

AN INTERGENERATIONAL MIGRATION EXPERIENCE:
SOCIAL MOBILITY AMONG RETURN MIGRANTS AND THEIR FAMILIES IN MEXICO

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ABSTRACT

Janelle Ashley Viera: An Intergenerational Migration Experience: Social Mobility Among
Return Migrants and their Families in Mexico
(Under the direction of Jacqueline M. Hagan)

This study examines intergenerational social mobility pathways within families of mixed migratory status. Focusing on the residents of Leon, Mexico, I use a mixed methods analysis of interviews and survey data on 50 return migrants to Leon to identify signs of intergenerational social mobility within their families. The study finds that parental return migration plays a role in determining a family's potential for upward mobility. Findings show that migrants' labor market experiences, both abroad and upon return to the origin country, influence their likelihood of intergenerational social mobility. Labor market experiences prove especially influential over these families' mobility pathways, with these experiences directly affecting the occupational and educational opportunities of the return migrants and their children, respectively. The study ultimately demonstrates international migration's potential to disrupt social class reproduction and highlights the implications of migration on the future economic success of migrant families with low levels of traditional human capital.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines intergenerational social mobility among Mexican return migrants, their parents, and their children. In the social sciences, scholars have widely examined intergenerational mobility both theoretically and empirically and have found that transmission of educational or occupational status occurs from parent to child, and this process can lead to upward, downward, or stagnant mobility (Blau and Duncan 1967; Haller and Portes 1973). Much of the existing literature on mobility among migrants with low educational attainment has explored the occupational mobility of migrants themselves (Lindstrom 1996; Akresh 2006; Hagan, Hernández-León, and Demonsant 2015). Migration scholars have also conducted many studies on the mobility pathways of migrant children, as well as on the second generation born in the host country, and have paid particular attention to understanding the incorporation experiences of Latin American migrants and their children in post-1965 United States (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Levitt and Waters 2006; Telles and Ortiz 2008; Kasinitz et al. 2009; Caponi 2011; Alba and Waters 2011). However, our understanding of how migration affects educational and occupational mobility across generations, especially among the parents and children of return migrants left behind in the country of origin, is limited. Few studies to date have investigated intergenerational mobility among multi-generational families comprised of migrant and non-migrant members (Guveli et al. 2016), and only a fraction of these studies have explored this specific process in the Mexican context (Antman 2002; Creighton et al. 2009; Halpern-Manners 2011; Lu 2014; Nobles 2011; Silver 2006). This research gap likely exists due to methodological constraints, particularly a lack of robust longitudinal data.

To address this gap in scholarship, in this thesis I investigate whether or not educational or occupational mobility is visible across three generations, which include the return migrants themselves, their parents, and their children. Drawing upon literature on return migration and social mobility, I posit that the human and financial capital that working-class Mexican migrants with little schooling acquire while abroad shape pathways of intergenerational social mobility between migrants and their parents, as well as between migrants and their children. In this paper, human capital refers to the knowledge and skills that migrants acquire primarily from their labor market experiences abroad, and financial capital includes remittances sent to migrant households in sending communities. Return migrants to Mexico often transfer new knowledge and skills that they acquired while working abroad to the country of origin's labor market (Hagan et al. 2015). The applicability of these forms of human capital can create new job opportunities for the migrants that may result in intergenerational mobility, vis-à-vis occupational status, between migrants and their parents. Return migrants may also develop new ideas about work and school that they share with their non-migrant children, in addition to job skills. Furthermore, they often send remittances home to supplement household incomes and fund children's schooling. Therefore, the transfer of new aspirations and forms of human and financial capital between migrant parents and children may facilitate intergenerational mobility in terms of education or occupational status.

My project is well-suited to investigate these claims. It employs findings from 2010 in-depth interviews and 2015 follow-up interviews with 50 return migrants in Guanajuato, Mexico, as well as survey data on returnees' parents and children, to consider the following research questions:

1. Is there educational and occupational mobility within families of return migrants across three generations? If so, what do these mobility pathways look like?
2. Do the social mobility pathways of return migrants and their children resemble the typical mobility pathways of peers in Leon more generally?
3. What social mechanisms explain occurrences of intergenerational social mobility within return migrant families?

If return migrant families experience social mobility across three generations, the main mechanism that will shape these mobility pathways will be the international migration experience of the returnees. More specifically, the skills that return migrants acquire in the United States and transfer back to their work upon return will afford them employment opportunities that offer incentives such as increased wages, financial stability, and job satisfaction. A key mobility pathway for return migrants will be an exit from Leon's shoe, leather, and textile manufacturing industry, which offers very limited mobility opportunities, and into other kinds of work that allow them to apply new skills acquired abroad. Among the children of return migrants, I expect them to have completed more schooling than their parents. Financial remittances will increase household allowances that can be used towards children's education expenses. I also posit that a smaller percentage of children to be employed in shoes. In these ways, the social mobility pathways of return migrants and their children will differ from those of other Leon residents.

In the following two sections, I will engage with the scholarships on social reproduction and social mobility among return migrants and their children in order to situate this thesis. I will also provide an overview of the economic context in Mexico since the second half of the twentieth century. This overview serves two purposes: it will provide a better understanding of the labor market conditions under which migrants emigrated and returned to Mexico, and it will highlight the changes to Mexico's education system over time that affect the schooling experiences of return migrants' children. Then, I describe the research site and methodology,

following by two sets of findings. The first set presents descriptive findings from survey data on the social mobility outcomes of return migrant families by industry and educational attainment. The second set presents an analysis of the qualitative data and narratives to identify the mechanisms influencing intergenerational social mobility within return migrant families. Finally, the discussion and conclusion section highlights key findings, addresses the study's limitations, and offers directions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Stratification and Mobility in Mexico

The sociological literature conceptualizes intergenerational social mobility as the transmission of educational or occupational status from parent to child that leads to upward, downward, or stagnant social mobility. Three studies conducted in the 1960s and 1970s on social stratification and mobility in Mexico develop a framework for the process of social reproduction that resembles Blau and Duncan's (1967) classic model of status attainment (Balán, Browning, and Jelin 1973; Muñoz, Oliveira and Stern 1977; Contreras 1978). Social status attainment is largely shaped by one's social origins, which are measured using father and mother's education and father's occupation. Social origins are reproduced in the subsequent generation, as they strongly affect children's educational attainment and have a small direct influence on children's occupational attainment. Their educational attainment strongly predicts their occupational attainment, thereby functioning as a mediator between social origins and occupational attainment. Finally, social origins have a smaller effect on education over time.

Social status attainment is just one mechanism that shapes the process of intergenerational social mobility. Social context also affects the intergenerational transmission of educational and occupational status from parent to child. For instance, institutional factors such as labor market trends and returns on education can lessen the salience of family background in shaping social mobility pathways for the next generation.

In the case of Mexico, the country underwent significant economic changes in the twentieth century. Between 1930 and 1970, Mexico and other Latin American countries rapidly

industrialized using the import substitution industrialization (ISI) model of development, which aimed to increase the national production of goods and services in order to develop internal markets (Dussel Peters 2000; Pastor and Wise 1998). This period of economic growth generated new job opportunities in Mexico's cities, which gave way to urbanization and internal migration from rural to urban areas. The prospect of finding new kinds of industrial work resulted in high social mobility among both internal migrants and long-term urban residents with diverse social origins. Three studies by Balán et al. (1973), Muñoz et al. (1977), and González Casanova (Contreras 1978), which were part of the Monterrey Geographic and Social Mobility Project, illustrate that Mexico had high absolute upward mobility rates during its period of economic restructuring. However, by the early 1980s, Mexico's economic boom came to an end as the nation experienced a debt crisis that increased interest rates and devalued the peso. At this time, Mexico began to shift away from the ISI policies of the 1960s and 1970s to a neoliberal, open market-driven economic approach in which the development of international as opposed to internal markets became the nation's prime concern (Parrado 2005). The focus on an export-oriented economy reduced public sector employment, called for labor flexibility, and prioritized entry into the global economy. Although Mexico's involvement in the global economy appeared promising, especially after the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, it negatively affected the domestic labor force by stagnating average incomes and increasing inequality (Parrado 2005). High poverty, lack of employment, and decline in real wages also persisted into the 2000s, and these trends decreased upward, intra-generational occupational mobility and increased downward mobility for both skilled and less skilled workers (Parrado 2005; Torche and Ribeiro 2007). Mexico has only begun to display signs of regional-level economic improvement in recent years (Hagan et al. 2015).

The accessibility and quality of schooling is another institutional factor that has implications for social mobility opportunities. The education systems of Mexico and other Latin American countries have undergone major reform throughout the twentieth century as part of ongoing development efforts. In Mexico's case, the expansion of public education began in 1950 when the government tripled the number of primary schools in the nation, which also resulted in a drastic increase in the number of teachers and student enrollment throughout the 1960s and 1970s (Psacharopoulos et al. 1996). The federal government initiated additional reform measures in the late 1980s with aims to decentralize the education system over time in order to address educational needs at the local level (Tatto 1999). In 1992, Mexico's president, secretary of education, governors of each of its 31 states, and teachers' union signed a federal initiative called the National Agreement to Modernize Basic Education (ANMEB), which placed the once federally-controlled education system under state jurisdiction (Tatto 1999). The initiative also made lower secondary school mandatory, which includes seventh through ninth grade (Parker, Rubalcava, Teruel, and Behrman 2007). By decentralizing the education system, ANMEB intended to improve the level and quality of schooling in Mexico according to each district's needs and increase community participation in education. Overall, Mexico's educational reform measures succeeded at increasing the overall years of schooling for its population. The completion of primary and lower secondary school significantly increased by the end of the twentieth century (Binder and Woodruff 2002). However, educational expansion did little to alleviate the increasingly inflexible class structure. The open market and export-driven model of development that shaped Mexico's economic restructuring policies in the 1980s had negative consequences for workers, who saw a decline in real wages and an increase in income inequality that was already high in Mexico (Parrado 2005). Opportunities for upward mobility in the labor

market diminished at the same time that the potential for downward mobility increased, even among highly educated workers. As a result, Mexico saw a reduction in returns on education in the form of upward occupational mobility due to the mismatch that existed between rising human capital and limited occupational opportunities (Parrado 2005).

Intergenerational Mobility within Return Migrant Families

Overall, the existing literature on the effects of international migration on the labor market reentry of return migrants provides some insight into how labor migrants socioeconomically fare compared to their parents. First, as previously stated, social reproduction occurs between parent and child; specifically, fathers transmit their occupational status to their sons, and this relationship is mediated vis-à-vis education (Blau and Duncan 1967). It is also important to consider labor market entry when examining the occupational status transmission process, as sons' first occupation is positively correlated with their current occupation. Second, studies on return migration find that labor migrants transfer human capital, financial capital, and physical assets that they accumulated during their time abroad to the origin country (Cobo, Giorguli, and Alba 2010; Hagan et al. 2015). Furthermore, migrants' reasons for return, individual characteristics, (e.g. years of schooling and type of skills acquired abroad), and social networks, in addition to the economic context of sending countries and communities, affect their reincorporation into the labor market. (Cassarino 2004; Lindstrom 1996; Ruben, van Houte, and Davids 2009; Hagan et al. 2015). Thus, the migration experience has the potential to disrupt the occupational status transmission process, leaving room for intergenerational mobility to occur between labor migrants with low-SES backgrounds and their parents residing in the country of origin. Higher levels of transferrable human and financial capital, voluntary return migration, increased education or skill sets, strong network support, and low national unemployment rates

serve as factors that may increase their opportunities for upward occupational mobility, creating distance between them and their parents in terms of occupational status.

Findings from recent studies on return migration lend support to the claim that intergenerational social mobility occurs between return migrants and their parents by examining patterns of intra-generational mobility among return migrants. A study by Hagan and colleagues (2015) on human capital and social mobility among Mexican migrants in Leon, Guanajuato uses fieldwork, interview, and survey data to illustrate that migration can disrupt the occupational status transmission process intra-generationally by facilitating skill acquisition and transfer across the migratory circuit. It is precisely through the migration experience that some migrants with low levels of traditional human capital are able to apply job skills acquired in their sending communities or learn new job skills in the destination country that facilitates upward occupational mobility – either through finding higher-skilled work, starting a business, or reporting increased job satisfaction – upon their return home (Hagan and Wassink 2016). One can postulate that the intra-generational outcomes observed in Hagan et al's (2015) study also demonstrate intergenerational mobility, as the migrants in this study have low socioeconomic origins.

Similarly, Cobo et al's (2010) study demonstrates that some return migrants experience upward occupational mobility; however, they add that prospects for such mobility depend on contextual factors of the labor force in sending communities. They use information from the Mexican Migration Project (MMP), which contains social and economic data on Mexico-U.S. migration, and the Latin American Migration Project (LAMP), an extension of MMP that contains data on U.S. migration from other Latin American countries, to examine the occupational mobility of return migrants from four sending states: Mexico, Costa Rica,

Guatemala, and Puerto Rico. Findings indicate that the economic context of the origin country directly impacts the possibility and directionality of occupational mobility of return migrants. For example, Mexico and Puerto Rico's limited opportunity structures explain the prevalence of downward occupational mobility among returnees, while the contrary is true for those returning to Costa Rica and Guatemala. Migrants returning to urban areas have decreased odds of downward mobility due to the greater number of economic opportunities that are available to them. Urban areas tend to have more diverse labor markets by industry, which increases the likelihood for social mobility to occur. Likewise, migrants returning to sending communities with high poverty levels are more likely to experience stagnant (i.e. Guatemala) or downward (i.e. Mexico and Costa Rica) occupational mobility.

In addition to economic context, life course stage and migration and work history abroad affect migrants' prospects for occupational mobility upon return. Cobo et al. use country-specific models to determine the effects of age at the time of migration, number of trips abroad, accumulated experience in the destination country, and last job held in the destination country on occupational achievement in the sending state, and they produce mixed results. For example, migrants from Costa Rica and Mexico who move after age 25 have a greater likelihood of experiencing upward occupational mobility upon return, while returnees to Guatemala and Puerto Rico are more likely to experience downward or stagnant mobility. In Mexico's case, more trips abroad increase the likelihood of downward mobility for returnees, while more accumulated U.S. experience limits the possibility of occupational mobility in either direction. This finding reflects of the selection of Mexican migrants into seasonal, low-paid work in the United States (p. 261). Finally, having a non-manual, non-agricultural last job in the United States increases the likelihood for upward occupational mobility in Mexico due to the potential

for skill acquisition and transfer. Cobo et al. note that the association between each individual characteristic and occupational mobility among returnees varies by country of origin, and this is likely caused by latent heterogeneity in the migration experience. However, the study overall illustrates that the migration experience influences social mobility pathways available to migrants upon their return home.

One study examines intergenerational outcomes across three generations of migrant and non-migrant families, as well as families of mixed migratory status,¹ in Turkey and Europe that examines international migration's effects on social mobility outcomes across generations.

Guveli et al. (2016) incorporate origin-oriented, multi-site and multi-generational data from the *2000 Families: Migration Histories of Turks in Europe* project. The study's findings first suggest that migrant self-selection takes place; in other words, potential migrants are more socially mobile before migrating. Those who display signs of social mobility via education, for instance, are more likely to become international migrants (Guveli et al. 2016, p. 95). This is why a non-migrant father's occupation in Turkey does not strongly predict their migrant children's first job. The study also demonstrates that occupational status transmission is a less definitive process among migrants compared to non-migrants. For example, a non-migrant father's occupation in Turkey is weakly correlated with the first job (i.e. before migration) and most recent job (i.e. after migration) of their migrant children,² while a non-migrant father's occupation remains a

¹Non-migrant families include individuals who resided in Turkey for three generations (abbreviated as TRTRTR), while migrant families resided in Europe for three generations (EUEUEU). Families of mixed migratory status include non-migrant grandparents, migrant parents, and either non-migrant or migrant children (TREUTR or TREUEU).

²Guveli et al. (2016) note that they are not able to distinguish the location of the most recent job of migrants. However, they indicate that over 70 percent of this generation of migrants experienced return migration, so we assume that the majority of respondents work in the origin country.

strong predictor of the first and most recent jobs among children who do not migrate from Turkey (Guveli et al. 2016, p. 104). In terms of educational status transmission, both individual characteristics and social context affect the prospect for intergenerational mobility. Children living in Turkey that have a migrant parent in Europe have less favorable educational outcomes compared to both children living in Europe and children living in Turkey whose parents never migrated, and this likely occurs due to the physical absence of migrant parents that can lead to a reduction in social support for children left behind. Nevertheless, both migrant and non-migrant children have benefited from educational reform measures. The educational expansion that took place in Europe between the 1930s and 1980s increased opportunities for students to achieve higher levels of education, and children of migrant families living in Europe enjoy these opportunities. Similarly, recent cohorts of children of non-migrant families living in Turkey have also begun to benefit from Turkey's efforts to expand education since the 1980s. Overall, these findings support Guveli et al's (2016) conclusion that migration interrupts the social status transmission process by reducing the effect of family background on the educational and occupational outcomes of the next generation.

Parental Migration and Social Mobility Among Children Left Behind

Although the academic literature on intergenerational social mobility across two as opposed to three generations of migrant families is vast, there are a limited number of existing studies that quantitatively examine parental migration's effects on the social mobility pathways of children left behind in the country of origin. Among these studies, there is a debate about the way in which parental migration affects non-migrant children's educational and occupational mobility opportunities. Many of the existing studies suggest that parental migration does little to prevent social reproduction across generations and is actually correlated with unfavorable

outcomes in education and local labor force participation due to parental absence. This means that the persistence of social reproduction among migrants with low levels of formal human capital, such as the migrants in this study, may stagnate social mobility across generations or result in downward mobility. Still, a few studies claim that parental migration expands educational opportunities for children, which has the potential to lessen the otherwise negative effects of parental absence on the social mobility pathways of children.

Several proponents of the notion that parental international migration negatively impacts children's educational outcomes, especially among non-migrant children, claim that a "culture of migration" deters children's attention away from school (Kandel and Massey 2002; Massey 1986, 1987; Mines and Massey 1985; Cohen 2004; Cohen 2011). The culture of migration is one in which children whose families, households, and communities belong directly and indirectly to migrant networks also become more likely to migrate internationally (Creighton et al. 2009; Cohen 2004; Kandel and Massey 2002). The likelihood of migration increases because children associate a future international move with potential employment benefits. Their motivation to continue their schooling diminishes as a result.

Studies by Creighton et al. (2009) and Halpern-Manners (2011) provide evidence to suggest that a culture of migration is prevalent in migrant sending communities in Mexico and affects the schooling of children left behind by migrant parents. Creighton et al. (2009) use data from the Mexican Family Life Survey (MxFLS), a longitudinal, nationally and regionally representative sample of 8,440 households across 150 communities between 2002 and 2005, to examine the likelihood of dropping out of secondary school for tenth through twelfth-grade children living in single-mother homes due to international migration or divorce/separation. They find that, in both cases, the likelihood of dropping out for children living in single-mother homes

is higher than for children living in two-parent homes. They partially attribute the negative social effects of international migration on non-migrant children's educational outcomes to the culture of migration; that is, international migration becomes more readily associated with financial gain than school completion. Halpern-Manners (2011) also cites the culture of migration as inhibiting educational attainment, as well as domestic labor force participation. The study uses a nationally representative sample of adolescents between the ages of 15 and 18 from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series-International (IPUMS-International) archive, which contains microdata from Mexico's XII General Population and Housing Census in 2000. Findings illustrate that the emigration of family members has a strong negative effect on educational attainment and domestic labor force participation among non-migrant youth. Halpern-Manners suggests that the youth become oriented towards international migration. These results do not differ by sex, which is consistent with previous studies and suggests that the gender gap in education may be closing in Mexico (Kandel and Kao 2001).

Creighton et al's (2009) study also highlights another consequence of parental migration that leads to poorer educational outcomes for children left behind: loss of social support. Within the U.S. context, a large body of research has shown that social support in the form of parental involvement in children's education positively affects school completion and success (Jeynes 2005; Anguiano 2004). Such parental involvement is reduced in migrant families due to the physical absence of one parent, and this may influence families with an international as opposed to internal migrant parent more because of the greater physical distance between parents and children (Creighton et al. 2009). After testing the relationship between SES and dropping out of high school for children with single mothers, Creighton et al. (2009) find that economic factors do not explain the association between SES and dropout rates for migrant families. They

conclude that social consequences of migration, which include lower levels of social support, drive this relationship.

As previously explained, findings by Guveli et al. (2016) also illustrate that parental absence due to migration can weaken social support, especially educational support, for non-migrant children. Their data across three generations of migrant and non-migrant families allow them to highlight the implications that reduced social support may have on the future social mobility of non-migrant children. The authors reason that because a migrant parent is absent from the household for extensive time periods, the social status transmission process between non-migrant grandparents and grandchildren becomes more influential due to grandparents' residence in the country of origin. Thus, if non-migrant grandparents have low socioeconomic status, their non-migrant grandchildren are also more likely to have poor educational outcomes. This association strengthens when parents' socioeconomic status is also low. From these findings, Guveli et al. (2016) conclude that education is the main route through which intergenerational social reproduction occurs within migrant and non-migrant families.

A third explanation for the negative effects of international migration on child outcomes highlights the psychological costs associated with migration (Lu 2014; Silver 2006). Silver (2006) uses MxFLS data to illustrate the detrimental effects of international migration on the mental health of close family members left behind in Mexico; particularly, with regard to reported feelings of depression and loneliness for spousal and parent-child relationships. Lu (2014) also incorporates data from the MxFLS as well as the Indonesian Family Life Survey to make cross-national comparisons of the effects of international migration on the educational outcomes of children left behind. Results indicate that, regardless of sending country or migrant stream, children left behind by international migrant parents had lower educational attainment

compared to children of non-migrant parents due to the psychological effects of family separation. The negative association was larger for Mexico than Indonesia. One possible explanation for this finding is “the different levels of development and public educational spending” (Lu 2014, p. 1094). In Indonesia, levels of economic development are low and educational resources and opportunities are limited, which causes families to depend more on financial remittances to cover the costs for children’s schooling. In contrast, Mexico has reached a moderate level of economic development and can provide more educational resources. Therefore, financial remittances are not as advantageous for children’s educational outcomes in Mexico compared to Indonesia.

While several studies demonstrate the negative consequences of parental migration on children’s educational and occupational outcomes, findings from other studies suggest that financial remittances can attenuate these negative outcomes in education by increasing household assets and stability (Nobles 2011; Antman 2002; Dustmann 2008). Remittances can relieve household financial constraints, which may allow children left behind to remain in school as opposed to enter the labor force and make it easier for migrant families to increase educational investments in children. They can serve as a key form of educational investment for children with migrant parents and tend to promote community development in sending states at the local level, despite offering more limited effects at the national level (Durand, Parrado, and Massey 1996; Massey et al. 2008).

A study by Nobles (2011) on the role of non-resident fathers in children’s education in Mexico considers the effect of the fathers’ financial support on children’s educational outcomes and aspirations to attend college. Using data on 739 children in Mexico and their non-resident fathers from the MxFLS, Nobles finds that children who have migrant fathers receive more

financial support from them than those whose fathers are absent from the household due to divorce. Positive correlations also exist between the financial support of migrant fathers and educational outcomes, and the financial support of migrant fathers and children's aspirations to attend college. Nobles's findings confirm that parental absence due to migration may not result in a complete loss of support for children left behind compared to other forms of parental absence. Since migrant fathers are likely to remit money back home, children are less likely to have to drop out of school to work because remittances alleviate household financial constraints (McKenzie and Rapoport 2006) and are often used to pay for children's schooling (Dreby 2010). Furthermore, findings from Nobles's study do not lend support to the notion that parental migration lowers social support and perpetuates a culture of migration. Her results illustrate that children have regular and more frequent contact with migrant fathers compared to children with divorced fathers, partially due to technological advances and the increase in communication devices over time, and this directly challenges the notion that migrant fathers are not involved in the lives of their non-migrant children. Nobles argues that migrant fathers' actions from abroad do not necessarily drive the culture of migration in Mexico. The fact that the association between the financial contributions of migrant fathers and the educational outcomes and aspirations of children left behind remains positive shows that migrant families are invested in their children's futures in Mexico (p. 742).

If parental migration can serve as a strategy to increase financial investment into children's education, then migration has the potential to disrupt the educational attainment process across generations. Dustmann's (2008) study, based on 19 waves of the German Socio-Economic panel between 1984 and 2002, examines the relationship between both educational investments in sons and the sons' earnings in the host country and the likelihood of fathers'

permanent migration in the host country. The study's sample is comprised of immigrant father-son pairs and a reference group of non-immigrant father-son pairs: that is, 334 sons of foreign-born fathers and 795 sons of native-born fathers in Germany. Using two time points – the first with both foreign-born fathers and sons living in the host country, and the second with foreign-born fathers migrating to their parents' origin country – the study demonstrates that educational investments in sons increase as the probability of the father's permanent migration to Germany, the host country, increases. The probability of permanent migration is also positively correlated with the wages of sons. These conclusions, though limited to migrant father-son pairs, affirm that migration can enable intergenerational social mobility among families of mixed migratory status vis-à-vis educational investments in children.

Parental migration might also produce gendered educational outcomes. In general, women are less likely to attend high school than men in Mexico (Andersen 2000). Post (2001) explains that the likelihood of full-time enrollment in secondary school without working for pay while attending school, engaging in domestic or unpaid labor, or working full-time decreases for daughters based on regional and individual level characteristics: namely, for those who live in rural as opposed to metropolitan areas, are the oldest of their siblings, and have younger sisters. This is likely the case due to the pressures placed on daughters to assume unpaid household work. The migration experience of one parent has the potential to alleviate the pressure of domestic responsibilities and increase the educational possibilities for daughters by generating more financial capital for the household. Some studies on the effects of parental migration on non-migrant child outcomes suggest that daughters and sons left behind received different levels of financial and social support from their parent living abroad (Antman 2012; Hu 2013).

Disentangling the effects of financial investments in education by gender is particularly important for understanding intergenerational social mobility pathways in the case of Mexico.

Hu's (2013) study uses longitudinal data from China's Gansu Survey of Children and Families, a longitudinal survey that contains data on children's welfare outcomes in rural areas of Gansu province in northwest China, and uncovers a negative association between the absence of adult household members (which include parents) and the educational performance of children, yet remittances maintain a small positive effect on educational performance. Both associations increase in magnitude for girls: the absence of adult household members proves more detrimental for girls' educational performance than for boys, but girls' educational performance also benefits more from remittances. Similarly, Antman's (2012) study, which uses survey data from MMP, demonstrates that daughters who are younger than 20 years old at the time of their fathers' migration to the United States have higher educational attainment by almost one year of schooling relative to daughters who are aged 20 and older at the time of their father's migration. Thus, not only do remittances serve as an important facilitator of educational attainment among daughters left behind by migrant fathers, but life course stage also functions as an important point of distinction between daughters who benefit from financial investment in education and those who do not.

Girls' education appears to benefit more from parental migration in these studies than their male counterparts due to the lessening of household resource constraint. In Antman's (2012) study, mothers whose husbands have migrated to the United States may become employed themselves. Mothers' wages and remittances from fathers may increase household income, thereby increasing the incentives for educating daughters. Conversely, since mothers are most likely to remain unemployed but become temporary household heads while their husbands

are away, they gain more power when it comes to decision-making and resource management. They can therefore increase investment in their daughters' education, which leads to more favorable schooling outcomes and, potentially, future social mobility.

The aforementioned studies on migration and intergenerational mobility raise several points that are important for this thesis. First, family background is an important factor for understanding the social status transmission process. Although the strength of the relationship between family background and social mobility among migrants is unclear, evidence from existing studies indicates that migrants' opportunities for occupational mobility across the migratory circuit directly impacts the potential for intergenerational mobility to occur. Second, parental migration appears to impact the relationship between family background and social mobility, but whether or not it strengthens or attenuates the relationship remains unclear and likely varies generationally and based on the family's migration history and time abroad. Third, the financial, social, and psychological costs and benefits that stem from parental international migration influences the schooling and labor market experiences of children left behind. Finally, the effects of parental migration on children's mobility opportunities are gendered, with daughters potentially benefiting more from greater investments in education than sons.

The findings from the migration and social mobility literature also present several limitations that my project seeks to address. First, with the exception of Guveli et al's (2016) study, which examines longitudinal, multi-generational data on Turkish migrants, the existing research does not utilize multi-generational data, thus restricting their analyses to parent-child models. Second, the existing research only employs quantitative data analyses to explain the relationship between parental migration and one or more social mobility indicators among non-migrant children. They do not explore the particular aspects of the parental migration experience

that shape social mobility pathways for children, nor do they offer insight into how migrants understand their migration experience as impacting their children's futures. In addition, scholars have not reached a consensus regarding the effects of parental migration on children left behind, nor do previous studies explore the ways in which the migration experience of returning parents can reshape non-migrant children's educational and occupational trajectories via the transmission of new human capital acquired abroad between parents and children.

This project is well suited to fill gaps in the scholarship on return migration and intergenerational social mobility in Mexico due to its use of interview and survey data across two time points on three generations of migrant families. Using a mixed methods approach, it aims to uncover and describe the aspects of the return migration experience of parents that affect social reproduction across generations, even if other family members did not migrate themselves. Survey and interview data on the educational and occupational attainment of returnees across the migratory circuit, as well as comparable information on the grandparents and children – the majority of whom reside in Leon – will offer another perspective on the costs and benefits of international migration on non-migrant family members. If the cross-border transfer of human and financial capital creates avenues for occupational mobility among returnees, then it is possible for their social status to improve beyond that of the previous generation and may have implications for their children's educational and occupational trajectories.

DATA AND METHODS

Research Site

The composition of migration flows between Mexico and the United States changed at the end of the twentieth century. Traditionally, migrants from rural communities sought temporary labor opportunities in agriculture and moved to places in the U.S. Southwest, California, and Chicago (Donato 1994). The liberalization of the Mexican market and other economic changes created financial instability among urban industrial workers that prompted them to internationally migrate in search of labor opportunities and higher wages. Many of these migrants settled in new destinations like southeastern U.S. states and found work in the growing sectors of construction, manufacturing, meatpacking, and forestry (Durand, Massey, and Capoferro 2005; Massey 2008).

By the mid-2000s, changes in the direction of migration flows between Mexico and the United States reoriented the U.S.-Mexico migratory system. The net rate of unauthorized migration decreased to about zero, and the rate of return migration to Mexico increased (Chiquiar and Salcedo 2013). Returnees' decision to migrate back to Mexico was influenced by improvements in the Mexican economy, the U.S. recession, and increased border enforcement and deportations of unauthorized migrants. Instead of settling in rural areas, returnees have generally relocated to medium and large urban centers with diverse labor markets where they can apply human, financial, and language capital acquired abroad to new jobs (Masferrer and Roberts 2012).

In order to account for the aforementioned changes in the U.S.-Mexico migration system, I have chosen the city of Leon as the site of my study. Leon is a large industrial center with a population of about 1.3 million residents located in Guanajuato, a major sending state of migrants to the United States since the 1980s. Its most important labor source stems from the manufacturing sector, especially from its domestic-oriented shoemaking, leather, and textile industry. The shoe industry is comprised of large manufacturing plants, medium-sized factories, and small, family-owned “*picas*,” with the *picas* each employing fewer than 20 workers and constituting the majority of the industry’s establishments throughout the city (Hagan et al. 2015; Brown Grossman and Villalobos 1997). About a quarter of all establishments in this industry are unregistered (Brown Grossman and Villalobos 1997). Historically, the rapid industrialization of the Mexican economy between 1930 and 1970 made it difficult for Leon’s domestically focused shoe and leather industry to remain competitive in the new export-based open market. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), passed in 1986, eliminated taxes and other regulations from foreign products that further hampered shoe production. The success of Leon’s shoe and leather industry remained in flux throughout the 1990s amidst political and economic changes. The enactment of NAFTA, for instance, somewhat increased Mexican exports and restricted foreign imports, but the policy changes did little to benefit the *picas* and other small firms in the shoe industry (Hernández-Águila 2007; Hagan et al. 2015). When the value of the peso plummeted during Mexico’s economic crisis in 1995, domestically-produced shoes became less expensive than imported shoes. As a result, shoe exports increased from 5.1 million pairs in 1994 to 11.6 million pairs in 1995 (Hagan et al. 2015). Still, the economic crisis decreased the overall demand for shoes, leading to mass unemployment in the industry and the closing of almost 150 shoe manufacturing plants in Leon (Hernández-Águila 2007; Hagan et al. 2015).

Although Leon's shoe and leather production has been vulnerable to the consequences of Mexico's economic restructuring initiatives throughout the twentieth century, it continues to produce almost two-thirds of Mexico's leather and currently employs about twenty percent of Leon's population (Hagan et al. 2015). Other industries, including retail, hospitality, and services, have also expanded due to the growing prominence of international markets. In spite of the dominance of the shoe and leather industry, Leon is an ideal site to examine intergenerational social mobility across generations of migrant families. Unlike traditional sending communities in Mexico with agriculture-based local economies, Leon's industrial labor market offers job opportunities across many industries that require employees to learn various skill sets before migration. The levels and forms of human capital of Leon's return migrant population mirror this heterogeneity, and this will allow me to consider the various possibilities for intergenerational skill acquisition and transfer, as well as social mobility. With the shoe and leather industry as the primary employer of Leon's working age population, I will be able to observe how many former migrants and their children exhibit occupational mobility by exiting the shoe industry and to what capacity. Additionally, my study in Leon will contribute to the scholarship on urban sending states, which remains limited (Marcelli and Cornelius 2001; Fussell and Massey 2004; Hernández-León 2008).

Research Design

My study is part of a larger longitudinal and multi-method project that focuses on migration, skill transfers, and intergenerational social mobility (Hagan et al. 2015). The data consist of two surveys, administered five years apart, with a sample of return migrants in Leon, along with worksite observations of large and medium-sized factories and family-based businesses in the area. The first survey from 2010 was delivered to a representative sample of

200 return migrants to Leon. This survey aimed to capture the processes of skill acquisition and transfer across the migratory circuit and their effects on the economic mobility pathways of migrants upon returning home.

The in-depth interviews took place in the return migrants' homes and worksites. Six graduate students from the University of Guanajuato and one of the authors conducted the interviews in Spanish. They lasted between an hour and an hour and a half in length and were comprised of 150 close-ended questions and 30 open-ended questions. The close-ended questions centered on the migration and employment histories of the return migrants, as well as on demographic information and the acquisition and transfer of money and skills from the United States to work in Mexico. The open-ended questions focused on reasons for migration, job characteristics, and labor market trajectories. Respondents provided voice-recorded personal narratives at the conclusion of each interview that detailed lifelong work experience and skill development and transfers. All interview data were coded and entered into either STATA or word processing files.

Follow-up interviews were conducted with the original respondents in 2015 by Hagan and a team of students from Mexico and the United States. This stage of data collection proved to be the first follow-up study of return migration. The interview team was able to relocate and interview 100 respondents, which was half of the original sample. New questions focused on the migration and employment histories of the return migrants since the last survey in 2010, as well as issues relating to reentry into the labor market upon return and sources of job satisfaction. The 2015 also included a module on intergenerational mobility. Given my focus on intergenerational mobility, my analyses will be based on information collected from 50 of the respondents from 2015 who provided responses to questions from a new module that captured information on the

return migrants' parents and children. Respondents were asked about the primary occupations of their mothers and fathers, as well as their opinions on their parents' level of satisfaction with their (respondents') current work. They also provided demographic, educational, and occupational data on their children over the age of 13. Finally, respondents were asked open-ended questions on occupational aspirations for their children and skill transfers to children before and after migration. Information was collected on a total of 91 parents and 123 children and entered into STATA. In order to investigate whether parental migration affects children's school and work outcomes, data from my sample will be compared with educational and occupational data on non-migrant youth in Leon from IPUMS-International, which contains census microdata for 82 countries from 1960 to the present (Minnesota Population Center 2015).³

³The author wishes to acknowledge the statistical office that provided the underlying data making this research possible: National Institute of Statistics, Geography, and Informatics, Mexico.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Sample Profile

Table 1 provides a profile of the study sample. As the table shows, the majority of return migrants are male (80 percent). The reason for the uneven distribution of men and women in the return migrant sample, as illustrated in the literature on return migration, is that female migrants are more likely to make longer trips or settle permanently in the United States (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Reyes 1997; Ruiz-Tagle and Wong 2009; Hagan et al. 2015). There is a relatively even sex ratio among the parents and children of returnees. The average age of return migrants is 46, suggesting that their migratory careers may be completed. The average age of the children is 26, placing many of them in the emerging adulthood and adulthood stages of the life course (McLeod and Almazan 2003). In terms of primary employment status, the table shows that most respondents are employed across the three generations. The percentage of homemakers significantly drops from 41 percent to 4 percent between parents of returnees and returnees, but it increases again among the children to 13 percent. This rise is likely reflective of the small sample number of female migrants. Thus, any potential findings on the basis of gender in this thesis are treated with caution.

Table 1 also shows that return migrants have low levels of traditional human capital as measured by the highest level of formal education attained. This finding corresponds with other studies that show that migrants who return to Mexico have lower levels of education than those who settle in the United States (Ruiz-Tagle and Wong 2009; Hagan et al. 2015). Fifty-six percent of the sample of return migrants completed primary school or less. A little over a third of

returnees completed secondary school (middle school). Most of the returnee's children, however, possess higher levels of traditional human capital than their parents. Over 42 percent of the children either finished or are currently enrolled in preparatory or vocational school, which consists of grades 10 through 12. Another 6.6 percent of children are also enrolled in or completed some form of higher education. These percentages are significantly higher than the four percent of return migrants who finished preparatory or vocational school and the two percent who completed college. Finally, Table 1 shows that all return migrants and over 90 percent of their children permanently resided in Mexico as of 2015. Eight percent of returnees' children lived in the United States.⁴

Occupational Changes Within Return Migrant Families

Tables 2 illustrates changes in the work experiences of return migrants, their parents, and the children of return migrants. As Table 2 shows, the generations in the sample are concentrated in different economic sectors, suggesting intergenerational social mobility through occupational change (Hagan, Lowe, and Quingla 2011; Sanderson and Painter II 2011). While almost a quarter of the parents of return migrants were concentrated in the agricultural sector of the economy, where many labored as farmworkers, none of their children or grandchildren were working in that sector at the time of the interviews. The industry shift from agriculture to service work within the sample also reflects larger industrial changes in Leon that have taken place over the last several decades. After an economic downturn in the 1990s, Mexico has managed to attract foreign companies, especially in the automotive industry, generating new jobs and a growing demand for highly skilled labor in urban centers like Leon (Cave 2013).

⁴The eight children of return migrants who resided in the United States in 2015 are excluded from the analyses in this thesis.

As Table 2 shows, almost half of return migrants and their children were employed in the service sector of the economy, where they labored in jobs in retail and hospitality. For example, Gina⁵, a 51-year-old mother of four children, worked in shoes with her husband and as a private in-home cook prior to migration. In the United States, she initially worked in a restaurant using cooking skills from Mexico. She later changed jobs and worked as a hostess at a restaurant, where she taught the chef how to make *chile relleños* (stuffed chiles) using the proper chile peppers. Upon returning to Leon, Gina started an in-home business preparing and selling foods. By 2015, her business had expanded; she had two employees. During the interview, Gina cited her application of customer service skills that she acquired in the United States as a key factor that facilitated her successful transition out of shoes and into the service industry as the operator of a business.

Another pattern illustrated in Table 2 is the gradual movement out of the shoe and leather industry. Though not shown here, prior to migration, over 40 percent of return migrant respondents worked in the same industries as at least one parent, and the majority of these occupations were concentrated in shoe, leather, and textile manufacturing. Almost 90 percent of shoe production takes place in family-owned *picas* that each employ just a handful of workers (Brown Grossman and Villalobos 1997). A gendered division of labor exists in which men typically operate and repair machinery, while the few female employees are designated to cleaning, stitching, lacing, and packaging shoes (Hagan et al. 2015). These *picas* employed a significant number of return migrant respondents in the shoe industry prior to migration. Table 2 shows that more than 28 percent of returnees' parents worked in shoes compared to about 15 percent of returnees after their time abroad in the United States. This decrease in the percentage

⁵Pseudonyms are used for the names of all return migrants and children in this thesis.

of returnees employed in shoes is noteworthy due to the limited opportunities in shoe manufacturing for wage gains and mobility, especially for women. An exit from the shoe industry can be indicative of occupational mobility, which findings from Hagan et al's (2015) study and figures from Table 3 confirm.

Table 3 compares the distribution of the return migrant respondents and the total working population of Leon within the same age range by economic sector. The absence of return migrant respondents from the agricultural sector corresponds with the mere 2.5 percent of the working population of Leon that is employed in agriculture. The table highlights return migrants' exit from the shoe industry, with about 14 percent of returnees employed in shoes compared to a quarter of Leon's total working population. The migration experience contributed to this change, as many returnees cite the transfer of technical and social skills from the United States to Mexico as a key reason why they were able to exit the shoe industry and improve their economic situation as a result. Several of these returnees transitioned to the formal sector, where they were more likely to report increased job security or wages, while others became *patrones* (business owners) by successfully starting and expanding businesses. For example, Ernesto worked with shoes before migration; an industry that was introduced to him by his father at an early age. After spending five years in the United States working in the food industry, he returned to Leon and opened a manufacturing business for women's purses. By 2015, this business had expanded to include two locations and 6 to 30 employees. During the interview, Ernesto reported that his time in the United States had developed his character and made him more open-minded. His successful acquisition and transfer of social skills facilitated his mobility out of the shoe industry and helped him become a successful business owner.

Table 3 also shows that more return migrants have jobs in construction (19 percent) and repair and maintenance (14.3 percent) than Leon's working population (9.3 percent and 4.2 percent, respectively). Again, skill transfer from construction and repair jobs in the United States enabled return migrants to gain employment in these industries upon return. Take the case of Jaime. Before migration, Jaime owned a body shop and also worked part-time in a body shop as an employee. In the United States, he also worked in a body shop. Upon his return to Leon, Jaime used computer skills and equipment that he brought back from the United States to gain employment as a supervisor in a body shop. With this promotion, he received a raise and increased responsibilities. Jaime's ability to transfer technical skills in both directions between the United States and Mexico helped him get a new repair job with additional benefits upon return. Overall, these findings support existing evidence that presents the migration process as disruptive of social class reproduction. One potential pathway to intergenerational occupational mobility for migrants is an increase in skills and their applicability in the origin community's labor market.

The generation of children of return migrants in the sample are also concentrated in different economic sectors than their parents and, in some cases, the total working population of Leon. Tables 2 and 4, which compare children of migrants to their parents and grandparents and Leon's working population within the same age range, respectively, provide evidence of mobility across some industries. Like their parents, the children of return migrants are heavily concentrated in the service sector. Table 2 shows that about half of children of return migrant respondents reported working in retail, hospitality, personal, or other services, which is similar to 47.8 percent of their parents who have service jobs. The distribution of children of returnees employed in the service sector is comparable to that of the total working population of Leon

within the same age range as the children, which is about 51 percent in Table 4. On one hand, this finding is illustrative of the increased demand for service-related work in Leon. For instance, tourism has increased throughout the state of Guanajuato in the last several years, with the city of Leon becoming a popular travel destination (San Miguel Times). This has likely increased the demand for service-related work in hotels, travel agencies, and other tourist-related businesses. As a result, any special effect that parental migration may have had here is unclear. However, “services” as an industrial category covers a wide range of jobs that have various degrees of selectivity and require different levels of education and job training. Although not shown in Tables 2 or 4, the children of returnees worked almost exclusively in the formal service sector, and a small but significant percentage held professional jobs in fields like medical services and tourism. Cases that exemplify the diverse range of service jobs among the children of return migrant respondents include: Jesús’s 22-year-old son, Roman, who works for the municipal police; Arturo’s 36-year-old son, Pablo, who works as a Walmart employee; Gloria’s 32-year-old daughter, Isabel, who works as an office administrator; and Julio’s 22-year-old daughter, Sandra, who received her bachelor’s degree in tourism and works at a travel agency. Each of these service jobs require different levels of formal education and interpersonal competencies, and each return migrant parent had varying degrees of success in Leon’s labor market upon returning from the United States. Thus, it is still possible that parental migration positively influenced children’s occupational trajectories through financial and human capital transfers, which is considered later in this section.

Table 2 also highlights a significant decrease in the percentage of children of return migrants that work in construction and repair and maintenance. While Table 2 shows that the percentage of children’s parents employed in the construction industry remained almost constant

compared to their grandparents – 17.4 and 18.9 percent, respectively – only 8.8 percent of children have construction jobs. The table also shows that only 1.5 percent of the children of return migrants work in repair and maintenance compared to 13.0 percent of their parents and 3.8 percent of their grandparents. Table 4 illustrates that these figures are similar to the percentage of Leon’s working population employed in construction and repair and maintenance, which are 7.9 and 3.4, respectively. The reason for this finding remains unclear. However, it is possible that since a large proportion of (male) return migrants work in construction and repair in the United States, they are able to transfer applicable skills from their U.S. work experiences and capitalize on them in Leon. This may make returnees more attractive for positions in these two industries than their children and working peers in Leon that never migrated.

In regards to the children of returnees working in shoes, Table 2 shows that 17.6 percent of children are employed in the shoe industry, which is slightly higher than their parents (15.2 percent). The reason for this small increase reflects the continuing prevalence of jobs in Leon’s shoe industry and the industry’s reputation as a family enterprise. Shoemaking skills are typically passed informally from father to son at an early age, and family members commonly assist with shoe production from the home (Hagan et al. 2015). As a result, positions in the shoe industry often serve as entry-level jobs for new generations of workers, especially young men, in Leon’s economy. However, Table 4 shows that significantly less children of return migrant respondents, ages 15 to 58, work in shoes compared to the total working population of Leon within the same age range: 17.9 percent and 24.5 percent, respectively. The table also indicates that 16.4 percent of children of returnees have other manufacturing jobs compared to only 10 percent of Leon’s working population. The percentage of children working in manufacturing outside of the shoe industry corresponds with the expansion of the manufacturing sector, especially in the

automotive industry, in the state of Guanajuato in recent years (The Worldfolio). When the figures for the shoe and other manufacturing industries are examined together, these findings illustrate that over a third of children of return migrants work some kind of manufacturing job, within or outside of the shoe industry, and this number is comparable to the total working population of Leon. Further statistical analysis is needed to determine whether or not children of return migrants are more likely to be employed in the manufacturing sector than the children of non-migrants, which is beyond the scope of this study.

Changes in Education Levels Within Return Migrant Families

As I showed in the description of the sample in Table 1, a greater percentage of children of return migrants completed preparatory or vocational school, and higher education, than their parents. In this section I ask whether this finding is due to parental migration. Table 5 suggests that in part it is. Table 5 compares the completed schooling for the children of return migrants between the ages of 18 and 54, with that of the total population of Leon within the same age range.

As Table 5 shows, over one-third of Leon's population between ages 18 and 54 have not finished secondary school, with 26.3 percent completing primary school and 9.5 percent obtaining less than a primary school education. However, under a quarter of the children of return migrant respondents have completed less than secondary school. The table also shows that 41.5 percent of the children in the sample have finished secondary school, which is higher than the 36.1 percent of their Leon peers that completed this level of schooling. There are also more children in the sample that finished preparatory or vocational school compared to their Leon counterparts: 26.8 percent and 23.0 percent, respectively. Finally, Table 5 shows that 9.8 percent

of children of return migrant respondents completed their studies at the university level, which is almost two times the percentage of their Leon peers (5.1 percent) who did the same.

Mechanisms of Intergenerational Social Mobility

As demonstrated in Hagan et al.'s (2015) work, social mobility is possible for return migrants to Mexico due to the *total human capital* they acquire both at home and abroad. In this thesis, total human capital describes the skills, competencies, and information that migrants with low levels of formal education can acquire, transfer, and apply throughout their life courses and migratory careers to improve their labor market trajectories (Hagan et al. 2015). Total human capital includes traditional measures of human capital, like years of formal schooling, professional training, and language skills (Chiswick 1986; Borjas 2000; Dustmann and Fabbri 2003). However, it also highlights forms of human capital that are more difficult to measure: technical (e.g. how to operate machinery), interpersonal (e.g. customer service, leadership), and cultural (e.g. specific ways of approaching work) competencies. This conceptualization of total human capital recognizes the working and social knowledge that migrants learn through their labor market experiences over the life course and across the migratory circuit.

Does parental migration serve as a key mechanism for intergenerational social mobility? In this section I draw on the qualitative data and narratives to identify the factors associated with parents' migration experience abroad that shapes the mobility experience of their children. First, I find that return migrants' social mobility outcomes affect the educational and occupational trajectories of their children living in the origin country. About 54 percent of households in the sample illustrate upward intergenerational social mobility between parent and child. Of these households, about 70 percent are cases in which return migrants experienced upward occupational mobility upon returning to Leon, and this mobility appears to have directly

facilitated their children's success in school and the labor market. Gerardo's family is one in which intergenerational social mobility is evident, and the key mechanism that appears to shape his children's social mobility pathways is his successful transfer of skills and occupational mobility upon return.

Gerardo worked for his father, the owner of a shoe factory, as a *pespuntador* (back stitcher) prior to migrating to the United States. Outside of his job, he learned how to repair shoe machines for his father's factory. Although he had completed 12 years of schooling, most of his working skills were learned on and off the job through observation and hands-on experience. He taught his children the work-related skills that he acquired during his pre-migration years in Leon, including those related to domestics and manufacturing shoes. At the age of 26, Gerardo made one trip to the United States where family members resided to earn more money and to improve the quality of his life. He did not transfer skills from Mexico to the United States, where he worked in construction and then in a restaurant. While working in the restaurant, he learned how to cook and run the establishment. He also went to night school to learn English. When he returned to Mexico after six months, Gerardo went into the security industry, initially working for a Mexican company. He later transferred to Brinks, an American security company, and cites his status as an English-speaking ex-migrant as the reason why he was hired. He frequently works overtime and also operates two businesses, a grocery and a café, with four employees. He applies his U.S. restaurant skills to his businesses in Mexico. Gerardo's children, 21-year-old Esperanza and 17-year-old Hector, both attend a private university. Esperanza currently studies criminology with hopes to practice psychology and work with children. Hector studies chemistry and hopes to become a veterinarian. Since they were young, Gerardo wanted his children to find

work in any field of their choice. After migrating to the U.S., Gerardo taught his children social skills: responsibility and the importance of studying and completing school.

Gerardo's story is one of upward intergenerational social mobility due to his occupational mobility and skill transfers to his children. Social reproduction is evident before Gerardo's migration, as he worked in the shoe industry like his father. However, his U.S. migration reshaped his occupational trajectory by helping him to exit the shoe industry. Gerardo intentionally learned new technical and social skills (e.g. customer service) as a restaurant worker and English language skills in an educational setting, which later facilitated his entry into security work and afforded him the qualifications to work for an American company that offered higher wages. The acquisition of new forms of human capital also helped him to start businesses in Mexico. Gerardo's higher wages and job stability allow him to financially support his children's private school education at the university level. Not only have Esperanza and Hector exceeded his educational attainment of high school completion, but they also aspire to become professionals. Their trajectories were likely influenced by the ideas that Gerardo transferred from the United States as well, including the importance of finishing school, which is also illustrative of an exchange of social remittances (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011).

In addition to parents' skill transfer and occupational mobility as a mechanism for intergenerational social mobility among return migrant families, I find that the level of financial remittances was higher among the families that experienced upward intergenerational mobility. Children who received higher levels of remittances were more likely to experience social mobility than children whose parents sent lower levels back home. Economic opportunities in the host country benefit both the mobility experiences of migrants and their families residing in the sending community.

The social mobility within Manuel's family illustrates how skill transfers and occupational mobility upon return, as well as financial remittances, shape the educational mobility pathways of his children. Manuel worked in Mexico as an *albañil* (mason) like his father before migrating to the United States at age 33. His migration marked an effort to find work, earn higher wages, and improve the quality of his life. Although he only spent seven months in the United States, he sent weekly remittances to his wife and three children, then ages 14, 12, and 9. He was able to transfer technical masonry skills, such as laying floors, to his new job as a mason. He also learned various technical skills in plumbing and electricity, as well as how to use machinery for painting. Upon resettling in Mexico, Manuel initially returned to work as a mason, but he could not find enough work. As a result, he used U.S. machinery, technical skills, and social skills, such as professionalism and how to give accurate estimates for new jobs, to begin working as a painter. Manuel managed to establish this job as a new niche. As of 2015, he was self-employed without employees.

Manuel's three children all completed preparatory or vocational school. His 23-year-old daughter, Araceli, works in tourism, and his 21-year-old son, David, works as an engineer. Nina, his 18-year-old daughter, is still in school and aims to become a doctor. When his children were young, Manuel hoped that they would work in whatever field they desired. This remained true after migration; he indicates that he could not ask for more from them due to their physical distance. He did, however, send money home regularly to be applied towards their schooling expenses. Manuel taught his children all of his work-related technical skills when they were young, such as how to paint, so that they had a backup plan for work. He also taught them skills upon returning, including how to use the equipment for painting.

Manuel's narrative demonstrates that he achieved upward social mobility as a result of his U.S. migratory experience, and his mobility and financial remittances positively influenced his children's educational trajectories. Before migration, family background shaped Manuel's occupational status; he did the same kind of work as his father. Migration to the United States benefited Manuel by allowing him to learn new technical and social skills, which he successfully applied to his new work in Mexico. His children's trajectories illustrate upward educational mobility. They completed 12 years of schooling, while Manuel only completed 6 years. Araceli and David hold professional jobs, and Nina aspires to work in medicine, which requires additional schooling. Manuel's decision to financially invest in his children's education and transfer work-related skills to them so they could have a back-up plan for employment further shows that he migrated to improve not only the quality of his own life, but also the lives of his children.

I also find that the life course stage of the children of returnees is another factor associated with parents' migration experience that influences the mobility experiences of the children. Over three-quarters (77 percent) of the households in the sample that experienced parent-to-child upward intergenerational social mobility had children under 12 years old at the time that their parent first moved to the United States. This finding shows that childhood is a crucial stage of the life course for social status transmission between parent and child (Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn, and Smith 1998; Corsaro and Eder 1995; Rutter 1989; Entwisle and Hayduk 1988). In terms of schooling, children between ages 3 and 11 are in the initial phases. As a result, the information and resources that parents provide them can alter or reshape their educational experiences and trajectories. If international migration is socioeconomically and informationally beneficial for parents, then they can utilize additional income and new

knowledge to support their children as they move through school and develop aspirations about what kinds of work they want to do in the future. This, in turn, can facilitate intergenerational social mobility.

Take the case of Teresa, a 36-year-old return migrant and mother of three children. Before migration, Teresa was separated from her husband and resided with her three children in Leon. The daughter of a mason and a housewife, she had never completed any schooling and did not have many lucrative job opportunities. She worked in the informal sector as a street vendor selling *gorditas*, a type of stuffed pastry. When Teresa migrated to the United States in 2003 at age 29, she placed her children, then ages 8, 5, and 4, in the care of family members and left them her savings. She migrated using family connections in the states to save money for her children's education in Leon. She wanted them to continue studying and establish careers. She also intended to build a house upon return. In the United States, Teresa worked in agriculture for seven years. She managed to learn various social skills, including punctuality and customer service. Upon returning to Mexico, she found herself unemployed at first but was able to purchase a house with the money that she had saved. She eventually became self-employed in the informal sector of the Leon economy, selling Mary K products that she learned about in the United States as well as clothing at the *Tianguis*, the local flea market. She also cleans houses.

As of 2015, Teresa's 23-year-old daughter, Raquel, and two sons, Samuel (age 20) and Mateo (age 16), were still in school. Samuel and Mateo balanced school and work as merchants using skills that Teresa had taught them. Upon returning from the United States, Teresa's aspirations for her children became more specific: she hoped that they would study and become kindergarten teachers. She notes that they were initially angry with her for seemingly abandoning

them for so long. However, she would migrate again because she wants to give her children the opportunity to stay in school.

Teresa's family was able to achieve upward intergenerational social mobility due to her skill transfer and mobility upon return, as well as the life course stages of Raquel, Samuel, and Mateo when she first migrated and the financial remittances that she sent to them while she was away. Teresa used her U.S. savings to purchase a house for her and her children, establishing a form of wealth for her family. Although she remains self-employed in the informal sector, she now sells Mary K products, a cosmetic line that she learned about in the United States. Teresa finds that this, and the fact that she is much more open and assertive since returning to Mexico, has positively impacted her work upon return. She is more upwardly mobile than her mother, who was a housewife, in terms of work experience and acquisition of skills. Teresa's children were able to educationally benefit from her migration experience and upward mobility upon return due to the fact that they were young at the time of her first U.S. trip and their family could utilize remittances for schooling purposes. Teresa migrated with the intention of saving money for her children's schooling, and she remitted money on a monthly basis throughout her seven years in the United States. Her migration during their childhood stage of the life course allowed them to continue studying while she was gone. As of 2015, Raquel and Samuel both attend university, and Mateo is completing high school. This result is especially noteworthy in light of the fact that Teresa never attained any formal education in Mexico.

Parental Aspirations

Select studies on educational aspirations in the U.S. context illustrate that high levels of parental or student aspirations do not produce uniform results in academic achievement due to variation in socioeconomic status and access to resources (Kao and Tienda 1998; Bohon,

Kirkpatrick Johnson, and Gorman 2006; Teachman and Paasch 1998; Kirk, Lewis-Moss, Nilsen, and Colvin 2011). I also find that parental aspirations reported by return migrant respondents do not serve as a mechanism for upward intergenerational social mobility. Nevertheless, they illuminate the high hopes that returnees had for their children's educational and occupational trajectories before and after migration.

Return migrant respondents were asked about the kind of work they hoped their children would do when the children were young, and how their hopes may have changed after spending time in the United States. Among the migrants whose responses were recorded ($N = 35$), all but one expressed a desire for their children to achieve a higher social status than they did, especially in terms of education. Many migrants provided responses like *“Estudiar hasta la universidad”* (“To study until college”), *“Que estudien y trabajen en lo que queiren”* (“That they study and work in a field that they want”), and *“Querría que estudiaran para ser profesionales”* (“I would like them to study to become professionals”). Some migrants reported wanting their children to have careers that require higher education, such as doctors, lawyers, and engineers. Others indicated that they wanted their children to do *“lo que les gusta”* (“What they like”) and gain satisfaction from whatever work they performed. Most of the migrants' desires for their children were present before migration and did not change after migration.

In spite of high parental aspirations, many children of return migrants did not achieve educational or occupational mobility. During the interviews, Arturo explained that he wanted his children to get jobs that provided stability and high wages, and that were not as hard as his work in the shoe industry because he was always tired. However, they left school around age 15 for low-wage work. Jesús reflected, *“Sí, quería que estudiaran. Fue, primero, el problema de no querer estudiar, con los dos primeros. [Con] los otros cinco [hijos], fue económico, el*

problema” (“Yes, I wanted them to study. First, the problem was that the two eldest did not want to study. With the other five children, the problem was economic”). Similarly, Carlos hoped “*que estudiaran lo que gustaran, [pero] el dinero fue el problema*” (“that [his/her children] would study what they liked, but money was a problem”). It is clear that high parental aspirations do not guarantee social mobility for the children of return migrants. The context of parental migration in terms of human capital and labor market outcomes is a stronger indicator of intergenerational mobility opportunities.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Intergenerational social mobility across three generations of return migrant families is evident in the data. With regard to employment by industry, there is a complete shift away from agricultural jobs by return migrants and their children. There is also a decrease in the percentage of return migrants and children employed in the shoe industry compared to return migrants' parents and the total working population of Leon. Instead, many return migrants and their children are now employed in the service sector. These findings align with the industrial changes that have taken place in Leon and Mexico more generally in recent decades. In terms of educational mobility, children of return migrants have higher educational attainment than their parents, with more children reaching or completing preparatory or vocational school and higher education. This is also the case when compared to the total population in Leon within the same age category. Higher educational attainment of the children of return migrant respondents corresponds with findings in studies by Nobles (2011), Dustmann (2008), and Antman (2012), which show that migrants invest in the schooling of their children residing in the origin country. This educational investment is associated with more favorable schooling outcomes for the children.

Finally, the mechanisms that explain intergenerational social mobility among return migrants and their families are the success of the parents' migration experience, financial remittances that migrants sent to their families while abroad, and the life course stage of the children during their parents' first U.S. trip. These findings support the claim that parental migration benefits children left behind in the origin country at certain life course stages (Antman

2012), especially vis-à-vis financial remittances (Nobles 2011; Dustmann 2008; Antman 2012). I also find that another possible mechanism, parental aspirations on the part of the return migrants, do not determine educational or occupational pathways of children. However, they do highlight that migrants' hopes for their children's futures are high in spite of their low levels of traditional human capital. Overall, the qualitative analyses illustrate that parental absence from the household does not necessarily reinforce a culture of migration that would negatively affect the educational and occupational outcomes of children left behind (Creighton et al. 2009; Halpern-Manners 2011). Instead, parental migration can serve as a strategy to broaden labor market opportunities for returnees and allow them to invest in their children's futures in the origin community.

A few data limitations arise in this study. First, the sample of return migrants is not representative of all migrants residing in Leon. This does not allow for the generalizability of the numeric findings. Second, the interview data is limited in several ways. Although it includes important data on the children of return migrants, too few questions are administered about their educational and occupational trajectories, and the majority of these questions are close-ended. The information about the parents of return migrants is restricted to their primary jobs. These limitations pose challenges for understanding how the mechanisms for intergenerational social mobility operate within return migrant families across all three generations. Finally, the children and the parents of return migrants are not interviewed; rather, information is provided by the return migrants. An examination of the children's perspective, in particular, on how their parents' migration experience affected them could have enhanced my qualitative findings. Future studies on return migration and intergenerational social mobility should address these data

restrictions and also take a longitudinal approach to understanding the intergenerational outcomes of parental migration.

Overall, this study contributes to the scholarship on international migration by considering the link between parental migration and intergenerational social mobility. The findings suggest that parental return migration affects the social mobility outcomes of the return migrants, allowing them the opportunity to increase their human and financial capital. This acquisition of skills, ideas, and money affords them more employment opportunities than their parents, which can benefit them socioeconomically. Moreover, parental return migration can create social mobility opportunities for the children who remained in the country of origin if their parents successfully reintegrate into the labor market upon return. These findings have implications for how migration can transform the lives of migrant families across international borders.

APPENDIX

Table 1. Sample Profile of Leon Return Migrant Families by Generation

Individual Characteristics	First Generation (Parents of Return Migrants)	Second Generation (Return Migrants)	Third Generation (Children of Return Migrants)
Sex			
Male (%)	50.5	80.0	49.6
Female (%)	49.5	20.0	50.4
Age (mean)	—	46.1	26.3
Primary Employment Status			
Employed (%)	58.0	88.0	54.5
Homemaker (%)	41.0	4.0	13.0
Student (%)	—	—	20.3
Unemployed & Other ^a (%)	1.0	8.0	11.4
Highest level of education attained ^b			
Less than primary (%)	—	26.0	7.9
Primary (%)	—	32.0	11.8
Secondary (%)	—	36.0	28.9
Preparatory/Vocational (%)	—	4.0	42.1
Higher Education (%)	—	2.0	6.6
Country of Residence			
Mexico (%)	—	100	91.1
United States (%)	—	0	8.9
<i>N</i>	100	50	123

Note: Due to rounding, percentages do not total exactly to 100 percent.

^a Looking for a job, retired, disabled, deceased, or unspecified.

^b Based on available data.

Table 2. Distribution of Return Migrant Family Sample by Generation and Economic Sector (2015)

Industry	First Generation (Parents of Return Migrants) <i>n</i> = 53	Second Generation (Return Migrants) <i>n</i> = 46	Third Generation (Children of Return Migrants) <i>n</i> = 68
Agriculture	24.5%	0%	0%
Construction	18.9%	17.4%	8.8%
Shoe, leather, and textile manufacturing	28.3%	15.2%	17.6%
Other manufacturing	5.7%	2.2%	17.6%
Repair and maintenance	3.8%	13.0%	1.5%
Retail, hospitality, and personal services	15.1%	32.6%	30.8%
Other services	0%	15.2%	19.1%
Other industries	3.8%	4.3%	4.4%

Note: Due to rounding, percentages do not total exactly to 100 percent.

Table 3. Distribution of Return Migrant Sample and Total Working Population of Leon, Ages 28-64, by Economic Sector (2010)

Industry	Leon Sample ^a <i>n</i> = 42	Leon (City) <i>n</i> = 10,442
Agriculture	0%	2.5%
Construction	19.0%	9.3%
Shoe, leather, and textile manufacturing	14.3%	25.7%
Other manufacturing	2.4%	9.5%
Repair and maintenance	14.3%	4.2%
Retail, hospitality, and personal services	28.6%	23.7%
Other services	16.7%	23.8%
Other industries	4.8%	1.2%

Source: Leon city population, IPUMS-International, Minnesota Population Center, 2010.

Notes: The Leon population begins at age 28 because 28 is the age of the youngest return migrant in sample. Due to rounding, percentages do not total exactly to 100 percent.

^aFigures exclude 8 respondents who are unemployed or over the maximum working age of 64.

Table 4. Distribution of Children of Return Migrant Sample and Total Working Population of Leon, Ages 15-58, by Economic Sector (2015, 2010)

Industry	Leon Sample ^a <i>n</i> = 67	Leon (City) <i>n</i> = 14,976
Agriculture	0%	2.0%
Construction	9.0%	7.9%
Shoe, leather, and textile manufacturing	17.9%	24.5%
Other manufacturing	16.4%	10.0%
Repair and maintenance	1.5%	3.4%
Retail, hospitality, and personal services	31.3%	28.4%
Other services	19.4%	22.8%
Other industries	4.5%	1.0%

Source: Leon city population, IPUMS-International, Minnesota Population Center, 2010.

Notes: The Leon population ends at age 58 because 58 is the age of the oldest child of a return migrant in sample. Due to rounding, percentages do not total exactly to 100 percent.

^aFigures exclude respondents whose occupation is unknown, are unemployed, or are under the minimum working age of 15.

Table 5. Years of Study of Children of Return Migrant Sample and Total Population of Leon, Ages 18-54 (2015, 2010)

Years of Completed Study	Leon Sample <i>n</i> = 41	Leon (City) <i>n</i> = 18,090
Less than Primary (<6 yrs.)	7.3%	9.5%
Primary (6-8 yrs.)	14.6%	26.3%
Secondary (9-11 yrs.)	41.5%	36.1%
Preparatory/Vocational (12-15 yrs.)	26.8%	23.0%
University (16 yrs.)	9.8%	5.1%

Source: Leon city population, IPUMS-International, Minnesota Population Center, 2010.

Notes: Figures exclude respondents who were continuing their education in 2015. Due to rounding, percentages do not total exactly to 100 percent.

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