THE XARIPU COMMUNITY

Labor, Migration,

ACROSS BORDERS

Community, and Family

MANUEL BARAJAS

University of Notre Dame Press

Notre Dame, Indiana

© 2009 University of Notre Dame Press
An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust. All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality.

—Martin Luther King Jr. ([1963] 2003)

On December 16, 2005, the House of Representatives passed House Resolution 4437, which threatened to further militarize the southern border and criminalize as felons undocumented immigrants and those assisting them in any way (Nevins 2002, 61–62, 68–69, 74, 78). Like Martin Luther King a generation ago, the Roman Catholic cardinal Roger Mahony instructed his priests to disobey HR 4437 if it became law, arguing that “denying aid to a fellow human being violates a higher authority than Congress—the law of God” (Fetzer 2006, 698). In 2007, competing interests in the US Congress continued to debate the content of a national immigration act and revealed the historical contradictions
of immigration policy, between capital and labor, economic structural
demands and nativism, and the ideals of an open society and rigid border
control (Calavita 1998; Carens 1998). In line with the historical trajec-
tory of US immigration policymaking, any likely compromise-based
immigration act—with its emphasis on border security, exploitable and
disposable guest workers, and a burdensome path to legalization—would
keep immigrants of color marginalized from the economic and social
center of US society for generations to come (Calavita 1998, 98).

This book illustrates the long-term consequences of national borders
on both the sending and the receiving societies. It presents an extended
case study of the Xaripu community originating from Michoacán, Mexi-
co, and elaborates how various forms of colonialism, institutional biases,
and emergent forms of domination have shaped the community’s labor
migration, community formation, and family experiences across the
Mexican and US border for over a century. The Xaripu people generally
constitute a transnational community with home bases in both Xaripu,
Michoacán, and Stockton, California, and reflect a high level of trans-
nationalism—that is, they feel at home in the two nations and maintain
active and fluid social ties across borders. A total of fifty-six persons par-
ticipated in the formal study on which this book is partly based: thirty-
one in California and twenty-five in Michoacán (the concept of trans-
nationalism and the methodology for this extended case study are
elaborated in chapter 2).

Among the central questions guiding this book are the following:
What historical events have shaped Xaripus’ migration experiences?
How have Xaripus been incorporated into the US labor market? How
have national inequalities affected their ability to form community
across borders? And how have migration, settlement, and employment
experiences affected the family, particularly gender relationships, on
both sides of the border?

People from the pueblo of Xaripu began coming to the United States
at the turn of the twentieth century, but it took three generations of
migrating before Xaripus began settling permanently in el norte (the
United States). While US national policy had privileged Western Euro-
pean migration and settlement since the foundation of the United States
(Ngai 2004; Bernard 1998), nonwhite colonial subjects were subordi-
nated in both the US society and labor markets through racist policies,
norms, and practices (Barrera 1979; Mirandé 1985; Glenn 2002). It was only after the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 ended racist quotas and allowed for family reunification that Xaripu migration changed from chiefly involving male laborers to entailing family migration and eventually settlement. This settlement produced a transnational experience for most Xaripus, though some are more active and comprehensively involved in the actual experience of crossing borders (e.g., communication, remittances, travel, social activities) than others.

In the past three decades there has been much interest in the transnational migration experiences of various groups, including Dominicans (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991), Filipinas/os (Parreñas 2001a), Indians (George 2000; Kurien 2003), Puerto Ricans (Toro-Morn and Alicea 2003), Salvadorans (Menjívar 2000; Mahler 1995), and persons of Mexican origin, who remain the most proximate and numerous immigrant population in the United States (Rouse 1992; Kearney and Nagengast 1989; Smith 2003; López 2007). While identifying the forces that dislocate migrants from their homelands and keep them from being fully incorporated into the receiving society (Espiritu 2003b; Parreñas 2001b), scholars often capture only part of the community experience and overlook the most politically and economically marginalized ones—i.e., the non-migrants who remain in the homeland. This absence of a comparative analysis of migrants and those they leave behind lessens our understanding of the full migration experience (Guarnizo and Smith 1999; Sarmiento 2002). Because the voices of immigrants or transnational subjects are privileged over those of non-migrants in the sending communities, the reality—that their dissimilar cultural and material contexts produce different experiences and at times distort their shared realities—is neglected.

Moreover, by focusing on one side of the border (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Torres 1998; Espiritu 2003b), one area of labor incorporation (agriculture) (Kearney 1996; Zavella 1987; López 2007), one generation of migrants (particularly older ones) (Massey et al. 1987; Rouse 1992, 1996), one gender (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994), or an essentialist or monolithic view of Mexican migrants (Massey et al. 2002; Portes and Rumbaut 2006), such scholarship offers a limited view of the labor migration and community formation experiences across borders. Thus this cross-national, comparative study of the Xaripu community builds upon these
early efforts but attempts to offer a more critical and comprehensive understanding of labor migration, community formation, and family experiences across borders. Unlike in most labor migration studies, I emphasize how colonial domination continues as a social-historical phenomenon that has had a significant impact on the quality of life for Xaripus in both Mexico and the United States.6

To do so, I trace the Xaripu community’s century-long international migration and detail how it was initiated, how it has transformed, and how it continues to this day. By examining the particular history of the Xaripus I hope to shed light on the experiences of other communities that were similarly dislocated and transformed by social-historical colonial processes. Furthermore, by focusing on this specific community, I attempt to move away from essentialist hegemonic scholarship that homogenizes and erases differences by producing a falsely universal discourse of “Latinos” or “Hispanics” or “Mexicans,” which, in truth, obscures social inequities and diversity based on race, class, gender, and national histories.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

After this introduction, chapter 2 reviews the scholarly frameworks through which labor migration is typically examined, focusing particularly on the structural (Bonacich and Cheng 1984; Frank 1978; Wallerstein 1974), transnational (Glick-Schiller et al. 1992b; Rouse 1992, 1996; Smith and Guarnizo 2003), and colonial (Blauner 1972, 2001; Barrera 1979)7 perspectives and offering a conceptual framework I call “interactive colonization” that synthesizes and advances their key concepts.8 The interactive colonization framework is derived from the social history of Xaripus and employed to understand their labor migration, community, and family experiences across borders. It aims to advance an understanding of their emergent social location between nations and other social structures, and the implications of this location for ending social inequalities rooted in colonialism. This theoretical model accounts for the overlapping forms of colonialism (internal, external, and new forms) and combines three central concepts of labor migration scholarship—colonization (the longue durée historical view; Braudel 1980, 25–34),9
dialectics, and social interaction—to provide a comprehensive, historically grounded, and dynamic understanding of labor migration experiences in the modern world.

The concept of colonization provides the necessary historical context for understanding modern global migration and social relationships, since descendants of the colonized continue to experience economic, racial/ethnic, and gender subjugation and geographic dislocations.10 The resulting dialectical relations—unequal and exploitative power relationships—create conflict and change in the social interactions that subsequently produce new individual and collective identities. To help illuminate the dynamics of these new identities I employ the Indigenous Nahuatl concept of nepantla—a state of being in-between or hybridity—because it captures the collective identity that emerges from being within conflicting material and cultural contexts (León-Portilla 1990, 10; Guarnizo and Smith 2003, 23). Thus the role that those who occupy the nepantla position play in advancing or impeding social justice becomes a central issue of analysis in this chapter.11 The distinction between structural (collective and enduring experience) and situational (individual and temporary level) inbetweenness is important. In the former type, social categories of in-between collectivities—e.g., middle class, mestizas/os,12 and transnational community—create distinct experiences shaped by collective and shared institutional experiences. Historically, trends show that emergent collective nepantlas develop interests distinct from those at the top and those at the bottom. In contrast, at the more individual level, a person’s agency and pragmatism work within the existing social hierarchies, and an individual may pursue or be given unique possibilities (token positions) in relationship to those with structured advantages along race, class, gender, and nationality. This individual intermediary position—e.g., contractor, administrator, spokesperson—is predicated on reproducing the status quo and can be terminated if this role is not followed.

Chapter 3 provides a social-historical context for the Xaripu labor migration experiences. Xaripu as a pueblo traces its origins to the Pu-répechan Empire, and its people’s labor migration has occurred within the context of various colonialisms (Fonseca and Moreno 1984; Moreno García 1994). Fifteenth-century European colonialism appropriated Indigenous land and labor (Cockcroft 1998; Keen 1994) and created the
first labor migratory movements among Indigenous people in the Michoacán region (Bravo Ugarte 1960). This domination was facilitated by in-between criollos/mestizas(os), who emerged as brokers and/or rivals for the conquering groups.

After Mexican Independence (1821), criollo hacendados gained power over the land and continued the suppression of Indigenous communities with the help of guardias blancas (hired security). Many of the guardias were mestizos—the emerging mixed-race class that would later be favored over more Indigenous communities in the agrarian reforms before and after the 1910 Mexican Revolution (Cockroft 1998; De Bernal 1969; Purnell 1999). Indigenous people were continuously dislocated and forced to migrate even into the twentieth century, particularly after the US-Mexican War and the rise of the US-backed dictator Porfirio Díaz (1876–1910). During this period, the dictator secured Mexico’s neocolonial position in the emergent global hierarchy by opening its most valuable resources (mines, petroleum, and railroads) to foreign domination. The overlapping colonialisms of internal-colonial and neocolonial relations created the conditions for the revolution. It was also a major catalyst for international migration.

Around this time Mexican hacienda elites, in association with foreign capitalists, expanded their landholdings by dislocating Indigenous and mestiza/o communities from their lands and converting their populations to migrant wage workers in extractive enterprises producing for export (Moreno García 1994; Fonseca and Moreno 1984; Gonzalez and Fernandez 2003). The construction of the Moreno Railroad Station near Xaripu in 1900 further encouraged Xaripus to begin migrating to the United States. This migration was formalized with the first US-Mexican guest-worker program of 1917–21, which recruited Mexican men to the expanding US agriculture, mining, and steel industries (Barrera 1979; Gómez-Quiñones 1994). Xaripu migration continued to be a largely male reality through the Bracero Program of 1942–64, but was ultimately transformed by the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act, after which entire families began to migrate north. Although seeking economic improvement in the United States, Xaripus remained occupationally stratified, devalued, and without access to labor protections.

Chapter 4 examines the relationship between racialized work and labor conditions, revealing the logic of colonialism in modern labor rela-
tions. I identify three racialized work settings—Mexicanized, diversified, and Whitened—that represent the differing workforce compositions and labor conditions Xaripu migrants experience. The concept of “Mexicanization” describes how wages and working conditions decline as the workplace’s labor force becomes increasingly Mexican. Mexican immigrants do not themselves deteriorate the labor conditions; rather, employers devalue Mexican workers and thus decrease both the pay and the quality of the working conditions. Thus, Xaripus did not enter such workplaces as low-cost labor but rather were reduced in value once they were on site. In other words, Mexican labor is not cheap but cheapened (devalued), illustrating the continued logic of colonialism—which, I argue, entrenches and universalizes the racial, gender, and class hierarchies that continue to this date (see also chapter 2).

This labor subordination is facilitated by in-between individuals (e.g., contractors, supervisors, political administrators, etc.), who become brokers and manage the appropriation of surplus value (profit) from those at the bottom. This emergent segment has historically been crucial in the ultimate domination of the colonized. Hence, in the extreme stages of Mexicanization, Mexican supervisors are appointed to manage and supervise the super-exploitation of those at the bottom, thus giving the impression that the employers are fair (“color-blind”) and that Mexicans themselves are the ones who keep themselves down—a belief that is often internalized and expressed via the comment uno mismo se baja (We keep ourselves down).

This chapter also analyzes the relationship between the racialization of the workplace and labor conditions in two sections: “Colonial Labor in the Fields” and “Out of the Fields.” In the United States, thanks to immigration policy, housing segregation, labor market opportunities, and class segmentation, older Xaripus generally remained working in farm labor throughout their lives. Many of their children and grandchildren, however, searched for economic opportunities outside of the fields, particularly at the time of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) and 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). While their economic opportunities improved out of the fields in comparison to their elders’ experiences, their labor experiences also reveal colonial hierarchies—occupational segregation in the service and de-skilled sectors and class segmentation within occupations (Barrera 1979; Segura 1990; Glenn 2002).
Chapter 5 explores how *haciendo comunidad* (building community) across borders works as a strategy by which Xaripus reclaim a fuller humanity. Xaripus’ unequal integration as full and equal members of US society keeps many of them oriented toward the homeland even in the twenty-first century (see also Espiritu 2003b). This chapter explores three interrelated concepts in building community across borders: *convivencia, nepantla,* and empowerment. *Convivencia* (affective and egalitarian social interaction) allows Xaripus to construct community on both sides of the border via informal and formal gatherings during *las buenas y las malas* (good and bad times). However, the different experiences between two unequal nations shapes their *nepantla* position for Xaripus *norteñas/os.* Social inequalities and nativist sentiments toward non-whites in the United States (e.g., anti-immigrant, anti-diversity, and anti-bilingual policies in California) create a hostile climate that contributes to their particular *nepantla.* For instance, while young Xaripus reject a one-way assimilation (i.e., conformity with Anglo culture) and seek to reproduce their cultural community in the United States, they have nonetheless undergone material and cultural changes that differentiate them from non-migrants in Mexico.

This social differentiation created by national inequalities becomes a unique source of tension and conflict between transnational Xaripus and non-migrants who remain in Michoacán. While there is evident interest in forming community across borders among transnational and non-migrant Xaripus, social inequalities rooted in national inequities and hierarchies (political, economic, and cultural) strain their relationships.

Today, Xaripus who are able to maintain a fluid and constant movement across the border are generally better off than those who cannot. They are relatively wealthier than non-migrant relatives in both California and Michoacán, and form an emergent in-between group that constructs, to the best of its abilities, a better future for its members. How should this group that exists between unequal power structures relate to those who are advantaged and those who are disadvantaged by an existing social order of privileges (Whiteness, economic hierarchies, and patriarchy) rooted and/or universalized in colonialism? Before pursuing this question in the conclusion (chapter 7), I explore family politics of gender empowerment across borders.
Chapter 6 examines gender equity across borders in relation to the Xaripu family. In the context of globalization and economic restructuring, tremendous stress has fallen on the family, the chief burdens for which have been unequally distributed along gender lines. Two dimensions of gender equity are observed: familial authority and household division of labor. The findings depart from views that assume that through wage labor participation, immigration/settlement experiences, and/or Americanization, women experience more gender equality in the United States (Hirsch 1999; Rouse 1992; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, 2003; Min 1997; George 2000; De Genova and Ramos-Zayas 2003). Although reporting more authority than women in Mexico, Xaripa norteñas experience a more intense work burden inside and outside the home. So why do they perceive themselves as being more empowered than women in Michoacán? To answer this I first discuss Xaripas’ familism and then explore how transnationalism affects the perception of gender equity.

Xaripas’ personal experience with transnationalism, I argue, shapes their perceptions of gender empowerment on both sides of the border. For instance, many US-based Xaripus visit Michoacán to relax, go out, and have fun, while the smaller number who live there year-round find themselves with more work during the peak of tourism. Consequently, non-migrants perceive norteñas as more liberal—that is, partying all the time, staying up long into the night, and going out for recreation. On the other hand, Xaripus in California, who rarely visit and do not feel as much at home in Michoacán, develop the impression that those residing in Michoacán are more traditional and submissive, particularly women. In contrast, transnational migrants, who maintain more active and continuous social ties across borders, do not see a difference in gender relations.

Overall, Xaripu men remain privileged over women across borders (see also Alicea 1997, 617–19; Orozco 1993, 12–15; García 1993, 23–25) and thus occupy an in-between status in terms of power and valorization as men in the larger society. That is, they possess greater social power than the women in their communities but considerably less authority in the broader work and civic sectors than men of higher socio-economic classes. Just as national inequalities empower transnational Xaripus over non-migrants in Michoacán, the gendered division of
labor inside and outside the home privileges men over women. Gender borders inside and outside the family achieve what national borders do: reproduce hierarchical relationships and unjustified inequalities.

The central objective of this book is to examine what has become of the Xaripu community across borders in the twenty-first century, focusing on their economic, social/cultural, and political integration within the larger emergent nation-states, Mexico and the United States. The interactive colonization model points to overlapping colonialisms and intersecting systems of oppression (racism, patriarchy, and capitalism), and how conflict involves not only polar groups but also emergent in-between individuals and groups that become central in advancing justice or maintaining injustice within labor, community, and family. Chapter 7 theorizes—based on the Xaripu experience—how those in-between unequal nation-states relate to those advantaged and disadvantaged by the global hierarchies rooted in colonialism. It concludes that the project of justice and equality can only be informed and advanced by las/los de abajo (those at the bottom), whose vision rests on un mundo sin fronteras (a world without borders).

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF XARIPU LABOR MIGRANTS

The following biographical sketches exemplify the Xaripus upon which this case study is based and provide insights into the nature and form of their labor migration and settlement experiences over time, elaborating the typical experiences of migrants and non-migrants on both sides of the border. They illustrate how Xaripus’ migration experiences have been shaped by their relations to land, work, community, and family. This brief review of the participants’ backgrounds helps contextualize the labor, community, and family experiences presented in the subsequent chapters. Participants are divided into four age cohorts based upon their differing border-crossing experiences (base year 2000): Re-tiradas/os (ages sixty-five and older), Mayores (ages fifty to sixty-four), Hijas/os (ages thirty to forty-nine), and Chicas/os (ages twenty to twenty-nine). A total of fifty-six Xaripus were formally interviewed for this study, and here I select cases that typify the experiences of each of
the four age cohorts (see elaboration of methods and sampling in chapter 2). The decision to examine Xaripas/os by age cohorts was based on the effort to highlight both historical particularities and generational changes among them.

Transnational Migrants: Retiradas/os (Age Sixty-five and Older)

Most of the retiradas/os were born to landless peasant families around the time of the Mexican Revolution (1910s) and the Cristero Revolt (1926–29). Their parents had been initially motivated to migrate in search of work intra-nationally during the Porfiriato Period (1876–1910), when haciendas and foreign investors expanded their monopoly of land and resources and disrupted and impoverished numerous Native communities. Although many Xaripus migrated to work in neighboring haciendas, most remained anchored to their pueblo and returned home at the end of each working season. During this period, a few Xaripus also began migrating to el norte to work21 as a consequence of an increasing global integration with the United States, though immigration policy and occupational segregation kept them in colonial conditions with fewer rights and less freedom to live, work, and move where they wanted (see Ngai 2004; Gonzalez and Fernandez 2003; Barrera 1979).

Thus retiradas/os comprised the second wave of Xaripus to migrate to the United States as laborers22 and are classified as a cohort for several reasons: (1) they were all born landless; (2) they experienced the Bracero Program for longer periods and worked in more diverse occupations than would later generations of migrants; (3) they were sixty-five years of age or older at the time of their interviews; and (4) all of them were considered officially retired even though many continued to work.

The men in this group spent more than half of their working lives laboring in the United States between thirty-eight and fifty-nine years in all (an average forty-nine years). These men were gradually joined in their annual migrations by their spouses and children, particularly after the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act allowed for the reunification of families. The women in this cohort tended to work as both farm workers and homemakers. Working within the structures of labor market demands and immigration policies, retiradas/os’ migration was also
mediated by household survival concerns, generation, and social ties (see also Massey et al. 1987; Palacios Franco 1987; López Castro 1986; Curry-Rodriguez 1988; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991). Benefiting from the family reunification provision, braceros and their spouses typically migrated alone the first few years. They would leave their young children with family in Michoacán; if some children were old enough to work, they would come to el norte, and the mother would stay back to care for the younger children. As they developed familiarity with resources (health care, unemployment insurance, schools) and built community, all the family members eventually migrated and settled in the United States.

Over time, retiradas/os’ movement across borders changed from being labor migrants to being transnational migrants. Previous generations of labor migrants had come to the United States primarily to work and continued to view Mexico as their only home. But as the Bracero Program ended and Xaripu migration shifted to include entire families, Xaripus began to settle in the United States, subsequently altering both their migration patterns and their views of home. Significantly, retiradas/os shifted from considering California just a place to work to viewing it as their families’ year-round home. But even though Mexico is no longer their primary place of residence, retiradas/os maintain a deeply transnational sense of identity and consider both Mexico and the United States their home.

Most retiradas/os continue to visit Xaripu on a yearly basis and spend as long as three months or more there. They particularly like to be in Xaripu for the pueblo’s celebration of the Virgen de la Inmaculada Concepción in January. These trips allow them to avoid the cold in el norte during the late fall and early winter and, more importantly, to see relatives and friends who are visiting the pueblo from other places in Mexico or from Chicago, Los Angeles, Texas, or New York—those they would otherwise not get to see. They also get to do things they do not do in the United States, such as farming, acting in theater, and organizing cultural and sporting events.

Profiles of Select Participating Retiradas/os

Armando and Carolina were born in Xaripu, in 1923 and 1925 respectively, and married in 1943. At the time of their interview they had nine children, forty-three grandchildren, and twenty great-grandchildren.
Both became naturalized US citizens in 1993, and until their deaths in 2002 and 2003, respectively, they had visited Michoacán annually, usually from November to March. Both were laid to rest in their second home, el vallé de San Joaquin.

Armando’s schooling went up to second grade, and Carolina completed the third grade. When the Bracero Program was implemented in 1942, Armando joined other Xaripu migrants who had been coming to the United States since the early twentieth century, among them his older brother, who had moved to Chicago in 1926. The brother had encouraged Armando and other Xaripus to settle there, but many of them returned to Mexico during the Great Depression because of economic conditions in the United States and, for some, the ability to capitalize on the agrarian reforms in Mexico that granted them claim to ejidos (collective lands) in Michoacán. Armando and a few other Xaripu friends were actually deported in the late 1930s and did not return to the United States until the 1942–64 guest-worker program (see chapter 3).

Carolina’s father had also migrated to the United States in the early twentieth century, and she began migrating shortly after the Bracero Program ended. Carolina worked for a few years picking cherries, apricots, and tomatoes in California before returning to Xaripu in the fall of 1966, when she was pregnant with their last child—a baby girl born in 1967. When the baby was nine months old, Carolina returned to work in California; she was able to work until her daughter turned two, when, like many migrant families, she had trouble finding baby sitters and so stopped working in the fields to look after her children. Some of the other women in this situation opted to bring their young children with them to the fields. When her daughter started preschool, Carolina returned to the fields, where she remained until the mid-1970s, when the field strikes began against La Francia grape company in Stockton, California.

Luis was born in 1923 and Nena in 1925. He did not go to school, and she attended for only a few years. Luis first migrated to the United States in 1940; he worked on the railroad tracks for about six months. He later was contracted as a bracero in 1942 with the help of Manuel Carrillo—a Xaripu who worked for the Mexican government and facilitated the guest-worker program. Xaripus remember Manuel fondly because during his visits to the pueblo he would give toys to the children and help
men get guest-worker permits. With Carrillo’s help, Luis traveled from Mexico City to Juarez, where he was directed to US employers and worked in the asparagus fields in las islas de Stockton (Delta River Islands). He continued migrating back and forth, saved a little money, and married Nena in 1950.

Nena’s father had been an early migrant to the United States in the 1920s, and she began to migrate north in 1968. Before she started migrating, she struggled to care for her growing family on sporadic remittances and with no house of her own. As has been documented by others (see Curry-Rodríguez 1988; Palacios Franco 1987; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994), women in her situation often did the impossible—working for subsistence, caring for children, and supporting their migrant husbands when they returned with nothing from el norte. Arguably the most difficult struggle these women endured was losing loved ones to preventable illnesses. In Nena and Luis’s case it was a daughter who died of pneumonia (Sahagun Sahagun 1967, 23–24).25

When Nena first came to the United States, her family lived in a farm labor camp during the six-month working season (April to late October) in French Camp, California, south of Stockton. At the time Nena was forty-four and had six children. Her two youngest children were under five years of age, and she stayed home to care for them while her husband and older children worked in the fields. In 1971, she became pregnant again and, like other Xaripu women, returned to Xaripu to have the baby there. In 1999, her eight children ranged in age from twenty-four to forty-eight. The two oldest sons (forty-five and forty-eight) and the youngest two sons (twenty-three and twenty-seven) still lived with them. Nena and Luis continued their transnational life of living between two worlds and visited Xaripu once a year.

Braceros and Post-Bracero Migrants/Immigrants:
Mayores (Age Fifty to Sixty-four)

Whereas retirados began migrating prior to and during the 1940s and traveled across the United States to work in diverse occupations—e.g., railroads, construction, and farm labor—the mayores cohort generally began migrating in the 1950s and were concentrated in the Southwest, where they worked primarily in agriculture. Although some of their
parents had access to *ejido* lands in Michoacán in the 1930s and 1940s, very few *mayores* were able to work on them, and so at a young age they followed the structured migration streams north.26

The *mayores*’ labor-migration experiences are also distinct from those of the *retiradas/os*. Typically the men have worked for all of their adult years in California’s agricultural fields, first in the capacity as braceros and then as documented or undocumented residents. The women have also worked for more than half of their lives in the United States. As children in Michoacán, the men would have worked in agriculture and with livestock, while the women would have knitted, sewed, done laundry for pay, and worked as domestics. After marrying, some of the women became homemakers, while some of those whose husbands did not migrate continued to work in the jobs they had held as single women. When families began migrating together after 1965, the women typically worked in the fields while they continued their homemaking labor. Age and injury have forced many of the women and men in this cohort out of the fields and into canneries and packing houses, which they alternate with working in the fields. Now older and worn out, most *mayores* search for lighter jobs like weeding, picking cherries, and packing house or cannery work.

*Mayores*’ visits to Michoacán are more diverse in comparison to the *retiradas/os*. While many go to Xaripu every year, some go less often, and a minority have not returned. Their movement across the border has taken on the form of visits rather than the more fluid movements and longer stays of the *retiradas/os*. Moreover, unlike *retirados/as*’ lengthy annual visits to the pueblo, *mayores* tend to visit only as work schedules, money, and children’s and grandchildren’s school and work schedules permit. Despite this, most *mayores* share *retirados/as*’ sense of being at home in both places.

Profiles of Selected Participating *Mayores*

Gregorio was born in 1938, and his wife, María, in 1941. He completed the third grade, and his wife the fifth, in Xaripu. They married in 1958 and have seven children, ages twenty-two to forty-five, and four grandchildren. Gregorio first came to the United States to work as a bracero in 1956. His father had been among the first Xaripu guest workers in the United States during the 1910s and was also one of the first to
benefit from the *ejidos* in the 1930s. Gregorio grew up surrounded by the idea of migrating because many of his great uncles had been migrating to the United States since early in the twentieth century. María was also raised amid migratory experiences—her father and maternal uncles had begun migrating in the early twentieth century. She and their children joined Gregorio on his trips north in 1971 and 1972.

Shortly after this, Gregorio decided to settle the family in California to avoid interrupting the children’s education. María recounted how sad and lonely she was, since at that time only a few Xaripu families had settled permanently in California while most other migrant families continued to return to Michoacán at the end of each growing season. Gregorio has not returned to Xaripu since 1972, though his children visit every six to eight years and María had gone with their youngest daughter in 2002, 2003, and 2006. The couple’s differing views toward their native land are also evident in the fact that Gregorio became a U.S. citizen in 1969, while María waited until 1993 to do so.

Both Lionel and Christina were born in 1943. He attended school to fifth grade, and she finished seventh grade. They married in 1966 and have eight children and over ten grandchildren. Christina’s father had migrated to the United States for work in the 1920s but stopped doing so after the Great Depression because of the extreme racism he had encountered. Christina’s father had attained land in Michoacán during the agrarian reform in the 1930s, and when he died in the 1950s, the *ejido* members (the collective land committee) wanted to transfer the land to someone else to work it. But Christina’s mother successfully fought to keep the land, after which she tended livestock and cultivated the fields on her own to support her family. Christina observed that this experience greatly empowered her and her sisters, all of whom are very assertive and influential women in their respective communities.

Christina and Lionel migrated to the United States with their children for the first time in February 1972. At that time, they had only four children, who ranged in age from a few months to five years old. They continued to migrate as a family until 1975, when Christina decided to settle the family in Stockton to advance their by then six children’s education. Christina and Lionel both became naturalized U.S. citizens in 1993. Unlike her mother and sisters in Michoacán, who worked outside the home and in commerce, Christina worked primarily as a homemaker.
Since settling in Stockton they have visited Xaripu about every seven years, and many of their eight adult children regularly visit Xaripu with their own families. The oldest goes every year. Martha was born in Xaripu in 1940 and has a fifth-grade education. She divorced her husband because of his infidelity, and they have four children and nine grandchildren. Martha has worked for most of her life in farm labor and grew up surrounded by migrants. When she was young, her father—a blacksmith by trade—would leave finished iron products for her mother to sell so that they could support themselves during his labor migrations to the United States. Most of her brothers migrated north in the 1950s through the Bracero Program. After marrying a man from southern Michoacán, Martha worked as a seamstress until 1972, when she and her husband migrated to el norte with their four children. When asked who decided to move to Stockton, Martha explained that her children enjoyed visiting her relatives in Stockton and wanted to live there rather than in Santa María, California. In 1991 she became a naturalized U.S. citizen. At the time of our 1999 interview, eleven people lived in her three-bedroom house, including her estranged husband, who lingered in a makeshift room in the backyard. Martha continues to visit Michoacán almost every year, and with much passion described Xaripu as being como mi madre (like my mother). For many years Martha made annual month-long visits to Michoacán, but in the past few years financial limitations, her work schedule, and obligations to look after her grandchildren have prevented her from staying as long.

Danilo was born in 1947 in Xaripu. His migration pattern was different from that of the other men in this cohort. In 1975, Danilo first migrated to California and spent nine months working in Stockton and the remaining three back in Mexico—a pattern he continues to this day. He has never married, and his connections with friends and family in Xaripu, Guadalajara, and Mexico City motivate him to continue migrating back and forth rather than settling exclusively on one side of the border.

Danilo has a higher level of formal education than all of the Xaripus introduced thus far, reflecting the reality that persons who came to the United States at a later age were able to advance their education further than those who had migrated as teenagers or younger. Danilo was raised by a single mother, Margarita, and all of his five siblings are older and
married. When he was between six and eleven years old he sold Jell-o and popcorn in the streets of Xaripu, and in 1956 he went to school in Jiquilpan (a city about eight miles west). In 1968, after finishing his secondary education at age sixteen, he moved to Mexico City, where he worked with relatives in a butcher market, continued his education, and began to work as an actor, appearing briefly in the Mexican soap opera El Mundo de Juguetes (A World of Toys) in the 1970s. In the summer of 1975, Danilo visited his family in Stockton and took a job in the fields in part to gain firsthand experience as a farm laborer in case a movie role typifying this experience arose.

Danilo continued to travel and work in the two nations until the late 1980s, when a heart problem prompted him to quit working in the fields for good. The fast-paced life in Mexico City and the strain of farm labor in California contributed to his illness. He had worked as a butcher and actor in Mexico from 1963 to 1988 and as a farm worker in California from 1975 to 1994. He stopped migrating sometime between 1986 and 1988, at which point he terminated his acting career and closed his butcher shop in Mexico. The devaluation of the peso, national wage differentials, and family connections also influenced his decision to abandon his work in Mexico City. In California, Danilo worked primarily as a farm worker, doing the most common work among Xaripus: harvesting asparagus, tomatoes, and cherries.

From Migrants to Immigrants: Hijas/os (Ages Thirty to Forty-nine)

Participants in the hijas/os cohort have had diverse migration and labor experiences. Most came to the United States as children in the 1960s to 1970s, while a few came only after the devaluation of the Mexican peso in 1982 and Mexico City’s earthquake in 1985. All of the hijas/os are permanent immigrants to California who worked in farm labor as children and teenagers, some of whom continued to work in the fields even after finishing high school. Because many in this cohort were already legal residents at the time the 1986 law was passed, legalization through IRCA was not the major push for Xaripus of this generation to leave farm labor (see also Sarmiento 2002). Rather, their transition from the fields to nonagricultural jobs was largely prompted by their experience with increasingly poor labor conditions during the late 1980s and
early 1990s, and also by their higher integration in school and social networks with workers outside the fields in comparison to the older cohorts.

Most of the hijas/os spent their first years in the United States in farm labor camps until their families moved into low-income housing projects in the early to late 1970s. As they moved into year-round housing (with some of the hijas/os leaving the fields), their families began to stay longer in the United States. Some families immediately became permanent immigrants in the early 1970s, others continued to migrate back and forth for most of the 1970s and early 1980s, and only a few families prolonged their familial migration into the late 1980s. By the 1990s, almost all families considered themselves to be living permanently in Stockton, even though all visit Xaripu frequently—though for shorter durations than before. While most hijas/os continue to visit Michoacán, only about half have the sense of having a dual home base in both countries, the way their parents and/or grandparents do. For them, home is generally in the United States, while Xaripu is their homeland and place of origin.

Profiles of Selected Participating Hijas/os

Nico was born in 1951 in Xaripu. His father had been a bracero in the early 1940s. Like Danilo, Nico first left the pueblo for Mexico City in 1968; he went to school there and worked part-time as a butcher while maintaining continuous contact with the pueblo. In his interviews he reflected that life was easier in Mexico City during the late 1960s and early 1970s than it was in the 1980s because even laborers could eat meat every day. Business had been good there until the national standard of living declined in the 1980s because of the falling prices of oil and the devaluation of the peso (Krauze 1997; Cockcroft 1998).

In the early 1980s, Nico and his wife, Chelo, who is also from Xaripu, visited the United States with passports and started working in the fields in California. They continued to migrate back and forth until they gained legal U.S. residency status through the Special Agricultural Worker provision that facilitated the legalization of workers who had worked in the fields for ninety days before 1986. They now have four American-born children, ages eleven to seventeen.
Nico, Chelo, and their family’s transnational experience is different from that of most of their cohort in that they spend more time on the southern side of the border than in California. Since 1987, Nico, who has a master’s degree in education, has worked as a teacher in Michoacán for nine months of the year and as a farm worker in California for the remaining three months. He is one of the few transnational Xaripus who works in Mexico for most of the year. Nico considers Xaripu his permanent home, and he and Chelo want their US-born children to be raised there.

Olivia was born in Xaripu in 1960 and migrated to Stockton in 1973 at the age of twelve. At that time she was the oldest of four children; the youngest was four years old. In 1983 she married Daniel, also a Xaripu, and moved to San Jose, California. They have two children, ages twenty-one and seventeen, both of whom were born in the United States. After eleven years in San Jose, the family moved to Stockton in 1995 primarily so they would be closer to family and community. In doing so, both Olivia and Daniel gave up work benefits and a comfortable lifestyle. Olivia earned an associate’s degree from San Joaquin County Delta College, and Daniel studied engineering at the University of Morelia in Michoacán for three years, after which he left his studies because of financial difficulties.

Olivia began to work in the fields of San Joaquin County during summer breaks and on weekends during school starting when she was twelve. She and her siblings initially accompanied their parents to the fields because her parents could not find or afford babysitters. Her father told her to keep all of her earnings, which motivated her to go on working so that she could buy clothing and other items. Olivia recounted excitedly how she bought dresses to go to dances, movies, and “everything” with her friends in Stockton. She contends that her relatively brief experience (six years) in the fields was helpful and did not traumatize her. Beginning in high school, Olivia worked at the YMCA for a few hours each day after school because her parents did not make enough money to provide for her teenage desires. She bought her own car—a 1978 Monarch—in 1979 when she was eighteen, which she recollected with pride: to her mind it illustrates how she had been a survivor who was “independent” and industrious.
Shortly after marrying in 1983, Olivia applied for a job at the post office in San Jose, where she worked from 1984 to 1995, until she moved to San Joaquin, and then transferred to a post office there. She recounted that her would-be employers were impressed by her diverse skills and thus quickly hired her. Olivia became a US citizen in 1978 and Daniel in the 1980s. Their family visits Xaripu about every six to eight years.

Anita was born in 1968 in Xaripu. She finished junior high school in Mexico and went up to the eighth grade in the United States. Anita was only a few months old when she was brought to the United States in 1969. She was the youngest of four siblings, the oldest of whom was then eleven years old. Her mother, Ana, had started migrating in 1966 and would leave her then three children in Xaripu under her mother-in-law’s care. When Ana got pregnant with Anita, she decided to return to Xaripu to give birth. This was during the Vietnam War, and she and her husband, Raul, were concerned that if the baby was born a boy in the United States he would be eligible to be drafted into the war when he turned eighteen. The exclusion of farm workers from unemployment insurance, workers compensation, and minimum wage also discouraged her from giving birth in the United States. Anita lived most of her life as a migrant worker, traveling from Xaripu to Stockton every six months until she married in 1991. Anita now has two daughters, aged thirteen and ten, both of whom were born in Stockton.

Anita started accompanying her family to the fields when she was about four years old but did not begin to work full-time there until she turned fifteen. Her experience was typical for this cohort. When she was very young, though her mother would sometimes stay home to care for her or leave her with other relatives, Anita was more often taken to the fields, where she would sleep in the car, wake up, and then get up to look for her family, who were picking cherries or tomatoes. She worked in the fields for the summers and on weekends during the school term. She was an excellent worker, with tremendous discipline and speed picking tomatoes, cherries, or apricots. Once the tomato harvest ended each November, her family headed back to Xaripu.

Anita’s family’s labor migration ended in the early 1990s, when they settled permanently in el norte. Hers was among the last Xaripu families
who migrated in the pattern of the Bracero Period: six months here, six months there. Their more permanent settlement resulted from her family’s educational goals, decision to get into year-round housing as opposed to seasonal farm labor camps, and shift from the fields to nonagricultural jobs. Since 1997 Anita has worked in the production line in a factory making car lights and other parts for Toyota cars. She now goes to Xaripu every other year for about a week or two when she is able to get time off from work.

**Born in the USA: Chicas/os (Ages Twenty to Twenty-nine)**

Two characteristics differentiate chicas/os from members of the older cohorts. First, most of them were born in the United States while their families lived in farm labor camps or housing projects near the San Joaquin County General Hospital in French Camp, south of Stockton. Second, though they all grew up in farm-working families, only a few have had extensive farm labor experiences, and all have permanently settled in California. Roughly half of them visit Xaripu on a regular basis (once every one to three years), while the other half does so infrequently (once every four to six years).

Four of the women in this cohort have university degrees, which is atypical for women and men from Xaripu. Their higher educational attainment appears related to their shared experience as students in a migrant education program that connected them with the Summer Youth Employment and Training Program, a federally sponsored program for economically disadvantaged youth that introduced them to different types of occupational opportunities. These experiences exposed them to work other than farm labor and encouraged them to seek easier and better paying jobs via higher education.

The youth program generally placed girls in public service, teaching, and health-related jobs and boys in janitorial positions, recreational centers, and law enforcement. Possibly as a result of exposure to jobs that require higher education, more young women than young men in this community obtain bachelor’s degrees. These young women tend to work in the private sector as clerical workers and sales staff or in public service as educators or health care providers. In contrast the young men gener-
ally work in warehouses, factories, construction, landscaping and gardening, and transportation. Their employment opportunities have been shaped by a racialized and gendered labor market that will be discussed in chapter 4 (see Segura 1990; Soldatenko 1991; Parreñas 2001a; Hesse-Biber and Carter 2000).

Profiles of Selected Participating Chicas/os

Tita was born in French Camp, California, in 1974. She obtained a bachelor’s degree from the University of California, Davis, and completed a master’s degree at California State University, Sacramento (CSUS). Her thesis focused on Chicanas/os’ educational attainment and the role of multicultural education. While in college, Tita worked as a substitute teacher in Sacramento and Stockton. At the time of our interview, she was single and lived in Sacramento with Valencia, her cousin, who is also a college graduate (Tita got married in 1999).

As a young girl Tita worked a few days picking cherries with her brothers while on vacation from elementary school, shortly after her mother had had a baby (mid-1980s). At the age of fourteen Tita participated in the Summer Youth Employment and Training Program, which gave her clerical training; she worked as a clerk for the school district from 1987 to 1992. In the early 1990s she also worked for migrant education as a tutor. In the fall of 1992 she started school at the University of California, Davis, graduating in 1997. She was a caseworker for Head Start from January to September 1998 before beginning work as a substitute teacher while completing her master’s degree.

Tita’s migratory experience is that of a second-generation Chicana who maintains symbolic links with Michoacán (i.e., the homeland), rather than that of a transnational migrant (see Espiritu 2003b). She has briefly visited Xaripu three times in her life, at age two, six, and sixteen. Her parents are also infrequent visitors to Michoacán. Tita’s home is California, and her short and infrequent visits to Michoacán demonstrate her rootedness to the United States.

Martina was born in Xaripu, Michoacán, in 1972. She was brought to the United States in 1973, and in 1975 her family decided to settle permanently in Stockton. In 1981 they moved to Lathrop, California, where they have lived ever since. Martina married a man from Jalisco, and they
have four children. Martina has a bachelor’s degree in sociology from University of Pacific, and in 1999 she worked for the Department of Corrections before becoming a full-time elementary school teacher.

Martina has also worked with the criminal justice system as a counselor and as a parole officer. Her early family experiences in Manteca, California, were characterized by conflict with the larger White community and a White police department. I grew up with her brothers in the housing projects in Stockton, and we also worked together in the fields as children in the 1970s and for most of the 1980s. When they moved out of the housing projects into a White working-class neighborhood, they experienced intense racial hostilities. Racial minorities “got jumped” (assaulted) by racially/culturally intolerant youth, and her brothers would often arrive home from school bruised and bleeding. In reaction to the social rejection, they fought back and coalesced with other neighborhood kids into a defensive block, which was inaccurately labeled a “gang” by the local media and police. These experiences influenced Martina’s interest in working with youth in a hostile and racist community and her later decision to become a teacher.

Martina worked from 1996 to 1999 as a counselor in youth group homes, and in 1999 she worked for the San Joaquin County Juvenile Department. Martina described her job this way: “[We] change positions every eighteen months. Right now my duty is to place kids with an electronic device to make sure they stay home, rather than confining them in the juvenile facility. There is no room for them there.” She quit her job early in 2000 because of what she felt were discriminatory practices in the department and now works as an elementary school teacher. Martina, who is married and has a growing family, visits Michoacán once every four to six years.

Lucina was also born in French Camp, California, in 1976. She is the youngest of eight siblings, is single, and lives with her parents. Lucina and her parents visit Xaripu almost every year, except when they cannot afford to or when she cannot get the time off from work. Lucina has worked mostly in service-sector jobs in restaurants and as a cashier. In 1999, at the time of our interview, she had started to work part-time for the probation department, writing re-institution letters, reading court orders, and working for the DAs office. She enjoyed the work and the
work environment, which she described as friendly. But as a part-time worker she did not receive health insurance and noted, “It is very unfair [not to have health coverage]. If I’m not mistaken, all government jobs offer full-time coverage. That’s what the part-time workers are fighting for.”

Her parents’ experiences with work injuries may have heightened her concern about the need for affordable health insurance. Her father, Juan, worked in California’s agriculture industry from 1955 to 1995, and Lupe, her mother, has worked in farm labor since 1972. In 1995 Juan was forced to retire as a result of a back injury sustained in 1964 while picking lettuce. Juan was disabled for some time and then went to Guadalajara, Jalisco, to be fitted for a special back-support belt. The canvas belt was about twelve inches wide with metal plates that ran parallel to his spine and was tightened from the front like a shoe lace. Juan wore the belt for back support while working in the fields for three more decades. Despite frustrations with her job, Lucina thinks it would be difficult to find a comparable one with equal pay since she only has a high school diploma.

**Connecting the Biographical Sketches to Colonial Dislocations**

These biographical sketches provide background context on labor, community, and family relations for the following chapters. Moreover, they illustrate how, though Xaripus have crossed borders for over a century, their movement has changed in form and meaning, especially for younger cohorts. The following chapters on theory and the social history of Xaripus further illustrate how the concepts of “migrant” and “immigrant” are inadequate for capturing Xaripus’ experiences crossing borders. The term “immigrant” obscures Xaripus’ historical and even ancestral connections with Indigenous people colonized by the Spanish and later by Anglos in the Southwest (Warren 1985, 4). “Migrant” implies transient foreigners coming primarily to work and then returning to their place of origin, while “immigrant” suggests foreigners coming to stay permanently. Older Xaripu cohorts had parents and relatives who worked in the United States for most of their adult lives. These Xaripus were not new to the United States, and calling them either migrants or...
immigrants obscures their long historical movement caused by American political-economic interventions in Mexico (Cockcroft 1998; Gómez-Quiñones 1994; Gonzalez and Fernandez 2003; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Sassen 1996b). Their migration parallels Southern Black migration at the turn of the twentieth century—dislocated by monopoly capitalism, agribusiness mechanization, and recruitment by northern industrialists (Bonacich 1976; Du Bois 1903). Occupational segregation in low-wage labor and immigration restrictions maintained Xaripus’ continuous migrations through most of the twentieth century, and their more permanent settlement in the United States led to various forms of transnationalism.

The majority of hijas/os came to the United States as children who routinely traveled back and forth between Michoacán and California. Through the family reunification provision of the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act, women and children began migrating in the mid-1960s. By the late ’70s most had settled permanently in el norte, though most continue to visit Michoacán as frequently. Younger Xaripus, however, stay for much shorter periods of time. Chicas/os generally were born in California, did not work in agriculture, and visit Michoacán less frequently than the older cohorts. Regardless of their citizenship status, most had parents, grandparents, and even great-grandparents who worked most of their lives in the United States.