

**THEORIZING ETHNICITY AND THE U.S-MEXICAN BORDER:  
A CASE STUDY ON PRESIDENT TRUMP'S ANTI-IMMIGRATION  
PROCLAMATION**

By

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the importance of ethnicity in the U.S-Mexican border in relation to stigmatization and devaluation of Mexicans in the United States. The research analyzed patterns in reactions from a border community in connection to the anti-immigration rhetoric seen at the 2016 US presidential campaign. This research consisted of in-depth interviews with twelve participants primarily first generation Mexican immigrant students in New Mexico. What was found is that there is greater awareness of their ethnic background, which raised anxieties in the local community. Nonetheless, I argue that regardless of the social tension and pressure this might cause in this region, patterns persisted in which solidarity was shown towards member of their ethnic group and great reluctance to accept negative stereotypes. Along with this, the students felt that their ethnic identity was an advantage in the region and a motivation for political participation.

**Keywords:** Migration; 2016 US Presidential Election; Mexico; ethnic identity; ethnic stigma; U.S-Mexican Border; Donald J. Trump

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## INTRODUCTION

During the length of the US election I had a course in which I was the only student from Mexico. My classmates kept talking about Mexicans as lazy and constantly saying all these horrible things. They repeatedly said ‘Trump should build that wall!’ I didn’t disclose my Mexican identity until the very last day of the semester. That day several people came and apologized, I think I didn’t look Mexican enough so they felt comfortable speaking this way about Mexicans<sup>1</sup>

The 2016 US election campaign marked a milestone in contemporary times in regards to reinforcement of anti-immigration sentiments and stereotypes. Dislike of migrants is not a new phenomenon in America as in other places of the world. In fact, it is indicated by sociologists that a long history of negative stereotypes about migrants has contributed to contemporary prejudice towards immigrants.<sup>2</sup> In the United States, there has been a long history of hostile and prejudiced attitudes toward migrants and minority groups. Nevertheless, Donald J. Trump’s run for presidency was unique in many ways, but specially on his obscure and consistent focus on immigration. More specifically, Trump marked a precedent in the way he unapologetically referred to Mexicans with absolute disregard of the consequences. In addition to this, Trump proposed to build a massive border wall along the U.S-Mexican border and take charge of all the illegal migrants in the country as soon as he made it to the White House as a means to protect and “put America first.”

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<sup>1</sup> All interviews were confidential; the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement (Anonymous, April 13, 2017)

<sup>2</sup> Wagner, U., Christ, O., Heitmeyer, W. (2010). Anti-Immigration Bias. In John F. Dovidio et al., *The SAGE Handbook of Prejudice, Stereotyping and Discrimination* (SAGE, 2010), 362.

Although this is a rather new phenomenon, several critics have described the 2016 US election as filled with populist rhetoric which was used as a major force to mobilize voters. This was especially used for the then Republican nominee Donald J. Trump. His constant attacks on the elite made him a candidate of the “People” and his stand to restrict immigration made him the defender of “we” from “them”.<sup>3</sup> The main issue with this is that in many instances this separation of *we* and *them* has the potential to be accompanied by feelings of nationalism, xenophobia and ethnocentric attitudes.

In fact, the focus on racist devaluation of ethnic groups in social sciences and psychology started as a response to Hitler’s rise to power in Germany.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps in the extreme spectrum of nationalism we find Nazi Germany in its quest for recovering the greatness of Germany led by bigotry, threat, fear, which taught the world the importance of paying detailed observation to political communication.

The following thesis analytically explores Trump’s campaign communication. The purpose, however, is not as a political analysis but instead to explore what kind of impact the attack on Mexico and immigrants from Mexico created on a group of people who are affiliated with the U.S-Mexican border.

The focus on the border is relatively close to the fact that this are places of transition, limits created by nations that symbolize migration or the movements of people. However, “frontier” as it is also called is argued to be far away from the nation’s core. Therefore, a place of change, in which society and institutions are shaped by the force of nature and humans which the core of the nation fails to experience.<sup>5</sup> Borders and particularly the peoples found there are relevant

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<sup>3</sup> J. E. Oliver and W. M. Rahn, “Rise of the Trumpenvolk: Populism in the 2016 Election,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 667, no. 1 (September 1, 2016): 189–206, doi:10.1177/0002716216662639.

<sup>4</sup> Wagner, U., Christ, O., Heitmeyer, W. (2010). Anti-Immigration Bias in John F. Dovidio et al., *The SAGE Handbook of Prejudice, Stereotyping and Discrimination* (SAGE, 2010), 363.

<sup>5</sup> Oscar Jaquez Martinez, *Border People: Life and Society in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (University of Arizona Press, 1994), 6.

to the study of nationalism because it is not only a place for cultural transmission but it has the potential to be used for the manipulation of national ideology and, regardless of being at the periphery, its future dynamics belongs to those at the center of power or better said at the core of the nation.

It is contended that historical products of either political dominance or political influences and of other types of defiance have influenced academic notions about culture and borders.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, I look at the border as the core region of my fieldwork. I attempt to understand the people found there, and to see what kind of impact the anti-immigration rhetoric has had on the participant's ethnic identity and in which ways the international border plays a role in the function of this identity. Also, I explore in which ways the stigmatization of this group has influenced the participant's political participation.

### Purpose and Structure

Through the analysis of the data collected I argue that the political communication seen during the 2016 US election has created an awareness of minorities' ethnic background in this border community. By doing so, I aim to contribute to a new subject. That is the "Trump phenomenon". So far, most studies done on his campaign have been based on his populist strategies and determinants of voting turn- out in favor of him. Here I focus on how his political campaign communication made an impact on the participants of my study in reference to the implications for the US-Mexican border but most importantly the study of ethnic groups and the effects of social stigmatization.

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<sup>6</sup> Scott Michaelsen and David E. Johnson, *Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics* (University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 59.



The framework of this thesis takes several theoretical approaches to have compelling literature as foundation. First, I look at the concept of ethnicity in general, especially in relation to minority ethnic groups, their relations with dominant groups, and the subject of stereotypes. In relation to this, there is a focus on the phenomenon of ethnic stigma which is mainly shown by the work of Erving Goffman in his *Notes on the Management of Spoiled identity*.<sup>7</sup>

To explore the implications of the physical and metaphorical border in the identity of this ethnic group, I look at the works of long time anthropologist of the U.S-Mexican border Michael Kearney and the notion of Mexican-American identity by Gloria Anzaldua to understand this ethnic group in relevant aspects such as their hybrid culture and transnational dynamics within both countries.

The last focus of theory is on Mexican migration and the stigmatization of this ethnic group. Scholars constantly study this ethnic group on themes of assimilation, language, acculturation and American identity. There is widespread knowledge on racialization and stigmatization of this group. However, for this study I extract criticism from political theorist Samuel Huntington towards the Mexican people mainly from his work *Who we are?* (2004) in which he envisions on America's identity.

With the abovementioned, is important to highlight the structure of how this was explored. In the next subsection I point out as background the major highlights of the 2016 US Election in relation to my study in which I claim Trump's exploits the threat narrative. In the next chapter (Chapter 2) I resume significant literature on ethnicity, ethnic stigma, the U.S-Mexican border, border identities and Mexican migration. Third, the methodology chapter narrates the implementation of the qualitative approach used for this study and the reasoning behind using this approach. Fourth, the location of the research is briefly addressed with a

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<sup>7</sup> Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Simon and Schuster, 2009).

several details on demographics of the region. Lastly, an analysis of the most meaningful main findings are narrated in detail.

## 2016 US Presidency Election and Trump's Agenda

Donald Trump's campaign to presidency had many controversial moments which amazed not only the United States but also the world—a unique piece in history for American politics but also for the study of nationalism for his constant message of national attachment. In fact, regardless of his lack of experience in politics, he has been listed as a populist candidate that worked around his rhetoric against the elite, among other things to advance in votes from the working class.<sup>8</sup> Donald Trump's statements reconsidered the meaning of political correctness while he made comments that angered women, the disabled, as well as religious and ethnic groups. In fact, Trump had many things to say about many people. However, his focus remained in issues related to immigration and securitization of the nation. Conceivably, he made Mexico the number one enemy of America in his conquest to “Make America Great Again.”<sup>9</sup>

### *They're Rapists...*

In 2015 Donald J Trump, known then by his celebrity status and as a business magnate opened his campaign proposal with the following verbatim statement: “When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They are not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're sending people that have lots of

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<sup>8</sup> Rogers Brubaker, “Between Nationalism and Civilizationism: The European Populist Moment in Comparative Perspective,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 8 (June 21, 2017): 31–33, doi:10.1080/01419870.2017.1294700.

<sup>9</sup> Campaign slogan used by Donald J. Trump during the 2016 US Presidential campaign

problems, and they're bringing those problems with them. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.”<sup>10</sup>

Trump introduced his campaign proposals with conveying concerns about immigration, but not immigration by itself. He started off by pointing in the direction of Mexican immigration in an unsubtle and explicit way. Often overlooking the consequences of his impenitent words. Trump's statement was not the most dangerous part about him, but the overwhelming attention that the world paid to him. This is what made his campaign unique, never had a candidate had so much attention from the media before.

In fact the coverage of the 2016 US election has been described as a win-win situation for both Trump's presidency and news network's revenues.<sup>11</sup> Networks benefited from Trump's performance and his message was repeated over and over again. Perhaps it was an election about migration, media and tweets. His run for presidency was a political show which not only benefited his campaign but also left behind a message of anti-immigrant feelings. Trump's agenda was lead on by a “security threat” in which he constantly claimed the security of the border as his main worry but also the people from neighboring country, Mexicans. He proposed himself as a hero for America from the threat of criminals and economic predicaments.

By asserting Mexico as not a friend of America and adding inflammatory language like crime, drugs and rape, Trump portrayed Mexicans as a threat to the nation and Americans. With the over usage of the term “They”, Trump labeled Mexicans as the other kind, which did not belong in the country for being criminal and opportunistic. This was seen as offensive and was expected to have negatives effects. Actually, in contemporary theories explaining bigotry

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<sup>10</sup> “DAPA, Politics - Rural Migration News | Migration Dialogue,” accessed June 1, 2017, <https://migration.ucdavis.edu/rmn/more.php?id=1925>.

<sup>11</sup> Victor Pickard, “Media and Politics in the Age of Trump | Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective,” accessed February 12, 2017, <http://origins.osu.edu/article/media-and-politics-age-trump>.

attitudes towards immigrants, these claim that the perception of threat plays a crucial role for the development of attitudes of prejudice.”<sup>12</sup>

In addition, while he criminalized Mexicans in his rhetoric, Donald Trump made the connection to the U.S.-Mexican border by proposing the construction of a border wall in order to secure the United States’ borders from immigration.<sup>13</sup> Trump stated “...I will build a great wall—and nobody builds walls better than me” On top of this, he assured repeatedly to the American people that Mexico would pay for it and to immediately deport the 11 million illegal immigrants living in the country.

Donald Trump’s statement about Mexican and securing the US-Mexican border came to an obvious conclusion. That is that America needs to build a wall to keep Mexicans out and to protect Americans from the rapists, drug dealers and criminals. In Trump’s plan to fight this evil to American and the immigration crisis was the immediate deportation of the so-called criminals as soon as he made it to the White House.

While associated immigrants with crime, he also claimed that children of immigrants, were contributors of crime and terrorism.<sup>14</sup> In association with this, during the campaign, Donald Trump debated about the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the US Constitution which grants citizenship by *jus soli*. During this debate he callously exposed the term “anchor baby.” This term is seen as a derogatory term for children born in the United States to foreign parents or those parents that do not have legal documents to be in the country.

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<sup>12</sup> Wagner, U., Christ, O., Heitmeyer, W. (2010). Anti-Immigration Bias. In Dovidio et al., *The SAGE Handbook of Prejudice, Stereotyping and Discrimination*, 2010, 363.

<sup>13</sup> Philip L. Martin, “Election of Donald Trump and Migration,” *Migration Letters* 14, no. 1 (January 2017): 161–71.

<sup>14</sup> Ken Fuchsman, “The Presidential Campaign That Astounded the World: A Psychohistory of Donald Trump and the 2016 American Election,” *Journal of Psychohistory* 44, no. 4 (Spring 2017): 292–309.

At the center of this, Trump argued that “anchor babies” are not and should not be considered citizens of the U.S. With this once again his country of choice to use an example was Mexico. He stated “What happens is they’re in Mexico, they’re going to have a baby, they move over here a couple of days, they have the baby.”<sup>15</sup> Regardless of the fact that this term is usually used for other immigrants Trump opted for using Mexico again.

Donald Trump’s attacks on Hispanics and especially Mexican communities came from all angles. On top of the whole Trump spectacle, he had confrontations with the Univision News Network— which is an influential Spanish news network in the United States. Reporter Jorge Ramos was one of only a few reporters throughout the campaign that was willing to fact check Trump’s claims on immigration and crime, because in fact, according to recent data the number of undocumented immigrants living in the United States is on the decline, immigration has decreased eight per cent since the highest seen in 2007.<sup>16</sup>

The questioning of this cost Ramos to be kicked out by Trump’s security at this conferences.<sup>17</sup> He told Ramos to “...go back to Univision.” Something similar to saying go back to Mexico, which is not uncommon to hear from those who have prejudiced attitudes towards Mexicans or to use it as a racist slur. Ramos, who is Mexican and known for his straightforwardness in subjects such as immigration, had previously contacted Trump before the incident to ask for an interview but Trump had denied his request.

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<sup>15</sup> Reena Flores CBS News August 19, 2015, and 10:44 Am, “Donald Trump: ‘Anchor Babies’ aren’t American Citizens,” accessed March 19, 2017, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/donald-trump-anchor-babies-arent-american-citizens/>.

<sup>16</sup> Jeffrey S. Passel and Senior Writer D’Vera Cohn, *Unauthorized Immigrant Population: National and State Trends, 2010* (Pew Hispanic Center Washington, DC, 2011), [http://www.immigrationresearch-info.org/system/files/Unauthorized\\_Immigrant\\_Population\\_2010.pdf](http://www.immigrationresearch-info.org/system/files/Unauthorized_Immigrant_Population_2010.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> “The Trump Card: How US News Media Dealt with a Migrant Hate Manifesto,” *Ethical Journalism Network*, accessed March 12, 2017.

In another event, Donald Trump questioned the impartiality of Supreme Court Judge Gonzalo Curiel based on his Mexican ethnicity. On his last presidential campaign with Democratic candidate Hilary Clinton, Trump stated, “We have some bad hombres (bad men) and we are going to get them out!”<sup>18</sup> Once again referring to Spanish speaking immigrants.

Donald Trump portrayed not only Mexicans in the United States as a threat but the entire country of Mexico as a threat. In his speeches referring to NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), he often talked about the 1994 treaty which was created to smooth trade within Canada, Mexico and the US. Trump blamed Mexico for getting most of the benefits from NAFTA, which hurt American industries and jobs and that it must be renegotiated.

Likewise, Trump proposed under his migration plan that he would impound ways on remittances sent to Mexico from immigrants in the US, as well to make unauthorized foreigners in the US to “pay back taxes.”<sup>19</sup> In all this, not acknowledging at any point that even unauthorized migrants in the United States pay taxes. Trump demonized Mexico and made it public enemy number one by exploiting this threat narrative. By analyzing all of these we can see a very aggressive message aimed at the Mexican community which resonated everywhere.

## 2. ETHNICITY, STIGMA AND BORDER IDENTITIES

Through this chapter, several concepts in connection to ethnic groups set the theoretical basis for my research. Before elaborating on this it is important to take into consideration that during the event or set of events surrounding the U.S. 2016 presidential election, the discourse about immigration focused on two major themes. First, Donald Trump’s speeches targeted primarily a particular geographical area and people; that is the U.S-Mexican border and migrants from Mexico.

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<sup>18</sup> “The Final Trump-Clinton Debate Transcript, Annotated,” *Washington Post*, accessed June 6, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/10/19/the-final-trump-clinton-debate-transcript-annotated/>.

<sup>19</sup> Martin, “Election of Donald Trump and Migration,” 162.

In this context, the understanding of the U.S.-Mexican border, its culture and identities are important for the crystallization and understanding of attitudes and more specifically on what type of impact the border has on a participant's identity. Therefore, I situate existing literature not only about ethnicity and ethnic stigma but also about border identity and Mexican migration to aim towards an interdisciplinary background that cohesively works in harmony for the purpose of this study — which is what kind of impact the anti-immigration rhetoric had on the participant's identity and how the international border plays a role on it.

## 2.1 The concept of ethnicity and ethnic stigma

The concept of ethnicity is very significant in this study because the fieldwork reflects on an ethnic group. In addition to this, I reflect on ethnic stigma and relevant studies that conceptualize the effects of stigma on those who are subject to it and determinants related to stigma such as stereotypes. First, we must acknowledge that studying the concept of ethnicity can be relatively complex. The first encounter of its complexity comes from its definition, which there exists no universal definition.

In 1969, Fredrik Barth described ethnicity as having the following qualities: "...a population which is largely biologically self-perpetuating, shares fundamental cultural values, realized in overt unity in cultural forms, makes up a field of communication and interaction and has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order."<sup>20</sup> In relation to ethnicity, Barth developed the model of "race=culture= language= society and society = a unit which rejects or discriminates against others."<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, Barth highlighted the importance of not

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<sup>20</sup> Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries : The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Oslo : Scandinavian University Press, 1994, n.d.), 11.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

rejecting the aspect of culture when studying ethnic groups. Barth's notion of ethnic groups placed them as entities that carried culture, and that these groups worked of forms associated socially.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, in anthropology, much more is discussed besides the definition of ethnicity. Therefore, aside from going into the definition, there is academic work in the subject of ethnicity which provides a better understanding about variables and complementary aspects like race, culture, language and the implication of ethnicity in society and politics. For example, Barth sought to investigate the boundaries of ethnic groups in ways that not only explored the ways they occupied particular geographical areas but most importantly the relation between ethnic groups and social boundaries, he wondered about the ways ethnic groups were maintained and the continual expression and validation of ethnicity.<sup>23</sup>

Nonetheless, Barth's main argument was that ethnic groups operated in categories and to position ethnic groups inside another ethnic group according to the importance of ascription. Barth questioned the primary idea of the emergence of boundaries as a consequence of isolation of ethnic groups, instead it was proposed that contact with other ethnic groups assisted the construction of ethnic boundaries.

Hence, Barth positions cultural differences as something that can endure even after interdependence and having contact with other ethnic groups.<sup>24</sup> In this thinking, the interaction within other groups emphasized differences and ethnic lines. There is a double- standard in ascription, first ascription by other groups and second auto ascription from the member of the ethnic group, therefore there is a kind of flexibility with these ethnic limits. In other words, it

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>24</sup> Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Waveland Press, 1998), 10.



was found to not be static and constantly crossing people as a result of this ascription variability.<sup>25</sup>

In an earlier anthropological perspective towards ethnicity Thomas Eriksen (1993) pointed out something similar to the flexible characteristics of ethnic groups. Eriksen focused on the notion that ethnicity is often ambiguous and how individuals are for the most part able to negotiate with ethnicity.<sup>26</sup> The logic behind this assertion is Eriksen's argument that "ethnic identity offers a sense of continuity with the past and personal dignity."<sup>27</sup> In addition to this analysis about ethnicity it is highlighted that the linkage of the individual with the places in which the ethnic group is located, which might change the way ethnic groups talk about their ethnicity or the way in which ways its expressed.

Eriksen discussed this issue while ethnographically looking in the relation between minorities and majorities. In one of his examples he describes the lives of the transhumant Sami ethnic group and the Norwegians in the tundra of Scandinavia. In this example Eriksen claimed that Harald Eidem research on the Sami's communication of ethnicity was limited as a coping mechanism as they were the minority in the region and often presented themselves as Norwegians, which were the majority in the region.<sup>28</sup> Part of the reason was connected to the fact that the Sami people was considered often as being backward and less worthy by the Norwegian or in other words the group that represented the majority in this region.

With these characteristics the Sami was ascribed as a stigmatized group. Hence, there particular instances in which ethnicity is important in comparison to others, perhaps one of these is when an individual is subject to stigmatization or marginalization as result of his or her

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<sup>25</sup> Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 1998.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives* (Pluto Press, 2002), 31.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 31–33.

<sup>28</sup> Harald Eidheim. When ethnic identity is a social stigma'. In Fredrik Barth, ed., *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, pp 39-57.

ethnic background. In consequence of this and other factors, commonly discriminated minorities tend to reject their ethnic background and go to the extent to believe the dominant group's assertions about themselves, deny their ethnicity or leave the culture attached to their ethnicity to eventually go into a process of assimilation.<sup>29</sup> Something similar was thought by an earlier author in association with stigmatized ethnic groups.

Erving Goffman (1963) is probably the greatest contributor to the study of stigma. Goffman described stigma as a process by which the reaction of others hauls normal identity.<sup>30</sup> In his theorization, Goffman pointed out stigma as discrediting coming from a society member towards others on basis of an attribute, behavior, or reputation.<sup>31</sup> However, for the focus of my research I engage in analysis of behavioral stigma but mainly on what is referred as tribal stigma.

General examples of those who would fall in this category are those who are stigmatized because of race, nationality and religion and ethnic background that as Goffman points out is "... transmitted through lineages and equally contaminate all members of family."<sup>32</sup> A lot of his work on the *Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* reflected about the social and psychological ways of the replication of tribal stigma and its relation to social norms and cognitive processes. In short, he focused on the study of those who have stigma attitudes towards others. However, he expanded on the effects of the stigmatized, which is the central focus of my study.

Following this point in regards to my very own study, Goffman mainly comments on the effects of stigma on the stigmatized which are resumed as,

- 1) Direct attempt to correct what he sees as the objective basis of his failing. Stigma becomes a central possibility, arising from the individual's perception of one of his own

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<sup>29</sup> Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 29–30.

<sup>30</sup> Goffman, *Stigma*.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 14.

attributes as being a defiling thing to possess, and one he can readily see himself as not possessing.

- 2) Minor failings or incidental impropriety may, he feels, be interpreted as a direct expression of his stigmatized differentness.
- 3) At least the 'visibly' stigmatized one will have special reasons for feelings that mixed social situations make for anxious unanchored interaction.<sup>33</sup>

A study similar to the one being discussed in this thesis looked into Ukrainian and Belarusian minorities in Poland, in which theorization of stigma was applied. Among the findings it was concluded that Belarusian minority's main response to stigmatization was to suppress their ethnic origin.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, announcements of proudness of the minority's ethnic background were fairly irregular.

There has been overall literature in the relation of stigma and stereotypes in identity construction of ethnic groups. It is relatively unavoidable to have all types of images come up when it is thought up of particular groups, which in almost all situation these are complementary part of the stigmatization, however to make a clear point in this sense we would be referring to negative stereotypes. While conversing about hybridity and post-colonial usage of stereotypes in a way vocalizes ethnicity, Homi K. Bhabha asserted stereotypes as "complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive, and demands not only that we extend our critical and political objectives but that we change the object of analysis itself."<sup>35</sup>

Regardless of the common understanding of the contradictory representation and negative effects of stereotypes, in anthropology, stereotypes are found as crucial for the enunciation of a group's boundaries regardless of the problematizing that most stereotyping might cause. For example, again and again we come to the suggestion that there exist certain

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 19–29.

<sup>34</sup> Ilona Matysiak, "Ethnic Identity as Stigma in Life Experiences of Different Generations: The Case of Belarusian and Ukrainian Minorities in Poland," *Nationalities Papers* 42, no. 6 (November 2, 2014): 1002–14, doi:10.1080/00905992.2014.953465.

<sup>35</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 2012), 100.

groups of minorities that carry strongly negative stereotypes about their ethnic minority groups while they hold positive stereotypes concerning the leading group.<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, in the debate about stigmatization of groups in relation to their ethnicity there can be found two important patterns to follow: one which might use ethnicity to harmlessly identify groups and preserve dignity or utilize stigmatization as a force to contradict stereotypes which in the long run might be taken by the individual as a benefit. However in the other hand, stigmatization because of one's identity can have very damaging effects on the individual identity such as hating those belonging to their very own group.

More recent collection on works about stereotypes from a psychological perspective show the effects of stereotypes as less pessimistic in relation to the stigmatized. Perhaps it is emphasized that even though regularly many of the stigmatized are aware of the prejudice against their group they sense to belong to, not always does he or she believe to have experienced discrimination or been target of prejudiced attitudes or acts.<sup>37</sup> In fact, when dealing with possible acts of discrimination it is important to point out the relevance it has for the individual the way a situation might be experienced differently depending on the individual.

This is because there is an understanding that individuals have several identities and that such identities may vary according to situations. In this case, however, as we focus on ethnicity as identity, the central question is about when it is that ethnicity under which circumstances becomes important for the individual. For example, those who are aware of the stigmatization of their group might relate to little things or features that can make a big difference in the meaning of situation in comparison to those who are usually not stigmatized. In other words:

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<sup>36</sup> Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 23–24.

<sup>37</sup> Crocker, J., & Quinn, D. M. (2003). Psychological Consequences of Devalued Identities. In Rupert Brown and Sam Gaertner, *Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology: Intergroup Processes* (John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 241–42.

A related collective representation that the stigmatized may bring to situations is awareness of specific stereotypes about their group. Because these stereotypes are often pervasive in the culture, it may be inevitable that members of stigmatized groups know the content of those stereotypes. That is not to say that stigmatized individuals inevitably accept the validity of these stereotypes, although some do.<sup>38</sup>

The same notion might be similar in relation to the spaces in which these ethnic groups are found or regionalized. Ethnic groups and ethnic minorities geographical region vary in every case, in some a particular ethnic group might be widespread and in other nations they are regionalized in particular places. Subsequently, I analyze the importance of geographical territories in ethnic group's identities.

Borders are thought to be socially constructed places that don't only belong to territory but to a specific culture, social dynamic, people and to ethnic groups. Borders pertain to a particular place and support the identity of its people. Many ethnic groups relate and acknowledge ethnicity or are vocal about it depending not only on the situation but their geographical spaces in which they are located.

These are all really important points to take into consideration for the purpose of the presented empirical study which focuses on an ethnic group living on the U.S-Mexican border. Therefore, the following segment illuminates on major characteristics of the U.S-Mexican border in two ways: It briefly explains historical processes explaining the particular way in which this border experienced shifting lines, enforced securitization and militarization. Secondly, this section focuses on border identity, its relation to ethnicity and trans-border paradigms.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 242.

## 2.2 Borders and hybrid identities

“It is in this border that identities are assigned and taken, withheld and rejected”<sup>39</sup>  
– Michael Kearney

The U.S.-Mexico border has common characteristics with other borders of the world, however every single border has its uniqueness based on historical and political processes. The U.S.-Mexican border is unique in that the northern side of this boundary once was a territory of Mexico but was annexed by the United States under the Treaty of Hidalgo de Guadalupe of 1848. Parts of the states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and Florida were part of Mexico up to the end of the Mexican-American war.

Consequently, this is a place in which a territory of almost 3000-kilometer is shared by different economies. These have been some particular aspects that did not only change where the lines of states were drawn but also intensified the movements of people and the shifting of identities. Facts as such give insight to the complexity of borders and the prevalent assertion that borders are places which are under prevalent adjustments and instability.

From Oscar Jaquez Martinez categorization of types of borderlands, the U.S. -Mexican border falls into the category of an *Interdependent borderland*. Which signifies that cross-border interaction can be found between both countries.<sup>40</sup> However, Martinez also asserts that there is a kind of pattern that prevails in which regions of binational nations across the world have an asymmetrical interdependence. That is, one nation is usually stronger and has

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<sup>39</sup> Michael Kearney, “Borders and Boundaries of State and Self at the End of Empire,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 4, no. 1 (March 1, 1991): 58, doi:10.1111/j.1467-6443.1991.tb00116.x.

<sup>40</sup> Mart’nez, *Border People*, 6.

domination over the neighboring country.<sup>41</sup> In this context it is self-evident that the United States holds dominance over the Republic of Mexico, this is especially because it is where the first and the third world meets and economic disparities prevail in the Mexican side. Within these transfers, mobilization across the Southwestern borders are not static and the dynamics of movement have been for the most part shaped by migration flows, meaningful events, national security and geo-political agendas.

At first, the movements of people were basically done exclusive of restriction throughout the mid-nineteenth century. Besides, the Mexicans already living in the territory when the annexation of the Mexican territory happened, a major influx of migrants from Mexico came during what was called the Bracero program, which was a program for legal guest and unskilled workers to come into the United States to work during the labor shortage that WWII caused. During this time and onward generally access to the United States was very flexible.

A major wave of immigrants from Mexico began in 1910 with the occurrence of the Mexican Revolution.<sup>42</sup> However, there was a major setback during the 1990's due the increment in flows of immigration. In consequence, large fences were built in border edges.<sup>43</sup> Then in 2001 the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center happened and as consequence affected the reinforcement of those fences with the construction of fortification along the dividing line. Perhaps this attack on the American nation constituted to many cultural and securitization changes. The threat of crime, terrorists and immigrants in general was a prevalent feeling in public opinion. Another major factor that shined light on the U.S-Mexican border was the

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<sup>41</sup> Oscar Jaquez Martinez, *Border People: Life and Society in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (University of Arizona Press, 1994), 6–9.

<sup>42</sup> David J. Leonard and Carmen R. Lugo-Lugo, *Latino History and Culture: An Encyclopedia* (Routledge, 2015), 246.

<sup>43</sup> Michael Dear, *Why Walls Won't Work: Repairing the US-Mexico Divide* (OUP USA, 2013).

vicious drug war on the Mexican side. In 2010, the then-president of Mexico Felipe Calderon declared a war on drugs which resulted in debouchment of a war between drug cartels in several borderland cities on the Mexican side.

All these events contributed to changes in securitization and enforcement. In short, the Mexican threat and the threat of risk for the nation has been used as a modifier of the border, it has been suggested that "...American perception of Mexico as a threat becomes the motive of the US-Mexican border control." <sup>44</sup> In consequence, the management of the US frontiers is modified which in times includes the fortification and stronger attitudes of policing from institutions such as the DEA, FBI or the border patrol. In this way, the US recurrently makes statements of power and expands the meaning of the "they" and "us."

However, regardless of the increasing measures of securitization, even if limited, this border continues to allow the mobilization of people. In regards to this Jenkins states: "Ethnicity is one of the most significant of social identities to respect to the relationship between localities and their regional or national arenas and institutions."<sup>45</sup>In this sense for instance the possibly the fluidity and constant change of ethnic identities is not only the consequence of slur labeling but it also depends on the geographical location where identities are found.

Following this notion Anthropologist Michael Kearney assures the idea that the US-Mexican border is in contemporary times beyond disputed territory. Instead a place where personal identification is challenged.<sup>46</sup> This contestation, shifting and transition of identities are very common characteristics of border identity, however in this particular context these first were initially explored in depth by pioneer in U.S-Mexican border studies Gloria Anzaldua. Anzaldua describes the border as an *open wound*. She refers of the damaged caused by the third

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<sup>44</sup> Flores, "Fronteras Porosas:El caso de los Estados Unidos y Mexico," (Porous Frontiers) 173-176.

<sup>45</sup> Richard Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity* (SAGE, 2008), 124.

<sup>46</sup>Michael Kearney, *Borders and Boundaries of State and Self at the End of Empire*, Journal of Historical Sociology 4, no.1 (1991): 58.



world living next to the first, how this damage never heals and hard to keep up with the power of the American Nation, these two merging to create the third country and therefore this is how border culture emerges. She writes,

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants.<sup>47</sup>

The narrative identifies historical and cultural factors that are often internalized in the identity of individuals in the communities along the border. It is important to mention that Anzaldua does not only use the US-Mexico boundary to visualize the power in militarization of the US and the cultural imperialism, but also as an expression of the struggle of identities go through at the border, implying the idea that those found at the border are subject to a process of persistent deterioration of culture. For example, there are several components to this deterioration. During this deterioration the individual might have to go through this transition which requires the individual to assimilate to the main nation-state, to this other culture.

In this reflection, Anzaldua often evokes instances of her very own experiences and family members to conceptualize the relations among whites and the Mexicans and injustices as consequence of cultural tyranny and constant struggle for land resources. The author relates the story of *Tejanos* (Texans), when Texas was then Mexico, driven out of their property and how a large number of Chicanos were killed in fights with Anglos in the border for the land in 1915.<sup>48</sup>

These and other narrations are used by Anzaldua with the purpose to relate the history of Mexicans in this border and to evaluate the meaning this part of history has on her identity and others like her. She states: “In every Chicano and Mexican lives the myth of the territorial

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<sup>47</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza* (Aunt Lute Books, 2012), 25.

<sup>48</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza* (Spinsters Ink Books, 1987).

treasure lost. North Americans call this return to the homeland the silent invasion.”<sup>49</sup> Hence it is stated that the annexation of the land and the cultural imperialism is an important element for the construction of the identities found here. Alejandro Portes claims that the attachment to the land as previously part of Mexico in fact has been in previous times, evoked a fear of succession pronounced by nativists and scholars.<sup>50</sup>

### 2.3 The Mexican Threat

Therefore, by these historical perspectives of frequently debated and consigned limits, borderlands have the tendency to be characterized by a variability of identities filled with ambiguous characteristics. The prevalent Chicano pride along with other factors have been a reason of criticism towards these community, mostly as result of their connection to Mexico. Historically, in the U.S-Mexican border the processes of these identities were the result of racist discourse and stereotypes.<sup>51</sup> Mexicans have a history of stigmatization and racial exclusion. This is particularly for those in California and in the South-western regions of the United States where such communities are mostly allocated. The following is a recollection of the major stereotypes and stigmatization patterns.

Like other ethnic minorities, Mexicans have been targets for scapegoating in the U.S. These thoughts are often reinforced by stereotypes and generalization patterns. Subsequently, I write about the main tendencies on stereotyping of this ethnic group and prominent theories about Mexican immigrants. Primarily, I observe the reasons behind stigmatization of this group, for example English language acquisition or the strong tendency of conservation of their culture

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>50</sup> Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America : A Portrait* (Berkeley : University of California Press, c1996, n.d.), 94.

<sup>51</sup> Scott Michaelsen and David E. Johnson, *Border Theory: The limits of Cultural Politics* (University of Minnesota Press, 1997,) Pg. 77

in the US. These are relatively important to understand the identity of this ethnic group but because as it was previously mentioned, the reinforcement done in the border is often along other factors consequence of anti-Mexican feelings.

There is plenty of literature about this ethnic group's stigmatization through criminalization. This group is also seen as a major threat to American identity. Stigmatization of Mexican ethnic groups has been widespread and it's not new. Scholars constantly study this ethnic group on themes of assimilation, language, acculturation and American identity. The concept of American identity was a central focus for influential political theorist Samuel Huntington. In an attempt to predict the future of the American identity in *Who we are* (2004) Huntington makes a link to the Mexicans ethnic group and immigration as one crucial aspect for the future American Identity.

Huntington describes the need for Americans to find a national identity after the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks. He notes this as a turning point for the American people to find common ground in order to stay united. He described the United States to be in an "identity crisis."<sup>52</sup> The author argued that eventually the massive Hispanic immigration and its continuity would result in the division between Anglos and Hispanics instead of a black-white division seen before.<sup>53</sup> He suggested that the Spanish challenge eventually threatened America's linguistic homogeneity and that it would lead the path for America to become similar to nations like Belgium. In other words, a country which is no longer monolingual.

This on one hand was a subtle way to approach Hispanics for Huntington in terms of the future of American identity, however he had special criticism for Mexicans, especially those in the Southwest. Huntington's main critical remarks about Mexicans were as followed: 1) The

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<sup>52</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We?: The Challenges to America's National Identity* (Simon and Schuster, 2004), 12–14.

<sup>53</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We?: The Challenges to America's National Identity* (Simon and Schuster, 2004).

author questioned Mexicans loyalty to the United States especially to those who carried double nationality. 2) He described Mexicans as failing behind on assimilation particularly in terms of language. 3) He highlighted women of this ethnic group as highly fertile and therefore as having high reproduction rates 4) He identified Mexicans as lazy and with a low performance in school matters.<sup>54</sup>

For example, on this last point, Huntington states:” At the start of the twenty-first century little progress had been made in the educational assimilation of Mexican-Americans.”<sup>55</sup> The political theorist claimed that Mexican immigration was different from other groups of migrants in American history not only for the assimilation process but also for the high numbers, their regionalism in the Southwest of the United States and illegality. In his arguments Huntington constantly emphasized their strong nationalism for Mexico and adherence and persistence to keep Mexican culture constituted to the deficiency of patriotism for the United States from this immigrant group.<sup>56</sup>

These among other prejudice of Mexicans drove in earlier times in earlier migrant flows to not keep the sojourner character and forget their Spanish language and cultural heritage. Also generally in Mexicans-Americans, the higher the socioeconomic status equaled the greatest probability that they could will blend with the mainstream Anglo culture<sup>57</sup> as they struggled to fit in. Also it wasn’t strange to try to avoid the connection to Mexico. A study from 2005 in New Mexico showed that it was very common for people belonging to the Hispanic pan-ethnic term to self-identify themselves as Spanish-American.<sup>58</sup> In illumination of the theory

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<sup>54</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, “The Hispanic Challenge,” *Foreign Policy*, accessed November 16, 2016, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/28/the-hispanic-challenge/>.

<sup>55</sup> Huntington, *Who Are We?*, 2004, 234.

<sup>56</sup> Huntington, *Who Are We?*, 2004, 221.

<sup>57</sup> Martinez, *Border People*, 92–93.

<sup>58</sup> Grace Olivares Doan and Cookie White Stephan, “The Functions of Ethnic Identity: A New Mexico Hispanic Example,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 30, no. 2 (March 2006): 230, doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.07.009.

to avoid being identified with a disliked group or individual this on an attempt to claim a higher status.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

From the previous analysis and set of events there is a common understanding that there were several discourses that repeatedly talked about Mexico and Mexicans as the enemies of the US and enemies of the US people. Throughout the campaign a strong focus remained in illegal immigration, Mexicans and the securing of the southern border. In this thesis my objective was to find out how all these discourses and or sets of events may have affected border communities. In my research I explored this situation while incorporating themes of ethnic identity, securitization of the border and stigmatization rhetoric. The method chosen to best approach this goal was based in qualitative techniques. These included individual in-depth interviews with a group of volunteers and a minor collaboration from expert-knowledge.

#### 3.1 The Method

This type of method is commonly used in social science research and was chosen because the great advantages it has in comparison to the shortcomings. It is said that “part of the power of qualitative research comes from its ability to explain the range and diversity of phenomena that occur.”<sup>59</sup> Therefore, I intended to gather responses that focused in this particular event to analyze how it was interpreted by the participants.

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<sup>59</sup> Jane Ritchie et al., *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers* (SAGE, 2013), 290.

Also it is important to mention that my particular investigation dealt with the subject of ethnicity or ethnic identity. In consideration of the above-mentioned, the feature of my study descent into the type of possibly delicate or abstract to deal with. In other words, this can mean in social research that certain issues are challenging to capture because they are so fragile in their manifestation or it can as well be related to the intangible nature of sentiments.<sup>60</sup>Therefore, the ambiguity and abstractness of ethnicity and identity is the major justification to have a qualitative approach.

Another very important justification of using in-depth interview was the delicate topic this might be to the interviewees. It is valid to keep in mind that there might be a risk of stigmatization of the respondents if they are in any way associated with the study or if information was shared. In this case in depth interviewing is better than other approaches we implemented of that for example focus groups. Most importantly identity itself is a complex and hard to perceive but also the focus on the anti-immigration rhetoric requires a subtle approach.

### 3.2 Participants

One major criteria needed for the participants was a strong trans-border connection with both the United States and the Mexico. Almost all the participants were US-born Mexicans except for two. As stated before the participants were recruited at a university campus. First I sought assistance from a few contacts at the Spanish and foreign languages department at New Mexico State University. Subsequently the remaining participants were recruited from snowball sampling. The reason behind choosing this institution has to do with the fact that a large percentage Hispanic students attend here. For the research it was important to find

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 33.

students whose characteristic were appropriate to the study. In this case they needed a connection to Mexico or Mexican heritage, or be considered as 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrants.

Another criterion needed for the participants was a strong trans-border connection with both the US and the Mexican nation and the institution's closeness to the international border aided with this requirement. There were a total 12 interviewers which most were pursuing an undergraduate academic degree. In the final sample the majority of my interviewees were US-born Mexicans who in fact held strong trans-border activities within both Mexico and the United States. The ages of the participants ranged between 19-27 years-old; six males, six females.

Although I used the Hispanic term to generalize a pan-ethnic group this term does not talk exclusively of immigrants of Mexico and usually is used as a way of group a wide range of ethnic backgrounds and nationalities. For this reason, it's important to mention that throughout the analytical part of the research I referring back to the Hispanic term when the connotation of this term is appropriate, however I make a distinction throughout the reason when speaking of the particular group being studies here and the subcategories.

For the purpose of the working and practical definitions of the study I will be using ethnic community or Mexican community. I will be using these terms to describe those individuals that have a genuine connection to their Mexican heritage or perhaps to the country of Mexico. Some of the attributes of these members included their self-ascription as part of this group and also to those who conserve the language and cultural traits pertaining to this ethnic group. For example, some a relatively good knowledge of the Spanish language. Otherwise, when speaking exclusively of the sample studied in the researcher this will be specified.

### 3.3 Reflections on the Fieldwork

During the interviews, three main themes were discussed with the students. These were: 1) self-identification, in which their Mexican heritage was discussed and gave the participants freedom to ascribe themselves to an ethnic group or nationality of choice. 2) Their relation and activity with the international border, in this case the U.S.-Mexican border. 3) The last theme explored was the 2015-2016 election, which had focus on their point of views on the anti-immigration rhetoric used. As for the expert interviews, these were provided by professors from the same university which focused border studies and communication. As well I conducted an interview with an affiliate of ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) who is currently working with the community on rights for migrants. (See Figure 1-3 in Appendix)

The following passage explains the considerations the researcher took to ensure that the research was completed following ethical and research guidelines of qualitative research. The fieldwork was done during the month of April 2017. The interviews were conducted during different times through the month. The participation of the interviewees was provided in a voluntary basis at all times. The group was provided with a small handout to provide consent and in which also provided permission and in which the participant's anonymity was guaranteed. The in-depth interviews with 12 participants lasted on average between 30-45 minutes in a face to face manner and the data was recorded. Subsequently to the fieldwork the interviews were then transcribed, translated and analyzed.

The location of the interviews was the university's campus, this location guaranteed a quiet environment for both: the interviewee and I. Most importantly it secured a more private setting where the participants felt comfortable sharing their thoughts, narratives and points of view. It's worth mentioning that the same tactic was implemented for the expert's interviews.



During the time of the interviews, they were allowed to ask questions and to stop at any time. They were given the option to tell their opinions in whichever language from English or Spanish they felt most comfortable with. In this case the common option was Spanish. All the interviews were done in Spanish and a couple of statement or sentences in English was common with my upbringing I can navigate both languages in a native proficiency, so if a combination of both emerged due that this is not uncommon in this region, I encountered no problem with it. Lastly, for reciprocity as a sign of gratitude, the participants a gift card with a small amount of money for coffee only once at the interview had ended. This was done for every participant with the exception of those in the expert interviews.

With the qualitative research there was a slight chance of misinterpretation, however accounts shared are told for the most part verbatim and if the syntax or structure needed change during translation and transcribing of the interviews, there was assurance that changing words would not change the meaning of the message and keep it that way as much as possible. My background as an interpreter and translator in the region helped with the shortcomings of this. Also previous experience as a journalist aided in taking a neutral role which helped minimize the possible bias.

Overall, there were not major inconveniences during the fieldwork. On the contrary the researcher sensed a type of trust during the interviews which is presumably attributed to the researchers active belonging to the community and language in common. Not reluctant to talk about ethnicity with me.

Perhaps the most serious disadvantage of this method is that it is not representative of this whole umbrella group of people, in other words no generalization can be made. Still I would like to emphasize that insights through individual narratives justify the usage of this method since it personalizes how a situation is viewed by this particular group and what possible implications this event has for these communities on future. This method allowed me in a

critical way to explore as far as possible people's personal experiences, feelings and opinions. In the interview analysis chapter (Chapter 5), the findings collected from the interviews can be found in a complete and detailed analysis.

## 4. CASE STUDY

### 4.1 Between Crosses and Twin Cities

The core region of this study was the city of Las Cruces (the Crosses), in the state of New Mexico. Which some might hesitate to call this a border town, however Las Cruces is relatively close to Mexico. This city shares limits with the city of El Paso, in Texas. El Paso del Norte or the *Passage to the North*, along with Cd. Juarez (Juarez City) in the Mexican side are what are commonly known as twin cities and in which together complement this part of the U.S-Mexican border. (see: Image no.1)

Within this city there is a governmental higher education institution: New Mexico State University in which the fieldwork was conducted. This is a campus which in fact is a place where many of their students come from a Mexican background. Although this has not been called a sanctuary university<sup>61</sup> this is a Hispanic serving institution. A lot of the students have lived here all their lives while others commonly come from places in norther Mexico to attend a Bachelors or Master's degree in this institution.

Many of these students in this region and universities use the international crossing back and forth for several reasons but especially for visiting family member and friends. This type of transnational activity is not only seen by movement of this people but also by the language

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<sup>61</sup> From sanctuary city, which is states, countries that limit their cooperation with the immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency of the Department of Homeland Security.

dynamics. The Spanish language is highly used in this region and it has even been part of the school system as bilingual education is implemented and considered a way of life. Regardless of at some point being pressured to get rid of their culture and language Hispanics in general in contemporary times have the freedom to sanctuary their cultural inheritance specially in terms of language. The Spanish language here can be found in media, schools, governmental institutions and almost every spectrum of society.

#### 4.2 Hispanics and Election Turn-out

Demographics make a big impact in these region. In general, there were 55.3 million Hispanics in the United States in 2014, encompassing 17.3% of the total U.S. population of that 55.3 million Hispanics 64% are of Mexican origin and it is estimated that 40% were born outside the United States.<sup>62</sup> For this specific region of my research, according to 2013 Data, in New Mexico, Hispanics make up almost half of the state's population and puts Texas as the 2<sup>nd</sup> state after California with the largest top Hispanic population.<sup>63</sup> Hispanic as a broad category is largest growing minority in the United States. As of Mexicans they are the largest Hispanic origin group in seven of the top ten largest states with Hispanic people.<sup>64</sup>

During this election New Mexico remained a Democrat state. However, despite his highly criticized campaign Trump was able to make himself a way to the White House with electoral votes in other states. Trump won the election by overpowering with a total of 306 electoral votes against 232 of Hilary Clinton. Not much is yet know of what considerations

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<sup>62</sup> Renee Stepler and Anna Brown, "Statistical Portrait of Hispanics in the United States," *Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project*, April 19, 2016, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2016/04/19/statistical-portrait-of-hispanics-in-the-united-states/>.

<sup>63</sup> Anna Brown and Mark Hugo Lopez, "II. Ranking Latino Populations in the States," *Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project*, August 29, 2013, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2013/08/29/ii-ranking-latino-populations-in-the-states/>.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

exactly were taken by Latino or Hispanic voters who voted or did not for Trump. However, as I look into the ways that ethnicity possibly played a role in political participation, there is literature which illustrates trends in voting. According to a recollection of scholarship in voting in 2008 by Harder and Krosnick there are certain psychological factors that hint into why people vote or not, as well insights on voting paradoxes that lean them to vote or not to vote.

Their analysis explains that there are things such as education, group solidarity and preference on a particular candidate that motivates a person to exercise their voting right or not. As explained on this analysis, a strong preference for one candidate over his or her competitor or competitors can be a driven force to get to the polls. As well if there are fundamental differences in the voter's attitudes between one candidate and his or her attitude toward a competing candidate, if so the potential voter is more likely to vote .<sup>65</sup>

In the other hand, it can be the case that the citizen has aversion for one or perhaps both candidates. "He or she may be unhappy with one possible election outcome, which may motivate him or her to turn out, especially if he or she prefers one candidate over the other by a larger margin." <sup>66</sup> There is also attributed to voting turnout the importance of education of the individual and how the more years of formal education, the more chances of likelihood of voting. Still there are special considerations for such depending on the kind of educated group. For example, there is an understanding that college graduates who took more social science classes in comparison to other graduates vote more than others due further feelings of civic duty. <sup>67</sup>

In accordance to the study, it's relevant to mention that in comparison to Whites, regardless of the Latinos have lower turnout rates than Whites, even after adjusting in socio-

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<sup>65</sup> Joshua Harder and Jon A. Krosnick, "Why Do People Vote? A Psychological Analysis of the Causes of Voter Turnout," *Journal of Social Issues* 64, no. 3 (2008): 527–37.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 538.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 530.

economic standing, Latinos have lower turnout rates.<sup>68</sup> Still it is suggested by in this recompilation that the reasons behind this might be lacking in literature but advice is made that they should be explored from distinguishing the subgroups of the Latino community such as for example Puerto Ricans and South Americans, etc.

Following this notion, we cannot dismiss the role that solidarity plays in particular groups or ethnic minorities. To clarify, that is people who possibly identify themselves with a group with collective characteristics such as race, socio-economic status, ethnicity, age or gender. It is asserted that “People with high solidarity could have higher motivation to vote because they are concerned with issues affecting their group, or their strong connection to members of that group could give them skills that better enable them to vote.”<sup>69</sup>

### 4.3 Graphics

Image 1. Map



Source: Wordpress.com

<sup>68</sup> Matt A. Barreto, “Latino Immigrants at the Polls: Foreign-Born Voter Turnout in the 2002 Election,” *Political Research Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (2005): 79–86.

<sup>69</sup> Harder and Krosnick, “Why Do People Vote?,” 536.

## 5. INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

As mentioned the aim of the research was to reflect on the possible ways the devaluation of Mexicans through political communication seen during the 2016 US presidential made an impact on a group of people belonging to a community affiliated with the U.S-Mexican border. The aim is to analyze to what extend these messages criminalizing Mexicans and other determinant factors made an impact on their ethnic identity, for example the possibility of reinforcement of lines among ethnic groups. Through this particular group of people responses were analyzed in accordance to several phases seen at the time of the election but also particularly in the post-election time. The research explored the participants' reactions about this event in relation to their ethnic identity and the presence of the US-Mexican border in their lives.

In the methodology chapter the sample was described as showing high trans-border activity between both countries of Mexico and the United States. At the same time, is important to mention that 10 of the participants were US born, with the exception of two participants. However, regardless of the two participants not being born in United States' territory, one was brought up to the United States at a young age and holds a legal status in the country. The other participant considered herself as a *borderlander* who has constantly moved across the border for most of her life.

### *The Findings*

During the interviews, three main themes were discussed with the students. These were:

- 1) self-identification, in which their Mexican heritage was discussed and gave the participants freedom to ascribe themselves to an ethnic group or nationality of choice. This was discussed not only to find out to what degree the participant felt association to Mexican heritage and feeling of belonging to the Mexican community; some examples of these was the exploration of the participant's place of birth, language growing up, etc.
- 2) The second theme explored was

their relation and activity with the international border, in this case the U.S.-Mexican border.

3) For last, the theme of the 2015-2016 US Presidential Election was explored. This part of the interview had a focus on their point of views about the anti-immigration rhetoric used during this time, the proposal by Donald J. Trump to build a border wall, along with other things.

The findings presented predictable responses but also attitudes which were thought-provoking. The interviews engaged the participants with the subject of ethnicity and as it was predicted from previous research on ethnicity, several attributions to ethnicity were commonly subjective and often difficult to crystallize. Nevertheless, the in-depth investigation presented significant patterns which allowed for the emergence of concrete and interesting findings. The following is an analysis of the findings which are expressed in major part with the participant's accounts and not limited to the researcher's own fieldwork and contribution from the knowledge of chosen scholars. I have divided the analysis in different sections which accordingly to criterion from the fieldwork, grasp the most significant findings in terms of scholarly value in the subject being researched.

The focus in self-identification served as basis to have a better understanding of the group in relation to ethnicity or belonging to a particular group. Their identification of choice varied between Mexican, Mexican-American and American but Mexican-American was the most prominent. Many times the term Chicano<sup>70</sup> was used interchangeably with Mexican-American. While mostly identified as Mexican-American, they expressed that the term "American" was used largely by them in a way to confirm citizenship or migration status in the country. In other words, all of them felt that the term "American" was mostly used in their lives for bureaucratic matters. One participant noted: "I know it sounds messed up but I have always considered myself American for the benefits."<sup>71</sup> Also by their response it was perceived that the

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<sup>70</sup> The term Chicano or Chicana is usually used by someone born in the United States, whose parents are originally from Mexico.

<sup>71</sup> Anonymous April 22, 2017.

students often felt as necessary to mention the fact they were American for purposes of proving legal status in the country.

In the beginning of the interviews, the hyphenated term Mexican-American and even American prevailed, but also some even felt very strongly about mentioning the term Mexican just by itself. This shows that in terms of identification, this group continuous to be highly heterogeneous. However, the most interesting fact about this is that towards the end of the interviews the identification varied accordingly to the theme being explored in the interview. These will be later explained in depth as the analysis develops.

### 5.1 Election and Trump's campaign

The last section of the interview revealed points of views on Trump's statements. Their answers were provoked after they were confronted with the infamous opening of his campaign in 2015: "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you... They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume are good people."<sup>72</sup> Although it is worth mentioning that attributions or comments related to Trump were made even before reaching to this segment, especially when talking about ethnic identification.

When the participants were asked directly about this matter there were several commonalities in the responses. The participants as a whole, regardless of the heterogeneity on responses about their ethnic identification of choice or nationality—shared feelings of strong disagreement with Trump's statements about Mexicans. Their disagreement about this was an outcome of several factors: One of these was their upbringing in life and growing up with parents who are Mexican immigrants. Much of the participants' Mexican pride came from the

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<sup>72</sup> Tal Kopan CNN, "What Donald Trump Has Said about Mexico," *CNN*, accessed December 14, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/08/31/politics/donald-trump-mexico-statements/index.html>.



inherited values passed on by their parents and culture. Many of them for instance used their parents example to deny the criminality statement stated by Trump. As one participant stated:

“My parents have always provided well to me, I never struggled in that way. However, I was always witness of their struggles, they worked very hard to succeed little by little; my parents were immigrants and the majority of immigrants are trying to do the same.”<sup>73</sup> Along with these type of opinions many of participants mentioned their disagreement with the statements made not only about Mexicans, but about other groups Trump talked about in a respective way.

The respondents specified examples of this by naming groups that included African-Americans, Muslims, women and people of color. As one interviewee puts it “A lot of my friends didn’t like Trump, and a lot of my friends come from India and the Middle East. They didn’t like Trump because they’re immigrants in general and well we don’t think it’s right for him to speak based on his own prejudice.”<sup>74</sup>

Overall the respondents showed solidarity toward ethnic minority groups and other groups being targeted in Trump’s rhetoric also. In many instances the respondents expressed having friends who were foreigners or immigrants. Also several of them felt that regardless of their citizenship status, their Mexican background made them immigrants and an odd group also and expressed solidarity with those “like them.” Also, it’s worth mentioning that it was observed that their educational background and contact with international students in campus aided this type of feelings by analyzing all this it was seen also that major empathy for other groups prevailed in the female participants.

While talking about the election and campaign, the subject of voting in the election was addressed. Among the group of participants, the majority were eligible for voting. Although

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<sup>73</sup> Anonymous, April 28,2017.

<sup>74</sup> Anonymous, April 28,2017.

most of the students mentioned going to the polls, there were three who did not vote in my sample because of several reasons. These three participants mentioned having a strong aversion towards both main candidates. For instance, one felt none of the candidates deserved his vote or that his vote wouldn't matter during this election. In this case even if the participant disagreed with Trump's statements he felt that there wouldn't be any benefit for him or the community if he voted for any of the candidates.

In another account an interviewee expressed his dilemma during this time: "I was going to vote for Hilary, but then I said no. I didn't want to vote for her just because I didn't like Trump" I didn't want to vote for Trump because I didn't like Hilary, especially after what he said about Mexicans... a lot of people decided to vote for Hilary to not vote for Trump."<sup>75</sup>

There were a few accounts in which there was a motivation to go out to the polls to vote against Trump. There was one in particular which I found quite interesting: This student stated, "I was previously registered for voting but I had not voted before, I voted for the first time because I did not want for Trump to win the presidency"<sup>76</sup> Surprisingly enough this participant did not recall who he had voted for, which was neither the Democrat or Republican candidate. He continued to say:

I did not vote for any of two main candidates. Maybe "she" did not expressed the same as Trump but I bet if she would of thought of the same tactic she would have done so...because I think Trump did it to mobilize all the *rednecks*<sup>77</sup> and all that to stand against Mexicans and get more votes.<sup>78</sup>

In the other hand with the exception of the example mentioned above, those who voted showed a preference for the representative of the democratic party Hilary Clinton, over the then republican party nominee Donald Trump.

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<sup>75</sup> Anonymous, April 25,2017.

<sup>76</sup> Anonymous, April 22, 2017.

<sup>77</sup> This participant used the English term *redneck* which is a term used to describe a working-class white person from southern US, especially for political reactionary purposes which is generally derogatory.

<sup>78</sup> Anonymous, April 22,2017

“I voted for Hilary because I didn’t want to live in a community based on hatred. I think hate divides. I thought to myself: If I vote for Trump it would be like harming myself. Regardless of me being born in this country, because of my Mexican culture I felt this threat was aimed at me. I think his words referred to a certain stereotype, people with a certain color shade.”<sup>79</sup>

The majority’s decision from my participants to vote for the democrat nominee as reflected by the analysis of my research indicated that Trump’s rhetoric influenced a large amount of the participant’s voting outcome. However, there were other factors which should be mentioned including several participants’ concern for the economy, how their taxes would be invested and how they felt that it was unnecessary spending taxes in the construction of a wall across the southwestern border, especially when they all were aware by their personal experiences that there is a barrier at this border already.

What can be recognized from this — is that this group of first generation immigrants are highly influenced by democratic values, and the idea that everybody is equal, which this greatly influenced by them being children of immigrants. They agreed that immigration was a central issue, but those commenting on immigration saw it as a good thing. There were two participants that disagreed with illegal immigration but their opinion was based by the fact that illegal immigrants don’t have access to the same rights in comparison to those who actually have the required documentation.

Also even if this particular group showed a degree of assimilation to American mainstream culture, their Mexican background or Mexican heritage per se is very important in their lives. Nevertheless, this group acknowledges their belonging to the American nation and the United States as their home.

In conclusion, these students felt that this type of rhetoric towards Mexicans was unacceptable and was part of their motivation to vote. However, they also considered other

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<sup>79</sup> Anonymous, April 19,2017

priorities such as the economy, climate change and education in the United States as meaningful issues in which the United Should work on and not a big concern about what happens in Mexico.

## 5.2 Responses to Stereotypes

When conducting the interviews, the concept of stereotypes constantly emerged, which mainly surfaced in relation to the anti-immigration rhetoric. Responses from the participants indicated that this group is well aware of the stereotypes being said before about Mexicans and that such assertions were not new in their lives which is a notion that prevails in theory in regards to stigmatization of groups in general, that is ethnic groups are usually aware of the discrediting of Mexicans to a group level.

Even if some of the participants expressed not being directly accused or singled out by these stereotypes, they acknowledge the existence of negative allegations about Mexicans. When interviewees were asked if Trump's statements were true, however the majority of the students acted to the negative stereotypes by expressing positive characteristic about Mexicans. For example, Mexicans who succeeded in educational settings in the United States. In the other hand for those students in the humanities, it was emphasized how hard working and persevering Mexicans were to get a better life for their families. For those in sectors such as engineering, they constantly mentioned Mexicans as coming to the country to contribute in the science and innovation, and technological sector.

Regardless of this, there is something notable about their attitudes which still showed the internalization of stereotypes and the constant effort to prove otherwise about these stereotypes. One prevalent comment was that they should be considered as "Americans" because they have not done anything wrong, implying that they had not committed a crime. For instance, a few of the participants commented on how they felt that they belong to the nation because they had followed the rule of law of the nation and how some of them tried to be part

of the armed forces. While talking about this topic one of the non-us citizen stated: “I even tried to join the armed forces draft to show them that I deserve to be here.”<sup>80</sup> In this way it seems that this group is still self-conscious of this stereotypes, as explained the stigmatized is constantly watching out of minor mistakes that would end up on their discretization.

Regardless of the constant struggle to contradict these stereotypes and to learn to live with them, the participants also agreed that this type of negative stereotyping has shaped them in a positive way and motivated them to prove otherwise these wrong claims. Although it was reported by several participants that at this point in time after the election, they felt a strong pressure even more to show their belonging to the society and to go against the negative images created about Mexican. One comment below illustrates the concerns in this matter.

Being Mexican I’ve always felt that I have to do double the work to feel content with myself. To hang out with *whites* and stuff like that...I guess the pressure seems to be more now with everything Donald Trump has said. Anglos have this thought that you are less, that you won’t be able to achieve anything<sup>81</sup>

Another participant expressed how even though he had lived in America all his life, he found himself trying to prove this to people. I am American but in that aspect I have more pressure to show that I am in fact American. He mentioned that after the election this mattered even more: “I didn’t used to be like this, my nationality wasn’t so important, I always said that I was from both Mexico and America, but now with this situation is a lot harder.”<sup>82</sup>

Also it is important to acknowledge the characteristic of the sample in this section. That is that these are individuals that are seeking higher education, which contradicts the stereotypes usually being used as stigmatization of this group. That is, claims that they are criminals and

<sup>80</sup> Anonymous, April 11, 2017.

<sup>81</sup> Anonymous, April 17, 2017

<sup>82</sup>Anonymous, April 22, 2017.

lack of success in academic settings. By taking this into consideration, interestingly instead of avoiding a linkage to this ethnic group or rather be categorized as Americans, in this case they did otherwise.

Unsurprisingly, although there was a strong disagreement about the statements stated by Donald Trump and the students' struggle to fight stereotypes. Many of the respondents showed a minimal concern on migration policies affecting them directly. This was not unusual as result of their legal status of immigration, since as most of the participants were born in the United States. Nevertheless, participants did express some concern about being targeted for their ethnic background at this period of time.

### 5.3 Ethnic awareness

At all times the participants never showed reluctance or unwillingness while talking about immigration and their ethnic background. One of the reasons to which openness is attributed is to: the inclusivity of this region created by the ethnic demographics; meaning the large amount of Hispanic people living in the region, the closeness to Mexican territory and the diversity embodied in many social aspects of the group.

These participants showed a great connection to their ethnicity and agree that the anti-Mexico rhetoric seen during the campaign came up constantly in their daily lives, even during their studies and to some even created anxieties and awareness about their ethnic background. For example, one participant commented on how this was a constant discussion in her classroom and how she felt uneasiness every time it was brought up.

With that said, the participants felt comfortable sharing their concerns during the interviews about being targeted for their ethnic background, even if they had a legal status in

the country. This was especially true for the ones who felt matched the typical stereotype of “Mexicans”. For example, having a darker skin complexion or speaking Spanish.

In several accounts some participants felt the need to be cautious when they spoke Spanish and with who, some even expressed feeling worried that his or her foreign accent would accentuate their ethnic background and therefore be subject to possible discrimination. One female participant expressed her concern about how she had to be careful of using Spanish outside the college campus during and after the election. She noted:

Usually I feel safe speaking Spanish at the University but now days with the current situation things have changed —If I find myself outside the campus, in other contexts when I decide to speak Spanish I try to be careful in this aspect. If I am out on the store with my sister and we are speaking Spanish, I feel uncomfortable, I get bad looks, I guess it’s because of the way I look. But things change when I am with my boyfriend, who is French. I usually feel okay speaking Spanish in the company of him, he has white complexion which for some reason it makes it more acceptable for the Anglos I guess.<sup>83</sup>

Throughout the interviews the Spanish language was a key element of their identity and Mexican heritage. Participants commonly emphasized how it played a role in their concern for possible discrimination. For instance, in another account a male student described how he felt that his accent made his ethnic background conspicuous and therefore a target. Talking about this issue he shared the following event:

I was at work which is on campus, selling tickets for a concert of country music, most of the attendees were *güeros*<sup>84</sup>. When I tried to explain to a customer the prices and exit routes after the concert he noticed my accent. He started shouting “I want someone who knows what he’s doing and that speaks English!” Even though I was clearly speaking English to him.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Anonymous. April 13, 2017.

<sup>84</sup> Güero is a Spanish slang term usually used to refer to a white person. It can be concluded as an ethnic slur depending on the context.

<sup>85</sup> Anonymous. April 25, 2017

In this case the participant shared that he had been raised with both languages English and Spanish. He added: “I speak English perfectly fine. I’ve been told I have a little bit of an accent but I had never been in such situation where someone so disrespectfully was uncomfortable with it.”<sup>86</sup> In a similar case, a student perceived that her physical characteristics in combination with the usage of her Spanish language possible act of racism.

I was walking to class with a friend...then I had a stranger come up to me and simply asked. ‘Are you Mexican’? I said, yes. He replied, I can tell. He didn’t say anything else but I could tell in the tone of his voice that he was trying to be spiteful about me being Mexican. I guess it was the fact that I was speaking with my friend Spanish and also the color of my skin. You know, my skin complexion is not white...I am a little darker. I’ve never experience a direct attack on my persona because I was Mexican.<sup>87</sup>

Here we can see the significance of social situations as perceived by the participant. Many of the participants emphasized their physical appearance in combination with their language of choice to incidents of possible discrimination. Taking into consideration that being Mexican is often perceived as also a linguistic group. Interestingly in this last case as analyzed how all this event is related or at least perceived by this participant as acts against them for their ethnic background. In all this cases they blamed this experiences as a consequence of Trump’s rhetoric about Mexicans.

Along this in many instances although not all had perceived this type of discrimination, their accounts indicated a fear in their surrounding community due to the new administration and other related factors because of them not being directly affected, they shared knowing people who would. Several participants stated how some family members had left the US for not having the needed documentation to be legally in the United States. One individual stated

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<sup>86</sup> Anonymous April 20, 2017.

<sup>87</sup> Anonymous. April 19, 2017



that “I had some family here in Las Cruces, which already left to Mexico because they felt scared.”<sup>88</sup>

This type of fear was not only reflected on those in the US side of the border but also it had been expressed by those who use the international border to go to work or go shopping. In one case, one of the participants shared an anecdote about the day Donald Trump won the presidential election. He told the story of a lady who usually goes to work at his house didn't want to cross afraid that her visa would be removed. He states:

She usually came to work at my house on Wednesdays and I was aware of this because I was the one to pick her up at the border and take her back... I remember she called my mother and said she wasn't coming, she felt scared her visitor's visa was going to be revoked now that Trump was in power. During the elections she would tell me that she felt nervous. That she didn't know if she was going to get her visa removed or if she was going to be able to renew her touristic visa.<sup>89</sup>

In a similar case another commented on her immediate family member:

My mother hasn't crossed the border lately. She has not gone to El Paso lately because she is afraid that at some point the border officer will ask her a tricky question and take away her residency. This is because she's heard that recently there has been case where the border authorities make people sign a paper in which it states that you renounce to the residency status and they send you to Mexico and you can't return<sup>90</sup>

The anti-Mexico climate seems to go beyond the expected and might have major effects in the ease of movements of people not only from those crossing to the US side but also visiting Mexico. In another account the participant expressed how a friend felt reluctant to cross the border although the participant's friend was a US citizen primarily because her physical characteristics: “Me and my friend used to go dancing to Mexico a lot, we would cross even if

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<sup>88</sup> Anonymous. April 11, 2017.

<sup>89</sup> Anonymous. April 17, 2017

<sup>90</sup> Anonymous. April 22, 2017

she didn't have a passport, as long as she had a type of id or by stating "Mexican" since Trump won she is afraid she won't be able to cross"<sup>91</sup>

Also some expressed how there was not only fear coming from the community but also new dynamics being applied by the border officers when going through revision to cross over to the United States side. One participant mentioned, "They have many restrictions. If you're asked to hand over your cellphone you have to give it to them and they can check your cellphone and there is nothing you can do about it"<sup>92</sup> In relation to this many commented and highlighted on the importance of social media during this time. There are several accounts on the participants where they pointed out seeing more stories of people getting detained at the border or having been subject of heavy security practices. They considered social media a key element to keep them informed about these matters. Some mentioned they felt aware of racism before, but that now they felt it was proliferated very easily through social networks.

In other accounts respondents stated they were aware of people they knew who had left the country voluntarily because of the fear of being deported, discriminated against or apprehended by the authorities. Gabriela Moreno who is a Professor at New Mexico State University asserts that what is being seen with the new presidential administration is an unprecedented event which is causing fear and creating distrust in the community towards institutions with the new presidency. She notes that "I think the community is affected in the sense of fear, not only for these measures that are being taken towards the Latino community, but also because people are feeling insecure inside their own country"<sup>93</sup> Moreno continued to discuss,

Because this is not only being reflected with those who are undocumented, but also because we are seeing this in the community in general. Here we've been used to see the border patrol in the store etc. However, we are not used to having the border patrol

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<sup>91</sup> Anonymous. April 27, 2017.

<sup>92</sup> Anonymous. April 13, 2017

<sup>93</sup> Moreno, Gabriela. 2017. Interviewed by thesis author. Las Cruces, NM. April 27.

or ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) to come without any good reason to harass our communities, that is not what we are used to. This is not new, but is the dynamics and paradigms we are seeing that is new. This is what is strange for us.<sup>94</sup>

What can be learned as an effect from the discourse being seen in the campaign is that it has contributed to the fear in the Hispanic communities but also with the new administration there are new dynamics being seen in policing attitudes from the state's institutions like ICE. Shown by the theoretical framework on borders, repeatedly times security practices and reinforcement have shifted according to events such as the attack on the world trade center or migration flows which were, this Mexican threat is also contributing to policing attitudes from migration control agencies not seen before.

Several of the participants and scholars during my fieldwork evident influence Trump's rhetoric has not only increased their self-consciousness about their ethnic background this group or to perceive acts as racist or discriminatory as results of their ethnic background as consequence of the anti-immigration feelings seen during the election, but also to make it acceptable for those in power to over use their authority. On the effect of the discourse showed by Trump, it shows that there has been a sense of difficult tension that is being reflected in school, jobs, and other places of life by the local community:

There was this clash between these two discourses. One won and I think there was a lot of talking on basis of "us", "them in broader terms. The notion of who was "us", was never problematized but I think a lot of people had a notion that it was white. And that those who were not white were this "other"...Not part a the society, not worthy of deserving being part of the society...so this person won and I think that justified the a certain way of acting upon it and in the other hand there were those who felt implicated in that discourse as being *othered* , being different, who is no longer being able to stay present here.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Morgan, EriC. 2017. Interviewed by thesis author. Las Cruces, NM. April 26.

## 5.4 Belonging and Identity

As mentioned before there was a dynamic when talking about self-identification, whether it was race, nationality or ethnicity as the interview evolved. Their ascription to a nationality and positions about belonging to the American nation changed as the theme changed which in many instances was contradictory. This was particularly seen when the participants were asked about Trump's rhetoric or any possible experienced discrimination during this time.

For example, comments such as "the Americans" and "the real Americans", prevailed. There was a pattern of ambivalence in the participants' identity in this sense and even if they had mentioned to feel American or Mexican-American at the beginning of the interview, these suddenly changed when there a reference made about Trump's campaign. There were references made about those determined as the Anglo-Saxon or perhaps with white skin as the "real Americans." There were also cases in which they would refer to them by saying the "American-American." At one point one participant stated: "The real Americans are the Native Americans. They stole the land"<sup>96</sup> Meaning the Anglo-Saxon stole the land in a way to response to Trump's anti-immigration statements.

Perhaps when being confronted with all the negative stereotypes of Mexican, there was the perception that the participant was not only attentive of their very own ethnicity but that of others, or more specifically the participants presented accounts in which mindfulness in color or skin complexion persisted when talking about themselves or the outgroups.

In other accounts their connection to the country Mexico is undisguised. One of them as he talked about the stereotypes about Mexicans mentioned: "First of all Trump doesn't know the Mexican people. How people live in Mexico, what is like to live in Mexico. And on top of it to come to the United States and to be categorized as a criminal, drug addict, a rapist, when

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<sup>96</sup> Anonymous April 22, 2017.

you just come here to escape those things that are happening in Mexico.”<sup>97</sup> This is very interesting because regardless of this participant’s US citizenship status and ascribing himself as a Mexican-American at the beginning of the interview. He frequently when confronted with the subject of Trump and devaluation of Mexicans, he manifested his disagreement with ascribing himself as Mexican.

All of these anecdotes along other conclusions from the analysis add to the argument that in this group ambivalent identities are not uncommon. However, they don’t see this as being a problem. Instead the participants comment on their hybrid characteristic as a positive asset and how grateful they are to live in a border in which they are able to have a connection with both cultures and related how lucky they were to not live in places where there are many whites and at the center of Mexico. Being close to Mexico made them have a meaningful connection with the values of their Mexican heritage but also be close to a country in which they could try to succeed.

### 5.5 De-constructing the Dangerous Border Myths and the Wall.

The participants’ Mexican ethnicity were willing to express their ethnic background is often related to living in a borderland region. Therefore, were analyzed in relation to the proposition by Donald J. Trump to construct a wall along the U.S Mexican border. The participants’ expressed initially shared their knowledge on the division which is already at the border and reinforced the idea of this preposition being unnecessary. They all felt relatively safe in the United States and denied the claims of crime spilling over from Mexico to the United States. Many stated they felt poorly represent the region where they live is not accurately reflected by Donald J. Trump or the media.

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<sup>97</sup> Anonymous, April 17, 2017

Even though shows that the international border influenced this in their life and identity. The participants' showed little concern about the construction of a border wall affecting them directly. However, there was strong feedback on the symbolic and esthetic meanings behind this that commonly expressed the imposing of power they felt from the United States already.

In other words, for the locals of this region the construction of a wall contributes to the already perception of US imminent power over Mexico. The construction of a wall instead of a threat, it has a symbolism of racism attached to it. "I lived next to the border all my life, my mom's home is close to the crossing. Since I was young I would look over to El Paso in the US side, and you can see the buildings, pretty and stuff. I think if a border wall will make a very ugly statement, a division of hate ."<sup>98</sup>

This has even been reflected in the amount the mobilization of people. In this place is common to find people crossing over for family but to nearby shopping center and consumptions. it was illuminated by several contacts that the devaluation of the peso has diminished the amount of people but also as consequence of feelings of resentment. This is seen both ways people even more reluctant to cross to the Mexican side and Mexicans crossing to the US.

## MAIN CONCLUSIONS

These students and the community are aware of what was said about Mexicans during the election. This is a type of message that prevails in the students but also through their accounts in the community and strong discourse around this region. The study showed salient patterns that illuminate important implication the anti-immigration rhetoric had made an impact on these first generation immigrants from Mexico but also to the community around them. The

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<sup>98</sup> Anonymous, April 22, 2017

participant's self-consciousness on their ethnic background was described to be intensified in certain situations, for example when speaking on their ethnic group language, or in situation in which they had to interact with Anglo-Saxon.

For this group ethnicity came to matter as result of circumstances experienced by the participants to be consequence of the threat narrative used by Donald J. Trump and the way he spoke about Mexicans. While relating anecdotes the participants which perceived being discriminated against attributed these events as hostile attitudes as consequence of being perceived as a member of the Mexican community. These patterns in attitudes were persistent in several participants especially when the participants had physical characteristics that fit the stereotype about being Mexican, particularly those having darker skin complexion. In addition, the participants associated their language of choice or connection with members of their group as being perceived as Mexicans. In this sense, for this particular group or in the region it has become a habit to use the attack on Spanish not exactly as a way to promote Americanness by the offenders but to find those which are possibly connected to Mexico.

What can be found here is a shift in prejudice attitudes which still perceives Mexicans a way as lazy, criminals and as people that take jobs from Americans, however the relevance of the Spanish language still persist to a certain degree, but differently. As we have learned from critics like Huntington, Spanish is seen as a threat to American identity, to monolinguals. However in 2017, it might not be exactly be connected to identity but as a way to identify people that are Hispanics or Mexican and therefore be seen as potential target. In this sense seeing them for being immigrants and not essentially for threatening the English language. Participants felt that misconceptions prevail that links the speaking of Spanish with illegality.

Although the participants expressed the concern on possible acts of discrimination towards them during this time as result of to the anti-Mexican climate, the group in general

show a tendency in being able to cope with negative stereotypes towards their or ethnic group. This group is generally aware of this stereotypes able to coexist with such to a certain degree.

Remarkably the majority of the participants felt reluctant to self-identify as a minority group in the United States which is perceived as a coping mechanism. For instance, a female participant felt that it was a word that meant oppression, and that she was more than a general term as it is that of Hispanic as well among the participants there is a reluctance of “victimization” from participants in this group. One of the most interesting findings is that the interviewees instead of distancing from their ethnicity, the participants embraced it. They often responded to the stigmatization by contradicting the negative stereotypes with positive characteristics they assured their ethnic group carried.

This is interesting taking into the account the literature found about ethnic groups which are stigmatized. For example, it is important to not overlook the fact that in many instances ethnic groups that have succeeded in academic settings, especially in the case of Mexicans in the United States, are relatively accepted to belong to the mainstream American culture, they’re often accepted by the society as Americans and in many extreme cases as psychological perspectives show the stigmatized or devalued individual tries to distance from their ethnic background or get to the extent of despising their ethnic group.<sup>99</sup> It’s remarkable that even the constant contact with Anglos-Saxon in educational settings, and pursuing a college level of education, for this group their upward mobilization socio-economically does not lead them to distance from their ethnic group.

The participants presented high self-esteem patterns, instead of comparing themselves to other immigrants to improve their self-esteem to combat the stereotypes, they found good attributes on their very own ethnic group. Also at least in this group of first generation

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<sup>99</sup> Crocker, J., & Quinn, D. M. (2003). Psychological Consequences of Devalued Identities. In “DAPA, Politics - Rural Migration News | Migration Dialogue,” accessed June 5, 2017, <https://migration.ucdavis.edu/rmn/more.php?id=1925>.



immigrants feel sympathetic to those believed to belong to this ethnic group or in more general words as part of the Mexican community. Overall, regardless of the tension seen in the community and believed to be created by the Trump phenomenon, in addition to self-conscious of their ethnic background, their ethnic identity is viewed by the participants as a feature that holds value.

Conceivably there is a linkage between the great concentration and acceptance of bilingualism in the region that makes this group comfortable expressing their ethnic background. Perhaps this gives us an insight of the growth on opportunities and education for this group, but as consequence counterproductively raising hostile attitudes from other groups. This analysis thus indicates that demographics between the majority and minority and cultural fortification from the homeland play a major role.

The participants' identity in terms of ethnicity and nationality changed as the interview progress and what can be learn from this that it varied according to situations. They expressed feeling American but when exposed with threatening messages, they emphasized being Mexican. Here too I want to suggest that identities reflected by these participants instead of calling them ambivalent continue to be contradictory, without complete awareness of the individual, especially in particular situations.

The participants' responses showed a patter in which their ethnic background does not make space to feel complete belonging to the American nation or to feel as a "typical American." Nevertheless, these first generation immigrants are not troubled by this and see this as a normal way of life. They believe their ethnic background is an asset for mobility in this region and that their bilingualism is no longer considered to be a drawback even if this is a feature that is used by others to discriminatorily identify them as Mexicans.

Reponses aid to understand that their pride on their Mexican identity does not necessarily mean the emergence of anti-American sentiments. Perhaps it describes well situated

dual loyalties. These students have normalized their lives around the idea of being the people in between. As one stated: “I am Mexican but I live here.” They understand their belonging to the nation is based on their adherence to the rule of law in America and economic contribution to the nation. They might not feel as accepted because of their ethnic background, but they feel as full participants of the American nation. They found themselves as locals in both sides of the borders and have adapted to that way of life. They do not the necessity to give up their ethnic background to keep this participation.

I argue that the way to understand the self-identification or patterns in which these participants see their ethnic origin is through the investigation of the territory in which they are found and dynamics of this region. This factors are crucial to their response in the face of stigmatization.

Currently for this group ethnicity matters in their lives especially being exposed to situation where they interact with individuals of other groups, especially Anglo-Saxons. However, the perception would depend and vary accordingly to the physical features of the person or if she or he knows as to be stigmatized. Nevertheless, this groups feel safe within the companionship of their akin and merging with the majority of the nation is not necessarily their priority.

In conclusion I argue through main findings of my research that the border has yet become an object through the years for the growth of nationalism or epicenter of nationalistic ideology, and this has incremented with Trump’s constant message to secure the borders. I suggest that this is already having repercussion in matter of movement of people. The territorial access not necessary as limitation from authorities but mostly as consequence of uncertainty and fear. The physical border is more a metaphorical border that symbolizes the intimidation and the power of the American nation which is manipulated by an authority which stigmatizes Mexicans.

## FINAL REMARKS

As result of methodology and time constrain this research met some shortcomings. It is important to acknowledge that my research is not representative of the general population or perhaps of first generation immigrants from Mexico. However, the intention was to be exploratory and illustrate findings of this particular group that are relevant to the understanding of this particular group of immigrants. That is first generation immigrants for Mexico in higher education with are connected to the border. In addition, the fieldwork exposed meaningful findings to the meaning of ethnicity in this region and shined light on future implications that could be seen in this society in terms of migration and reinforcement of policing attitudes at the border.

In addition, further empirical study could be done to have points of view from with second or third generations of Mexican descent, which were beyond my scope of analysis. Feasibly it would be noteworthy to look into different paradigms of for example those who had a preference towards Donald Trump in this community and immerse reasoning behind it.

## APPENDIX

### Figure 1: In-depth interviews

In-Depth Interviews "Responses on Borderland Communities Post 2016 US Election"

Researcher: Ana Cristina Nunez

Interview code: Participant #

Location: TBA

Date:

Participant's information:

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Gender \_\_\_\_\_ Education Level \_\_\_\_\_ Concentration \_\_\_\_\_

- **Introduction** – Please tell me a little about yourself. Where are you from? Where is your family from? How come you're studying in this particular program? Which generation immigrant are you? Take note whether 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, etc.

#### Topic 1 – Self-Identification

- What do you primarily identify yourself as in a national census?
- Do you consider yourself as part of an ethnic minority in the US?
- Do you feel comfortable sharing your ethnic/cultural background in your community?
- You do consider ethnicity as a big element of your daily life?
- Which language were you brought up in? How well do you speak Spanish? If bilingual, what prompts you to choose a language?
- Who or what do you think has influenced your interest in Mexican heritage?

#### Topic 2 – Transnational activity/ Border relevance

- What role does the US-Mexican border play in your life?
- Would you please describe to me what prompts you to visit Mexico?
- Have you experience any differences in the border this past year?
- Do you think there is an immigration problem at the border?

#### Topic 3 – 2016 US Elections-illegality discourse, border wall, etc.

- What are your thoughts about the following statement: "When Mexico sends it people, they're not sending their best? They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people," he said. (Note: Depending on answer, probes might follow)
- To what extent does this comments about Mexicans affect you directly?
- You know anyone that would be directly threatened by the proposed immigration policies?
- Did you vote in the past election? Note: If answer is no skip question No.2
- What was your main motivation to vote or not to vote?
- You felt comfortable talking about your political views according to your values and beliefs this past election in your community?
- What is your general opinion about the proposed construction of a wall in the US-Mexican border?
- If built, how might this impact you?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

**Figure 2- Interview Reference**

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Date</b>
1	24	M	04/11/2017
2	22	M	04/11/2017
3	27	F	04/13/2017
4	21	M	04/17/2017
5	19	F	04/19/2017
6	26	M	04/22/2017
7	26	F	04/25/2017
8	25	F	04/25/2017
9	20	M	04/24/2017
10	22	M	06/25/2017
11	20	F	04/27/2017
12	25	F	04/28/2017

**Figure 3.**

<b>Scholars/ Critics</b>	<b>Field</b>
Dr. Gabriela Moreno	Border Studies & (April 25, 2017) Department of Languages and Linguistics
Dr. Erik Morgan	April 26,2017 Cultural and Intercultural Communication
Elizabeth Castrejon	New Mexico (United We Dream) ACLU (April 27, 2017)

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