

## Mexican Immigrants' Nostalgic Experiences in New York

### Experiencias nostálgicas de migrantes mexicanos en Nueva York

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#### ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the nostalgic experiences of Mexican immigrants in the state of New York. From a new approach to mobilities paradigm, we propose a focus on the emotional aspects of migration to reveal the internal conflicts that emerge when migrants seek to adapt to the lifestyle of their destination country, while trying not to lose their cultural roots, and how this inner tension influences the interactions in their everyday doings and emotions. Based on the narratives exposed in 35 interviews with Mexican immigrants living at the destination country, this qualitative study provides elements for the understanding of nostalgic experiences derived from the painful process of leaving their home country.

*Keywords:* 1. nostalgia, 2. mobilities, 3. cultural identity, 4. Mexico, 5. United States

#### RESUMEN

En este artículo se analiza la experiencia nostálgica de migrantes mexicanos en el estado de Nueva York, Estados Unidos. Desde el marco de los estudios de movilidad, se propone un enfoque que explora la dimensión emocional de la migración para dar cuenta de la tensión subjetiva que existe cuando las personas desean adaptarse al estilo de vida del país de destino sin querer perder sus raíces, y cómo esta tensión dirige las negociaciones que realizan en sus prácticas y sentires cotidianos. A partir de un estudio cualitativo y de las narrativas de 35 migrantes, este artículo aporta elementos para comprender que la experiencia de la nostalgia requiere el entendimiento de las narrativas que se elaboran en el nuevo destino, lo que supone un duelo elaborado de la partida del hogar de origen.

*Palabras clave:* 1. nostalgia, 2. movilidades, 3. identidad cultural, 4. México, 5. Estados Unidos.

Date received: June 14, 2017

Date accepted: February 22, 2018

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## INTRODUCTION

At that precise moment he said to himself: What would I not give for the joy  
Of being at your side in Iceland, in the great immobile day  
And partake of now as one partakes of music or the taste of fruit.  
At that precise moment he was together with her in Iceland.

Jorge Luis Borges, *Nostalgia for the Present* (1981)

Nostalgia, understood as the ability to invoke memories and make cuts of them, and put them into perspective, allows finding in the memories of past people and places the elements that provide actions and experiences with meaning. In this text we turn to nostalgia as an analytical category in line with the postulates of Wilson (2015), who posits nostalgia as a complex, temporal and spatial experience, as well as a cultural, social and mnemonic one.<sup>3</sup> Thus, nostalgia, as a social emotion, falls within geographical (temporal and spatial), social (cultural norms) and psychic elements, whereas its mnemonic element reflects the particular ways in which certain events are recorded in the memory of each individual. We also make use of concepts by Davis (1979), who explains how nostalgia facilitates the continuity of identity, particularly in times of transition. There are three types of nostalgia: simple or first order, reflective or second order, and interpretive or third order; and by Blunt (2003) who, similarly, calls the latter *productive nostalgia*.

We start from the premise that mobility is an integral aspect of social life, where in processes such as displacement, rupture and duel, emotional experiences are found. Although Borges' epigraph to nostalgia appears non-sensical and a paradox, it displays how in nostalgia there are multiple forms, times, senses, places and, above all, movements; it also refers to an emotion that does not necessarily takes place in the past, but is lived again from helical movements and feelings of joy in different places, spaces and times, as well as flavors and sounds that appeal to the senses. It can be said that this way of being in the world arising from experiencing nostalgia manifests itself with greater force during mobilities and migratory processes.

### *Emotional Realities in the Study of Mobilities*

The incorporation of migrants to *host* societies is an issue that has raised great interest due to the increase in migration flows. The common approach to the study of migration, referring back to the explanatory model of pull and push, reflects the interest in assessing the influence of structural factors in migrations in different contexts, not taking into account mobility as an integral aspect of social life (Urry, 2007). Easthope (2009) explains

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<sup>3</sup>According to Laplanche & Pontalis (2004), the concept of mnemonic footprint is used by Freud throughout his work to designate the way in which events are recorded in memory, persist permanently and are reactivated at certain times according to simultaneous and causal associations.

how, from that perspective, migration is described in economic terms, mainly of poverty and lack of job opportunities in the countries of origin, an approach that is insufficient to explain the ways in which people experience, understand and deal with their migration. The latter factors are as important as the original reasons why they decide to migrate in the first place.

This new approach proposes an exploration of the different elements and resources of migrants to reconstruct/deconstruct their identities and the concept of home in culturally different contexts (Narváez, 2013). This way, identity is a key element to incorporate in the public debate on migration and minority groups (Casey & Dustmann, 2010) since it refers to the expression of both cultural similarities and differences within contemporary societies (Ashworth, Graham & Tunbridge, 2007). This new approach to studying the mobility of people, objects and information picks up the *social* concerns of sociology (inequity, power) with the *spatial* ones of geography (territories, borders) and the *cultural* ones of anthropology (discourses, representations) to combine them in a relational way in the co-constitution of subjects, spaces and meanings (Sheller, 2014).

From this, the study of mobility is coordinated with the study of the corporeal journey of people and the physical movements of objects, as well as with imaginary, virtual and communicative journeys. This paradigm emphasizes the complex configuration of power relations between the local and the global; in the same way, it generates reflections focused on the study of affective and bodily dimensions. Thus, the communication between the personal and the social allows exploring how emotions are related to the social environment that surrounds people and how various political, social and economic forces permeate the subject through narratives, emotions and imaginations.

Then, the emphasis is on understanding the emotional reality of human beings and social structures. From the anthropology and sociology of emotions, emotion is conceptualized as a social construction as long as: 1) emotions develop in a given social and historical context and are experienced by individuals and/or groups within a social process, as a result of interactions with their social environment, and 2) emotions have motivational forces that impact behavior, organization and social life (Clairgue, 2012; Hirai, 2009, 2014). From the lens of psychology and mental health, the interest in nostalgia has mainly focused on the migrant individual and on the processes called *migratory duels* reflected in symptoms perceived as nostalgia: sadness, mood swings and psychic disorders, among others. In that sense, Clairgue (2012) points out that the narrative of the past refers to the use of nostalgia as a “survival” strategy or, from the view of psychology, as a coping mechanism.

From the angle of sociology, Davis (1979) proposes to examine nostalgia as a private emotion that is also shared socially, as long as it refers to the subjective feelings of the biography and the collective memory of a group of people. For Davis, nostalgia has an

inherent reflexive aspect that manifests itself in what he calls *ascending orders of nostalgia*: first order, which refers to the romantic and idealized sense of the past; second order, which aims at giving precision and accuracy to memory and reality; and third order, in which the subject wonders if things really happened as they remember. A similar concept is found in *productive nostalgia*, proposed by Blunt (2003), as it allows us to rework an imaginary past in the experiences lived in the present and while facing the future. It should be said that there is no nostalgic experience that remains unaltered in the process of reconstructing the past; therefore, it is important to acknowledge the existence of different types of nostalgia, some productive and socially useful and others not so much (Pickering & Keightley, 2006).

From the field of history, Boym (2003) argues that what is perceived as nostalgia is not an actual recovery of the “absolute truth of the past,” but a contemplation on history and on the passing of time as the bittersweet pain from the loss caused by the imperfect process of memory. Emphasis is made on the contemplative aspect of nostalgia, but also on the restorative one, through which it allows for the rebuilding of the lost home and the healing of the shadows of memory. Thus, he argues that contemporary nostalgia should be understood as a series of cross migrations. Similarly, Wilson (2015) states that people exercise agency based on the ways in which they (re)build the past and assign meaning to nostalgic emotions, as well as to those anchored in space and that, depending on the way in which they are remembered, nostalgia will materialize (Kitson & McHugh, 2015).

On the other hand, Della (2006), Bonnett (2015) and Blunt & Varley (2004), from geography, question the concept of nostalgia developed and confined to the field of narrative and imagination. They point out that the place called home is the most appropriate and powerful to inquire about nostalgic imagination. The above-mentioned authors all agree that nostalgia interacts in the geographical imagination and the physical landscape, which allows theorizing the connections between places, belonging and cultural material. In this regard, Easthope (2009, p. 66) points out that “a place is not the same as a physical space” and, as long as we exist as physical bodies in a physical world, significant places will always be created, which have some kind of attachment and subjective ties to the world. In this context, home and the meaning attributed to the domestic, intimate and private result in a feeling of place and belonging (Blunt, 2003), which explains the meanings, emotions, experiences and relationships attributed to it.

The study of nostalgia refers to various ontological and methodological difficulties. On the one hand, the fact that the nostalgic experience changes position over time causes that an event narrated under certain circumstances (one that may also depend on the way in which it is currently perceived) to change, as long as such circumstances change. Thus, that which happened under the influence of a symbolic power that Bhaba (2002) calls a *traveling theory* or a *metaphorical movement* is reinterpreted and represented.

On the other hand, the “ascending orders of nostalgia” proposed by Davis (1979) are not in themselves phenomena experienced by people; for the individual, the nostalgic experience is a single thing, and it is only when analyzing their stories that we can see how they move vividly from one level to another. Thus, when narrated nostalgia is mobile, but not linear; instead it is discontinuous and helical. This means that nostalgic experiences are both stable and mobile, vary in their form and content according to the time and circumstance under which they are narrated: in health, in illness, in situations of emotional, economic or migratory crisis, work or school failures or successes, and in the establishment or breaking up of relationships, among others. It is common that the intensity of the emotion highlights certain elements and minimizes others, and that whoever narrates an event, strongly symbolic and full of affections, deciphers it according to their cultural projections and the interpellation that they carry out (Macías & De la Mata, 2013). Marte (2008) points out that these cultural projections usually appear in the form of fragments with contradictions; in addition, the valuation schemes they contain change depending on the contexts and the survival project of the subjects, which, in turn, modify how nostalgia manifests. Thus, an event, an experience or a situation that might involve the mobilization of passions and feelings, at another time or with the passing of time may not mean the same. It is, however, the reflection inherent to process of remembrance that allows these reinterpreted movements.

The above is linked to the issue of identity inasmuch as physical proximity and opportunities for contact between different cultural groups (as it happens in migratory processes) make it necessary to establish cultural boundaries that stress the characteristics, practices and emotions that self-identify people as members of a community (Barth, 1976). In this context, the process of remembering and commemorating becomes fundamental to develop a sense of belonging to one's own culture. According to Davis (1979), group identity manifests through the construction of narratives about the recent past and collective commemoration acts derived from cultural power relations. Along the same lines, Hall (1992) points out that national culture is a discourse and a way of constructing meanings that influence and organize both actions and self-conception, while national identity is a structure of cultural power that frames ties and loyalties, and that represents attachment to places, national symbols and particular rituals.

From this theoretical background, the present text seeks to explore the nostalgic expressions sprung from narratives of Mexican migrant families in New York, United States, and how mobile people participate through them in the dynamic and complex process of home, identity and culture reconstruction at their place of settlement, how they value their original communities and, according to Guinsberg (2005) and Imilan (2013), how they build ties to places by way of visiting multiple homes, which is an experience strongly lived by migrants.

### *Studies on Nostalgia in the Mexican Population in the United States*

Different investigations address the emotional part of migration from different perspectives and interest angles. The classic study by Massey (1987) finds that Mexicans' desire to return from the United States back to Mexico decreases over time due to the acculturation processes, but paradoxically increases with the acquisition of property back in Mexico and the coming of age. Keefe, Padilla and Carlos (1979) study the "extended families" of Mexicans born in the United States, referring to godparenthood as part of an emotional support system that allows them to survive and keep cultural ties even at the host society. As for Rouse (1992), he analyzes situations of cultural struggle associated with class transformation among migrants, and the new forms of transnational social organization originated from mobility.

More recent research studies nostalgia in relation to different aspects of daily life, sexuality and food. Hirsch, Munoz-Laboy, Nyhus, Yount and Bauermeister (2009) explore the sexual behavior of migrants in the United States and describe the feelings of longing for the *normal life* they had at home. From a transnational perspective, Pizarro (2010) gives an account of transnational knowledge and flavors, where ethnicity, gender and culture, as well as the national, provide the framework for everyday experiences. Following this perspective, Vázquez-Medina (2017) analyzes how nostalgia influences in a multidimensional way the reality of migrants who work in Mexican restaurants and how it helps in building ways to represent Mexicanness, make visible canons of loyalty and national ascription, as well as strengthen the sense of community.

When it comes to the migration of Mexicans to New York, we must turn to the works of Robert Smith (1996, 2006; Smith, Cordero-Guzmán & Grosfoguel, 2001), who, from the transnational theory, analyzes several areas of the insertion of Mexican migrants on the east coast of the United States, and highlights the existing ethnic-racial-gender dynamics. His contributions include focusing on the ways in which gender structures the transnational experience of broad migration processes and when settling down at the host country; identifying the ways in which masculinity and Mexicanness are negotiated collectively and transformed over time; and shedding light on the ability of migrants to remain linked to their countries of origin, as well as to resist the discriminatory processes that they endure during the migratory journey and their arrival in the United States. It is also worth mentioning how he makes reference to an *ethnic nostalgia*, wherein generation and gender act simultaneously in creating a certain conflict between first- and second-generation Mexican Americans. Also remarkable is his assertion that people have a multiplicity of *social locations*, based on images and gender, ethnic and racial hierarchies in both Mexico and the United States, that allows them, following Massey, to create a sense of place (2005).

## METHODOLOGY

When analyzing the nostalgic experience in migration, we made use of narratives provided within the framework of a qualitative study on eating and health habits, carried out in 2015-2016 on Mexican migrant families in New York. Through in-depth interviews and participant observation, information was obtained on the sociodemographic characteristics and gender conditions of the participants, as well as on their daily activities, eating habits, exercise, health care, recreational and work activities, and personal and social relationships.

We interviewed 35 migrants (23 women and 12 men) under different sociodemographic, legal and economic situations in New York: 26 are married, 20 are without legal status and 15 do have identity papers, 17 have young children and 12 have children over 18, 10 are middle-class economic level. Almost a third come from Oaxaca (10), while the rest are native to the State of Mexico, Michoacán, Guanajuato, Yucatán, Puebla, Sinaloa, Morelos, Chiapas, Mexico City and Tamaulipas. The average time of residence in the United States is 12.5 years and, at the time of the interview, participants lived in different locations including large urban centers such as New York, Brooklyn and Queens (10), small cities such as Saratoga and Albany (15), and suburban and semi-rural contexts such as Latham, Delmar, Bethlehem, Glenmont and Slingerland (10).

The interviews were conducted in several sessions and either individually, as a couple or as a family; they were recorded with the informed consent of the participants and, in order to keep anonymity, all the names in this text are fictitious. The common thread in the interviews focused on old and new eating habits, family care and health strategies, and Mexican food as an object of nostalgia. This analysis looks for the expressions of nostalgia of Mexican migrants in the process of creating a significant place outside their original home. We believe that sociological studies, home geographies and belonging aid in theorizing the connections between emotion, affection and place in the study of mobility.

## THE EXPERIENCE OF NOSTALGIA: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following Davis (1979), we can identify in the narratives of the informants in this study the three types of nostalgia indicated by this author. It should be noted that linear discourses are not to be found and that the rather helical form of nostalgia is expressed in a continuous swinging of sensations and experiences that flow and transition from one type of nostalgia to another and, sometimes, even in the same memory narrated by the same subjects. Likewise, we found substantive differences by time of residence in the host country, immigration status –migrants with a legal status are more likely to travel back to Mexico than undocumented immigrants, from which they experience different intensities of nostalgia–, gender status and children's age.

Regarding simple nostalgia, the most common topics refer to romantic and idealized longing for family relationships, childhood spaces, traditions and customs of Mexico, the differences in use of time in both countries and, especially, the taste of food, which we will further address in a special section. According to the features of this type of nostalgia, the trend is to compare aspects of daily life in both spaces, resulting in an overvaluation of the country of origin:

One misses Mexico because of family, traditions and stuff... (Hilario, 35 years old, three children, married and without legal status, Oaxaca; personal communication, May 15, 2015).

I lived six months in North Carolina; then, I came here and I had to change my life because you arrive with nothing; and if you are used to living well in Mexico, you are here and say: "What am I going to do here?" Yes, it's hard (Gloria, 48 years old, three children, married and with legal status, Guanajuato; personal communication, March 3, 2015).

In Mexico there are many more traditions for children to learn from. Christmas [here] is only December 24 and 25. In Mexico, it begins on December 16 or 18. There are so many things to teach them... The meaning of Christmas... Christmas here means gifts, and it's not that simple... (Regina, 31 years old, two daughters, married and without legal status, Oaxaca; personal communication, June 17, 2015).

Time is what shocks me the most when I go to Mexico. Time... how they take advantage of it and how Americans do it. Here time is not wasted (Salvador, 52 years old, two children, married and with legal status, Mexico City; personal communication, February 4, 2015).

Yes. What happens is that here you're indoors all the time and can't exercise. On the other hand, there is a lot of time in Mexico, a lot of time; so you can play soccer on weekends or... do whatever sport and time doesn't feel the same (Julián, 30 years old, childless, married and without legal status, Mexico City; personal communication, October 6, 2016).

Here, nobody tells you: "Hey, what's up? Let's go for a walk!" They do it in Mexico. Here, life is more inwards than outwards, and lonelier (Sofía, 32 years old, childless, common law marriage and with legal status, Michoacán; personal communication, August 5, 2015).

When you are here, you have to take off everything you were in Mexico and live the way it's here. Here, when a woman lives with her family or, for example, I live with the tenant, my brother-in-law and my husband, so I am the mother. Everything here is hard; here, you have to focus on your one thing. You don't have a life of your own (Amalia, 33 years old, two children,

married, without legal status, Puebla; personal communication, September 22, 2016).

A simple constant of nostalgia that is clearly seen in the previous testimonies is the reference to *here* and *there*, which shows how a new spatial configuration of the domestic is elaborated in situations of physical mobilization, and how in such conditions what is distant and close in subjective terms implies social, affective and cultural distances. Concurrently saying *here* to refer to the United States and/or their current environment, and *there* to refer to Mexico and their past living conditions implies differentiated and recreated spaces within the same narrative, used to express spatio-temporal distances between ways of living that are perceived as distant and distinct.

The transcribed fragments also make it clear that those who migrate cling to fixed beliefs or ideas about food and the ways of coexistence in their original countries, which allows them not to lose their former home as a reference point. For example, the assessment that in Mexico there is more space, more things to do, less time is spent indoors and there is more leisure time is due to the tendency to idealize the place of origin and to strengthen the loyalty to Mexico –regardless of mobility expectations–.

Regarding reflective nostalgia, we find it mainly in those migrants who have spent more time in the host country. They face ambivalent feelings that go from appreciating the benefits of living in the United States to the desire not to lose national identity and culture. At the same time, they experience rejection towards certain aspects of life in their country of origin, which introduces greater complexity and allows them to overcome the romantic vision of simple nostalgia. The following testimonials account for the above:

Leaving the family is hard. We miss Mexico a lot. The first year I dreamed I was back home. I wanted to go home, but I kept telling myself: “No, I can’t, I can’t” and over time, you adapt... (Rosa, 46 years old, three daughters, married, with legal status, Chiapas; personal communication, October 4, 2015).

It was a major change. At first, you have nothing, either economically or the tools or where to find them... but after you settle, you have more access to stuff and then you can make decisions (Salvador, 52 years old, two children, married, with legal status, Mexico City; personal communication, February 4, 2015).

As I say: “It would be better to be in Mexico” But how? Mexico is far from great too... What do they do in Mexico? They kidnap people. There are many bad things. I feel safer here with my children. Sure, traditions and everything is beautiful there, but it depends... Many people have suffered and I cannot live in peace *there* or enjoy what I have... I'd rather stay *here*... (Isabel, 31 years old,

three children, married, with legal status, Oaxaca; personal communication, April 18, 2015).

Regarding interpretive or productive nostalgia, migrants who have lived longer in the destination country and who have older children are the ones who express most clearly the number of emotional strategies they make use of to either adapt or resist the American lifestyle (some authors (Baucells, 2001) call this phenomena *acculturation processes*). Among these strategies we find that families perform a series of emotional acts that symbolically link them to the place of origin so as not to lose their roots: they sell Mexican food to co-nationals, decorate their homes with elements of Mexican culture, attend dance events and mass in Spanish at Catholic churches. These actions represent productive forms of nostalgia, in which the reasons to perform these activities are anchored in the emotional plane.

One aspect that clearly shows us the thin line between reflective nostalgia and productive nostalgia refers to the ambivalent feelings of returning home to the country of origin, the realizing of the actual possibilities of achieving that, and the future scenarios that migrants imagine under the expectation of conciliating their real situation with their desires. Although many migrants had the desire to return permanently to Mexico and argued that they worked to achieve the optimal conditions for doing so, they also thought about the existing impediments to achieve it. Their reasons were based on the fact that their children born or raised in the host country would not adapt to their country of origin and/or that their whole family was already in the United States. These reasons strengthened and tilted the balance towards the decision to stay or postpone their return in order not to disturb the family unit.

As he told us: "Mom, I'm not going to live in Mexico. I grew up here and I have friends here... if you leave, I will visit you, but I will not live there." My husband says: "Yes, we will return to Mexico," but we have not returned yet; we are still here... We're always about to leave, but we're still here... (Consuelo, 38 years old, three children, without legal status, State of Mexico; personal communication; July 20, 2015).

I wanted to say: "Let's go back to Mexico, I don't want to stay here..." I didn't eat because I was depressed. I wanted to tell my husband: "You know what? I'm going to Mexico, I'd rather lose you. I'm leaving." But I also didn't want to hurt him or make him feel guilty of all this, because when they come here, we cling to them, we also want to come and then... It didn't interest me at all [learning English], because returning to Mexico was always in my mind. My husband was telling me: "Wait 15 days and I'll send you back to Mexico," because I wanted to go back right away, I didn't like the United States. Those 15 days never passed... It's been 15 years already... because it's hard...

Interviewer: Do you still want to go back to Mexico?

No, not anymore; my children have grown up. My children are settling down here. My daughter is married to a Mexican, but her daughters already got used to this life, and my son is studying and says: “Mom, I won’t return to Mexico” (Gloria, 48 years old, three children, married, with legal status, Guanajuato; personal communication, March 3, 2015).

The tension between adapting to the way of life in the United States and the desire to return home is the closing or opening of subjective borders, rather than a real impediment (Marte, 2008). In this regard, families are not located clearly or definitively in either of these two positions (adaptation or return), but rather they lean to one side or the other depending on certain moments or situations experienced, including the age of their children. It is important to highlight this process, since it allowed us to glimpse a more nostalgic discourse among those who, due to their status as undocumented immigrants, had not visited Mexico for a long time or ever since their arrival in the U.S.; unlike those that could come and go more easily and safely. In the case of migrants with couples and/or children, nostalgia for the country of origin emerges as a bittersweet memory that fades away when comparing the pragmatic and subjective costs of returning to Mexico or staying in the United States.

In accordance with the above, they prefer to keep on experiencing a relative and subjective suffering living far from their families, home or country of origin, so as not to change everyday life and return to a space that has changed and is no longer the same as when they migrated. The longing for the taste of dishes guides and mobilizes food practices; however, there are other factors that affect their habits, such as their children’s preferences and ingredient availability. Undoubtedly, customs, festivities and cuisine are reinterpreted by nostalgia and fueled by national identity, yet also by new cultural possibilities fostered by children or support networks.

It is interesting to point out the new ways in which migrant women reformulate what their ideal life project would be, stemming from the acknowledgment of their particular economic conditions and immigration status:

If I had papers and money, I would go to Mexico at least twice a year, visit my family over there and then return to my children here. That’s how I see my life: divided between two countries... (Micaela, 35 years old, two children, separated, without legal status, Morelos; personal communication, October 8, 2016).

I would like to be like you [she means the interviewer and first author of this text]. You can come and go whenever you want. I could do it because I have papers, but I don’t have much money... That way, I would have the best of both countries. I could be here and there, that would be perfect... (Olga, 50

years old, three children, married, with legal status, Oaxaca; personal communication, October 10, 2016).

### *The Bitter Taste*

Interviewees miss food. Despite finding almost all the ingredients to prepare Mexican dishes, the flavor somehow differs from what is expected. Although the emphasis of this study on eating habits led to a dialogue around food and the imaginaries revolving around them, it is a fact that nostalgic feelings are stronger when talking about food. The food representation scenes are made up of places, times, family memories, dishes, flavors and even the commercial brands of the ingredients. Food conveys a message of re-appropriation of national culture, inviting those who eat to ritually recover the senses of identification, familiarity and belonging.

Typical foods (tamales, mole, rice, pozole) that people associated with their town, ranch, city or region of origin blurred temporal and geographical distances in their narratives. At a more intimate level, flavors are identified with the taste of their home and particularly with the female figures in charge of preparing food, which created the feeling of being at home.

The qualifiers around the idea of Mexican food in nostalgia refer to what is natural, fresh and, therefore, healthier. On the contrary, frozen food is symbolized as alien to Mexican culinary values. Dishes and the socialization revolving around the culinary act create specific links between each family and their regional history. In this case, the base experience formulates the impossibility of consuming food with the family, an element that becomes relevant for nostalgic narratives.

For 26 years I still follow my Mexican and healthy diet... and I cook as my mother and grandmother did (Martha, 68 years old, one daughter, married, with legal status, Yucatan; personal communication, November 4, 2015).

When I left Mexico the food was natural. Now, who knows... it's been 16 years (Juana, 38 years old, three children, married, without legal status, Sinaloa; personal communication, October 15, 2016).

In Mexico you go to an actual butcher's shop and buy fresh meat; sometimes they just killed the animal and the cows and pigs are fresh there. We fattened the chickens at home and ate them. Here, here everything is... frozen chicken. All types of meat is frozen; the cheese is not fresh... (Benito, 36 years old, one child, single, without legal status, Oaxaca; personal communication, August 22, 2015).

I grew up in the countryside and let me tell you... if we're going to make tortillas here we use Maseca, flour, and we don't do that there; there, you go to the mill and they grind you fresh dough... it's not the same to eat a Maseca

tortilla and a corn tortilla... (Gloria, 48 years old, three children, married, with legal status, Guanajuato; personal communication, March 3, 2015).

Sometimes we miss Mexican food; the taste... it might be similar, but I don't know... food was tastier over there (Julian, 30 years old, childless, married, without legal status, Mexico City; personal communication, October 6, 2015).

I was used to spicy food; everything is tastier. On Thanksgiving, turkey day, in November, there is plenty, because they cook a lot... I don't say no and if it is well seasoned... Yes, I will eat it (Consuelo, 38 years, three children, without legal status, State of Mexico; personal communication, July 20, 2015).

When we lived in the countryside, we all had lunch as a family... At noon, kids would come back from school and we all ate together; at night, we had dinner and we were all together. Not here. It's not possible, unless I change jobs... (Juana, 38 years old, three children, married, without legal status, Sinaloa; personal communication, October 15, 2016).

I follow my tradition. Sometimes we go out to eat or buy American food, but only every now and then... I'm always cooking. Maybe once a week or the weekend we eat outside, if at all... today I cooked beef broth. We're Mexican, that's it (Gloria, 48 years old, three children, married, with legal status, Guanajuato; personal communication, March 3, 2015).

Sometimes, we cook pozole out of nostalgia... but it is easier to make enchiladas or chilaquiles, and the ingredients are also easier to get (Sofia, 32 years old, childless, common law marriage, with legal status, Michoacán; personal communication, August 5, 2016).

The food practices of the interviewees have been transformed both in domestic and public spaces. It is possible to appreciate the incorporation of new ingredients and utensils in kitchens, as well as different food cycles in relation to the work and school times of family members. The idea behind following a healthy Mexican diet and feeling part of Mexico, is to, in a symbolic way, hold a cultural resistance promoted mainly by those who prepare food.

However, the consumption of junk food is a common practice that is often justified *because kids crave it*. Craving on a whim, which can be described as a desire that mixes the physical, the emotional and the nostalgic, appears in the narratives in two ways: as a space of desire and as cultural negotiation. The importance of understanding why family culinary habits are reproduced or why there are ruptures in them has to do with the fact that these foods position the subjects as part of a community through food relationships.

The abandonment of this cultural reference can mean the destabilization of the self through eating patterns. Therefore, references to food can denote an everyday bitter taste that cannot be covered by simply spicing up the dishes. As Mars notes (2008, p. 40): "This

culturally produced liking for certain food seems to be learned, not through food itself, but through contextual events that emotionally marked certain basic substances and products."

The rupture in everyday life alludes to special occasions: shared cultural festivals, such as Christmas and Day of the Dead; Mexican or American national and personal celebrations such as birthdays, weddings and *quinceañeras*, among others. In these spaces, the feeling of being at home intensifies by the meaning it acquires for those who cohabit and share there. Socialization and meetings, the food and drink consumed, and even the duration of a celebration, also generate cultural tension, and feelings of nostalgia become more evident.

Gloria: You meet people... When I got here first I did not leave my house... from work to home... but little by little I met other people...

Olga: ...now we have Ecuadorian, Nicaraguan, Costa Rican, Dominican and other friends. We assimilated better now... but with the same race, I almost never go to gringo parties, as we call them...

Gloria: ...the atmosphere is not the same... once I was going to one and my *comadre* was also going, so we got there together... Oh, *doña*! Just American people and hear me, do you know the little things they have at parties? They don't spend in parties like we do...

Olga: ...and the parties last for two hours and then you have to leave... Maybe it's that we haven't fully assimilated yet, but I think our parties are better...

(Gloria, 48 years old, three children, married, with legal status, Guanajuato; Olga, 50 years old, three children, married, with legal status, Oaxaca; personal communication, August 24, 2015).

On holidays, like Christmas, we spend time with those who are closest to us... Actually, instead of having fun with the family, here we do so with friends, who are like us, alone and without their families... But, it is not the same to share with the family than sharing with them... we make food, of course, but American food, not Mexican (Cecilia, 31 years old, three children, common law marriage, without legal status, Tamaulipas; personal communication, September 3, 2015).

## CONCLUSIONS

In the process of mobility, nostalgia appears in narratives in a simple and romantic way by comparing current feelings in relation to what was experienced during the process of transition from one home to another. Migration processes involve experiences of loss due to the separation from family and primary support networks, while strengthening new networks that allow the transitioning and settling down in the destination country. It also

operates a displacement that acquires meaning with the idea of sacrifice and instills the promise the promise that things will improve in the future. The narratives that deal with these processes are loaded with ambivalent feelings born from both distance and the desire to build new personal spaces, relationships of reciprocity, and fulfillment of the expectations and life project that caused mobility in the first place; they are ambivalent feelings that go back and forth from reflective to productive nostalgia.

Narratives showed how nostalgia clearly fluctuated in three ways: the longing for a certain taste and way (of food and life), for family relationships and traditions at home, and for perceptions about time. The presence of a romanticized discourse about the eras and places of childhood, the evocation of country and culture, of traditions and celebrations, makes it obvious that simple nostalgia is experienced more frequently. The desire to return to an idealized home was a constant in the discourse; although, the impossibility of achieving such return was also acknowledged, as were the multiple aspects that evidence acculturation and the advantages of the income and the raising of children in the United States.

As for reflective nostalgia, ambivalent feelings towards situations in both countries provide accounts of more elaborate and thoughtful narratives about the expectations migrants had when leaving Mexico and how they have transformed during their stay in the United States. Likewise, the contact with people of different nationalities in school or work environments, and the access to food from other countries both transform everyday cultural beliefs.

On the other hand, the American lifestyle also creates tensions and tends to modify the imaginaries and nostalgic experiences based on age, sex, immigration status and occupation. Undoubtedly, these markers structure in a differential way the relations with the past and with existing nostalgic possibilities, giving way to productive nostalgia, which implies duel for what is left behind in the country of origin, the gradual adaptation to the host country and the reformulation of the life project.

Therefore, being a valuable affective experience, nostalgia is an object of study that allows us to understand how mobile people participate in the dynamic and complex process of rebuilding home in a new location. Our interest in inquiring about nostalgia in everyday life is due to the fact that it is a place of memory with strong emotional load (Javeau cited in Lindón, 2000), as well as a source wherefrom specific meanings linked to situations experienced by people at different spatio-temporal scales can be evoked. Although the social and cultural structures of memory guide the process of nostalgia and allow us to glimpse patterns of nostalgia on certain issues, it is important to keep in mind that individual memory provides such structures with meaning in particular ways.

Nostalgia as a concept is thus a heterogeneous construct made up of diverse elements that interweave and configure different ways of longing. Therefore, the impossibility of

understanding it in a unique and totalizing manner must be recognized. What we rather have are multiple forms of nostalgia expressions that can be found in the migratory narrative, as well as certain cultural logics that support and reproduce it. Finally, it must be remembered that the movements of nostalgia are constantly reinterpreted. Just like political, economic and social conditions are extremely changing due to globalization, notions about culture and food will also gradually transform through individual and collective cultural interactions. This will in turn modify the emotions that people experience and the ways in which they act through symbolic exercises of power.

Among the topics open to future research, we consider it relevant to point out the way in which nostalgia acquires new textures, scales and tones from information technologies and the use of the Internet, which shorten distances and create new communication experiences and links. Another significant aspect important to further address in depth is the way in which nostalgic cultural elements tend to reinforce or transform the hegemonic patterns of gender in family dynamics, parenting, home care and the labor environment of migrants.

Translator: Fernando Llanas

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