Identity and rural migration: A phenomenological approach

Identidad y migración rural: Un enfoque fenomenológico

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Abstract

The objective of the paper is to analyze the experiences of returned migrants in Tejupilco, State of Mexico. We use the phenomenological epoche as a theoretical and methodological axis, and we apply it to ten individuals who migrated to the United States that for different reasons returned to Mexico (August-November 2007). In this way, the paper starts from the premise that it is necessary to deepen the migratory experience, beyond the established pragmatic knowledge, and to base the experiences of the individuals in a factual way. The results show the need for the social sciences to appreciate the migration issue in a phenomenological way. The findings demonstrated the existence a migratory identity of dynamic nature that does not depend on macrosocial factors but depends on the activity performed by the subject as a social actor. Likewise, the results allow us to conclude that the way in which migrants assimilate the meaning of experience is a source of transcendental meaning that currently represents their lifestyle.

Keywords: phenomenological epoché, migratory experience, social actor, conscience, human agency.

Resumen

El objetivo del presente artículo es analizar las experiencias de migrantes retornados en Tejupilco, Estado de México. Se utiliza como eje teórico y metodológico la epojé fenomenológica, aplicada a diez individuos que migraron a Estados Unidos y que por diferentes razones regresaron a México (agosto-noviembre de 2017). De esta forma, se parte de la premisa de que es necesario profundizar en la experiencia migratoria más allá del conocimiento pragmático establecido y fundamentar las experiencias de los individuos de manera fáctica. Los resultados muestran que existe una necesidad en las ciencias sociales por apreciar

de manera fenomenológica el tema migratorio. Se demuestra la existencia de una identidad migratoria de naturaleza dinámica que no depende de definiciones macro-sociales sino de la actividad que realiza el sujeto como capacidad de ser actor social. Asimismo, denota la manera en que los migrantes asimilan el significado de la experiencia, fuente del sentido trascendental que representa actualmente su estilo de vida.

Palabras clave: *epojé* fenomenológica, experiencia migratoria, actor social, conciencia, agencia.

Introduction[1]

The cause of emigration from Mexico to the United States is driven by income disparity, pursuant to which the perception of economic well-being in the host country is greater than what the migrant believes can be achieved in his country of origin (Arizpe, 2015). Likewise, the constant coming and going of Mexican migrants has become a transnational system that is easily accessed through social networks (Anguiano & Cardoso, 2012; Ariza & Portes, 2007; González, 2012). This system is evident in most of the Mexican communities in which the main cause of migration remains to be a lack of work in the place of origin. Moreover, despite their work efforts, some of the returning migrants do not find lucrative ways to exploit the talents and skills acquired in the migration experience (Gandini, Lozano-Asencio & Gaspar, 2015; Nicolás, 2016; Rivera, 2016). In the case of the State of Mexico, according to the "Survey on Migration from the State of Mexico to the United States" (Encuesta sobre Migración de Mexiquenses a Estados Unidos [emmeu]), between 1970 and 2009, this state rose from twentieth to fourth place among states with the highest emigration rates in the country and was third in the country for remittances received from abroad (González, Montoya & López, 2012). One of the state's regions with the largest migratory flow is Tejupilco, in the southwestern part of the state. It includes the municipalities of Amatepec, Luvianos, Tejupilco de Hidalgo, and Tlatlaya (Salas, 2017; Salas & Alcántara, 2015). According to the Secretariat for Social Development (Secretaría de Desarrollo Social [Sedesol], 2015), the region has more than 420 communities, of which only the municipal seat (Tejupilco de Hidalgo) and Bejucos are considered urban areas; the rest are rural and have high to very high rates of marginalization.

Tejupilco Municipality is dominated by farmworkers with a proclivity for international migration and is distinguished by the economic advancement of the migrants who have returned home (Salas & Alcántara, 2015). This can be observed in neighboring communities such as Rincon de Jaimes, Rincon de Aguirre, Rincon de Lopez, and Zacatepec, among others, which have been surrounded by the demographic imprint of new settlements. These communities mostly consist of the families of migrants to the United States who have improved their economic status and upon returning, seek better housing and living conditions than the rural reality of their places of origin.

Emerging from this scenario is the premise that social adaptation abroad eventually disrupts the migrant's identity and that this adaptation is believed to stem from the various social lived experiences during the migratory journey. This approach is incorporated into the epistemological conceptions of the social science perspective based on Husserl's phenomenology and specifically from the phenomenological *epoché*[2] perspective. The way in which phenomenology operates analytically in experiences describes how this perspective can be established in the sociological framework of migration studies. The objective of this research study is to propose a theoretical approach for analyzing the migratory phenomenon, focusing on specific events in the social actors' experiences (Long, 2007).

The Theoretical Nature of Identity in the Social Sciences

Since the 1950s, identity has become a central concept of the social sciences and humanities, in which concerns about problems rooted in mass society have been transformed into several approaches based on hypotheses about the nature of society that constitute the foundation of contemporary studies (Bagga-Gupta, Hansen & Feilberg, 2017; Coté, 2006; Giménez, 1996; Schwartz, 2005). At the end of the 20th century, academia called for more prominence and a better command of the subject of identity as a new object of study in the fields of sociology and anthropology. This was based on concern about how national attributes are developing and the trends of globalization, transnationalism, and cultural homologation (Giménez, 1996). This was viewed as a social crisis that was called the general crisis of identity, the impacts of which were mostly felt by developing countries facing the challenges of modernization (Dubar, 2002; Giménez, 1996). This crisis can currently be observed in the international migration dynamic, in which the capitalist influence operates and seduces using the lure of modern consumption but does not provide the financial means to acquire such goods (Ariza & Portes, 2007, p. 654). This prompts mostly collectivist individuals from developing societies to migrate to developed societies that are notably individualistic (Schwartz, 2005).

From this point of view, identity is influenced by the globalization of current migration patterns that Nation-states (as static entities) use to classify the people, citizens, and migrants that move through them or within them (Bagga-Gupta et al., 2017). This means that cross-border exchanges are a transnational exercise intermediated by global trade policies in which border operations and the migration across them also affect the transfer of interpersonal and interregional value (Kearney, 2006). However, it is noteworthy that the issue of identity has not been fully examined in migratory studies (Schwartz, 2005), most of which are limited to describing the influence and evolution of globalization on migration dynamics from a demographic perspective (Zarur, 2016). The consensus in the literature is that research on the subject of identity

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[2] To suspend the general thesis inherent to the essence of nature; we put aside all of its ontic implications; the entire natural world, that is constantly present and that will continue to be a reality of which we are always aware even if we place it in brackets. By doing so [...], I do not deny this world, as if I were a sophist, or doubt its existence, as if I were a skeptic; but I practice the phenomenological *epoché* that requires me to suspend all judgment regarding existence in space and time (Husserl, 2013, p. 144).

is constrained by the theoretical constraints of the essentialist paradigm of the nation-state (Coté, 2006; Bagga-Gupta et al., 2017; Giménez, 1996, 1997, 2000; Schwartz, 2005; Schwartz, Montgomery & Briones, 2006; Wetherell, 2010; Wetherell & Mohanty, 2010). Despite the above, some work since the turn of the century has outlined a dynamic perspective of identity that incorporates potential analytical methods that go beyond global static patterns. One example is the study by Bucholtz & Hall (2005, p. 585) that describes the current status of identity:

> Identity is the product rather than the source of linguistic and other semiotic practices, and therefore is a social and cultural rather than primarily internal psychological phenomenon. Identities encompass macro-level demographic categories, temporary and interactionally specific stances and participant roles, and local, ethnographically emergent cultural positions. Identities may be linguistically indexed using labels, styles or structures, and linguistic systems. Identities are relationally constructed with several, often overlapping, aspects of the relationship between self and other, including similarity/difference, genuineness/artifice, and authority/delegitimacy […].

In this regard, the issue of identity has been thoroughly debated but remains poorly systematized in terms of a stable theoretical application. Nevertheless, there is clearly a need to see it as an open and dynamic problem area, one that is a collection point for a wide range of concerns, tropes, thought patterns, certain binary debates, and specific types of discussions (Wetherell, 2010) that challenge the essentialist and traditionalist perspective of states as being a weak analytical approach to characterizing human identity (Bagga-Gupta et al., 2017).

Although analytical approaches considered "revolutionary" have their theoretical genesis in Husserl's phenomenological perspective that was more solidly cemented by Max Weber (2014) when he established the social aspect of the individual, they have currently resurfaced in the theoretical structure of "social constructionism" (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Long, 2007; Searle, 1997). The social aspect of Husserl and Weber's phenomenology was developed as a theoretical system by Alfred Schütz (2004), who established the guidelines of the sociological discipline by proposing the relationship between subjectivity and action. Luckmann (a disciple of Schütz) and Berger redefined the sociology of knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 2003), applying the phenomenology of everyday life (Dreher, 2012). This phenomenological stream provides theoretical bases for understanding the social constructionism that Norman Long (2007) expounded in his social theory, in which identity is externalized as a fluid and malleable product that materializes as people position themselves or are positioned in social interaction through a variety of contexts, including discursive environments (Bagga-Gupta et al., 2017).

The guiding question for this study is as follows: how can the malleable nature of identity be transformed through the migratory experience? The current landscape of migration analysis in Mexico has raised issues regarding a dynamic identity when addressing topics such as the following: *1)* social networks and altruistic links organized by migrants in the host countries in support of their places of origin (Anguiano & Cardoso, 2012); *2)* transnationalism and its connection to the transformation of migrant identities (Ariza & Portes, 2007; Jardón & Corona, 2012; Nicolás, 2016); *3)* the inclusion of women in the migratory flow (Salas & Baca, 2016); *4)* the inclusion of indigenous peoples (Fox & Rivera-Salgado, 2004); and *5)* the field of emotions

(Ariza, 2016; Sánchez, 2016). These aspects show that research is not focused exclusively on demographic and economic perspectives: little by little, they demonstrate that "migration cannot be (fully) understood by simply aggregating abstractions and generalities that attempt to demonstrate and explain by centering on supposed common features of human beings displaced across borders and territories" (Zarur, 2016, p. 381).

The analysis proposed for this research is built on this inflection point that combines the malleable nature of identity and a qualitative approach to the migration issue. It springs from the phenomenological *epoché* approach presented in Long's social theory that enables the observation of the dynamics and organization of internal and external factors, and relationships systematized by human action and consciousness. This theoretical approach is based on an identity that is open and dynamic in nature, as opposed to the nation-state concept that ignores the capability of agency and the circumstantial context of the migratory experience. According to Long,

> […] we need to document the ways in which people guide or entangle their paths in a series of difficult scenarios, turning bad circumstances into ones that are less bad" [...] This will lead us to clarifying the links between the small worlds of local actors and global phenomena (Long, 2007, p. 45).

This attitude reflects the nature of an identity that, according to Dubet & Zapata (1989), is not a given, nor is it unidimensional. Instead, it is an identity that progressively develops from the administration and experiential organization of an actor who merges different levels of identity, producing a subjective social image of itself. Next, we attempt to answer the following question: how can we reveal the outcome of this identity in the migration experience?

Epoché and Experiences: An Analytical Approach for Observing Identity in Return Migration

Phenomenology is considered a methodological approach in the analysis of consciousness that, as an object of study, is the systematic unit that links experiences and gives them meaning and significance (Husserl, 2011). The starting point is to disengage from natural thought that, according to Husserl, ignores "the difficulties that affect knowledge in life and in science" (2011, p. 59) and to position oneself in an attitude of disinterested observation, suspending "completely all judgment on the space-time existence" (2013, p. 144). For Husserl (2011, p. 161), this attitude consists of "not accepting any knowledge as knowledge", which does not mean that it should be completely rejected when examining it, but that only those outcomes that have been attributed to knowledge are rejected.

The way in which phenomenology starts with consciousness as an object of study is through the *epoché* by bracketing any prejudices about the object of study. The purpose is to show the object (experiences) as it appears to consciousness (events experienced), neutralizing the prejudices around it to describe its meaning in a pure way (Husserl, 2013). In this manner "[...] the events experienced cannot be doubted when one lives through and reflects unassumingly on them; the direct, intuitive grasp and possession of (events experienced) are already something known; (so then), the (experiences) are the first absolute data" (Husserl, 2011, p. 61).

This phenomenological attitude is used as method to establish the theoretical approach followed in this study, since it is considered necessary to delve deeper into the migration issue using the migratory experience itself and to go beyond existing practical knowledge.[3] Therefore, the *epoché* is needed to guide the research objective and to reveal how the identities of social actors on migratory journeys are dynamic. This requires what authors such as Dubet & Zapata (1989) and Giménez (1996) call "a return to the subject". To account for this, two tasks are undertaken here: to show the condensing effect of the *epoché* when positioning itself in the experiences and to apply it to the field of study that this theoretical approach addresses.

The context for this approach is the phenomenon of Mexican migration to the United States. As such, it is necessary *1*) to address the subject of Mexican migrants who return home; *2*) to place geographical limits on the context of the analysis: Tejupilco, State of Mexico; and *3*) to define the profile of the migrant: people with experience migrating to the United States who have either returned home to Tejupilco or who have decided to settle there.[4] These parameters reveal a subject with specific characteristics that identify him or her with a group. The participation of this subject is only viewed as an "agent" or link between the social field in which he develops as an actor and the field of consciousness in which his experiences are systematized (Dubet & Zapata, 1989; Giménez, 1996; Husserl, 2008). The contextual spheres around the subject heavily influence the formation of identity through interaction in and with these contexts, creating the social field (Long, 2007) or world of everyday life (Berger & Luckmann, 2003; Husserl, 2011, 2013). The broadening of this social field depends on the degree of mobility and interaction of the subject with his context, which is composed of a variety of elements that configure, delineate, and define it (Long, 2007). In the case studied here, the broadening of the social field is seen in the dynamic nature of the migratory phenomenon: before, during, and after. This implies different scenarios and methodological categories that are dynamic in nature.

Thus, it is considered that the interaction of the migrant subject with the social field becomes the foundation for the identity. As Giménez (1997, p. 12) comments, "[identity] is the self-perception of a subject in relation to others, which in turn corresponds to recognition and 'approval' of the other subjects". However, this study is not concerned with how these circumstances or structures intervene in the delineation of the subject (at any scale or degree), but with what is "lived" by the subject in these interactions and circumstances as an experience of something that happened. As such, and according to Dubet & Zapata (1989), it can be said that identity is the outcome of certain categories and relationships and cannot be developed by defining it, but only under the principle of uniqueness and unity; a capacity that only develops through the subject agent (Heidegger, 1971, 2013) and the systemic activity of consciousness (Husserl, 2013; Sánchez Ortíz de Urbina, 2015).

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[3] We will refrain from describing the philosophical specifications and distinctions of phenomenological *epoché* and transcendental *epoché* or the various eidetic reductions and noetic and noematic structures (Husserl, 2008; 2013) that a strict phenomenological analysis requires. This should not detract from previous work, but instead delineates the epistemological framework that guides this research study.

[4] It is important to clarify that there is no interest here in categorizing migrants by gender, age, or social status. As will be explained later, our interest is the observation of experiences and not their contextualization by social or existential categories.

According to Castles (2014, p. 249), migration "is a social process, in which participants undergo processes of change and act [...] to modify the conditions and practices in which they find themselves". The author notes the broadening of the "social process" concept to include a variety of circumstantial elements and tangible and intangible assets that contextualize the migration scenario. From this, one can infer how "the participants suffer and act" in this process. The question is as follows: how can we visualize and describe or analyze the elements and assets that spur the modification of conditions and practices? The *epoché's* bracketing of the contextual circumstances of the subject (migrant) makes the analysis more accessible for observing people in everyday life (Berger & Luckmann, 2003) in a factual state. This is not in the manner of the empirical sciences but as something "self-made" that belongs to the person – in other words, what is "lived" (Heidegger, 1990; Husserl, 2011; Long, 2007; Schutz & Luckmann, 2003) in those circumstances. This is conceptualized in the strictest sense of the word "apprehension" - that is, belonging (Heidegger, 1990).

The following are two different ways of observing the subject studied: *1)* the way he is doing (living) things: observe the actions; and *2)* the way he has done (lived) things: observe the fact. In the first, the researcher can make judgments: he does it well or not, it is right or wrong, and the best way to do it, among others. In the second, these judgments are suspended; they cannot classify, organize, or reference; they do not interfere because there is no action, but instead there is a fact, a lived experience. This leads to the observations by which the judgments are delineated and depend on the action and the subject in question (migrant). The researcher does not have direct access to the fact (lived experience) except through the experience of the subject (Heidegger, 1971). The researcher's task is "reduced" to describing the "apprehension" of the subject, in other words, describing the fact of what was lived: the experience (Berger & Luckmann, 2003; Husserl, 2011). In this way, the classification, organization, and causal references (to the context) depend only on what is given, on what is observed in the description of the experience. This is very important because the contextual circumstances (social field) are implicit as correlates of consciousness, which means that they are the essential content of the experiences (Husserl, 1997, 2011 and 2013).

The approach offered by the *epoché* filters how the migrant reveals his assimilation into a different culture through the telling of what he has lived (experiences). Meaning runs through this narrative without social or structural prejudices and expresses the process that changes the world's conditions and practices for life and identity, whether personal, social, or cultural. The above describes a flexible methodology consisting of previously established categories and categories developed inductively in the context of the analysis. As such, this article proposes to show how the described theoretical approach can be useful when the objective is to visualize the manner in which the subject uses experiences in making decisions and adapting to a foreign context.

Methodology

The selection criteria for the object studied were refined based on participatory observation of the researcher over a two-year period of living in that community. The findings include the following: *a)* the community has a high rate of migrants returning

from the United States, and this rate is considered commonplace for the majority of the inhabitants; and *b)* the neighborhoods around the municipal seat have many residents who, for the most part, are not from those neighborhoods. However, because of the income earned during migration, they have been able to obtain better housing and living conditions than can be found in the rural areas they came from.

The fieldwork was conducted from August to November 2017. The first step was to have the students of the two main high schools in the municipality (n=250) (Tejupilco Regional High School and the high school associated with Tejupilco Teacher's College) answer a questionnaire. Its purpose was to identify relatives or acquaintances of the students with experience migrating to the United States. The selection of key respondents was carried out sequentially using a selective, nonprobabilistic, snowball (discriminatory) sampling (Patton, 2002) that applied the following criteria: the individual has at least two years of migratory experience and has returned home or to a chosen location within the region studied.

Ten returning migrants were identified: three women and seven men between 31 and 53 years old. Of these, six were 31-35 years old, one was 43, and three were between 52 and 53 years old. All were born and currently reside in Tejupilco, albeit in different locations.[5] The migration to the United States occurred as follows: two cases in 1985, three cases from 1995 to 1999, four cases between 2003 and 2004, and one in 2011. Regarding the return trip, the earliest cases were in 1994 and 2000, followed by one in 2007; the rest were between 2013 and 2015. The length of stays in the United States were as follows: one three-year stay, two nine-year stays, four stays between 10 and 13 years, two 15-year stays, and one stay that lasted 20 years. This represented an average of 11.7 years of migratory experience for the group.

It is important to note that the differences in the migratory experiences are not attributable to the length of stay but instead reflect the social events that occurred and how the migrants absorbed these events. Accordingly, the objective of this study is to shed light on how the subject accommodates these experiences to adopt and adapt to a foreign environment. In the cases analyzed, the motivation to migrate was rooted in financial need. However, the migrations themselves differed in that some crossed the border by walking through the desert, others crossed undocumented by car, and others entered the U.S. on a tourist visa and renewed their tourist status by sending documentation to Mexico without appearing in person. In all cases, their migratory status in the U.S. was irregular; two of the subjects migrated continuously on tourist visas and extended their temporary stays while working in the U.S.

The daily migration pattern in the region showed that eight of the ten migrants were always coming and going. Some made two or three round trips, others made five, and still others did the round trip "14 times or more", including Guadalupe and Ángeles, whose experiences will be described later. The reasons for migrating vary and are determined by contextual events and circumstances, along with the individual's decision to migrate and assimilate. For some, having a visa made it easier to come and go, while for others such as Juan Carlos, who was deported over four times, reimmigration represented a social field that was different from the others. In Jose's case, because of the circumstances in which he was deported from the U.S., he did

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[5] The interview information obtained from two of the respondents Lourdes (2017) and Sergio, (2017) was omitted because of problems identified in the experiences reported. However, we acknowledge their collaboration and participation in the research supporting this article.

not have the financial means to try again. Miguel only made one trip that lasted 20 years and decided not to return to the U.S. after being deported. His reasons for not attempting to return were related to the causes of his deportation and the obstacles to entering the U.S. Accordingly, he decided to settle where he started with the security gained by achieving an economic status "maybe not better, but possibly the same as in the United States" (Miguel, 2017).

In general, the migrants' stories reveal migratory histories originating in the same rural reality. However, it is interesting to compare the subjective experiences of different lifestyles and the differences resulting from contextual assimilation, family and cultural influence, gender, and more; the decisions and attitudes of a completely different lifestyle than where they came from; the actions taken during their ups and downs, and above all, the manner in which migrants absorb the significance of an experience as the basis for the overall significance of their current lifestyles.

The sample size was determined by observing and analyzing the various ideas obtained in the data collection. When these became repetitive, a saturation point was declared (Strauss & Corbin, 2002). The information gathering was guided by Glaser & Strauss's Grounded Theory (1967) and consisted of the following: *a*) ten semistructured interviews organized according to the status of the migration (before migrating, during the stay in the U.S., and after return to Mexico) and the stated objectives of the research; *b*) to find and understand structures and meanings, the interview material was transcribed and edited, read and reread; *c*) codes were generated inductively to identify significant patterns in the information collected. In the "before" cases, contextual causes, motivations, influences, imaginations, and objectives are considered. In the "during" cases, the border crossing and the adaptation and contrast of social structures (in the place of origin versus the host country) were taken into account; and in the "after" cases, the re-adaptation of identity is taken into account considering both the advantages and disadvantages, the lessons learned, a different lifestyle, habits and attitudes, social and work reintegration, recognition of personal and community improvement, and an appreciation of the migration upon return. These codes are considered analytical subcategories that *d*) were compared using axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 2002) into the categories of *Arena*, *Agency*, *Domain*, and *Livelihood* previously established from Long's (2007) theoretical structure. These were then *e*) organized based on the status of the migration, where each stage represents the circumstantial context of the migrant's interaction with the social field. This resulted in *f*) the *social field* (Long, 2007) as a macrocategory consisting of the migration stages, as shown in Table 1.

Likewise, the data obtained were treated ideographically, with attention paid to the uniqueness of the changing events that shaped the circumstances described in the migrants' stories. This led to the notion that the return home took on the holistic significance of the entire migratory experience.

Results

The *epoché* perspective mostly condenses the stages of the migratory event (before, during, and after) to the return (after) stage. This enables the analysis of experiences to see them not as a cycle, but as the subject matter of consciousness, which upon

systematization, acquires the significance level of the migrant's interactions in the effort to achieve his objectives. This can be seen as the result of merging Long's (2007) actor-focused approach with the phenomenological *epoché* perspective of the distinctive features of Tejupilco's migratory experiences.

Table 1: Analytical macrocategories, categories, and subcategories

Migration experience – Social field – Everyiday lives		
Beforeit	**During**	**After**
Everyday lives — Contextual causes, Motivations, Influence, Fantasies, Objectives	**Arena** — **Crossing the border** Adversities **Adaptation** Difficulties, fresh start, language	**Livelihood** — **Identity adaptation** • Advantages and disadvantages • Lessons learned • Different lifestyles, habits, and attitudes • Reintegration in Mexico • Acknowledgements of personal and community betterment • Value of the experience upon return
	Domain — **Comparison of social structures (place of origin, host country)** • Axiological conflict, role of the family and gender	
	Agency — **Self-assessment, and personal and financial betterment** • New projects, objectives, and motivations	

Source: created by the authors based on Glaser & Strauss (1967), Heath & Cowley (2004), and Long (2007).

The context reveals the starting point for observing the restructuring of identity and how it is systematized through the migratory experience. The results obtained reveal a rural society with a strong proclivity for international migration distinguished by the economic activity of its returned migrants:

> In Mexico we had land and livestock, but not workers [...] we did not have the means to solve that problem; we had to do it all: climb the hill, bring down the cows, milk them, and make the cheese. I didn't want to do it anymore, and didn't want my Mom doing it anymore either [...] that is why one goes to the United States, to earn more dollars (Guadalupe, 2017).

> [...] That's why we go there (usa) a lot [...] you can find people around here, (they) have fewer ways to make money, that's why they say no, we should go north. Once we cross over, we can live well, have a few amenities, buy a little house and save money [...] This the way of thinking that one brings here; but they're only dreams, ideas. Others come back with good business ideas, but see that there are no opportunities; so they get discouraged and go north again (Abelardo, 2017).

The actors describe the deplorable conditions of local economic development, the abandonment of rural activities, rural migration abroad, and a household economy supported by remittances. These are characteristics observed in the literature at both the national and the state levels (González & López, 2012; Jardón & Corona, 2012; Román, 2012).

In the "before" stage, Long's social field can be seen in the causes that motivated the migration: economic precariousness in the country of origin, and labor demand from the host country. Ariel (2017) comments, "There was not enough money, not enough to support the family [...] a friend told me it (usa) was very nice, that there was money and work [...]". Juan Carlos (2017) said, "[...] due to the lack of financial resources [...] we didn't have enough food in the family [...] I decided to leave to help my brothers [...]; I was 15 years old".

Ángeles (2017) gives her reasons for migrating as follows: "They were mostly financial. I come from a family of six children and I'm the third. I was born and raised on a ranch [...] my sister and I decided to leave and went to get a tourist visa [...] if they gave it to us, we would stay to work".

It can also be observed that the actor is influenced by comparing the lifestyles of the place of origin and the host country, as this produce certain fantasies that, according to Berger and Luckmann (2003), lead to (false) expectations of how life could be. This is how Guadalupe (2017) tells it:

> (I imagined) something nice, easy. —I would arrive with no problem—, ready to work and everything would be smooth [...] that's the way people who'd already gone and returned described it: nice clothes, good cars, everything very neat. —It's easy there—, they said, —everything is clean when you get there—. The apartments have washing machines, microwaves, and carpeting. And here I am on a ranch full of mud and cows...well... —I'm leaving! [...] it's tempting.

These fantasies turn into motivations and intentions focused on an objective (Schwartz et al., 2006). As such, irregular migration as seen from the *epoché* approach

begins to develop out of the actors' dynamism, which will be associated with eventual and possibly continuous confrontations that are arduous and long-lasting (Long, 2007). The border crossing most likely represents a battlefield for migrants in which interpretations of value play the most important role. For Long (2007), these are the places and social situations that he calls *Arena*. Juan Carlos (2017) explains,

> We crossed the river in Piedras Negras and U.S. immigration immediately caught us [...] I was a minor, so they separated me and reported me to the Mexican Consulate [...] they turned me over to the DIF [**N**ational system for integral development of family, is a mexican decentralized public agency whose purpose is to promote social assistance] in Piedras Negras [...] they collected some money [...] put me on the bus with a ham sandwich, and that's how I came back. (In the second attempt) we crossed through Sonora, but on the other side we were caught by immigration [...] they chased us down a ravine; we ran across drainage ditches, but the helicopter caught up to us and they deported us.

Telling his story, José (2017) says: "[...] I couldn't keep going [...] I saw a light in the distance and I just sat down [...] —this is as far as I go— [...] we didn't bring food or anything [...] I made it thanks to a friend that I met in Agua Prieta". The dynamics of the adverse events and circumstances that migrants experience begin to smooth out the rough spots that look daunting at the beginning. However, with experience, the assimilation of these experienced (Berger & Luckmann, 2003) enable migrants to develop a certain security in which they build new steps, techniques and adaptation strategies (Long, 2007) along the way. Juan Carlos (2017), with more than 10 years of experience, comments that "I learned that in order to advance you have to respect your job; get there early and try harder than normal; be on the lookout all the time [...]. Don't just focus on today, but focus on the future and look at the long term".

In the "during" stage, it's important to consider that by entering into a different social structure with unfamiliar habits and customs, actors need to discern and adopt a series of experiences that guide their actions and objectives (Nicolás, 2016; Schwartz, 2005). Guadalupe (2017) says that "It was difficult, many people think —I already suffered, now it's your turn— [...] Sometimes the American dream becomes a nightmare; I experienced it in my own family [...]". For José (2017), "It's like another world; new food, another language. You have to start over like a child to learn everything. People spoke to me and I didn't understand anything". Meanwhile, Ángeles (2017) said "[...] I couldn't find a job and spent two or three months stuck in a room because we couldn't go out either [...]. My brother had 12-hour work days, and we had to wait for him at home since he would bring us something to eat after work". This is a practice that Long (2007, p. 48) calls *agency*, which "provides the individual actor with the ability to process social experiences and develop ways to deal with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion". Agency enables one to visualize how an experience, event, or interaction can be superimposed (through its meaning) on new experiences and establish itself as an intentional guideline for the actor's decisions (Berger & Luckmann, 2003; Sánchez Ortíz de Urbina, 2015). Humberto (2017) says that:

> The first time I didn't have anything in mind; I only knew that there was money, that it was nice. I didn't even have a goal, and that's how I came back, without anything [...]. The second time, I was motivated by something. I had a

girlfriend who is (now) my wife. I wanted to get married, so I said: —I'm going to go earn some money so we can get married.

This reveals that agency plays the role of intentional awareness in Husserlian phenomenology, as it attributes to the actor the ability to reflect on experiences and the result of this reflection is the intentional enabling of actions to realize new objectives (Husserl, 2013; Long, 2007; Sánchez Ortíz de Urbina, 2015). In this sense, like consciousness, agency will always be directed at some object "whether the object [...] is experienced as part of the external physical world, or grasped as an element of an internal subjective reality" (Berger & Luckmann, 2003, p. 36), thereby allowing the social field in this stage to be structured as a dialectical associative space of meanings (Long, 2007). Ángeles (2017) states,

That experience changed me a lot. I wouldn't be the same person today if I had not gone and suffered that experience. It's the result of trying to be better, to not stay the same, but fighting to be a better person; not just financially, but personally. For example, it helped me to be more outgoing. Before I was very shy; learning the language helped me a lot [...].

From an overall perspective, the transformations of the social field experienced by the migrant can be seen in the transition from a collectivist to an individualistic social structure (Schwartz, 2005). For most migrants, the clash of these two structures not only happens in everyday lives but also goes beyond in that these clashes of adaptation are represented by intangible values and transcendental meanings that are in conflict with the original social structure. This area of contention is what Long (2007, p. 124) calls *domain.*

[...] because I am a woman [...] my dad was a male chauvinist [...] he told me "no, you're a woman, what are you going to do over there? You're going to get married here, and your husband will support you so you can study" [...] my mother said "If a woman gets married and is supported —OK. But if not, what are they going to live on? Or what if they marry a drunk? They have to learn a trade or something" (Ángeles, 2017).

The difference between arena and domain is that the latter exerts a certain influence on the social actor, to the extent that the migrant is committed to the norms and values of the social field of the place of origin. This concept not only makes it possible to discern paths in which migrants as a demographic unit have created collective significance but also reveals the ways in which this social group imbues collective identities with individual significance. According to Long (2007, p. 124), the domains "should not be conceptualized [...] a priori as a cultural given, but as something produced [...] through the experiences [...] and struggles between actors with different characteristics or conditions". In this sense, the concept of domain has some similarity with the concept of "nurture" (*cuido*) described by Giménez (1993, 2000), since a migrant's adaptation is determined culturally by the nation of origin, both axiologically and socially. This means that the clash of domains arises from encounters between cultural values and customs: the culture of the place of origin and the culture of the host country. At this point, it is useful to analyze the process of adaptation to values, customs, and norms foreign to a migrant's social make-up and to observe how a new social commitment is accepted through the lived experiences. The following are some examples from Tejupilco.

> Treatment as an immigrant [...] They are racist; they give you work, but they punish you and they don't pay you. You don't have any rights, or you have them, but don't know what they are [...]. They're unfair; you work to eat and get ahead, but you can't say anything. You look for work and if you don't like it, then leave it (Juan Carlos, 2017).

> Learning to become independent [...] in Mexico you're daddy's little girl. Sure, you worked in the fields with the cows, and you made cheese and other things; but you depended on your parents. You didn't have any freedom like you have [...] over there (in the U.S.), you have to learn to get going, to take care of yourself, to get organized. You have to do everything on your own. As an older sister, as a woman, "it's my responsibility to look out for my younger sister". It's about adapting, becoming independent, knowing how to go about it and everything (Guadalupe, 2017).

A migrant's grasp of and interaction in the social field creates an individual network of meanings and at an empirical level, generates the strategies needed to adapt and cope with adversity in the migratory experience. These are strategies that Long (2007) calls *livelihood*. Abelardo (2017) says that after several years of working in restaurants,

> [...] I then moved to Florida; same country, same amenities, same type of work. But I was already a waiter; it was easier and paid more [...]. When people go to the beach, they're happy and have money to spend; they're less stressed than in the city. You start to notice. In the city, everyone is on the defensive; they don't tip, or tip very little. It's more peaceful at the beach. People go to spend money, to have fun, and take time off. It's different.

The above shows that the association between various contents of consciousness transcends whatever social field one is in and changes it according to the meaning generated by the agency. Another important point is that ideas for livelihood strategies were based on various consequences both for the migrant (at a personal level) and for his family and community (at a social level). This confirms that the migratory experience does not only involve the pursuit of financial well-being. This is demonstrated by several of the interviewees.

> [...] so you leave; here your family lives in poor little houses, living day-to-day. You get there and find work, earn good pay and get a house. You have money and live well —whatever you want, like a car. But what about your family? What is the sacrifice you're making? In other words, you're already forgetting about them. They're screwed, and you're enjoying yourself. So, no, you always have help others, help your family [...]. Many people leave and forget their families; they return after their mothers have already died; [...] they can no longer hug them and say "Son, I love you." [...] It's too late. That's the worst, forgetting about the family (José, 2017).

Ángeles (2017) shares that "Being over there, you appreciate your family so much. Even though I was with my brother and sister, I missed my parents and their food a lot; I missed everything, even the smallest things". This reveals a central point regarding Mexican migration: the role of the family is the intentional basis for the journey, and

reasons, motivations, and objectives are established all around it. This means that the scope of the social field goes beyond borders through the migrant's agencies during the search and, above all, in the application of livelihood strategies. However, this does not imply a lack of individual variations. For example, Abelardo (2017) says that "[...] if I hadn't had my mother here, I'd never go back. Seriously. But then I said no, I'm going back —my mom is alone over there". The phenomenon of migration does not represent the mere fact of leaving home to look for food and then returning. If that were the case, then it would be an experience in itself not only in all of its existential apprehension but also in all of its "social comprehension".

According to Long (2007, p. 127), "The concept of livelihood implies [...] more than making a living [...]. It encompasses ways living and life styles, and [...] choosing between different values, assuming a status and a sense of identity in relation to other people". This means that identity adaptation becomes unequivocally visible in the return stage through livelihood, because it is where the migrant brings to light the content of conscience as the holistic significance of the migratory experience. This is how the Tejupilco actors describe this phenomenon:

> [...] The advantage of going to the U.S. is that you learn to relate [...]. The disadvantage is the time you lost while you were there [...]; maybe you had a career, a stable job [...]. But if I hadn't gone, I wouldn't have studied as much. With what money? Yes, that's why we left (Ángeles, 2017).

> [...] I learned the way Americans work, their ideas, why they get ahead, and how they do it. Maybe this is something that we Mexicans don't know how to do [...]. I learned that in order to get ahead you have to be serious about your work; even if you already have a job, you have to arrive early, and try harder than normal all the time; thinking about work 24 hours a day (Juan Carlos, 2017).

In Miguel's case (2017), after more than 20 years of migratory experience he says that his status in Mexico is "resigned due to deportation". However, he calmly continues "I just have to think positively that I also have to get ahead here". He mentions that despite the desire to be with his family (like most returned migrants with such a long migration experience), "I don't intend to return to the U.S. [...] I need to give it a shot here". Meanwhile, Guadalupe (2017) answered the question "Do you value the sacrifice and bad experiences that you had in the U.S.?" as follows:

> Yes, for what I am now, for what my family is now, for what we have as a family —yes. Because no matter the sacrifices, the experiences we live —some of them bad— mold you as a person and make you what you are today. They make you value what you had before that you didn't appreciate.

The concept of livelihood takes on broader meaning beyond mere economic strategies and becomes "processes for building identity inherent in the pursuit of livelihoods" (Long, 2007, p. 127). As described above, it implies: *a*) building relationships with others whose worlds and status can be strikingly different; *b*) skills and relationship management; *c*) affirmation of personal significance (self-esteem); and *d*) personal and group identity (Long, 2007).

Discussion

The social field is self-fulfilling in each migratory stage in that the migrant's consciousness assimilates the experiences and then acts based on these experiences. Everyday life, the foundation of the social field, was manifested similarly in most of the cases analyzed. The contextual causes in the "before" stage were observed under the migratory influence of the place of origin (relatives, neighbors, or acquaintances) that facilitated the migration activity. The established objectives, like the fantasies, were obscured at the beginning of the "during" stage in different types of arenas. For some, this occurred when crossing the border; for most, it happened during adaptation, when the different social structures clashed and produced the cultural conflict. However, these objectives were gradually refined, expanded, or exhibited in different and new perspectives through the migrants' many agencies, revealing new decisions, attitudes, and ways of life.

The livelihood strategies represented the background of arenas, domains, and agencies carried out in specific ways through the migrants' varied experiences and, like the social field, an adaptation of identity is manifested in the "return" stage that although it is not a radical change, it does reveal an identity in the place of origin that seeks to accommodate the means and strategies of everyday lives learned in the host location. This is exhibited through a change of residence in the place of origin, different lifestyles, habits, and vices, and a positive attitude despite political, economic, and social difficulties upon reintegration in the place of origin.

The results of this study show that the analysis of identity in the context of migration becomes more relevant when viewed from a broader perspective and when questioning how crossing borders disrupts the migrant's personal, social, or cultural identity. The structure developed using phenomenology, and Long's constructionism shows that, above all, "people and their environments [...] do not respond simply to the imperatives of cultural frameworks and norms, or to the directives of the dominant discourses" (Long, 2007, p. 27). Second, condensing the subject by bracketing the contextualization of the migrant and focusing on the facts (*factum*) of the experiences enabled us to explain "how the meanings, purposes, and powers associated with different modes of human agency are interwoven to become the results of emerging social forms" (Long, 2007, p. 27). This reveals a malleable identity that although institutionally defined (Bagga-Gupta et al., 2017), operates introspectively according to the intentionality of the migratory experience acquired. These results are added to the heuristic efforts to eliminate the difficulties that, according to Ariza & Portes (2007, p. 38) "arise when trying to explain how crossing the border alters the parameters of identity".

A study conducted by Arizpe (2015, p. 244) poses the question: "How do Mexican migrants identify themselves?" The purpose is to define what culture they identify with —"do they prefer Mexican or American culture?" (Arizpe, 2015, pp. 249-250). This topic is approached through the "cultural loyalty" that the Mexican culture represents for Arizpe. When comparing that study with the results presented in this article, the issue of identity in migration is constrained by the answers given to structured and defining questions. This is because, according to Ghiardo & Dávila (2008, p. 139), "The subject only speaks through what the researcher assumes are the possible answer choices, but the intended meaning remains hidden". *Agency* makes it possible to

visualize how an experience, event, or social interaction can be superimposed (by its meaning) onto new experiential content and be established as an intentional guideline for the decisions of the social actor. This is the contention of Berger & Luckmann (2003) regarding the impact caused by experiencing the transition from one reality to another. Therefore, the issue of identity in migration is believed to require a refined analysis of experiences that can describe the structuring of this identity. This approach will allow topics such as intersubjectivity, interaction, intercommunication, and language to avoid being thought of as premises for the analysis of identity. In addition, "the social sciences specialist does not need to have already solved any fundamental issue before beginning the scientific inquiry" (Schutz, 1995, p. 75).

At present, transnationalism is apparently the only theory that shows any interest in the phenomenon of identity in migration analysis (Ariza & Portes, 2007; Bretones & González-González, 2011; Moctezuma, 2013; Rodríguez, 2013). These types of studies of Mexico have made significant contributions in visualizing, for example, structural changes in groups, because of the impetus of migration in the creation of social networks (Moctezuma, 2013); transnational relations, and the comparison of lifestyles in Mexican border communities (Rodríguez, 2013), among others. However, the *epoché* approach encompasses the analysis of the empirical causes that have propelled the migratory flow in specific ways. This makes it possible to conduct qualitative research based on data from the migrants' experiences (Ghiardo & Dávila, 2008; Husserl, 2011; Zarur, 2016). This is very important because, according to Long,

> Social actors should not be viewed merely as embodied social categories (based on class or some other criterion), or as passive recipients of intervention, but as active participants who receive and interpret information, and develop strategies in their relationships with the various local actors, as well as with external institutions and their staff (Long, 2007, p. 43).

Our results indicate that identity change is shaped by the migrant's progressive experience in the social relationships of his environment (adaptation difficulties, language learning, and creation of new projects, among others). Even the traditional starting point of work-driven migration (in most cases) does not necessarily imply that the cumulative landscape of experiences, knowledge, and learning must all have the same characteristics (Zarur, 2016). According to Nicolas,

> Migrating to another country in search of a better job and better living conditions changes the course of personal, family, and community life. The migratory experience reshapes meaning and significance for individuals, their families, and the groups to which they belong throughout the migration journey (Nicolas, 2016, p. 208).

The phenomenon of migration examined under the world view proposed by phenomenology (Berger & Luckmann, 2003; Husserl, 2008, 2011, 2013; Schutz, 1995) develops in an uneven field through the dynamism of the actors, as proposed by Long (2007). This means that the migrant's life is not limited exclusively to work experiences, as was seen in the "return" stage with the concept of *livelihood*. Underlying these work experiences are others that go beyond the practical skills and tasks learned. The results demonstrate how these experiences generate a parallel qualitative background that gradually identifies the migrants with their social context and help them find meaning and belonging; they enable migrants to define themselves as individuals in a different

cultural context than their places of origin through axiological and cultural conflicts (Schwartz, 2005; Schwartz et al., 2006).

Regarding the U.S.-Mexico border, Kearney (2006) says that the crossing the border is ultimately an economic dynamic, but that its role is to dictate the cultural identity of people who are restricted and excluded in the act of crossing. However, applying the *domain* concept, the results show that each experience is individual, even if it happens in the same context. In addition, while individual arguments can be made, one can also make an argument for the collective experience that migration symbolizes for most people: "who doesn't know that going north means getting screwed and putting up with everything that happens, better not to go" (Jose, 2017). The global determinants of identity identified by Bagga-Gupta et al. (2017) are unconsciously understood in the Mexican migrant; this is seen in the results of this study. However, this study also showed that it is the risk they accept and through which they project their hopes that shapes the dynamic and malleable identity that develops during the pursuit of a better life both for the migrant and for the family.

The social construction perspective under the *epoché* approach leads one to question the current heuristic interest in the identity of the migrant subject as a social actor. If this interest is indeed focused on the migrant or assumes a global perspective, migration can be heuristically maneuvered by the political and economic winds of the host country, just as experienced by the sailboat of Mexican migration. There is a need to examine the effect on the Mexican migrant's identity of the worldwide North (Bagga-Gupta et al., 2017) that the migrant accepts and adopts (Schwartz, 2005; Schwartz et al., 2006) and that affects re-adaptation when returning to the place of origin (Rivera, 2016). In addition, how is this adaptation manifested in the development of an identity that gestates in the denigrating attitudes of global discourse?

The above leads to two pertinent observations: *1*) the influence and predominance of commercial forces and cultural values condition realities and social phenomena; *2*) the conditioning of this structure is of such magnitude that the notion of "nation-state" has taken root in our collective global imagination (Bagga-Gupta et al., 2017) to the extent that the heuristic observation of realities and social phenomena is also found to be rooted in and conditioned by these structures. This is clear when one admits that "in a globalized world based on economic models and global patterns of accumulation, there is no doubt that migration has to be thought of and analyzed in terms of its globalization" (Canales, 2013, p. 10). The outcome of doing so is to think of experiences in terms of issues with specific characteristics pertaining to a defined social sector to reveal the generalized context of the phenomena studied sociologically (Long, 2007; Zarur, 2016). This means that lived experiences are still generalized as social categories, while individuality "comes (essentially) with" the experience and is not an accidental byproduct.

What, then, happens in cases in which the migratory return unfolds as a rehabilitation process in which the migrant "could be a foreigner in his own land" and somehow experience what he experienced abroad (Rivera, 2016)? Or what happens when "reintegration works more like an expectation [...] of being included, accepted, or socially welcomed, and this expectation is not necessarily fulfilled"? (Rivera, 2016, p. 118). The need to delve into the identity of the migrant as an emerging problem seems clear. Therefore, it would be appropriate to examine the social circumstances of the migrant that produce changes in his/her identity. In this sense, the migrant's return is becoming a factor of change in the place of origin.

The analytical categories of this study's results are consistent with Rivera (2016), who observed that "the detailed descriptions of the narratives lead to the identification of how the immigrants' experiences progress, and how the means for traveling through various areas are related to diverse and critical historical processes" (Rivera, 2016, p. 140). Rivera also states that "the concept of integration exhibits heuristic limitations for understanding the experience of returning to Mexico after living in the United States" (Rivera, 2016, p. 118). Likewise, the analysis by Nicolás of the cultural and identity components of the migrant-homeland relationship looks at the extent to which the migratory experience influences this relationship either by connecting or separating people and aims to "understand the way that structure acts in real life, in people's experiences" (Nicolás, 2016, p. 219).

Conclusions

The results of this analysis align with Mexico's current situation vis-à-vis the United States in which the Mexican migrant's position is defined and bounded by the influence of the surrounding macrosocial discourse. This discourse does not accept or reject the migrant but paradoxically needs migrants to make the economy work. This study identified well-grounded ideas that show how discourse is also a social construction derived from experiences and that is gestated in interpretative reflections of social life that constitute meaningful representations; they are organized, structural rationalizations expressed as systemic units through language.

Furthermore, this study demonstrated the need for a phenomenological appreciation of migrant experiences and outlined ways to understand what sociodemographic studies (because of their limitations and analytical approach) cannot reveal. Focusing on the object of study from this perspective leads to an appreciation of the migratory return not as the journey's end, but as an introspection that tells an expansive story of the individual aspects of migration through lived experiences. This acknowledges that returned migrants as a whole represent not only an external social actor but also an identity that was formed in a different context.

The limitations of this research are seen in the qualitative shift implied by examining the migratory phenomenon from a nonobservational perspective instead of using a statistical and quantitative approach. The phenomenological approach is based on the philosophical perspective of the Husserlian *epoché* that in other fields has not only theoretical and methodological limitations but also epistemological ones. To examine a social phenomenon without the supporting empirical data seems to be a contradiction in itself. However, this is the paradox that supported the proposed theoretical approach. In this regard, the heuristic effort to address this limitation represented a personal and professional challenge that can be further refined in future research.

The results show that the dynamic nature of identity does not depend on macrosocial definitions, but on the activity that the subject performs as a social actor. In this sense, the Grounded Theory's inductive generation of knowledge showed that the capability for personalization must come from one's own creativity and concerns as an identity composed of meaning, where subjectivity is the subject's proactive internalization of its interaction with its social context. The return to the subject through the *epoché*

reveals that identity changes from the migratory experience are found in its existential content and not in the definition of global structures.

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