Between worlds: online transnationalism of highly skilled Mexicans in Vancouver

by

María Esther Cervantes Macías

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Between worlds: online transnationalism of highly skilled Mexicans in Vancouver

submitted by   María Esther Cervantes Macías   in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

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Examining Committee:

Merje Kuus, Professor, Department of Geography, UBC

Supervisor

Elvin Wyly, Professor, Department of Geography, UBC

Supervisory Committee Member

Abstract

This thesis examines the ways in which highly skilled Mexicans in Vancouver participate in digitally enabled transnational activities. I explore how this group uses digital technologies to facilitate their transnational relations, particularly by focusing on how technology contributes to immigrants maintaining a sense of belonging in their country of origin, as they adapt to Vancouver at different stages of their migration journey. Additionally, I explore how highly skilled Mexicans deploy their social, cultural, economic and political capital once they are established in Vancouver to maintain or neglect their ties with Mexico. I use a mixed methods approach including autoethnography, analysis of public statistics, an analysis of Youtube data and 18 semi-structured interviews with highly skilled Mexicans in Vancouver.

Throughout this research, I explore the socioeconomic characteristics of Mexican migrants to Vancouver and their interactions with Mexican institutions in Vancouver. I also look at how highly skilled Mexicans use digital technologies to maintain or neglect their transnational relations with Mexico, and the way that the use of these technologies impact their everyday life in Vancouver. To zoom into the role that identity negotiation plays in digital content created by expatriates, I analyze two YouTube channels hosted by Mexicans living in Vancouver. I conclude that a lack of adequate engagement from both the origin and destination nation-states results in a status of limbo for highly skilled Mexican immigrants that creates a need to reduce their vulnerability by choosing to associate with others who share a similar class habitus rather than nationality.

Lay summary

This research focuses on the impact that digital technologies have in the maintenance of relationships that highly skilled Mexicans have with Mexico while living in Vancouver. I ask: how do digital technologies allow highly skilled Mexicans to maintain relations with Mexico while in Vancouver, and how do they affect their interactions with Mexican institutions both in Vancouver and in Mexico?. This project deploys a mixed methods approach, using public statistics, an analysis of Youtube data and 18 interviews with highly skilled Mexicans in Vancouver. This project contributes to the study of class in immigration and a better understanding of the role of digital technologies such as social media, video chats and texting for immigrants to maintain their relationships with friends, family and other co-nationals in their home country and the country of migration.

Preface

This thesis, including design, analysis and presentation, is the original unpublished work of the author. It was approved by the University of British Columbia's Behavioral Research Ethics Board, certificate number H19-01550.

Table of contents

List of tables

List of abbreviations

CONACYT- National Science and Technology Council of Mexico (Spanish)

EXATEC- Tecnológico de Monterrey Alumni

FUMEC- Mexico- United States Foundation for Science

IME - Institute of Mexicans Abroad (Spanish)

INEGI- National Institute of Geography and Statistics of Mexico (Spanish)

IRCC- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

LCP - Live-in Caregiver Program

NAFTA- North American Free Trade Agreement

OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

SAWP - Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program

UBC - University of British Columbia

Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank my community, my friends.
It's a lesson I have learned over and over again,
But it bears repeating:

No one achieves anything alone.
Leslie Knope (Parks and Recreation)

This thesis has only been possible because my mother firmly believed that a bilingual education was the best gift she could give my sister and I. Thank you Mom, for sticking with your ideals and for insisting on giving us the best education that you could imagine. To my Dad, I recognize the privilege that it is to have an academic Dad that has never let me doubt that I was going to be here one day, and how lucky I am to have someone that pushes me to be better and work harder to make sure that I know that being here is not just some kind of miracle. Diana, you know I believe you are the smartest of all of us. Thank you for answering my unannounced Facetimes and for copyediting and avoiding that my tired brain writes things like inundation instead of flooding. To Watson, you are truly a source of joy in my life. I love you all, thank you for showing me the endless possibilities of transnational affection.

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1 Introduction

Context: Negotiating Mexico

I first moved to Vancouver at the end of December 2018, ahead of the start of my semester abroad during the last year of my undergraduate degree. I had been here once before, visiting my cousin, and that same cousin welcomed me in her home while I waited for move-in day in my residence, in early January. I met my first friend in that building's elevator — when I first saw her, I thought she was also from Monterrey, my home back in Mexico. Something about the way she dressed and her posture seemed familiar, and that scared me — I did not want my first exchange friend to be from Monterrey. I later found out she was on exchange from Istanbul, but that initial pushback was not enough to stop us from becoming friends.

I have become familiar with that feeling of identification, awareness and vigilance that I felt when I first met her: I experience it while at university, in public transportation and even walking the streets downtown. *Where are the other Mexicans? Do I look like them? Can everyone tell I am one of them?* I had never felt that way before, as I had lived in the same city, in the same house and went to school with the same people from childhood through university — that is just how life is in upper middle class Monterrey. Living in Vancouver was my first opportunity to escape the familiar, and I wanted to take advantage of that opportunity.

When my semester abroad was over, I decided I liked Vancouver, and applied for graduate school so I could come back to find the person that I was allowed to be here. I wanted to be something more than just another Mexican that does not feel Mexican enough, a feeling that is somewhat common in border-adjacent Monterrey.

As is the case with many graduate students of colour in the social sciences, your experiences are either understudied or overstudied by people who are not like you, so my research focuses on Mexicans living in Vancouver. Since the 2016 United States Presidential election, or even before, "Mexican" has been twisted into a hateful word in immigration discourses, and while I have tried to distance myself from being Mexican for longer than that, it is not something I can escape. My skin and my accent and my name are generally enough for people to want to take guesses at my nationality in the supermarket and public transportation, more often than not asking my opinion about cartel violence and Puerto Vallarta once they figure it out. I decided that I would reclaim the word by studying Mexicans who were like me, to prove to whoever reads this thesis that Mexican is not a bad word.

Research questions and objectives

This thesis examines the ways in which highly skilled Mexicans in Vancouver participate in digitally enabled transnational activities. I explore how this group uses digital technologies to facilitate their transnational relations, particularly by focusing on how technology contributes to immigrants maintaining a sense of belonging in their country of origin, as they adapt to Vancouver at different stages of their migration journey. Additionally, I explore how highly skilled Mexicans deploy their social, cultural, economic and political capital once they are established in Vancouver to maintain or neglect their ties with Mexico. There is a lot to unpack

in the motivations behind this research, and I will attempt to address them as I analyze transnational identity formation of highly skilled Mexicans living in Vancouver.

I must start by acknowledging that my interest in this specific population stems from the fact that I am a highly skilled Mexican living in Vancouver. I define highly skilled based on educational achievement: the only requirements to participate in this research were to hold a university degree or above and Mexican citizenship. The rationale behind the definition of highly skilled used in this research is addressed extensively in Chapter 2.

When I arrived in Vancouver for my graduate program, I had no real contact with other Mexicans except for my cousin and my roommate, both of whom I knew before moving to the city. I was not sure where to start looking for other conationals in the city, and in the process of searching, I stumbled upon several Facebook groups dedicated to the Mexican community in Vancouver. I browsed through the groups and decided not to join, as I did not need to start making connections in my first term and I was not really interested in going to any of the events. I also remembered that at the end of my study abroad term I met several Tec de Monterrey alumni during a party for exchange students. Since they also had a Facebook group, I joined to make some connections that would be somewhat more related to my research.

During my first year in Vancouver, I concentrated on figuring out what my place was in the Geography department and the city, and meeting other Mexicans was not a real priority in my list. I am writing this while nearing the end of my master's program, and the evolution of my identity as a highly skilled Mexican in Vancouver has been parallel to my evolution as an international graduate student. As Rilke calls for in his letter, during my first year in Vancouver I was trying to live in the questions — *What does it mean to be a Mexican graduate student*

studying other Mexicans? Why am I the most qualified person to do this work? How does my identity affect the results of this research? — in the hope that that process would help me find the answers that this research is looking to respond to.

Methodology and ethics

This thesis is my attempt at answering those questions, and addressing how understanding my positionality is essential to approach the results of this research. I used a mixed methods approach to this research in order to better illustrate the different fields in which highly skilled Mexicans negotiate their transnational identity. I start by using existing quantitative data from Statistics Canada, obtained mostly from the 2016 Canadian Census. This data allowed me to identify the number of highly skilled Mexicans living in British Columbia at the time of the Census, by building a profile with socioeconomic characteristics such as visa stream of entry, education level, average income and other data which I analyze in Chapter 2.

After building a socioeconomic profile with publicly available data, I routinely observed posts found in Mexican community Facebook groups in order to analyze the interaction between physical and digital spaces in which highly skilled Mexicans negotiate their identity. Additionally, I examined 226 videos from two Youtube channels hosted by highly skilled Mexicans living in Vancouver. I decided not to use concrete data from the Facebook groups, due to anonymity and privacy concerns, but questions about interactions the research participants had with the Mexican community Facebook groups in the semi-structured interviews were included. The privacy concerns related to the use of Youtube videos were mainly about preserving the anonymity of the Youtube hosts, as I interviewed them for this project, in order to be able to comply with the Behavioural and Research Ethics Guidelines. Since the videos are in the public

domain, I use them as the main source of data for Chapter 4. I collected this data during the month of October 2019, meaning that any videos uploaded after October 31st 2019 are not considered as part of my analysis.

Lastly, I conducted 18 quasi-ethnographic semi-structured interviews with highly skilled Mexicans living in Vancouver. These Mexicans were either professionals or graduate students that had been living in Vancouver in periods ranging from 1 year to 14 years, with an average of 4.5 years and a mode of 1.5 years. Most of the participants were relatively new to the city, although more than half had previous experiences living in Canada or abroad before. The gender composition of the interviews was 55% male and 44% female, and their immigration status in Canada varied from study and work permits to Canadian citizens. To use the data obtained from the interviews while maintaining anonymity, all the participants have been given pseudonyms.

I used an interview guide divided in three sections: 1) Migration to Vancouver, 2) Social circle in Vancouver, 3)Digitally enabled sense of belonging. The first section consisted of context questions on the reasons why participants decided to move to Vancouver, any previous migration experiences and the networks that they had in the city prior to their arrival. The second section asked about their social networks in Vancouver and their interactions with other Mexicans and Mexican institutions in Vancouver. The third section was divided into two subsections: questions about their use of digital technologies to manage and maintain their transnational relationships and their use of digital technologies to obtain information and politically participate in Mexico while in Vancouver.

Lastly, this work is heavily informed by the use of autoethnography, as it is the method most tied with my own positionality. I will structure the discussion of methodology and ethics by each

method used, however the role of autoethnography is relevant across the rest of the methods since it requires me to reflect on the benefits and limitations of my positionality as a highly skilled Mexican researching other highly skilled Mexicans in Vancouver.

From the inside looking in

I will start by discussing autoethnography as a method and the implications that using this method had for this research. In the field of Geography, autoethnography has been adopted as a practice "to move beyond ruminations about our discipline's coloniality and into the realm of anticolonial praxis" (Besio and Butz, 2004, p. 432). However, as Fisher (2015) argues, much of the existing research on subjectivity and its role in the research process focuses "either on 'white' researchers in Global South contexts or on researchers working in their 'home' country or community" (p. 457) and less common but increasingly so, "the intersection between gender and race of the researcher and subsequent effects on research relationships" (p. 457). This research attempts to look at the intersection of ethnicity/nationality and class, by exploring my own positionality in a national community that is deeply socioeconomically divided, and the replication of these divisions in a transnational context.

Addressing positionality while performing any type of ethnography is essential to understand how the research is approached. Besio and Butz (2004) argue that they are drawn to ethnography because it "utilizes an epistemological position that prioritizes the particularity and context-dependent nature of knowledge" (p. 433). My personal context informs the way that I experience the world, and as a highly skilled immigrant in the early stages of my migration journey, I face many of the same experiences and challenges as the participants in this research.

This research builds on new and pre-existing relationships I had in Vancouver, which I started cultivating when I first came to study abroad at the University of British Columbia. In their reflections about intimate field research, Massaro & Cuomo (2016) explore how the existence of pre-existing and intimate relationships with their research participants enabled the level of access obtained in their research projects. I, as many migrants do, had connections in Vancouver that provided support and knowledge before I moved to Vancouver and throughout my initial months in the city.

The strongest relationship was primarily my cousin, but former professors and classmates that I met during my exchange were also essential. Massey et al (1994) use the network theory of migration to explain how migrants networks are "sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants and nonmigrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship, and a shared community of origin" (p. 449). However, beside my kinship, friendship and community of origin networks, there are networks that are more closely associated with my position as a highly skilled immigrant. Being a Tec de Monterrey alumni gave me access to the pre-established Tec de Monterrey Vancouver alumni network, and my position as a graduate student allowed me to meet students at the University of British Columbia (UBC) who knew Mexicans in other departments. Additionally, I am also a Mitacs Research intern alumna, and this organization has an office at UBC which hosts events for interns and alumni during the summer. This was especially valuable because Mexico is one of the few countries from where Mitacs recruits summer interns. My access to these groups was central to my interview process, since I was able to recruit research participants from different social circles through these pre-established networks.

My unique position belonging to different networks of highly skilled Mexicans placed me as an insider in various groups, not only due to my nationality but also by the different professional associations we were part of. Ganga & Scott (2006) define "insider research" as "social interviews conducted between researchers and participants who share a similar cultural, linguistic, ethnic, national and religious heritage" (p. 2). The focus of their article is research that involves social interaction between migrants from the same imagined community (Anderson, 1983), and they argue that this type of research creates a distinct social dynamic as a result of shared cultural knowledge. This concept of "diversity in proximity" makes both the interviewer and the interviewee better able to recognize both "the ties that bind us and the social fissures that divide us" (Ganga & Scott, 2006, p. 2), however I must acknowledge, and I do this by using autoethnography as a method, that my position as an insider within the community is constantly being transformed as I undergo the initial stages of my own migration path in Vancouver.

Méndez (2013) characterizes autoethnography as a method that can range from "research about personal experiences of a research process to parallel exploration of the researcher's and the participants' experiences, and the experience of the researcher while conducting a specific piece of research" (p. 281). This work focuses on the exploration of my personal experience parallel to those of the participants, in a way that I can identify through other research methods such as interviews and analysis of digital content, and through previous literature, the similarities and differences between my experiences and the research participants' experiences.

Kuus (2013) argues that "the effects of foreign policies can be observed in numerous settings but its conception inside the insular echelons of the state is much less visible" (p. 19). In a similar manner, I argue that the effects of upper class upbringing in Mexico can be "observed in numerous settings", but its conception is much less visible. The identity of upper class Mexican

citizens is closely tied to education as a means of achieving social mobility — and in the case of the upper middle classes, a private bilingual education is an investment that parents make in order to guarantee access to better universities and in some cases, transnational social mobility through higher education or professional opportunities.

In the context of transnational social mobility through education, it is not enough or strictly necessary to have economic capital in order to obtain a space inside the "echelons" (Kuus, 2013, p. 19). Highly skilled migrants can strategically use their social and cultural capital to obtain access to these spaces. I argue that this social and cultural capital translates into an ability which Carol Cohn (1987) identifies as "speaking the language". Highly skilled immigrants have been learning the language through an education system that gives access to what Guarnizo (1997) calls the transnational habitus:

> the social position of the migrant and the context in which transmigration occurs. This accounts for the similarity in the transnational habitus of migrants from the same social grouping (class, gender, generation) and the generation of transnational practices adjusted to specific situations. (p. 311).

For highly skilled immigrants in Vancouver, the adaptation to this transnational habitus occurs in different stages. As an example, a majority of the research participants had experience studying abroad for short periods of time before migrating to Vancouver, which gave them access to learning about a new environment first hand before committing to a more permanent migration. Globalization gives highly skilled immigrants cultural capital that proves to be valuable when trying to adapt to a new environment. In contrast to broader studies about migration, language was not mentioned as a barrier for the experiences in Vancouver for any of the research

participants, as most had counted on some sort of English education from a young age. In addition to linguistic abilities, cultural markers such as food and culture consumption have been heavily globalized, and many participants said that they do not miss Mexican food as what they eat in Vancouver is very similar to what they ate back home, and consumption of global — mostly American — popular culture makes it easier to integrate into cultural conversations in the city. Nothing ever was ever exclusively Mexican about their lives in Mexico, which makes it easier to transition into the "Canadian" way of life, even at the first stages of their migration. In the next section I explore the benefits and limitations of doing semi-structured, quasi-ethnographic interviews, reflecting on the dynamics between researcher and research participants, the variations in profiles of research participants and the type of questions asked.

Studying up and studying lateral

The semi-structured interviews were a key source of data for this research, and as explained above, the different networks to which I have access in Vancouver were extremely useful to broaden the scope of profiles of the research participants. My networks helped me obtain access and legitimize me as a researcher, and this helps counteract the difficulties that being a junior scholar could bring to obtaining access to different types of networks, particularly when dealing with elite subjects in a transnational context. Vertovec (2002) explores how migrants' networks vary depending on "local histories of migration, national conditions and communal socio-cultural traits" (p. 2) and he argues that there are also variations in types of networks used by different occupational classes. Vertovec (2002) also remarks that highly skilled immigrants "rely more on networks of colleagues or organizations and less on kin-based networks than unskilled workers" (p. 3). My connections with Tec de Monterrey, the University of British Columbia and Mitacs

proved to be more important to gain access not only to individual highly skilled Mexicans, but also to official government representatives in the Mexican Consulate.

These networks gave me access to research participants using the snowballing method, which is commonly used in migration research. In their exploration of the bias and limitations of snowballing methods, Beauchemin & González-Ferrer (2011) argue that migrants contacted through snowballing methods were more likely to have kept close ties with their home community. However, in the case of highly skilled immigrants, the home community is less relevant to the maintenance of their networks than professional organizations such as higher education institutions and alumni networks.

Given my own relationship with the organizations through which I recruited participants, from the starting point I shared a nationality and in most cases, a claim to the professional organization. However, there were many variations in age, profession, region of origin in Mexico and time spent in Vancouver, all of which enrich the experiences I was able to capture in my interviews and through participant observation. When addressing the interviews in general, I exclude the interview with the Mexican diplomat because, despite following the same structure, their answers referred to the community in general and not to themselves. In the next section of this chapter I explore how the similarities and differences between the research participants and myself influenced the power dynamics of our interactions.

My first contact with Mexicans outside of UBC was the Tec de Monterrey alumni network. This group is formed mostly by professionals working in different management or administration positions in the city, and they host a monthly networking dinner. The first meeting I went to was

attended mostly by middle aged men, and this trend continued throughout the rest of the dinners I attended, although on several occasions younger women would also show up.

Despite the noticeable gender and age differentials between the average Tec de Monterrey alumni and myself, my position as an alumna gave me access to their spaces, and throughout my participation in their meetings, I learned to highlight specific aspects of my identity in order to overcome the distance between myself, as a young female graduate student, and the rest of the mostly male middle-aged professional alumni. Cohn (1987) addresses a similar experience with her nuclear scientist coworkers, and argues that learning to speak their technostrategic language was the key to cementing her insider status. Cohn explains how "using the right phrases opened my way into long, elaborate discussions that taught me a lot about technostrategic reasoning and how to manipulate it" (p. 708). In the case of the alumni, I argue that the technostrategic reasoning was instead the reproduction of meritocracy discourses (Sliwa & Johansson, 2014), and class double-entendres that would be less visible to someone without a positionality like my own.

Most conversations during the dinners involved presenting your professional accomplishments and demonstrating your connections to other alumni, but those who were regarded as figures of authority in the group were the older alumni — particularly those who had been in Vancouver longer. Surprisingly, I was the only alumni who was a student at UBC, and given the reputation of the university and my research interests, people were interested in asking me questions about my findings and my opinion on Mexican migration in general. However, my age and gender still created a slight power imbalance in my interactions with the alumni in professional events.

These power dynamics were also present in the only meeting hosted by the Global Network of Mexican Talents during the one and a half years of my fieldwork, a membership drive in mid-December 2018. It was hosted in a downtown area restaurant that provided the group with a TV for broadcasting presentations on the work and mission for the network, followed by a happy hour to encourage possible members to mix and mingle. This event was mostly attended by middle aged professional men, with around 20% attendance of professional women of various ages. Once again, I was one of the youngest people in attendance. However, being from UBC gave me credibility, in a similar fashion to the EXATEC alumni meeting, and some of the attendees asked for more information about my research interests and for my Linkedin contact. This was the professional association where I was the least successful in recruiting participants for the interview process, but their behaviour and posts on social media and their web page informs, in a limited way, some of my conclusions.

This power dynamic was not present in my interviews with UBC students and Mitacs alumni, due to both of these populations being closer to my age, and generally female. UBC, as a Mitacs partner, hosts events for summer interns with invitations for Mitacs alumni, and I was able to attend this networking event to recruit Mitacs alumni to participate in my research. Mitacs recruiting from a handful of countries resulted in alumni and interns from the same nationally gravitating towards each other, so I ended up sitting next to two Mexican Mitacs alumni doing their postgraduate programs at UBC, having done their Mitacs internships in 2016 and 2017. I quickly discovered their Mitacs internships took place at SFU and UBC, and that was the main reason why they decided to come back to Vancouver for their postgraduate programs.

This was different from my own experience, as my Mitacs internship took place in the rural campus of the University of Alberta, but I had participated in an exchange program at UBC

through Tec de Monterrey. Chatting with them began to show the connections between previous short-term experiences in Canada and the return for long-term or permanent migration that I addressed later on in the interviews. In this meeting I also experienced what would later become a common theme across my interviews, as many of the Mitacs summer interns were interested in us sharing our strategies to get accepted into grad school in UBC, so they could replicate them to try to come back to Vancouver when they were done with their undergraduate education. This event also resulted in several people adding me on social media and the occasional request for help with navigating the UBC school system and life in Vancouver in general.

In all these events, besides the obvious age and gender difference, there were other smaller differences that, while not necessarily influencing power dynamics, allowed for me and the participants to recognize some of our differences. For example, in the interviews I asked participants about their backgrounds, asking them to provide contextual information about themselves. I asked this at the beginning of the interview and it helped both myself and the participant to understand what we had in common and what were some of our main differences. Interestingly, the region where you are from in Mexico is a big point of divergence between Mexicans, and it assigns several cultural peculiarities such as the kind of food you miss and some of your vocabulary. For example, when asked about language barriers, many participants said that they could tell I did not have any issues with my English and that it was probably related to the fact that I am from Monterrey, which is constantly regarded as one of the most "Americanized" cities in Mexico.

Having this information upfront, and handling the interviews as a conversation instead of a one-sided dynamic in which I asked questions and they answered, made participants feel more comfortable when I asked about their experience as Mexicans living in Vancouver. This was

particularly successful when asked about their interaction with other Mexicans in the city, both online and offline. By the third section of the interview, which dealt with their political participation and the way the digital technologies enabled their sense of belonging to Mexico, it was noticeable they were more comfortable in responding to my questions. When transcribing the interviews, I noticed that instead of short, straight answers, they were providing more examples and stories in order to answer the questions I was asking.

This strategy allowed the participants to feel more comfortable during the interviews, and in some cases, due to our recognition of each other as equals, many of the research participants were becoming my friends, and my interactions with them influenced my everyday life in Vancouver. Gusterson (1995) discusses the changing nature of ethnographically informed fieldwork, transforming fieldwork from a "bounded and hierarchical encounter between the knower and the known" (p. 19) to a fieldwork that has more of the qualities of an "ongoing albeit asymmetrical dialogue" (p. 19). Following this idea, the fact that the place of my fieldwork could not be separated from the place of my everyday life influences the ongoing nature of the dialogue between me as a researcher and the participants. I did not spend a few months in a place which I then left to write my findings, I had constant interactions with many of the research participants both by accident and on purpose.

By doing research in the city where I live and in the environments I frequent, I interacted constantly with my research participants by accident in random points of the city, on purpose in the cases where we decided to continue our relationship beyond the interviews, and in digital spaces by observing social media. Gusterson (1995) reflects that "there is no stop button" to ethnography, and we must live with our subjects' responses to our work. This ongoing observation, while I was in the same position as some of my research subjects, also influenced

how I experience my life as a highly skilled immigrant in Vancouver. Despite common claims of not hanging out with other Mexicans, after the interviews took place we would meet periodically for brunch, and eventually formed a Whatsapp group of Mexican graduate students, some of whom I had interviewed. Throughout this work I address the tensions of trying to maintain the balance between the period I considered as fieldwork, and the rest of my everyday life in Vancouver.

The difference in dynamics between the Tec de Monterrey alumni and graduate students allowed me to reflect on the practical difference between studying up, which is common in research on elites, and what I call "studying lateral". Kuus (Forthcoming) argues that it is analytically more useful to speak of particular groups of elite subjects rather than elite in a generic sense. In the case of this research, I recognize all highly skilled immigrants as Mexican elites, and address the differences between the two groups: international professionals and international graduate students. Given the reflection encouraged by engaging in autoethnography, by claiming to be studying lateral I recognize myself as a part of a group of elite subjects and address the effect that certain aspects of my positionality have on others. By recognizing that I am also studying up, I address what Kuus (Forthcoming) calls "power differentials" between the researcher and the research subjects. Recognizing the impact that my own experiences had in both creating, performing and analyzing the interviews, I also used quantitative data from Statistics Canada and qualitative data obtained from 226 videos found on two Youtube channels to have additional data sources that helped me inform my research findings.

Translating experience and numbers

As explored in the previous section, my positionality is central to the methods of autoethnography and semi-structured interviews and as a recognition of the limitations of these approaches, throughout this research I also take on an analysis of existing quantitative and qualitative data in two different areas:

> a) public data from the Canadian government, to shape a socioeconomic profile of highly skilled immigrants living in Vancouver
>
> b) data obtained from interactive media platforms, namely Youtube channels hosted by two highly skilled Mexicans in Vancouver.

The existing public data about highly skilled Mexicans in Vancouver was drawn from the 2016 Canadian Census, the 2011 National Household Survey and information from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). Even if the sources of Canadian data about Mexicans are limited, the Census has many interesting categories that helped me get a good picture of who Mexicans are in British Columbia. For example, the Census includes information on the type of visa regimes through which Mexicans in Vancouver live in Canada and the numbers of internal and external migration and socioeconomic characteristics. Because I was only able to obtain data from the host country, the transnational perspective of my quantitative analysis is limited. The Mexican government does not actively publish information about Mexicans in Canada, and the information they provide is sourced from Statistics Canada.

Another limitation that particularly affected the data analysis was the lack of standardization in the Canadian government collection of migration data. The information about the Mexican community is published under the broader "Latin American" category. This restricted the

amount of data available to identify highly skilled Mexican immigrants, since there is no standardized data about this specific sector of the migrant population. This led me to use proxies such as education level and income to identify the number of members of the Mexican population that could be classified as highly skilled. For example, I based my definition of highly skilled in terms of educational achievement, and according to the 2016 Census, 33% of the Mexican population in British Columbia has a University degree at the bachelor level or above, and an additional 19% has College or other non-university certificate or diploma or a University certificate below bachelor level. This means that around 52% of the Mexican population in Vancouver has higher education, significantly higher than the Mexican national average of people with higher education (31.2% in 2016) and close to the Canadian national average of 54% in 2016. Despite the lack of a transnational perspective in the data publicly available, I was able to compare different data sources in order to create a working definition of highly skilled immigrants for this work.

In the analysis of content generated in interactive media platforms such as Facebook and Youtube, the latter was the main source of data for analysis due to ethical concerns regarding the privacy of Facebook groups. The video platform is used by some Mexicans to share information about their everyday life and immigration experiences with others who might be interested in migrating to Canada. Social media sites such as Facebook are used in different ways: to network with other Mexicans living in the same city using public or private Facebook groups, and to share their experiences abroad with friends and family both in Vancouver and in Mexico. Chapter 3 addresses the ways in which these platforms have contributed to enrich the transnational experience of immigrants. In Chapter 4, I deal with the issues of using Youtube as a

source of data for this research, mainly the way that I prioritized anonymity of research participants while also using their public data on Youtube as a main source of information.

Concepts and Literature

In the next section I will explore the main concepts and literature from which I am drawing in this research. The principal literature that informs this research is transnational migration studies, particularly the work that focuses on the transnational activities of skilled immigrants. Transnational migration studies argue that migrants and their descendants participate in a variety of processes that extend across borders while they become part of the places where they settle (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007, p. 130). This has generated critiques that claim transnationalism encourages a rejection of localization (Zhou & Tseng, 2001), particularly when studying the transnational experiences of highly mobile elites (Sklair 2002, Ong 2007, Ley 2010). Given these critiques, it is important to distinguish between highly mobile elites and highly skilled workers, even if at times these categories may overlap.

Ho (2011) explains that a highly skilled worker is normally defined as an individual with a university degree or extensive/equivalent experience in a given field (p. 120), and in her work she investigates how highly skilled migrants use a range of migration strategies and changing trajectories in order to work and live in London which might impact their 'highly skilled' status. Highly skilled immigrants can be part of what is known as the "transnational capitalist class", in the form of CEOs of transnational corporations, but more commonly are professionals that are part of a "middling migrant" class (Luthra & Platt, 2016), migrants that are neither economically disadvantaged nor super rich elites.

However, Beaverstock (2018) finds that even if they are not the transnational capitalist class per se, these migrants are "primarily a constituent of the so-called 1 per cent through economic exchange, lifestyle and consumption" and are "in receipt of the wealth, social/cultural and network capital they need to move seamlessly between the immigration systems of different organizations and nation-states" (p. 517). Another advantage of using the "middling migrant" category, is that there are considerable differences among participants in terms of disposable income and lifestyle (Ryan, Klewkowski, Von Koppenfels & Mulholland, 2015), even if they are highly skilled and part of the one percent. Here, as Neumann (2008) suggests, I turn to Bourdieu rather than to Marx to understand class: "the point lies not in absolute but in relative difference, and in questions of consumption as much as in questions of production" (p. 674). Throughout this research I question how these patterns of consumption are constructed for "middling migrants" through exposure to education systems that prepare middling migrants — through social, cultural and economical capital — for better job opportunities through migration, highlighting the value of educational achievements for transnational social mobility (Waters, 2009; Hall 2008). Understanding the subtle class differences between skilled elite migrants and skilled middling migrants allows me to place limits on the time, energy and resources that migrants can use for maintaining their transnational ties.

Tackling this perspective contributes to adding more factors to understand the spatiality of transnational networks, and despite online transnationalism being a central aspect of this research, I do not want to reproduce the simplistic approach of assuming that digital technologies have effectively managed to deterritorialize transnationalism. It is not enough to acknowledge that digital technologies have contributed to the shrinking of time/space, it is also important to understand that migrants are still rooted in territories and despite advances in digital

technologies, migrants are still "anchored in places, with a variety of legal, political and cultural ramifications" (Vertovec, 2009, p. 14), which impacts their management of transnational relations. Studying this particular sector of the migrant population also allows for this work to move beyond studying the effect of remittances, as previous literature (Faini, 2007) has shown that highly skilled migrants rarely send remittances back home and instead, attempt to reunite their families in their host country once they have settled.

By looking specifically at middling migrants, I can use broader literature on transnational migration studies, such as migrants' navigation of immigration regimes in transnational contexts, that in turn impacts their negotiations of identity and belonging, to understand how their cultural and economic capital affects these negotiations in their everyday transnational lives. It is important to acknowledge that my work is not dealing with transnational citizenship (Baubock, 2007) since highly skilled immigrants tend to be more mobile and are in constant movement, becoming "transmigrants who can practically and symbolically travel back and forth between their countries of destination and of origin" (Kaya, 2012, p. 168). However, this back and forth travel is limited by specific immigration regimes of destination countries.

This literature is particularly relevant to understand why many highly skilled immigrants find themselves in temporary migration regimes such as work or study permits, particularly as the paths toward permanent residence in Canada are increasingly more limited. Migrants' desire for multiple citizenships is a response to the understanding of passports as "less and less attestations of citizenship, let alone of loyalty to a protective nation-state, than of claims to participate in labor markets" (Ong, 1999, p. 5). Ong also argues that in response to globalization, individuals and governments "develop a flexible notion of citizenship and sovereignty as strategies to accumulate capital and power" (1999, p. 6). Ong defines flexible citizenship as follows:

"Flexible citizenship" refers to the cultural logics of capitalist accumulation, travel, and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions. In their quest to accumulate capital and social prestige in the global arena, subjects emphasize, and are regulated by, practices favoring flexibility, mobility, and repositioning in relation to markets, governments, and cultural regimes. These logics and practices are produced within particular structures of meaning about family, gender, nationality, class mobility, and social power (Ong, 1999, p. 6).

Ong's conceptualization of flexible citizenship is central to understanding the way that highly mobile elites use the concept to have greater flexibility in international travel and in professional and personal opportunities. As Ley (2010) discovered in his study of elite Hong Kong migrants in Vancouver, for elite migrants the benefits of having several passports have evolved: "before it was insurance. Right now it is for convenience" (p. 229). A gap in the flexible citizenship literature is that there is almost no research that focuses on Mexican highly skilled immigrants, particularly outside of the United States, which this research is hoping to contribute to.

Throughout this research, I look closely at the logics and practices that "are produced within particular structures of meaning about family, gender, nationality, class mobility, and social power" that Ong (1999) identifies as central in the conceptualization of flexible citizenship. Since these structures are essential to the sense of identity and belonging of migrants to a particular nation or state, the literature that deals with the ways in which immigrants negotiate the best strategies to accommodate these structures into their everyday lives is essential.

The way that specific immigration programs shape skilled immigrant future experiences varies widely from program to program. For example, in contrast to the Business Investor Visa

Programs studied by Ley (2010), Pratt (2004) focuses on the ways in which Filipina immigrants, despite having a higher proportion of university degrees compared to Canadians, found themselves "deskilling through immigration, followed by ghettoisation within marginal occupations and low monetary returns on educational investments" (Pratt, 2004, p. 39) by participating in the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP). Both the Business Investor Visa program and the Live-In Caregiver program rely heavily on immigrants' occupational identity, however the LCP results in an additional challenge of deskilling through immigration (Pratt, 2004, p. 39). This deskilling happens mainly given the two year requirement to adhere to extensive restrictions — not being able to study, work outside the home or work in other provinces — which results in losing confidence in the skills they brought from the Philippines. In contrast, the Business Investor Visa studied by Ley (2010) is primarily a monetary investment that requires constant monitoring from the state to permit an advance toward citizenship. However, many Investor stream migrants are able to migrate with their families and are able to use their skills to attempt to make their investment successful in the two year time frame demanded by the visa program.

The pathways toward migration available for the highly skilled Mexican immigrants participating in this research are not as straightforward as the two programs mentioned above. Many go through several temporary migrations in the study or work streams before applying for Express Entry or Permanent Residence. Previous research has found that educational institutions are essential for expats to participate in a two-step migration process— going through one or more temporary migrations before migrating permanently— as they provide expats with access and information that they otherwise would not be able to have. Kwak and Hiebert (2010) found that immigrants' association with the international education industrial sector contributes to the "blurring of boundaries between temporary and permanent migration associated with

international education, since individuals develop complex trajectories of migration based on their assessment of changing economic opportunities" (p. 135). Navigating several streams of immigration regimes complicate the different structures in which Mexican expats are constantly negotiating their identity and sense of belonging in a transnational setting.

Literature that deals with immigrants negotiating their sense of belonging has found that many transnational phenomena are mainly organized at the family or community level and "migrant families originating from a particular village or town tend to maintain and develop economic and social relations with that particular place, and not necessarily with the homeland as a whole" (Kaya, 2012, p. 159). This has been widely explored in research about Mexican migration to the United States (Goldring 2002; Délano 2011) where migrant organizations are formed based on belonging to the same state or city. This phenomenon has not been widely studied in Mexican migration to Canada, although given the differences in socioeconomic profiles of Mexican immigrants to Canada, it is less likely that hometown associations are particularly relevant in the Canadian context.

Ley (2010) encourages to think beyond the settler society narrative of immigration, settlement, and assimilation to take into account the dynamics of return that highly mobile skilled immigrants participate in during different periods of their immigration journeys. Ley focuses on return based on the experiences of those for whom "family or personal illness, the failure of economic aspirations, homesickness, and aging encourage a return home" (Ley, 2010, p. 227). Incorporating the possibility of return into the analysis brings me into the second literature that this project deals with is diaspora management.

I have two main reasons to deal with this literature. First, to explore how digital technologies have contributed to the sense of belonging of highly skilled Mexicans to the homeland, and secondly, how digital technologies have changed the tactics deployed by the Mexican state to encourage the enfranchisement of highly skilled migrants. It is essential to understand the meaning of diaspora in order to study diaspora institutions, particularly because the case study of this research, despite fulfilling most of the characteristics of a diaspora, does not identify as such. The term diaspora is rarely used by Mexican migrants and community organizations, or by the Mexican government, which normally favours the term "Mexican communities abroad" (Delano, 2011). It is also important to note that the diaspora imaginary is mostly associated with the Mexican community in the United States since this is the country where Mexican migrants have historically concentrated, but the institutions created to handle the communities abroad are at the service of all Mexican migrants regardless of destination country.

By focusing on highly skilled immigrants, this project builds heavily on what Pellerin and Mullings (2013) called the "diaspora option". The "diaspora option" explains how sending-states employ non-coercive management strategies to mitigate the effects of the brain drain. States, by employing neoliberal discourses and practices, create "governing technologies that rely on claims to scientific objectivity, pragmatism, and tropes of responsibility to mobilize migrant groups to assume developmental functions once reserved for governments and the private sector" (Pellerin & Mullings, 2013, p. 98). This phenomenon was previously studied by authors such as Gamlen (2008) and Larner (2007) who identified that the element of coercion is mostly absent in the governance of diasporas. The diaspora option "seeks to institute practices aimed at directing how migrants act towards their home countries" (Pellerin and Mullings, 2013, p. 111) by relying on immigrant groups' internalization of current neoliberal discourses of development.

A challenge of using the "diaspora option" literature is that in order for the diaspora option to work, immigrants have to internalize the neoliberal discourses and practices, as well as feel a strong sense of connection with the homeland. This might be a given when talking about diaspora in the traditional understanding, but the social, cultural and economic capital of my subjects results in specific economic exchanges, lifestyle and consumption patterns that place them not only in between countries, but also in between socioeconomic classes. I argue throughout my research that there are class components that affect how these neoliberal discourses impact highly skilled immigrants' ability to internalize such discourses. Despite the decrease in costs of engaging with the diaspora due to digital technologies, highly skilled migrants' experiences that stem from their own political, economic, social and cultural capital affect their desires and abilities to engage with the homeland's state institutions.

Given my interest in understanding how the expansion of digital technologies into many aspects of everyday life has affected transnationalism, there are two specific matters that I address through my thesis through digital transnationalism. First, what are the effects that the Internet and other digital technologies have in the transnational experience of highly skilled Mexicans? Second, to what degree does the expansion of ubiquitous computing lessens the disembodiment experience (Hardey, 2002) that characterized early virtual interactions? Authors such as Madianou (2016) and Baldassar (2008) have called this ambient co-presence: "the peripheral, yet intense awareness of distant others made possible through the affordances of ubiquitous media environments" (Madianou, 2016, p. 183). These media environments are for the most part occurring in social media, but include other types of technologies such as text messaging and video calls.

Finally, this research contributes specifically to the literature about Mexican highly skilled migration, which is particularly limited. Didou Aupetit (2013) found that academic research in Mexico has looked at the rise in the internationalization of higher education in Mexico since the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, although she found that for Mexican elites, international higher education had historical importance since the sixteenth century. Mexican research about highly skilled migration mostly concentrates on Mexican migration to the United States (Albo and Ordaz, 2011; Cruz Pineiro and Ruiz, 2010; Castaños Rodríguez, 2009), and analyzing the effectiveness of public policies that aimed to combat the brain drain (Didou Aupetit, 2012) and brain repatriation (Trejo and Sierra, 2014).

In the Global North, research about highly skilled Mexicans is even more limited, with the tendency of research concentrating on the United States. Research about Mexicans in Canada focuses on temporary foreign agricultural workers (Basok, 2004; Rajkumar et al, 2012; Preibisch & Grez, 2013, Gabriel & Macdonald, 2014), and there are few works (Muller, 2005) on highly skilled Mexican migration to Canada, and only a small section (Whittaker, 1988; Hernandez Ramirez, 2019) look at the Mexican communities in the Canadian West Coast.

Roadmap

The rest of this thesis is divided into four chapters. The next chapter introduces the definition of highly skilled migration used in this thesis, and explores broadly what are the dynamics of highly skilled Mexican migration to Canada, specifically in Vancouver, British Columbia. Using data from Statistics Canada, specifically from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and the 2016 Census, I look at the socioeconomic characteristics of Mexican migrants to Vancouver and

analyze the interactions that highly skilled Mexicans have with the Mexican state and other Mexicans while in Vancouver.

In Chapter 3, I examine how highly skilled Mexicans use digital technologies to maintain or neglect their transnational relations with Mexico, and the way that the use of these technologies impact their everyday life in Vancouver. The discussion continues to use data obtained from in-depth interviews with eighteen Mexican expats living in Vancouver.

In the subsequent chapter, I focus on two YouTube channels hosted by Mexicans living in Vancouver, "GeorgeSays" and "Cruz en Canada". This allows me to zoom into an active way in which highly skilled immigrants interact with Mexico, and explore the role that identity negotiation plays in digital content created by expatriates.

Throughout this research, I tried answering questions that stemmed primarily from my position as a highly skilled Mexican living in Vancouver. By working through these questions with a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods, I build on the work of Ong (1999) and Ley (2010) on highly skilled migration and contribute with a perspective of highly skilled migration from Mexico. I also build on the work of scholars of Mexican migration (Goldring 2002; Durand & Massey 2004; Délano 2011) that traditionally focus on temporary foreign workers and the transnational dynamics of Mexican diaspora between Mexico and the United States.

I also contribute to the "diaspora option" literature (Pellerin and Mullings, 2013), by exploring how this option is used by highly skilled migrants specifically. With respect to the diaspora option, I argue that despite having the social and human capital qualifications required by the Canadian government to immigrate successfully, both Mexico as the sending state and Canada as the receiving state are failing to adequately engage with highly skilled immigrants. The lack of

adequate engagement results in a state of limbo for highly skilled Mexican immigrants, who find themselves with the desire to settle in Canada but still maintain cultural and economic relationships in Mexico due to the high levels of instability that they experience in Canadian society. This instability comes from a range of sources, including negative media discourses surrounding Mexican immigration, increasingly restrictive requirements for foreign credential recognition and the cost of living in Vancouver. On the other hand, Mexico has historically focused on its immigrant population in the United States, and therefore lacks adequate policies to interact with highly skilled immigrants elsewhere, thus losing their valuable contributions.

This state of limbo makes highly skilled Mexicans vulnerable and in need of creating strategies to reduce their vulnerability in any way they can. These strategies result in them choosing to associate with others who share similar cultural capital indicators such as education level or professional organizations, rather than resorting to another conational for help by default. Being Mexican is not enough for expats to develop relationships with each other in Vancouver. There is a need to show a claim to a professional organization, such as being from the same university or the same alumni association, in order to feel more comfortable around each other — what I call "Mexican+". In many cases, highly skilled Mexicans in Vancouver do not interact with other Mexicans who are not in a similar socioeconomic position as them, particularly if they believe that their interaction might be problematic or burdensome. Since the Mexican population in Vancouver is relatively small, and there are no physical spaces of gathering, Mexicans do not encounter each other in their everyday life, and avoid interacting with each other online as well.

Highly skilled Mexicans seem to assimilate easily into Canadian society, and while they miss their friends and family in Mexico, securing permanent residence in Canada as a path towards better job opportunities and financial stability is a priority. This research contributes to placing

class at the forefront of studying the geographies of transnational identity construction of highly

skilled Mexicans in Vancouver.

2   So close, yet so far: Mexicans in Canada

According to the National Institute of Mexicans Abroad (IME), 11.9 million nationals were identified to live outside of Mexico in 2017, amounting to nearly 10% of the total population, although the United Nations identified the Mexican diaspora as 13 million people in 2017. The Mexican diaspora is concentrated in the United States, as is most research about it. Other than the United States, the ten countries with the most Mexicans are Canada, Spain, Germany, United Kingdom, Bolivia, Argentina, Switzerland, Netherlands and Costa Rica (Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). According to the OECD (2009) Mexican emigrants to Canada and Europe are more likely to have completed higher education, with a proportion of around 50% in Mexican migration to Canada and 60% or more in Mexican migration to Europe.

The number of Mexicans in Canada has been increasing since the late 1990s, which is presumably related to the creation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, which strengthened the friendly relations between Mexico and Canada. More recently, increases in Mexican migration to Canada might be related in part to the political tension between the United States and Mexico under the Trump administration and the subsequent decision by Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau to lift visa requirements for Mexican nationals.

The Mexican government's engagement with its diaspora has historically concentrated on the Mexican migrants in the United States — resulting in the exclusion of Mexican expats in Canada and elsewhere, because they do not fit into the imagined community of Mexicans abroad. These strategies were first developed at the turn of the millennium under newly elected President Vicente Fox. After a brief attempt of coordinating immigration policies with the United States, Mexico began institutionalizing its relationship with its emigrants by creating formal entities at

the federal level dedicated to managing this relationship, namely the Institute for Mexicans Abroad and its Consultative Council. This resulted in the creation of the National Council for Mexican Communities Abroad, which gives "a seat at the table" to members of the Mexican diaspora. However highly skilled migration is not a main component of Mexican migration strategies, mainly because of the composition of the diaspora in the United States.

This research hopes to contribute to the Mexican migration literature by focusing primarily on highly skilled migration, which I define in this thesis as based on educational achievement. My understanding of this concept comes directly from the Canadian Immigration points system, which is heavily focused on human capital — giving points for having at the core of the points system age, level of education levels, official language proficiency and Canadian work experience, as well as arranged employment in Canada and adaptability (IRCC, 2019). Highly skilled migration is particularly relevant in a society as economically stratified as Mexico, where there is a high correlation between educational achievement and belonging to the middle or upper class (OECD, 2012). My interest in studying this particular population reflects the fact that the Mexican government characterizes Mexican migration to Canada as legal migration from middle and upper classes.

The main objective of this chapter is to understand broadly what are the dynamics of highly skilled Mexican migration in Canada, specifically in Vancouver, British Columbia. Despite the geographical proximity between Mexico and Canada, Mexican migration to Canada is a relatively new phenomenon, and has not been widely studied. A major limitation of this research is how heavily concentrated Mexican migration research is on Mexico-United States migration patterns, and the limited research done about Mexicans in Canada concentrates on the East

Coast. This is a limitation in terms of available information, but also an opportunity for this research to contribute to create more knowledge about Mexican migration to Canada.

Stuck in the middle: Mexican expats in Canada

The first part of this chapter will examine briefly the characteristics of Mexican migration to Canada using primarily data from IRCC and the 2016 Census, as this is the most updated information about the population. Due to the transnational nature of this research, I will explain how Mexican migration to Canada is characterized from the Mexican perspective, although there is no statistical data available from the Mexican government to support these claims, as the Institute of Mexicans Abroad uses Canadian data as their source. Additionally, the Consulate General of Mexico in Vancouver was generous enough to participate in an interview for this thesis, and the interview contributes to supplementing statistical data that is provided exclusively by Canadian authorities with an empirical perspective.

The Mexican government characterizes Mexican migration to Canada as legal migration from middle and upper classes. As established in the introduction, highly skilled Mexican migration is a concept that can be understood from an education perspective or an income perspective, and in some cases, can be used as a cop-out to avoid saying "upper class". This characterization of Mexican migration to Canada presented the opportunity to choose to describe them as highly skilled immigrants or expats. I argue that both are applicable to the population studied in this research and use them interchangeably. In an article exploring expats in Brussels, Gatti (2009) defines "expats" as educated people who go to Brussels "not because they are motivated by basic needs, but rather by professional reasons or because they seek an experience abroad" (Gatti, 2009, p. 2). He identifies that there is an assumption of community among expats (Maya-Jariego

and Armitage, 2007) and the perception of expat immigration as "positive immigration". Additionally, Gatti's (2009) definition of expat argues for considerations that go beyond a person's nationality or mobility schemes, and imply social status, education level and profession.

The interviews that inform this research had three main requirements: a) having a Mexican passport, b) having a university education or above and c) living in the Greater Vancouver Area. The requirements did not consider any type of restrictions related to the number of years spent in Canada or professional occupation. The decision to have limited restrictions for the research participants was in part made to acknowledge that the Canadian Immigration points system is designed for permanent migration. However, many professionals and graduate students go through a two-step immigration process, which involves entering Canada with a temporary work permit or a temporary study permit with the intention of settling in Canada in the near future.

Nonetheless, because of the basic requirements of citizenship and educational credentials, I can classify these Mexican immigrants as highly skilled or expatriates, and throughout the interview process identify information about their class background in Mexico and their decision to immigrate to Canada. The literature about skilled migration acknowledges that skilled migrants come from "varied economically and socially advantaged or disadvantaged sections of the society in their home countries" (Bailey & Mulderand, 2017, p. 2692), with migrants from upper classes having the privileges of better education and a more luxurious lifestyle. Bonjour and Chauvin (2018) argue that class inequality's impact in shaping the "possibilities and impossibilities of migration" (p. 5). has been neglected in scholarly migration literature. They argue that a key reason for this is that "social class as ascribed social group membership has become a relatively illegitimate criterion of discrimination that may only appear in official policy in the form of proxies such as economic resources, cultural values, education, individual merit or

skill" (Bonjour & Chauvin, 2018, p. 5). This has been the case in the Canadian immigration system since the introduction of the points system in 1967 and reinforced with the implementation of Express Entry in January 2015.

The points system, as well as Express Entry, are great examples of policies that use proxies that are used together to indicate social class. These policies result in the homogenization of profiles that are allowed to immigrate with fewer barriers than others, "jumping ahead of the line" for a permanent migration to Canada. My interviews have a mix of Canadian citizens, permanent residents and temporary residents (with work permit or study permit), that nonetheless have the common goal of settling permanently in Canada.

The way IRCC categorizes immigrants allows for the classification of certain groups as highly skilled based on their visa type. These categories fall mainly in programs such as the Post-Graduation Work Permit, the Express Entry Program or the Provincial Nominee Program. Another category that applies specifically for Mexican professionals is the Trade NAFTA visa, created under Chapter 16 of the North American Free Trade Agreement (now United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, USMCA). Another category of highly skilled migration that is considered in my research are international graduate students, who are in Canada temporarily, but aim to settle permanently. International graduate students form ties in Canada and might want to immigrate once they are done with their studies, obtaining language and educational skills that contribute to high scores in the Canadian point system.

According to IRCC, Mexican migration has represented at least 30% of the Temporary Foreign Workers Program (TFW) permit holders since 2015. The TFW program allows for the temporary hiring of both low skilled and high skilled workers, in categories ranging from foreign

agricultural workers, foreign in-home caregivers, foreign talent through Global Stream and hiring of foreign academics. At the moment, there is no available information on the number of Mexican individuals in each stream of the Temporary Foreign Workers Program, which could show how the level of skill is distributed in the temporary immigrant population. In terms of permanent residence, Mexicans represent a very small percentage of the admitted permanent residents maintaining a steady rate of around 1% since 2015, and this rate is similar for Mexicans obtaining Canadian citizenship, albeit a very small percentage higher (1.25%).

Bonjour and Chauvin (2018) explain that literature on the politics of immigration usually take into account either economic considerations or identity concerns, and they argue that placing class centre stage is necessary because it "serves as the analytical connector between economic and identity rationales" (Bonjour & Chauvin, 2018, p. 7). By placing class at the forefront of my research, I will be able to discuss with more analytical tools the way that Mexican migration to Canada is framed by the Canadian and the Mexican government.

Due to the transnational nature of this research, class matters because it informs immigrants' life experiences that facilitate or limit certain types of migration, but it also provides migrants with what Bonjour & Chauvin (2018) called "at least two contradictory spaces of reference" (p. 8) that result in them experiencing upward and downward mobility simultaneously. In order to assess this simultaneous upward and downward mobility, it is important to understand the subtle class aspects in the narrative surrounding Mexican immigration to Canada, particularly the narrative promoted by the Mexican government. I will not engage with trying to understand how class works in Mexican society as a whole, since that would require at least a book to attempt to even begin to understand, but I will focus exclusively on trying to understand class in an immigration context.

Highly skilled Mexicans are not necessarily all upper class, so I use the concept "middling migrants" as an analytical tool to understand the complexities of this group. These are generally professionals who are neither economically disadvantaged nor super rich elites (Luthra & Platt, 2016). Beaverstock (2018) finds that even if they are not the transnational capitalist class per se, these migrants are "primarily a constituent of the so-called 1 per cent through economic exchange, lifestyle and consumption" and are "in receipt of the wealth, social/cultural and network capital they need to move seamlessly between the immigration systems of different organizations and nation-states" (Beaverstock, 2018, p. 517). Another advantage of using the "middling migrant" category is that there are considerable differences among participants in terms of disposable income and lifestyle (Ryan et al, 2015) even if they are highly skilled and part of the 1%.

These migrants are not super rich elites who migrate to Canada under investor visas, but they still benefit from cultural and economic capital, which allows them to facilitate their transnational social mobility. Most of the work concerning this phenomenon concentrates on the United States. Rangel-Ortiz's (2011) piece about Mexican business people migrating to San Antonio, Texas provides an empirical background that uses Bourdieu's principles of capital and power. In this paper he argues that Mexican national immigrants in San Antonio construct a new imagined Mexican nation through co-ethnic and mainstream social networking, but "their financial and cultural capitals are useless unless translated into social and symbolic power" (Rangel-Ortiz, 2011, p. 401). This shows that Mexican immigrants need to adapt successfully into the mainstream and "any attitude of social superiority or arrogance must be abandoned in order to thrive in San Antonio" (p. 401). I argue throughout the thesis that due to the lack of a variety of pre-established ethnic networks, geographical proximity and goodwill of the

government to engage actively with this particular ethnic community, Mexican expats in Canada face an opposite dilemma — needing to assert status and class — due to the construction of totalizing discourses that render "Mexican" as a one-dimensional category. Additionally to the lack of the aforementioned variables, the Mexican government recognizes the migrant population as a "North American Community", without acknowledging the differences that exist between Mexican migration to Canada and the United States.

Another issue related to class — and the strategies Mexican expats in Vancouver use to deal with class — is that Mexicans are not particularly good at placing themselves in the "correct" socioeconomic class as defined by the Mexican government. According to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico (INEGI, in Spanish) people who live in urban areas and have an income of 21,801 MXN a month (~1500 CAD/month) are part of the upper class. Class categories are further disaggregated according to the INEGI (2013), where the lower-upper class is composed of 5% of the population (~5.6 million people) who are from "new rich families" or people who have stable and relatively high incomes. The upper-upper class is composed of 1% of the population (~1.1 million people) and these are mostly families with "old money who have forgotten when and how they got the money" according to the Secretary of the Treasury. This second classification system proposed by INEGI is more suited to use Bourdieu's work on class by being able to focus on the relative differences between the lower-upper classes and the upper-upper classes. Bourdieu (1984) states "the habitus is not only a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social worlds is itself the product of internalization of the division into social classes" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 170). The concept of middling migrants is a useful conceptual approach to understanding the way in which

Mexican expats perceive the world is organized around what Bourdieu (1984) calls the habitus, and in turn, the habitus informs the subtle differences that they experience in their immigration journeys based on their social, political, cultural and economic capital. Following Bourdieu's (1990, 55) conceptualization of habitus — "the various forms of capital converge to form a habitus: a socially constructed system of dispositions that makes possible the production of thoughts, perceptions and actions in the social field" — Kuus (2014) argues that the habitus has a "pre-reflective nature" and the best way to know it is to "be born with it or rather be born into it" (2014, 43). Given this, I follow Kuus' (2014) methodological advice to engage in a "constant back-and-forth between structural and individual tactics" (2014, 43) to understand how the habitus of highly skilled Mexicans impacts their migration strategies and the management of their transnational relations. I engage with this methodology in the next chapter, where I analyze the strategies implemented by Mexican expats to manage their transnational relationships in Vancouver.

This brief exploration of class in Mexico and the introduction of Bourdieu's conceptualization of capital and the habitus allows me to identify how transnational activities and transnational social spaces "reproduce or transform established relationships of power and privilege" (Wong & Satzewich, 2011, p. 10) particularly when the relationships of power and privilege are so intricate to society's collective self-identification. Class self-identification and transnational social mobility were in the background of most of the interviews done for this research, and interviewees remarked that they constantly struggled to place themselves in a specific class, but are aware of certain privileges that allowed them to migrate to Canada for better jobs or education.

We/Them: Transnational social mobility and assimilation

Canadian media's coverage of Mexican migration is extremely limited and since 2016 has concentrated on the possible rise of undocumented migration from Mexico as immigrants look for an alternative to the United States. This discourse is consistent with academic research about Mexican migration to Canada, which concentrates on topics such as Temporary Foreign Worker programs, mainly the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) (Flores and Pantaleón, 2015), or the increase in refugee claims by Mexicans (Jian and Ibrahim, 2019). Additionally, this literature concentrates in Eastern Canada, particularly the Toronto and Montreal regions.

The aforementioned literature is the main source of academic studies about Mexicans in Canada, however, this research aims to explore precisely what is being discussed as the exception of Mexican migration to Canada: Mexicans who fit the increasingly restrictive path for permanent migration to Canada. Additionally, my research focuses only in British Columbia, contributing to expanding the geographical understandings of Mexican migration to western Canada. My interest in studying highly skilled Mexican migration to Vancouver is motivated by the fact that I am a highly skilled Mexican living in Vancouver, and education seemed a viable way to start my permanent migration to Canada, as it did for many of the participants in this research.

This research is focused on highly educated, upper, and upper middle class Mexicans who have a university degree and for the most part, strong English skills before migrating to Canada. This is not the Mexican immigrant typically portrayed in Canadian media or academic literature. Given their personal circumstances, I argue that these highly skilled immigrants participate in reproducing Canadian media rhetoric in order to differentiate themselves from the rest of Mexican immigrants in Canada. This is a strategy that aims to diminish the effect of a

phenomenom identified by Gilbert (2013) argues is "the media's stereotypical portrayal of immigrants and refugees perpetuates a 'we/them' divide where personal circumstances are ignored" (p. 830). In this case, highly skilled Mexican immigrants aim to align themselves with the Canadian "we" rather than the Mexican "them" throughout a series of strategies that will be discussed further in this research.

Highly skilled Mexicans participate in these strategies in part to distance themselves from "illegality", which according to Dauvergne (2008) "underscores a shift in perception regarding the moral worthiness of migrants and creates a moral and national superiority of those perceiving immigration infringements as a crime" (p. 16). In the next chapter, I argue that expats reproduce these strategies in online forums aimed at the Mexican community, in an effort to differentiate themselves from the "illegal" immigrants, allowing themselves to reproduce a sentiment of moral superiority despite a common nationality. Dauvergne (2008) also argues that the construction of illegality "reflects an increasingly globally coherent view that there are proper and improper reasons to migrate" (p. 18) and "people with an abundance of education, training, labor, and entrepreneurial experience are welcome and encouraged to migrate" (p. 18), reinforcing traditional class lines.

In this sense, the focus on this research is on what Bonjour and Chauvin (2018) identify that scholarly and policy debates regard as "expats" who are "are usually exempted from integration courses and programs, as they are assumed not only to find employment easily, but also to share core values and practices of the host society" (Bonjour & Chauvin, 2018, p. 7). In contrast to what Gilbert (2013) called the "discursive production of a Mexican refugee crisis", Mexican expats in Canada aim to disappear into Canadian society by assimilating their discourses and practices.

The next section of this chapter will analyze Canada's characterization of Mexican migration in discursive terms, by examining the contents of the Embassy of Canada's webpage as well as IRCC data pertaining to Mexican immigration. The goal is to understand how Mexican immigration to Canada is constituted and portrayed with the most recently available information.

The Canadian government's contemporary characterization of Mexican migration to Canada, contrary to the panicked vision of Mexican migration promoted by Canadian media and academia, presents a particularly positive image of Mexican-Canadian relations: "Spanning 75 years, Canada and Mexico share a vibrant, multi-faceted relationship that is characterized by deep people-to-people ties, rich cultural connections and growing trade and investment." With regards to the specific interest of this research, the Canadian government (2018) highlights the cultural and academic ties of Mexico, citing that:

> "Mexico is also Canada's 11th largest source country for international students globally, and the 2nd largest in Latin American, with more than 6,900 Mexican students going to Canada in 2017 (for six months or more). Academic and cultural ties are essential components of our relationship. There is a significant amount of ongoing academic collaboration and exchange, with more than 400 signed agreements among Canadian universities and Mexican universities and technical institutes"

As discussed above, this positive portrayal of Mexican immigration to Canada is not reflected by public discourses surrounding Canadian media and academia. Additionally, by acknowledging the NAFTA treaty objectives, it could also be argued that Mexican immigration to Canada is far too low for two countries that aspire to be able to interact without the intermediation of the United States. This leads to the next section of the paper which will analyze the Immigration,

Refugee and Citizenship Canada agency data that pertains to Mexican immigration, particularly highly skilled migration.

The previous information allows us to place in context the importance of studying the transnational aspect of Mexican immigrants' lives in Canada, because the rates of permanent migration from Mexico to Canada are very small. As discussed in the first section of this chapter, the low rates of Mexican permanent migration to Canada are a result of an immigration policy that explicitly aims for this migration to be temporary. This research focuses on those who, despite the objectives of Canadian policy, have been successful in migrating permanently to Canada, or have the socioeconomic characteristics that will facilitate a permanent migration in the near future.

Despite their socioeconomic advantages, highly skilled migrants experience simultaneously upward and downward mobility, I argue that this upward and downward mobility is constructed by the immigration policies that resulted from a public discourse that focuses primarily on nationality as determinant of social behaviour. This encourages certain Mexican immigrants to perpetuate the 'we/them' divide generated by public discourses identified by Gilbert (2013) in order to exploit their personal circumstances. Their goal is to make categories such as education, social class and economic power visible enough to counter stereotypes and access paths to permanent migration to Canada that would otherwise not be available to them.

Given how heavily concentrated Mexican migration is in the United States, the dynamics of Mexican immigration to Canada are not represented thoroughly in Canadian in academia or media discourses. Mexican migration to the "rest of the world" resembles Mexican migration to Canada, but there is almost no literature written about this. My interview with a Mexican

diplomat highlighted the main differences they identified in their job in Vancouver compared with their experiences in California, mainly the number of Mexicans in Canada/Vancouver, possession of immigration documents, education and community organization.

This is in line with the extensive literature regarding Mexican migration to the United States. The diplomat's previous jurisdiction in a city in California served around one million Mexicans, a number that is bigger than the entire population of the City of Vancouver. The vast majority of people in that jurisdiction needed assistance due to not having legal documentation in the United States, which is why the Government of Mexico issues the "Matrícula Consular", a form of legal identification for Mexicans in the United States. With this document they are able to access services like opening bank accounts. The "Matrícula Consular" is not implemented in Canada.

Additionally, there are some community-based differences. The Mexican community in the United States is very organized, particularly in the form of "migrant clubs" that are organized by states and federations. This organization facilitated the implementation of the 3 x 1 program, a federal program that matches funds collected by Mexican communities abroad to financially support social projects in their hometowns, with funds being matched ⅓ by the Secretariat of Social Development, ⅓ by the Federal Government and ⅓ by the migrant clubs of each state. The diplomat pointed out that Mexican migrants in the United States usually had no education, and thus, an important service of the Consulate was to provide Adult Education programs from primary school to high school. On the contrary, Mexicans in Canada have, for the most part, higher education, and the Consulate wants to provide services that encourage people not to forget the Spanish language and to foster links with the community. However, there is not a real sense of community, mainly due to the fact that the population is heavily segmented and there is not constant communication beyond the Facebook groups.

Vancouver: Second choice or ultimate destination?

The following section presents a brief overview of the Mexican community in British Columbia, as the Vancouver area is the focus of this research. According to IRCC[1], there were around 23,055 Mexicans in British Columbia in 2016. Most are already Canadian citizens (73%) and some (21%) hold dual citizenship; the rest of the population (27%) were not Canadian citizens as of 2016. There was an accelerated increase of Mexican migration to BC, starting in the mid-1990s, that reached its height in the period 2001 to 2010. This trend could contribute to explaining why a large part of the Mexican population in British Columbia holds Canadian citizenship, and the uptick in migration matches with the start of the NAFTA treaty in 1994.

Mexican migration to British Columbia is affected by internal and external migration, and IRCC data[2] shows that there was an increase in both external and internal migration from Mexican immigrants in 2010, compared to immigration in 2015. In the same year, British Columbia received slightly more Mexicans that were already in Canada, compared to the number of external Mexican immigrants received. Eastern Canada has a greater concentration of the Mexican population and the Ontario region holds the biggest concentration of people of Mexican ethnic origin (43,120) according to the 2016 census[3], followed by Quebec. This trend suggests that British Columbia is not the first destination of immigration. Using only this data, it is unclear if Mexicans had the intention of settling in British Columbia even if it was not their first arrival destination.

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[1] Statistics Canada (2019) Mexicans in British Columbia. Ethnic Origin (101), Age (15A), Sex (3) and Selected Demographic, Cultural, Labour Force, Educational and Income Characteristics (651) for the Population in Private Households of Canada, Provinces and Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations, 2016 Census - 25% Sample Data.

[2] Statistics Canada (2019) Mobility status 1 year ago - 25% sample data. 2016 Census - 25% Sample Data.

[3] Statistics Canada (2019) Mexicans in Ontario. 2016 Census - 25% Sample Data.

The next section will deal with the socioeconomic characteristics of the Mexican community in British Columbia, using some of the information available from the 2016 Census. Admissions categories can allow us to roughly understand the purpose of Mexican immigration to British Columbia. According to the 2016 Census[4], almost half of Mexican immigrants entered under the Economic category (49%) followed closely by the Family Reunification category (42%). Refugees (7%) and other immigrants are a small part of the total population, despite attention to Mexican refugee claims in the Canadian media. There is not enough public information to determine trends over time, particularly with regard to analyzing the evolution of migration in the economic category as highly skilled migration is the main interest of this research. As established in the previous section, I define highly skilled migration based on educational achievement.

Despite the educational achievements of Mexicans in British Columbia, most (83%) of the Mexican population in Vancouver earn less than $69,999 a year[5], below the median income of Vancouver which was $72,000 in 2015. Downward mobility of skilled immigrants from visible minorities has been extensively studied, and might explain the reasons why, despite their educational achievements, Mexicans find themselves earning less than the median income. According to 2016 Census data[6], the National Occupation Classification fields in which most Mexicans are in British Columbia is NOC 6 Service and sales occupations (28%), followed by NOC 1 Business, finance and administration occupations (14%). I did not ask about income in

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[4] Statistics Canada (2019) . Admission category and applicant type for the immigrant population in private households who landed between 1980 and 2016. 2016 Census - 25% Sample Data.
[5] Statistics Canada (2019) Total income groups in 2015 for the population aged 15 years and over in private households - 25% sample data. 2016 Census - 25% Sample Data.
[6] Statistics Canada (2019) Total labour force population aged 15 years and over by occupation - National Occupational Classification (NOC) 2016 - 25% sample data. 2016 Census 25% sample data.

my interviews, and the only people that mentioned some financial troubles were graduate students who depended on scholarship funds to sustain themselves.

For the majority of research participants, Vancouver has been the first and only Canadian city they lived in. There are also some cases in which they arrived in Vancouver for a temporary stay — such as internships, study abroad or to study English — and they decided to find a way to come back permanently. This was the migration pathway for a third of the research participants, although some have lived in other Canadian cities due to work opportunities, and came back to Vancouver. The relatively short distance between Mexico and Canada is important to a considerable number of my interviewees. When planning their move to another country for professional or educational development, they considered time difference and physical distance as an important part of their choice. This makes Canada a more desirable destination than Europe, which highly skilled Mexicans also considered as a possible migration destination. Meanwhile, the United States is similar or closer than Canada in terms of physical distance, but there are additional political and economic challenges, such as the extremely high cost of education, that makes these people choose Canada over the United States. For example, Santiago, a graduate student, said the following:

> "I decided to migrate to Canada because of my studies. The main education options for my field available in North America were in the United States and Canada. Mexico does not have many [options], in fact, it is extremely limited. To study in the United States is much more expensive, and offered less opportunities to stay after, which is something that interests me professionally".

The main reasons mentioned for wanting to arrive or return to Vancouver are related to previous experiences such as exchange, research internships or English summer school, and physical characteristics such as the warm climate and the natural beauty of the city and the region. Another interesting finding is that fewer than a third of the interviewees knew someone in Vancouver prior to moving to the city, so they had to rely primarily on Facebook groups and other internet forums to obtain information about life in Vancouver. A majority of the interviewees mentioned that the process of applying for their work or study permit was not very hard, and some, particularly those who obtained a work permit directly from a Canadian business, had immigration lawyers at their disposal who assisted them in the process.

Ana, a professional who had studied abroad in Vancouver before moving back to Canada, mentioned that she had always considered Vancouver as her ultimate destination, but due to the state of Canadian immigration policies at the specific moment of her migration made it an easier path to migrate under Quebec's immigration system. Cases like this one speak of a particular set of skills required, such as the ability to speak French, which limits the number of people available to pursue this specific immigration path. About a third of the interviewees who immigrated to Canada had applied for Canadian Permanent Residence while in Mexico, although this did not necessarily facilitate them finding employment in Canada. This opened up conversations about perceived discrimination from employers, foreign credential recognition, and language abilities. A significant portion of my interviewees are alumni from Tecnológico de Monterrey, and the vast majority of them mentioned that due to the international recognition of the Tecnológico de Monterrey, their credential recognition and finding employment was relatively easy. The international recognition of Tecnológico de Monterrey (2019) is due to the

internationalization efforts of the university[7], as they have academic agreements with 575 universities in 48 countries and 58% of their students have had some type of international experience upon graduating. In addition to the international experiences of graduates, Tecnológico de Monterrey reports that within 5 years of graduation 43% of their students are pursuing a graduate degree, although it does not specify if they do this in Mexico or abroad.

Despite the international recognition of Tecnológico de Monterrey, not all of the alumni were successful in obtaining credential recognition and finding employment easily in Canada. This was in part related to having professions that are more strictly regulated, such as engineering, where they need to obtain certifications in order to have their credentials recognized in Canada. Foreign credential recognition is a widely regarded problem that immigrants face. The story of an immigrant taxi driver with a PhD is told time and time again in Canadian immigration conferences. However, due to the small percentage of research participants that mentioned facing this problem, I do not address it extensively in this work.

Conclusions

The objective of this chapter was to understand the dynamics of highly skilled Mexican migration in Canada — specifically in Vancouver, British Columbia. The main factor driving highly skilled Mexican migration to Canada is the implementation of the Canadian immigration points system of 1967 and Express Entry system in January 2015. Both programs are designed for the facilitation of permanent migration, which I argue encourages immigrants to go through a two-step immigration process, in which they enter Canada as temporary migrants with the hopes of obtaining permanent migration through Canadian work experience or Canadian education.

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[7] Tecnológico de Monterrey (2019) Data and Figures https://tec.mx/en/data-and-figures

Going through an immigration process requires sufficient resources to support a temporary position. These resources vary from mastering an official language such as English or French, previous education that facilitates getting a job without the limits of credential recognition, or enough financial security to pursue education in Canada. Although not all highly skilled Mexicans are part of the upper class in Mexico, they are more likely to be professionals that are neither economically disadvantaged nor super rich elites, a group that Luthra & Platt (2016) call "middling migrants".

As explored in the first chapter, the network theory of migration explains how migrants maintain networks in origin and destination areas "through ties of kinship, friendship, and a shared community of origin" (Massey et al, 1993, p. 449). However, highly skilled migrants look towards networks of colleagues or organizations to obtain help in their migration process. The interviews showed that many built their networks by spending short periods of time in Canada before deciding to go through the two-step migration processes that I describe throughout this chapter. Graduate students met potential supervisors during short research internships and professionals networked through alumni or business associations that gave them first hand knowledge of possible job opportunities. Given how IRCC collects data, it is hard to confirm the number of highly skilled Mexicans that spend short periods of time in Canada — studying abroad, attending English summer school, or participating in research internships — because these short periods do not require a study permit or any other documentation besides an Electronic Travel Authorization.

It is not until they are back in Canada under a work or study permit when they start seriously thinking about settling permanently, and obtaining temporary legal status to do so. In that process they acknowledge themselves as immigrants, missing and comparing their experiences in

Vancouver with their life back home. Becoming an immigrant throws them into a vulnerable position, and in turn they deploy certain strategies to face this vulnerability in their everyday life in Vancouver, which are explored in the next chapter. They are also recognized as immigrants by the state, appearing in official data about Mexican migration to Canada by obtaining work or study permits, Social Insurance Numbers and other data that renders them visible to the state.

Despite the limitations in obtaining immigration data about highly skilled Mexicans in Vancouver, data obtained from interviews allowed me to get a clearer picture of the different paths through which highly skilled Mexicans are able to immigrate to Canada. Throughout this chapter, I aimed to establish a working definition of "highly skilled" based on the parameters established by the Express Entry program, although the value of skilled workers is constantly changing to keep up with market demands. Sending and receiving countries could benefit from the standardization of the definition of highly skilled, and while I do not deal with this particular challenge due to the broader interests of this research, it is important to acknowledge that the standardization of definitions and data is essential to understanding transnational phenomena.

In the following chapter, I explore the way that Mexican expats are constantly comparing their experiences in Mexico to their life in Canada, and how they deploy their social and cultural capital to lessen the impact of downward mobility that most immigrants face in different stages of their migration journey.

3   Digital transnationalism

Digital sense of belonging

The previous chapter explored how Mexican expats aim to align themselves with the Canadian "we" rather than a Mexican "them" throughout a series of strategies that are highly dependent on reproducing a particular class habitus in order to combat the upward and downward mobility they constantly face while living in Vancouver. This chapter will explore how these strategies are transferred to their use of digital technologies, particularly when interacting with other Mexicans online.

Throughout this research, I rely heavily on Massey et al's (1993) exploration of the network theory of migration, which emphasizes the importance of existent migrant networks as facilitators of migration. Massey et al (1993) explain that "migrant networks are sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and non migrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin" (p. 448). In this particular chapter, my goal is to explore how digital technologies — mainly social media — have facilitated the maintenance or creation of these networks. This theory is particularly useful to understand what I will be calling *digital transnationalism*, since it assumes there are migrant networks both at home and abroad, and access to these networks are facilitated by the use of digital technologies.

Digital technologies give immigrants access to their homelands and their networks without having to leave the new country to which they have migrated, creating what some authors have called "thirdspaces" (Price and Whitworth, 2004; Skop, 2016) that are a result of advances in the technologies of contact (Vertovec, 2009). Thirdspaces "come from the duality of migrant

existence, a tension between a lived-in space and a distant, remembered space" (Price and Whitworth, 2004, p. 185). Mitchell (1997) writes of thirdspaces in the context of diaspora and hybridity as the "the spaces in the margins, the unfixed spaces in-between states and subject positions that are vaunted as the location of resistance and intervention in hegemonic narratives of race, culture, and nation" (p. 536). However, in more contemporary uses of thirdspaces, the concept can be used to move away from the cyber/real world dichotomy that characterizes many of the first works about digital technologies' socio-spatial effects. While the Internet and the ubiquity of social media in everyday life have altered a number of behaviour patterns, some patterns have not been altered and are just facilitated by digital tools.

The transformation of the world by the digital revolution has affected all areas of human life, including transnational relations. Nedelcu (2012) finds that immigrants are "able to master new geographies of everyday life and strategically use their multiple belongings and identifications within a ubiquitous regime of co-presence engendered by the technological developments of the twenty-first century" (Nedelcu, 2012, p. 1340) The widespread advances of digital technologies — mainly the Internet, but also the infrastructure to access these technologies around the world — has facilitated what Nedelcu (2012) calls the emergence of a new transnational habitus, although Vertovec (2009) argues that "technologies do not altogether create new social patterns but they certainly reinforce pre-existing ones" (p. 5). The reinforcement of pre-existing social patterns in a transnational space also lead to what Mitchell (1997) calls "new kinds of manipulations of community and nation, and narratives and counternarratives of essentialized identities are used strategically by the state as well as a multitude of other actors" (p. 538). In the case of Mexican expats in Vancouver, I argue that they use digital technologies — as a

thirdspace — in which to implement strategies to reproduce their cultural, social and economic capital that allow them to differentiate themselves from "other" Mexicans that are not like them.

The refusal to participate in activities that might increase their vulnerability by associating themselves with other Mexicans is translated into the thirdspace, where immigrants can "affirm one's status to oneself, one's family, and to a broader locality-based social network" (Price and Whitworth, 2004, p. 186). They refuse by deploying their social, cultural or economic capital which in turn transforms their immigration experiences and transnational habitus. Vertovec (2004) identified three modes of transformation that happen when transnational relations are built: migrants' orientational "bifocality" in the sociocultural domain; "identities-borders-orders" in the political domain; and financial transfers, public-private relationships and local development in the economic domain. He builds on authors such as Guarnizo (1997) and Mountz & Wright (1996), and their work on how immigrants retain "a dual frame of reference" through which they constantly compare their situation in their "home" society to their situation in the host society abroad.

Skop (2016) adds that thirdspaces provide "new arenas to promulgate old divisions based on social structures and hierarchies that once only existed 'here' and 'there', but now exist everywhere" (p. 82). During the interviews, I asked specifically about the use of digital technologies in the sociocultural domain and the political domain, and I asked about proxies for the economic domain such as sending remittances to Mexico or knowledge of business-oriented Mexican organizations in Vancouver.

While the Mexican community in Vancouver is relatively small in comparison to their counterparts in Eastern Canada or the United States, there is an increasing presence of this

community in Vancouver. Despite this growth, there are not many community events or a particular area of the city where Mexicans congregate. An official from the Mexican Consulate commented that they identify certain tensions within the different groups in Vancouver, which prevent the creation of strong community ties. Most participants in this research identified a public Facebook group with over 30,000 members as the main source of information about the Mexican community in Vancouver. However, the majority of the research participants mentioned that while they are aware of the Facebook groups, they prefer not to interact with them on a regular basis.

I argue that by refusing to actively participate in the online national communities, they are choosing to align with the Canadian "we" in the digital space, and this can be observed in the interactions that certain Mexicans have with others in the aforementioned Facebook group. These interactions can be observed in posts about irregular migration, such as posts seeking advice about topics such as visa overstaying and looking for jobs that do not require a work permit. Some members of the community are very adamant to state that such activities are "illegal", and claim that people creating those posts are reproducing negative stereotypes about the Mexican community in Canada.

These interactions do not occur in person, only online, which allows for an interesting layer of analysis that allows me to question if these interactions would be different if they were face-to-face with the other person. Even if everyone has their real names and pictures in their Facebook profiles, the likelihood of seeing each other in person is small, which may encourage excessive rudeness that would not occur in a face-to-face setting. When asked about their interaction with other Mexicans in Vancouver, most of the interviewees answered that they do not interact with other Mexicans often. When asked if they thought it was due to a small presence of Mexicans in

Vancouver, a lack of interest from their part or a combination of both, most said it was a lack of interest on their part, mainly because they did not believe that it was possible to have close relationships with people who have vastly different life experiences than them, where their only thing in common is having the same nationality.

However, when asked about their perception of the presence of Mexicans in Vancouver, the answers were particularly divided. Some felt there are a lot of Mexicans in Vancouver, while some others said they did not meet Mexicans often. This divide was mostly between graduate students and professionals, particularly between those graduate students who attend UBC, who perceive that there is not a Mexican community in the University of British Columbia, although some said there has been an increase in Latin American students in recent years. Partying was mentioned in some of the interviews as the main source of connection between highly skilled Mexicans and other Mexicans, as well as celebrations such as Mexican Independence Day or the World Cup, although these events were not a common occurrence.

In addition to the low quantity of Mexican community events in Vancouver, there is not a specific place in the city where Mexicans, or even Latin Americans, concentrate. Bruneau (2010) argues that for a diaspora to be able to live on, it is necessary to have places for periodic gatherings of a religious, cultural or political nature, in which the diaspora can concentrate on the main elements of its iconography. Given the size and composition of the Mexican community in Vancouver, in comparison with other diasporic communities, there is no real demand for places where Mexicans can gather, which in turn contributes to the lack of community that is perceived by Mexican expats. The Facebook groups can be seen as a response from the wider community to the lack of physical places of gathering, but highly skilled Mexicans, while aware of their

existence, actively choose not to participate in these groups and instead are passive observers of the posts and discussions made by the rest of the Mexican community.

User-generated bifocality

Facebook groups for the Mexican community in Vancouver are usually the first encounter that the research participants had with the wider community in Vancouver, and from my observations, it seems that most of the interactions within the community occur in the online groups. Previous research shows that the migration stage in which immigrants find themselves has a considerable impact on the management of their transnational relations. Kissau (2012) identifies that immigrants' use of digital technologies varies depending on the migration phase they find themselves in. During the immediate post-migration phase, information and communication technologies are used by migrants to learn about their new surroundings and either assimilate (Appadurai, 1996) or integrate into the new society (Hunger & Kissau, 2008). Those who assimilate are more likely to adopt the culture of the receiving society and those who integrate maintain their cultural values and norms and use the receiving society's cultural norms — such as official languages — when necessary. Settled migrants, on the other hand, "use the Internet for identity exploration, to relate to the country of origin and to maintain family ties and/ or transnational social networks to other migrants worldwide" (Kissau, 2012, p. 1381).

A key actor in the integration and settlement of expats in several countries that is explored in this research are alumni associations. They compose networks that go beyond nationality, and that makes expats more comfortable as they know their life experiences are similar. They are part of what Friesen and Collins (2017) call "brain chains", a concept that draws attention to the constitutive features of knowledge migration, "policies, processes and institutions that facilitate

the development and movement of skilled workers and the knowledge they embody" (Yeoh and Huang as cited in Friesen and Collins, 2017, p. 324) as well as the "intermediary actors and networks involved in generating and channelling flows, from families and communities to profit-seeking agents" (Xiang and Lindquist as cited in Friesen and Collins, 2017, p. 324). In this sense, alumni associations function as an indicator of social capital, that in Vancouver can be exploited to access social groups that are not available to everyone. In comparison with Rangel-Ortiz's (2011) findings about Mexican elites in San Antonio, expats in Vancouver rely on exclusive circles that allow them to thrive, and thus alumni associations become gatekeepers that give alumni access to previously established networks who have access to professional and networking opportunities.

As mentioned in the methodology section, most of the research participants are in the early stages of their migration to Canada. The majority of participants were temporary residents with either a work permit or study permit, five being permanent residents and only two Canadian citizens, although most of the participants said they have the goal of settling permanently in Canada in the near future.

The participants in this research have been in Canada on average 4.5 years, although some have been here for as long as 14 years or as little as 1 year. My findings are consistent with the literature, as most of the participants are temporary residents with the goal of permanent migration and their use of digital technologies is mostly to learn about their new society in order to integrate.

When I asked the research participants about the ways that they interacted with other Mexicans in Vancouver, most spoke about the role of the Mexican community Facebook groups. When

they arrived in Vancouver, they looked at the group to find out what events were happening and to ask for help in the first stages of their immigration to Vancouver, but most interviewees said that they quickly found out that they disliked the dynamics of the group.

Regina, a graduate student, said of the groups: *"*[I mostly do not interact] because the profiles of the people that use them are very different. I think the groups are not made for Mexicans in general, but more so for a very specific type of Mexican that wants help getting a job or immigration advice. I feel lucky to not go through the same thing, but I think that's why I don't interact with them".

This sentiment was echoed by Mariana, a postdoctoral fellow: "Sometimes I interact, when I think I can contribute something, when they ask something I know about. Many other times I do not even want to answer, because many of the posts bother me and I do not want to fight with people. Especially the posts of the guys who are here illegally, trying to make things easier, such as looking for an orange Compass Card, or skipping this, or not following the rules. And that's why I prefer not to interact (with them).*"*

Throughout the interviews, the sentiment of not sharing many interests with other Mexicans in Vancouver was common. This perception was not exclusive to the digital space but was exacerbated in it.

My interviews with Tec alumni demonstrate that many highly skilled Mexicans need to feel a connection beyond nationality[8] in order to want to build community with other Mexicans in Vancouver. This is where I identify that Mexican expats engage in what Kuus (2014) calls the

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[8] A large portion of my research participants are alumni of Tecnológico de Monterrey, as explained in the introductory chapter. The alumni association in Vancouver also has a Facebook group, although access to this group is restricted only to alumni and in order to access the group you need to provide your student number and year of graduation for the group moderator's approval.

"constant back-and-forth between structural and individual tactics" (Kuus, 2014, 43) in the management of their transnational relations. This results in looking for experiences or connections in common with other Mexicans that are not only national identity. Contrary to Rangel-Ortiz's (2011) findings in San Antonio, Mexican expats in Canada actively showcase their occupational, alumni or regional identities to feel more at ease with each other, what I call being "Mexican+". These identities are informed by the expat's habitus, mainly their cultural, social and economic capital. However, what I found in the interviews is that this can be explicit, such as only engaging with Mexicans that are part of a Facebook group from the same alumni association, or implicit, when they observe other Mexicans in public space and make judgements according to cultural capital markers such as brand of clothes and regional accents.

For example, Ana, a professional working in a multinational corporation said: *"The Tecnológico de Monterrey alumni (EXATEC) group makes me feel more secure because of the tone. In the posts of the Mexican community in Vancouver you come across everything, literally from a person who tells you I am illegal, I want a job, it does not inspire confidence to ask something from there. And in EXATEC it gives me the certainty that they already had a process of coming to work here, and of having their migration process settled."*

A similar feeling was stated by Diego, who said: "I do not interact with that page, because I could get into trouble, I think immigration is seeing those groups, and I'd rather not interact. But for example, in the EXATECS group, a week after I arrived the earthquake in Mexico City happened, and I saw that they were going to do an event to raise funds to send to Mexico, and I started to get involved a little more".

This gatekeeping is demonstrated by the interviews that were made with expats that had no association with the EXATEC community, as they conveyed having a harder time finding other Mexicans with whom they felt comfortable fostering community. Rogelio, a graduate student who had done his undergrad in Vancouver, said that in his first year he was part of a group of Latinos who he had met at orientation, but did not frequent because "it was mostly for parties, it wasn't like settling in or adapting. It was more of 'who wants to go to Red Room[9]!' or go out to another club". Sebastián, a graduate student, expressed something similar saying: "I don't interact with the Mexican student club, because they are undergraduates and it is mostly for parties. It does not align with my objectives right now, which are mainly to be a resident in Canada".

In this case, highly skilled Mexicans separate themselves from other Mexicans, even some who could be considered highly skilled, because their lifestyles are not compatible. However, this did not happen exclusively with highly skilled Mexicans looking down and excluding themselves from other Mexicans, as was the case with the Facebook groups. Some, although a minority, of the research participants mentioned that in places like the university, they did not want to interact with other Mexicans because they are behaving like "rich kids from Mexico". For example, David, a graduate student, said that he thinks that there are not many Mexicans in Vancouver, and if there are "It is usually upper class people in business programs or so, and we have nothing in common. It is as if we were from different countries".

This perception was shared by Sofía, another graduate student, who said that she usually encounters two types of Mexicans: temporary foreign workers who work in construction and

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[9] The Red Room is a nightclub in downtown Vancouver that is commonly frequented by Latin Americans, they host Vancouver's longest running latin night on Friday nights.https://redroomvancouver.com/

similar sectors, and the *Mexican Mirrey* (juniors) whose upper and upper middle class families are supporting their stay in Vancouver. She says: "Whenever I see them leaving Red Room, I think 'Ugh, I am working so hard to be here, and you come here and throw away three months' worth of your daddy's money.' It's like 'no thanks, bye!' I already lived in Monterrey, I don't want to live in Monterrey anymore. And I see them and it makes me anxious."

Even though the comments about feeling uncomfortable around "rich Mexicans" were not the most common in the interviews, it is important to highlight them to understand why using the category of middling migrants is useful to understand the behaviour of Mexican expats in Vancouver. They are in a constant struggle to prove that they deserve to be in Canada, even if that means employing strategies to differentiate themselves from other Mexicans. Throughout the interviews, most participants expressed feelings of loneliness and feeling left out of any community, while they navigated their multiple identities they had as professionals, graduate students and Mexicans. I argue that the self-exclusion that Mexican expats impose on themselves stems from a feeling of vulnerability while they navigate their path towards Canadian permanent residence or citizenship.

The vulnerability faced by Mexican expats due to the temporary status of their residence in Canada informs the activities they choose to participate in (or not) online, showing their desire to integrate into the new society. Glick-Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton's (1992) foundational piece about transnationalism states that "transmigrants draw upon and create fluid and multiple identities grounded both in their society of origin and in the host societies" (p. 11), and by maintaining these multiple identities, they are able to "express their resistance to the global political and economic situations that engulf them, as they accommodate to living conditions marked by vulnerability and insecurity" (Glick-Schiller et al, 1992, p. 12). It is necessary to

acknowledge that the vulnerability and insecurity faced by highly skilled Mexicans in Vancouver occurs despite their class privileges, mainly engulfed in the upward and downward mobility they are experiencing.

I am not arguing that the insecurity faced by Mexican expats places them in immediate physical danger — such as the insecurity of Mexican temporary foreign agricultural workers, or Mexicans who are in Canada without proper authorization. However, they still perceive themselves as being in a vulnerable position, mainly because they could be affected by their own actions as well as what other Mexicans do, or how decisions made by the Canadian government might impact their immigration status.

This view is widely shared by my research participants, who throughout the interviews constantly acknowledged their privilege and even refused to acknowledge their particular struggles because they consider themselves "lucky" to have had social mobility opportunities in Mexico that allow them to have migrated to Canada in relatively easy circumstances. Sofía, a graduate student whose studies are funded by the Mexican government, acknowledged that even if she does not want to go back to Mexico, she feels the need to give back due to the privileges that allowed for her to be here: "I had it so easy. I see the people I grew up with and that's the thing, we live in a bad neighborhood and I had the opportunity to learn English and that's why I could graduate from Tec or come to Canada. But that kind of things like learning English required money that my neighbor didn't have, so I had it very easy compared to the people I grew up with". The investment made by her parents that allowed her to obtain cultural capital through learning English at a young age, resulted in facilitating her later migration to Canada, without having to confront common challenges such as language barriers.

Another manifestation of privilege is the fact that almost none of the expats I interviewed sent money to Mexico in the form of remittances, and if they did it was mostly to maintain their credit card lines and investments in Mexico. This was the case of Ana and Mauricio, who are both home owners in Mexico and are renting out their properties, so they send money to their families so they can manage the properties. The variety in the manifestation of privilege of the participants in this research is why the "middling migrant" concept is central to my arguments, as these migrants are professionals who are neither economically disadvantaged nor super rich elites. They face particular struggles of their own, that are somehow lost in the dichotomy of deservingness created by media discourses and policy categorizations explored in the previous chapter.

In the political domain, this dual frame of reference is used to compare the political situation in Mexico and a sense of safety and trust in Canadian government institutions. The confidence that Mexicans expats have in Canadian institutions, compared to Mexican institutions, allows them to render the political domain as a second thought. Take for example the following quote from Enrique, a dual citizen of Mexico and Canada working in the private sector:

> "People do not care so much about politics here because their basic needs are covered, this is the case of the Canadian majority. You have a house, you have your family, a job and you can focus on other things like adopting puppies or kittens, or doing social service on a farm. That, for a Mexican, can be seen as very banal, but it is not. It is like a fulfillment of wanting to serve the community. But in Mexico, we still won't cover the basic needs, we don't have enough salary, for some people it's not enough for tortillas and beans. Life in Mexico is much harder".

In this case, the dual frame of reference allows migrants to maintain a sense of accomplishment due to the rights guaranteed through immigration to Canada. In this particular case, Enrique has both Mexican and Canadian citizenship, but this sentiment was echoed by others with permanent or temporary residency. Kastoryano (2002) argues that "the country of origin becomes a source of identity and the country of residence a source of right. The result is a confusion between rights and identity, culture and politics, states and nations" (p. 160). For highly skilled migrants, I argue that their source of identity is not tied exclusively to their political identity, but more so to class identity, which allows them to identify with others with similar education and class backgrounds regardless of nationality. This source of identification renders the political less relevant to them, unless there is a threat to their sense of safety and comfort.

Some of the graduate students I interviewed stated constantly throughout the interviews that they did not make an effort to follow Mexican news, and their only contact with political activity in Mexico was what they saw on their Facebook newsfeed, and in less frequent cases, Twitter timelines or Youtube videos. However, despite considering themselves apolitical, some of the graduate students were part of an organized effort to contact the National Science and Technology Council (CONACYT), because their scholarships were not being paid.

This action was coordinated by a graduate student who posted in a graduate student forum of one of the universities in Vancouver attempting to contact other Mexican students for whom the CONACYT had not paid tuition and maintenance scholarships. Without meeting face to face, Mexican graduate students coordinated to send a letter to the CONACYT officials, contacting the Mexican Consulate in Vancouver. After the recipients got their tuition paid, the interviewees told me they did not come in contact with the other graduate students again. In this case, having

the same scholarship from the Mexican government brought these students together, but they did not find a reason to build a community with each other afterwards.

Science and technology politics is a topic that several of the graduate students felt comfortable posting and commenting online in relation to Mexico. In 2019, the CONACYT was affected by budget cuts and changes in management, and the graduate students talk about these problems in their Whatsapp groups with other friends in Mexico or other countries with similar experiences. For example, Mariana, a postdoctoral fellow, said that given the CONACYT budget cuts, many of her graduate student friends who are scattered around the world have asked her to sign and share online petitions to pressure the government to pay for their stipends, and she does, but otherwise they do not talk about politics: "With my friends we don't talk much about politics, they are more personal things. Although we do share memes, but not so politically because my group is very politically divided and we better avoid it".

The use of digital technologies by Mexican expats, especially social media, is limited mostly to the sociocultural domain. Komito (2011) finds that despite the increased use of social networking sites by immigrants, they use it mostly passively rather than actively for keeping in contact with friends and family, and instead they used other technologies such as text messaging, email or video calls. The passive use of social media shows that they use social media to a) check messages, b) browse photos and c) look for friends, and not precisely to generate content or engage in political debates. I will explore two cases of active use of digital technologies, specifically Youtube channels about immigration, in the following chapter.

When asked specifically about their interactions with other Mexicans in Vancouver through digital technologies, most participants said they are members of some Mexican community

Facebook groups, but they were not active participants in it. They would read the group or see some of the posts in their own newsfeed on Facebook, but rarely post any content themselves, and in very few occasions interact with the posts made on the group. Those who have interacted with the group said they did it because they felt they could help others, answering questions about how to find housing in Vancouver or specific questions about how to do certain immigration procedures, but most also remarked that this dynamic can be exhausting and they do not have time to regularly do this due to their professional commitments. Most participants indicated that they were tired of the fact that asking for help was one of the main activities in the group, as it does not foster community and they considered it mostly for some type of personal gain. This dynamic was not only present in the interactions with the Facebook group, but also with the broader Mexican community.

The most common use of digital technologies that Mexican expats had involving other Mexicans was to keep in touch with their friends and family back home through Whatsapp groups or one-on-one conversations. Research on immigrants' use of technologies looks into mobile intimacies (Schofield Clark & Lynn Sywyj, 2012), particularly how immigrant families use mobile technologies, such as cellphones, to maintain intimate one-on-one relationships. Francisco (2013) found that "the visual component on webcam technologies like Skype, Yahoo Messenger, etc. allows for a different type of care work to be exchanged both by migrants and by families left behind" (p. 188). In general, Lingel et al (2014) find that social network sites provide a venue to "maintain a sense of intimacy and connectivity with people in one's personal network irrespective of distance" (p. 1505).

Before the rise of social media, Ley (2004) had called for understanding that "emotional sites may be in geographically distant places, so that people live a kind of polycentredness, requiring

multiple site ethnographies" (p. 155). Research on the use of digital technologies by immigrants has been able to engage in multiple site ethnographies without moving from one specific location. My interviews show that graduate students are in constant communication with their friends and families back home, which allowed them to confront feelings of loneliness caused by graduate school and the coldness that they perceive from Vancouverites in general.

This sentiment was also shared by professionals, particularly those who were relatively new to the city. This "ambient co-presence" (Madianou, 2016; Baldassar, 2008) functions as a two-way dynamic, particularly with expats who are expected to provide for their households. Several participants mentioned using digital applications to take care of their parents — for example, Cristian, a professional, mentioned that he had food or snacks delivered to them through Rappi, an on-demand delivery app. Research participants also mentioned that they kept in touch with news from the cities where their parents live, and made sure to alert them of any spikes in insecurity statistics or potentially harmful climate events, such as alerts for floods or earthquakes.

Because most of the research participants were relatively new to Vancouver, my findings cannot indicate if the longer you are in Canada, the less you maintain constant communication with Mexico. The people who had been in Canada for 14 years appeared to have contradictory experiences, one noting that they felt "as connected as ever to Mexico" and the other saying that even if their primary social circles in Vancouver are Mexican, they are too busy to be in constant communication with Mexico. These findings, however, are not enough to make conclusions about a broader number of Mexican expats.

Political expression in the thirdspace

The previous sections of this chapter explored some of the reasons that Mexican expats apply to their participation within the wider Mexican community, both online and offline. However, the discussion has focused on social participation, given their refusal to actively comment on political situations. As explored in the previous chapter, refusal strategies employed by Mexican expats affect their social and political domains, where they choose to avoid posting or commenting on their political leanings, mostly to avoid confrontation with members of their social networks. Ximena, a graduate student, said that she avoids posting political opinions about Mexico and prefers to stick to facts in order to avoid conflict: "Sometimes I would like to post my opinions, but I do not want to enter into conflict and I prefer to only share facts, so it's not seen as my opinion." She mainly posts about her expertise in climate science in response to political events that affect the environment, such as supporting policies that look for a shift to clean energy instead of fossil fuels, and other environmental policies.

Many also noted that they feel like they should not comment on political events happening in Mexico since they are not there, and they are no longer entitled to do so. For example, Elena, who has been in Canada for 14 years and has Canadian citizenship, said: "I am more interested in following the elections here because this is where I vote, and where I pay taxes, where I make my life and I know I can make a change in my community or in my city, but there I am only a passive person". However, even newcomers such as Sebastián, who has been in Vancouver for less than a year, say that they stop keeping up with Mexican news. He said: "It frustrates me to see the political situation in Mexico and feeling like I can't do anything, and it does factor in that I know that I want to stay here (in Canada), I don't want to go back."

The attitudes towards entitlement to politically participate in the Mexican and Canadian political arenas are particularly interesting, given the discussions typically associated with dual citizenship debates. While only two of the participants had dual citizenship, strong and conflicting attitudes about the right to participate were visible within expats. For example, Fernanda, a university administrator who has been in Canada for 7 years, expressed the following: "I have Mexican citizenship, I am a permanent resident, eternally. I'm not going to be anything else and I'm not interested. At the moment, (Canadian citizenship) is not a priority for me because I have all the benefits and the only thing that I can't do is vote, but really…".

Ramiro, a professional who has been in Vancouver for 5 years, said that he is not politically active in regards to Mexico while living in Vancouver, but he was not politically active in Mexico either: "I don't vote (from abroad), even when I was in Mexico I didn't vote". Most of the participants expressed similar feelings, and only 23% of the research participants voted from abroad in the 2018 Mexican presidential election. It is important to note that some were not able to vote from abroad due to having moved very recently, thus missing the deadline to register, or they voted in Mexico and soon after moved to Vancouver.

Throughout the interviews, expats seemed to agree that their path to permanent migration to Canada is motivated mostly by the desire to have security and stability in their immigration status, and access to better jobs. Almost none of the interviewees mentioned voting or political participation as an important aspect of their desire to settle permanently in Canada, although most also mentioned not being politically involved in Mexico, and being happy that there is a perception that political participation is less urgent in Canada, so they have time to focus on other activities they consider more important.

However, as part of their strategies to combat the vulnerability their immigration status gives them, Mexican expats engage in back and forth self-identification as Mexicans and not-Mexicans by being able to select which identities-borders-orders to reproduce in their digital behavior. Vertovec (2004) explains that sense of identity is supposed to characterize people, and this identity/people is "believed to be contiguous with a territory, demarcated by a border". Being inside the border creates a social and political order that "draws upon and reinforces the sense of collective identity" (Vertovec, 2004, p. 979) Still, because they are confronted by the "we/them" divide generated by Canadian public discourses, Mexican expats — mainly those who are vulnerable due to the temporary nature of their immigration status, but less vulnerable due to their social class — refuse to fully identify as Mexicans and cannot identify as Canadians either, resulting in a lack of political engagement for many.

The political domain of migrant transnationalism is usually associated with two main phenomena: dual citizenship/nationality and "homeland" politics, which concern both the receiving and the sending country. Macklin and Crépeau (2010) observe that diasporic communities whose members are dual citizens can serve as social, political, economic and cultural integration facilitators, especially if this bridging role is recognized and fostered by the host state. However, I argue this perspective understands transnationalism only at the stage where migrants have obtained citizenship in the host society. Temporary migrants with the end goal of permanent migration are left out of these discussions. This research aims to look at transmigrants as explored by Kaya (2012), to understand how their end goal of permanent migration to Canada contributes to create an environment where these citizens are encouraged to remain apolitical for individual risk reduction.

On the other hand, Mexican strategies for engaging with migrants are heavily dictated by the community in the United States, and thus often exclude middling migrants and the transnational capitalist class from the strategies of engagement that the Mexican government has with its communities abroad.

In order to engage with these migrants, states typically engage in what Pellerin and Mullings (2013) called the "diaspora option". This phenomenon explains how sending-states employ non-coercive management strategies to mitigate the effects of the "brain drain". By employing neoliberal discourses and practices, states create "governing technologies that rely on claims to scientific objectivity, pragmatism, and tropes of responsibility to mobilize migrant groups to assume developmental functions once reserved for governments and the private sector" (Pellerin and Mullings, 2013, p. 98). This phenomenon was previously studied by authors such as Gamlen (2008) and Larner (2007), who identified that the element of coercion is mostly absent in the governance of diasporas. The diaspora option "seeks to institute practices aimed at directing how migrants act towards their home countries" (Pellerin and Mullings, 2013, p. 111) by relying on immigrant groups' internalization of current neoliberal discourses of development.

As explored before, the Mexican government's development of diaspora engagement strategies have historically excluded highly skilled migrants, although the early 2000's institutionalization of diaspora engagement policies resulted in the creation and maintenance of a few programs aimed specifically at highly skilled migrants in order to mitigate the "brain drain" and encourage "brain circulation". In 2005, the Institute of Mexicans Abroad (IME), in partnership with CONACYT and the Mexico-US Foundation for Science (FUMEC), created the Global Network of Mexican Talents, an association that brings together skilled Mexican professionals interested

in promoting the development of Mexico through the insertion of Mexico in the knowledge economy (Red Global Mexico, 2019). Its first chapter opened in Silicon Valley that same year.

The creation of this network was a decision to "abandon the concept of brain drain and adopt a paradigm based on the circularity of knowledge, which seeks to combat old prejudices that persist in conceiving emigrants as a permanent loss for sending countries" (IME, 2019). This was mainly because the IME found that "repatriation is not a viable option for many of their compatriots, so working with the diaspora is considered to be a way to take advantage of the knowledge, experience and contacts of highly qualified migrants, in favor of the development of Mexico". The network currently operates in 35 countries with 70 chapters, and has around 6,500 members.

However, after its creation and during President Calderón's administration, the Mexican state was forced to turn its attention inwards, due to the quickly escalating War Against Drugs, which started in 2006, forgoing any changes to the diaspora management strategies started by President Fox. This period coincided with an uptick in Mexican migration to Canada both by upper class Mexican citizens who had the means to apply for investor visa programs and even through refugee claims. The following administration also failed to develop more programs to engage with highly skilled migrants leading to the perpetuation of the dynamic that combines autoexclusion strategies implemented by highly skilled Mexicans to integrate better into Canadian society with a perceived unofficial exclusion from the State's imagined community of Mexicans abroad.

A diplomat from the Consulate mentioned that there are efforts being made by Mexican Consulates in Canada to gather information that would allow the Mexican government to create

better strategies to engage with the diaspora in Canada. This project is attempting to employ neoliberal discourses and practices to mobilize migrant groups to assume developmental functions once reserved for governments and the private sector. This was the case in the 2019 Global Forum in Ottawa, an event organized by the Mexican Embassy in Canada and the Institute of Mexicans Abroad. It was also mentioned that the Mexican Government announced that the Consulate can only support initiatives from Mexican nationals abroad that support a social project in Mexico. This is a new regulation, part of the new immigration guidelines announced by Foreign Minister Ebrard.

I would argue that these strategies are not going to be successful for the Mexican diaspora in Canada, mainly because they are, once again, developed for the particular characteristics of Mexican migrants in the United States. The Mexican government implements strategies to engage with the diaspora regardless of location, without having done any previous type of community building or diaspora engagement beyond the already organized communities in the United States.

Conclusions

Given the small size of the Mexican population in Vancouver and the lack of physical places of gathering, Mexicans in Vancouver have resorted to using digital forums — mainly Facebook groups — to keep in touch with other Mexicans. These groups become particularly important when newcomers do not have a pre-existing network in Vancouver, and are mostly in use at the initial stages of their migration journey to obtain help for common challenges, such as looking for housing and finding others with similar interests.

The proliferation of new digital technologies has accelerated the creation of digital third spaces, where immigrants confront the "tension between a lived-in space and a distant, remembered space" (Price and Whitworth, 2004, p. 185), and master new geographies of everyday life in what Nedelcu (2012) calls a new transnational habitus. However, I agree with Vertovec (2009) in his thinking that technologies mostly reinforce pre-existing social patterns in a different medium, rather than creating new social patterns. Focusing on Mexican expats allowed me to observe how they use digital technologies to reproduce their cultural, social and economic capital that allows them to differentiate themselves from "other" Mexicans that are not like them. Even if most of the research participants were aware of the Facebook groups as the main source of information for Mexicans in Canada, once they were settled in the city they actively chose not to participate in discussions or find a community in the group.

Even if highly skilled Mexicans experience different degrees of isolation, they navigate and capitalize on their identities as professionals or graduate students and Mexicans. They do this to lessen the impact of the vulnerability that stems from their temporary status in Canada, choosing instead to showcase their "desirable" characteristics that allow them to integrate more easily into the receiving society. Their ability to capitalize on these characteristics gives them a perception of control over the upward and downward mobility they experience in Vancouver. Digital technologies aid Mexican expats by providing cheap and direct communication with their friends and families back home, but do not make a significant difference in access or interest to be politically active in Mexico while living abroad.

Mexican expats engage in individual activities that protect them from the impact of the upward and downward mobility they experience in Vancouver, because they are in practice excluded from the Mexican state's design of diaspora management strategies. These policies are designed

with the characteristics of the Mexican community in the United States in mind, focusing mainly on remittances, migrant associations and education programs that are not useful for Mexicans in Canada. Mexican government programs designed to engage with the highly skilled population — namely the Global Network of Mexican Talent — are heavily individualistic and rely on the exploitation of professional achievements and interest for access. Very few of the research participants were aware of the existence of the Global Network of Mexican Talent, much less participated in their events.

This chapter aimed to examine the ways in which highly skilled Mexicans in Vancouver participate in digitally enabled transnational activities, leading to the conclusion that this group mostly uses digital technologies in a passive way to maintain their transnational relations with friends and family, while distancing themselves completely from the Mexican state. Instead of contributing to maintaining a sense of belonging to Mexico, digital technologies reinforce previous social behaviours and Canadian media discourses that encourage expats to refuse to be associated with the Mexican community, particularly once they have settled. In the following chapter, I will examine the activities of two Mexican expats who have monetized their identity and experiences as immigrants by broadcasting their everyday life in Vancouver through their Youtube channels.

4 Broadcasting privilege and guilt

Mexican YouTubers and everyday life in Vancouver

The focus of this chapter is on two YouTube channels hosted by Mexicans living in Vancouver, "GeorgeSays" and "Cruz en Canada". There is a very limited selection of YouTube channels featuring Mexicans in Canada, and these were the two channels located in Vancouver. "Cruz en Canada" is a Mexican digital animator who vlogs about his life, with a heavy focus on his work experience. he has around 35,000 subscribers. The second channel, "GeorgeSays", features a Mexican that vlogs about his everyday life to his 22,500 subscribers. Both vlog in Spanish and use their channel and other social media, mainly Instagram, to interact with viewers who want to migrate to Vancouver or Canada, and with others already in the city.

The broader interest of this research is to study the ways in which highly skilled Mexicans use digital technologies to maintain their transnational relations, which is why I am interested in analyzing these YouTube channels. While YouTube was not mentioned as a widely used tool by my research participants, analyzing the way in which two Mexicans use their YouTube platform to share their everyday life in Vancouver allows me to explore an active way of engaging in transnational relations. The active nature of curating a YouTube channel where being a Mexican in Canada is the main source of content places identity negotiation at the forefront of digital content creation.

I chose to explore a form of active immigrant engagement with the homeland, to build on Komito's (2011) research on immigrants' passive use of digital technologies. It is interesting to study these particular cases because they are an exception to the norm, and because by taking

advantage of the limited number of Mexicans in Canada vlogging about their lives, they are monetizing their immigrant condition through YouTube views and Instagram likes.

YouTube has not been widely explored in relation to immigration, but there is some research that argues that YouTube should be understood as an immigrant thirdspace. For example, Chang and Chang (2019) study the potential of YouTube channels as a "third space in which second/additional language learners negotiate for alternative identities". They found that "YouTubers not only shuttle between cultures in their home and host communities but also speak to their audience as transcultural experts who are knowledgeable about global cultural artifacts, figures, and practices" (Chang & Chang, 2019, p. 84). This shows that YouTube is a tool that immigrants use to explore their continuous navigation between home and host communities.

In research related to Latin American immigrants' uses of Youtube, Adkins and Sandy (2017) studied the ways in which Latin Americans in the Midwestern United States look for information online, and found that several participants indicated using YouTube as a source of how-to information, reinforcing Brown and Lopez's (2015) findings on Latin American audiences' strong desire for audiovisual materials as opposed to text-based materials in the United States. My work contributes to expanding research about Mexicans' use of digital technologies in different transnational contexts.

Placing the transnational context at the center of a discussion around uses of digital technologies allows me to explore what Lam et al (2012) call the dualistic orientation employed by immigrants signaling the "impact of transnational connections and activities on the cognitive, social, and cultural orientations of migrants, as they are exposed to social and material practices that are not confined to one societal system" (p. 195). Similarly to previous chapters, I use

Vertovec's (2004) framework of the policial, sociocultural and economic domains of transnational transformation in order to explore how Cruz en Canada and GeorgeSays manage these domains in a digital transnational context. Due to the social nature of YouTube as a platform, both of these YouTube channels can be located in the sociocultural domain, where they perform transnational bifocality. However, despite mainly placing the videos in the sociocultural domain, I also discuss what Vertovec (2004) calls 'identities-borders-orders' in the political domain, by analyzing how they highlight or play down certain aspects of their identity over others. By choosing certain "identities-borders-orders" over others, immigrants are "legitimating and reproducing a system of narratives, public rituals and institutions, educational materials, formal state bureaucracies and informal social relationships, written and unwritten regulations, sets of assumptions, and expectations of civility and public behavior" (Vertovec, 2004, p. 979), which give them access to broadcasting their content to specific audiences that value particular systems and narratives over others. The economic domain does not figure extensively in this analysis, however I do focus on what are the economic benefits that being Youtube public figures brings to both Youtube hosts.

This chapter deals with two main sources of data, a) data gathered from their public YouTube channels, and b) interviews with both YouTubers. I will not attribute the quotes to a particular Youtuber given the anonymity granted by ethics guidelines. Interviews were an essential component of this chapter, because they allowed me to explore how their life in Vancouver is affected by the content they post online. Anonymity was prioritized while dealing with interviews through this chapter, due to the small sample size of the Youtube channels available, in order to comply with Behavioural and Research Ethics guidelines. Given the similarities in profiles of both Youtubers, making their interview quotes anonymous allows me to understand

how their experiences could be applicable to a broader population of high skilled Mexican immigrants broadcasting their everyday lives on the internet, and the effects that doing this has in their everyday lives in the city. This is essential to understand how their identity negotiation in Vancouver has been affected by their conditions of "public figures" that the rest of my research participants do not have.

At the beginning of both interviews, I asked why did they decide to start a YouTube channel, and both of them mentioned that they started their channels "by chance", creating videos for their families who wanted to experience what they were seeing in their new city, without having to rely solely on out of context pictures or texts on Whatsapp or Facebook. They also agree that their channels grew extremely fast without them having to invest a lot of time or effort in gaining subscribers. This is in part because they are the only two prominent Spanish-speaking YouTubers in Vancouver, which made them part of a very limited Spanish-speaking YouTuber community in Canada.

Cruz and George mostly share their everyday life experiences as Mexicans living in Vancouver, and throughout this chapter I will explore five main themes that I have identified in their videos. These are immigration, irregular migration, everyday life, Canadian and Mexican stereotypes, and how these content creators use their dual sense of reference to compare their experiences in Canada with Mexico. I also created an additional category, in order to explore themes that are not central to this research, but are recurring themes in their videos.

As of October 26, 2019, the channel Cruz en Canada had 106 videos, and GeorgeSays channel had 120 videos. I coded the videos according to the following categories: a) Immigration, b)

Irregular Migration, c) Everyday life, d) Canadian stereotypes, e) Mexican stereotypes, f) Dual frame of reference and g) Other.

Table 1 Main themes in Cruz en Canada and GeorgeSays Youtube Channels[10]

Theme	Immigration	Undocumented Migration	Everday Life	Canadian stereotypes	Mexican stereotypes	Dual frame of reference	Other
Cruz en Canada	20.755%	3.774%	57.547%	32.075%	26.415%	34.906%	23.585%
GeorgeSays	30.833%	10.833%	56.667%	31.667%	22.500%	41.667%	33.333%

After coding the videos, it is possible to observe that both channels mostly vlog about their everyday life, with around 57% of their content belonging to this category. These videos show their city life, including their apartments, neighborhoods, and experiences with friends and family in the city. It is interesting that throughout the videos, these YouTubers use a dual frame of reference to compare their experiences in Canada to their lives in Mexico, which makes their experiences more relatable and easier to understand to a broader Latin American audience. It is also important to note that they vlog in Spanish rather than in English. I do not have access to their YouTube Analytics, but both YouTubers confirmed that their videos are mostly watched in Mexico, followed by the United States and Canada. Their most popular videos are on guidelines about what to do or not do in Canada. For example, the most watched video on the Cruz en Canada channel, with almost a million views, is called "10 things you can't do in Canada - In my experience". For the GeorgeSays channel, the most watched video is "Questions in the Canadian Airport" with 346,000 views. Compared to popular Youtube channels, both channels are fairly small, given the small size of the Latin American and Mexican population in Canada. There are

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[10] The total adds to more than 100% because individual videos are coded for multiple themes

674,640 people with Latin American ethnic origin living in Canada, the equivalent of 1.9% of the Canadian population according to the 2016 Census[11], which explains the limited reach of their channels.

In order to exemplify the type of content they post, I chose one popular video from each channel featuring their everyday lives. "Let's go to the Canadian supermarket" is Cruz en Canada's third most watched video, with 102,000 views. In this video, he narrates his grocery shopping errand in Vancouver, and he employs his dual frame of reference to compare average prices of products, like avocados, in Canadian dollars against Mexican pesos. A banal activity such as going to the supermarket gathered the interest of many, and the comments section of the video shows that viewers compare Cruz going to the supermarket in Canada with them going in their own countries and a discussion around prices and salaries. In GeorgeSays' YouTube channel, the most popular videos are about immigration, not about his personal life. Despite the amount of times everyday life is featured in his videos, his 10th most popular video is a tour of his apartment, where he talks about how much rent he pays to live there. It has around 44,000 views.

These two YouTube channels can be seen as a source of how-to information about immigrating to Canada, although, and I will discuss below, the information provided is not useful for most of the viewers. The most striking difference between both channels is who is at the center of the content in each one. As established in the introduction, this chapter is enriched by the interviews I made with both YouTubers, who provided additional context into their content and the impact on their lives. One of the video creators works for a multinational company in downtown Vancouver, and the other is a social media manager and content creator for a Vancouver company.

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[11] Statistics Canada (2019) Ethnic origin for the population in private households - 25% sample data. 2016 Census.

I argue that one of them fits the definition of highly skilled migration employed in this research more strictly than the other, primarily due to the reasons they had to migrate to Canada. One of them was recruited by a multinational company who offered him a job opportunity, and the other arrived in Vancouver through family reunification. Their migration pathway has an impact on the content they post on YouTube, for example, the YouTuber who migrated through family reunification features other Mexicans or Mexico centered activities more heavily, even if both talk about Mexico frequently.

In his YouTube channel, Cruz talks about Mexico constantly and compares his experiences in Vancouver with his life in Mexico, but his videos do not feature other Mexicans often. On the other hand, George has adapted his channel to feature stories from his subscribers, who are often Mexicans but sometimes part of a broader Latin American community, and his friends and family are featured more often in videos. His behaviour is an outlier based on the rest of my interviews, since most participants said they do not spend time with other Mexicans or Latin Americans in Vancouver.

The juxtaposition of their profiles enables me to explore the role identity negotiation plays out in YouTube as a "thirdspace". It illustrates the tension that highly skilled Mexicans face in Vancouver, as created by the Canadian media discourses explored in Chapter 2. I identified that immigration is a recurring theme in both channels, although it is featured more heavily by George, since it was a topic in 41.67% of his 120 videos.

George talks about irregular migration much more frequently than Cruz, this topic appearing in 10.83% of GeorgeSays videos, compared to an infrequent 3.77% of Cruz en Canada videos. The way that they engage with irregular migration is similar to the discussions happening in the

Mexican community Facebook groups. Despite the similarities, George and Cruz are much more exposed to negative backlash by talking about this in their YouTube videos, because they do not get the benefit of anonymity that the group gives to a certain extent.

In this section I will explore how both channels deal with topics of immigration and irregular immigration. Cruz has a video that addresses the issue of irregular immigration directly, titled "Illegal Migration in Canada - My Opinion", uploaded on July 20, 2017. In the video, he explains that he decided to make a video on this topic because he was looking at one of the Facebook groups and he saw an image that depicted stereotypes about Mexicans in Vancouver. At minute 3:18 in the video, he says that he could not stop laughing because he found that the image was "very accurate". He then proceeds to explain his thoughts on the image, briefly explaining stereotypes associated with irregular Mexican migration to Vancouver.

A common discussion in the Facebook groups is signaling "overstayers", which people argue are easy to recognize by the symbols featured in the image, which are associated with Mexicans overstaying their Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA). These stereotypes signal the following: Mexicans work mostly in the construction sector, smoke cannabis, attempt to be cheap by shopping at No Frills and not paying full price for public transportation. In his video, he adds "The easiest way to recognize a Mexican, particularly from Guadalajara, is if they are wearing Adidas pants and sneakers".

It is interesting that there are certain class markers even within the "overstayers" that allow other Mexicans to make fun of them, like wearing Adidas. I argue that this "permission to mock" is granted in the community because they are perceived as taking advantage of the system by overstaying their visas, in contrast to people who are in vulnerable situations that are irregular

due to necessity. However, because this image was in a Facebook group, people who were offended by it could express their anger at the people making fun of the situation.

In his video, Cruz explains that he found it funny because it does not apply to him, but he saw that many in the group were offended because "*les cayó el saco*", which is a popular Mexican saying that means that someone is offended because they know that something said about them is true. After explaining the situation that triggered the video, he gives his opinion on Mexican irregular migration to Canada:

> "I was lucky because Mexico did not fail me as a country, my family gave me everything and I have a degree and I had a lot of opportunities. People come here and they say that Mexico did not give them opportunities and that it failed them as a country, and that's why they are here. That's completely fine, I think this is a very gray area. Although working in Canada without a work permit is wrong, it is objectively wrong, I do question what happens when the situation is not great? When there's a lot of insecurity or you did not have many opportunities to finish your degree and you can't apply for a Canadian work permit? I have asked a lot of Canadians and they tell me that Mexicans should come only legally, but they have not seen how the situation is in Mexico, so they don't understand. When I was in Mexico I was completely against illegal migration, but I guess now I see things from another perspective. I think this should be examined on a case by case basis." (Cruz en Canada, 2017)

This statement deals with many themes that have been discussed in this research, mainly how expats feel guilt because they know that the opportunities they had in Mexico have allowed them to immigrate to Canada with less restrictions than other Mexicans. It also deals with the idea that

highly skilled Mexicans empathize with other conationals because they are aware of the difficulties that are involved in settling in a city like Vancouver, as explored in Chapter 3. However, because social class is a scale, and people are constantly experiencing upward and downward mobility, there is a lot of judgement when certain people are perceived as cheating the system, particularly when the biggest consequence they could have is going back to a comfortable life in Mexico.

In a similar way, George addresses irregular migration in a video called "Canada is Deporting Hundreds of Mexicans" uploaded on August 22, 2019. He explains that the video was motivated by the August 19, 2019 Hasting Racecourse raids[12] where CBSA (Canadian Border Services Agency) deported several Mexicans. In the video he acknowledges that this is a difficult topic but "it is necessary to talk about, because things are getting out of hand". He says that given the increase in irregular migration from Mexico, he has seen in the news that Canada is deporting many Mexicans all over Canada, he gives a quick disclaimer on his opinion: "I'm not saying that I'm against people choosing to come here this way, I'm in no position to judge and we all deserve the opportunity to fight to get ahead in life."

He argues in his video that given the more strict immigration enforcement in the United States under the Trump Administration, Mexicans have decided to migrate to Canada. In order to justify his opinions, he makes an interesting comparison between wanting to be here (*in Canada*) for a while to try to make money and fully immigrating, although he says that in both cases it is necessary to follow the correct procedures to do it legally.

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[12] Hasegawa & Jung (2019) CBSA makes several arrests at Hastings Racecourse, witnesses say. CTV News. https://bc.ctvnews.ca/cbsa-makes-several-arrests-at-hastings-racecourse-witnesses-say-1.4556744.

Both YouTubers acknowledge that sometimes irregular migration might be justified when people are in difficult situations and that is the only way to move forward, but they also address their viewers asking them to question if that was their case. For example, Cruz asked his viewers to consider the dangers of promoting irregular migration, even if the viewer has managed to do so successfully. He says:

> "What I will say if you are watching this video and you are here in Canada illegally, you shouldn't be promoting illegal migration. You are exposing people to being in another country with no medical insurance, and you have to understand that this is not something that anyone should do, and if you are already here, try to regularize your situation".

In the interviews with the YouTubers, we discussed the idea of responsibility as a "public figure" when dealing with subjects that might result in a legal danger to them, such as talking about irregular migration. One of them told me he tries not to engage in this topic heavily, although he feels a responsibility to help if he can. However, he finds that most of the time he cannot help, because people asking for his help usually do not have education credentials or official language abilities, so he cannot give him advice based on his personal experience and he does not have the knowledge that an immigration consultant would have. When he is unable to provide help, he told me that he usually tries to tell them to consult with a lawyer because he does not have enough expertise to give them advice. "Some people take it nicely but others get mad and scold me, they tell me: "Why do you have a YouTube channel if you don't help us?"

One of them told me he has been encouraged by his family to obtain an Immigration Consultant certification, so he can take advantage of his perceived expertise and protect himself if he is giving advice. He has considered it, but he said he feels guilty because he did not have a hard

time coming to Canada, so he would feel bad to charge for something that he believes is already online in the IRCC or Canadian government web pages. However, in both cases, the perceived benefits of having a YouTube channel are greater than the costs. I will explore the way in which both negotiate their online personas with their life in Vancouver in the next section.

Online/offline identity negotiation

As discussed in the introduction of this chapter, both of these channels feature content about the everyday life of Cruz and George, as well as stories and information about their immigration to Canada. Creating this content has placed Cruz and George in a position in which they become "transcultural experts" (Chang & Chang, 2019) and this position challenges the way that they negotiate their identity in their YouTube channel and in Vancouver.

The amount of content that they post about specific topics has led them to receive many questions about their YouTube comments and Instagram Direct messages. The three most popular videos in the GeorgeSays channel are about immigration: 1) Questions in the Canadian Airport? 2) Ten Reasons You Won't Be Allowed to Enter Canada, and 3) Five Tips to Go Through Canadian Customs. He justifies the amount of immigration related content he posts because he gets many questions about the topic in his comments and Direct messages, signaling that he is responding to his followers' requests. George gives a disclaimer at the beginning of his videos, stating he is not an immigration consultant and the sources that he is citing come from official government pages and his own personal anecdotes. These actions show how George negotiates his online identity, where he is perceived as a source of knowledge about immigration to Canada, and his identity in Vancouver, where you are legally required to be a certified Immigration Consultant in order to give valid immigration advice.

Despite their lack of legal qualifications to give immigration advice, both YouTubers argue that they are motivated by the desire to help others. One of them told me he once allowed a viewer to stay at his apartment, although he will not be doing that again, as it was not a good experience. He explained that this invitation was a result of contact initiated by the viewer in his Instagram Direct messages, and the requests for help vary in the degree of urgency and importance.

> "I get about 200 [Direct messages] a day, I think 20% are questions from people living in Vancouver and the rest are people who want to come here. I have gotten messages telling me "I'll be there Monday, please tell me what to do when I get to the airport". Once I did not see a message in time, and the guy told me that he got lost in the Skytrain and had to spend the night in a McDonald's because he did not know where to go, so I felt guilty. I try to direct my efforts to people who are telling me they are arriving soon, or to keep them from falling for scams like paying 1,500 MXN (around 100 CAD) for an ETA that really costs 7 CAD".

Both of them said they receive a lot of Instagram Direct messages asking for help, but they cannot keep up with the influx of new messages they get everyday. I asked one of them if he has considered stopping, and he told me:

> "I have thought about it, but I don't really want to. The channel has brought me many benefits, it has helped me get a foot through the door with the Mexican community, people in restaurants know me and they are nice to me. I also feel that I can help people, but it is very tiring."

This quote is interesting because it signals that his YouTube channel has allowed them to perform "Mexicanness" in a way that gives him a higher standing as a public figure within the

Mexican community in Vancouver, giving him access to spaces he would not have had access otherwise. However, during the interview he also said that having a YouTube channel prevents him from attending events, such as alumni reunions in Vancouver from his Mexican university because he feels too exposed:

"I think about going to the reunions all the time, but I never go because of my channel. I try not to go to places with a lot of Mexicans who I do not know, because there is always this question of if they know my channel and they stare while they try to figure out where they know me from, and it makes me feel uncomfortable".

Bork-Hüffer (2016) argues that "as digital sense of place combines with offline sense of place, the use of digital media contributes to the multiplicity and complexity of sense of place" (p. 2168). In this case, their sense of place in their daily activities in Vancouver is informed by their digital sense of place in the Mexican and Latin American community on YouTube. There are many ways in which both Cruz and George negotiate their identity in relation to their YouTube channels. For them, being a public figure means negotiating their position as a Mexican, as a Mexican living in Vancouver working in a highly demanding job, as a "transcultural expert" who is a source of information for other Mexicans and Latin Americans who watch his videos. They have to confront the tensions between their identities, particularly the "anonymity" that their offline persona grants versus the "public figure" aspect of choosing to post their everyday life in Vancouver, without knowing if these conflicting identities are going to be confronted in their city life.

George leans more heavily into the "public figure" identity, staging the background of his videos in a "newsroom" or office format, signaling that he is trying to visually demonstrate authority

over the topic he is discussing. He does not do this in all of his videos, and it usually happens when he is hosting Question and Answer sessions that he titles #AskGeorge. Both George and Cruz are engaging with what Chan (2019) calls "performance of expertise", their expertise coming from their personal experiences as immigrants living in Canada. In both cases, but prominently in the GeorgeSays channel, an active search for official government information is translated and transmitted to their viewers, who look to them as authorities due to their performance of expertise.

Performing transcultural expertise

The last section of this chapter will explore the ways in which George and Cruz transform their everyday lives into "transcultural expertise" that they translate to Mexican and Latin American audiences. I will engage with their videos that deal with Mexican and Canadian stereotypes, as well as the categories I classified under "Others". I am particularly interested in the videos that employ a dual sense of reference to compare their experiences in Vancouver with their life in Mexico.

Table 2: Themes of transcultural expertise[13]

Theme	Canadian stereotypes	Mexican stereotypes	Dual frame of reference	Other
Cruz en Canada	32.075%	26.415%	34.906%	23.585%
GeorgeSays	31.667%	22.500%	41.667%	33.333%

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[13] The total adds to more than 100% because individual videos are coded for multiple themes

With this coding, I wanted to reflect on how their everyday lives as immigrants are coloured by their constant comparison of life "back home" and in Vancouver. The codes used to subcategorize "Others" are indicative of cognitive, social, and cultural orientations, dealing with issues such as language learning, multiculturalism, Latin American identity, LGBTQ+ activism and political activities, among others. Given the differences in their content, it is not surprising that the GeorgeSays channel is used to broadcast topics beyond his life as a Mexican expat, for example, embracing Latin American identity and other social categories, such as belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. The Cruz en Canada channel, on the other hand, mostly shares videos about his work experience and living expenses and tourist activities around Vancouver. He mostly does not engage with political issues or with other communities in Vancouver.

Table 3: Other themes of transcultural expertise[14]

Other	Language learning	Tourism	Work	Drugs	US migration	Multiculturalism
Cruz en Canada	2.830%	6.604%	10.377%	0.000%	2.830%	1.887%
GeorgeSays	1.667%	10.000%	0.833%	2.500%	0.833%	2.500%

Other	Living expenses	Weather	Latino Identity	Food	LGBT	Political
Cruz en Canada	4.717%	0.943%	0.943%	0.943%	0.000%	0.000%
GeorgeSays	0.833%	1.667%	5.000%	2.500%	2.500%	1.667%

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[14] The total adds to more than 100% because individual videos are coded for multiple themes

Due to the differences in thematic interests of the channels, after a brief explanation of the contents of their videos, I compare the experiences broadcasted to the findings from the interviews with highly skilled Mexicans in Vancouver. As explained in the introduction, I use what Vertovec (2004) calls 'identities-borders-orders' in the political domain in order to understand what aspects of their identity both hosts showcase in their videos. For example, in his videos, George completely embraces his Latino identity. He has around 12 videos where he talks or shows his conversations with other Latin Americans, or events and reunions he attends that are related to the community. This is in line with how the Canadian government understands Mexican migration to Canada, as part of a broader Latin American community.

There are several events in Vancouver that are organized for and by the Latin American community. The main event is a festival called Carnaval del Sol, to which George dedicates a video, although it did not get a significant number of views. His most watched video featuring Latin American content is about a fight that happened in The Cambie Hostel and Bar, a place frequented commonly by Mexicans and Latin Americans, accumulating 14,000 views. His close relationship with the community has resulted in professional and personal relationships with the Mexican Consulate, and other organizations working with the Latin American LGBTQ+ community in Vancouver.

By talking about his belonging to the Mexican, Latin American and LGBTQ+ communities, George is reaffirming certain "identities-borders-orders" reproducing narratives and rituals through public broadcasting has allowed George to legitimize himself as a member of the community in Canada, and this gives him access to political spaces that others do not have.

Most Mexicans I interviewed do not have access to these spaces, such as a relationship beyond access to services with the Consulate. I argue that they give up access to these spaces because they choose to stay away from reproducing particular narratives and assumptions that are expected in the "identities-borders-orders" of Mexicans in Canada. Most of my research participants had a first encounter with other Mexicans in the *Mexicanos en Vancouver* Facebook group, but they decided they did not like the dynamics of the group and chose not to engage with it. This indicates that they chose to steer away from reproducing what they perceived as the "narratives and expectations of civility and public behavior" (Vertovec, 2004, p. 979) from other Mexicans in Vancouver, and instead decided to exploit their identity as professionals or students to build community with others in similar situations.

To a certain extent, this is what Cruz does on his channel although, as discussed in the previous section, he can choose to exploit his "identities-borders-orders" as a Mexican for personal recognition and economic gain. This research does not deal heavily with the economic domain of migrant transformations identified by Vertovec (2004), mainly because Vertovec focuses on remittances and my interviews showed that Mexican expats in Vancouver rarely send remittances. However, having a YouTube channel that is mainly about one's everyday life as an immigrant can be classified as a contemporary "spin-off industry catering to migrant transnational practices" (Vertovec, 2004, pg 984). In a city like Vancouver where there is not a huge Mexican population, it is profitable to exploit one's identity in order to gain economic and cultural capital. As discussed, Cruz has many videos narrating his experiences at work, since this is where he spends most of his time in Vancouver. He does not film in his workplace, but he makes videos talking about his experiences there, for example, the differences that he finds

working in Canada versus working in Mexico and his experiences interviewing for jobs in Canada.

This is not a black and white situation, as both YouTubers were of the few research participants said their social circle is mostly composed of other Mexicans and Latin Americans. I argue this happens because in order to be able to broadcast your experiences in a video platform, you have to be comfortable enough with the perceived identity that others will have of you in order to be able to exploit it for profit. These two case studies are good examples of how highly skilled Mexicans living in Vancouver decide to engage with Mexico. When immigrants — regardless of cultural, economic and social capital — cross the border and are immediately identified as having certain characteristics based on nationality, they are confronted by the fact that every interaction they have with either locals or conationals is going to be coloured by their previous knowledge of others who share the same nationality. It is particularly interesting how YouTubers are validated by political institutions, such as the Mexican Consulate or International Organization for Migration[15], who look at them as public figures that legitimize immigrant stories.

Conclusions

YouTube is an intriguing platform to analyze identity negotiation over the Internet, because this is a highly curated version of oneself that is exploited once there is a certain number of followers in order to obtain a profit unlike Facebook, Twitter and to a certain extent, Instagram. Curating a YouTube channel is an active form of online participation, compared to the passive activities of transnational immigrants discussed in Chapter 3, as it allows for a reflection on the way that

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[15] Cruz en Canada (2017) Challenged by the IOM #SoyMigrante- I tell you my story and I start to cry. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ltmnAHByxo&t=846s

people choose to employ their identification with certain "identities-borders-orders" that are assigned to them by others. Given the limited number of Mexican YouTubers in Vancouver, it is not possible to draw generalized conclusions about their behaviour. Nonetheless, zooming in on these activities contributes to the literature on identity negotiations and the transmission of transcultural expertise to different types of immigrants.

Despite the small sample size of the Youtube channels in my analysis, the thematic differences in the content posted by GeorgeSays and Cruz en Canada allows for an exploration of what Lam et al (2012) call "the dualistic orientation" employed by immigrants, and the way in which they broadcast this to other immigrants. Their exposure as Youtubers gives Cruz and George a platform through which they edit themselves as "transcultural experts" (Chang and Chang, 2019) who, after establishing a viewership, are tasked with providing information about immigration procedures and experiences for others who are planning to immigrate or who have immigrated and need assistance settling in a city like Vancouver.

The fact that they are recognized as transcultural experts by official institutions such as the Mexican Consulate and the International Organization for Migration showcases the new type of diaspora engagement policies employed by institutions. There is a fine line between being recognized as transcultural experts by homeland or international institutions, and having the administrative knowledge or authorization to provide valid and legal immigration advice in the receiving country. Both Youtubers insist on adding a disclaimer to their videos to acknowledge that they are not certified immigration consultants, and thus the information provided in their channel is not enough to guarantee entrance to Canada. However, viewers are not discouraged by this disclaimer to stop resorting to these Youtube channels as valid sources of information about their migration questions. A major limitation of this analysis is that by concentrating only on

Youtube channels, I am excluding the dynamics that stem from the Youtube channel through other digital platforms — mainly Instagram. I decided not to include Instagram or Facebook data because it falls outside of the scope of the research and raised privacy concerns, however I do explain that viewers engage with the Youtubers in multiple platforms, since it was acknowledged in the videos and in the interviews with the Youtubers.

The inception of these Youtube channels, according to both Cruz and George, was motivated by their desire to communicate more effectively their everyday life experiences to their friends and families back home through Youtube videos instead of simply communicating via text messages or messaging apps. Given the lack of other sources of information targeted specifically for Mexican and Latin American audiences, both channels quickly became go-to resources that lack the formality of official government sources such as the content posted by IRCC.

As explored in this chapter, the social and cultural capital due to the standing of both Youtubers as highly skilled immigrants is what makes their content attractive to others who dream or plan to move to Canada. Because of their socioeconomic profiles and particular skills, their videos are no more than aspirational content that cannot, and should not, be used as immigration how-to guides. Immigration policies in Canada do not have explicit guidelines to deal with the effects that information obtained from social media sources can have on immigrant applications to enter the country. These Youtubers have reported in their own videos that having searched for any type of information that could make it seem like they are trying to enter the country irregularly or overstay their ETAs can result in being banned from entering the country.

The effects that vlogging about everyday life as immigrants has had on these Youtubers contributes to enhancing their dual frames of reference between their life in Mexico and their life

in Vancouver, and this in turn informs their online and offline sense of place in Vancouver. This results in an active transnational identity negotiation that they adjust according to the public they are broadcasting their daily activities to. Having an active transnational engagement has benefitted these immigrants economically and in their professional and personal life, but it is a demanding activity that has diminished their anonymity, and makes them more vulnerable and exposed to possible repercussions by the receiving state.

While most of the immigrants who participated in this research do not engage in an active broadcasting of their everyday life in Vancouver, their own social media presence has an impact on their own family or professional networks, who look at them as sources of information for migration pathways to Canada on a smaller scale. In the case of highly skilled migrants giving information to other highly skilled professionals, it is more likely that their everyday life experiences as immigrants and their experiences with the bureaucratic processes of IRCC will be more useful for others who share similar socioeconomic backgrounds. As explored in previous chapters, this does not necessarily mean that they are more willing to provide this information, particularly to strangers, and it can become an additional burden while they navigate their own immigration journeys.

5 Co-constitutive relationships: geographies of transnational identity construction

This research aimed to identify the ways in which highly skilled Mexicans in Vancouver participate in digitally enabled transnational activities. To do so, I employed a mixed methods approach using autoethnography in fieldwork, data analysis from existing quantitative data, data analysis of interactive media such as Facebook and Youtube, and semi-structured quasi ethnographic interviews. The variety of methods allowed for me to examine different fields of everyday life, reflecting on the diversity of spaces in which highly skilled Mexicans inhabit the city. This research contributes to the understanding of an understudied population in Canadian migration studies, and while the results are not representative of all highly skilled Mexicans in Canada, I hope that my conclusions can be used as a base for future work on this subject.

Throughout the chapters, I address how Mexican expats use digital technologies to facilitate their transnational relations in Vancouver and in online spaces both connected and disconnected from the city. In the second chapter, I set out to understand the dynamics of highly skilled Mexican migration in Vancouver, to understand broadly who these people are and what the socioeconomic composition of this group is. This chapter relied heavily on 18 in-depth interviews with Mexican professionals and graduate students who are in different stages of their migration journeys. Additionally, this chapter is coloured by the methodological lens of autoethnography, which allowed me to position myself amongst the research participants.

My conceptual chapter builds on the network theory of migration (Massey et al, 1994) by identifying how highly skilled Mexicans look towards networks of colleagues and organizations

to obtain help in their migration process. As an expat myself, I had several networks in common with the research participants, namely the Tec de Monterrey alumni network, Mitacs and the University of British Columbia. By focusing on highly skilled immigrants and bringing class into the analysis, I am able to look at the institutions that contribute to lowering the costs of migration for members of pre-established elite networks in sending countries. Most notable is the importance of universities — both in Canada and in Mexico — as central actors in the international education sector, playing an important part in the configuration of international networks of skilled migrants.

It should be noted that not all universities, particularly those in developing countries, are as well positioned internationally to provide its graduates with access to networks in different countries. This results in obstacles for immigrants such as the lack of recognition of foreign credentials and official language abilities which are important for successfully engaging with the Canadian Immigration Point System. This came up in a few of my interviews, and these migrants resort to other types of programs such as English language summer schools that also allow them to participate in a two-step migration process, although it accentuates downward mobility and the costs of doing this are higher. English language schools also play an important part in the international education sector, although their role in highly skilled migration is less central and less helpful than universities or transnational corporations.

Going through a two-step immigration process in Canada, or directly through Express Entry — particularly in an expensive city like Vancouver — requires economic capital and cultural capital that still limits most Mexicans in pursuing legal migration to Canada. Given the rapidly changing political landscape in North America, Mexican migration to Canada has been increasing steadily. More research is needed to understand how Mexican migration to Canada is impacted by the

changing immigration regime in the United States, and the tensions that these changes bring to the small established Mexican community in Vancouver. After analyzing who the highly skilled Mexicans in Vancouver are, I address the objective of understanding how highly skilled Mexicans deploy their social, cultural, economic and political capital once they are established in Vancouver to maintain or neglect their ties with Mexico in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

Chapter 3 explored the strategies implemented by Mexican expats to integrate into Vancouver, and how they negotiate their Mexican identity online/offline. Most notably, this chapter acknowledges that given the small size of the Mexican population in Vancouver and the lack of physical places of gathering, Mexicans in Vancouver use digital forums — mainly Facebook groups — to keep in touch with other Mexicans. However, highly skilled Mexicans use these groups only when they first arrive in Vancouver, mostly to obtain help settling into the city. This chapter relies heavily on the interviews to understand the perceptions that Mexican expats have of nationality-based Facebook groups, and while the number of interviews limit the generalizability of the results, this approach provides new insight into the digital transnational behaviour of expatriates.

Most of the research participants commented on their fears of engaging with Facebook groups due to perceptions of irregular activities such as advertising for jobs that do not require work permits. They felt that the groups were mostly about asking for help without offering anything in return. In some of the interviews, expats noted that they believed that Immigration authorities could look at the group, and they did not want to risk being associated with irregular activities. Throughout the chapter, I explore how the risk of vulnerability limits the engagement that highly skilled Mexicans have with other conationals in digital spaces. Other activities outside the digital space are rare, limited to Mexican Independence Day celebrations in September or Mexico

National Soccer Team games. The few participants who commented on attending events organized by the Consulate were generally well connected and worked closely with Mexican authorities in their professional lives. These generally were University Administration professionals, Alumni Network Presidents or Youtubers.

The relationship between highly skilled Mexicans and Mexican diaspora management institutions is particularly limited. I argue that this is a result of the lack of attention that Mexican diaspora strategies give to highly skilled immigrants. The Mexican diaspora management programs designed to engage with the highly skilled population — namely the Global Network of Mexican Talent — are heavily individualistic and rely on the exploitation of professional achievements and interest for access. However, despite the success in establishing the network, and the apparent success that it has had in several regions of the world, this research found that at least in British Columbia, where a chapter of the Network exists, few of the research participants were aware of its existence.

Due to the small sample size of this research and the snowballing sample method, it is possible that other highly skilled Mexicans are more likely to actively engage with the Mexican state than the ones represented in this research. A longer quantitative survey would be an ideal next step to obtain more information about the variations amongst this particular group. There are some new efforts to reach the Mexican community in Canada. The Consulate of Mexico in Vancouver provided me with an event report of the event *Global Forum: Meeting point of the Mexican Community Abroad*, a forum organized by the Embassy of Mexico in Canada and the Institute of Mexicans Abroad. This forum had the objective of promoting a close, active and direct relationship with the Mexican communities living in Canada, and promoting their participation in the development of Mexico. This forum was organized around 3 thematic axes: a)

Economic/Commercial, b) Folklore/Community and c) Academic/Innovation. This report concluded that a major limitation in the success of the Mexican community in Canada is that there are numerous isolated projects that pursue common objectives. This projects were found to "generate little impact on society and expose the lack of bonds and harmony amongst the members of the Mexican community in the eyes of other communities; mistrust among members of the community caused by fear of sabotage, plagiarism of ideas, envy and the leading role of some members over others" (Global Forum Report, 2019, p. 4).

The report was made by a group of individuals who were invited directly to participate in the workshop due to their active status in the community of their particular regions in Canada. This resulted in findings that contrast the outcomes of my interviews, where highly skilled Mexicans in British Columbia generally do not have an active engagement with diaspora policies, and they do not engage with the Mexican state while abroad. They instead take advantage of digital technologies to keep in touch with their friends and families through instant text messages, video calls and social media.

My findings contribute to transnational migration studies literature on digital transnationalism, in particular it advances the literature that deals with the spatiality (or lack thereof) of transnationalism (Eriksen, 2007) and the effects that the non-territorial character of the Internet could have in upholding a collective sense of identity. This work illustrates that for highly skilled Mexicans, sharing a nationality is not enough to maintain relationships with other Mexican immigrants, and this finding demonstrates the importance of incorporating class dynamics and other types of network analysis into research to highlight how immigrants reproduce and import pre-existing social patterns (Vertovec, 2004) in a transnational context, both through digital

technologies and in their everyday lives while they navigate the geographies of transnational identity construction.

For expatriates, transnational networks are also based on kinship and friendship, and in many cases, the same effort is given to keeping transnational networks with friends and family in Mexico and to new networks made with friends and family abroad that were created as part of other migrations related to work or studies. This research contributes to the literature on "ambient co-presence" (Madianou 2016, Baldassar, 2016) by looking at how middling migrants use their economic capital to maintain their relationships through digital technologies, alongside frequent returns to the homeland and visits from friends and family to their new location. While most of the contact is "the peripheral, yet intense awareness of distant others made possible through the affordances of ubiquitous media environments" that Madianou (2016, pg.183) addresses, the economic capacity of middling migrants that allows for them to return several times a year to visit friends and family contributes to the constant maintenance of a "dual frame of reference" (Guarnizo, 1997; and Mountz & Wright, 1996), through which they constantly compare their situation in their "home" society to their situation in the "host" society abroad.

In Chapter 4, I focus on an active way of maintaining transnational relations with Mexico through digital technologies, by analyzing the Youtube channels of two highly skilled Mexicans in Vancouver. The main limitation of this chapter is that it is not possible to draw generalized conclusions from their behaviour due to the small sample size, but it is nonetheless a useful exercise to understand transnational identity negotiation and the digital transmission of transcultural expertise to different types of immigrants.

The broadcasting of their everyday life in Vancouver to a Latin American audience is an active exercise in what Lam et al (2012) call "the dualistic orientation", as well as an active employment of their "dual sense of reference". The active nature of their activities allowed them to establish themselves as "transcultural experts" (Chang and Chang, 2019), tasked with providing information about immigration procedures and experiences for others who are planning to immigrate or who have immigrated and need assistance settling in a city like Vancouver. The social and cultural capital of these expats makes their content attractive to others who dream or plan to move to Canada, but they function mostly as aspirational guides as Canadian immigration policies rely so heavily on individual characteristics and skills.

Research into Youtube channels of immigrants, particularly the highly skilled, provides new insight into the active creation of immigrant networks, as well as the importance of transcultural experts in the translation of immigration knowledge which surpasses the capacity of the state to provide personalized content for different types of immigrant populations. If states or diaspora management institutions recognize other immigrants — who are willing to engage with the state — as translators between cultures, they could be valuable allies in the efforts of assimilation into receiving states and the "diaspora option" policies of sending states.

Based on these conclusions, I argue that sending and receiving states are failing to engage adequately with highly skilled immigrants, who have the social and cultural capital — in the form of education, linguistic abilities and cultural assimilation — necessary to engage with both states successfully. By allowing highly skilled migrants to succumb to the pressure of vulnerability that emanates from what Gilbert argues is "the media's stereotypical portrayal of immigrants and refugees [which] perpetuates a 'we/them' divide where personal circumstances are ignored" (Gilbert, 2013, p. 830), highly skilled Mexican migrants are excluded from fully

integrating into Canadian society, and go through self-exclusion processes from the Mexican community in order to lessen the consequences of being associated with Canadian stereotypes of Mexican migrants. On the other hand, Mexican institutions forfeit valuable contributions from highly skilled Mexicans by not making an extra effort to include them in the diaspora management strategies due to the small size of the highly skilled population abroad. This lack of consideration results in a disengagement with the sending state, and thus diminishes the return possibilities for Mexicans who have obtained knowledge and skill training abroad as well as the facilitation of transnational collaboration.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge and reflect on the role of autoethnography in this work, since it was particularly useful to address the benefits and limitations that my identity played in both the experiences that informed this research and the data that makes this research something bigger than my own experiences. As established in the introduction, I came back to Vancouver to be able to be something other than Mexican, and after spending almost two years studying and interacting with other Mexicans with whom I shared several characteristics, I confirmed my initial inkling that belonging to a similar habitus is more important than just sharing a nationality. Recognizing this allows for placing class at the forefront of transnational research, and examining dynamics that are specific to middling migrants such as the influence of previous international experiences, dynamics of ongoing migration and return, and lack of access to immigration services in the host country or emigration narratives from the sending country.

Throughout this research, I found myself questioning my previous decision of not wanting to interact with any Mexicans, that initial feeling I had in the residence elevator, because throughout the research fieldwork I discovered that many participants had similar experiences to mine. I also felt less guilty because I was not the only one calculating when and when not to

appear Mexican in order to advance my personal and professional goals. However, in a city like Vancouver that has such a small Mexican population, the differences that divide us rather than the ties that bind us are much easier to identify. The small cultural differences and patterns of consumption that impact each expat's habitus such as accents, food preferences, schools you attended or professional identity become increasingly more important in the interactions with other Mexicans. It is not enough being Mexican, as explained by what I call being Mexican+, since it is hard to sustain a "community" without a centralizing organ that goes beyond a common nationality, meaningful relations are created among highly skilled Mexicans that share an extremely similar habitus. What I found is that for myself and other highly skilled Mexicans the priority is taking advantage of our current social and economic capital to effectively claim access to participate in labor markets as Ong (1999) has identified.

In terms of the geographies of identity construction, and particularly the role of sense of belonging in this identity construction, I found that for me and for other expats participating in this research, digital technologies permit us to have access to transnational care networks that are not only geographically bound to Mexico and Canada. In many cases, particularly with those who had previous international experiences, networks of care can be found in many parts of the world. Digital technologies are mainly used by Mexican expats to communicate with friends and loved ones back home, but also in different parts of the world where they have formed attachments as part of this ongoing back and forth between access to education and labor market participation.

In my case, regardless of where I am, I find myself constantly navigating time zones in order to talk with my friends and family in Monterrey, my friends in Dubai, Los Angeles, Singapore, Amman or different parts of Europe and with coworkers in Canada, Uruguay, Paraguay, Costa

Rica, Argentina, the United Kingdom and the United States. In my everyday life, it doesn't really matter if I am in Monterrey or in Vancouver, as long as I have my laptop and an internet connection. However, the nation state is still relevant since my Mexican passport limits or gives me access to other nations, my Canadian study permit allows me to live and work in Canada and I have to pay taxes on my worldwide income to Canada where I live most of the year.

In terms of limitations, I am confident that the data obtained from the interviews, Youtube videos and statistical data were able to confirm what was at first an inkling and became my research findings. However, it is important to reiterate that the Mexican population in Vancouver is relatively small, and more research is needed in order to understand better how highly skilled Mexicans in Canada interact with each other, the Mexican state and with Canada.

I hope that as the political landscape changes in North America, more attention is given to the role that highly skilled immigrants play in the maintenance of networks of migration, and that this research has contributed to better understanding of an understudied phenomenon of Mexican migration. Additionally, this research has contributed to placing class at the forefront of studying the geographies of transnational identity construction of highly skilled Mexicans in Vancouver, and this is a necessary shift that can broaden our understanding of middling migrants' experiences immigrating to Canada.

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