during my fieldwork in Connecticut, I attended a holiday party hosted by a local farm at which many Rio Secan men are employed. The party was held in an open-layout farm building, and was attended by about 35 people. On one side of the room, 10-20 white, mostly middle-aged farm owners and farm management staff chatted animatedly in small groups around tables filled with food. On the other side of the room, arranged in a stiff arc along the wall facing the center of the room, was a group of 10-15 Rio Secan workers employed by several different area farms. Moving back and forth between the two sides of the room were three of the bilingual, long-time workers and a couple of the farmers. As time went on and party attendees' nerves were lubricated by a few alcoholic drinks, the atmosphere lightened on the "workers' side" of the room. A few farm owners gathered their respective groups of Rio Secan employees to take group photographs. Some music was playing in the background, and one Rio Secan

worker who had had a little more to drink than the rest danced jokingly with his boss, a 70-year-old white man. Despite the overall conviviality, Rio Secan workers remained cautiously reserved. Most of the Rio Seco men drank only in moderation, and I heard several men comment quietly in Spanish things like “I can’t drink another one – I don’t want the boss to get mad.” In addition, several of the host farm’s workers were conspicuously absent, and their co-workers indicated that they were simply too uncomfortable to attend an event where such personal intimacy between workers and farmers was expected.

A similar moment of encounter was described to me by a Rio Secan worker named Alicia. One evening near the end of one harvest season, Alicia and a few co-workers decided to go Christmas caroling in the neighborhood surrounding the farm. They dressed up in holiday attire and set out for the home of the owners of the farm where they worked. Alicia said that the farm owners seemed to be excited that they had come to visit, and despite their intention to just drop by and then leave, they were invited into the farmers’ home. In an effort to encourage the workers to stay a bit longer (despite their inability to communicate effectively across the language barrier), Alicia’s employers handed out toy instruments. Alicia told this story with a look of disbelief on her face in an interview I conducted with her in her living room in Rio Seco. Such encounters, she said, were unheard of in other places she had worked in the United States.

The awkward interactions that take place between workers and farmers in Connecticut are intensified in the context of another peculiar form of social engagement: farmers’ visits to Mexico. The first time I encountered Aldenboro farmers in Mexico, I was standing in the entrance to Iglesia Santa Maria, one of Rio Seco’s two Catholic churches, preparing to attend the marriage ceremony of the brother of a farmworker employed in Aldenboro. In the days leading up to the farmers’ arrival, Rio Secan workers and their families had actively debated the nature

of the visit – whether or not it was a good thing, whether or not the “gringos” would be willing to eat traditional foods, and where and for how long they would stay. The worker who was to be their host described to me at length, almost in ethnographic fashion, their typical behaviors, and laughed while recounting a story about a time when his employer had been shocked to witness the butchering of a cow for a major community celebration. Later in the afternoon, visitors joined the family and some 200 community guests at the wedding reception. To my surprise, the farmers happily devoured the two main courses - *mole* prepared by local women in an outdoor kitchen and tacos made with traditional *barbacoa*-style beef cooked for hours in underground ovens.

Several Connecticut farmers take annual or bi-annual trips to Rio Seco to visit with workers. When they visit Rio Seco, farmers are pulled into the daily life of the community, attending and participating in local weddings, birthdays, holidays, and other celebrations with workers and their families. The trips take on a significance far beyond a casual social encounter for both the farmers and the migrants and their families, as both sides go to considerable effort to make the visits successful. Rio Secan farmworkers and their families play “host,” “tour guide,” and even “caretaker” for their employers, whose limited (or complete lack of) Spanish language and relative unfamiliarity with life in Mexico makes them dependent upon the guidance of their workers. Sometimes the personal ties between farmers and workers even become formalized through local social institutions, as in the case in the opening vignette where the two farmers became financial sponsors of an employee’s daughter’s coming of age celebration. These moments of social encounter in Mexico reveal the complex and sometimes competing desires, motivations, and strategies at play in network relationships.

One couple, José and Celia, invited their employers to stay in their home for the duration of their three-day visit to Rio Seco. The pair went to great lengths to prepare for and entertain their guests, particularly with regard to food. Contemporary diets in Rio Seco are highly dependent upon a few key staple items, including rice, beans, tortillas, and (of course) hot peppers. During festival periods in particular, locals consume large quantities of carnitas, a local delicacy consisting of pork boiled for hours in vats of lard. Rio Secans with experience working in the U.S. tend to believe that Americans don't like locally available foods, or may suffer intestinal problems due to abrupt dietary changes. To accommodate their guests, José and Celia took care to stock their refrigerator with yogurt, something the couple understood to be more agreeable to the American digestive tract. Also fearing that his guests would not like the kind of coffee available in Rio Seco, José brought artisanal coffee from Connecticut to serve his employers during their stay. Locally available coffee is exclusively of the "instant" dissolvable variety, and is typically prepared in large, highly sweetened pots of cinnamon-infused water. As I sat in their kitchen during an interview after their visitors had returned to the United States, Celia and José served me a cup of freshly brewed "toasted coconut" flavored coffee, leftover from the visit, and expressed their confusion (and mild frustration) that their employers had not eaten a single package of yogurt. José and Celia's decision to host their employers (though not without its frustrations) was an important investment in the maintenance of social ties.

Not all workers are willing to forge such social attachments. Some workers opt only to visit with farmers once or twice during their stay, while others try to avoid encounters with their employers completely. Diego, a long-time Connecticut worker, told me he was actively dodging his former employers during their visit to Rio Seco, because he was worried that they harbored negative feelings about his departure from their farm some seven years ago. He had worked with

them for almost ten years, but left after he was offered higher wages at another farm and feared his understandable if narrow economic behavior might have been perceived as a moral breach by his former employers. Diego said he felt anxious that he would accidentally run into them in the street, so he avoided going into town during the farmers' visit.

Farmers also have varying approaches to the visits. Some farmers opt for hotel accommodations rather than staying in a worker's home, sometimes staying a considerable distance away from the community. While there are a few hotels located within a 15-minute radius of Rio Seco, the amenities available tend to be quite basic, and there are few attractions or distractions for tourists in the area. Given these inconveniences, one Connecticut farmer typically combines the trip to Rio Seco with a luxurious vacation to a tourist destination elsewhere in Mexico, and prefers to stay in an expensive business-class or tourist hotel in a nearby city, rather than staying in the community. During visits, this farmer spends two to three days in the area, typically driving a rental car or getting a ride from a worker between his hotel and Rio Seco each day. Depending on the city in which he chooses to stay, this amounts to two to four hours of driving round trip each day.

Why, then, do farmers subject themselves to the discomforts and awkwardness of these visits? In the words of one farmer,

I like their families to see [my] face. It's face time. You know, I ask their families to be without their men for, ... seven months of the year. So I want them to know that they are appreciated, and that we have some connection with their family... I've literally seen kids grow up, so it's been really kinda neat. And their wives are much more comfortable, even if we don't speak the same language, you know they're... very open... Even this past time, we had a couple new workers... we got invited to a wedding! ... I think it was the cousin of one of our workers. [They said] "Oh, you gotta come!" ... It was a way of going and seeing, you know, half my men... in a relaxed atmosphere... And of course there's men that work for other people in the area there, because everybody knows everybody....

Her explanation suggests that the trips to Mexico are a ritual, conducted in an attempt to close the immense social space between herself and her workers by shrinking the *geographic* space between them. She hopes to create a sense of mutual personal understanding and shared obligation by meeting workers' families and experiencing life in their hometown.

Conclusion

Despite a century-long national trend driving the increasing mechanization and consolidation of crop production in the U.S., advanced agricultural technologies have yet to eliminate one essential human input - labor. Agricultural businesses are still dependent upon seasonal farmworkers who, despite receiving low wages for their backbreaking work, perform an essential service for their employers. Given the hierarchical organization of farm labor, farm operators and owners in much of the United States may never come to know the names of the fieldworkers they employ.

The moral economy of farmwork in Connecticut has produced patterns of worker-farmer interaction quite distinct from this national picture. The robust transnational employment network operating between Rio Seco and Connecticut, which was facilitated by the particular structure of Connecticut's agricultural industry, has made it possible for farmworkers to achieve unprecedented autonomy at work, and for new forms of worker-farmer engagement to emerge. As Rio Secan workers and their employers work together toward a common goal, the success of their respective farms, they find themselves in uncharted territory in which their relationships defy simple classification as either "economic" or "social." Both sides – despite asymmetrical power relations – work to achieve individual practical goals and maintain the network. Ultimately these tenuous friendships are the glue that holds the network together.

Chapter Four - Strategic II/legalization and Legal Permanent Migration

“A little citizen lives here...”

I arrived to Rio Seco for my December, 2015 fieldwork trip late in the afternoon, as the sun was setting behind the mountain ridges surrounding the valley. After traveling all day, I was exhausted, but my hosts, Polinar and Lidia, insisted upon taking me to visit with several family members before allowing me to sleep. Although I spent most of these visits struggling to keep my eyes open while engaging in polite conversation with my rusty Spanish, one of the visits we made that day ultimately served as the first thread of inspiration for this dissertation. As we turned down an eroded dirt driveway and approached a small cinder block building, Polinar stated - lightheartedly and matter-of-factly - “a little citizen lives here.” He seemed to think this was self-explanatory. My sleepy brain instantly snapped to attention – *this is the kind of curious comment that leads to great ethnographic moments*, I thought. We exited the car and walked around the side of the house, where we were greeted by a woman in her 40’s holding a chubby infant wrapped in an oversized blanket. I later learned that this little bundle, Suzy, was the “little citizen” to whom Poli had referred.

In order to understand what Poli meant, we must turn to the biography of Suzy’s mother, Beatriz. Beatriz, 16 at the time of our meeting, is the daughter of Juan, an IRCA beneficiary and long-time Connecticut migrant. Juan, like many Rio Secan migrants, worked without authorization in California agriculture during the 1980’s, and was able to apply for the 1986 IRCA “amnesty” for “Special Agricultural Workers.” Juan continued to migrate solo for many years, until he decided to apply for legal permanent resident status for his wife, Lucia, and his three children, Beatriz, her older sister Jessica, and their younger brother Jose, through the F2A provision of the INA. It took five years before the family was called to participate in interviews in Juarez with the U.S. consulate, but shortly thereafter they were issued green cards. As legal permanent residents,

Lucia and her children have authorization to move to the United States, to work there, and eventually to apply to become naturalized citizens. Instead, the family has decided to maintain their roots in Mexico, at least for the time being. Lucia and her husband began to migrate together to engage in seasonal work in the U.S. and the children stayed in school in Mexico, only joining their parents in the U.S. when they were on school vacations. When Beatriz got pregnant, the family decided that it would be best for her to have the baby in the U.S. They traveled together to Texas, and returned promptly after Suzy's birth to resume living in Rio Seco. By virtue of the principle of *jus solis*, Suzy is a U.S. citizen by birth (Bloemraad et al. 2008). Hence, Poli's comment, "a little citizen lives here."

In this chapter, I consider the ways in which migrants like Juan and their families make decisions about how, when, and whether to pursue legal U.S. immigrant status for their family members, as well as the ways in which they make decisions about how, when, and whether to migrate to the U.S. In the sections that follow, I examine the legal processes through which Rio Secan migrants may legalize their family members, before turning to a more in-depth examination of the stories of Rio Secan migrants and their families. I focus on the varying rationales for and against the legalization of spouses and children, the reasons why they choose to stay in Mexico or to migrate, either temporarily or semi-permanently, and the impact these decisions have on gender and family relations in Rio Seco and transnationally.

"Pathways to Citizenship"

One of the most controversial questions in contemporary immigration debates in the U.S. (and globally) is the question of which "foreigners" have the right, or the privilege, to stay and make a life in the U.S. This question has been a central focus of debates about immigration reform, in particular in conversations about what has been dubbed the "pathway to citizenship" (Massey

and Malone 2002). The phrase, which has been featured prominently in the rallying calls of activists and politicians calling for comprehensive immigration reform, refers to the legal avenue through which some foreign nationals may *eventually, potentially*, become U.S. citizens.

In order to understand why this phrase has become so important in U.S. immigration debates, and why it is central to the experiences of Rio Secan migrants, it is necessary to review the current legal frameworks through which non-U.S. nationals may come to live and/or work in the U.S. The primary body of law which regulates the entry and exit of foreign nationals into and out of the U.S. is the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, or the INA. The INA, also known as the Hart-Celler Act, was formally enacted in 1968, and brought about several major changes in the regulation of immigration and international migration flows into and out of the U.S. Between 1924 and 1965, U.S. immigration was regulated according to the “National Origins Formula,” which “placed numerical limits on immigration and established a quota system that classified the world’s population according to nationality and race, ranking immigrants in a hierarchy of desirability for admission into the United States” (Ngai 2005:18). At the bottom of the list were East and South Asians and Africans, populations that were entirely banned or severely restricted. The ratification of the INA in 1965 signaled a sea change in the fundamental principles upon which im/migration regulation was based. Based in part on Americans’ supposed commitment to cultural pluralism, and in part on geopolitical and economic nationalism, the INA raised the total number of immigrants allowed per year and removed national quotas, instead allowing for equal numbers of immigrants to come from all countries. The INA also established categories for family-based and employment-based immigration, built (at least in theory) on two notions: 1) that U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents should be able to live together in the U.S. with their families, and therefore should have the opportunity to apply or “petition” for the immigration of certain eligible

family members, and 2) that employers who would like to recruit talent from other countries should be able to do so, provided that the immigration of these employees will not negatively impact the wages or employment of U.S. citizens.

Based on the first principle, family reunification, the INA created four main “Family-Based Preference” categories making certain family members of U.S. citizens and LPRs eligible to apply for legal immigrant, or “LPR” status. The first (“F1”), third (“F3”), and fourth (“F4”) are reserved for family members of U.S. citizens. The “F2” family preference category, reserved for family members of LPRs, is broken down into two subsections: “F2A” and “F2B.” Through F2A, a legal permanent resident may petition for visas for her/his spouse and minor children; through F2B, s/he may petition for unmarried sons and daughters under age 21. Each category is subject to yearly caps and per-country limits, such that only a certain number of petitions in any Family-Based Preference category may be granted in a given year.

Employment-based visas are highly restricted; most are designated exclusively for high-skilled workers and investors. Just 5000 employment-based immigrant visas are available each year for unskilled workers, and these are restricted to permanent/non-seasonal work. Employers hoping to hire unskilled workers through this visa option (a sub-category of EB-3) must also prove that no local eligible workers are available to fill the job, and must complete a labor certification process indicating that the hiring of the worker will not negatively affect local wages (USCIS 2017c). The restrictions on visas for unskilled workers and the considerable cost incurred by employers to go through the application process means that rural Mexican migrants hoping to work in the U.S. are virtually excluded from employment-based legal immigration.

The family- and employment-based immigration visas described above are referred to by USCIS as “immigrant visas.” But the INA also created a whole series of what are called “non-

immigrant” visas – which provide permission for approved applicants to enter, stay (for varying periods of time), and sometimes work or study in the U.S. On their own, these legal statuses *do not* provide direct access to a pathway to legal permanent residency or U.S. citizenship. These visas, which include tourist/“visitor” visas (B-1), student visas (“F” visas and “M” visas), and a whole series of temporary work visas (i.e., H-1B, H-2A), amongst others, *do not* enable the visa holder to become a legal permanent resident or a naturalized citizen without what is referred to as an “adjustment” to *immigrant* status, a privilege which is restricted primarily for individuals with certain kinds of non-immigrant visas (typically those which are granted to highly skilled professional workers and investors). Unskilled laborers, like farmworkers with H-2A visas and seasonal workers on H-2B visas, are patently ineligible for adjustment to immigrant status.

The formally cited rationale behind these restrictions, of course, is that the government has a responsibility to protect the jobs of U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents, and that temporary workers are recruited to fill temporary labor shortages, not to become long-term or permanent members of society who would eventually demand resources, services, and support. In reality these designations serve to create a disposable, transient force of temporary “nonimmigrant” workers who can supply labor when needed and disappear at a moment’s notice. Their status is contingent upon proof of need, and as such they are not entitled to the requisite “adjustment” to immigrant status necessary to access a pathway to citizenship.

Given these parameters, a very small number of people who desire to enter the U.S., for whatever reason and for whatever period of time, are able to do so “legally,” through officially sanctioned avenues. Opportunities are particularly rare for individuals with intent to immigrate (those seeking immigrant visas). Finally, those with means have far greater opportunity to immigrate to the U.S. than do members of the poor and working classes. The EB-5 “Immigrant

Investor” program, for example, grants up to 10,000 foreigners a year, including their spouses and unmarried children under 21, a green card if they invest a certain amount of money, enough to create ten jobs in the U.S. In effect, through this program, rich people can buy American citizenship.

Ultimately it is very unlikely, if not impossible, for a poor/working-class person from rural Mexico to be able to immigrate legally to the United States. Due to the historical exclusion of rural Mexicans from legal immigration to the U.S., such migrants are unlikely to have the very narrowly-defined family-based eligibility required in order to gain access to legal immigrant status – particularly one that comes with a pathway to citizenship. The only option for such a person hoping to migrate through legal means is through a temporary non-immigrant visa for unskilled labor (i.e., H-2A), which is typically heavily restricted through a costly labor certification process.

When I first met this cohort of migrant farmworkers with legal permanent residency, I was surprised. How, I wondered, did these folks gain access to legal permanent residency given the restrictive nature of contemporary U.S. immigration law?

Given the ongoing historical migration processes between Rio Seco and California’s agricultural industry, many Rio Seco men happened to be working in California “without authorization” during the mid-80’s. Illegal immigration rates soared in the 70’s and 80’s after the INA’s new regulations took effect, and the “illegal alien problem” was framed in public policy debates as an imminent threat to the nation. The IRCA was passed in 1986 as a primarily restrictive measure, instituting penalties for employers of immigrants, and increasing deportations. But IRCA also established what many have referred to as an “amnesty” program for two specific contingents of undocumented immigrants: 1) Long-time, continuous residents with “good moral standing,” and 2) Special Agricultural Workers.

When IRCA was passed, many Rio Secan men suddenly became eligible for legal immigrant status. Although border crossing was not nearly as dangerous or costly during this time, many Rio Secan felt it a worthwhile investment to apply for what they saw as permission to cross the border freely and work legally in the United States. Those whose applications were successful were eventually given a standard issue “green card,” complete with all the rights and privileges afforded to all other legal immigrants. Importantly, unlike some past and current legal statuses intended to relieve the struggles of certain undocumented immigrants (i.e., TPS, DACA), the green cards issued to IRCA applicants are indistinguishable from those held by other Legal Permanent Residents (“LPRs”) who do not have a history of unauthorized immigration. The 1986 IRCA was the last time the U.S. government provided a pathway to citizenship to undocumented immigrants on a mass scale.

It was this sequence of events that ultimately made it possible for Juan – and many others like him – to become a legal immigrant farmworker, for his daughter to become a legal permanent resident, and for his granddaughter to become a U.S. citizen.

While a close examination of the relevant legal parameters for immigrant legalization begins to explain why this poor migrant community is populated by many legal U.S. immigrants and citizens, the bulk of the story is still missing. Although the men became instantly eligible to petition for LPR status for their family members, many waited several years to do so, and some never did. Similarly, although LPR status instantly enabled the men to live and work permanently in the U.S., and opened the opportunity to move their whole families to the U.S. after legalization, most continued to engage in seasonal migration, and almost none moved their families permanently – even those who *did* successfully petition for legal permanent residency. So, three key questions remain. How and why do IRCA beneficiaries and their families decide whether to

pursue family-based legalization? How and why do they decide what to *do* with their legal immigrant status – i.e., to stay in Mexico, or to leave for the U.S.? Finally, what impact has this legal resource had on these transnational families and their broader community?

“Arreglando la Familia” – Legalization Rationales

One day, while sitting at the kitchen table in Poli and Lidia’s house, I witnessed a conversation among Poli, Lidia, their three adult children, and a family friend named Naro – a Connecticut migrant who had dropped by for a visit. I listened closely as Poli, Lidia, and Naro discussed the merits and drawbacks of legalizing their children²⁸. The conversation began when Naro indicated that he was planning to submit the paperwork to get green cards for his wife and three children, ages 16, 14, and 9. The always vocal Lidia responded with a pointed comment about how she hadn’t allowed her husband (Poli) to arrange *her* children’s’ immigration papers, and suggested that Naro do the same. “If they go they won’t come back,” she said. “They will stop studying and stay and work instead.” In defense of his decision, Naro responded, “But my kids don’t like school. They like to work! Maybe I’ll bring them and see if they work hard and let them decide. Julio’s kids went to the U.S. and they were even able to build careers there.” Lidia, unpersuaded, responded “Yes, but those are the exceptions.” Looking conflicted, Naro explained that, particularly as his kids got older, he felt like he had no choice *but* to legalize them. “The thing is, if I don’t arrange their papers now, they are going to want to leave, but they’ll have to go illegally. Imagine how awful that would be for us.” Unpersuaded, Lidia explained that in her view, children are likely to ‘lose their way’ when they go to the United States, citing some local families whose children had abandoned their studies to become “just” manual laborers. Those who stay in

²⁸ Though I wasn’t able to record this conversation, I took copious notes, and have recreated it here to the best of my ability. Elsewhere, all participant quotations were recorded, transcribed, and translated by the author.

Mexico, she insisted, will continue to study. At this point, Lidia's eldest son Efrain, who had previously been silent, spoke up. "They will regret it later if they don't get the opportunity to go." His mother responded, "Who regrets it?" "I do!" Efrain said.

A few weeks later near the end of my visit, Lidia and I sat alone in her kitchen drinking tea. Our conversation turned, as it often did, to the subject of my research. This time I was surprised when Lidia, who had always seemed so confident with the choices she had made for her children, asked me "Did I do the right thing?"

Before turning to an in-depth examination of these rationales, it is necessary to take a moment to consider the language used to refer to what I am calling the "family legalization" process. Officially, the process of applying for legal permanent resident status for eligible family members of LPRs is called a "Petition for Alien Relative." In colloquial U.S. English parlance, it is often referred to as "getting a green card," or "becoming a legal immigrant." In Rio Seco, the process is referred to with the phrase "arreglando papeles" or "arreglandose." As Susan Bibler-Coutin (2003) has explained, "arreglar" is a Spanish verb which can be translated to English in several ways. It can mean "to arrange," as well as "to fix," or "to set right," or "to mend." The first phrase, "arreglando papeles," then, roughly translates to "fixing" or "arranging for" papers – in this case, the legal documents that would grant one legal permission to enter, and in the case of LPRs, to work and to live in the U.S., *with* a pathway to citizenship. The second phrase, "arreglarse," has a slightly different meaning. As a reflexive verb, "arreglarse" acts directly on a person. In other words, from a linguistic perspective, the "fixing," "mending," or "arranging," is done *to a person*, rather than to the person's documents. When Juan's wife, Lucia, for example, says "Y fue cuando tomó la decision de que iba a meter los papeles para que nos arreglara," her words literally translate to "And that's when he made the decision to submit the papers to

fix/mend/arrange *us*.” In this use, the word *arreglarse* takes on another meaning, and the legal process involved in arranging for immigration visas is understood to act directly on Lucia and her family. For the purposes of this dissertation, then, I follow Coutin (2003) in translating the word “*arreglarse*” to “legalize” (in the sense of immigration legalization), to reflect its local usage. use of *arreglarse*, a reflexive verb, serves as a reminder of the ways in which legal status can be experienced in deeply personal, intimate, embodied ways. As anthropologist Daniel Goldstein (2014) notes in a recent blog posting, “to call someone illegal is to classify them not on the basis of their actions but on what we might call their soul, their fundamental essence. Illegal aliens are by definition outside the pale, unredeemable, unincorporable. Despite the sentiments expressed by the activist T-shirt, this is in fact how law, the state, and public discourse often operate, demonizing persons instead of behaviors, and feeding them to the neoliberal incarceration machine.” I suggest that in their use of the word “*arreglarse*,” Rio Secans at least implicitly acknowledge the ways in which legalization also impacts one’s fundamental essence.

II/legalization rationales

Conversations with Rio Secan families reveal that the decision to pursue LPR status for one’s family members is neither easy, nor simple. There are several rationales, both for and against, and each rationale is contested and hotly debated in the community. These rationales can roughly be divided into several overlapping, interlinked “this or that” debates, in which parents see legalization as a primary factor determining the futures of their children. Although the ways parents weigh these options is quite complex and dependent upon many contextual and personal factors, these debates can be roughly categorized in four groups: 1) working vs. schooling; 2) girls vs. boys; 3) family separation vs. family unification; and 4) legal inheritance vs. cultural inheritance.

Working vs. Schooling

One particularly salient factor parents consider in legalization decision-making processes revolves around their hopes for the educational and professional futures of their children. Access to higher status and better-paid in-country occupations is reached through attaining a technical or university education, and many parents aspire for this opportunity for their children. Although prospects to pursue higher education in and around Rio Seco have increased significantly in the last twenty years, many children only complete formal schooling up to the government-funded “Secundaria” level, roughly equivalent to the 10th grade in the U.S. After graduating from Secundaria, children from families with greater financial resources may attend “Preparatoria,” grades 11 and 12, and then pursue technical training or university education, either at the small branch of the state university in Rio Seco or in the nearest large-scale city, two hours away. The tuition, fees, and other costs (including room and board for those attending Preparatoria and university education out of town) prove to be insurmountable barriers for children from families with fewer resources. Youth who lack the financial resources to pursue further education typically continue to live with their parents until they get married; some may seek work in nearby cities, typically in manufacturing, or they may choose to migrate.

Although most parents I spoke with indicated that they hoped their children would pursue the highest levels of education and find satisfying, permanent, gainful employment at home in Mexico, they often felt that this was unlikely, either due to the family’s financial constraints, or the lack of employment opportunities in Mexico. For some Rio Secan LPRs and their spouses, then, legalization is seen as a positive development - a way to expand their children’s’ possibilities in a context where options are quite limited. With legal status, children can migrate safely to the United States, seek work, and – parents hope – cultivate a sustainable life for themselves. For some

parents, like Naro in the above anecdote, legalization is a *preventative* measure. If parents feel migration is inevitable, they are likely legalize their children in order to avoid the uncertainties, dangers, and expense associated with illegal migration.

One might think that parents legalize their children to enable them to *work legally* in the U.S. Certainly work authorization is a benefit that Rio Secan migrants appreciate about their access to legal status, given that it can provide access to higher-paying jobs. But for most of the people I interviewed, it was the capacity to cross the border freely, rather than permission to work in the U.S., which proved to be the most valuable. Rio Secans immigrating to the U.S. typically have low levels of education, do not speak English, and engage in temporary labor migration. Therefore, they are usually employed in marginal work situations in the construction, agriculture, and landscaping industries, where they often work alongside unauthorized workers. Legal status is not essential given their employment patterns. The struggle of crossing the border to get to the work place, by contrast, is a significant and unique burden. Having legal permanent residency allows the men to cross the border at formal border crossings, or even to fly to- and from- work at the beginning and the end of the season. Crossing and traveling “legally” allows the men to avoid the bodily dangers posed by the desert, dealing with human traffickers, and potential victimization by thieves and gang operatives on the border. Furthermore, clandestine crossing has become increasingly expensive as border militarization and enforcement has continued to expand, and crossing the border legally with a green card allows the men to avoid that yearly cost (which can be as high as \$5,000-\$6,000, or more). Thus, for these men, there is more value in a green card’s capacity to facilitate legal border crossing than there is in its capacity to facilitate legal employment.

Girls vs. boys

Rio Secan parents contemplating the legalization of their children consider gender to be an important variable in their deliberations, and husbands and wives don't always agree about what is right for their children. In an interview with Gerardo and his wife, the contentious nature of legalization decisions emerged. The couple have one son and three daughters.

Gerardo: Well, in reality when I said I wasn't going to arrange for their papers, well after that... they said "legalize us!" [And I thought] "Ohh, no, hijole"...

(Gerardo cleared his throat)

Gerardo: I don't know how to tell you. There's a lot of... well for my daughters, I don't know, it could be because... well... they were women? Maybe that's what made me not want to arrange for their papers. Because they were women. That's what I think...

Sara: That's like the parents that... don't let their daughters study. Why? Because they're women. It's the same thing... That's wrong. That's wrong.

Gerardo: That's what happened... It could be that that was... an error of mine.

(Both sat in silence for several seconds)

Gerardo: Yes, that was an... error. That's where I went wrong. That just because they were women [I didn't legalize them].

Gerardo's decision not to provide legal status to his children, most whom were women, reflects a cultural logic that emerged through other interviews with Rio Secans. Legalization is seen by some as particularly important, or even necessary, for those who have male children. Since so many men in the community migrate to the United States, legally and otherwise, there is a sense amongst parents that their boy children are more likely than their girl children to go to the U.S. to work in the future. There is also a sense that boys are more likely to *need* to migrate in order to support

their families, and that boys are *less likely* to do well in school. Girls, however, are believed to have “more options.” They are not typically expected to become the sole economic providers for their families, as men are – so theoretically the pressure to acquire gainful employment is lower. Girls are also perceived to be more likely to succeed in school, which many parents believe may lead to income-generating opportunities either in town or in nearby cities in Mexico. Furthermore, although most parents don’t mention this explicitly, women have the option of marrying men who plan to engage in migrant work in the U.S.

The way gender factors into legalization decisions is highlighted in the following conversation with Naro and his wife, Licha. At the time of our interview, Naro had already submitted the applications to legalize Licha and their three children - a 21-year-old daughter and two teenage sons.

Licha: Well, it’s something... tense... right?... Because for example my daughter really likes to study. And she says to me, “Mama, I’m not going to leave my school. And you’re going to go [to the U.S.], how are we going to do it?” ... But also, as my husband says, for the men, for them, if they don’t like to study much, they have a second opportunity. But... well, yes, we see it as... something new, to experiment with...

Naro: I say [to my daughter], I want to help you go as far as you want to go. Because it’s good for you. Talking about my sons, if my sons don’t study, they have to work and maintain a family like I do. Now if they don’t study, I’ve told them, “If you don’t study, you are going to be running around all the time working like me, like a...” ... here we say it in a vulgar way, like a burro, where they drag you over here and over there [to work].

Here, Licha and Naro are one of many couples who consider the gender of their children as an important variable in the legalization decision. Young men who are perceived as lacking an affinity or “knack” for formal school work are, in their parents’ estimation, unlikely to pursue the highest levels of education in the future. Concerned that their male children will inevitably need to migrate

in order to support themselves absent such an educational background, some parents feel that they should grant them legal status to ease their travel back and forth across the border. But Naro also reveals that – at least for he and his wife – the life of a migrant worker is a future they do not desire for their children. Thus, they continue to encourage their two teenage sons to work hard in school.

It is important to note that this does not appear merely to be gender-based discrimination resulting in the denial of opportunities to daughters. Of the families with whom I spoke, none who went through the legalization process indicated that they had *purposely* left out their wives or female children. In fact, everyone I spoke with who *did* pursue family legalization ultimately petitioned for all eligible family members. In Julio's case, for instance, it was the birth of his son that seemed to inspire him to apply for legalization, but he did not opt to *only* legalize his son – he granted status to his daughters and wife as well. This is particularly significant given that the fees for family-based petitions are assessed *per person*, not per family. So, in order to legalize his daughters and wife, Julio had to pay more than he would have to just legalize his son. In fact, Naro was adamant that he aimed to apply a gender egalitarian framework in his parenting. As he explained, "I'm not a machista, I want to give all of my kids, including my daughter, equal opportunities." For these families, it does not seem that simple gender discrimination explains their decision-making processes. Rather, gender is a variable entered into a complex calculation that parents make based on what they think the realistic opportunities are for their children given what they know about the society in which they live.

Family separation vs. family unity

Another factor weighed in family legalization decision-making is family separation. Some families suggested that applying for legal permanent residency for the whole family was a way to avoid family separation, in that the entire family could safely and legally migrate along

with the “breadwinner”. This rationale is demonstrated in the following excerpt from an interview with Julia, Nacho, and their 9-year-old daughter who are all legal permanent residents as a result of an F2B family petition Nacho submitted.

Julia: I wanted to spend more time with my husband. Because, well, my daughter was growing up, and here [in Mexico] she was always crying to me, that she wanted her father, she wanted her father, and I said, well, let’s try to spend... more time over there... Since the first year that I went, I brought her [my daughter] with me. ...now... it’s like two months separated and that’s it. The longest time that we are apart.

Nacho: “Well the decision was made by both of us. With the purpose of spending more time united... to not be stressed with... thinking about how we are separated, how we are... so far away, that we can’t be together, and that was the decision we made to obtain the residency, in order to be able to live together (*convivir*) more. And thank God, we were able to get it [legal permanent residency]. And up to today we have been happier, you can say... We are separated for less time. And we can be together even if it’s in a country that’s not our own.

For Julia, obtaining legal U.S. immigration status was a strategy to keep her family together, by limiting the amount of time that they were physically separated from each other. Though some families opt to legalize the second spouse in order to become “dual-earner” families, with both parents engaging in wage labor, this was not the case for Julia and Nacho, at least initially. On the contrary, Julia says that on her first trip to Aldenboro, she had no intention of working. “I thought I was going like for a vacation, but the boss invited me to work so I wouldn’t get bored,” she said.

Notably, however, some migrants felt that family legalization, particularly when combined with (semi-)permanent emigration, could lead to family disintegration and further separation. These families expressed quite specific fears, guided by the actual or rumored experiences of other families whose children had succumbed to unfortunate influences in the United States, getting involved with drugs, gangs, or other morally distasteful activities/associations. Sara, whom I

quoted earlier, expressing her disapproval of her husband's gender-based rationale for not legalizing his children, explained that she, too, had doubts about emigration to the United States.

We had two children... and [a friend] said 'Don't you ever think about going to the U.S. because... if you are going to bring your kids there... some will go to one country, others will go to other countries, and you are going to lose them.' I based my decision on that, on the words of that woman... I started thinking about it and... to lose my children? It's better if they stay here, look for a spouse, a husband, and that way I know they are here close, it's easier to see them, and yes I got worried that [if they leave] I would lose them.

Sara and others used the word "*desparramarse*" (roughly, "scatter") to describe what they feared would happen to their children if they were allowed to migrate legally to the United States.

Emigrant children would likely get married in the U.S., start families there, and eventually lose their ties to Mexico, parents feared. For these families, the father/husband's²⁹ absence was a sacrifice they were willing to make in the interest of the moral integrity of their families, and for the good of their children's moral development and future prospects.

Legal inheritance vs. cultural inheritance

A final consideration for Rio Secan families frames legal status as either a positive form of inheritance, or as a threat to the cultural integrity of the community. For some, legal status was seen as a form of inheritance with its own intrinsic value, which could in turn produce economic value through enabling transnational migrant employment. For others, an inheritance of cultural values, tight-knit community life, and strong family connections was a more valued "estate" they wished to leave their children, a bequest which is potentially threatened by the granting of legal status. Edgar, the single father of two daughters and grandfather of one, explained:

²⁹ I use "father/husband," rather than "head of household," to describe the role the Rio Secan men play in their families, because I think it better reflects the complexity of gendered dynamics in Rio Secan migrant families. As other scholars have documented, while the father/husband is away from home, the mother/wife takes on many additional responsibilities. Rather than privileging a single "head," the terms "father/husband" and "mother/wife" are relative terms that more adequately indicate the gendered relational dynamics of Rio Secan households.

It's a project that I have. I hope it is realized. But I'm also visualizing [a future] for my grandson as well. Because it's like a... how can I tell you, it's a... it's an inheritance that one is leaving behind. In some form... with the final objective that they be prepared.... I'm going to do it *para que siga mi descendencia* (so that my descendants can continue)... My daughter... She can arrange for papers for her son too. What's more, if I could arrange his papers I would do it right now. For my grandson. If I could I would... And, well, there are not many people that can arrange for papers (*arreglar*). But also, those of us who have papers are old now. We are going to be a generation that's going to have to die. So I'm of the idea that we must leave it to those who follow us.

Although Edgar has not yet legalized his children, he expresses the desire to do so. He feels that legal U.S. immigration status is something he can grant to the “next generation” of Rio Secan migrants. Another Rio Seco migrant who now lives permanently in the U.S. suggested that his father had a similar notion about the role legalization would play in his life. “One day, my dad said to us [kids] ‘We don’t have land, nor houses. But something that I will leave behind for you are your papers.’ He wanted us to know that with the papers we could enter and leave the U.S. freely, and earn more money than if we were in Mexico.”

Others felt that the most important form of inheritance was cultural, rather than legal. Legalization (and resulting migration) was seen as a threat to the unity of the town. There is a sense amongst many Rio Secans that people should stay in the community if they can. Lidia, for example, has expressed numerous times that she believes that the town could improve itself from within, if only the migrants would stay in Mexico and invest their time and efforts in the local community. Of course, economic realities in Rio Seco make this possibility seem distant – even those who stay in Mexico often leave Rio Seco to pursue employment opportunities in Querétaro and other cities. Furthermore, legal status and its economic benefits have enabled Rio Secan LPRs to return more frequently and spend more time in Rio Seco than their undocumented migrant counterparts. While some emigrate permanently and completely severing their social ties

to the town, most continue to remain deeply engaged in the town's cultural, social, economic, and political life.

Whether families consider one, two, three, four, or all five of these dimensions, the decision to legalize or not is approached with the utmost care and consideration. Numerous discussions between husbands and wives, exhaustive research, and extensive planning demonstrate how critical this decision is viewed in the parenting of Rio Secan children. Legalization is expensive, time-consuming, stressful, and demanding. Husbands and wives approach the process with respect for the significance it may have for their children's future success and happiness.

Strategic Moves: Legal Permanent Migration

For Rio Secans, emigration and return migration choices are distinct from choices about legalization. Legalization is seen as a resource that can be potentially deployed by one's family members, if needed. But a person who pursues legalization may not necessarily immediately, or ever, pursue migration. As a result, there are a few different legal/migration arrangements seen amongst families of IRCA beneficiaries. These arrangements can roughly be categorized in to four "types": 1) the male migrant breadwinner; 2) family legalization without migration except to maintain legal status; 3) family legalization and family migration with no intent to stay permanently; and 4) family legalization and (semi-)permanent family migration with the intent to stay longer than one season.

The most prevalent household migration strategy in the Rio Seco-Connecticut network is the "male migrant breadwinner" arrangement. This strategy involves the annual seasonal migration of the father/husband, who sends remittances back home to support the family who remains in Rio Seco. This strategy is quite common, because it provides an efficient way to manipulate earnings

to produce the most “bang for their buck,” as dollars earned in U.S. are translated into greater value in Mexican pesos. Families remain in Rio Seco, partly due to a fear of experiencing poverty in the U.S. As Gerardo explained of his experience in the U.S.,

I saw a lot of couples, families, that had a hard time. They had to pay rent, and all of that, and their bills arrived and they said no... there were occasions in which they... came to us for money because they couldn't manage. So I thought about all of that and I said *no*. Bringing my family... How am I going to manage... no, no, no, no. So that's what I thought about, I said no, *mejor las tengo bien allá* (it's better to have them there [in Mexico]). And that way when I send [money], well, *algo rinde* (it's worth more) or something, well we can do more, than if [they're all in the U.S.]

Given these challenges, many parents opt to keep their children in Mexico where life is more affordable, or “*rinde mas el dinero*” (money is worth more).

A second strategy Rio Secan families deploy is family legalization without immediate migration (except to maintain legal status). This strategy is used in a variety of ways. As described above, legalization is considered to be a resource for potential future migration. Families who wish to enable some additional members to migrate at some point in the future may pursue legalization despite having no immediate plans to leave Rio Seco, even temporarily. However, because legal permanent residency requires green card holders to be present in the United States for a certain period to maintain their legal status, each LPR technically should plan to emigrate at some point, if only to maintain their legal status. The INA guidelines are relatively vague on exactly what percentage of one's time must be spent in the U.S., indicating only that LPRS may leave and re-enter multiple times “as long as [they] do not intend to stay outside the U.S. for one year or more” (U.S. Customs and Border Patrol). Rio Secans try to meet these vague requirements when they can, but it was clear that at least some LPRs probably do not meet these official guidelines. It was also clear that Rio Secans occasionally received contradictory advice from border patrol and ICE representatives. Mauricio, for example, is an IRCA LPR who

decided to legalize his family several years ago. For the time being, he plans to continue to work in the U.S. to support his family, while his wife and children maintain their permanent residence in Mexico. In order to save money, Mauricio (and many other Rio Secans) sometimes travels to the U.S. by car or bus. A few times, while crossing the border, he has been “scolded” by border patrol agents, who question him about how long he has been out of the country. Once, they even threatened him, suggesting that they would “take away” his green card if he refused to settle permanently in the U.S. and, of course, learn English. While he does not know for certain exactly how much time he is legally supposed to spend in the U.S. to maintain his legal permanent resident status, he has been told by border patrol agents during these encounters that three months of residency in the U.S. are required. Thus, he began to bring his wife and children to the U.S. during their summer vacation from school.

Indeed, in order to maintain their legal permanent residency, Rio Secans also must engage in periodic migration to deal with various bureaucratic processes and document maintenance. A number of Rio Secans I know who have semi-permanently returned to Rio Seco for retirement occasionally return to the Rio Secan network node in the San Joaquin Valley, staying with friends and relatives – sometimes for weeks or months – in order to participate in visa-related interviews, appointments, and paperwork processing.

A third strategy, utilized by Julia and Nacho above, is family legalization and family seasonal migration. Juan and his family, discussed in the opening vignette, also engage in a version of this strategy, by bringing their daughters to the U.S. to work with them on summer vacations. Although this strategy can give way to one or more family members (particularly children) eventually immigrating on a more permanent basis to the United States, these families typically do not express an immediate intent to become “permanent” residents.

The final “type” of migration arrangement is family legalization combined with (semi-) permanent migration. As discussed in Chapter 2, some Rio Secan migrants based in California chose to legalize their families almost immediately after the passing of the 1986 IRCA, and several now have U.S. citizen “jus solis” children and even grandchildren living in the United States. This strategy was less common amongst the Rio Secans I spoke with, compared to the other three migration arrangements, but may become more common in the future. Some families who have legalized the wife/mother and children and have engaged in bureaucratic or seasonal family migration see these as opportunities to “try out” living in the U.S. Mauricio enrolled his young adult daughter in an English class on one trip visiting relatives in the U.S., to see if she would be interested in pursuing a future there. Similarly, Nacho and Julia enrolled their 9-year-old daughter in elementary school in Aldenboro for three months while they were working.

As these examples illustrate, these strategies are far from static. On the contrary, they are quite fluid, and vary over time, particularly as children get older. The family of Bernardo, a former Bracero and IRCA LPR, provides a cogent example of how legalization and migration strategies may change over time. Bernardo applied for legalization for his wife and ten children when his oldest reached working age. The two oldest migrated to the United States to work for several years, and send money back to their parents in order to support the survival and education of their younger siblings. Most of the family, including Bernardo’s wife Bettina, never even set foot in the United States (having processed their paperwork on the Mexican side of the border) until a full ten years later, when they needed to renew their green cards. The whole family ventured to California to go through the renewal process, hoping that their lack of residence in the U.S. would be overlooked. Somehow, it was, and they were all able to renew their green cards.

The Garcia family, in contrast, legalized early on and moved the entire family (except one child who could not be legalized due to her age³⁰) to the San Joaquin Valley, where they eventually purchased a small home. For a few years, they lived “permanently” in the U.S., making periodic returns to Mexico to visit with family. Once their children were all of age, they began to make plans to return to Mexico for their retirement. They sold their home, and used the proceeds of the sale to fix up their home in Rio Seco and establish a small business which they hope will sustain them during their retirement.

Naturalization and U.S. Citizenship

Even though legal permanent residents have access to a “pathway to citizenship,” very few Rio Secan migrants pursue this option. The reasons for this are, again, quite complex, and reflect both individual choices as well as structural barriers.

In order to apply for naturalization, an applicant must have been a legal permanent resident for at least five years, and have lived within the state (or USCIS district) of current residence for at least three months prior to the date they filed the application. They must be able to demonstrate continuous residence in the U.S. as an LPR for the last 5 years, and must have been physically present in the U.S. at least 30 months of those 5 years. Once the naturalization application has been submitted, an applicant cannot leave the United States. When an applicant’s paperwork gets processed, s/he then must complete an interview, where s/he will be asked to pass an English language test and a civics test. If all goes well, and the applicant is determined to be “a person of good moral character... disposed to the good order and happiness of the United

³⁰ At age 21, children are eligible under family preference category F2B, instead of F2A, which currently has a backlog (USCIS 2017d).

States,” (USCIS 2017a) then her/his application will likely be granted, and s/he will become a citizen.

Particularly for folks like the Rio Secan migrants, who have limited financial resources, and whose English language skills have been somewhat limited by their transnational lifestyles, this process can seem quite daunting. Citizenship is a costly process, and the level of English language facility required to pass the interview is a significant barrier. As a result, Rio Secans have mixed views about whether or not they plan to pursue (or are capable of pursuing) citizenship. Most of the men are aware of the “English language exemption,” which waives the English language requirement (but not the civics test) for those who are 50 or older at the time of filing for naturalization, and have been permanent residents for 20 years, or those who are 55 or older and have been LPRs for 15 years (USCIS 2017b). By virtue of their personal migration histories, most Rio Secan IRCA LPRs currently are, or eventually will be, eligible for one or the other of these exemptions. Those who are interested in applying for citizenship, and who are not confident that they could pass the English test, indicate that they plan to wait to apply for naturalization at least until they no longer have to take the English test.

That said, not all Rio Secans are interested in becoming U.S. citizens, despite their long-term status as “legal permanent residents.” Many indicated that they didn’t see a clear purpose to naturalization; legal permanent residency facilitated their transnational employment, so there was no need to become a citizen.

For those who did want to naturalize, the reasons were primarily strategic, rather than based in affection for or allegiance to the United States. Some, particularly those who had had negative border-crossing experiences, felt that it was a way to protect their ability to continue to cross the border legally – essentially, as a way to protect their legal permanent resident status.

Others cited more abstract notions, including a general sense of “stability,” and of having more concrete “rights” in the U.S. Citizenship was also seen to provide access to certain privileges not provided legal permanent residents, including the right to vote.

But perhaps the most common reason for interest in naturalization was the fact that citizens have greater “powers of legalization” vis-à-vis family members than do legal permanent residents. First, the “immediate relatives” of U.S. citizens automatically become eligible for legalization, with no yearly quota limit. This means that a U.S. citizen’s spouse, unmarried children under 21 years of age, and parents (if the petitioner is 21 or older) can simply file a form (I-130), and if/when it is processed, they will be granted a visa to travel to the U.S. Immediate relatives who follow this process become legal permanent residents upon admission to the U.S. at a port of entry. This option is typically faster than legalizing family members through the F2 preference category for (certain) family members of legal permanent residents because applications are not subject to visa priority dates and yearly limits. Second, certain children born outside of the U.S. legally become U.S. citizens when at least one parent becomes a citizen, in a legal phenomenon known as “derivative citizenship.” Juan, for example, told me that he was considering becoming a U.S. citizen in the future, even though he had already legalized his wife and children through F2 petitions, because “my son would automatically become a citizen.” While we did not discuss this further at the time, it is important to note that there are several specific parameters which restrict this kind of derivative citizenship. As the USCIS website states, “A child born outside the U.S. is a citizen after birth if the child was under 18 or not yet born on February 27, 2011, and at least one parent is a U.S. citizen, the child is currently under 18 *and residing in the U.S. in the legal and physical custody of the U.S. citizen parent* pursuant to lawful admission for permanent residence” (USCIS 2017e). In other words, in order for his

son to get derivative citizenship, he would have to be living with Juan in the U.S. – but it was unclear if Juan understood this particular wrinkle in the law.

Third, U.S. citizens may apply for the legalization of several categories of family members (under family preference categories F1, F3, and F4) that are otherwise excluded in the family-based preferences afforded legal permanent residents (F2). U.S. citizens can petition for the legalization of their unmarried sons and daughters, and their minor children (F1), their married sons and daughters, and their spouses and minor children (F3), *and* their brothers and sisters, and *their* spouses and minor children, if the petitioner is at least 21 years of age (F4).

Despite their continued vulnerability as legal permanent residents, and despite their capacity to naturalize, very few Rio Secans have opted to become citizens. As Rouse (1992) also found in the early 1980's, this is in large part due to the fact that it is this in-between status, "as Mexican citizens with the right to "permanent residence" that they will be best equipped to move back and forth between the two countries" (Rouse 1992: 14). While legal permanent resident status grants a significant benefit when compared to the alternatives (undocumented migration, visas providing temporary work authorization), citizenship is perceived to grant fewer benefits when compared to LPR status. The "profit margin" of legalization is greater than that of naturalization, except in *some* specific cases (for example, when a migrant wants to legalize a family member only eligible through the family preference categories pertaining to U.S. citizens).

Conclusion: Rio Secan Legal Futures

This dissertation focuses primarily on the migration and legalization arrangements of the cohort of Rio Secans who were granted legal status through the 1986 IRCA and their oldest

children, who are also adults engaging in seasonal labor migration. But it will be important to consider the ways in which these strategies may change over time. The next generation of il/legal Rio Secans may develop new ways of thinking about migration and legalization, particularly considering that they may encounter dramatically different socioeconomic circumstances in Rio Seco (and, arguably, the United States) as they come of age.

For instance, most of the Rio Secan men who legalized after the 1986 IRCA were already of legal working age by the time they gained legal permanent resident status. If they weren't already married with children, most married soon after their legalization and started families. This means that most of the men were not eligible to become citizens until their children had already been born, so the main incentives they cite for becoming citizens at this point in their lives relate to the legalization of other family members in the F1, F3, and F4 preference categories. How might these considerations be different for members of the next generation of Rio Secan legal permanent residents, who are currently children, youth, and unmarried young adults? Conceivably, given the strategic moves families make to gain and maintain legal status, it is possible that the opportunity to grant children U.S. citizenship through birth ("acquired citizenship") might be adopted as a legitimate strategy. Members of this new generation of legal permanent residents could, conceivably, opt to become citizens before having children, so that their children would become citizens even if they are born in Mexico. That said, there are specific statutory requirements for acquired citizenship with which Rio Secans would have to comply. Children born outside the U.S. to a U.S. citizen parent are U.S. citizens at birth if, and only if, the U.S. citizen parent has been "physically present in the U.S. or its territories for a period of at least five years at some time in his or her life prior to the birth, of which at least two years were after his or her 14th birthday" (USCIS 2017e). In other words, a young Rio Secan

migrant hoping to grant acquired citizenship to her/his future children would have to spend a cumulative five years in the U.S. prior to the birth of the child, and after they turn 14.

Alternatively, Rio Secans might opt to remain legal permanent residents while starting their families to maintain control over the legal status of their children. If they were to become citizens, and grant their children acquired citizenship through birth, they could nullify the power of il/legalization as a parenting tool. Whether Rio Secans' "lay" legal knowledge will expand to incorporate the contours of these elements of U.S. immigration law will also be important to consider in future research.

Another important question for future research relates to the gendered dynamics of legalization strategies. Since virtually all members of the initial cohort of IRCA beneficiaries were men, it has ultimately been Rio Secan husbands with the power to decide whether to submit family-based petitions to legalize their wives and children. But as they legalize their families, there is a growing new generation of women with legal status, and concomitantly, the power to legalize their own family members. How will women with legal permanent resident status decide to manage the legalization and migration arrangements of their future families? How will their legal status impact their lives as wives and mothers in Rio Seco and transnationally? How might women's legal status impact gendered power dynamics in the wider Rio Seco community? What will little Suzy, a U.S. citizen being raised in Mexico, decide to do with herself as she comes of age? How will she conceive of her identity? If she spends at least a cumulative five years of her young adult life in the U.S., her future children will be U.S. citizens. Will they, too, seek to maintain transnational lives?

Chapter Five - Migrant Money, Social Status, and Social Change in Rio Seco and Beyond

There is a distinctively seasonal ebb and flow to social life in Rio Seco, which roughly mirrors the agricultural growing season in the United States. Most Rio Secan migrants with legal status come to the U.S. during the months with peak agricultural production – April through September. Many linger into the late fall and winter if they find work pruning and maintaining the fields, but most at least try to return to Rio Seco soon after the main growing and harvesting seasons in Connecticut end. After working ten-hour days, seven days per week, for five or more months, migrants return to Mexico to rest and recharge, and to take part in family celebrations. By mid-December, most Rio Secans who plan to return in a given year have done so.

The half of the year that Rio Secan migrants are in the United States working furiously to earn money for their families is quite a slow time for those who remain in the town. But as the migrants return, things start to pick up, particularly as the festival dedicated to the town's patron saint approaches. Migrants and their families take full advantage of this window of time – birthday celebrations, baptisms, communions, and weddings are crammed into every weekend in December and January, so that migrant family members may attend. On a given Saturday during these months there may be multiple weddings going on in the municipality, and sometimes more than one in the same day within the same rancho. Occasionally the bride and groom are left waiting for the priest to arrive from another wedding ceremony, and are ushered out quickly after the ceremony is over as the next bride waits outside the church gates. In the cumulative five months I have spent in Rio Seco, I have attended six or seven weddings.

Weddings in Rio Seco are an all-day affair. Custom dictates that a typical wedding consists of a Catholic Mass in one of the two main churches in town, followed by a large two- to three-course meal in the early afternoon (usually chicken with mole, rice, and beans, then

carnitas and barbacoa tacos), followed by a reception in the late afternoon or evening with music and dancing. Traditionally, weddings are 100% open to the community, and a few hundred people may attend the meal and reception, depending on the popularity of the family and the rumored quality of the food and entertainment. Families with more financial resources, or with better-off social connections, may invite a big-name band to play live at the reception. One wedding I attended, which featured a very popular huapango band, drew easily 1000 people over the course of the day.

While weddings in the United States are often evaluated based on originality, weddings in Rio Seco are evaluated based on how well they match the traditional model. There are just a few ways in which traditional Rio Secan weddings may vary, including the color of the streamers, balloons, and other decorations, whether a DJ or band is invited, and which traditional wedding rituals are done at the reception³¹. Most wedding meals and receptions are held at the cancha, but a family with a large enough plot of land may host these events at the family home.

One wedding I attended in 2015 stands out in my memory. Efraín Gonzalez, the son of a Connecticut migrant, proposed to his now wife, Julia, in the Spring of 2015 shortly after I left Rio Seco. They planned to marry the following December, when Efraín's father would be home from working in Connecticut. Being friendly with the groom's family, and having returned to Rio Seco to conduct fieldwork, I offered to help with some of the preparations in the days leading up to the wedding. I got an extensive inside preview of the event as I helped clean the lawn, set up chairs and center pieces for around 50 eight-person tables, and unpacked eating utensils for the 300-some expected attendees.

³¹ Some rituals are considered to be absolutely necessary, while others are optional and may be included or excluded depending on the preference of the couple.

The family went to incredible lengths to prepare the property where they planned to hold the meal and reception, Efraín's mother's childhood home, which has been converted in recent years into an event venue. In the days before the wedding, family members and hired help installed an enormous shade structure, extended the stone-paved driveway by an additional 20 feet, outfitted the property with industrial light fixtures, and raked the lawn to within an inch of its life. But perhaps what was most remarkable about Efraín and Julia's wedding was the blend of traditional and "modern" elements it featured. The couple was married by the priest in the church in the cabecera, per tradition, but Julia was accompanied by several bridesmaids, a relatively atypical practice. The meal and reception were held at the groom's extended family's property in the rancho, but hand-crafted Styrofoam globes decorated with cream-colored artificial flowers and trailing ribbons replaced the usual balloons and paper streamers. Guests were fed traditional fare – mole, carnitas, and barbacoa, but did so using expensive gold-colored disposable plates and silverware and crystal-cut plastic condiment bowls, painstakingly procured package by package at markets in several nearby cities, rather than the typical inexpensive white Styrofoam available locally in Rio Seco. Guests were entertained by a classical musical group featuring violins, as well as a contemporary Mexican band later in the evening, and a "photo booth" complete with colorful wigs, oversized sunglasses, and other props. They also hired a professional photographer, who took high-definition photos of the couple in romantic poses from "artsy" angles with the Rio Secan desert landscape as a backdrop. This wedding was undoubtedly more expensive than the typical Rio Secan affair. It was also more exclusive – though officially open to the community, I heard of a few community members who felt uncomfortable attending due to the relative luxury of the event.

These differences reflect, in part, the social positioning of Efraín, Julia, and their respective families. Julia's family, though not from Rio Seco, is quite wealthy. Efraín's parents play prominent roles in the social life of Rio Seco as successful merchants and dedicated community organizers with magnanimous personalities. Efraín's mother is a retired teacher – a highly respected occupation in Rio Seco, and his father was one of the “pioneer” migrants who continues to play a major role in the maintenance and perpetuation of the Rio Seco-Connecticut employment network. It makes sense, then, that their wedding would be more elaborate and costly than other weddings in less well-connected families.

But the wedding wasn't just differentiated based on its larger budget and relative exclusivity. The unique touches Efraín and Julia incorporated into their wedding bear more resemblance to the “wedding industrial complex” (Ingraham 2009) in the U.S. than they do to Rio Secan customs. From the bridesmaids, to the decorations, to the photobooth setup, this wedding looked like it could have been inspired by Pinterest,³² a photo-based digital bookmarking site particularly popular among women in the U.S., and known for its' extensive network of “wedding ideas” boards³³.

The divergence of Efraín and Julia's wedding from Rio Secan norms belies a complex process of social change which is taking place in Rio Seco, as migrant families' dreams of upward social mobility and cosmopolitan modernity have come to seem achievable based on the relative financial stability and higher incomes generated by legal migration.

In this chapter, I trace the contours of these changes, and examine their impact on contemporary Rio Secan class structures and subjectivities. Specifically, I argue that legal

³² <http://pinterest.com>

³³ Given the proliferation of internet and social media access in Rio Seco, it may very well have been inspired by ideas Julia saw on Pinterest.

migration through the network has generated increased economic resources, which have in turn begun to upset the traditional status hierarchy in Rio Seco. Ultimately, these shifts are transforming class subjectivities, as migrants and their families, find ways to cope with the shifting terrain of class and social status in their home town.

Social Status and Class Subjectivity in Anthropology

The concept of “class” has a variety of uses and meanings in anthropology and the broader social sciences. For some, “class” refers primarily to the existence of income stratification. According to this construction, class can be operationalized relatively simplistically, using income or in some cases occupation. “Upper” classes have more money, whereas “lower” classes have less (Breen and Rottman 2014)). For others, particularly those influenced by the Marxist tradition, “class” refers to exploitative relations of production generated by the capitalist economic system. According to this framework, as it was originally elaborated, there are two classes in society: the bourgeoisie (owners of the means of production) and the proletariat (the working class). Still others use a combination of definitions, including the way people think of themselves as belonging to particular class groups based on levels of education or social connectedness (Ortner 2006).

In this dissertation, I view “class” as a multi-layered, culturally and historically constructed concept, comprised of three analytically linked but distinct elements: economic/material resources, social positions or statuses, and class subjectivities. Economic and material resources include assets or property owned or possessed by migrants which have a monetary value. In the context of rural Mexico, these include land, homes, cars, and other goods (ie. stereos, furniture), as well as cash income and other financial assets. I include a consideration of these economic and material resources because, while class cannot be simplified to mere

“incomes” or “assets,” these resources are an important piece of the puzzle in understanding inequality and social mobility (Ortner 2006).

A second aspect of class is a person’s social position or status, terms which refer to one’s location in a social-economic hierarchy. This concept draws on systems of social stratification, or “the internal division into a hierarchy of distinct social groups, each having specific life chances and a distinctive style of life” (Scott 2014:np). For this dissertation, a particularly important distinction is that one’s “social status” is linked, though not equivalent to, “class status.” I use the term “social status” to refer to notions of prestige, which are typically determined by occupation, education, and other moral evaluations of a person’s social “honor.” “Class status,” on the other hand, refers to a person’s economic position.

Finally, with the phrase class subjectivity, I refer to the “complex structures of thought, feeling, and reflection, that make social beings always more than the occupants of particular positions and the holders of particular identities” (Ortner 2006) in an economic system. For the purposes of this dissertation, this includes how individuals may embrace or reject tropes of modernity in the context of rising incomes and greater access to international communication.

Despite the proliferation of anthropological and sociological work on both migrant transnationalism and migrant labor, few scholars have examined how shifts in status hierarchies and class subjectivity function when factoring in continued transnational social connections and repeated or circular migration patterns. This is an important consideration, however, according to Portes and Walton (1981);

“We need to focus attention on the labor process... we need additional analysis of class structures within specific nation-states as they are molded and in turn react to world-capitalist penetration. Included under this rubric are the shifting character of the working class in response to labor migration...; contradictions

within core and peripheral class structures provoked by the global strategies of capital; and the forms adapted by the class struggle in response to them.”
(p. 19)

One exception to this trend is the work of anthropologist Roger Rouse. In his work with migrants from rural Aguililla, Michoacan, Rouse (1992) argues that the first generation of men who emigrated in the 1960's underwent a transformation in their class consciousness. Though they started out engaged in systems of independent petty production in the context of the rural agricultural economy of their home town, they were eventually “proletarianized,” or transformed into wage laborers, through their experiences as migrant workers. In the process, these migrants became “members of a transnational semiproletariat, caught chronically astride borders and class positions” (1992: 45).

In her work with Filipina domestic workers, Parreñas suggests that highly educated migrants experience “contradictory class mobility” (2015, 118), or simultaneous downward and upward mobility, when they engage in low-skill domestic work. Their employment in domestic work constitutes a decline in occupational status, despite the fact that they earn considerably more than they would at home in the Philippines.

Similarly, Horton (2013) has proposed that Mexican migrants experience a temporary “dual class transformation... from Medicaid recipients to cash-paying patients, and from poor rural peasants to a privileged elite.” (2013:418). In the U.S., migrants seeking care are seen as “denigrated recipients of entitlements” (2013:424), but in Mexico they are seen as “valuable customers whose business must be courted and retained” (2013:424), and therefore receive “red carpet” treatment by Mexico's private health care system.

Class, Status, and Stratification in Rural Mexico

Social status hierarchies in Rio Seco are best understood in the context of the broader history of social status hierarchies in Mexican history. After the arrival of the Spanish, colonial systems of social and political organization took root, and a new hierarchy based on race-ethnicity and political-economic positioning emerged. In the early years of Spanish colonial rule there was a fairly simplistic Spanish/Indigenous dichotomy, which positioned indigenous people as inherently inferior – culturally and biologically – to the Spanish invaders. As Spanish presence persisted, a caste system developed to distinguish among these original groups and “newer” populations. “Peninsulares,” (Spaniards and other Europeans born in Europe), sat at the top of the hierarchy, followed by “criollos” (people of full Spanish descent born in Latin America) and “mestizos,” people of mixed Spanish and Amerindian heritage. “Indios,” a derogatory term used to refer to Amerindians, were understood to occupy the bottom rungs of the socio-racial caste system.

During the Spanish colonial regime, Mexico’s rural lands were primarily organized into haciendas, large plots of land owned by Spain and operated by local representatives, and “pueblos de indios” (Assies 2008). Haciendas continued, largely untouched, after Independence, and just prior to the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) rural lands were increasingly concentrated in the hands of a powerful few: “87 percent of the land occupied by rural holdings [was] in the hands of .2 percent of the landowners” (2008: 41). In fact, it was in part the extreme consolidation of landholding which fueled revolutionary sentiment amongst rural Mexican populations (Assies 2008). Rio Seco was, at one time, hacienda-managed agricultural land.

Haciendas were eventually dismantled and lands were granted for community use in the form of “ejidos” – communally-owned lands that could not be transferred or sold. Rural

Mexicans continued to survive on subsistence agriculture and, increasingly, migrant agricultural work within the country. During the 1940's through the 1960's, the Mexican and U.S. governments facilitated the Bracero Program in an attempt to turn Mexico's "inefficient" peasantry into "future yeoman farmers" (Cohen 2011) to support the growth of urban populations. The ratification of NAFTA in the mid-1990's resulted in the collapse of Mexico's smallholding farming sector, and dramatically increased the proportion of Mexicans seeking wage labor through transnational migration to the United States. Today, the country still suffers from a significant gap between the rich and the poor. Rural areas are often particularly neglected, and there is an overwhelming concentration of wealth in the hands of a small urban elite (Nutini and Isaac 2009).

The most salient markers of social status in Rio Seco are indigenous identity, economic wealth, and occupational status. Despite national, state, and local-level attempts to engage in indigenous cultural revitalization, actual indigenous identities continue to be devalued. Although most Rio Secans acknowledge their "roots" are indigenous, many do not personally identify as indigenous, and some even explicitly disparage local "Indian" populations in an attempt to distance themselves from indigeneity. This anti-indigenous sentiment reflects long-standing prejudices rooted in the Spanish colonial socio-racial hierarchies. Importantly, following the trend in the rest of Mexico, the devaluation of indigeneity in Rio Seco is based on more of a cultural, rather than a racial, distinction, although there is a degree of preference for lighter-skinned or "European" features in the community. Since most Rio Secan residents today are quite similar, phenotypically and culturally (excluding Los Corrales and the affiliated ranchos who *do* espouse explicitly indigenous identities), the main social differentiators amongst the self-

identified “nonindigenous” population are wealth, social status (occupational prestige and education), and, to a lesser degree, geography.

In terms of wealth, Rio Seco’s population can roughly be conceptualized in three groups: those with “old” money, those with “new” money, and those with “no money.”³⁴ The old money category includes descendants of what locals refer to as some of Rio Seco’s “first families.” One such family home I visited during fieldwork featured antique Spanish colonial style furniture and ornate curtains – these families’ prestigious lineage and inherited wealth place them at the top of the local hierarchy. There are also a number of families in Rio Seco which have old money by virtue of their generations of experience as local merchants, professionals (ie. private medical practices), and craftsmen. Most of these families live within the cabecera municipal, and typically have large, multi-storied homes with store fronts. For these families, their well-established businesses generate enough income to support the family, and migration is usually unnecessary. It is important to note that, although these old money families have relatively more economic resources than average Rio Secans, they are by no means “rich,” neither by international nor by Mexican standards.

Families with *new* money include some merchants, professionals, and craftsmen who have managed to start successful businesses in the last generation or two, as well as families who support themselves with remittances from migration to the U.S. (legal and otherwise). These two groups are somewhat intertwined – some of these new business ventures were started with seed money gleaned from transnational migrant work, and many of the customers supporting the existence of these businesses are only able to patronize them by virtue of their earnings as

³⁴ Given the considerable variability in each category, they are best understood as existing on a continuum.

migrant workers³⁵. Many of these new money families continue to engage in both a local business venture and transnational migration in order to support themselves. Of course, the economic realities of families in this broadly-defined category vary significantly. Some businesses fare better than others, and families with legal permanent resident migrants tend to fare better than those of undocumented migrants (as I will describe below).

Despite the increasing flow of economic resources coming into Rio Seco due to migration, many residents continue to have very little access to financial resources. Families in this category, which I refer to as those with no money, have very little or no access to income-generating activities, and live day-to-day with very little cash-based consumption. They may engage in temporary odd jobs for extremely low wages, or depend upon the limited government support they receive³⁶. They may also engage in seasonal agricultural production if they happen to own productive land, or find an opportunity to work someone else's land as a sharecropper, referred to locally as "a medias"³⁷. Locals engaged in factory work in nearby San Rafael, and construction workers engaging in day labor in and around Rio Seco constitute the upper end of this category – they are more prosperous than those who don't engage in any wage labor, but they still struggle to meet the needs of daily subsistence.

Though linked to wealth, social status is reckoned using slightly different criteria, including occupational prestige and educational achievement. Rio Secans hold certain classes of professionals – particularly doctors and teachers – in high regard, despite the relatively meager incomes earned by most in these careers. Although doctors with private practices are

³⁵ In almost every instance of which I've learned, class movement has been fueled by remittances from transnational and/or (to a lesser degree) internal urban migration to Querétaro or Mexico City.

³⁶ Some Rio Secans receive government support through the "oportunidades" program (see Smith-Oka 2013).

³⁷ Under this system, the sharecropper works the land and keeps half of the harvest (Colin 2005). In Rio Seco, peanuts, corn, and beans are the most common crop planted in such arrangements.

compensated somewhat better than their publicly employed counterparts, their incomes are nowhere near as elevated as those of doctors in the United States. The respect they are accorded is based in occupational prestige, and respect for the high level of education they have achieved, not wealth.

A final consideration in the Rio Secan social hierarchy is geography. Rio Secans who live in the extremely rural regions of the municipality are sometimes referred to as “los del cerro,” literally “those from the mountains.” The phrase has a derogatory connotation, likely based in the historically constructed association between rurality, indigeneity, and “backwardness.”

Legal Migration and Social Change in Rio Seco

Rio Secan men have been migrating to the United States to engage in seasonal agricultural labor since the Bracero program in the 1940’s-1960’s, and there are many families which have been supported by migrant remittances for two, or even three, generations. But the amount of money Rio Secans remit has dramatically increased since the 1940’s. While some of this increase has been due to nation-wide farmworker protections in the U.S. resulting from extensive farmworker organizing, and the increase of real wages over time, the cohort of Rio Secans discussed in this dissertation have seen disproportionately higher increases in the economic resources they generate through their work on farms in the U.S. compared with farmworker migrants outside the network.

Below, I compare the working and living arrangements, wages, and other economic benefits available to “legal” Rio Secans in Connecticut with the situation of their undocumented counterparts and farmworkers in other parts of the country, in order to show that it is their status as legal permanent residents, combined with the influence of the Connecticut-Rio Seco network,

which have dramatically altered the economic and material realities of these Rio Secan migrants and their families.

Perhaps the most obvious way in which legal status results in increased material resources is by reducing the cost of migration. Undocumented migrants in Rio Seco pay anywhere from 3,500 dollars to 5,000 dollars or more to a coyote each time they cross the border, and often pay additional fees and bribes to police, narcotraffickers, gang representatives, and other gatekeepers along the way. In contrast, legal migrants cross the border at designated crossing points and only incur the fees associated with their transportation to and from Connecticut. This benefit is magnified for those who work in Connecticut through the network, as a number of Connecticut farmers pay for plane tickets for their workers to come and go from Mexico at the beginning and end of the season.

Legal status also enables migrants to engage in profit maximization behaviors that are more difficult (or impossible) for undocumented migrants, including “shopping around” in search of better wages and other work-related benefits. It was through these profit maximization behaviors that Rio Secans ultimately decided to establish employment ties in Connecticut, where they enjoy relatively higher wages and better working conditions than in other states. The typical hourly wage for Rio Secans working in Connecticut ranges between eleven and fifteen dollars an hour, and they typically work sixty- to seventy- hour weeks for seven to nine months, after which time they return to Mexico. Annual U.S. earnings for Rio Secans in Connecticut range between \$15,000 and \$35,000 dollars, with the latter characteristic of workers with seniority or with higher-paying employers, and workers who work a full 9 months of 70-hour work weeks. These salaries are between one dollar per hour and five dollars per hour higher than in California, where farm labor is typically compensated at minimum wage, or \$10 per hour. This is also

substantially higher than the U.S. national average for farmworkers of \$7.25 per hour, or a range of \$10,000-12,499 in annual income.

In addition to higher wages, those who work in Connecticut through the network enjoy a reduction in overall expenses. The cost of living for a farmworker in Connecticut is typically lower than it is in other states, as farmers in the network charge no rent or transportation fees to those who live on-site. Although a worker is responsible for paying for her/his phone, groceries, and other personal expenses in any employment situation, the geographic and cultural isolation experienced by Rio Secans in Connecticut farms means that they are likely to spend considerably less money in these categories, particularly when compared to California, where workers are tempted by weekly dances and other events put on by the sizeable Mexican immigrant and Mexican American communities in places like the San Joaquin Valley. Furthermore, Rio Secan workers in Connecticut often work extra hours after their regular workdays are over – a practice which both increases their total earnings and reduces their discretionary spending on social activities.

Considered individually, the higher wages and savings associated with legal work in Connecticut³⁸ seem insignificant – but a conservative estimate based on my interviews suggests that the impact is substantial – a difference of some \$1200-\$1500 or more per month, or \$7200-\$9000 per six-month season. This “profit margin” associated with work in Connecticut is magnified even further when converted to pesos (136,800-171,000 pesos). This amount of money could enable a Rio Secan to buy a small plot of land in El Mecate, build an additional room in her/his house, or buy a decent used car. Ultimately, the combination of legal permanent resident status with the desirable conditions in Connecticut and the establishment of the

³⁸ It is worth noting that some of these benefits are also transferred to undocumented workers through the network (ie. rent-free housing and higher wages).

employment network have enabled legal Rio Secan migrants to cut costs that they would otherwise incur, save more money, and remit more to their families in Mexico.

In turn, this remittance money has resulted in material changes to the quality of life of migrants' families³⁹. Rio Secan legal migrants remit a substantial proportion of their wages to their families in Mexico, in a manner similar to that described in other studies of Mexican migrants (ie. Durand and Massey 1992; Cohen 2004). Some migrants use a portion of their incomes to sponsor celebrations for extended family and community events, but most is spent at the household level. Migrants often use remittances to build additional rooms onto their homes, to build store fronts, to invest in merchandise or equipment for business ventures, to pay for children's school fees, or to improve the sanitation or other infrastructure of their homes⁴⁰. Depending on how much a family has saved, they may be able to invest in a small business venture⁴¹ while their children are still small, but once children enter "prepa" and university, many families spend most of their remittance-based income to school fees.

³⁹ The economic impact of migrant remittances has long been debated by anthropologists and other scholars of migration. The literature devotes considerable attention to the "development vs. dependency" debate, which considers whether migrant remittances contribute to local economic "development" – ie, community-level improvements in infrastructure – or, rather, produces a local economy singularly dependent upon migrant remittances to survive. Such research typically focuses on consumption practices– whether remittances are invested, either in family-based business opportunities with the potential to generate income, or in community improvement projects. In the case of U.S.-Mexico migration, conclusions have been mixed. But many scholars agree that remittances tend to be used on conspicuous, rather than "constructive," spending for individuals and families (Levitt 2001). Some community-level investment has been documented, particularly when there are migrant "hometown associations" in operation in a given community (Fitzgerald 2000, 2008).

⁴⁰ For many families, spending priorities shift over time. Newly married couples may focus primarily on purchasing a plot of land and building a basic "starter" home, sometimes consisting of a single bedroom and an outdoor kitchen and bathroom. Once a couple is more established, investments typically go toward expanding the home, and eventually putting the "finishing touches" on the home (ie. tiling the floors, painting the walls). Many families live for years, or even indefinitely, in unfinished homes, which they work on incrementally each year until remittances run out. Efrain's mother, for example, lamented the fact that the home she raised her children in had never quite been finished, and was now starting to deteriorate. In recent years virtually all of the family's income, she said, had been diverted to the costs of their children's higher education. Now that they had finished school, she hoped to invest in some renovations.

⁴¹ Many Rio Secans supplement their substantial seasonal migrant income with small-scale business ventures, including shops, internet cafes, restaurants, and food stands, among others. A fair number also engage in seasonal agricultural production on lands they own, sometimes through "a medias" arrangements with locals looking for

As a result of these investments, Rio Secans with legal permanent resident status generally have better personal living conditions than their non-migrant and undocumented migrant counterparts, and they tend to have more money available to spend on educational fees, clothing, home accessories, and other discretionary items than do families without legal permanent resident migrants. In an interview, Laura, the wife of an LPR, compared the material impact of undocumented and legal migration.

... My brothers went [undocumented] two or three times a year... They didn't earn much money. They ended up [in the same position]. They don't have a big house. They don't even have... well, *comodidades* (comforts, amenities) that sometimes others of us have... Well the thing is that [our family has my husband] who has his papers to be able to come and go.

Here, Laura suggests that her brothers' undocumented status has inhibited their families from achieving relative upward social mobility, despite years of work in the United States, while she and her legal permanent migrant husband have been able to make dramatic material improvements in their quality of life.

The influx of remittances from legal migration has had complex effects on the social hierarchy of Rio Seco. Although they started out with much more humble roots, Rio Secan legal migrants tend to have greater access to financial resources than most other Rio Secans in the "new money" category described above (including some of the town's merchants), and in some cases may even have more cash flow than those in the "old money" category of Rio Secan elites who have less reliable sources of continued income. They have achieved a degree of social prominence due to their relative material position, and they often invest their money in community events and visible markers of status, including cars, clothes, and cell phones. But at

work. These businesses are often maintained primarily by their wives, particularly in families where the wife does not migrate.

the same time, legal migrants do not gain in terms of occupational prestige or high educational achievement. As agricultural laborers, they fall relatively low in the social hierarchy according to these measures. Thus, they occupy a contradictory class position in Rio Secan society – prestigious by some measures, and humble by others.

When considered in transnational context, the picture becomes even more complex. Agricultural labor is also devalued in the U.S., particularly when associated with temporary or seasonal migration. Rio Secans also occupy a marginalized ethno-racial position in U.S. society. So while Rio Secan workers have achieved a degree of prominence in their respective roles at farms in Connecticut, they remain in a subordinate position vis-à-vis the wider society. Their marginality is made particularly obvious in the context of Aldenboro. Connecticut is the fourth wealthiest state in the United States, and Aldenboro's per capita income places it in the top 10% of Connecticut counties ranked by wealth (U.S. Census Bureau 2014, 2017). Several million-dollar-plus mansions sit on hilltops overlooking Aldenboro farmland, some of which are visible from the mobile home where some Rio Secan workers live. In Connecticut, Rio Secan farmworkers are the recipients of occasional free health care provided through the pro-bono services of local doctors volunteering with the UConn Migrant Farmworker Clinics. Their position as the beneficiaries of such services produces quite a contrast. In Rio Seco, several Connecticut workers engage in regular charitable giving; Polinar and his wife, for example, collect toys and used clothes for local children every year.

The children of this cohort of legal migrants face a similar paradox. They have access to a broader array of material goods as well as higher levels of education and professional training compared to children of the undocumented and non-migrants. With a few exceptions, children of IRCA beneficiaries tend to live in “nicer” homes with more “modern” amenities, including flush

toilets, American-style indoor kitchens, one or more family or personal vehicles, entertainment systems, and even in-home internet access. Few have experienced the poverty in which many of their parents grew up. Laura, wife of a legal migrant, highlighted the difference between the lifestyles of her children and their cousins, whose father migrates without authorization.

My daughters... they are accustomed to other *comodidades*⁴². And their cousins, my nephews, well 'they are still more behind you guys' [I tell them]. 'You are accustomed to another life.' Because they practically don't want for anything... My brothers, their families are still a little... well maybe it's because they are larger families. So they have even less. And our daughters are accustomed to other things.

She went on to explain that while her daughters have their own rooms and their own clothes, the cousins share everything and live, in her words, in a "cramped" space.

Many children of Rio Secan migrants have graduated from, currently attend, or plan to enroll in secondary and post-secondary education, in academic, professional, and technical programs. In this generation of adult children of IRCA beneficiaries, there are nurses, architects, administrative professionals, and others with advanced degrees. Such high levels of education place these youth in a higher social status category in the community, earning them positions of respect and influence. But there's a catch. Due to the lack of employment opportunities in Rio Seco, these highly educated youth often complete their training only to remain unemployed, underemployed, or severely underpaid. Furthermore, migrant earnings are typically higher than the meager incomes professionals command when they do find employment. The decision to pursue higher education, then, can seem like a waste of time. Teodoro, a Connecticut migrant who received legal status through his father, explained to me,

One of [my friends] is a psychologist. And he says 'take me [to the U.S.]!'... I told him, 'you have your profession!' 'No,' he says, 'the thing is that the salaries here, the truth is that it's not even enough for me to eat.' 'But you're a professional!' [I tell him] And the truth is they have

⁴² A Spanish word which translates roughly to "luxury items."

been working for years. And they are professionals, they studied and everything, and they don't... well, they'd like to have what we have, or more... And other friends, I've chatted with, they tell me that they are uncomfortable because they look at us year after year, year after year we are going, and we do things, but they would like to have what, I don't know, what they can't have with their profession...they think that it's just a matter of going and coming back and bringing money... but I tell them it's not like that. You work all day as soon as you go, all day it's work.

Thus, in the context of Rio Seco, agricultural laborers like Teodoro appear to occupy a privileged position due to their ready access to cash, while highly educated non-migrant youth have few income-generating opportunities of their own. In the context of Connecticut, however, migrant youth spend all their time working. From this perspective, highly educated non-migrant youth lead relatively luxurious lives, as they are able to engage in intellectual pursuits well into their 20's.

This paradoxical situation can cause tension in social dynamics within and between families. Given the initial poverty that many IRCA beneficiaries and their families experienced before and immediately after legalization, the eldest children of legal migrants often entered the labor force early in their youth. In one Rio Secan family with ten children, for instance, the two eldest children (now in their 30's) migrated to the United States as soon as they were old enough. Their earnings were sent home to help their parents pay for the educational expenses of their younger siblings, who were therefore able to pursue higher levels of education than their older siblings. Thus, the oldest children in a given family often lead very different lives than their youngest siblings.

These tensions carry over into interactions between families. Nonmigrant community members⁴³ sometimes express resentment towards returning migrants and their seeming

⁴³ In discussing migrants and nonmigrants, I acknowledge that making such a distinction is somewhat arbitrary. As many others have noted (See Boehm 2012: 18, for example), and as I have discussed here (in Chapter Four),

elevation in social status. This resentment is felt particularly acutely when migrants return to the community and engage in certain forms of conspicuous consumption and cultural displays that others deem “pompous” or “self-aggrandizing.” As Teodoro explained,

...there’s always people that go [to the U.S.], sometimes they go a half a year, or less, and they come back and they want to come to you *apantallando* (to impress you), that they speak English, or that they have money, or clothes, or, I don’t know, [it’s like] they want to humiliate the people, when we are all the same.

Teodoro suggests that this derives from the changes in class subjectivity that are produced by migrants’ experiences in the U.S.

What happens is you get used to the lifestyle there [in the U.S.], but you’re always thinking... [it’s important] to be *noble* (courteous, kind) and... Because you spend a year, ten years, whatever, well you’re always going to be the same...

In suggesting that Rio Secan migrants are “always going to be the same” despite long periods of time spent in the U.S., he suggests that migrant money doesn’t fundamentally change a person’s class status. In other words, Teodoro describes class as an ascribed, immutable characteristic. His commentary suggests the notion that although some migrants may attempt to obscure their impoverished roots by gilding their lives with expensive items purchased through migrant remittances, they can never remove themselves completely from their poor rural heritage. Teodoro noted that this aspect of class identity is sometimes reflected in peoples’ dietary choices.

Sometimes [it even happens] with food... if you grew up here, and you went [to the U.S.] when you were grown, 30 or 35 years old, and all of a sudden you come and now you don’t like beans? No, that’s not right.

migration arrangements shift over time in response to changing conditions in the sending community and potential communities of reception, and as network ties expand and mature. Thus, the categories of “migrant” and “nonmigrant” are best described as porous and fluid.

Teodoro suggests that migrants' continued identity with their humble roots – symbolized here with the practice of eating beans - is a moral imperative. He suggests that even if migrant incomes and social statuses change, a migrant's subjective sense of self should remain tied to the rural, impoverished roots of the community. There is a strong sense, amongst almost all community members that I met, that taking the moral high ground entails both being *humilde*, humble, as well as having respect for *la gente humilde*, poor folk, who represent the roots and true identity of the community, and, indeed, the personal histories of many migrants.

Conclusion

Migrant farmworkers occupy a peculiar place in the U.S. national imaginary. In some ways, their lives are hidden. Their work is invisible to – or at least ignored by - the vast majority of the U.S. population who survives by eating the literal fruits of their labor. Many migrant farmworkers lack work authorization, a fact that drives them to avoid being detected by the wider communities in which they work, and the geographic isolation of many of the nation's agricultural producers means that farmworkers may be literally “out of sight, out of mind.” At the same time, migrant farmworkers have drawn a great deal of attention from activists and academics alike. There are hundreds of national organizations focused on migrant farmworker issues, countless local organizations in agricultural areas of the country, and federal programs directed at their protection. Additionally, numerous academics have examined various dimensions of migrant farmworkers' experiences (Scheder 1988; Rothenberg 1998; Arcury et al. 2009; Balderrama and Molina 2009; Horton 2016; Benson 2012; Smith-Nonini 2013; Holmes 2013).

Despite all this attention, we have very little knowledge about how farmworkers conceive of their lives. Typically portrayed as either a pitiable population deserving of our utmost care and concern, or honorable “hard workers” who “do the jobs that Americans won't do,” we come to understand them primarily as nameless bodies doing work, rather than as fully social beings with complex and varied ways of life; people who are making critical decisions and planning futures.

In response to this phenomenon, my aim in this dissertation has been three-fold: 1) to portray, with rich ethnographic detail, the way of life that has been established in the Rio Seco-Connecticut network, and to do justice in that portrayal to the humanity of the characters in this story; 2) to show how that way of life is embedded within and shaped by larger historical

processes, social structures, and global patterns, and 3) to analyze the ways in which Rio Secan migrants and their families negotiate these structures, through every-day strategies and longer-term projects, in their work and personal lives. Broadly speaking, my goal has been to accomplish “ethnography at its best” which “is like a camera with a zoom lens that can both capture the wide context of structure and narrowly focus on agents in a way that shows their interactions with that structure” (Fitzgerald 2006: 10). In using Fitzgerald’s metaphor, I do not mean to imply the antiquated idea that ethnographers can somehow “capture” a perfectly real, truthful or fully complete image of what life is like in any community or global space. Rather, it is the *zoom* function itself that is most important to ethnography in a global world – the capacity to narrow in and broaden out the focus of the ethnographic gaze in order to focus on multiple levels of analysis. This allows ethnographers to understand people as they are embedded within, created by, and working to create the world around them.

Specifically, I set out to answer some underexamined questions about the contemporary nature of transnational Mexico-U.S. migration and im/migrant legality. I endeavored to explore the micro-level strategies migrants and their families use to survive in the context of national policies and global forces that so often result in perpetual precarity and painful family separation (Boehm 2012; Dreby 2010). Studying the Rio Seco-Connecticut network provides the opportunity to explore the factors which produce migrant agency and wellbeing, including social networks incorporating strong ties to unexpected allies – employers. It also facilitates further investigation into the way macro-level forces (like immigration regimes) reach into the intimate space of family life, and how migrants, in turn, attempt to use them to their advantage. In embarking on this project, I also hoped to find out how legal status intersects with particular forms of class subjectivity in transnational context. And finally, does a “pathway to citizenship,”

the rallying cry of many pro-immigrant activists, really eliminate migrants' economic and legal vulnerabilities?

This dissertation uncovers some important answers to these questions. It reveals that access to legal immigration status has been transformed into a tool of migrant agency. Legal status has granted Rio Secans greater freedom of movement and employment, which enables them both to seek better work opportunities in the U.S. and to create thoroughly transnational lives. Another structural factor – the political economic organization of farm labor in Connecticut – created a fertile environment for their efforts to establish a social network encompassing both farmworkers and local employers. The network, in turn, enables them to improve their work and life circumstances – both in Connecticut and in Rio Seco. Though still restricted by the legal parameters and bureaucratic delays of the U.S. immigration regime, and encumbered by the challenging economic situation in Rio Seco, the families of IRCA beneficiaries have a greater degree of *choice* in deciding how to arrange family life. For those who choose to keep their families in Mexico, legal status enables the men to maintain their families both economically and emotionally over their periodic annual departures and returns. In the end, they have been able to grant remarkable opportunities to their children, many of whom live radically different lives than their parents did in the same community just one generation ago.

As useful as legal status has been to the migrant men who were initially granted it through the IRCA in 1986, the opportunity to use it to legalize one's family members poses some challenging questions. Migrants and their families debate the impact of legalization on the integrity of their nuclear family, and on the professional and moral development of the next generation. IRCA beneficiaries' children have far greater educational opportunities than their

parents did, so the potential benefits and drawbacks of legal status are less clear. Parents debate whether legal status will perpetuate the cycle of dependence upon marginal agricultural labor, or whether it is a necessary move to protect their children from the dangers of inevitable illegal border crossing. They consider whether denial of legal status will encourage children to pursue higher education, or whether in hindsight, it will seem like a lost opportunity to grant what may be their only form of inheritance. Of course, the freedom to make a choice in the matter emerges from a certain kind of limited privilege derived from the relative success of Rio Secans' transnational arrangement and their legal status. They produce enough earnings to cover the one of the few alternatives to migration - higher education.

Ultimately, through legal migration, these farmworkers have found a way to mitigate several social-economic challenges of transnational migration. Through their coming and going, they make it possible for their children to stay and pursue higher levels of education, in the hopes that they will ultimately be able to stay permanently and make a life for themselves in Mexico, despite the challenges that still remain. Only time will tell how sustainable this strategy will ultimately turn out to be for future generations.

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