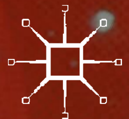
Challenges for the 21st Century

NEW MIGRATION PATTERNS IN THE AMERICAS

Edited by Andreas E. Feldmann, Xóchitl Bada and Stephanie Schütze



New Migration Patterns in the Americas

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Editors

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For our children Emilio, Macarena and Martín in the hope they will live a more welcoming and accepting world.

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CHAPTER 8

Beyond the Expat Bubble: Migration and Labor Incorporation of Spanish Skilled Immigrants in Mexico

Cristóbal Mendoza

Literature on skilled migration[1] constitutes a small part of migration studies, because qualified migrants are not a relevant fraction of total numbers and are considered socially and statistically "invisible" (Salt 1992; Peixoto 2001). Despite small numbers, though, this group has a great impact on the economy, labor market and society of destination countries (Appleyard 1995; Hall and Appleyard 2011). Skilled migration literature has a clear bias towards labor-related topics, with their main foci being "brain drain" (for recent research, see Smith and Favell 2006; Bhagwati and Hanson 2009; Chiswick 2011) and the migration and mobility of expatriates within transnational corporations (for instance, Salt 1992; Millar and Salt 2008). From a geographical perspective, research has mainly focused on labor incorporation of the highly skilled in developed countries and on the negative impacts of emigration in sending countries. This chapter changes this geographical approach and

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studies migration from Spain to a developing economy, Mexico. With the adoption of this geographical perspective, emphasis has been placed on the movements and short stays of expatriates (Willis and Yeoh 2000; Beaverstock 2002), rather than on permanent migration.

Southern European economies are characterized by high structural unemployment and large regional differences that have worsened after the 2008 economic crisis. In Spain, 42.9% of those between ages 15 and 29 had no job by 2016's last trimester (INE 2017). Therefore, it is not surprising that the number of emigrants from this Southern European country has recently risen substantially. Official data show the number of emigrants has grown from 1,471,691 in January 2009 to 2,305,030 in January 2016 (INE 2016), a total growth of 833,339 overall and annual increase of approximately 119,000 people. In relative terms, the number of Spaniards living in a foreign country has increased 56.6% for 2009–2016, a 6.4% annual growth rate.

Increasingly globalized Latin American countries, on the other hand, have become important destinations for migrants from Southern Europe. Mexico in particular increasingly attracts a significant number of these migrants. Thus in 2009, Spaniards constituted the second largest foreign population in Mexico, after US citizens (Rodríguez Chávez and Cobo 2012). Official data from Spanish consulates in Mexico also show that the number of Spaniards in Mexico has grown from 69,571 in 2009 to 123,189 in 2016 (INE 2016), a total growth of 53,618 for the period and an impressive relative increase of 77.1%. The annual growth rate for Spanish immigrants is higher in Mexico than the global average (8.2% in Mexico and 6.4% worldwide). However, official data do not fully reveal the scope of this rising trend, since many immigrants decide not to register in consulates. Despite data not being broken down by economic activity, or profession, qualitative studies suggest that a significant part of the foreign population in Mexico is highly skilled immigrants (Mendoza and Ortiz-Guitart 2006; Palma Mora 2006).

In the next section, this chapter presents a theoretical discussion of skilled migration to contextualize the subsequent analysis of immigration in Mexico. Specifically, the chapter studies the migration and mobility patterns of Spaniards who work in private companies, contrasting the labor incorporation of those who came to Mexico through transnational internal labor markets ("expatriates") with "independent" immigrants whose arrival occurred outside these companies. In doing so, the chapter explores different aspects of labor incorporation and mobility of foreign skilled

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immigrants in Mexico-based companies and, from this analysis, helps refute some dominant ideas in the skilled migration literature.

The chapter discussed four aspects that have been marginal in the literature. First, it addresses the role of Mexico as a permanent destination for these professionals in a context of increasing globalization and economic crisis. This section concludes that skilled immigrants can advance their careers in the country to the point that some expatriates (i.e. those whose migration was initially temporary) decide to stay in Mexico. Second, the chapter discusses the role of the Mexican state when understanding processes of labor incorporation of skilled migrants. The literature has generally concluded that developing countries have legislation that favors skilled immigrants. Yet this is not the case for Mexico, which has no specific program for this group. Moreover, the 2012 Migration Act has had a negative impact on immigration, resulting in some young immigrant workers falling into administrative irregularity. Third, the chapter exposes the variety of working and hiring conditions of this group, suggesting a more complex view of the labor incorporation of foreign professionals in Mexico. Here it is concluded that labor incorporation depends on nationality, the age of the interviewee—and, consequently, the point at which they are in their career—year of migration—before/after the economic crisis—and their channel of arrival. Finally, it analyzes work conflicts between immigrant and local workers, a relatively less explored aspect in the literature. These conflicts could be considered minor, but they are of the utmost importance for some professionals who expressed their intention to go back to Spain because they do not feel integrated in Mexico's labor culture.

Skilled Migration: Brain Drain and Mobility Within Transnationals

"Brain drain" was the first approach used to analyze skilled migration. The first research, in the 1970s, was highly influenced by Marxist theory and migration was explained following underdevelopment and dependence theories (for instance, Bhagwati and Hamada 1974; Portes 1976). More recently, however, the concept of "brain drain" has progressively been replaced by "brain exchange" and "brain gain," which reflect increasing mobility globally among the highly skilled (Angel-Urdinola et al. 2008; Solimano 2008) and suggest that migration may encourage human capital improvements in both origin and destination countries (Docquier and

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Rapoport 2011; Giannetti et al. 2012). These concepts do not only imply a greater number of international movements but more multidirectional flows in an increasingly integrated world (Docquier and Rapoport 2011; Giannetti et al. 2012), which further suggest that mobility and circularity are co-substantial parts of the lives of some professionals (Ong 1999; Pellegrino 2001).

The second prevailing approach in the literature relates to migration and mobility within transnational corporations. With the clear influence of the world-system theory, research in the late 1980s and early 1990s used a center-periphery framework to comprehend mobility within these corporations. In brief, as transnational corporations expand their activities to developing countries, expatriates were transferred from headquarters located in global cities to subsidiaries in developing countries within the safety net of internal labor markets (e.g. Findlay 1989; Beaverstock 1991). Therefore, skilled migration follows capital to less developed countries, whereas unskilled migration heads for developed economies. According to this view, headquarters' managerial and technical staff are in charge of supervising and coordinating highly specialized tasks in developing countries, assuming that workers in these countries do not have specific expertise.

Following this line of analysis, skilled migration within transnational corporations in Mexico may follow a center-periphery model. In a context of globalization, these companies may expand their activities in the country and decide to re-locate part of their staff as part of their expansion plans. The shortcomings of this argument have become clearer with the rise of the emerging economies, with transnational subsidiaries playing an autonomous role in regional markets (and not strictly dependent on headquarters' decisions). To this regard, Mexico has had open economic policies accompanied by a relatively stable political situation in Latin America. This has made the country attractive to foreign investment. Certainly, Spanish transnationals have increased their business in Mexico since the 1990s (see, for instance, Noceda 2005; Relea 2005; Mendoza and Ortiz-Guitart 2006).

Trying to overcome rigid interpretation schemes, the literature has also approached skilled migration from the perspective of labor trajectories. Therefore, research has mapped trajectories in interconnected branches, national subsidiaries and company headquarters (Koser and Salt 1997), following upward labor mobility logics (Findlay et al. 1996; Iredale 2001; Millar and Salt 2008). Likewise, this literature has made visible other enterprise decisions linked to mobility, such as connections between

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migration and more flexible patterns of mobility within companies (e.g. business trips, Beaverstock et al. 2009), and the role of labor markets outside the companies (e.g. outsourcing at destination) in order to reduce travel expenses and expatriate transfers (Beaverstock 1996).

This last aspect is of interest for this chapter because it suggests that movements within the transnationals should be understood in a general context (and not within the strict limits of corporations' internal markets). When observing transnationals as part of a more general picture, we should consider that the technical and managerial staff might opt to exit these corporations at some point in their careers. Transnationals, indeed, may be very demanding in terms of mobility practices, depending on expansion and contraction plans subject to changing economic tides. In fact, recent studies on skilled migration, rather than precise corporations and sectors, have focused on specific groups and nationalities. As an example, Boyd's 2001 study took a group of Asian engineers in Canada, Pellegrino (2001) and Lozano and Gandini (2011) focused on trends of skilled migration in Latin America and Khadria (2001) analyzed a group of Indian professionals in the information technology industries.

Further, the growing internationalization of the economy implies not only that the production of goods and services is increasingly homogenized worldwide, but that education trajectories are also very similar globally (see, e.g. Ackers 2005). Moreover, Khadria (2009) reckons that contemporary migration flows are nowadays dominated by the search for workers globally, unlike 30 years ago, where flows were directed by the excess supply of workers (see also Kuptsch and Pang 2006). In this context, Mexico is categorized as an emerging market in the global economy, which may demand professionals for some industrial branches and services.

Finally, some qualitative studies have recently stressed hitherto unnoticed aspects in the skilled migration literature, for example, the reasons for choosing a specific destination, family ties, personal experiences and assessments of the labor and social culture of destination before migration (e.g. Hardill and MacDonald 2000; Meijering and Van Hoven 2003; Voigt-Graf 2003; Ferro 2004). In effect, reasons for migration depend greatly on immigrants' education and personal circumstances, as well as perceptions and opinions of the countries and labor markets of both the origin and destination countries (Nagel 2005), even if skilled migrants would eventually have lower costs and more incentives than those who are not qualified to undertake a migration (Kennan and Walker 2013).

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Methodology

This chapter uses 50 semi-structured interviews with highly skilled immigrants from Spain who worked for private companies in Mexico. These are part of more general research on skilled migration in Mexico, for which a total of 106 interviews were made with Spanish degree holders. Out of the 106, a total of 30 interviews were carried out in Mexico City, 26 in Guadalajara, 25 in Monterrey and 25 in Puebla. Although the research did not attempt to achieve a representative sample, efforts were made to collect information from immigrants with different backgrounds. Thus, we interviewed men and women in similar numbers, as well as different types of skilled migrants (e.g. managers and technicians in multinational corporations, academics and businesspeople; Table 8.1).

Due to the lack of reliable official statistics, a snowball sampling technique was used. Participants were assured that the provided information would be treated confidentially, so pseudonyms are used herein. Most

Table 8.1 Interviewed Spanish highly skilled immigrants, by sex, age, year of arrival and professional profile

	Total		*Companies*	
		%	*Employees*	*%*
Sex				
Women	39	36.8	20	40.0
Men	67	63.2	30	60.0
Age				
30 years and less	17	16.1	4	8.0
31–49	79	74.5	43	86.0
50 years and more	10	9.4	3	6.0
Year of arrival				
Before 2008	31	29.2	14	28.0
2008–2015	75	70.8	36	72.0
Professional profile				
Managers and technicians in private companies				
Expatriates	20	18.9		
Non-expatriates	30	28.3		
Academics and teachers	25	23.6		
Employers and self-employed workers	27	25.5		
Others	4	3.8		
Total (*n*)	106	100.0	50	100.0

Source: Fieldwork (June 2014–September 2015)

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interviews were carried out at the workplace, although some were held in the interviewees' homes or in cafeterias, at their request. Fieldwork was carried out from June 2014 to September 2015. The 106 in-depth interviews, which lasted an hour on average, were structured along three lines: work, social integration and geographical issues. Via the interviews, it was possible to discuss reasons for migration, intentions to stay, opinions on Mexico's labor market (e.g. views on workmates, professionalism and discrimination at work), everyday experiences in Mexico (e.g. living standards, everyday spaces) and links with the home country. Data were analyzed through the content analysis method, which includes open coding, creating categories and abstracting.

This chapter specifically focuses on managerial and technical staff of private companies. This group constitutes almost half of the non-representative sample (50 out of 106; 47.2%; Table 8.1). Among those professionals, 20 are expatriates, whose migrations have been within the safety net of transnational internal labor markets. Expatriate migration has been defined as temporary (i.e. three-year maximum), resulting in upward labor mobility for the transferee (Beaverstock 2002; Millar and Salt 2008). The other 30 interviewees obtained their jobs through channels outside transnationals (e.g. personal contacts and professional networks like LinkedIn). Although interviews also discuss social incorporation and everyday practices in the four study cities, this chapter specifically focuses on labor incorporation. Because a labor trajectory approach is adopted, the chapter also uses information from interviewees who had been companies' employees, but, at the time of their interview, were employers or self-employed workers.

Mexico: Permanent Destination?

Mexico has not traditionally been considered a country of immigration, even if it has been haven for exiles from Latin America (Yankelevich 2002) and Spain (Lida 2002), country of passage for Central Americans on their way north (Carrasco González 2013) and host to deeply rooted immigrant communities since the late nineteenth century (Palma Mora 2006). The main foreign nationality in the country is US nationals, a great part of whom are retired people living in Mexico's northern region (Lardiés-Bosque et al. 2016), tourist areas (Hiernaux 2010) and well-known US "enclaves" such as San Miguel de Allende (Guanajuato) and Ajijic (Jalisco). In contrast with Americans, the other foreign nationalities are mainly composed of working populations, such as the Spaniards (Mendoza and

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Ortiz-Guitart 2006) and immigrants from Asian countries. Even if their numbers are relatively low, Asian communities are raising their numbers throughout the country, which has been understood as an indicator of Mexico's attractiveness as an emerging market to Asian investors and traders alike (Alba and Rubio 2018).

In this environment, center-periphery models, used in the 1970s and early 1980s to understand skilled migration, have been weakened by the current process of globalization, which requires more complex explanations. Indeed, these models are of little relevance in today's contemporary world, given the economic role of the so-called new industrialized countries. Certainly, Mexico is an emerging economic that has been characterized by relative political and economic stability, which has made the country attractive for foreign investment. The literature, in fact, has frequently focused on the analysis of mobility patterns towards new emerging economies, but emphasis has been placed on transferees and business trips (and not on permanent migration; e.g. Beaverstock 2002; Millar and Salt 2008; Faulconbridge et al. 2009).

Among our interviewees, Mexico is frequently cited as an emerging economy with ample employment possibilities. With few exceptions, the dominant opinion holds that Mexico's economy has good prospects and offers excellent employment opportunities which allow immigrants move upward in labor markets and climb the social ladder. As an example, the following interviewee, who is an expatriate of a Spanish construction transnational, clearly illustrates the reasons why he returned to Mexico, after moving back to Spain:

> It is a construction company … In 2009, a very interesting project emerged here in Mexico. It was a hospital … a public-private partnership. We did the investment, the hospital design and, later, the management … I came here [in 2009] during the design and construction phases … Then I returned to Spain in 2012 for eight months; I tried to do some projects [there], but they did not work out well … They proposed that I come back here [to Mexico] and I accepted the transfer. Since then, I have been in Mexico, and I hope to be for a long time. I decided to return because things were not well in Spain. (Pedro, 34, medium-sized city of Ciudad Real, expatriate, manager, four years in Mexico City)

This same interviewee explained later in interview what he meant by "because things were not well in Spain." He indicated that the problem was not the lack of jobs (in the case of engineers, unemployment is low),

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but wages (and working conditions in general) have worsened. ("The problem is wages. Employers have thrown them on the ground, so a position that used to pay 10, now pays 5. Colleagues who remain in Spain are now facing these bad working conditions.") This is why he sees himself living in the near future in Mexico, to the point that he would not mind eventually leaving his current company ("If an opportunity arises at another company in Mexico, I will stay here. Job opportunities are good in Mexico and I think there are here more opportunities than in Spain.") For Pedro, his very positive assessment of the Mexican labor market (and his career in the country) makes him consider staying in Mexico.

It is not an isolated case. Víctor, in Mexico for seven years, also arrived as an expatriate to organize a Mexican subsidiary. He has far exceeded the three years initially planned, but remains with the same company, as an assistant director. In Víctor's words:

> I joined [the company] as a base consultant in 1995. After being a consultant for a while, I became a manager … The company expanded its operations in several countries and needed an operations director to deal with it, to implement projects in foreign countries, to advise foreign countries in the implementation of best practices projects. In 2007, the economic crisis exploded and they told me, "We need more added value in foreign markets, could you go to Mexico for a couple of years? The country has a great potential. We need someone to help grow the office." And I came here as operations director. And I have been here since … I really like the work. I'm fine. It is a company that is growing … In Madrid, the company is already very settled and here it is a recent company. The work is much more varied here, there is no routine. I have a lot of fun. I learn a lot every day … Mexico is a country that offers many things, and it offers me more things now than Spain and even Europe, not only the economy. It is a question of attitude. I see that companies here are willing to do much more than in Spain. (Víctor, 48, Palma de Mallorca, expatriate, manager, seven years in Mexico City)

Víctor values the Mexican market as dynamic and full of opportunities, especially in times of crisis in Spain. He also adds other interesting aspects that are key to understanding why he wants to stay in the country, what he calls the "things" that Mexico offers beyond salary, but instead related to a question of attitude. In his words, "companies here are willing to do much more than in Spain." That is, they are more open to innovation, which is key in the world of corporate "coaching" in which the company operates. Thus, he finds "the work is more varied, there is no routine."

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This was, in fact, the case of several interviewees who decide to stay in Mexico, even if that meant giving up the contract, and some attendant benefits, that brought them there. However, they were able to negotiate working conditions that are still advantageous compared with skilled "local" people. The following interviewee, Gonzalo points out the abundance of job opportunities in Mexico. Questions of motivation, innovation and learning illuminate why Gonzalo decided to stay in Mexico:

> I worked in Spain for two years and a year and a half here for [my previous company]. The results were very good, breaking records. But I got tired of doing the same activity for three and a half years ["ad networking"]. They offered me the video department, but it was the same activity, only a different format. Then I started to listen to offers, and my current company contacted me … It interested me a lot, because it was big data management, target design, users impact, analysis of impacts. Technologically, it was much more advanced. (Gonzalo, 34, Vitoria, big data technician, three years in Mexico City)

Gonzalo opted to quit the transnational company that had sent him there to stay in Mexico. He chose his current job because this was more interesting from a professional point of view; it was a challenge. In this case, it was not an improvement of working conditions (although he was able to negotiate competitive salary and holidays, the new company did not agree to pay for housing), but the chance of being able to develop other aspects of his career and eventually improve his expertise.

In other cases, the reason for staying in Mexico relates to a new business; an activity that is considered to be more complicated in Spain. This is the case of Josep Lluís, who was sent to Mexico as head of the Spanish subsidiary and currently owns his own company. Josep Lluís describes this process:

> The opportunity to buy this company came unexpectedly. The step to entrepreneur was easy. I am a member of the *Club de Empresarios Catalanes* in Mexico. An old fellow wanted to retire and return to Barcelona. He put the business up for sale, he talked to me, he showed me the figures, he asked for a reasonable price, I saw that there was potential, I mortgaged everything and I bought the business. (Josep Lluís, 42, Barcelona, businessman, seven years in Mexico City)

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The idea we would like to underline is that not all expatriates prefer to return to Spain as soon as their contracts end, but some remain beyond them, others opt to change companies and others even decide to change professional activity. As we have seen previously, this evidence is not in line with the literature on expatriates in emerging countries, which highlights the temporary patterns of these displacements. Mexico is, in short, an attractive country for many of the interviewees who decide to stay, despite their previous temporary migration plans. The lack of job prospects and difficulty of doing business in Spain and, in general, Mexico's economic stability at the time of interviews make remaining in the country appealing, even if some work benefits might be lost. These aspects suggest that the assumptions of the skilled migration literature are partially wrong. The literature, which is based on static, cross-sectional studies of highly qualified groups, assumes that transnational corporations are the preferred destination for the skilled. Moreover, when studies present a dynamic vision, they mainly focus on mobility within transnational companies, without taking into account exits from companies' internal market. Our fieldwork suggests though that labor incorporation in transnationals and expatriate status can be a mere phase of more complex labor trajectories. In this complexity, the economic situation of both the countries of origin and destination play a relevant role.

The Role of the Mexican State

State legislation is key in the divide of current international migration flows between the tolerated and even encouraged skilled migration and "undesirable" low-skilled flows (Castles and Miller 2003). As Raghuram (2013) suggests, skilled migration is nowadays the only "acceptable" face of migration. Since human capital is one of the characteristics that best defines a society's capacity for adaptation, countries seek to improve it not only by investing in education but also by attracting immigrants (Kuptsch and Pang 2006).

Many countries establish migration programs aimed at attracting foreign professionals (e.g. the Australian point-tested visas, Khoo et al. 2011). Moreover, the need for foreign direct investment has prompted many developing countries to adopt a less restrictive position on the arrival of foreign qualified personnel (see, for instance, Koser and Salt 1997, who illustrate the cases of Indonesia, Malaysia and China). In the same vein,

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Pang (1993) states that Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan and Thailand also allow foreign professionals to be employed in transnationals. But perhaps the most well-known example of this kind of policy is those Arab countries that have promoted ambitious development plans involving technology transfers and highly skilled migration in order to create and consolidate companies and institutions. Even the poorest countries in Africa see technology investment as a first step for development and, consequently, have promoted short-term visa permits for the high-skilled workers (Errichiello 2012). Yet the majority of visas offered to skilled migrants are temporary (Boyd 2014).

By contrast, Mexico has no specific immigration program to attract highly qualified talent. Furthermore, the current 2012 Mexican Migration Act is more restrictive than its predecessor. For the interviewees, prior to the new law enactment, being reclassified from tourist to immigrant used to be easy in Mexico. Nowadays, work visas have to be processed before entering the country. This does not seem to be a problem for large corporations, since transnationals generally move workers under temporary arrangements. For smaller companies, though, the situation is far more complicated. Interviewees expressed the difficulties they face when dealing with a bureaucracy which some find opaque.

The following interview extracts illustrate the variety of situations faced by immigrants in Mexico when obtaining/renewing their migration permits. The first is an example of a Spanish transnational employee who arrived as an expatriate in 2007, before the legislation change:

> The company does the renewal of the migration permit for me … The person who deals with this in the company tells me, "Go at eight o'clock in the morning to the offices of the Institute of Migration." [He will be] queuing from 6:30 AM to do many procedures that I do not really want to know. And I arrive at 8:00 AM, I step into a room with the person in charge, I sign and that's it. Bureaucracy here is a real nuisance. (Víctor, 48, Palma de Mallorca, expatriate, manager, seven years in Mexico City)

Since the enactment of the new law, however, the situation has been more complex. Interviewees observe that the Institute of Migration does not really have guidelines for issuing work permits, so obtaining a permit is highly dependent on bureaucrats' arbitrary decisions. Furthermore, the bureaucracy is inefficient and procedures long and wearisome to the point that some interviewees work irregularly in the country and/or decide to

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renew their tourist permit every six months. In other words, they are legally tourists with no right to work in Mexico and would eventually be expelled if caught. Yet, according to our interviewees, this is likely not to happen: foreign skilled workers are practically invisible to migration officials, unlike highly visible Central Americans on their way north, who are an easy target for police and migration enforcement alike as the chapter of Tanya Basok in this volume clearly shows. Furthermore, companies must apply for a permit to hire foreigners. Since companies and employees alike have to apply for permits, the whole process of contracting a foreign worker may last several months or even years. This is the case of Alberto, an expatriate sent by his company to Mexico. Ironically, he says in the interview that irregularity is not as bad as it seems, because he and his wife renew their tourist permit on holidays. In his own words:

> We are contracted by a Spanish company; our contract is Spanish. Initially, they started to do the paperwork [for him and his wife], but it's not as simple as it seems. The company must be registered with the Institute of Migration for at least one year. Currently, we have to leave every six months. But sometimes we have to go to the United States for work or on holidays. Until now, it has not been a problem. We are tourists in the country. (Alberto, 36, Barcelona, expatriate, industrial technician, two years in Puebla)

Juan Antonio is a similar case, choosing to enter as a tourist. The company for which he worked, as in the previous example, was not registered with the Institute of Migration and therefore could not contract foreigners. Furthermore, he had to leave the country, because his work visa was denied. After trying to get a work visa in Spain, he decided to go back to Mexico as a tourist and try to apply for a work visa again. This interviewee also details the procedures he had to carry out both in Mexico and in Spain:

> I had a student permit and I applied for a change in immigration category, from student to worker. It took me about ten months to have an answer to the application. It was negative, and they told me that I had to leave the country in a month. Meanwhile, my company applied for both the employer's certificate, so they could hire foreigners, and consequently for my resident permit … Migration also denied the company's registration, because it seems that it did not fulfil Migration's requirements. And they told me again to leave the country. I finally left. I spent a month and a half in Spain. I put

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> in a new work permit application, this time in the Mexican Consulate in Spain They told me that I would have a reply in ten days maximum. I waited for four months. I wrote to them, I called them so many times. No answer. Then, I made up my mind and I decided to come back as a tourist. I obtained a 180-day tourist permit, and the company has resumed the employer registration process. This began in August last year and they finally approved it yesterday. Now I can start again with my work permit. (Juan Antonio, 33, Seville, expatriate, manager, one and half years in Guadalajara)

The above cases are Spanish expatriates working in medium-sized companies. Despite favorable working conditions, two of the three interviewees have languished in an inscrutable, arbitrary bureaucracy, according to them. The situation is even more complex, however, for those who migrate outside transnational channels. In these cases, interviewees trade irony and resignation for descriptions of the process tinged with helplessness and disappointment. Mariana, who also entered as a tourist, explained that she obtained a job relatively quickly, but getting a work permit was a nightmare. The following extract portrays the vicissitudes experienced by some interviewees. In Mariana's words:

> I entered Mexico as a tourist and a month later I found work, and the company started to do my papers. The company was already registered with the Institute of Migration. The company presented my passport, the job offer, and Migration authorized an interview at the Consulate to apply for a work permit … I should have done the interview in the Mexican consulate in Spain, before entering … Fortunately, Migration is flexible and the interview can be done in any country … I asked for an appointment at the consulate of Mexico in Guatemala and I went, I gave all the papers, and they told me to return in eight days … And the interview lasted two minutes, standing … It is a very intimidating unpleasant interview. After this, they issued me a provisional 30-day visa, so I could apply for a work permit … The company has not paid me all these months that I have been working. The majority of companies I know are like that, since they cannot justify the payment … Their cynical response is: "You do volunteer work for us these months, while we process your work permit." (Mariana, 28, town of Murcia, University technician, six months in Mexico City)

The previous interview extracts show that immigration policies in Mexico (and their enforcement) are complicated, particularly since the law change. They also point at immigrants' legal vulnerability, which

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may be of special relevance for the youngest non-expatriate skilled workers. The literature has also mentioned some aspects related to skilled migrants' vulnerability, stemming from temporary migration arrangements (but not coming from the lack of resident permits). The precarious working conditions of many professionals, working in unfavorable conditions on temporary visas, call to mind Alarcón's "high-tech braceros" (2000), an allusion to the Mexican temporary worker program implemented by the United States in the 1950s and 1960s to fill vacancies in agriculture. Khoo et al. (2011) suggest that the policy of temporary visas has put a halt to immigration in Australia. These studies, however, focus on immigration to developed countries. Theoretically, developing economies would seek to attract highly qualified people under favorable migration schemes, as occurs in Southeast Asia (Pang 1993) and in Persian Gulf countries (Errichiello 2012). In the case of Mexico, rather, the lack of a specific policy for high-skilled migrants puts some professionals at risk of legal vulnerability and irregular work.

In short, changes in immigration laws have also had an impact on incorporation in Mexican labor markets. The new 2012 Migration Act establishes tougher controls on new arrivals. Before it, and according to our interviewees, tourists could easily be reclassified as immigrants once in the country. After 2012, new arrivals are required to ask for a (work) visa before their entry into Mexico, if they want to stay in the country for more than 90 days. In many cases, interviewees do not have a clear idea of the legal requirements or their long-term plans in Mexico are not clear upon arrival. Of importance for this chapter, and different from other developing countries (see, for instance, Koser and Salt 1997 for an appraisal of migration policies in Indonesia, Malaysia and China), Mexico has no specific program nor any quotas for attracting highly skilled migrants. Even so, large transnational corporations seem to have no problem obtaining work permits for their foreign employees, according to interviewed expatriates. The situation is more complex for small to medium Mexican enterprises which face difficulties demonstrating the lack of qualified Mexican workers for positions. In any case, immigration laws (and ineffective bureaucracy) are not a deterrent to migration, but complicate labor incorporation in Mexico to the point that several immigrants were working irregularly in Mexico at the time of their interview.

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Upward Labor Mobility? Wages and Labor Conditions

Positive opinions of the Mexican labor market abound among expatriates, older people and those who migrated before the 2008 economic crisis. Specifically, expatriates value most their migration to Mexico, which is associated with job promotion, better wages and work benefits, such as housing, children's schooling and company cars (for more on expatriates' careers and benefits, see Koser and Salt 1997; Iredale 2001; Harvey and Beaverstock 2016). Certainly, positive feelings about the Mexican labor market is the main reason why some interviewees decide to stay in the country and even give up their status as expatriates. However, among those who arrived after 2008, including some expatriates, we observe that immigration into Mexico seems to be the result of push factors at origin, like bad labor conditions and the lack of job promotion in Spain. Emigration is a voluntary step, but, at the same time, a necessary one to pursue upward labor mobility within the company. If not, their professional futures in Europe would be gloomier. Pedro, an engineer from a transnational corporation, is frankly satisfied with his decision to migrate to Mexico and he acknowledges that his former colleagues back in Spain are paid less than before, with some of them being even unemployed.

In our fieldwork, we found examples of precarious work due to legal migration irregularities, but also low wages, unsatisfactory working conditions and irregular outsourcing. At first, it is surprising that interviewees complain of low wages, since salary is the main reason for migration from a neoclassical point of view. When deciding to migrate, interviewees actually value the possibility of advancing their careers—difficult in Spain, where many occupied jobs below their education level or were unemployed. Yet the wages of non-expatriates vary greatly, being particularly low for some young professionals outside Mexico City. That was the case for Christian and Estrella, both living in Puebla, who said that their wages were clearly insufficient. In their own words:

> As a waiter in Spain, I got 17,000 pesos [900 dollars] and here as a journalist, I get 3,000 pesos. You can imagine how I consider my situation here. There are many labor options here, but wages are excessively low. (Christian, 28, Reus, Tarragona, journalist, three years in Puebla)

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> When I saw people living in foreign countries, I used to think, "How interesting, you learn new things." However, when you are actually in a foreign country, things are very different. Mexico is very far away from Spain and you live uncertain if you will eventually return one day … Wages are not high either. I must save a lot to be able to travel. Saving all year allows me to visit my family for 15 days annually. (Estrella, 34, Badajoz, environmental educator, three years in Puebla)

Apart from wages, labor conditions are also viewed poorly by some interviewees. Here, they mention aspects such as the small number of holidays (according to the Federal Labor Law, employees are allowed six days of paid leave after the first year of work and two more are added annually until the fifth working year), the low quality of public healthcare and the poorly funded retirement schemes. As an example, Laura has a very poor opinion of her job benefits. Beside poor working conditions, she thinks that the lack of benefits (or their low quality) is a good reason to leave Mexico in the near future. In her own words:

> In terms of opportunities, I see more in Mexico, at least, in journalism, compared to Spain today. Professional opportunities and working conditions are different things. Mexican working conditions, at least, in my sector, are not good in terms of holidays, work benefits, social security, all that. At that level, I compare it with Spain and, despite all the setbacks, the two countries are far away one from the other. (Laura, 31, Madrid, journalist, three years in Mexico City)

Beyond working conditions and wages, it may be surprising that some interviewees face irregular outsourcing (i.e. despite being de facto company employees, they work as contractors). These practices are not always involuntary, given that some of the interviewees prefer the higher wages over lost some labor rights, such as health insurance. These practices are seen in all kind of companies, not only in small local firms. The latter may be more susceptible to experiencing destabilizing turnover and consequently be "forced" to use this type of flexible arrangement. Yet large companies, even transnationals, eagerly outsource. The next example illustrates the case of Mario, who resigned from his job for a position in a Spanish bank. In his new job, he found himself facing unacceptable working conditions:

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> I was in [a Spanish bank] three weeks … They promised me that they would hire me with all the benefits, and then I got an outsourcing contract without the mandated benefits. I told them I was not interested. They told me, "You have already left your previous job, you are here, the salary is good after all" … If I had been told that it was outsourcing, I would not have accepted it from the beginning. There are many companies like that, it's cheaper for them. Companies pay you the same wage, but they save a lot of money, the benefits. You don't have health insurance, you don't have any right … For me it's clear. When the day I sell myself short by accepting all these kind of things comes, I return home. I am not in another country to be worse off than I would be in my country … I would not accept jobs like this, without holidays (…) I would go back to work with my family. (Mario, 28, medium-sized town of Girona, financial analyst, five years in Mexico City)

"When the day I sell myself short by accepting all these kind of things comes; I return home." This last interviewee shows that not all highly skilled migrants enjoy satisfying salaries, working conditions and contracts. But in addition to these "objective" conditions, highly skilled immigrants might also face very different (and even hostile) work environments from those of their countries of origin.

Labor Relations: Values in Conflict

The literature on skilled migration has recently taken up some hitherto underappreciated aspects of migration patterns, such as reasons for choosing a specific country, personal experiences, family and opinions on the labor and social culture of the destination place (e.g. Meijering and Van Hoven 2003; Voigt-Graf 2003; Harvey and Beaverstock 2016). Difficulties obtaining permanent residence in destination countries (Alarcón 2000; Khoo et al. 2011), unfavorable working conditions (Dean and Wilson 2009) and adaptation problems (Tseng 2011) among skilled workers have also attracted increased attention.

Labor relations and eventual conflicts between natives and skilled migrants, on the contrary, have not been widely addressed in the migration literature, although it has been done from the business management perspective (Groysberg et al. 2008; Dries 2013). In those studies, the emphasis has been on the adaptation and adjustment processes of expatriates in order to optimize their stays in the destination countries. In economic geography, meanwhile, emphasis has been placed on the knowledge economy and information flows within companies and, from another per-

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spective, between global cities, but mostly ignoring cultural barriers (e.g. Faulconbridge et al. 2009; Hall and Appleyard 2011).

In our interviews, we found remarkably negative opinions on Mexican labor culture, particularly among expatriates. Among non-expatriates, perhaps due to the fact that they see career development opportunities in the country, there is greater acceptance of Mexican labor culture. Negative opinions may be of such intensity that some interviewees consider leaving Mexico simply because they could not adapt to it. This is the case of Joan, from Tarragona, managing commercial director of a Belgian transnational. His specific job is to coordinate and supervise customs activities for the Mexican subsidiary. Joan is in charge of looking for new clients and he thinks that the lack of professionalism among his Mexican colleagues makes business especially burdensome. In his words:

> My salary has improved a lot, but the work environment is much worse than in Spain. Working conditions are very precarious. There is no commitment with work, with business. I try to do my job, but it's really hard. My job requires great responsibility, and this is very hard for a newcomer like me who doesn't know the Mexican labour culture very well. (Joan, 28, Tarragona, expatriate, managing commercial director of a Belgian company in Mexico, three years in Mexico City)

He was pondering another move, leaving Mexico because he could not adapt to its labor culture. His story shows how labor trajectories may change depending on perceptions and opinions of both origin and destination countries. Oriol, for example, who decided to try out an international experience within the French food corporation for which he works, is also critical of some aspects of Mexican labor culture, particularly responsibility, commitment and working times, such that he sees the company (and their workers) as short-termist. In his words:

> The work environment is very different from that of Spain. It's good … People work differently. The sense of responsibility though is very low. The commitment to the company ethos is also very low. And people, in general terms, I would say they focus on the short term … People are never on time, never, at work. (Oriol, 46, expatriate, Barcelona, human resources director of a French corporation)

Other interviewees do not complain of lack of professionalism in the workplace, at least not in the same strong terms as Oriol. They believe that

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highly skilled Mexican employees who have studied at (private) universities are efficient professionals, committed to their company's ethos. However, they say that less skilled—and worse remunerated—workers have a lower level of commitment to the company.

Communication problems, difficulties in relationships, hierarchy, excessive working hours and socialization outside work are aspects that have not been widely investigated in the literature, being considered "minor" compared to wages and work benefits. Our fieldwork suggests that these issues should be considered relevant aspects of the migration process, and particularly of labor market incorporation patterns. Indeed, they may be key to understanding the desire to stay with a company and even in a country. In this sense, Antonio, who works for a Mexican company as an editor and proof-reader, reports chafing under some work procedures at his first job:

> I worked as an English proof-reader [in a news agency] I felt free … I am a bit work-obsessed, I worked very fast, and then I would go for drinks and come back to the office. I would prepare almost everything for the next day. I had my three-day agenda ready in advance, except the unexpected obviously. And that's it. I was very good … The conflict came up when they wanted me to be more present, to warm up the damned chair … Congratulations even arrived … because now captions, cables were understandable. And they made the mistake of showing it to me. And when they went on with "No, you need to be here for your working hours", I said, "Let's see, I mean, I've been working like this for two years, they congratulate me, and you want me to change my work routine?" Things went increasingly wrong, and I said to myself, "Enough is enough. Enough of this Latin American 'plunge' that leaves nothing but anger." (Antonio, Toledo, 39, editor and proof-reader, 13 discontinuous years in Mexico City)

This same interviewee decided to return to Europe and later go back to Mexico, once again joining a publishing house. In the following excerpt, he notes aspects of alleged employment discrimination for being a foreigner. Antonio, like other interviewees, also points out (negative) job characteristics, like excessive hierarchy and power:

> They told me I used a very formal style, and a girl told me, "No, this is not the Mexican way." She told me that my writing style was from another country. I was told it several times, when I used some expressions, a cer-

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> tain formal tone. And they said, "No, it's just that the way it is." And I said to them, "Hey, let's see, I know the way people speak here, eh" … It was a bit of racism too … It is not pleasant at all. You know, as a foreign white man, you obtain many perks in Mexico, many, many, many. But, as soon as people have power, they let you know it. I'm not here to put up with people's sense of inferiority. Finally, I thought, "You know what, keep your small portion of power. I'm not going to take it away from you." It's tiring. (Antonio, Toledo, 39, editor and proof-reader, 13 discontinuous years in Mexico City)

Criticism and negative opinions of labor relations may seem irrelevant, compared to the advantages that expatriates enjoy in transnationals, although we have already seen that work situations are diverse and complex. Gandini (2018) identifies that dismissal, founded on the perception that highly skilled immigrants are "privileged" compared to other workers, as a reason why their labor improvement demands are so often discounted. She believes that qualified immigrants are, in this sense, deprived of "rights," suggesting an interesting line of debate that, again, has not been extensively pursued in the skilled migration literature.

Conclusions

From extensive fieldwork, this chapter explores aspects of skilled migration to which the literature has paid little attention. Giving voice to a highly qualified group of private employees, the chapter shows that the incorporation of skilled migrants in Mexico is diverse, facing various labor and contract conditions and even confronting legal migration issues, to the point that some interviewees are in an irregular administrative situation in the country. Differences among immigrants lie in the interviewee's age, year of arrival (before/after the migration crisis in 2008, before/after the implementation of the 2012 Migration Act) and channel of arrival in Mexico (within or without transnational companies). These three elements (age, moment of migration and expatriate status) are decisive for understanding labor incorporations and trajectories in Mexico and point towards a great diversity in its population of skilled immigrants. Therefore, there is no single, homogeneous non-problematic path to labor incorporation for skilled immigrants in Mexico; the path is shaped by various factors.

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Interviewees agree, though, in their positive evaluations of the Mexican labor market and its ample work choices and great flexibility. Indeed, some expatriates who arrived under temporary contracts decide to stay in the country afterwards. Work prospects are specially valued by young professionals who "escaped" the adverse working conditions back in Spain. Interestingly, this group is more receptive to Mexican labor culture than those transferred within transnational companies, who, at least theoretically, share a professional ethos with the local staff of these corporations. In any case, and although this aspect has not been widely discussed in the chapter, the interviews point out that work experiences in Mexico are influenced by the immigrants' degree of social and cultural integration, so their labor decisions often depend on factors exogenous to their workplace experience.

Arising from the analysis of the Spanish interviewees, the chapter also shed light on skilled migration in Mexico, not often considered a receiving country for foreign professionals in the literature. Therefore, observing the multiple reality of this group in Mexico, the chapter fills a gap in the literature which has excessively focused on developed countries using rigid perspectives and interpretation schemes. Immigration into to Mexico seems to respond to a two-sided dynamic of "push," generated by the economic crisis, and "pull," due to the specific demands of some sectors of activity and companies in the receiving country.

This chapter shows a typology of qualified personnel of companies that would overcome the strict division between expatriates and "independent" professionals. This typology relates to labor trajectories prior to Mexico and reasons for migration. On the one hand, there are "pioneer" professionals, whose job consists in opening new market niches/subsidiaries in Mexico, responding sometimes to decisions made at company headquarters. For them, migration decisions come down to "pull" factors. On the other, there are those for whom immigration to Mexico is an opportunity to develop their careers, something sorely lacking in Spain. Here, both "push" and "pull" factors have to be considered when understanding migration decisions. There is a third, distinct group: those who chose immigration to Mexico for personal reasons. For these, labor decisions depend on love and family. Although the emphasis here has been made on work, it is evident that couple and family creation/breakup and children can be key factors in the decision to migrate and remain in a foreign country (see, for instance, Ortiz-Guitart 2018).

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Note

1. The definition of "skilled migrant" is controversial in the literature. Some authors reckon that "qualification" must be defined in terms of years of formal education, but others argue that the key aspect is labor incorporation. Taking this perspective, Meier (2015) believes that many migrants who are considered highly qualified due to their formal education in reality fail to obtain a professional position in accordance with it. However, the literature generally agrees that a "skilled migrant" is one who has a university degree (Eich-Krohm 2013). It is also assumes that people with higher education can pursue more sophisticated jobs than other workers (Fratesi 2014).

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