BETWEEN HERE AND THERE

CREATING THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MEXICAN MIGRATION, 1900-1942

DANIEL MORALES

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OXFORD
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Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Morales, Daniel (History teacher), author.
Title: Between here and there : creating the political economy of Mexican migration, 1900–1942 / Daniel Morales.
Description: New York, NY : Oxford University Press, [2024] | Includes bibliographical references and index. |
Identifiers: LCCN 2024024064 (print) | LCCN 2024024065 (ebook) | ISBN 9780197612590 (hardback) | ISBN 9780197612606 (paperback) | ISBN 9780197612620 (epub) | ISBN 9780197612637
Subjects: LCSH: Mexicans—United States—History—20th century. | Mexico—Emigration and immigration—20th century. | United States—Emigration and immigration—20th century. | Mexico—Emigration and immigration—Economic aspects. | United States—Emigration and immigration—Economic aspects.
Classification: LCC E184.M5 M656 2024 (print) | LCC E184.M5 (ebook) | DDC 973/.046872—dc23/eng/20240723
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2024024064
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2024024065

DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780197612590.001.0001

Paperback printed by Marquis Book Printing, Canada
Hardback printed by Bridgeport National Bindery, Inc., United States of America

Chapter 5 is adapted from Daniel Morales, "*Tejas, Afuera de México*: Newspapers, the Mexican Government, *Mutualistas*, and Migrants in San Antonio 1910–1940." *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 40, no. 2 (Wntr 2021): 52–91.

Dedicated to my grandparents
Mariana Gonzalez Morales
Fermín Ramón Morales Hernandez
&
Maria Juana Martinez Ramírez
Jose Jesús Martinez Rodríguez

Contents

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction: The Roots of Mexican Migration 1

1. Revolution and Migration: The Rise of "Migration Fever" in San Luis Potosí and Guanajuato, 1890–1920 14

2. Navigating the Borderlands: Migrants in the Mining and Cotton Regions of Arizona and Texas, 1900–1925 44

3. Into the North: Railroads, Sugar Beets, and Steel in the Spread of Mexican Migration to the Midwest, 1910–1930 89

4. *Entre Familia y Patria*: The Paths of Migration in Central Mexico, 1920–1930 131

5. *Tejas, Afuera de México*: Newspapers, the Mexican Government, *Mutualistas*, and Migrants in San Antonio, 1915–1940 170

6. Caught in the Middle: Migrant Labor in Southern California, 1920–1940 203

7. *El Retorno*: Remaking Lives in Mexico, 1930–1942 243

Epilogue: The Persistent Political Economy of Migrant Labor 281

Appendix: Counting the Uncounted: The Mexican Migrant Study, 1910–1940 295
Notes 309
Bibliography 343
Index 357

Acknowledgments

Nobody can write alone. This work could only have been completed with the help and generosity of many people along the way. I became interested in writing Latino History while an undergraduate at the University of Chicago. A long way away from the barrio I grew up in, I increasingly spent more time involved in the city, education programs, and immigrant communities. In the city, I became involved in activism for immigrant rights, and to my surprise found support for my interests in the history department. Through the Mellon-Mays Undergraduate Fellowship, I found a community of students and worked with Kathleen Conzen, Emilio Kouri, and Sarah Osten on immigrant research in Chicago. Later, thanks to the advice from Ramon Gutierrez, I was able to turn that initial paper into my BA thesis.

It was at Columbia University that I learned to take my interest in migration and turn it into what became my book. Mae Ngai took my half-formed ideas for a history of Mexican migration and guided it into this book. I would like to thank the rest of my committee, Elizabeth Blackmar, Pablo Piccato, Claudio Lomnitz, and Jose Moya, for their patience and feedback throughout all of these years, and Pablo Yankelevich for acting as a mentor at the Colegio de México. I would also like to thank all the faculty who read parts and provided advice: Karl Jacoby, Caterina Pizzigoni, Carlos Alonso, John Coatsworth, Eric Foner, and Adam McKeown.

This project has received funding and forums from various organizations that helped refine and revise the project. A post-doctoral fellowship at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences allowed me to expand the project's scope. The Mellon-Mays Foundation has supported this project in various forums, and a fellowship from the Institute for Scholars and Citizens (formerly the Woodrow Wilson Foundation) allowed me time to finish the book. Research and travel grants from James Madison University (JMU) and Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) made additional chapters possible. I would like to thank the organizers and participants in places where pieces of the book were workshopped. The Bancroft Seminar on Interdisciplinary Latina/o History at the University of California, Berkeley;

the Newberry Seminary in Borderlands History at the Newberry Library; and the Southeastern Latinx History Workshop.

Community is critical in doing research, completing work, reading drafts, and keeping each other company. I want to start with the South El Monte Arts Posse: Romeo Guzman, Nick Juravich, Carribean Fragoza, Yesenia Barragan, Maria John, and Andre Deckrow. Those from the Southeastern Latinx History workshop are Sarah Deutsch, Fawn-Amber Montoya, Benny Andres, and Cecilia Marquez. Those at JMU and VCU, especially the Migration Studies Lab, who have provided an academic home and community: Bill Van Norman, Kristen McCleary, Carlos Aleman, Antonio Espinoza, Gabriella León-Pérez, Rocio Gomez, Robert Mckenna, Paula Rodriguez, Michael Ahn Paarlberg, Carolyn Eastman, Meliz Hafez, Michael Dickinson, and Gabriel Reich. Those who had encouraged this work along the way: Fernando Saúl Alanís Ensico, Mark Overmyer-Velázquez, David Montejano, Jose Alamillo, Emilio Zamora, George Sánchez, Alberto Camarillo, Kelly Lytle Hernandez, and many more. A special thanks to Melisa Borja, Georgina Escoto Molina, Laura Gutierrez, Adam Goodman, James T. Roane, Jessica Ordaz, Jessica Lee, Amy Absher, Mariana Gatzava, Maru Beltran, Nancy Ng Tam, Ian Chin, Masako Hattori, Rachel Newman, Allison Powers, Tracy Goode, and everyone who has helped me throughout the years. There are too many to thank here.

A special thanks is in order for the people at the libraries, archives, and organizations that made this research project possible: Columbia University, El Colegio de México, and the University of Chicago. Collections in the United States: Columbia's Rare Books and Manuscripts Library; the National Archives in Washington, DC; the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley; the California State Archives; the Archives of the University of California, Los Angeles; the Oral History Archives at California State University, Fullerton; La Historia Society of El Monte; the South El Monte Arts Posse; the Stanford University Archives; the Benson Library at the University of Texas at Austin; Arte Publico Press at the University of Houston; the Oral History Collection at the University of Texas at El Paso; Special Collections at the University of Chicago; the Newberry Library; and the New York City Public Library. Collections in Mexico: Archivo del Instituto Nacional de Migración, El Archivo General de la Nación, Archivo de la Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, Archivo Plutarco Calles, Registro Agrario, Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia, and Los Archivos Municipales de Villa Juárez y Cerritos San Luis Potosí.

I would like to thank Oxford University Press and my editor, Susan Ferber. Her guidance and three anonymous readers helped shape this work into a much more focused and better book. I would also like to thank the research assistants who have worked on various parts of the project: Hannah Rosner, Nidale Zouhir, César Omar Tenorio Nava, Lauren Oakes, Kimberly Garcia, and Louise McDonald.

This project began on the road, journeying across the landscape of Mexico as a child. I grew up in Azusa, California, in a home that knew the meaning of migration. My parents came without documents and had been deported on a few occasions, as have many of my relatives. Once they obtained documentation from the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act in the mid-1990s, they began not only to send money back to Mexico as they had always done, but to travel there as well. Going to Mexico and then to Chicago every few months opened up a world of Mexican communities. There, I learned that my maternal grandfather had been a bracero, as had most of the men in his town, Villa Juarez. I also learned that my fraternal grandmother was American born but had been deported in the 1930s and that my great-grandparents had been migrants in the 1910s. It is to the story of my grandparents, especially my grandmother Mariana Gonzales-Morales, that this book is dedicated. Finally, I wish to thank my loving and supporting family, my parents Maria Socorro and Felipe Morales, my brothers David and the late Philip Morales, and my nephews Philip, Issac, and Daniel David. My wife and soulmate Heng Rui has supported this project in ways too many to account for here. Her heroic work on the frontlines of the pandemic has given me a new perspective on the nature of essential work. Our daughters Isabella and Gabriela have given purpose to all our work. May this book one day open up the past to them.

Between Here and There

Introduction

The Roots of Mexican Migration

The church of Santa Gertrudis de la Carbonera is in surprisingly good condition for a centuries-old building. The church looms over the town square of Villa Juárez, San Luis Potosí. The town is mostly empty, with about 5,000 people remaining, and its fields are mostly fallow. More than 15,000 people have left in the past four decades; over two-thirds of them reside in the United States. Most of the men who live in Villa Juárez today have been to the United States—from the old braceros who sit in the plaza sharing stories, to the leadership of the political parties. Migration from the town began during the Mexican Revolution and continues to this day. To listen to the stories of its people is to listen to the history of Mexican migration in the twentieth century.

Every year, from the festival of Santa Gertrudis on November 16th, when a large carnival is thrown, to January 6th, thousands of people return from *El Norte*. While the number of people participating in the annual return has fallen since the start of Mexico's drug war, license plates from California, Texas, Illinois, and other US states in Villa Juárez testify to the spread of the town's migrants. Their material success is visible in the large amounts of cars, consumer goods, and money they bring back and in the large houses that line the town's streets, the rewards for years of labor in America's hardest jobs. There are Villa Juárez town associations in Houston, Dallas, Chicago, and even Nebraska. The largest of these, the Fundación de Villa Juárez, took the lead in constructing the town market, and returning migrants helped to fund the improvements to the plaza and the church.

Migration provides opportunities for people in Villa Juárez. New migrants rely on the experience of older generations of migrants to identify places to go, jobs to apply for, and skills to acquire. As in many older migrant-sending towns, generations of experience have accrued in Villa Juárez, and remittances are a major part of the local economy. In central Mexico, the rural economy has long relied on migrants to support both those who do not

Between Here and There. Daniel Morales, Oxford University Press. © Oxford University Press 2024.
DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780197612590.003.0001

have access to their own plot of land, and those who do. When individuals or households choose to migrate, they rely on pre-established structures and retrace the experiences of those who have migrated before them. When migrants return with money, goods, and information, they are not only helping their own families but also encouraging others to migrate. In this way, the migration is self-constitutive, with people's actions on both sides of the border creating changes that trigger further migration.

In researching the states' history and spending time in Cerritos, Villa Juárez, Rioverde, Cárdenas, and many smaller towns and villages, it became clear that the region and migration have long been interconnected. The now-defunct railroad station at Cerritos not only carried sulfur and copper ore, corn, and other goods to distant markets but also transported generations of people east to Tampico and north to the United States. Listening to the history of Villa Juárez and its people's migration, I was struck by how similar these stories were to others I had heard across the region. Since the mid-nineteenth century, migrants had come from the northern border states of Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas. However, the large-scale migration that dominated the twentieth century was primarily driven by migration from the central/north-central states of Guanajuato, Michoacán, Jalisco, Aguascalientes, Zacatecas, Durango, and San Luis Potosí. The history of Mexican migration to the United States is a two-way connection that binds villages to the communities in the north.[1]

These close connections between *aqui y alla* ("here and there") do not appear in most Mexican American histories, which focus on the alienation of belonging in the United States. There is a disconnect between the history of migration, the history of Mexican American communities in the United States, and the ways in which people in the past described their own experiences of migration. Much of what has been written about Mexican migration has centered on the role and actions of the US government, especially immigrant policy and border enforcement, showing the ways in which policy has shaped the experiences of migrants and marginalized ethnic communities.[2] Another set of work has focused on how immigrants fared over time in the United States and primarily revolved around questions of adjustment, acculturation, assimilation or lack thereof, and identity. This work has tended to stress the formation of settled communities, labor struggles, and processes of racial identity formation as the migrations of the 1910s led to permanent settlement in the 1920s.[3]

The longstanding pattern of circular migration, especially in the first half of the twentieth century, has gotten far less attention. Although cyclical migration patterns and Mexican villages' dependency on remittances in the late twentieth century have been examined, this model was established decades earlier.[4] This book revisits the era of the first mass migration, between 1910 and 1940—that is, from the Mexican Revolution to World War II. It reconsiders Mexican American community formation within the broader context of ongoing circular migration, both between the United States and Mexico and within the United States. The latter dynamic has been least recognized or understood. Permanently settled migrants were in the minority; most were constantly on the move. They trekked around the country following work in agriculture, mining, and industry. They voted with their feet to resist local vagrancy laws and labor agents who tried to control them. They organized mutual aid organizations and unions. And they sought to return to their hometowns in Mexico. Circular migration and settlement were not successive phases, but always concurrent and dynamically related. This can be best seen by going full circle, starting and ending with communities in Mexico.

These continual links to Mexico offer a new perspective on assimilation, political identity, and organizing in the migrant community. By expanding the field of analysis across national borders, this book captures the ways that transnational practices and ties shaped communities in both countries. People and communities engaged in a common currency of exchange—experience, information, organizing, and ideologies—that linked them across time and space. Migrants rarely challenged conceptions of community centered in the nation-state; the politics of both Mexico and the United States made that impossible. For these migrants, transnational migration did not mean transcending the state but finding ways to stay connected even when they were apart. Most migrants' daily lives were rooted in one state or another, but their communities, politics, culture, norms, and family expectations took the form they did as a result of transnational currents.

This book builds its claims about circular, regional, and local migration networks and patterns on new data from two census cohort studies—a national study and a local case study in Chicago. Using the US Census, Mexican Census, and border and city records, it traces Mexican migration patterns from 1910 to 1940 of 2,500 families. It is the only study of individual and family migration patterns across the first three decades of mass migration between Mexico and the United States. (See the Appendix for details.)

This quantitative material underscores several important patterns. First, circular migration was more extensive than scholars have recognized. More than 50% of Mexican migrants who had arrived in the years before 1920 went back to Mexico at some point before 1930. This trend was strongest in the Midwest and California, regions that received the bulk of their migrants from central Mexico. Interstate migration was just as common an experience as international migration for migrants in this era. Mexicans circulated not only within regional circuits but also across regions and industries. For example, it was common for an agricultural worker in Texas to become a beet worker in Michigan or a factory worker in California. Most Mexican migrants who went to urban centers such as Los Angeles, San Antonio, or Chicago between 1910 and 1930 left within ten years.

There were multiple types of migration, with local and regional circuits overlapping national and transnational circuits across the United States and back to central Mexico. This migration was not unidirectional, and many people did not live in any location for very long. Primarily migratory laborers, they moved in alignment with employment opportunities. A large proportion of them, more than half, circulated back into Mexico regularly or semiregularly. Many crossed the border as seasonal agricultural laborers, a significant proportion of whom followed regional migratory circuits: cotton from east Texas to Oklahoma, vegetable harvests up and down the Rio Grande, beet harvests from Colorado to Michigan, and fruit and vegetable crops from the Imperial Valley to the San Joaquin Valley of California. Medium and large cities acted as hubs of migration as networks guided people into and out of them, following the major railroad routes and industries. Circular migration, both within the United States and between the two countries, was both regular and highly irregular. There were some established seasonal circuits, but a lot of this movement was haphazard. Migrants might express their intentions to go back every year, but such regularity was often the exception rather than the norm.

Second, physical and economic mobility was highly dependent on where Mexicans fit within the larger migrant economy. Whether individuals or families settled down or migrated, whether they began to identify as Mexican American or not, were choices framed by their employment and community. Seasonal unemployment was structurally built into many of these jobs, hence the migratory life. Most people migrated back to Mexico or within regional circuits. Moving to other jobs was one of the few means by which they could improve their wages and working conditions. Due to agricultural

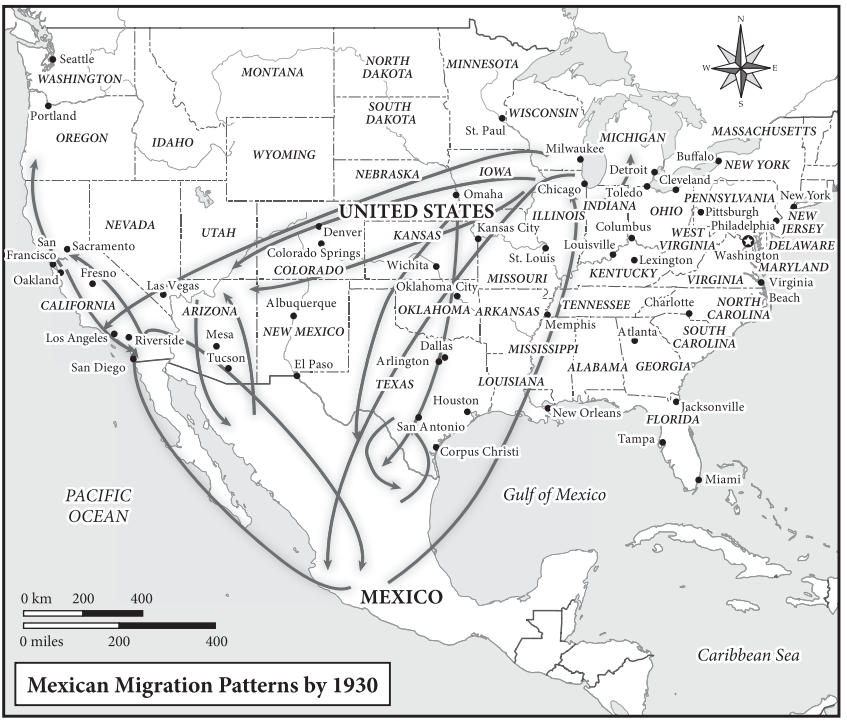

Figure I.1 Regional and local migration circuits overlapped with national and transnational routes throughout the 1920s. Most of the new migration was driven by people from central Mexico.

picking cycles, many were precluded from settling even if they wanted to. Their trajectories varied, however. Some could and did become more settled over time, bringing their families from Mexico to the United States, but most Mexican migrants did not have the stability needed to do so and relocated without their loved ones according to the particular needs of the industries that employed them.

The two major exceptions to this pattern were tenant farmers and the stable "middle class." Farmers and their children had little economic or spatial mobility given the exploitive cotton contracts into which they were locked in the farm economy of Texas. The small but critical middle class in Mexican communities was also stationary. Their settlement was made possible by the migratory majority, and vice versa. They were the brokers who formed the core of ethnic Mexican neighborhoods, especially the civic life of these places, but they also acted as critical nodes in migrant networks,

particularly by creating connections between newcomers and their new employers and locations. Their economic stability in large part depended on their position within immigrant communities, where they were part of a key constituency that included small businesses, church organizations, labor unions, and *mutualistas* (mutual aid organizations). This middle class was critical not only in the functioning of the migrant economy but also in the spread of information, ideologies, and organizations that later crystallized into social movements.

Third, the workings of a migrant economy between Mexico and the United States led to extremely limited socioeconomic mobility. The overall economic status of both Mexican migrants and their children made no significant advances between 1910 and 1940. Moreover, settling down did not bring upward mobility.[5] Only the most stable settlers were able to take advantage of some form of economic mobility, and intergenerational mobility was likewise minimal. This reflects the nature of most of the work performed by Mexicans in the United States. Mexican migrants followed a longstanding immigrant labor pattern of holding a different set of jobs than the native-born workforce.[6] They were locked into low-wage agricultural, railroad, and mining jobs that were unstable, with long periods of unemployment and strong barriers to upward mobility. Both the structures of the industries and the dynamics on the ground led employers to use Mexican migrants as the base labor of the American West.

The structural patterns that shape migration today were created during these decades before World War II. In 1900, fewer than 3,000 people officially migrated from Mexico to the United States, but by 1920, tens of thousands were traveling in both directions every year. Following the conquest and annexation of the Southwest by the United States in the mid-nineteenth century, the industrialization of northern Mexico and the American West uprooted millions of people. Many were displaced within Mexico, some migrated, and many more joined the revolution. The Mexican Revolution drove migration from central Mexico on a scale never before seen. Some 500,000 migrants traveled north, the bulk of them into Texas. Whereas young men from *haciendas* and mines had previously dominated the migrant flow, this stream carried families and people from every economic class. The revolution coincided with an economic boom in the American Southwest.

American companies imported the industrial working class, mainly from Europe and increasingly from Asia and Latin America. Anti-immigration restrictions passed in 1917 when the United States entered World War

I ended the influx of European workers. Concurrently, the US Secretary of Labor created a series of exceptions to immigration restrictions (notably the ban on foreign contract labor). Under this program, 72,000 Mexican workers crossed into the United States over a three-year period. After the war, the 1921 Immigration Act and the landmark 1924 Johnson-Reed Immigration Act severely restricted migration from Europe and Asia, ending an era of those regions as major sources of labor even as it exempted the countries of the western hemisphere, especially Mexico, from numerical quotas.

Through the 1920s, the US economy and demand for labor continued to grow. In the American West, capitalists depended on non-whites and immigrants for the railroad, mining, and agricultural industries. They sought to create a de-politized and racialized labor force that lacked the protections of white settlers/citizens. In this, they were aided by immigration laws that kept these workers in increasing legal precarity, the establishment of the Border Patrol in 1924, and the criminalization of undocumented entry in 1929, as well as by state laws. Seen as "others," "birds of passage," and criminals, these migrants were easy targets for expulsion in the repatriations of the 1930s. With the start of the Bracero Program in 1942, the US government replaced unregulated migration with regulated labor, contracted and imported under its control.

In Mexico, public discourse and the government increasingly turned against migration. The 1917 Constitution limited migration to those who had labor contracts, and President Álvaro Obregon devoted resources to repatriating those in the north and to creating colonies (free agricultural land to those who were willing to relocate, clear, and work the claim), a position held by every Mexican president through Cárdenas. With the 1926 Migration Law, the government went further, creating a migration police force to regulate and stop uncontrolled migration. During that decade, however, the Cristero War, an armed conflict between the Mexican government and Catholic rebels that raged from 1926 to 1929, drove tens of thousands from their homes and encouraged local governments to promote migration as an alternative to land redistribution. As a result, hundreds of thousands of Mexicans continued to migrate. By 1930, nearly one million Mexican-born people lived in the United States. The Great Depression put official policy to the test as returning migrants created a series of crises over land redistribution. In other words, on both sides of the border, the state acted to control migrants, shaping their lives through law, policing, and violence.

Why did people migrate? I asked people in Mexico and the United States why they had gone north, expecting to hear stories of broken dreams. Migrants needed to raise enough money to make the journey, survive obstacles on the road that ranged from bribes to violence, and face the extremely dangerous and increasingly difficult task of crossing the border. They were often exploited and discriminated against once in the United States. Why would anyone assume these risks? Many of those I interviewed in San Luis Potosí and Guanajuato migrated during the Bracero Program era and had family members who had made the journey around the revolution. When I asked if they knew about their relatives' motivations, they frequently described their ancestors' choice to migrate as a necessity but also an opportunity.

Migrants and family members of migrants from before the Bracero Program told stories that highlighted common themes: the Mexican Revolution, railroads, Cristeros, mining, cotton, and sugar beets. But nearly all of them also had a destination in mind and knew someone in the United States. They described how their families came to join uncles, cousins, brothers, and fathers in communities like Miami, El Monte, San Antonio, and Chicago. In studying the places where migration became deeply ingrained in the local culture, it was possible to see the paths created by early migrants. Mass migration on the ground looks like many micro migrations between communities, networks, and families in both sending and receiving places. As migrants went north, they sent back information, and when they returned, they brought back experience. This experience, combined with money raised from others in the community, made it easier for others to go north. These networks of people and information helped migrants mitigate and navigate the risks of migrating. This set of reinforcing logics also made up the political economy of migration, which affected migrant-sending areas as much as it affected Mexican American communities.

People left their homes in search of jobs or to escape violence, but how they did it, where they went, and which places they returned to were highly dependent on their particular positions within the larger economy. Railroad workers were the most mobile and the least likely to stay in a job for long. Cotton and beet workers also moved regularly. Regional migratory circuits developed in California, Texas, Arizona, and the Midwest, but these regional circuits regularly overlapped to a large extent with workers moving from region to region and from industry to industry. Migration could not have functioned without recruiters and brokers, who acted as the critical link

between new arrivals and older communities and institutions. They helped migrants acquire housing and jobs, redress wrongs, and negotiate a foreign world as much as the migrants' direct links back home did. Just as importantly, Mexican communities in the United States were anchored by a stable minority of skilled workers and owners of small businesses such as grocery stores, pool halls, and boarding houses. This was the middle class—the men and women who made up most *mutualistas*, charity organizations, and civil rights organizations.

By 1930, there were about a million Mexican migrants in the United States, with tens of thousands crossing in both directions every year. Mexican and Mexican American spaces were being created across the West and Midwest, as people settled and created communities. In Mexico, villages and towns were changed by the rise of transnational circular migration. Hundreds of thousands of families were being supported by work in *El Norte*, pushing traditional family structures to change as women took on more public responsibilities. These practices gave rise to a culture of migration that saw going north as a path for young men to support their families and a rural way of life. Circular migration became normalized across both societies, despite the significant efforts both nations undertook to control and end this reality.

Migration met with a range of responses. Scholars and intellectuals in the United States at the time sought to understand and explain Mexican migrants through a European immigrant framework oriented towards settlement and assimilation. Politicians argued about the "Mexican Problem" and quotas. The Mexican government promoted its *México de Afuera*, with the post-revolutionary state as the defender of the people. Mexican American activists in the Southwest generally sought to maintain Mexican culture while working for civil rights. Some radical organizations such as the *Partido Liberal Mexicano* (PLM), Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and communist unions pushed back against a conception of belonging centered on the nation-state. Union leaders Emma Tenayuca and Luisa Moreno articulated visions of polity for people of the borderlands that did not depend on one state or the other but were based on their labor, common peoplehood, and history. Their transborder visions were violently repressed. In this era, the rise of mass migration forced intellectuals, migrants, and governments to think about Mexican migrants' place in society, but their discourse always lagged practice.[7] In letters and interviews, nearly all migrants saw themselves as primarily "Mexican" even as they built a world of transnational practices that challenged that identity. Most could not conceive of themselves as

something else; they were part of the community they had left. However, they did use these frameworks to organize for material change and advocate for a broader conception of "Mexican." Those who returned used an expansive vision of *México de Afuera* to lay claim to citizenship and land in Mexico. Those who stayed in the United States joined efforts to lay claim to better pay, working conditions, and rights from the New Deal state, creating a base for later organizing. Migrants fought for recognition in both societies.

The politics of migration on both sides of the border was the product of reactions to people and the local social structures they created. In the United States, the government responded to migrants' organizing with campaigns of intimidation, violence, and ultimately, repatriation. Meanwhile, the Mexican government responded by discouraging people from migrating and by seeking to control their migration and, later, their return. During the Great Depression, both governments, along with most civic organizations, saw repatriation as the only solution. Those who left to return to Mexico, sometimes dividing their families, pushed the limits of what was possible, joining protests and agrarian movements for land. For their children, adjustment was difficult but possible. Yet even mass land redistribution was not enough to satisfy the demand for better conditions and opportunities. In the 1940s, migrants and communities turned the Bracero Program to their advantage, relying on local networks to operate, creating transnational families, going on strikes, forming unions, defying expectations, and evading the program when needed. To maintain their rural way of life and improve their situation, they had to leave again. Even as both countries saw migrants as problems, as outsiders ineligible for participation in the nation, migrants continued to build transnational lives through the twentieth century.

The title of this book, *Between Here and There—entre aqui y alla*—places the dislocation of people at the center. Millions took part in migration between Mexico and the United States during the first half of the twentieth century. Many stayed and built a new world together; others returned, using their migration to enhance their own lives or those of their family in Mexico; many lived lives in between. Mexicans circulated, worked, and resided in a vast space from central Mexico to the upper reaches of the American Midwest. This space was held together through social networks that expanded the geographic parameters of migration while fostering consistent communication. Building on local and regional work as well as transnational and

cross-border scholarship, this book argues that the relationship between economic transformations, US and Mexican domestic policies, and migrants' actions must all be taken into account to understand how migration became a continuing reality.

To showcase the ways that migration to individual places were part of larger national and international processes, this book looks at dynamics on the ground. It explores town networks in San Luis Potosí, remittances in Guanajuato, consuls and newspapers in Texas, and small businesses and personal networks in Chicago. It offers a set of case studies that address different regions, but when seen together present a transnational whole. Each chapter focuses on a different aspect of the political economy of migration, but the dynamics they discuss operated in other regions as well.

Chapters 1 and 2 track the formation of an economy of migrant labor across northern Mexico and the American Southwest as it disrupted older forms of production. This new economy was intensified by the Mexican Revolution, which unleashed further cycles of displacement, refugees, and relocation. Mass migration took off with the pull of industrialization (and its relatively high wages) in northern Mexico and the resulting push of economic and social instability in Mexico. Violence further limited people's choices and drove them to leave home for safety and survival. Two states in the heart of migrant-sending north-central Mexico, Guanajuato and San Luis Potosí, illustrate the preconditions of land alienation, mining industrialization, and railroad construction that fueled migratory patterns. Town-based networks provided the transportation, capital, and information migrants needed to travel north.

The narrative then shifts to the United States, where political and business elites recruited migrants to create a government-subsidized, low-wage, industrial workforce that transformed the American West. Immigrant labor made the mining, cotton, fruits, sugar beets, and railroad industries possible, while urban centers became manufacturing hubs connected to regional and international migration routes. As they were drawn into migrant labor, workers struggled under precarious circumstances without the benefit of legal protections or many avenues for socioeconomic advancement. Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrate how migrants navigated their transnational lives, finding ways to circumvent and resist control at the border and in the interior.

The exodus of 10% of the population caused considerable alarm across Mexican society. As more and more people migrated, they sent back

information that enabled others to follow their routes. Circular migration reinforced this dynamic as many returning migrants brought back and shared firsthand knowledge and experience. Chapter 4 focuses on the public sphere and the ways in which the press, bureaucrats, and others reacted to these changes. Migrants, along with local officials, consular officials, and migrant agents, were as influential in shaping events as federal officials were.

The Great Depression created unemployment crises that hit the Mexican communities in the United States hard. Chapters 5 and 6 examine how this impacted San Antonio and Southern California, two places where massive agricultural economies were built on migrant labor. Building on the long history of *México de Afuera*, the Mexican government, *La Prensa*, and nearly every civic organization in Texas supported the return of Mexican citizens and were critical to making repatriation a reality for them. Simultaneously, in Southern California, local officials led the largest repatriation campaign in the country, fueling calls for unionization among Mexican workers.

Chapter 7 shows how in Mexico returning migrants vied for land and resources with those who had stayed behind, increasing the pressure on the government to enact land redistribution. However, land reform did not resolve the structural causes of migration, and in the late 1930s, and especially the 1940s, a second generation from central Mexico moved north across the border as an economic survival strategy. From this point forward, migration was an important component of the rural economy of central Mexico, one that supported rather than competed with rural landholding. By the time World War II accelerated the need for Mexican labor in the United States, migration had become ingrained in the US economy. The Bracero Program formalized and sanctioned the political economy of migration between Mexico and the United States.

Migration between Mexico and the United States continues to be a topic in the headlines daily. The patterns of contemporary migration—the dependence of industrial and agricultural employers on Latin American labor, the locations where people cluster and the trajectories they travel, and Mexico's dependence on remittances to support the rural economy—were all established during the first half of the twentieth century. So too did the "Mexican Problem," the vision of walls and a sealed border, a border patrol that has grown into the largest police force in the United States, and the mass expulsions of people from the polity originate during these decades. At the same time, migrants also established a tradition of challenging

companies and governments through daily action, civic organizations, and labor organizing. It has been forgotten that the years 1933 to 1940 witnessed the largest organizing activity among migrant workers before the Chicano movement of the 1960s. The expansive political visions of these Mexicans in the United States continue to reverberate today.

1

Revolution and Migration

The Rise of "Migration Fever" in San Luis Potosí and Guanajuato, 1890–1920

Manuel Pérez, an agricultural laborer from Guanajuato, heard stories: "I became acquainted with a number of boys in my hometown who excited me with the idea of coming to work in the United States." He explained that "since I didn't have the means with which to come, I told those friends that I would meet them here. One of them, however, lent me enough for the ride to Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, telling me that we would take an *enganche* [labor contract] in El Paso. I came [to the United States], leaving my wife and my child, who was then about five."[1]

Later, when he arrived in California, he ran into other people from his hometown who gave him advice on not taking railroad work. Perez was just one of dozens who left his town in the 1910s. His account contains many of the constant refrains in migrants' stories: interest sparked by information via friends and families, financing the trip by borrowing from acquaintances, using information from hometown contacts to ease the journey, and leaving behind family, with the intention of sending money back.

The conditions that propelled this mass migration were created by the industrialization of the Mexico-US borderlands and the violence of the Mexican Revolution. However, large-scale structural forces do not explain why one area, but not another, might send many migrants. This chapter examines the interplay of economic forces, revolutionary violence, and the personal choices involved in leaving. It does so by looking at two states in central Mexico: Guanajuato, in the heart of the Bajío valley, and San Luis Potosí, in the less densely populated north-central part of the country. While mass migration was initiated by labor recruiters and later encouraged by revolutionary violence, it grew to such a large scale because interpersonal networks spread information and established durable pathways. These networks are important for migrations everywhere, but to date, no in-depth

Between Here and There. Daniel Morales, Oxford University Press. © Oxford University Press 2024.
DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780197612590.003.0002

studies have illuminated how they were established and reproduced in early twentieth-century Mexico.

Much has been written about the politics and economics underlying mass migration, but far less is known about the migrants themselves. From their perspectives—revealed in letters to family members, in their songs, and in interviews conducted by researchers, government officials, and others—migration looks not like a process controlled by impersonal global and political forces, but rather like a dynamic continuously contested by events on the ground and the actions of people. Migrants' personal networks operated within the larger structural forces of revolutions, government policies, and labor markets; they too constituted elements of the larger structures of migration.

The *Porfiriato* and the Railroads

Porfirio Díaz became president in Mexico City via a coup in 1876, he would go on to rule nearly uninterrupted for more than three decades. The *Porfiriato* pursued a liberal developmentalist agenda; altered the nation's agricultural, mining, and industrial sectors; and intended to reform the economy and society along "scientific" lines. The regime supported the expansion of private land ownership over communal lands, consolidation of land under *hacendados* (plantation owners), and shifting to exportable commodity crops, such as sugar and henequen, rather than crops for local consumption. Across Mexico, land holdings became more concentrated as indigenous villages and independent farmers lost land through privatization, consolidation, and outright theft. In the mining, oil, and railroad industries, Díaz encouraged heavy foreign investment through land and tax concessions, the use of police and soldiers to create favorable labor conditions, and the creation of new settlements for foreigners. His large patronage network enabled various sectors of society to become part of the political system while maintaining their ostensible independence. Those outside this network found a violent peace enforced by federal *Rurales*, the mounted gendarmeries, and a modernized army. Rebellions were put down across the periphery of the Mexican state; in the case of the indigenous Yaqui tribe in Sonora, this resulted in repression and slavery. Díaz sought to keep a balance between British, German, US, and French investments in order to

deter foreign interference such as the US and French invasions in the nineteenth century.[2]

Traditionally, foreign trade in Mexico went to Veracruz and overseas markets; railroads changed this equation. Following its victory in the US-Mexico War, the United States annexed the northern half of Mexico. Two groups of US investors vied to build a national railroad network, with large financial subsides and land grants from the government. One group built the *Ferrocarriles Nacionales de México* (Mexican National Railway); going from Mexico City to Nuevo Laredo in south Texas, it passed through San Miguel Allende, San Luis Potosí, Saltillo, and Monterrey, with branch lines through Morelia to Pátzcuaro and El Salto. A second group, which also controlled the Santa Fe railroad in the US Southwest, built the *Ferrocarril Central Mexicano* (Mexican Central Railway). This much larger network ran one main line through the sugar-producing areas of Morelos to Mexico City and another north to Torreón and El Paso, where it connected to the Santa Fe railroad lines to Chicago. The network ran a major branch through the Bajío states

Figure 1.1 The construction of the Mexican Central Railway created the infrastructure that tens of thousands used to migrate to the United States. William Henry Jackson, Mexican Central Railway train at station, Mexico, ca. 1880–1897. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-D418-30155.

of Jalisco, Aguascalientes, Michoacán, and Guanajuato and another branch east to San Luis Potosí, Tampico, and north to Monterrey.[3]

Construction of the railroad projects and the concurrent mining boom would not have been possible without a large labor force. An estimated 40,000 people worked on the construction of the Mexican Central. Most of them were recruited from central Mexico by *enganchadores* (labor contractors), and after their time on the railroad, they searched for work in other industrial centers. There they were joined by hundreds of thousands of peasants who had lost their traditional lands to *haciendas* (plantations). This large-scale internal migration and displacement would not have been possible without American investment and was one of the major preconditions for the subsequent mass migration.[4]

The completion of the *Ferrocarril Nacional de México* and the *Ferrocarril Central Mexicano* in 1888 and 1884, respectively, created the connections necessary for goods and people to travel deep into both nations. The Mexican Central linked to the Southern Pacific Railway and the Topeka and Santa Fe Railway at Ciudad Juárez/El Paso, while the Mexican National ended at Laredo, where it joined up with the Texas-Mexican and the International and Great Northern railway systems. Initially, the railroads boosted the economy. The Mexican gross domestic product (GDP) grew 3.7% a year from 1880 to 1910, while transportation costs fell dramatically and tonnage increased.[5] Internally, the vast new network boosted interstate trade, grew regional centers, and integrated the Mexican state.[6] Over time, the railroads generated social tensions as companies and *hacendados* came to own most of the land around them, leading to many cases of violence and small revolts.[7] Internationally, they tied the Mexican economy to the United States, especially in the Mexican north. With the flow of capital across borders, the increasing movement of goods, use of wage laborers, and growth of migratory labor inside of Mexico, certain sectors of the Mexican workforce were moving towards a common labor market along the borderlands.

San Luis Potosí

The *Porfiriato* in San Luis Potosí is, in many ways, a microcosm of the economic changes that swept over central Mexico. San Luis Potosí lies in the central north of Mexico; the state slopes from the high plains in central/northern Mexico east towards the lowland jungles of the Huasteca. Although

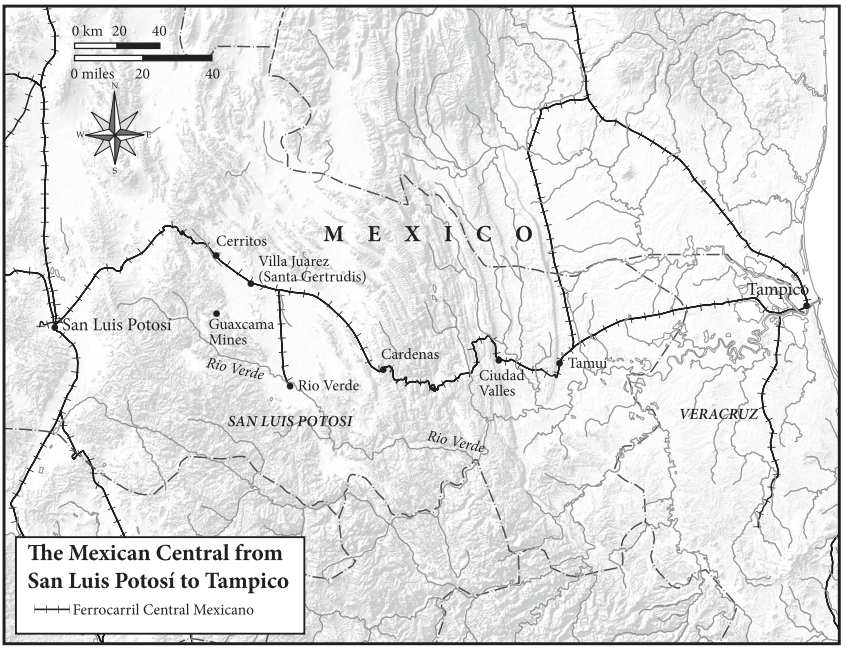

Figure 1.2 The Mexican Central Railway from San Luis Potosí to Tampico.

much less dense than states in the western Bajío, it became a center of migration. With large mining-, railroad-, and plantation-based agricultural sectors, its story illustrates the relationship between economic change, violence, and migration.

In the 1880s, both the Mexican Central and Mexican National railroads ran lines into and out of the city of San Luis Potosí, the state capital, linking the interior of the country to the north and east. While the Mexican National ran a branch line into the mining center of Matehuala, the most significant rail project ran east to the port of Tampico, in the state of Tamaulipas, on the Gulf of Mexico. Construction of the Mexican Central turned out to be much more complicated than most investors thought, requiring twelve years of construction across several mountain passes to cover the distance between Tampico and San Luis Potosí. In addition to the normal concessions of land next to the railroads, the state government levied a special tax from 1878 to 1880 to finance the line. After the railroad was completed in 1890, San Luis Potosí and Tamaulipas experienced growing inequality. In the city of San Luis Potosí itself, economic growth lagged, and a series of railroad strikes

Figure 1.3 Construction of the Mexican Central Railway through the Zona Media from San Luis Potosí to Tampico in 1902. "El Ferrocarril en Rioverde," 1902, Museo Nacional de los Ferrocarriles Mexicanos, México DF.

Figure 1.4 The Mexican National Railway in San Luis Potosí. William Henry Jackson, Mexico National R. R. Station, ca. 1880–1897. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-D401-3973.

in 1908 broke out over wages and the segregation between Mexican and US migrant workers.[8]

The construction of the railroad encouraged the consolidation of land from small holdings into larger ones on an unprecedented scale. *Hacendados* in the center and south of the state took over their surrounding villages. By 1910, an astounding 82% of the population in the state lived within *hacienda* boundaries.[9] In and around Tamazunchale in the state's southeastern Huasteca region, where new *hacendados* took land from indigenous villages, a series of violent disputes continued until the revolution. Many of the valleys in the Huasteca became cattle operations, and large areas were fenced in with barbed wire so that villages could not use the *hacienda* land for foraging, as had been their traditional right. As the number of independent landowners fell, *rancherías* became smaller and less numerous; as *haciendas* grew, large numbers of towns lost common lands they had previously claimed. Twenty-two families came to own a third of the state's land.[10]

The concentration of land into *haciendas*, loss of autonomy by villages, and movement towards income based on wage labor had dramatic effects on the agricultural economy. Production was reoriented towards commercial crops for export and away from subsistence farming. Cotton, sugar, coffee, tobacco, and henequen production rose dramatically. As profits from maize production dropped comparatively, it had to be imported from the United States.[11] Furthermore, the real wages of rural workers and conditions of tenants and sharecroppers deteriorated over time.[12]

Traditionally, silver and gold mining made up the largest sector of the San Luis Potosí economy, but new metals soon came to rival them. From 1890 onwards, the smelting of lead, copper, iron, zinc, and sulfur grew exponentially, with the Guggenheim-owned American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO) buying up the previously independent *Compañía Metalurgica Mexicana* and, later, the American National Metallurgical Company. The presence of large US-dominated firms in the state tended, over the long term, to spur migration to large urban centers. This was not in the interest of San Luis Potosí *hacendados*, who resented the higher wages that the mining companies paid their workers. In one case, local *hacendados* refused to sell land to US mining officials, who explained in a company report, "The proximity of an industrial center always does serious harm to

agricultural concerns, since the latter then never pay the wages offered by the former."[13]

Before the revolution, the relationship between the *hacendados* in the area and the people who worked for them was exploitative. The Zona Media's short rainy season meant that irrigation was needed for the most demanding agricultural production, something that benefited the largest and most capitalized *hacendados* of the region, such as the Hacienda de San Anton Guaxcama, the Laguna de Santo Domingo, and Angostura. Angostura was owned by Antonio Espinosa y Cervantes, one of the richest men of the state. The *hacienda* bordered Santa Gertrudis de la Carbonera (also known as Villa de Carbonera) on two sides to the south. The residents of the town held a grant from colonial decrees to about 1,700 hectares. In 1879, Espinosa y Cervantes claimed about 350 of those hectares as part of Angostura. When the residents of the town brought in a judge and government surveyors who upheld their claim, Espinosa y Cervantes used his connections to have state troops resurvey the land in his favor. The village, like many in the state, was completely enclosed by *haciendas* by 1910.

To the southwest, the Hacienda de San Anton Guaxcama had existed in one form or another since the seventeenth century. The *hacienda* boasted more than a hundred families, its own aqueduct system, a convent, and vast ranch lands. Indeed, the tiny church town of San Gertrudis de la Carbonera seemed more like a satellite of the *hacienda* than the main market town of the area. This imbalance in power between the people of the valley and the state elites had only grown since the establishment of sulfur mines in the mountains above Guaxcama during the late colonial period. However, these mines remained small until the railroad was completed in 1890.

After the Mexican Central completed the branch line linking San Luis Potosí to the Gulf of Mexico, most of the freight of the railroad went through the valley, with passenger and fueling stops at Cerritos Cárdenas and Rioverde, the largest city of the valley. Although most of the agricultural production of the area continued to be sold in local markets, major changes occurred at the mines in the area. Two new mines were established above Cerritos and Guaxcama. By 1910, more than 700 miners worked at the Guaxcama mines. These workers supported several hundred other jobs in the immediate vicinity, especially the nearby town of Buenavista.[14]

Guanajuato

Guanajuato encompasses two very different regions: a mountainous north that is rich in mineral ores and the Bajío valley in the south. Historically one of the regions in Mexico where capitalist production most shaped society, Guanajuato saw greater economic growth than neighboring San Luis Potosí.[15] The state experienced a silver and gold mining boom when the United States began to purchase large amounts of silver and American companies bought and recapitalized old mines in Mexico.[16]

However, it was the southern part of the state, with its massive agricultural region, that had greater consequences for the history of migration. Located northwest of the central plateau of Mexico, the Bajío basin stretches across five states and constitutes the most productive agricultural region in Mexico. In the Guanajuato Bajío, there was a mixed economy with many small landholders (*rancheros*) but in the years before the revolution, *haciendas* consolidated land from autonomous villages and become more powerful

Figure 1.5 The Mexican Central Railway in Guanajuato, from San Francisco de Rincón to Celaya, with Leon, Silao, Guanajuato, Romita, Irapuato, Salamanca, Pénjamo, and other towns shown.

than the numerous independent *rancheros*. Landholdings were smaller than in the central north, mostly because they held a larger percentage of highly fertile lands. The result was strong profits even in years when the production of maize decreased.[17]

The cities of Celaya and San Francisco de Rincón were situated at different ends of the state of Guanajuato but shared several traits. Eventually, hundreds of men, almost all of whom who worked in agriculture, would leave these towns to work in the United States. The state capital of Guanajuato at the center of the mining economy had traditionally been the center of economic activity. The arrival of the railroads changed this; by 1900, León, Silao, and other agricultural projection hubs had become the centers of population growth.[18] Celaya's economy, like that of many cities in the area, was agricultural. Located near the eastern end of the Bajío basin, it was surrounded by some of the country's richest agricultural land. A center of trade and agricultural production since the colonial period, it also became a manufacturing center. Because the Mexican Central and Mexican National railroads converged at Celaya, it was an important junction for the movement of goods. In addition to a railyard, the city had telegraph operations, warehouses, and oil- and food-processing factories as well as distilleries and an electrical generation plant.

San Francisco de Rincón had no mining or manufacturing economy. The first city linking Guanajuato with the mountainous Altos de Jalisco, it was critical market town for farmers from the Altos and home to a large agricultural economy and several major *haciendas*. In 1884, a line of the Mexican Central established a station linking it to the rest the country. As cities in the region grew, they began to pull migrants in from the surrounding countryside. By 1907, San Francisco de Rincón had developed into a small industrial center teeming with small businesses, especially hat-making. The earliest recorded migrant from the town was Gumercindo Ramírez, who was probably one of many who joined the railroads in those years. By 1910, there were newspaper reports of groups of men leaving the town to work for the railroads and the fields of Texas.[19] The towns of San Francisco de Rincón and Celaya became centers of migration activity as citizens moved out from them to other parts of Mexico. While the people who migrated from San Luis Potosí often came from mining or railroad backgrounds, those who migrated from Guanajuato came primarily from agricultural backgrounds.

Haciendas and *El Norte*

In 1906, Jose Encarnacion Impina wrote to Luis Toranzo, the owner of the Cerro Prieto Hacienda southeast of Rioverde, San Luis Potosí, "I am thinking of selling all my *haciendas*, not because they are not profitable or cause me any losses, but I already hear the approaching steps of the commune. You cannot imagine how the countryside is here in San Luis . . . it is like a desert, and the people are departing in droves for the north."[20] Though clearly an exaggeration, Impina's letter reveals the mindset of landowners in the state. No large-scale violence had broken out, but small acts of violence caused fear among *hacendados* and spurred migration by workers. In the countryside, *hacendados* came to see their control of local labor under threat from mining companies, railroads, migration north, and violent revolution.

As large-scale mining and export-oriented agriculture expanded, people in central and northern Mexico increasingly became unemployed or wage laborers rather than subsistence farmers. When market prices dropped, greater numbers were reduced to poverty than ever before. This new relationship between labor, land, and capital also threatened traditional hierarchies, as *hacendados* suddenly found themselves competing for workers. Migration tended to come from areas that were undergoing capitalist transformation, or at least adjacent to it, mainly from small towns a few days walk from rail stations. This caused large-scale internal migration within Mexico as this transformation unfolded. When news of even higher wages across the border started to circulate, employers also found themselves competing against jobs in *El Norte*. Wages in Texas and California were four to nine times larger than those available in Guanajuato, Jalisco, and Michoacán.[21] Some *hacendados*, especially in the north, embraced these changes, recruiting workers from central Mexico and rivaling Laguna operations by offering higher wages and by providing schools, healthcare, and other services.[22] Others fought against these changes to maintain traditional patron/peon relationships. Although Article 11 of the 1857 Constitution had established the right to enter and leave the country, various tactics had been used to keep workers on the land, and *hacendados* increasingly turned to more forceful methods.[23]

Amado Delgado, a *jefe político* (political machine boss) in Guanajuato, resolved to stop migration, which he saw as labor theft. In 1910, he forcibly removed *peones* (farm laborers) from trains and put recruiters in jail. But even this did not prevent the exodus of workers, large numbers of