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## **Palm Trees y Nopales: The Commodification and Hybridization of the South Texas Borderlands**

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**PALM TREES Y NOPALES: THE COMMODIFICATION AND  
HYBRIDIZATION OF THE SOUTH TEXAS BORDERLANDS**

A Dissertation Presented

by

A. M. FOILES SIFUENTES

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

September 2014

Department of Anthropology

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ABSTRACT

PALM TREES Y NOPALES: THE COMMODIFICATION AND HYBRIDIZATION  
OF THE SOUTH TEXAS BORDERLANDS

SEPTEMBER 2014

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This dissertation examines social inequalities rooted in capital. Through research conducted in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of South Texas, this project interrogates how social characters use capital to access goods and services. By investigating seasonal migration of US and Canadian retirees into the region, the work highlights the social construction of retirement, the use of state and local governances to establish white only enclaves, and the nation-state's role in creating marginalized populations in the Texas-Mexico borderlands. Ethnography is the primary research method with demographic and popular culture analysis as secondary modes of collecting data.

## FOREWARD

This dissertation is comprised of five chapters, including an introduction and conclusion. The three data-driven chapters are written as independent articles and have methodology and population sections. This creates some measure of redundancy in the document. I felt compelled to include these sections in each chapter in order to maintain the format of independent articles. The introduction chapter provides an overview that establishes the framework for the project, and the conclusion brings together the different aspects of the dissertation.

What follows is an outline summary of each chapter of the dissertation:

### Chapter 1: Introduction

A study of white working-class retirees migrating to the Lower Rio Grande Valley of South Texas serves as a point of analysis to examine the evolving nature of social and cultural capital. Through the investigation of Winter Texans, the study interrogated the use of race, ethnocentrism, and whiteness as spendable communities. Given the limited data on domestic migration and seasonal retirement for seniors, the project contributes to these growing bodies of literature and expands the inquiry by including a working-class population.

### Chapter 2: Compound Communities: Fortifying Socio-Economic and Racial Barriers in Border Towns

This chapter addresses the construction of white only enclaves in the Texas-Mexico borderlands. By focusing on three exclusive communities in a working-class retirement location, the research showed that Winter Texans used their most salient forms of capital to create, maintain, and police segregated communities in the Lower Rio

Grande Valley of South Texas. Additionally, Winter Texans believed the social and cultural capital that accompanied their race, ethnicity, and retiree status to be more valuable than any money that local Tejanos or Mexicanos possessed. The study highlighted through demographic data, participant-observation, and interviews that Winter Texans utilized the resources available to them to ensure that their neighborhoods remained white only.

### Chapter 3: “A Poor Man’s Miami”: Blue-Collar Tourism on the Turbulent Mexico Border

This chapter examines the role of performance and stigma in regard to seasonal retirement. By comparing two groups of Winter Texans, the study showed that each group of Winter Texans were using avoidance as their main strategy to deflect stigma about their person, or retirement locations. Through performance, Winter Texans disengaged from the threat of physical violence that surround them as well as social violence wielded by other Winter Texans. Winter Texans were experiencing internalized stigma about their inability to retire to idyllic US locations for seniors, and found alternate means to perform their “golden retirement”, be it owning property in different locations or celebrating the travel as opposed to the traveled to location.

### Chapter 4: Framing and Defining Difference: Living as Others in the US

This chapter investigates the role of the nation-state in creating and perpetuating the marginalized Other in the US. Given that the nation-state has imposed internal border-crossings in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, and other locations on the US-Mexico border, and not along the US-Canadian border, the nation-state is defining Tejanos, and broadly Latinos, as a foreign Other that requires greater monitoring and surveillance.



Since the nation-state has defined citizens of the Lower Rio Grande Valley as Other, Winter Texans find greater confidence in their racism and ill treatment of their US counterparts. Tejanos respond accordingly, and cultivate various defense strategies to ward off the Winter Texans' social violence.

#### Chapter 5: Conclusion

The study is a multifaceted, dynamic project that asked various questions. Due to the convergence of numerous conditions, the study was able to show that performance was the richest source of data on social and cultural capital, as well as seasonal domestic migration. Though performative, the social and cultural capital allowed Winter Texans to access goods and services denied local populations. The performance itself, in some instances, became a form of currency as Winter Texans actively avoided stigma, or people willing to discuss it, by ease and relaxation in the face of contradictory circumstances.

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CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

As I see it, we have the opportunity to make fundamental contributions to culture theory, by understanding how culture works in relation to structural constraints.

William Dressler, 2001.

La facultad is the capacity to see in the surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant “sensing”, a quick perception arrived at by part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feelings, that is behind which feelings reside/hide. The one possessing this sensitivity is excruciating alive to the world.

Gloria E. Anzaldua, 1987.

Prologue:

Driving west on highway 59, I am lost in thoughts of my past, present, and imaginary as I set course to my future. Houston, the place of my childhood, is the beginning of my journey and is filled with memories of joy and pain, not unlike most people’s homelands. But my journey, or pilgrimage, as it were, is not the usual track. My travels are taking me to my field site, the epicenter—a culmination of years of study, dedication, and sacrifice. Odd as it is, my travels are also taking me through the current homelands of many of my family members and back to my grandmother’s epicenter, the beginning of her journey—the border crossing that brought her into the United States, Brownsville, Texas.

As the miles pass by, I am captivated by the landscape of this not so foreign land. And I am reminded of things from the past, memories of my youth. “Andri, stay out of

the sun; your skin gets too dark,” my mother would say during the peak hours of sunlight. “Andri, be sure to carry an umbrella, you need to protect yourself from the sun”. Said in love and meant as a gift to protect me from harm, my mother actively sought to keep my skin light in order to shelter me from the ills she suffered as a first generation Mexicana in southern Texas. Hindsight has taught her, and me, that brownness is not worn on the skin; it’s burned into your soul—rooted in the flesh. And it’s a badge of honor to be worn as a symbol of survival, struggle, and endurance, especially in southern Texas. For those of us that derive from border-crossers, we are particularly aware of the hardships that can originate from our difference and are keen to encourage our youth to avoid the pitfalls that we suffered. These gifts from my mother, though hard at times, brought me to my present day, a Ph.D. candidate in cultural anthropology at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and the first person in my family to receive a college degree. And as I turn south on highway 77—driving from my past and speeding into my future—I am struck by the irony of going home to conduct my fieldwork, where my family’s story begins.

A blessing and curse. Conducting fieldwork among people that are your family can create a dissonance that has no name. I’ve read countless scholars of color that grapple with conducting research amongst their families, often themselves the target of academic inquiry. Like them, I struggle with how to situate my argument, locate my “Anthropological Other”, without focusing on me *y mi familia*. And I wonder if anthropology can exist without an Other? Do I serve myself and my family as an offering to the anthropological gods in order to get my degree? Will I have to do that in order to get a job? Is there a way to balance the offering between my family, my people,

and my education? That remains to be seen, but for now my journey moves beyond memory and abstractions, and into the material.

Brownsville, and South Texas as a whole, is a space of familial imaginary for those of us that live “north” of South Texas. Many of us have heard tales of pilgrimages or passages that brought our families into Texas, or stories about the U.S. border moving, crossing over our communities making us immigrants in our hometowns. Though my family traveled into the region, and northern Mexico, often during my youth, it has been several years since I had returned to the area. And as the miles drew shorter to my destination, I am overcome with joy as I watch the desert landscape change into rolling hills of green pastures, signaling my arrival in Harlingen, then Brownsville. Swimming in nostalgia from my youth and the unforeseen future, I am snapped into reality as I passed a fifty-foot tall golf ball water-tower that stands watch over a ten-foot tall barbed-wire fence that surrounds an exclusive community five miles north of Brownsville. And as I descend the remaining miles on highway 77 into Brownsville, I am struck by the staggeringly large number of palm trees that have been placed along the highway to “beautify” the space. Little did I know, the cultivated, non-indigenous, and strategically placed palm trees would represent a metaphor of things to come. And the cactus, indigenous growing wild and free, whose needles invaded my skin often during my youth, were seen as a nuisance that needed to be controlled.

Palm trees y Nopales is a conversation about spatial metaphors rooted in the lived experience. It is a discussion of the Other, though not in the traditional form. Historically, anthropologists would enter a space and study persons that did not reflect or resemble their families, communities, or ethnicities. Since I am intimately connected to

my field site, my work will take a notably different approach, although my goal remains the same: to interrogate, analyze, and explain commonalities and differences among divergent communities.

## 1.1 Introduction

This dissertation will intervene in anthropological theory to engage with questions of social inequalities rooted in capital. Questions of capital or currency are not unique, but the way we understand the connection between social and cultural capital requires further interrogation. Definitions of social and cultural capital will be expanded in this dissertation to include whiteness as an institutionalized status and process, and dominant “American Culture” as a spendable resource. Marxist literature has historically neglected racism, whiteness, and ethnocentrism as commodities, given the theoretical focus on economy. These phenomena must be interrogated as forms of capital given the shifting social and cultural landscape in this globalizing age and the mobility of migrating populations.

In order to adequately engage racism, whiteness, and ethnocentrism as currency, I observed white, working-class, U.S. retirees who possess limited economic capital. My intent was to discern how they use their social and cultural capital as spendable commodities in lieu of economic capital. In myriad forums, retirees utilize social and cultural capital to access commodities, highlighting racism, whiteness, and ethnocentrism as recognizable, valuable forms of currency. Furthermore, dominant, white U.S. culture – predicated on racial privileges – has become a commodity in and of its self, a currency granted to all Anglo Americans. Notwithstanding the bourgeois/proletariat hierarchy within Anglo-American social structures, the proletariat possess the white U.S. culture

commodity, rooted in ethnocentrism, and use it as a spendable currency in the global system of capital exchange. This dissertation demonstrates, through myriad expressions, how racism, whiteness, and ethnocentrism manifest itself as currencies on the social and physical landscapes.

## 1.2 Background of Problem

Destination retirement tourism has received moderate attention over the last several decades (Jarvis 2002; McElroy & Albuquerque 1992; McHugh 2000). A breadth of literature exists about myriad forms of conventional, mass destination tourism (Foglesong 2001; Frenkel & Walton 2000; Goss 1999; Pretes 1995; Ritzer & Liska 1997) with narrower niche studies that focuses on eco-tourism (Cater & Cloke 2007; Hammerschlag et al. 2012; Napier 2006; Robertson 1999), various forms of heritage tourism (Bunten 2008; Figal 2008; Gatewood & Cameron 2004; Kang 2009; Silverman 2002), and the like, as well as less celebrated forms of destination tourism (e.g., danger zone/war tourism, medical tourism, sex tourism, etc.) (Babb 2004; Brennan 2004; Holguin 2005; Hartnell 2009; Padilla 2007; Simpson 1999; Wendland 2012; Wonders & Michaloski 2001; Yokota 2006). Areas of inquiry often focus on the local impact, be it the economy (Donaldson 2009; Gullette 2007; Torres & Momsen 2005), population (Cabezas 2008; Montero 2011; Swords & Mize 2008), or environment (Garcia & Servera 2003; Healy 1994; Stevens 2003; Thiel et al. 2008), understanding that they are each interconnected. With noted exceptions (Bruner 2001; Desforges 2001), limited attention is paid to the travelers themselves or the rationale for their chosen destination (Stronza 2001). Traveling retirees relocating for extended periods of time draw even less academic attention given their often reserved, modest lifestyles, and removal from local



populations (McElroy & Albuquerque 1992). Moreover, research on seniors often focuses on physical and social decline, as opposed to increased participation in leisure activities like retirement (Schau, Gilly, & Wolfenbarger 2009).

Populations of sun-seeking, affluent retirees traveled to Florida and California during the 1960s to enjoy the warmer climate of seasonal retirement (Coast 1998). Similar retirees sought second homes or seasonal retirement on Caribbean Islands during the same era of economic growth (McElroy & Albuquerque 1992). Even though investors were building new housing and accommodations to entice potential clients as early as the 1950s (Coast 1998; McElroy & Albuquerque 1992; McHugh and Larson-Keagy 2005), the language of a “golden retirement” or the “golden years” emerges later in the literature, although it is acknowledged that the social construction of retirement is occurring (McHugh and Larson-Keagy 2005). There are several poignant discussions about the historical origination and evolution of “active adult communities” in the U.S. during the 1960’s, and beyond (Calhoun 1978; Freedman 1999; McHugh and Larson-Keagy 2005) that document the construction of retirement enclaves. Compelling research analyzing retirement can be found about certain dynamics of the retirement industry (Ekerdt & Clark 2001; Kemp, Rosenthal, Denton 2005), marketing strategies used for older consumers (Drolet, Williams, & Lau-Gesk 2007; Moschis 1993; Noble & Walker 1998), and buying trends of seniors citizens (Williams & Drolet 2005), with particular attention to articles that address “promises” of grandeur, enjoyment, or pleasure (Fabien 1997), regardless of the product being marketed.

The focus on marketing suggests an economic model of consumerism, moving away from the industrialization model that formally dominated our economic landscape.

It is widely acknowledged that seniors have moved out of the industrial economy, be it age-related or leisure driven, and were, historically, relegated to a life of decline and decay (Costa 1998). This is certainly no longer the dominant narrative for seniors (Schau, Gilly, & Wolfenbarger 2009), and the market economy has “discovered” a new class of consuming public, removed from the industrial economy. In an economic model of consumerism, the concept of “golden retirement” is a product for consumption, a lifestyle to be purchased. Zigmunt Bauman (2000; 2003) argues that we have entered an age of “liquid modernity”, an economic model predicated on people as consumers as opposed to producers of the former industrial era. Bauman highlights social and economic stratification, and the impact that capital has on one’s ability to participate in the consumer model (Abrahamson 2004; Bauman 2003). He argues that the consumer (Abrahamson 2004), and later tourist (Bauman 2003), is bound only by time, since the tourist is no longer confined by space or place given their increased mobility. Moreover, Bauman argues that, “ ‘today’s industry is geared increasingly to the production of attractions and temptations’ (Bauman 1998a: 75)” (Abrahamson 2004: 172). Because the economy is geared toward producing attractions, the affordability of mass tourism and entertainment has increased the rate of leisure retirement (Costa 1998a). Presently, income has less influence on retirement (Costa, 1998b; Schau, Gilly, & Wolfenbarger 2009), and may be related to, in part, retirees’ “ability to maintain their standard of living by migrating to low-cost areas, and from the affordability of mass tourism and mass entertainment, both of which enable the elderly to pursue ‘the good life’ ” (Costa 1998: 235). Additional research has shown that U.S. retirees are traveling more frequently and greater distances (Morse & Gray 1980), highlighting the construction of retirement

communities in Caribbean and Latin American destinations (Banks 2009), as well as within the continental U.S. (McHugh & Larson-Keagy 2005). Certainly, the recent downturn in the U.S. economy has impacted the retirement landscape to some degree; however, little information exists about those effects, and mass tourism and mass entertainment remain desirable commodities for the U.S. retiree.

### 1.3 Statement of Problem

Much of the retirement and tourism research focuses on the middle or affluent class of persons. Little data exists about retirees or working-class tourism or the industry geared toward these populations leaving a gap in the knowledge. It is widely understood that working-class whites cannot afford socio-spatial distance from the Other (Low 2009), and that “vulgar racism” is commonly attributed to this population “perhaps [as] the primary means of distancing and differentiation employed by them in the absence of class privileges” (Dwyer & Jones 2000: 215-216). Given the gap in knowledge about working-class tourism and the common knowledge of white working-class racism, it is essential to examine how white working-class racism manifests itself and functions while participating in domestic tourism (and elsewhere), particularly among destination retirement tourism – a relatively recent phenomenon. Moreover, there is a need to interrogate the capital associated with racism and whiteness, as well as other social and cultural capitals afforded white Americans.

### 1.4 Purpose of the Study

Ethnography is the primary source of cultural information and data collection. Brownsville, Texas, and South Padre Island, Texas, were chosen as the sites for this

project due to their location and primary populations: Winter Texans<sup>1</sup>, Tejanos, and Mexicanos. Brownsville, Texas, is the first site for this research project. It is one of the southernmost cities in the continental United States, and the sister city of Matamoros, Tamaulipas, Mexico, both located on the actual international border. The second location, South Padre Island, is a small neighboring island in the Gulf of Mexico situated on the edge of Texas and Mexico. They are both part of the Rio Grande Valley, colloquially referenced as “the Valley,” the southern most region of Texas that stretches from the eastern South Padre Island to the western town of McAllen, Texas. The Valley is approximately 50 miles wide encompassing four Texas counties along the U.S.-Mexico border, beginning at the international border in the city of Brownsville, and moving inland away from the border to towns approximately 50 miles north (Richardson, 1999). For some time, Brownsville and South Padre Island have cultivated a tourist industry geared specifically toward working-class retirees, particularly during the winter months. The region’s economic conditions allow for moderate-income, working-class people to retire to a mild winter climate destination and enjoy their “golden years.”

### 1.5 Significance of the Study

The definitions of status and capital are changing and evolving in this era of global contact. It is important to interrogate how migrant populations use race, ethnocentrism, and whiteness as a source of redeemable capital to access various goods and services. It is understood that the mobility of migrant populations has created a caste

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<sup>1</sup> Seasonal retirees that frequent destination locations like Florida or Arizona are often referred to as “snow birds”. Winter Texan is the chosen name for traveling seniors relocating to Texas during the winter months. Folks throughout the state, starting in North Texas where retirees often rent hotel rooms along their long drive to South Texas, call them Winter Texans.

system in third world receiving lands that are inundated with Western travelers, and a tourist industry predicated on the exoticism of the Other (Pi-Sunyer 2002). Examining the social construction of retirement and U.S. based white, working-class destination retirement tourism will demonstrate the purchasing power of race, ethnocentrism, and whiteness within the U.S. context, thus, highlighting the degree to which each of these phenomena operate as a form of capital among different races and ethnicities within the U.S., and potentially beyond. This work will benefit those interested in studying social inequalities predicated on race and racism, as well as those examining social constructionism, retirement, tourism, and the processes of race formation.

#### 1.6 Primary Research Questions

Four central questions guided the research for this project:

1. How are the definitions of social and cultural capital expanded from a traditional understanding into a more nuanced approach that recognizes the current moment of people's mobility and globalization? Additionally, how does knowledge of a "valued" culture (e.g., U.S. white culture) become a form of currency?
2. How do Winter Texans negotiate their relationship with the increasing border violence in the region border?
3. Although a majority of Winter Texas are from lower middle-class/working class backgrounds, there are variations in the amounts of spendable monies that they possess. How do Winter Texans negotiate their class background when confronted with other Winter Texans from more affluent socioeconomic

backgrounds? And how do they navigate the poverty and violence that surrounds their “golden retirement” location?

4. Given the effect of Western tourism on international communities of color, how do local Tejanos and Mexicanos – who are American citizens – negotiate the increased racial tension with the influx of Winter Texans?

### 1.7 Research Design

I utilize a number of anthropological methods to gather data including ethnography, participant observation, interviews, popular culture literature and commentary, and spatial analysis. I lived among retirees at Valley International Country Club (VICC) in Brownsville for 7 months and in South Padre Island for 4 weeks among different Winter Texan retirement communities. I immersed myself among my participants in order to build rapport and establish relationships with individuals who would later become informants. I built relationships with neighbors, retirees that frequented the country club at VICC, regular patrons of one restaurant on SPI, and those that played golf weekly. I tried unsuccessfully to recruit retirees that walked the coastline every morning. I then conducted informal interviews with approximately 35 retirees – both men and women – ranging in age from 65-75 years, and documented the conversations with handwritten notes. Due to some informants’ distrust of technology, I chose not to tape record conversations out of respect for my participants. Some discussions were held in social settings with up to 10 participants, while other interviews were conducted one-on-one. My aim during these informal interviews was to learn about how they perceived themselves as seasonal retirees from “other places” in relation to the area and local people. In addition to these one-on-one interviews, I spent time talking to

groups of retirees in order to learn more about how they viewed their retirement in Brownsville and South Padre Island, and to see how they related to each other. I also participated in countless informal conversations with local Tejano and Mexicano people that were employed in the service industries frequented by Winter Texans. Three participants from local communities became trusted informants.

Three primary populations live in the Brownsville/South Padre Island area: Winter Texans, Tejanos, and Mexicanos. Winter Texans (WTs), as they are colloquially referred to by all parties in the region, originate from various locations within North America, primarily the Midwestern United States and southern Canada. This demographic comes in search of a tourist destination that allows their modest incomes, generally not exceeding \$80,000 dollars annually for two wage earners, to serve as a vehicle for their retirement. WTs return to their primary homes after the winter has passed. As for the more local populations, Tejanos have lived in the area for many generations and are mostly a mixture of Mexicano<sup>2</sup> and native peoples indigenous to the region. They are bilingual, speaking Spanish and English fluently. Mexicanos are best described as a population of border-crossers seeking services and/or employment, that typically return to Mexico once their tasks are completed or their visas expire. There is also a population of Mexicanos who cross the border legally, but remain in the United States and are now undocumented people. Though Tejanos and Mexicanos are not the focus of this project, both groups are an integral part of the conversation.

### 1.8 Theoretical Framework

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<sup>2</sup> I am using the term Mexican in Spanish, *Mexicano*, for political, personal, and historical reasons. For further explanation, see Jose Limon's (1994), *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican-American South Texas*.

In order to synthesis my findings, I utilize a multi-faceted theoretical approach that melds multiple theoreticians' works into a framework that provides a richer foundation for analysis. My intent is to create a theoretical framework that allows for agency and social/cultural mobility within a structure, or as William Dressler (2001) states, to demonstrate where "cultural construction collides with structural constraint" (p. 461). According to Dressler (2001), because of Anthropology's commitment to human rights and ethics, the discipline must interrogate its theoretical framework and begin to contemplate the "third moment" in social theory. He argues that the inherent nature of our research requires our keen attention on the "intersection of cultural construction and structural constraint" (Dressler, 2001: 462). Due to the nature of a project that focuses on marginalized populations across racial, cultural, national, and socio-economic spectrums, it is essential to recognize agency, and I deploy a theoretical framework that speaks to agency in the face of structural limitations.

Anthony Giddens serves as the overarching theoretical model that centralizes, what is best described as, a structure in motion. Through his concept of "duality of structure," Giddens (1984) argues that structures operate as both internal and external entities within people, or agents. An internalized component of the structure exists within each agent known as "memory traces," inherited behavioral patterns and actions. When agents perform the inherited behavioral patterns, they are creating the external structure. Therefore, actors create the structure of social life as they perform human activities and reproduce social patterns. Because individuals possess agency, which, for Giddens, means a pattern of people's actions, they are creating a structure while they are simultaneously constrained by it. Since social relations between agents are constantly



changing and the structure is dependent upon human actions, the structure evolves over time and space. This concept is useful when examining how Winter Texans use race and ethnocentrism as vehicles for establishing access given the profound shift in social relations based on demographic changes.

Louis Althusser's (1971) *ideological state apparatus* is particularly useful in that it outlines a person's relationship to a structured, social belief system. Althusser argues that society is comprised of three primary practices: economy, political-labor, and ideology. Each practice is an essential component to create a whole structure, and is dependent upon each other to varying degrees. For Althusser, ideological state apparatus (ISA) is the concept that encompasses human desire, values, etc., and originates from various social institutions like family, media, and religion. Since society operates within a structured system, all people are born into an ISA, which has many expressions and is not a singular, fixed entity. Within an ISA, social behaviors and practices inundate agents with ideologies making them subjects of the structure. Subjects learn agency as they acquire social practices that shape various aspects of their personhood, and they learn their identities when they see them mirrored in ideology. Ideology is something that subjects cannot understand themselves without. According to Althusser, ideology does not exist in abstraction; rather it has behavioral manifestations and tangible, material expressions. ISA is a useful concept when interrogating Winter Texans' understanding of racial and cultural value given the historical relationship of race and racism in the U.S.

Peirre Bourdieu's (1984) *habitus*, a consciousness based on an individual's social conditions, becomes a pivotal point of analysis since it describes observable behaviors often associated with one's childhood economic background. For Bourdieu, actors are

reproducing hierarchal social structures as they perform social actions. He argues that, outside of the monetary system, a currency structure is in place that assigns value to social behaviors and patterns that are readable, and observable. And through these social structures, one is able to obtain social mobility. Even though individuals ascend the economic scale, Bourdieu argues that they often lack the social and cultural practices associated with their newly found wealth, or capital.

According to Bourdieu, there are four types of capital: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic. Each capital has a unique expression and is rooted in different dynamics of the human experience. Economic is, of course, finances and monetary, and symbolic is something bestowed upon or assigned to an individual. A good example would be the title “Winter Texan.” Retirees acquire this title, because they relocate to Texas during the winter months. As seasonal retirees, Winter Texans obtain symbolic capital based on the practices of destination retirement. By gaining symbolic capital, Winter Texans are able to access social, cultural, and economic capital<sup>3</sup>. However, when the retirees return to their homes, the significance of the Winter Texan title fades along with its symbolic capital, demonstrating that the value of symbolic capital can be situational, variable, and passing. For Bourdieu, cultural capital is a much more fixed entity that derives from education and socialization, and is best understood as “social graces”. Speech patterns, style of dress, social etiquette, and behaviors acquired during one’s childhood serve as a source of capital, and influence social mobility during the course of one’s life. Cultural capital can be attained over time. However, even if cultural capital is gained over the course of one’s life, it will never be an integral part of their habitus since their way of

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<sup>3</sup> Entrepreneurial Winter Texans have opened businesses that catered explicitly to other Winter Texans.

thinking has already been formed. For those that obtain cultural capital later in life, Bourdieu suggests that there are instances of “ill-adapted behaviors”, which he calls the “Don Quixote Effect” (Bourdieu 1984: 109) demonstrating the continuity of their habitus to an earlier state of being. If we understand that cultural capital is behaviors learned through socialization and education, then a racial analysis would complicate the significance of speech patterns, etiquette, etc., given the foundational component of race and racism in U.S. culture, both presently and historically. Although Bourdieu does not address race and racism in his discussion of cultural capital, there is a clear delineation of value attributed to white bodies, and social/cultural characteristics designated as white U.S. culture. Since Bourdieu is most concerned with the social structures that reproduce hierarchies, then it would be useful to examine race and racism as they might serve as forms of cultural capital. Given that Winter Texans are moving into a region that is predominately Spanish speaking and Latino, if they view their race and dominant American culture as an asset that can be used as leverage, then I will observe behaviors that would indicate a shift in their perceived cultural capital, and subsequently, status. Moreover, social capital for Bourdieu, asserts that there is value in group affiliations and social networks. For Winter Texans, group affiliation is an essential component of their social interactions, and serves to heighten the significance of their symbolic capital.

As a whole, Winter Texans often avoid populations that challenge their cultural, social, and symbolic capital. Given the historically limited economic capital of most Winter Texans, their habitus is attuned to an economic condition that no longer fits their current lifestyle as seasonal retirees. Affluent white property owners, or vacationers themselves, often mock Winter Texans for their frugal spending habits, “They arrive with

\$20 and a pair of underwear. And they leave with \$20". The practice of destination retirement in a mild, sunny climate allows Winter Texans to reinvent themselves, and celebrate a "golden retirement" while acquiring capital in the process. Through the attainment of new capitals, Winter Texans are ascending the hierarchal social structures. According to Erving Goffman (1957), "the richest source of data on the presentation of idealized performances is the literature on social mobility." (p. 36). Since the economic conditions of Winter Texans do not change, they are performing their idealized interpretation of social economies through patterned behaviors. When confronted with affluent white property owners, or vacationers, Winter Texans' authority to leverage cultural, social, and symbolic capital is disrupted, and delegitimized. Therefore, Winter Texans limit their interactions with the well-to-do and perform their access to entitlements based on cultural, social, and symbolic capital with the local Tejano and Mexicano populations. If we understand that definitions of social behaviors come from structures (e.g., memory traces, ideology, habitus) and that social relations change based on actors (Giddens 1984; Goffman 1957), then the patterned behaviors directed toward local Tejanos and Mexicanos can be interpreted as significant, and valuable. By examining the interactions between local Tejanos/Mexicanos and Winter Texans, I am better situated to interrogate the significance of race and racism as potential cultural and social capital given the Winter Texans idealized performance of the social mobility.

### 1.9 Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope (Delimitations)

#### Assumptions:

It is assumed that all participants traveled to the region on their own accord, and that they actively chose to be there without coercion. It is assumed that participants truthfully and

accurately answered individual interview questions based on their personal experiences, and that participants spoke honestly during group dialogues. It is assumed that participants will have social personas and private personas that may, at times, be in conflict with one another. It is assumed that discernable patterns will emerge within participant behaviors, and that those behaviors will become readable actions that fit within broader conversations of social analysis.

Limitations:

Misperception and researcher biases are potential limitations in an ethnographic project. The researcher's sexual orientation and racial/ethnic affiliation may have influenced people's willingness to participate in the project. Site selection and the random selection of participants influenced data collection. Research dates and length of stay may have also impacted data.

Scope:

I made two trips to my field site over 3 years, and spent 9 months collecting data. The research was conducted at two field sites in the Rio Grande Valley, Brownsville, Texas, and South Padre Island, Texas, among different Winter Texan retirement communities. I spent 7 ½ months at my field site in Brownsville, and 4 weeks with participants in South Padre Island. Approximately 35 retirees – both men and women ranging in age from 65-75 years – participated in informal interviews. Some discussions were had in social settings with up to 10 participants while other interviews were conducted one-on-one. Countless Tejanos and Mexicanos participated in general conversations, with 3 becoming my closest informants.

Delimitations:

The field sites were deliberately selected based on Winter Texan populations that resided at each site. The date marking the beginning of the research precedes the arrival of Winter Texans at both sites, and was conducted post Winter Texan departure at the Brownsville location. Due to some informants' distrust of technology, I chose not to tape record conversations out of respect for my participants, and documented the conversations with handwritten notes.

## CHAPTER 2

### COMPOUND COMMUNITIES: FORTIFYING SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND RACIAL BARRIERS IN BORDER TOWNS

This chapter examines the interaction of space, place, and people in a seasonal, destination retirement tourist region. Through an analysis of settlement patterns and “fortress communities” in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of South Texas, the project engages the political economy of space, and the negotiation of spatial dynamics that are used to express value and worth in relation to varied peoples. It seeks to interrogate the use of social and cultural capital, specifically racial and cultural affiliation, as a means of obtaining, maintaining, and securing spaces of exclusivity in the United States by generally working-class white seasonal retirees. It will demonstrate how white retirees use the mechanism of fortress communities to ensure a predominantly white space in a largely Latino region. Moreover, it will highlight that working-class white retirees view their social and cultural capital as more valuable than the economic capital of local affluent communities of color. This research will serve as a tool to better understand the purchasing power of racism and ethnocentrism, and the impact that it has on the landscape.

The concept of exclusivity, or exclusive, has myriad meanings that vary by region, population, and intent. Regardless, the essence of exclusivity is the maintenance of guidelines and parameters that are deemed valuable by a set of people (Crowther 2003; Katz 2008; Stolcke 1995). In the U.S., as well as other countries, the definition of

exclusivity and value are often associated with racial classification, ethnic affiliation, language patterns, economic status, and the like (Hastings, Zahran, & Cable 2006; Lamont & Molnar 2002; Page & Thomas 1994; Yen-Ling 2011), and intimately linked to power and access (Calavita 2007; Novkov 2008; Ream & Palardy 2008; Tienda 2002). On the physical landscape, communities of exclusivity – or fortress communities – have emerged based on social and economic conditions (e.g., race, ethnicity, class) (Calderia 2000; Logan & Molotch 1987; Low 2001; Marcuse 1997) and serve as havens for largely white, upper/middle-class occupants in the U.S. (Blakely & Snyder 1997; Byers 2003; Low 2009; Maher 2003). Populations living in gated communities are diversifying (Le Giox 2005), although not integrating (Vesselinov 2008). The most common example of diversifying gated communities is existing neighborhoods of color and/or working class neighborhoods constructing gates as an attempt to maintain property values (Le Giox 2005; McKenzie 2005) and acquire the social status associated with newly constructed gated communities (Sanchez, Lang, & Dhavale 2005). This stands in stark contrast to the desire of white populations to separate themselves from the diversifying U.S. demographics, which was foundational in the creation of gated communities (Blakely & Snyder 1997; Low 2003).

In order to ensure the exclusivity of gated communities, the perimeters of the neighborhood are fiercely protected. Fortress/gated communities are characterized by their protection mechanisms (Blakely & Snyder 1997; Klauser 2010), which help ensure a white, homogeneous community increasing the desirability of the space (Le Giox 2005; Low 2009; Maher 2003; Vesselinov 2008). Hired security guards, fencing, and/or legal regulations that define acceptable resident behaviors and use of property are but a few



measures implemented by exclusive communities as a means of maintaining the space's integrity (i.e. no outsiders or undesirables) (Berner 2001; Grant & Rosen 2009; Klauser 2010; Roitman 2013; Webster 2002). It is argued that whiteness masks the racism and elitism underpinning the desire for gated/exclusive community, rendering the impetus for self-segregation nearly invisible (Hubbard 2005; Low 2009; Pulido 2000). In the Lower Rio Grande Valley (the valley), however, the visibility of racism on the landscape is both blatant and unapologetic.

The findings are drawn from ethnographic research conducted among working-class, white retirees living at Valley International County Club, a golf-course destination retirement community located in Brownsville, Texas. Additional research was conducted at similar destination retirement locations throughout the region. Working-class white retirees, known as Winter Texans, have limited financial resources, and the notable U.S. retirement havens like Miami or Phoenix exceed their purchasing power. They have, subsequently, sought refuge in the mild winter climate of South Texas, and the modest economic conditions of the region without which they could not afford such a luxury. Dywer & Jones (2000) argue that the vulgar racism of white working-class people is due, in large part, to their inability to create physical space from the Other. The residents of VICC use the resources available to them, namely racism and retiree status, as a means of creating space and maintaining an exclusive community in a predominantly Latino region.

## 2.1 Populations

Three primary populations live in Brownsville, Texas, and surrounding communities. 1) Tejanos, the local population, are indigenous to the region and often

mestizos, mixed Native American and Mexican ethnicities, whose families have resided in the region for centuries. Tejanos living in the valley, as it's colloquially referenced, are bilingual (Spanish/English), with Spanish being their first language. 2) Mexicanos, the second largest population, are peoples that have migrated, or immigrated, from the Mexican side of the border. Given Brownsville's proximity to Matamoros and the migration/immigration laws that historically governed the region, it is not uncommon for Mexicanos from Matamoros, to have family living in the valley, and/or possess dual citizenship – Mexico and U.S. Mexicanos without familial ties to the region travel to Brownsville for myriad reasons (e.g., shopping, vacationing, work) and remain in the valley, or beyond, for hours, days, or years depending upon the intent of their trip. Some Mexicanos have legal documentation to be in the U.S. and others do not. 3) Winter Texans (WTs), as they are colloquially referred to, are seasonal, migrating, retirees from the Midwestern United States and southern Canada that reside throughout the region during the winter months. The WT population is predominantly white<sup>4</sup>, and a significant percentage of the population derives from a working/lower-middle class economic background, with participants earning, at the peak of their lifetime annual wages, less than \$80,000 annually in a dual-income household<sup>5</sup>.

## 2.2 Methods

My aim for conducting this research was to answer two primary questions: 1) how does privilege influence the socio-spatial landscape; and 2) how does one maintain the

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<sup>4</sup> I observed one black man participating in the daily activities of the WTs during my research. There were likely more people of color in the WT population, although I did not encounter them.

<sup>5</sup> There is variability to the \$80,000 annual income, with some making more money and others making significantly less. This number is an approximate mean. Similarly, not all WTs lived in a dual-income home.

parameters of spatial landscapes that are predicated on privilege. I chose to conduct the research in Brownsville, Texas, because of the region's economic condition and local populations. The valley experiences a large influx of WTs during the winter months due to seasonal, U.S. domestic migration. These vacationers, for the most part, originate from the Midwestern, U.S., with a small percentage from southern Canada, and have varying degrees of economic capital and affiliation with the region. The convergence of WTs into a predominantly Latino region creates a unique landscape in that 1) the WT population is the ethnic, cultural, and racial minority; 2) they are temporary residents and have little to no relationship to the region beyond vacationing; 3) the landscape has been constructed to entice and accommodate WTs housing needs; and 4) it allows for a pronounced, visible expression of social and cultural capital as a point of an examination given the stark contrast of the internal U.S. populations.

Over two winter seasons, I lived in Brownsville at Valley International Country Club (VICC) for 7 months and in South Padre Island (SPI) for 4 weeks among different Winter Texan retirement communities. I lived with two different WT communities in order to compare my findings from each community (Montero 2011). My initial research at VICC created questions that required further interrogation, and I believed that a comparison between two WTs communities would better serve to explain events at VICC (Rosaldo 1993). This, ultimately, proved successful in that the two WT populations had extremely different social patterns, even though they shared a comparable – although notably different economic background<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Wintering on SPI costs approximately 25% percent more than at VICC. This is a significant price differentiation under any circumstance; however, when considering the cost differential it should be noted that Motel 6 on SPI costs \$29.99 a night, and Motel 6

I utilize a number of anthropological methods to gather data including ethnography, participant observation, interviews, and spatial analysis. I immersed myself among my participants in order to build rapport, and establish relationships with individuals who would later become informants (Geertz 1988; Jackson 2010; Svenden 2006). I then conducted informal interviews with approximately 35 retirees – both men and women – ranging in age from 65-75 years, and documented the conversations with handwritten notes (Benard 2011). Due to some informants' distrust of technology, I chose not to tape record conversations out of respect for my participants. Some discussions were had in social settings with up to 10 participants, while other interviews were conducted one-on one (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). My aim during these informal interviews was to learn about how they perceived themselves as seasonal retirees from “other places” in relation to the area and local people. In addition to these one-on-one interviews, I spent time talking to groups of retirees in order to learn more about how they viewed their retirement at VICC and South Padre Island, and to see how they related to each other (Handwerker 2002; Susser 2010). I also participated in countless informal conversations with local Tejanos and Mexicanos who were employed in the service industries establishments frequented by Winter Texans (DeVault 1995; Tsing 2005). Three participants from the local communities became trusted informants. Informant data coupled with visual analysis was used to interpret the symbolic meanings of the built environment (Lamont et al. 1996). Lastly, residential property values and population

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in Brownsville costs \$23.99. Long term, temporary housing is similarly priced with Value America costing \$179.99 a week on SPI, and \$139.99 a week in Brownsville. The prices do change based on the season, as does the tax rate for each area. The tax rate also varies, but the vacationers are considered residents after thirty consecutive days and do not pay taxes on their housing.

percentages were gathered from city and county tax roles (Rayer & Brown 2001), census data (Lee *at el* 2008), property management companies, real estate brokers, and observation (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). My goal was to create a multitier examination of my primary questions by gathering data from numerous sources.

### 2.3 Literature Review

Located in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Brownsville, Texas, U.S., sister city of Matamoros, Tamaulipas, Mexico, serves as a hub for peoples and goods that transverse the international border, and broader region of South Texas as a whole. Often understood in social science literature as a borderland, Brownsville, and other international border cities, have been cultivated in the geographic imaginary (Pi-Sunyer 2002) as a dynamic space that melds multiple worlds. This is certainly true. However, the spaces of Brownsville are fixed entities that tell a very different story when measured against the melded worlds of the geographic imaginary. On the physical landscape, measures of human worth and social value are transcribed and embedded in settlement patterns fixed upon the land that often mirror social hierarchies within the humanscape (Marcuse 1997).

Spatial segregation is not unique to Brownsville, nor is it uncommon in the U.S. It is an intimate part of the U.S. history dating back to, and pre-dating, fortresses built by 18<sup>th</sup> century European colonizers (Halbirt 2004), and up to the present day suburbs (Hayden 2003). The historical relationship between spatial segregation and social value has cultivated ethnic, racial, and economic enclaves that constantly frame and reframe the physical landscape (Iceland & Wilkes 2006; Massey & Denton 1993; Ovadia 2003; Sibley 1996).

In recent years, the phenomena of gated communities, or fortress communities, has emerged in the built environment in countless cities around the world (Lara 2011; Lo & Wang 2013; Morange et al. 2012; Roitman 2013; Webster, Glasze, & Franz 2002), creating a profit-rich industry based on deep-seeded fears of violence and the stigmatized Other (Durlington 2009; Flusty 1997; Low 2003; Vesselinov 2008). The mechanisms used to secure a gated community vary depending upon economic and social conditions, as well as location (Grant & Rosen 2009). However, it is widely acknowledged that gated communities are “segregated and defended landscape[s]” (Low 2009) that are predicated on exclusion (Caldeira 2000; Falzon 2004; Flusty 1997; Sibley 2006) and create boundaries that simultaneously contain and exclude populations (Berner 2011; Caldeira 2000; Durlington 2009; Lara 2011; Lo & Wang 2013; Morange et al. 2012; Yen-Ling 2011). Regardless of location, it is argued that, “[g]ated communities, or ‘fortified enclaves,’ are privatized, enclosed, and monitored spaces for residence, consumption, leisure, and work” (Falzon 2004: 146). The purpose of a gated community is to maintain populations through restriction and is an expression of fear cultivated through myriad mechanisms (e.g political and economic changes, media, etc.) resulting in protected spaces (Klauser 2010).

Scholars have identified four thematic archetypes that frame the broader analysis of gated communities: residence, consumption, leisure, and work (Falzon 2004). Each archetype has subsections that serve myriad functions, and vary depending upon region and circumstance. All four archetypes of fortified/gated communities share primary characteristics that centralize separation, and often cite security as the impetus for maintaining people, property, and space (Klauser 2010). Surveillance is the corner-stone

of security, and can take many forms including, but not limited to: hired security personnel, live-camera feeds that stream video footage to monitored screens, a built environment that directs entry and departure through specified locations, distance from surrounding communities via measureable-space or visible markers, architectural design of community, etc. (Berner 2001; Grant & Rosen 2009; MacLeod & Ward 2002; Roitman 2013; Webster 2002). Each thematic archetype has a more commonly used security practice, and is associated with the purpose of the gated community (Klauser 2010). For example, leisure fortress communities often center their focus on environmental, cultural, or activity attractions, and remove themselves from local populations (Torres & Momsen 2005). Some forms of leisure and relaxation are accompanied by profound wealth (Klauser, 2010), while other destination locations distance themselves from local populations through the built environment (Freitag 1996). Residential communities offer varied mechanisms (Caldeira 2000; Grant & Rosen 2003; Maher 2003; Vesselinov 2008; Wilson-Doenges 2000), where as consumer destinations offer comparable methods when predicated on material consumption like malls, shopping venues, or sports arenas (Klauser 2010).

Leisure communities, an archetype of the broader gated communities, are constructed to be bastions of consumption, associated with decadence and relaxation. Each leisure community caters to the desire of travelers, and offer myriad possibilities for pleasure-seeking vacationers. Ranging from spa resorts that boast facilities focused on specialized skincare to guided tours through dense tropical environments, leisure communities accommodate various cravings and interests, and have multiple expressions of structure, style, and security (Berner 2001; Freitag 1996; MacLeod 1999; Stronza

2001). One's ability to access these pleasurable isles of consumption is predicated solely on the financial means of the would-be vacationer. Corporatized tourist locations require significantly less financial capital to visit than their boutique counterparts (Coast 1998). Mass produced tourist locations enable a wider population of vacations in that corporations make a sizable capital investment not only in the structure and security of the leisure community, but also in the marketing and enticing of would-be vacationers (Cornelissen 2005). Literature discussing corporatized leisure communities accessible to larger populations of people often refer to these locations as destination resorts (Torres & Momsen 2005).

Destination resort communities are a subsection of leisure gated communities, and entail a significant alteration of the local built environment. Substantial construction is required to erect a destination resort, particularly in developing nations<sup>7</sup> (MacLeod 1999). Constructed to be all encompassing, would-be vacationers can fulfill their every desire without having to leave the confines of the compound-like structure that often accompanies the resort (Torres & Momsen 2005). Luxury meals, rooms, and spa-type services are offered at myriad times, and employees work around the clock at sometimes sprawling structures to ensure the guests' comfort and happiness (MacLeod 1999). Destination resorts centralize the natural landscape, or casinos, as part of the location's allure, and are situated near beautiful environmental landmarks<sup>8</sup> (Boissevain 1996).

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<sup>7</sup> I am using developing nation and third world country interchangeably.

<sup>8</sup> Destination resorts differ from theme parks in so far as theme parks, like Disneyland, Dollywood, etc., centralize active consumerism over the passive consumerism of leisure and decadence.



Vacationers utilize the landscape surrounding the resort, in addition to the amenities, as a factor in their decision process<sup>9</sup>.

Tourism is the underlying motivation for leisure-gated communities, and the impetus for the construction of destination resorts. Tourism is a ubiquitous term, and many scholars have spent a great deal of time and effort debating its significance and meaning (Dumont 1984; Stronza 2001). In this chapter, tourism is best understood as a person leaving one's home, community, and everyday spaces, and relocating for a period of time to a different social and/or cultural environment. Individuals participating in tourism contribute to the local market economy through the consumption of products or services (Cornelissen 2005). This interpretation of tourism allows for infinite possibilities, while concentrating the definition on consumerism outside of routinely frequented spaces.

Destination resorts, and broadly leisure-gated communities, are constructed, cultivated landscapes of consumerism not often visited by patrons in their daily lives. They are marketed as picturesque sanctuaries of passive consumption<sup>10</sup>, and tourists select the respective resort based on environmental beauties in addition to the amenities (Boissevain 1996). For resorts located in third world countries, the landscape and cultural elegance of local people both become commodities marketed and sold by retailers and promotional firms (Cornelissen 2005). The exotic location, and people, become part of the lure that entices tourists to the resort (Comaroff & Comaroff 2009). And tourists can choose to venture into the local community to consume their culture, or

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<sup>9</sup> Very simply, some people may prefer the desert to the ocean, or mountains to tropical environments.

<sup>10</sup> Passive consumption is defined as a low, or no, energy activity that allows persons to ingest products or amenities (e.g., laying on the beach).

remain in the resort compound and enjoy the natural beauty of the landscape and the resort's amenities.

Due to the all-encompassing nature of destination resorts, tourists patronizing these resorts offer minimal financial contribution to the local economies (Torres & Momsen 2005;). Employment opportunities are available at the resort; however, many job prospects are low-wage, underpaid labor positions that have limited potential for growth or advancement (Weaver 1993). Local merchants and businesses begin to cater to the massive economic pull of the resort, and redirect their financial endeavors toward the resort economy (Kincaid 1988). Since local businesses are unable to sustain the never-ending demands for products from the resort, external companies ship the necessary goods into the resort and bypass local merchants (Babb 2004). Local economies are systematically disrupted by the influx of external products, and residents become locked in a cycle of service industry employment or laboring for the resort economy (MacLeod 1999; Weaver 1993). Like historical forms of colonization, the destination resort creates a singular form of production that ensnares surrounding economies, unilaterally making tourism the predominant form of production (Weaver 1993).

Resort communities in Brownsville, and surrounding areas in the valley, mirrors what one might find in resorts built for Western Travelers in third world counties. Because of the predominantly poor, local Tejano/Mexicano/Latino population, the demographic milieu mimics the touristic model of people of color as employees and white populations as tourists. Like many tourist destinations populated by the Other, the physical and cultural landscape of Brownsville has been actively cultivated to lure would-be tourists into the region (Berner 2001; Cornelissen 2005). Tourists racialized the local

population, and the local culture and region's natural physical beauty – white sand beaches, crystal blue water, and mild winter climate – are both commodities for consumption (Torres & Momsen 2005). The tourism industry is one of the two dominant economies in Brownsville, and many of the local residents find work in service industry jobs. Unlike third world destination resorts, however, Brownsville targets working-class, domestic retirees that are seeking warmer winter climates.

The retirement tourist industry became a thriving market during the early 1950's. Sun-seeking seniors had already begun migrating to the warmer winter climates when entrepreneurs sought to capitalize on the trend. Locations like Miami, Phoenix, San Diego, became sites of construction as housing prospectors built active adult communities, and sold the concept of a "golden retirement" (McHugh & Larson-Keagy 2005). These cities developed into notable winter retreats for retirees, and quickly became too expensive for large populations of would-be snowbirds, a colloquial term used to identify seasonal retirees that migrate to warm winter climates. Secondary sites emerged as affordable alternatives, and Brownsville, like other cities, cultivated a tourist industry to attract snowbirds, specifically working-class, as part of a growing niche market (Cornelissen 2005). Resort communities in Brownsville, were built to attract retirees, and be visible locations of leisure and relaxation (McHugh & Larson-Keagy 2005). Surrounding communities benefitted from the tourist economy by creating myriad types of resort developments, (e.g., Recreation Motor Vehicle parks, extended stay hotels, etc.) markets, pharmacies, and the like, that cater to the various desires and purchasing powers of the migrating retirees.

Limited data exists about U.S. retiree winter migrations, or the locations that they

frequent (Walters 2002). Much of the retirement studies and tourism research, in general, focus on the middle or affluent class of persons (Stronza 2001). Little data exists about retirees or working-class tourism, and the industry catering to these populations (Stronza 2001;). It is widely understood that working-class whites cannot afford socio-spatial distance from the Other (Low 2009), and that “vulgar racism” is commonly attributed to this population, used as “perhaps the primary means of distancing and differentiation employed by them in the absence of class privileges” (Dwyer & Jones 2000: 215-216). Given the limited data addressing working-class tourism and the common knowledge of white working-class racism, it is essential to examine how white working-class racism manifests itself on the landscape, and functions while participating in domestic tourism.

#### 2.4 Findings

The destination resorts in the Lower Rio Grande Valley range from separate islands and port cities to golf-course communities and recreation vehicle parks. The respective resorts delineate in value based on their distance from the border and local residents, in addition to their amenities. The most exclusive and desirable locations are farthest removed from the local peoples and have unmistakable, pronounced visible markers that signify distance. Distance holds greater value for Winter Texans given their limited purchasing power (Dwyer & Jones 2000), and racial privilege becomes part of the allure, accentuating the exclusive nature of compound communities and the experience of exotic, destination retirement tourism. Three destination resorts in the Lower Rio Grande Valley are the focal point of this analysis. South Padre Island, Rancho Viejo, and Valley International Country Club are locations frequented by Winter Texans, and established locations of leisure and relaxation for retirees.

Located approximately 20 miles from Brownsville's city-center, South Padre Island and its port city Isabel are viewed as premier, exclusive locations within the region. Local residents do not own most of the properties in either city, and the winter population percentages skew profoundly from other regional population analysis with approximately 93-96% of residents being white<sup>11</sup>. Alone, this number is not particularly remarkable given the nature of gated communities, and exclusive retirement communities (McHugh & Larson-Keagy 2005); however, taken in conjunction with the region's broader population percentages, it is quite profound, and telling in a host of ways. Based on 2010 census data, population demographics range from 93-99% Latino, Mexicano, Tejano, Chicano, or other variation of Hispanic, for nearly a 100 miles radius (US Department of Commerce).

Rancho Viejo, a golf course community, is situated approximately 8 miles north of Brownsville's center, and is a municipality created within city limits. As a municipality, Rancho, as it is colloquially referenced, created a localized governance enabling them to keep their property taxes for the municipality's benefit, while simultaneously drawing from Brownsville's city services like public sewage, water supplies, hospitals, and public schools, although no school busses travel to Rancho. The municipality has a higher percentage of white residents than its host city of Brownsville, and draws affluent Mexicanos from Monterey, and WTs seeking to utilize the compound's amenities. Unlike South Padre and Isabel, Rancho is located on the main highway corridor and major throughway leading into Brownsville, and Mexico. The

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<sup>11</sup> The numbers are based on rental records and conversations with local rental agents specializing in properties for these two communities. The racial landscape was also visible through observation.

central location could have devalued the community; however, a ten-foot high fence topped with two-feet of barbed wire maximizes the location in so far as it allows a declarative statement about access to be made from a central, public vantage point.

Defining access and establishing boundaries are common themes for WT communities in the valley. Aside from fences and barbed wire, extra measures have also been added that are more subtle although equally effective. A recreational vehicle (RV) community that abuts the International border with Mexico has erected flag towers inside of their fenced compound. Through no uncertain terms, they have marked who is allowed access to their RV park by using three, thirty-foot tall flag towers that flank the entrance of the property. Each of the towers has one flag, and the respective flags are: Texas state flag, United States flag, and Canadian flags. Conspicuously absent is the Mexican flag, even though Mexico is approximately 200 yards away. (Image 1).

According to Erving Goffman (1981), an omission holds meaning in much the same way as inclusion would. “Whatever comes to be said there will be inspected to see how it might serve as an answer, and if nothing is said, then the resulting silence will be taken as notable – a rejoinder in its own right, a silence to be heard” (7). The brazen use of definitive markers underscores the fervor of WTs maintenance of the landscape, and imposition of racialized Other onto local populations. Valley International Country Club (VICC), a small golf-course community in Brownsville, is emblematic of the social barricades constructed around WT compounds, and the intensity with which WTs patrol their spaces.

Due to limited monies, some WTs cannot afford the more lavish locations of SPI<sup>12</sup> or Rancho and reside instead at VICC. With a majority WT population in residence, VICC is the least desirable golf-course community for WTs, or any person seeking an exclusive location in the lower valley. Locals and vacationers alike view the city of Brownsville as “rancho”, or dirty, and moneyed locals say that it is a political statement to live in the city. The VICC compound is embedded within a residential neighborhood, and located on a major throughway. Strip malls and large chain-box stores line the roadway that abuts VICC, and carries travelers to a Mexico border crossing 3 miles away. There are no separate shopping facilities like grocery stores, restaurants, boutique, etc., that cater solely to the VICC community. WT residents must venture into the surrounding area filled with local peoples in order to purchase goods and services. Interacting with local populations was a point of contention for WTs, as indicated by one informant’s comment after I mentioned that I was going shopping, “You should be careful. *They* probably carry knives.” Even though residents indicate fearing locals, security at VICC consists of one unarmed, untrained man in a golf cart that rides around the perimeter of the property, which is marked by basic landscaping such as trees, hedges, and such, and operate as indicators of exclusion (Low 2009).

VICC is a reasonably priced property, and most people living in the area can afford to either purchase or rent a unit. Condos facing the golf course can be purchased for \$40,000, \$50,000 if it has been fully remodeled and furnished. The built residential landscape consists of side-by-side duplex houses with two units sharing one wall. The

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<sup>12</sup> Just to be clear about cost, on SPI, I paid \$450 for a four-week stay in a hotel suite that had a kitchenette and was one block from the beach.

predominant spatial configuration of the community consists of four duplex structures built adjacent to one another forming a square. Each of the eight residential units opens to a small, central courtyard that functions as a shared space. The condos have 450 sq. ft. of living space, and a private rear deck. The patio space faces an adjacent cluster of four duplexes, and the private patio space of another unit. (Image 2). Condos that abut another group of duplexes cannot construct barriers or obscure the visibility through their private patio; it must be left open as to not spoil view of the grounds, as per the Home Owners Association. A secondary, more expensive duplex formation is located on the grounds, and distanced, at the closest, 100 yards from the squared, eight unit features. Each building is built at least 20 yards apart, some have greater distance, and do not create an enclosed space. Instead, each condo has a small yard, private patio, and faces the golf course. The condos have 1100 sq ft of living space, and are valued at \$70,000. The largest structure at VICC is an apartment complex community that was built on the grounds as an affordable alternative to the discussed duplexes. Each apartment is an independent condo, and comes with one parking space. Unfortunately, I was unable to find anyone willing to speak with me about the apartment-condo pricings at VICC, and I could not locate their market value in any of the city or state tax rolls. I do, however, know that a 1000 sq. ft. apartment-condo in Rancho Viejo is valued at \$48,000, or rented for \$600/\$650 a month.

The spatial and residential landscapes of VICC are essential components in analyzing the mechanism employed by WTs to distance themselves from local populations. WTs have limited privacy given the configuration of the residential structures, and resort to policing one another in order to impose conformity, argued to be



security, and homogeneity (Low 2009). Due to their limited financial resources, WTs cannot purchase physical space from the racialized Other, nor can they afford properties that construct visible barriers in the built environment, like fences or bridges. WTs utilize the most salient capital available to them, their race, and deploy racism as a mechanism to create distance from local peoples, a common practice among their demographic (Dwyer & Jones 2000).

Local Tejanos and Mexicanos that live at VICC are met with WTs unabashed hostility and disdain. WTs spend extensive amounts of time and energy complaining to whomever will listen about the habits of their Other neighbors, including the Other neighbors themselves. It was not uncommon to hear WTs yelling at local residents, demanding that they watch their children, lower their voices, or pickup after themselves. One WT married couple repeatedly told their local neighbor that they were filthy and unclean, stating that, “that is just how you people are.” Unfortunately, I shared a common space with the WT couple and listened to the relentless harassment of our local neighbor. In addition to being tormented by WTs, Tejanos and Mexicanos living at VICC often found themselves under the scrutinizing gaze of the homeowners association who investigated complaints lodged by, primarily, WT residents.

The function of a Home Owners Association (HOA) is to protect the shared values of a community by ensuring a measure of conformity, stabilizing property value. An HOA governing board is formed of community members that establishes rules and regulations that all residents of the community must follow (Low 2009). Since VICC is a golf course community and the residential structures share primary features, like foundations, roofs, walls, etc., an HOA was established to ensure the maintenance of

shared spaces and master insurance on the shared structures. The HOA at VICC did not maintain the shared spaces or physical property of the grounds, one of the central functions of an HOA and something that WTs complained about privately. However, it did actively and vigorously maintain the people living there through coercion and harassment. WTs rarely found themselves under the scrutiny of the HOA, unless they challenged the rule of the board. Locals living at VICC on the contrary were not so fortunate.

More often than not, locals living at VICC had numerous complaints lodged against them, and the HOA was, or had previously, conducted a thorough, rigorous investigation into their behavior, even for the smallest infractions. For example, it is common practice for WTs to put their garbage outside the night before its scheduled morning collection. Little to no attention is paid to their behavior by the HOA, or other WTs. However, when a local does the exact same thing, they received multiple notifications from various HOA officials. Warnings about the infraction were delivered through the mail, left on the local's front door step, and, in some instances, called in to the local's personal phone. These announcements arrive for weeks, or longer, and address the same, single offense of putting the garbage out early. In the numerous notifications, it is reiterated that the HOA will move to evict residents found to be in violation of the same infractions. The HOA invests substantial resources in policing local Tejano and Mexicano residents', and resulted in locals choosing to live elsewhere in order to avoid the harassment, even though many could afford to live at VICC.

The expenditure of HOA assets provides a clear indication of where the value of VICC resides, not in the grounds of the property, but in the bodies' and behavior of the

residents. The HOA operates under the direction of WTs on the governing board, and functions as an extension of VICC residents. WTs use the structure of the HOA as a mechanism to create space through the imposition of racial and ethnic barriers. Operating within the legal guidelines of the HOA, local Tejanos and Mexicanos are actively targeted for removal from the space. Racism, then, is the fence/blockade used to maintain the borders of VICC, and establish WTs sense of security in their gated community.

Oddly enough, VICC sits adjacent to one of the most prestigious neighborhoods in Brownsville. A resaca, a natural occurring waterway, serves as the dividing line between the Brownsville neighborhood and VICC, and marks the edge of the community's golf course. (Image 3). A number of extremely expensive homes in Brownsville abut the resaca, and are visible from approximately 40% of VICC residential units and a significant portion of the golf course. The locally owned houses neighboring VICC range in size from 3,000-5,000 sq. ft., with a host of architectural features used to accent the sprawling structures. Each home has access to the resaca, since their private, enclosed backyards end at the water's edge. Assefa Mehretu et al. (2000) defines the term microperipherality as, "describes the unequal development within very small geographic units, like census tracts or city block, in which poor and marginalized households and prosperous households may share neighbourhoods" (98). This concept is used to explain disparate living conditions of persons due, more often than not, to systemic oppression rooted in social inequalities. Mehretu et al. (2000) also argues that microperipherality can occur when gentrifying mechanisms are used to improve the quality of a neighborhood by adding more expensive homes. The residents of VICC are

certainly not destitute; they are, however, poor compared to their Brownsville neighbors. The lavish homes that line the resaca were constructed after VICC was established, and brought local money into the area. It is unclear, however, as to whether the new homes signaled a gentrification of the area or a mirroring of the perceived value of VICC given the WT population. Regardless, WTs actively work to ignore their affluent neighbors, and when those attempts fail, WTs vent their rage in racialized slander much the way they do with less moneyed Tejanos and Mexicanos.

WTs cannot police the behavior of the wealthy locals across the resaca since they are not part of VICC. They do, however, use the same pejorative language to describe their actions as they do with local peoples trying to live at VICC. Special celebrations and everyday events become points of contention for WTs, as they complained about local cultural practices. Large family celebrations that boasted live music, catered outdoor parties, or other similar events, were described as “disturbing the peace of the area.” The parties did draw large crowds and it is debatable as to whether or not the events were in all actuality disturbing the peace. However, WTs also said that these festivities were “bringing their property value down”, even though each of the numerous parties that occurred during my research were tasteful, and clearly well funded. The WTs were not measuring their property value in term of monetary investment. The affluent locals possessed significantly more expensive homes, vehicles, and the like. For the WTs, that was irrelevant since their most salient form of capital, race, far exceeded any financial capital that Tejanos or Mexicanos might have had.

## 2.5 Conclusions

Destination retirement tourism serves as the vehicle for examining racism on the landscape. The majority of the retirees in this study are working-class whites, and are purchasing, or renting, properties in resort communities that have varying degrees of separation from the local populations. Due to the limited economic resources of Winter Texan retirees at VICC, they are embedded among populations of people of color and using racism as the primary means of distancing themselves. In much the same way colonialism imposes/d power and difference on the landscape, WTs assert dominance over the space and employ structural tools, like the HOA, to ensure that local populations do not access their communities. Moreover, WTs believe that their white race is a capital that far exceeds any monetary value held by local people of color, and are entitled to the benefits of racism.

## CHAPTER 3

### “A POOR MAN’S MIAMI”: BLUE-COLLAR TOURISM ON THE TURBULENT TEXAS-MEXICO BORDER

This chapter examines performativity and stigma in the context of destination retirement tourism. Through research conducted among working-class retirees in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of South Texas, this chapter interrogates the social construction of retirement, and the behavioral patterns used by retirees to enjoy their “golden years” in a landscape surrounded by less than desirable circumstances. A comparison was conducted between two groups of retirees in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV) that demonstrates status is a valuable commodity used to increase the personal value of one’s retirement. In addition, this chapter highlights avoidance as a strategy deployed by retiree populations when confronted by events that challenge their perception of leisure and relaxation. This research will serve as a tool to better understand the social construction of destination retirement tourism, and the strategies used to maintain that experience.

Over the last few decades, as the economic disparity in the United States grew wider, and the rate of inflation increased, more people have been postponing retirement and fewer people have been able to retire comfortably. The cultural creation of “the golden years,” promising leisure and relaxation, eludes a larger percentage of people. Iconic retirement havens with mild winter climates, such as Miami or Phoenix, have become too expensive for many retirees. Alternate locations for working-class and lower-middle-class retirees have emerged to fill the void in the retirement tourist industry.

Brownsville, Texas, located on the Texas/Mexico border, in the LRGV, has for some time cultivated a tourist industry geared specifically toward working-class retirees. Neighboring communities have followed and established their own attractions in order to draw the tourist monies of winter retirees. Stretching from the eastern city of South Padre Island beyond the western town of McAllen, Texas, the LRGV traces approximately 50 miles of the Texas-Mexico border (Richardson, 1999). The region's economic condition allows for moderate-income, working-class people to retire seasonally to a mild winter climate destination and enjoy their "golden years." Every winter working-class retirees from the Midwest United States, and Southern Canada, migrate into the Texas-Mexico borderlands to take refuge in the mild climate. From late December through early-March, Winter Texans (WTs), as they are colloquially referred to, fill local hotels, condos, recreational vehicle parks, and the like, throughout the LRGV. Although the LRGV has comparable weather conditions to iconic retirement locations, the area is accompanied by sometimes less than ideal circumstances.

The Texas/Mexico border has experienced an increase in drug violence over the last decade and parts of the LRGV are wrought with violence. The depressed economic conditions of the LRGV leave many unemployed, or under employed, and people from local populations on both sides of the border participate in underground economies. These conditions, and more, surround WTs during their destination retirement nearly every season. Through ethnographic research conducted at two separate WT communities, this chapter demonstrates that performance is an essential strategy used by WTs to avoid the stigma associated with destination retirement tourism in the LRGV, and the omnipresent threat of violence that surrounds them.

### 3.1 Populations

Three primary populations live in Brownsville, Texas, and surrounding communities. 1) Tejanos, the local population, are indigenous to the region and often mestizos, mixed Native American and Mexican ethnicities, whose families have resided in the region for centuries. Tejanos living in the valley, as it's colloquially referenced, are bilingual (Spanish/English), with Spanish being their first language. 2) Mexicanos, the second largest population, are peoples that have migrated, or immigrated, from the Mexican side of the border. Given Brownsville's proximity to Matamoros and the migration/immigration laws that historically governed the region, it is not uncommon for Mexicanos from Matamoros, to have family living in the valley, and/or possess dual citizenship – Mexico and U.S. Mexicanos without familial ties to the region travel to Brownsville for myriad reasons (e.g., shopping, vacationing, work) and remain in the valley, or beyond, for hours, days, or years depending upon the intent of their trip. Some Mexicanos have legal documentation to be in the U.S. and others do not. 3) Winter Texans (WTs), as they are colloquially referred to, are seasonal, migrating, retirees from the Midwestern United States and southern Canada that reside throughout the region during the winter months. The WT population is predominantly white<sup>13</sup>, and a significant percentage of the population derives from a working/lower-middle class economic

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<sup>13</sup> I observed one black man participating in the daily activities of the WTs during my research. There were likely more people of color in the WT population, although I did not encounter them.



background, with participants earning, at the peak of their lifetime annual wages, less than \$80,000 annually in a dual-income household<sup>14</sup>.

### 3.2 Methods

During my research, I aimed to answer two primary questions: 1) how does the social construction of seasonal retirement influence retirees' desire to migrate to the LRGV; and 2) how does one maintain the experience of a pleasurable retirement destination in the face of contradictory circumstances. I chose to conduct the research in Brownsville, Texas, because of the region's economic condition and local populations. The valley experiences a large influx of WTs during the winter months due to seasonal, U.S. domestic migration. These vacationers, for the most part, originate from the Midwestern, U.S., with a small percentage from southern Canada, and have varying degrees of economic capital and affiliation with the region. The convergence of WTs into a predominantly Latino region creates a unique landscape in that 1) the WT population is the ethnic, cultural, and racial minority; 2) they are temporary residents and have little to no relationship to the region beyond vacationing; 3) the social and economic landscape has been constructed to entice WTs into the area; and 4) the poverty and violence plaguing the region allows for an interrogation of avoidance strategies used by WTs to maintain the luxury of destination retirement.

Over two winter seasons, I lived in Brownsville at Valley International Country Club (VICC) for 7 months and in South Padre Island (SPI) for 4 weeks among different Winter Texan retirement communities. I lived with two different WT communities in

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<sup>14</sup> There is variability to the \$80,000 annual income, with some making more money and others making significantly less. This number is an approximate mean. Similarly, not all WTs lived in a dual-income home.

order to compare my findings from each community (Montero 2011). My initial research at VICC created questions that required further interrogation, and I believed that a comparison between two WT communities would better serve to explain events at VICC (Rosaldo 1993). This, ultimately, proved successful in that the two WT populations had extremely different social patterns, even though they shared a comparable – although notably different economic background<sup>15</sup>.

I utilize a number of anthropological methods to gather data including ethnography, participant observation, and interviews. I immersed myself among my participants in order to build rapport, and establish relationships with individuals who would later become informants (Geertz 1988; Jackson 2010; Svenden 2006). I then conducted informal interviews with approximately 35 retirees – both men and women – ranging in age from 65-75 years, and documented the conversations with handwritten notes (Benard 2011). Due to some informants' distrust of technology, I chose not to tape record conversations out of respect for my participants. Some discussions were had in social settings with up to 10 participants, while other interviews were conducted one-on-one (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). My aim during these informal interviews was to learn about how they perceived themselves as seasonal retirees from “other places” in relation to the area and local people. In addition to these one-on-one interviews, I spent time talking to groups of retirees in order to learn more about how they viewed their

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<sup>15</sup> Wintering on SPI costs approximately 25% percent more than at VICC. This is a significant price differentiation under any circumstance; however, when considering the cost differential it should be noted that Motel 6 on SPI costs \$29.99 a night, and Motel 6 in Brownsville costs \$23.99. Long term, temporary housing is similarly priced with Value America costing \$179.99 a week on SPI, and \$139.99 a week in Brownsville. The prices do change based on the season, as does the tax rate for each area. The tax rate also varies, but the vacationers are considered residents after thirty consecutive days and do not pay taxes on their housing.

retirement at VICC and South Padre Island, and to see how they related to each other (Handwerker 2002; Susser 2010). I also participated in countless informal conversations with local Tejanos and Mexicanos that were employed in the service industries establishments frequented by Winter Texans (DeVault 1995; Tsing 2005). Three participants from the local communities became trusted informants. Informant data coupled with observation were used to interpret the social environment and behavioral patterns of participants (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). My goal was to create a multitier examination, gathering data from numerous sources in order to answer my primary questions.

### 3.3 Literature Review

For decades, leading anthropologists in the young, fledgling field of anthropology of tourism debated how best to establish a framework that would serve as a foundation for the study of tourism from an anthropological perspective. With the increased availability of mass travel, remote locations that were the anthropologists' purview had begun to experience an influx of international travelers. Anthropologists found themselves encountering international travelers with greater frequency, and witnessing the transformation of their long established field sites. In an attempt to interrogate this new phenomenon, anthropologists discussed myriad topics ranging from how to define tourism to what the role of an anthropologist is in studying it. Collectively, they argued for a conservative frame of analysis since the field was in its infancy, believing that more specified models would develop in due time as the field developed (Nash et al. 1981). Unfortunately, progress in the field of anthropology of tourism has been slow, and many

of the same discussions that occupied Nash et al. 1981 are still prominent in today's literature.

Wallace (2005) asserts that cultural anthropologists have cultivated a negative reading of tourism due, in large part, to their personal agendas, and their academic perspectives. Enmeshed in inflammatory language and questionable analysis, Wallace (2005) argues that cultural anthropologists have categorized tourism negatively, because they are claiming "ownership" to their field sites and "knowledge production," afraid that they too will be seen as tourists. He writes that cultural anthropologists' interrogation of tourism's impact on local communities is self-serving, rooted in self-preservation and entitlement that grew organically from arrogant researchers protecting "their" turf. "Consumed with concern about how traditional cultures would fare against the arrival of tourists, unschooled in the anthropology, who sought an authentic experience, anthropologists saw this 'invasion' as part of an unwanted globalization process. Almost without thought, anthropologists began to study the 'impact of tourists and tourism' on local communities" (Wallace 2005: 7). He continues and argues that ethnographers want no association with tourist or tourism out of fear for their professional reputations. Wallace (2005) cites a grant application focused on tourist research that was initially denied and then funded after minor revisions and the removal of tourism from the title as an example of cultural anthropologists' bias against tourism, and tourism research.

Ironically, Wallace (2005) challenges cultural anthropologists' examination of tourism by echoing the forebears of the field. In order to demonstrate the great degree of repetition of Wallace's (2005) argument with his predecessors, it's most prudent to simply quote both articles in small segments and to highlight two similarities. Wallace

(2005) says that, “Earlier anthropologists may have been reluctant to investigate this phenomenon because tourism is too close to what anthropologists do themselves when they are in the field. There may have appeared to be too little difference between travelers’ accounts and anthropological accounts of social and cultural phenomena” (5). Sharing a similar sentiment and closely mirrored language, the second sentence of Nash et al. (1981) states, “One might speculate, first of all, that they tend to think of themselves as intrepid fieldworkers and so do not want to be identified with tourists in any way” (461). Nash et al. (1981) identifies nearly every significant argument Wallace (2005) levels against cultural anthropologists’ study of tourism. What’s more, Nash *et al* (1981) argues that a practical minded question would be how to increase the positive effects of tourism if there are pros and cons. As if discovering a new species, Wallace (2005) proclaims that tourism has both pros and cons, and that applied anthropologists have a more nuanced take on tourism since they offer solutions to would be tourists and locals about how to mitigate the negative impacts of tourism.

Some twenty-four years after Nash et al. (1981) worked to establish a framework for the anthropology of tourism, Wallace (2005) is repeating much of the same information although he does not reference the source. One hates to speculate, but the lack of reference to Nash et al. (1981) and the repetitive challenges offered nearly two decades earlier might be partially related to Wallace (2005) not being funded as a tourist scholar. Lacking basic foundational knowledge of a field might disway reviewers from funding a grant in any area of study, regardless of personal opinion or agenda.

Wallace (2005) continues to be a point of concern in that his contention that applied anthropology can offer solutions to lessen the negative consequences of tourism

remains un-interrogated. Certainly, an anthropological perspective can offer positive contributions to evolving markets where multiple cultures are intersecting (Nash 2001; Tsing 2005). It is argued, however, that anthropological knowledge is being utilized to continue marginalizing people in developing nations (Torres & Momsen 2005; Salazar 2013). Tour-guides are capitalizing on early anthropological research that portrays people as the exotic Other. Tourists seeking an “authentic” experience arrive in foreign lands expecting to see “cultural oddities” fixed in time, and local communities are sometimes forced into compliance (Salazar 2013). According to Salazar (2013), this trend is more disconcerting given that “...anthropologist no longer despise tourism—as a social reality or an object of study – but now play active roles in tourism planning and development, as guides, researchers, consultants, analysis, or policy makers” (673). It is difficult to decrease the impact of tourism when it is predicated on a broader system of power and disenfranchisement (Crick 1989; Gullette 2007; Nash 2001; Nash et al. 1981; Pi-Sunyer 2002), and in some instances literally demeans people. There are notable exceptions, however, that show tourism can have some positive benefits when rooted in a community-based approach, often meaning lower tourist traffic and smaller revenues (Bartholo et al. 2008; Stronza 2001).

The Winter Texans of South Texas add a different dynamic to the conversation of tourism in anthropology. Given their migratory patterns and seasonal returns (McHugh, Hogan, & Happel 1995; McHugh & Mings 1991), Winter Texans, known as snowbirds in other states (Hogan & Steiness 1991; Mullins & Tucker 1988), challenge conventional interpretations of tourism, and tourists, due to their sometimes-acquired residency status resulting from extended stays in their “host” communities (O’Reilly 2003; Smith 1989).

Scholars from myriad disciplines have debated how best to quantify the percentage of migrant populations that become temporary residents in their host communities (Halfacree 1993; Happel & Hogan 2002; Lin 1999; Skeldon 1995). This includes the growing snowbird<sup>16</sup> populations that migrate seasonally to warmer climates during the winter (Hazelrigg & Hardy 1995; Rose & Kingma 1989), and cooler climates during the summer depending upon their sending location (Willam 1994). There continues to be the question of economic impact and development that has emerged in the host communities (Bennett 1996; Day & Barlett 2000; Glasgow 1990, 1995), and in Mexico regarding snowbird travel to U.S./Mexico border towns (Judkins 2007).

Limited data exists concerning domestic senior leisure migration (Walters 2007) with the majority of the represented works coming from geography, gerontology, demography, development studies, and sociology. Few studies have utilized qualitative methods to examine the experience of U.S. seasonal migration (Bjelde & Snaders 2012), and lesser still have conducted ethnography or participant-observation among snowbirds (McHugh & Mings 1996), especially Winter Texans. Statistical data represents the most promising information source, although “seasonal populations remain an elusive topic for U.S. demographers” (Happel & Hogan 2002: 227). Early estimates show that 220,000 snowbirds travel to Phoenix locations annually (McHugh & Mings 1996), with current numbers approximating 273,000 snowbirds frequenting Phoenix, and surrounding areas (Happel & Hogan 2002). Recent trends in snowbird migration have shown a decline from the 1990s peak in Arizona’s two primary snowbird cities (Phoenix and Tuscon) with smaller cities witnessing an increase (Happel & Hogan 2002). Speculative though

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<sup>16</sup> Snowbirds are older, seasonal residents who live in northern regions of the U.S. or Canada and travel south to warmer climates during the winter months.

probable, the U.S. economic downturn has redirected snowbirds from the more expensive locations in and around Arizona to the surrounding communities where costs are lower.

It is readily accepted that tourists seek destinations that are priced within their personal financial means; this includes retirees. For some, their monies allow for a broader potential of seasonal migration locations (McElroy & Albuquerque 1992), domestic or abroad, while others have fewer choices, although they can still afford to live or travel abroad to countries where the U.S. dollar has greater value (Topmiller, Conway, & Gerber 2011). Others, still, have more limited choices and travel to destinations that are both more economic and practical (Judkins 2007). Discussing the increase in medical-tourism in Mexican towns that border the U.S., Judkins (2007) notes that American seniors represent a large percentage of clients crossing into Los Algodones, Mexico, to access the various health services offered in the town: pharmaceutical drugs, dental care, eye care, etc. According to Judkins (2007), “Beginning in the late 1980s, the economy of the town began to specialize in providing low-cost medical services to Americans. This process accelerated in the following decade with rising medical costs in the U.S. and the growth of the snowbird retirement population across the border in Yuma, Arizona and the southwest in general” (17). The increased snowbird population in Yuma was created, in part, by real estate ventures building gated communities in Arizona, and Texas, during the 1980s, targeting would-be snowbirds (Low 2001). The constructed communities, increases in the U.S. cost of living, and decreases in financial resources created a practical, cost cutting rationalization for snowbirds to migrate to cheaper U.S. locations. By crossing into Mexico to purchase much cheaper prescription medications, eyeglasses, and the like, snowbirds with limited financial resources are able to save



money on healthcare which they redirect to cover their travel costs (Judkins 2007). For Winter Texans in the LRGV, and snowbirds in locations like Yuma, their financial resources limit their choices for seasonal migration, and they rely on the lower prices of the region and Mexican healthcare services to afford their travels.

The decreased cost of goods and services indicates a weaker economy, which is often accompanied by lower wages for workers. This is certainly the case for third world countries (Crick 1989), and in border-towns that experience an influx of lower priced goods and services coming from countries with weaker economies (Judkins 2007). In the LRGV, high underemployment, and unemployment, is tied to the sluggish economy, and people on both sides of the border participate in underground economies to supplement their incomes. It is readily known that Mexicano organized crime operating outside of the government manages the border with Texas, and that they use violence and crime as a means of controlling their territory. Over the last 5 plus years, Mexicano officials have been battling the drug cartels for control of the Texas/Mexico border-region, including Brownsville/Matamoros and the Gulf of Mexico. There is limited discussion in LRGV popular media or among WTs about the violence in the region, although U.S. and world national news did cover some events during the height of the violence.

WTs in LRGV are migrating to a region with heightened drug wars between the Mexican government and drug cartels. The violence in Mexico, spilling into Texas, does not deter WTs seasonal migration; rather, there is little acknowledgement of the violence and a willful avoidance of the topic. There is little discussion in the literature about the experience of seasonal migration, let alone retirement migration to a region plagued by violence. An examination of the lived experience of seasonal migration would contribute

to the broader interpretation of migratory retirement, an essential inquiry given the increase in baby boomers retiring (Topmiller, Conway, & Gerber 2011). The impact of snowbirds traveling to lesser-celebrated retirement locations (Happel & Hogan 2002) and accessing cheaper goods in Mexico (Judkins 2007) also needs directed research. Moreover, by participating in seasonal migration into a violence-riddled region, one is able to question the impetus for the return of retirees in the face of less than desirable conditions.

### 3.4 Findings

The WTs of the LRGV proved to be an important group to study. By examining WTs at SPI and VICC, I was able to discern how each group of WTs interpreted their experience of seasonal retirement to the LRGV. They exhibited different forms of avoidance behaviors as strategies used to negotiate the region they migrated to. Comparing the two groups allowed for patterns to emerge that are unique to each location, which revealed additional information about both sets of WTs. Furthermore, given that SPI and VICC have varying degrees of separation from each other, the local populations, and the international border, I was able to interrogate how WTs from each community negotiated one another, and the violence in neighboring Mexico.

The social landscape of SPI is a relaxed, friendly place, and people move around the island with relative ease. It's a small, narrow island that is approximately 5 blocks wide in some sections with both a bay and ocean front properties. During the winter months, WTs make-up the largest number of tourists on the island, and they can be seen at local restaurants, bars, or local gathering spots at different points during the day. WTs spend most of their time together in small groups and don't mingle with local peoples.

The local resident population is small and often relocated from another part of the state themselves to enjoy the island atmosphere. Many SPI small business owners are newer residents and view the WT's as a minor annoyance. To quote a middle-aged couple that moved from Dallas, and own and operate several charter boats, "WT's arrive with \$20 and a pair of underwear. And they leave with \$20." Hotel owners, leasing agents, restaurateurs, and the like welcome WT's to SPI, but WT's rarely spend money on materials beyond necessity, evidenced by the charter boat owners' previous quote.

The predominantly white WT population occupies the bulk of the island rentals during the winter months. They share a common air of entitlement to the charms that the island offers: beautiful beaches, amazing sunsets, and bird watching at one end of the island. When they are displaced, their expectation of and demand for entitlement becomes evident. While staying at the Motel 6 for \$24.99 a night (I received a \$5 discount), I became acquainted with a couple that had traveled from Iowa in their RV. They too were staying at Motel 6 and were angrily complaining about the increased price of the island's RV park. In the seven years that they had been traveling to the island, they had never had to pay that much for their lot in the park. Although they never said how much the park cost, even when I asked, they did say that they were cutting their trip short because of the increased cost. They only stayed on the island for 3 days, and while I cannot say with certainty why they left, I suspect that they went to a cheaper RV park off of the island. I too moved to a cheaper location two blocks away, the Ramada Inn, a few days later just before the WT couple from Iowa drove away. While chatting with a WT in the parking lot of my new hotel, I learned that he would be renting a small apartment across the street. He had arrived earlier from his drive from Montana where he summers

and was waiting for the landlord to finish painting the interior of his new winter home. He proudly proclaimed, "I'm retired and I travel. I've earned it." He followed with, "I mean, its Montana and *the valley*, but who cares." It was clear from his second statement that he felt a measure of disappointment about his destinations, even though he was celebrating his travels. Granted, his travels are not to celebrated retirement destinations (Montana and the LRGV), but it is travel nonetheless. And that appears to be what is most important, at least to WTs with limited financial resources. For WTs, the impetus is not as much where they are going; rather, it is *that* they are going. This sentiment was further accentuated by my encounter with Sue (pseudonym), a woman that I spoke with very briefly.

During the New Year's Day celebration on SPI, I happened across a very talkative woman who was thrilled to have an audience for her tales. Sue reported that, "SPI is a dump, a sandbar. Not a real island, and that she would NEVER buy anything on *this* island." Her statement came as a response to me asking if she liked the island. Sue informed me that she and her husband own property in Barbados, and that they would be visiting there in the coming weeks while the property was unrented. "We rent it most of the time," she said. She was looking forward to being on an island to enjoy the sun, "Now, that's an island." Sue provided an extensive, detailed explanation highlighting her superiority to her current SPI location both through inflection and specifics, citing her ownership of property in a more desirable location. Oddly enough, in the same conversation, Sue also said that she and her husband have been coming to SPI for 12 years, and stay for 3 months of the year. The conversation with Sue allowed for greater insight into her situation in that: 1) she and her husband were likely supplementing their

income with the Barbados property given her emphasis on not disrupting potential renters and only traveling there due to its vacancy; 2) even though Sue owns property in Barbados, she and her husband seasonally migrate to SPI, because they cannot financially afford to spend their winter months on an island paradise—just a sandbar, as Sue called it. She is returning seasonally to SPI while simultaneously maintaining the mantra – I do not belong here. It is apparent that Sue would travel elsewhere if she could; yet, she is avoiding her financial reality and the location of her seasonal retirement by holding her property in Barbados as a token of her difference, and subsequent superiority.

WTs on SPI have varying degrees of wealth, but draw value by residing on SPI when comparing themselves to WTs not staying on the island. A casual conversation between two WTs quickly became an inconvenience when the SPI WT learned the other WT was not staying on the island. Said with contempt, “Oh! You’re not staying on the island?” The SPI WT abruptly departed the conversation and left the other individual standing stunned and alone. Being able to see one’s self as superior compared to another retiree has value for WTs on SPI, although the actual cost of SPI is only marginally higher than neighboring communities.

SPI is known throughout the region as the most expensive location for tourism and residency alike. Median home prices in SPI far exceed those in the region, as do prices in SPI’s port city Isabel (Cameron County, TX tax assessor). Wintering on SPI costs approximately 25% percent more than at VICC, a significant price increase under any circumstance. When considering the cost differential it is important to note that Motel 6 on SPI costs \$29.99 a night, and Motel 6 in Brownsville costs \$23.99. Long term, temporary housing is similarly priced with Value America costing \$179.99 a week

on SPI, and \$139.99 a week in Brownsville. The prices change based on the season, of course, and the tax rate varies for each location. However, vacationers are considered residents after thirty consecutive days and do not pay taxes on their housing thus mitigating the cost. A WT staying on SPI for 3 months, like Sue mentioned earlier, would pay approximately \$480 more than a WT residing in a Brownsville hotel, and \$600 dollars more than I paid staying at VICC.

WTs living at VICC are in a unique position in that they are situated in the least desirable city in the LRGV, and embedded in a local neighborhood (Foiles Sifuentes 2013). VICC is three miles from Mexico on a major-throughway leading to one of Brownsville's two bordering crossings. There is an underlying fear found throughout the city affecting everyone not just WTs. Just beneath the surface, an insecurity plagues the area due, in large part, to the increased violence over the last decade (CNN Mexico Drug War). Since Matamoros/Brownsville is a large hub for goods, people, services, drugs and human smuggling all of which have become an inevitable part of the local economy (Lower Rio Grande Valley Regional Strategic Plan). This type of underground economy is not uncommon in border regions (Andreas 2003), especially when one country has greater wealth than the other (Judkins 2007). The violence has become more pronounced in recent years since the change of public policy in Mexico toward drug cartels (Dallas News). Unfortunately, rival cartels have been fighting for control of the area as well, because of its location on the border and Gulf of Mexico water access (Huffington Post). The violence has spilled from Matamoros into Brownsville, and other areas along the border, and has impacted the local communities. Brownsville is separated from

Matamoros by a walk-able bridge (IMAGE 4), and the ills of Matamoros literally walk into Brownsville.

Brownsville is wrought with tension, skepticism, and fear. Border patrol agents travel the city in great numbers and can be seen driving the roadways. Chain link fences topped with barbed wire line the international border and run through parts of the city. Before the fence existed, the built environment suggested that the international border was more breathable in that there is a continuation of architectural design and structures that move from Brownsville into Matamoros, or vice versa. The two cities were merged at one point and the fence now stands as a reminder of Otherness imposed on the landscape, and people. A large Homeland Security facility abuts a border crossing in Brownsville, and it too is lined with fencing topped with barbed wire. Local law enforcement agencies are less prominent than border patrol or homeland security, although they are present as well.

Gathering information from any of the three government agencies was nearly impossible. After numerous attempts to schedule meetings and conducting drop-in visits, I was unable to access anyone at the Homeland Security compound. Border patrol agents were easier to access since they are posted at locations throughout the city and at the international crossing. I attempted to speak with several agents about the crime conditions in the area, and inadvertently became a subject of their brief inquiry. Fortunately, my curiosity was my only crime, but I learned very quickly to avoid conversations, or contact, with Border Patrol agents. Local law enforcement agencies were much easier to access, although they were hesitant to discuss crime statistics and avoided any discussion of specific numbers or percentages. Even after filling the

paperwork necessary to receive public information about crimes committed in the area, I was still unable to access the data and was instead directed to the Texas Department of Public Safety website. This website contains the crime statistics for the state of Texas, including those submitted by local law enforcement agencies (Cameron County, Texas). The statistical data is not categorized by variables that are useful to my questions, crimes committed against a specific race and/or age group, nor is it grouped by neighborhoods or land tracks, an alternative strategy that would have been equally effective given WTs propensity to compound communities.

As a city, Brownsville does have its charms and is full of many wonderful people and places. A vibrant downtown corridor sits adjacent to the University of Texas, Brownsville, and people-lined streets connect to and from a busy bus terminal and border-crossing. The people are warm and friendly and easily approachable. I have heard that WTs participate in local events, volunteer in schools, and offer their time and skills toward the betterment of the community. WT websites and handout literature show WTs actively engaging in local projects. Unfortunately, I did not encounter any such person during my fieldwork at VICC. I did, however, happen across a group of 10 – 15 WTs in the Charro Day parade; however, they were riding a float that said WTs in a holiday day parade celebrating the cultural and historical relationship between Brownsville and Matamoros. It read more separating and co-opting, rather than participating.

WTs living at VICC do not engage with local people or places, and remain at the country club unless traveling for basic necessities or leaving the city. While talking to my most trusted informants, Bob and Emily (pseudonyms), I mentioned that I was



heading to a local restaurant for breakfast. Bob responded curt and abrasively, “Be careful. They probably all have knives.” Similarly, WTs do not travel to neighboring communities that host events explicitly for WTs. To quote a prominent WT at VICC, “Our people don’t go over there. You have to pay to get in and they won’t do that.” During a meeting with a local law official, I said that I was studying WT communities. His response, said with pity, “Well, that’s all they can afford.” WTs are stigmatized by their more affluent WTs counterparts, like those on SPI, while local middle-class peoples feel sorry for them. As such, engaging with people outside of their VICC community could jeopardize the air of decadence they have established. By choosing to “avoid locals”, they claim a sense of control and power that might otherwise be absent, further cementing their constructed reality.

Avoidance has a great utility among WTs at VICC and they deploy it in varying ways. For some, it allows them to construct an international retirement as proclaimed by one WT standing beside a pool at VICC, “Welcome to Mexico!” For others, like Emily and Bob, a married couple who have been traveling to VICC for 20 years and my most trusted informants, they choose to ignore the visible decline in Brownsville. According to Emily, “Brownsville is the poor man’s Miami,” and the region city has experienced an economic downturn since their early travels to the region. Regardless of how WTs choose to see Brownsville, as Mexico or a worsening city, they share a common pattern of avoiding the rampant violence plaguing the city and any acknowledgement of its existence.

On numerous occasions, gunshots and police sirens could be heard in our immediate area. It was not uncommon to hear brief bursts of gunfire, squealing tires, and

sirens following shortly after. One night in particular was significantly different than anything that I had experienced at VICC, or anywhere. The sounds of automatic weapons and police sirens filled the air and raged through the night. It went on for hours. Overcome by fear and trying to avoid potential stray bullets, I laid on the floor of my small efficiency crying, cradling my dog waiting for the night to end. When the morning finally came, I went outside and it was as if the previous night's events had not occurred. Bob was outside playing with his golf putter and Emily was sitting in the house with the screen door open. They were enjoying the morning breeze. If I had not experienced the previous night's events, I would never have fathomed that such an event had occurred. I am unsure if we were in actual danger, but sounds of violence were unmistakable.

Intrigued by the serenity of the morning, I began to inquire about the previous night's events. I asked 3 people in my quadruplex about the sirens and gunshots and not one of them knew what I was talking about. Perplexed, I asked each of them – subtly at different times – if they had noise machines or devices that drown out noise. Perhaps they were all heavy sleepers, but that seems unlikely given the volume of the sirens (and gunfire)<sup>17</sup>, and the profound reluctance of each resident to discuss the topic with me. All 3 WTs that I spoke with became very hurried after I asked about the violence and had a pressing engagement that required their immediate attention. For days following the incident, each WT avoided conversations with me and I learned very quickly, like with the Border Patrol, that I had breached an invisible boundary. I became someone to be wary of and it took weeks to overcome the loss of trust that we had previously

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<sup>17</sup> The night in question was reported in local media as having been a shoot-out between drug cartels and Mexican police/military. It is unclear why Brownsville PD and U.S. officials were participating in the situation if it was in Mexico. I asked local officials and, again, received no information.

established. Conversely, I spoke with the Mexicano employees at the country club at great length about the violence. Like me, they too were terrified and stunned by the magnitude of violence that surrounded us<sup>18</sup>, and our conversations further strengthened our relationships.

I am by no means suggesting that WTs were unaware of the danger that surrounds them; it's quite the contrary. Rarely, if ever, did I see WT females outside of the company of their male counterparts. Residents do not walk or bike the grounds, unless it was on the golf course. Most residents stayed within the immediate area of their quadruplex. Like Brownsville, there is a pervasive underlying fear encompassing VICC, and WTs project that tension in different forms, although it never directly relates to the violence in the area.

Much of the fear that shrouds VICC is directed toward other VICC residents, and the Home Owners Association (HOA) that governs the property. WTs infrequently interact with one another outside of the country club's main building or the golf course, the central point of the property and primary communal spaces. When they did socialize, it was only with a very small percentage of residences. Bill and Emily have been going to VICC for over 20 years and were part of the initial population of people targeted to buy in Brownsville. Bill's employer hosted a party for VICC's builder so that they could sell condos to their employees. Many of Bill's colleagues purchased during the first wave of construction, and they knew a lot of people at VICC. Despite knowing a large number of WTs at VICC, Bill and Emily did not socialize with anyone. Bill attributed this to his inability to refrain from commenting on the deteriorating conditions of the golf

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<sup>18</sup> Two of the employees lived within a few blocks of VICC.

course. Several years before, the HOA had decided to change property management companies, and the new management was not caring for the grounds the way the previous company had. Since Bill was apt to speak out about the worsening conditions of his beloved golf course, he chose not to engage with other residents in order to avoid any potential backlash that may have befallen him for speaking against the current management company.

As mentioned in a previous chapter, the HOA was used by WT's to maintain the racial configuration of the property and was relentless in their efforts to remove "undesirable" people. Bill feared the same fate would befall him if he created enemies on the board and among leaders in the HOA. He feared the "policing mechanism" that he used to control his Tejano neighbors, whom he actively disliked upon their arrival – a perplexing position to feel empowered by something while at the same time fearing its wrath. Bill and Emily were not unique in their self-contained retirement; I did not find one WT couple that socialized regularly with others at VICC. Perhaps there were some, but I did not encounter them. People kept to themselves.

I had initially attributed the lack of social engagement to age, generational gap, cultural differences among WT's, or some unknown. During my second trip to the field, I lived on SPI and was able to discern a pattern by comparing the two populations. WT's on SPI travel freely about the island, and women and men alike can be found walking, jogging, or biking every morning along the beach and central roadways. This is completely contradictory to WT's at VICC. Aside from the golf course, the outdoor space is minimally used by anyone. SPI WT's also mingle at local restaurants and parks, as well as social events coordinated by local businesses. There is an ease, calm on the island that

is not found at VICC. The tension that surrounds VICC initially presented itself as behaviors predicated on racism. Given their hostility toward local Latino populations, and their whiteness, they believe that their racial privilege will protect them. Perhaps for some, this is the case. However, after comparing the two WT populations, the very nature of WTs behavior at VICC is self-preservation. It is an attempt to maintain the illusion of their golden retirement location. Their avoidance of the violence taken in conjunction with their avoidance of each other reinforces their construction of a golden retirement.

### 3.5 Conclusions

Destination retirement tourism is a thriving industry and experiencing an increase in potential customers with the baby boomer generation reaching retirement age. Due to the economic decline in the U.S. and fewer retirees having sufficient monies for iconic destinations, lesser-known sites like Brownsville and South Padre Island in the LRGV of South Texas have emerged to entice working-class retirees into their region. The economic conditions of the LRGV create an environment that allows working-class retirees to enjoy seasonal retirement. Without a location with a humble economy, WTs could not afford seasonal retirement, although it does come with a cost. Crime and violence often accompany poverty due to limited economic opportunities for local populations. This is especially true for the Texas/Mexico border and the drug-cartel controlled border region. Mexico's government crackdowns on the drug trade has sparked violence in the region, and a border-war rages for control of the pivot city of Brownsville, with access to the Gulf of Mexico and multiple border-crossings. Located

within an audible distance of gunfire, police sirens and the like, WTs at VICC are enjoying their golden retirement in less than desirable circumstances.

Avoidance is an essential strategy used by WTs to maintain their experience of a pleasurable retirement destination. In the face of contradictory conditions, WTs deploy avoidance as a tool to mask the ills, stigma, or people that challenge their constructed reality. In order to actively utilize avoidance, one must perform a certain persona for onlookers. WTs avoid anyone that questions their performance to ensure that their experiences remain intact. Those able to afford the more celebrated location of SPI enjoy the luxury of seasonal retirement on an island. Even within the LRGV that targets working-class retirees, there is a hierarchal system predicated on class and retirees on SPI who draw value from their greater wealth. Similarly, they recognize that their seasonal retirement destination is not an iconic location and actively reject the stigma associated with a “lesser-site.” For some, that means idealizing a remote personal property while others romanticize that they travel, as opposed to where they travel. And others, still, remain trapped in the confines of VICC and have constructed a gilded shield of sorts, enjoying the luxury of destination seasonal retirement yet unable to leave their controlled environment for fear of shattering the delicate balance of that same, celebrated travel.

## CHAPTER 4

### FRAMING AND DEFINING DIFFERENCE: LIVING AS

#### OTHERS IN THE MEXICO BORDERLAND

Historically, a colonial logic defined citizens by excluding Others, who were savages, degenerate, or not quite human. ... Meanings of borders, aliens, or citizens are not given in the nature of things but discursive productions. To make meanings that define “citizen” is a political act which has material consequences, sometimes terrible ones, in people’s lives.

Phyllis Pease Chock 1994.

This chapter interrogates state violence and the construction of the Other. By examining key modalities deployed by the nation-state in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of South Texas, the research highlights the construction of the Other through political and physical boundaries. Ethnography among local Tejano and Mexicano populations as well as analysis of local popular cultural materials were used to investigate the affects of state policies and practices. The findings showed that the increased presence of state-policing agencies negativity impacted local populations while it was simultaneously celebrated in popular media. This chapter demonstrates a contradiction between the experience of state practices and its social representation. This research will serve as a tool to better understand the impact of state policing practices in a border region.

The term “border” has become an important part of the academic lexicon and represents myriad meanings. Ranging from the geo-political boundaries of the nation-state (Andreas 2003; Gupta 1995; Judkins 2007) to mixed racial/ethnic identities (Ballinger 2004; Johnson 1997; Lipuma & Meltzoff 1997; Tamanio 2003), a border

exemplifies a multiplicity of potentials that define or defy imposed order (Chock 1994). Imposition and order each have their own significance; however, in relation to a border, imposition is understood to be an external defining process asserted upon the populace (Kyed & Burr 2006) and order is the categorization processes used to maintain power (Mehretu et al. 2000; Secor 2004). When deriving from powerful entities like the nation-state, imposition and order of a “border” does more than define national boundaries -- it defines personhood and humanity.

For border-regions like the Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV) of South Texas, a border represents multiple meanings that can be used to define a space, place, and people (Anzaldua 1987; Cintron 1997; Dorsey 2005; Limon 1994; Richardson 1999).

Anthropologists and other scholars have engaged in projects that cover various aspects of the Texas-Mexico region be it migrating Mexicanos crossing from Mexico into the U.S., to labor practices and unions in the Mexican *maquiladoras* (manufacturing facilities) located in U.S.-Mexico border towns (Aradhyula & Tronstad 2003; Bradshaw 1976; Clark 1994; Dorsey 2005; Goldrich & Carruthers 1999; May et al. 2003; Miller, Hom, & Gomez-Mejia, 2001; Mondragon & Brandon 2004; Russ 2004). Border theory, or borderlands research as it is sometimes called, has emerged from on going research of a theoretical model that seeks to understand the complexity and uniqueness of this cultural space (Alvarez 1995; Alvarez & Collier 1994; Anzaldua 1987; Ballinger 2004; Cintron 1997; Flynn 1997; Limon 1994; Meyler & Pena 2008; Perez 2003).

Similar to other regions of the world where two cultures and polities connect or intersect, the LRGV is home to a vibrant culture that represents and expresses a hybridization of Texas and Mexicano cultural forms (Anzaldua 1987; Limon 1994;



Hildago 1986). It should be noted that at different points in history (Hildago 1986), this borderland has been part of the United States and Mexico, and earlier than that, the US and the Spanish empire. The resident population has not changed, many have familial lineages to the region that date back centuries; rather, the change has been in nationality. Ethnic association has remained constant for Latinos, Tejanos specifically, residing in the predominantly “Hispanic” area. Tejanos have a colloquial saying that captures the reality of their experience, “We didn’t cross the border. The border crossed us.” For many Tejanos, the understanding of crossing moves beyond the national border into a much more complex and intimate negotiation of self that acknowledges becoming strangers in their native lands. Like Native Americans that have been marked as foreigners in their homelands, Tejanos have been captioned as “Mexicano” (Limon 1994; Richardson 1999) regardless of their personal identification and the number of generations rooted in the region.

Discussing state violence and the construction of Other through the use of borders is never an easy endeavor, nor is asking people to discuss how they are impacted by that marginalization. It is certainly a privileged place to write about another person’s experience. I could never encapsulate all that is present among local Tejanos and Mexicanos. There is a lot of love and joy among the local peoples in the face of profound hardship, prejudice, and violence. To deny that the LRGV is filled with laughter, family, and celebration is to deny Tejanos their humanity, their humanness. That is something I will not do. So they too, like the Winter Texans, are a people full of contradictions, though theirs is not one chosen -- it is imposed. And it is the imposition that is the focus of the chapter, not the people.

## 4.1 Populations

Three primary populations live in Brownsville, Texas, and surrounding communities. 1) Tejanos, the local population, are indigenous to the region and often mestizos, mixed Native American and Mexican ethnicities, whose families have resided in the region for centuries. Tejanos living in the valley, as it's colloquially referenced, are bilingual (Spanish/English), with Spanish being their first language. 2) Mexicanos, the second largest population, are peoples that have migrated, or immigrated, from the Mexican side of the border. Given Brownsville's proximity to Matamoros and the migration/immigration laws that historically governed the region, it is not uncommon for Mexicanos from Matamoros, to have family living in the valley, and/or possess dual citizenship – Mexico and U.S. Mexicanos without familial ties to the region travel to Brownsville for myriad reasons (e.g., shopping, vacationing, work) and remain in the valley, or beyond, for hours, days, or years depending upon the intent of their trip. Some Mexicanos have legal documentation to be in the U.S. and others do not. 3) Winter Texans (WTs), as they are colloquially referred, are seasonal, migrating, retirees from the Midwestern United States and southern Canada that reside throughout the region during the winter months. The WT population is predominantly white<sup>19</sup>, and a significant percentage of the population derives from a working/lower-middle class economic

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<sup>19</sup> I observed one black man participating in the daily activities of the WTs during my research. There were likely more people of color in the WT population, although I did not encounter them.

background, with participants earning, at the peak of their lifetime annual wages, less than \$80,000 annually in a dual-income household<sup>20</sup>.

## 4.2 Methods

During my research, I aimed to answer two primary questions: 1) how does the nation-state impose differential treatment of citizens on the landscape; and 2) how does that imposition of Other manifest itself among WT's treatment of Tejanos, and subsequently, Tejanos' responses. I chose to conduct the research in Brownsville, Texas, because of the region's economic condition, location, and local populations. The valley experiences a large influx of WT's during the winter months due to seasonal, U.S. domestic migration. These vacationers, for the most part, originate from the Midwestern, U.S., with a small percentage from southern Canada, and have varying degrees of economic capital and affiliation with the region. The convergence of WT's into the predominantly Latino region creates a unique landscape in that 1) the WT population is the ethnic, cultural, and racial minority; 2) they are temporary residents and have little to no relationship to the region beyond vacationing; 3) the social and economic landscape has been constructed to entice WT's into the area; and 4) the poverty and violence plaguing the region allows for an interrogation of avoidance strategies created by and for WT's to maintain the luxury of destination retirement.

Over two winter seasons, I lived in Brownsville at Valley International Country Club (VICC), for 7 months and in South Padre Island (SPI) for 4 weeks. Each situation involves different Winter Texan retirement communities. I lived with two different WT

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<sup>20</sup> There is variability to the \$80,000 annual income, with some making more money and others making significantly less. This number is an approximate mean. Similarly, not all WT's lived in a dual-income home.

communities in order to compare my findings from each community (Montero 2011). My initial research at VICC created questions that required further interrogation, and I believe that a comparison between two WT communities would better serve to explain events at VICC (Rosaldo 1993). This, ultimately, has proven successful in that the two WT populations had extremely different social patterns, even though they shared a comparable – although notably different economic background<sup>21</sup>. While studying the WTs, it became apparent that their behavior toward Tejanos was due to, in part, the nation-state's imposition of Other onto the local population.

I utilize a number of anthropological methods to gather data including ethnography, participant observation, analysis of popular culture materials, and interviews. I immersed myself among my participants in order to build rapport, and establish relationships with individuals who would later become informants (Geertz 1988; Jackson 2010; Svenden 2006). I conducted informal interviews with approximately 35 retirees – both men and women – ranging in age from 65-75 years, and documented the conversations with handwritten notes (Benard 2011). Due to some informants' distrust of technology, I chose not to tape record conversations out of respect for my participants. Some discussions took place in social settings with up to 10 participants, while other interviews were conducted one-on one (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). My aim during these informal interviews was to learn how they perceived

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<sup>21</sup> Wintering on SPI costs approximately 25% percent more than at VICC. This is a significant price differentiation under any circumstance; however, when considering the to cost differential it should be noted that Motel 6 on SPI costs \$29.99 a night, and Motel 6 in Brownsville costs \$23.99. Long term, temporary housing is similarly priced with Value America costing \$179.99 a week on SPI, and \$139.99 a week in Brownsville. The prices do change based on the season, as does the tax rate for each area. The tax rate also varies, but the vacationers are considered residents after thirty consecutive days and do not pay taxes on their housing.

themselves as seasonal retirees from “other places” in relation to the area and local people. In addition to these one-on-one interviews, I spent time talking to groups of retirees in order to learn more about how they viewed their retirement at VICC and South Padre Island, and to see how they related to each other (Handwerker 2002; Susser 2010). I also participated in countless informal conversations with local Tejanos and Mexicanos that were employed in the service industry’s establishments frequented by Winter Texans (DeVault 1995; Geertz 1973; Tsing 2005). Three participants from the local communities became trusted informants, and I had many in depth conversations with them about how they interpreted state policing and militarization of their communities (Gutpa 1995). Informant data coupled with observation were used to interpret the social environment and behavioral patterns of participants (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). In addition, I examined numerous popular media sources, government websites, and official documents as part of my ethnography of the state (Gutpa 1995). My goal was to create a multitier examination, gathering data from numerous sources in order to answer my primary questions.

#### 4.3 Literature Review

The nation-state is a modern age phenomena predicated on defining power through borders. It has been argued that the 1922 League of Nations agreement solidified the nation-state as the universal political form on the planet. A defining hallmark of the nation-state is full, flat, and even application of law (Biolsi 2005). Differential treatment among peoples and issues of sovereignty and rights accompany the legality of the nation-state. US slavery and Jim Crow south are prime examples of disparate actions, or inaction, of the nation-state to protect its peoples. “This is a case in which the nation-state

purposely declined to exercise full, flat, and even jurisdiction over space, at least as far as some of its ‘citizens’ were concerned” (Biolsi 2005: 240-241). Since there is a history of unequal treatment of people based on race, we understand that the nation-state is a hegemonic force that shifts its parameters to privilege some while marginalizing, and subsequently constructing, Others (Biolsi 2005; Gilbert 1998; Johnson 1997; Novkov 2008).

Citizenship is foundational for the nation-state and used as a mechanism for defining and dispensing rights. According to Phyllis Pease Chock (1994), what constitute the attributes of a citizen and who is allowed to be a citizen is defined by a powerful dominant white majority. Citizenship is synonymous to personhood in that persons without legal status, or marked as Other, are criminals by definition and denied basic services (e.g., health care, education, housing, etc.) available to legal residents (Secor 2004). In the US, government and popular culture conversations about citizenship are utilized to legitimize the current status quo and “immigrant myth,” an immigrant as a class-less, culture-less, gender-less, race-less person that is able to ascend the social and economic hierarchy by hard work and dedication – establishing their personhood and good moral character (Chock 1994; Johnson 1997). While describing the 1980s immigration reform debate in the US, Chock (1994) argues that, “[I]t recalls the enduring dilemmas of ‘race’ used as a term with which to make social partitions... [in that] legislators’ quandary was how to create legal terms which unambiguously included persons and excluded non-persons” (47, 49). Anyone unable to achieve the success of the “myth” is less than human and deemed undeserving of citizenship. The Immigration Reform Control Act of 1986 granted amnesty and legal residence to persons of good

moral character and imposed employer sanctions, “extend[ing] surveillance of persons by the state to employers, who adjudicate employees’ personhood” (Chock 1994: 49). The subsequent law did not examine or account for systems of oppression. These systems socially limit the ability of marginalized populations’ ability to ascend the social hierarchy due to stigma and social inequalities (Chock 1994; Johnson 1997; Secor 2004). Similarly, the system moved partial responsibility of monitoring citizens from the nation-state to the employer, transferring state functions to corporations.

Aihwa Ong (1999; 2006) describes the outsourcing of state functions to privately held companies as graduated sovereignty. Graduated sovereignty creates buffered zones of citizenship that afford citizens of a nation-state different rights based on their location and governing entity – a private company or the nation-state (Ong 1999; Powell 2008). Ong’s focus of graduated sovereignty is the developing economies of Asia, and Southeast Asia; however, her concept is pertinent to the LRGV in so far as multiple policing zones and international border-crossings have been established throughout the region (Spener 2009). The emergence of homeland security, a governing entity established after 9/11, and the increased presence of border patrol throughout the region has altered the social and physical landscape of the area. According to Ong (2007), “... in emerging non-Western contexts, the strategy of governing and self-governing is not uniformly applied to all groups and domains within a nation” (4). Given the resident population of the LRGV and the historical use of race to define citizenship in the U.S., it becomes imperative to interrogate the nation-state’s use of governmental subsidiaries that have independent operational budgets, power, and ambiguous agendas to police the borders and citizens.

#### 4.4 Findings

The Brownsville-Matamoros border-crossing is a towering, maze-like series of structures that straddle the Rio Grande River. A walk-able/drivable bridge crossing over the riverbed connects the two cities, and countries. Seemingly, the bridge carries persons over an unclaimed segment of land that has no nationality or affiliation. The degree of surveillance scrutinizing the people using the border-crossing is daunting by any measure, with fencing, barbed wire, and armed guards waiting for bridge crossers on either side of the border (IMAGE 5). U.S. Customs and Border Patrol agents – in their hallmark white and green sport utility vehicles – sit in wait for any potential transgressors of the border security who choose to circumvent the nation-states’ watchful gaze (Image 6). Yet in the face of the many looming government agents and structures, people cross over daily. There is a constant flow of people moving “freely” between the two countries in order to visit loved ones, shop, or to work for the day. Often, a brave soul challenges the policing structures of the nation-state and climbs through the riverbed in order to avoid one side of the crossing. I cannot speak to why they are avoiding one side of the patrolled border; however, it happens frequently and no one, pedestrian or motorist, acknowledges the “fence hopping.”<sup>22</sup> The local population, separated by the border, ban together against the imposition of the difference forced upon their person and use silence to make a declarative statement about allegiance (Goffman 1981).

Tejanos and Mexicanos have family and friends on both sides of the border. As previously stated, Tejanos have a colloquial saying in the LRGV, and beyond, that captures their experience, “We didn’t cross the border; the border crossed us.” A sense

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<sup>22</sup> I saw at least one person “fence hop” each time that I crossed the border, which is well over 50 trips.



of community exists between Tejanos living in Brownsville and Matamoros, even though they now live in different countries. It is not uncommon to find one generation of people being born in the U.S. and raising their children on the Mexico side, or visa versa. Although functionally bilingual in English and Spanish, Spanish remains the first language for Tejanos on both sides of the border and cultural practices span generations, rooted in a long shared history (Anzaldua 1987; Limon 1994; Dorsey 2005). Tejanos on both sides of the border express their frustration with the increased patrols of the border, highway systems, and US communities in the border region<sup>23</sup>.

Heightened criminalization and surveillance of the LRGV followed the 9/11 attacks on the U.S. and the economic collapse of 2007-2008. Overwhelming popular national rhetoric argued for an increased vigilance patrolling our national borders from “terrorists” and “illegal aliens,” terms that became synonymous in dominant discourse (National Review). Political pundits and elected officials alike demanded more money for additional security measures to keep “illegal aliens” from “nuclear bombing” U.S. communities (Republicans in Their Own Words). Countless suggestions were offered from myriad sources, including the 2008 Presidential campaign, about how to best interrupt the “wave of illegal aliens” (Examiner; Free Republic; Front page Mag) fleeing the U.S. public welfare systems, collapsing the economy and posing a threat to national security (CIS; Examiner; Stand with Arizona). The culmination of fear, scapegoating, and xenophobia resulted in the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security, the creation of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), increased monies for

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<sup>23</sup> The Tejano community living in Mexico will not be discussed.

U.S. Customs and Border Patrol, and the construction of additional fencing and barriers between the U.S. and Mexico – all of which were imposed on the residents of the LRGV.

Multiple compounds were built in the LRGV to support the newly established heightened security initiatives of the nation-state. Located within 500 yards of one of the three border-crossings in Brownsville, the Department of Homeland Security has a sprawling location that is comprised of a massive building, acres of fenced land, and weigh stations for 18-wheel trucks. Vehicles hauling materials to and from Mexico are required to use this border-crossing, and Homeland Security performs a second inspection of the vehicles as they enter the U.S. The first inspection is conducted at the actual international border, and a second check is conducted within 500 yards. Similarly, a second international border-crossing is located in the town of Sarita, Texas, some 85 miles north of the U.S.-Mexico border (IMAGE 7). Patrolled by U.S. Customs and Border Patrol, all passers through must submit to a vehicle inspection, demonstrate proof of citizenship, and allow drug-sniffing dogs to inspect their vehicles. Thirty-eight internal checkpoints are currently in operation along the U.S.-Mexico border, three of which are in the LRGV. The internal checkpoints were historically mobile stations that would intermittently relocate to different points along the highway system in order to adhere to laws that required that they be non-permanent structures (Spener 2009). With the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, the internal checkpoints have become permanent locations that not only inspect any person and vehicle leaving the LRGV, they now monitor and record, via mounted cameras, all vehicles entering the LRGV (US Border Patrol).

The extension of surveillance of the nation-state from the international border to secondary locations throughout the LRGV demonstrates graduated sovereignty on the landscape in so far as citizens living in the LRGV are subject to differential treatment due to their location. Internal checkpoints only exist within 100 miles of the U.S.-Mexico border, and no other citizens of the nation-state are subject to secondary inspection, even those living in the Northern border region with Canada. Because Latinos are the predominant population of people living in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, they are subject to a racialized criminalization of the person by the nation-state. Moreover, there is no record documenting the construction or existence of the Department of the Homeland Security compound in Brownsville. Likewise, the Sarita border-crossing does not exist on official documents in the city registry or government records (Border Patrol; Kenedy County Texas; Texas State Historical Association). According to official paperwork and government websites (US Homeland Security), the Sarita border-crossing is located in the city of Kingsville, some 15 miles away north of Sarita, and home to the newly constructed 500,000 sq ft U.S. Customs and Border Patrol station (Harlingen News). By imposing a second international border-crossing, the nation-state has militarized the 85 mile stretch of land between the two border-crossings with numerous policing agencies and have, subsequently, inscribed Other on the people living in the LRGV. Furthermore, the residents live in a militarized area and the information about their experience of this is being hidden or falsely represented<sup>24</sup>, another layer of violence. As such, it further disenfranchises Tejanos and gives credence to WTs treating them as a foreign Other.

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<sup>24</sup> The deception about the existence or location of these two facilities could serve to increase the effectiveness of the patrols and searches; however, would-be criminals

Given that WTs segregated themselves, WTs and Tejanos most frequently interact in the service industry sector. Early in my fieldwork, I spent a significant amount of time searching for parking lots that had large numbers of out of state license plates. After a few weeks of this strategy, I realized that -- people gravitate toward the familiar -- especially in new communities, and large numbers of WTs could be found in large discount chain stores like Big Lots, Dollar Tree, Dollar General, and the like. I focused my early research in chain stores and eventually befriended an employee (Pseudonym: Marie) in a Brownsville location. Marie said that she was treated poorly, “all of the time” by WTs, but tried to ignore it.

I had the sad fortune to witness an incident with a WT asking about the store’s return policy and the less than subtle difference imposed on my friend. The WT, after announcing that she was from Oklahoma, asked about the return policy for the \$10 toaster that she was purchasing. She wanted to know if she could take it back in Oklahoma, since “She was not from here and was only here for a few months.” She was staying in her RV at a local RV park and was not sure if the toaster would work. After explaining the store’s return policy and stating that any of the sister chain stores would accept her return, Marie returned to the register to continue checking out customers. The WT reinserted herself and insisted that, “She was not from here!” and again, questioned if an Oklahoma store would accept a return from Brownsville. Patiently, Marie explained, again, that Big Lots is the same company, regardless of its location, and that they would honor her return. This dance around store policy continued for several minutes, and Marie repeated, numerous times, the same statement, “It’s the same store regardless of

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already know the location of the permanent inspection stations. This begs the question: what purpose does it serve to mask this information?

location. And they will take your return as long as you have a receipt.” The WT’s inquiry was not about the \$10 toaster; it was about announcing herself, and imposing Other. The WT remained skeptical of Marie’s information throughout the exchange and continued to insist on her difference from Brownsville, the local populations, and the store that she was shopping in.

While at a restaurant on SPI, the epicenter of affluent WTs, I watched a waiter deploy a skillful defense mechanism against the WTs violence. This young waiter would approach WTs in his section and greet each of them speaking French. He exclusively spoke French to WTs, and would switch languages when introducing the daily restaurant specials. By speaking French, he transformed the Other imposed on him from a Spanish speaking Mexicano into a different embodiment, Other. He was asserting autonomy over who defines him, and challenged WTs imposed Othering before it began. During one particular conversation with WTs, this young waiter, after discussing very intelligently at great length the environmental side effects of the Gulf oil spill, responded to the patron’s question about carcinogens by asking what the term meant. He said that he didn’t know the term because “I’m just a dumb Mexican.” He was pushing against the notion of ignorance and sameness imposed on his person because he was “a Mexican,” a phrase that has become associated with derogatory connotations. His keenly honed defense strategies worked against racism/hatred that he was anticipating. It could be argued he was cultivating his own experience given his defensive stance. Since he was anticipating social violence, his preemptive defensiveness created discomfort in the WTs causing them to react aggressively. It could also be argued that he had created this guise in order to distance himself from the years of violence he experienced as a Tejano living in the

borders. The constant onslaught of violence encouraged him to cultivate an alter self, if you will, that he performs when interacting with WTs so that they do not engage his primary sense of self; rather, just the performance.

#### 4.5 Conclusions

State violence and the construction of Other can take myriad forms. By interrogating U.S. Customs and Border Patrol internal checkpoints and the Department of Homeland Security compound in the LRGV, this research brings to light the use of government agencies to establish differential treatment of U.S. citizens within the United States. It demonstrates how the nation-state imposes violence on the landscape through physical and political boundaries. Through the use of structural violence, the nation-state inscribes Other on the residents of the LRGV by creating a militarized zone between the international border with Mexico, and the secondary border-crossing 85 miles north. The individuals within that militarized area are subject to surveillance and scrutiny from several policing agencies, thus imposing a criminalization to the Other'ed Tejanos of the LRGV. Moreover, pundits and government officials argued for the increased monitoring and patrolling of the U.S.-Mexico border claiming that Latino immigrants were causing the downturn in the U.S. economy.

Due to the nation-state's imposition of Other and the pundits and governmental scapegoating of Latino immigrants, the LRGV residents bear the brunt of the social and state violence. The existence of structural compounds used to monitor the LRGV are hidden, or their locations are disguised. Not only is the nation-state engaging the citizens of the LRGV differently from other U.S. citizens, it is willfully misleading or masking the information that details how they are being Other'ed. Drawing credibility from the

nation-state, WTs associating with local residents, demand to be recognized as “different,” equating Tejanos with a foreign, lesser Other. As a response, Tejanos living in the LRGV have created defense mechanisms to shield themselves from the long established violent difference being imposed on their persons as exemplified by the waiter.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

The study was set up to interrogate how race, ethnicity, and whiteness function as capital used to access goods and services. The study also aimed to examine the social construction of retirement as an impetus for migrating to a potentially dangerous region plagued by drug-violence, and to investigate how the nation-state participates in creating and disfranchising marginalized populations. The general literature on the subject is developing, although it is limited in reference to the domestic migration of working-class retirees, and several vital questions require further inquiry. The project sought to answer these questions:

1. How are the definitions of social and cultural capital expanded from a traditional understanding into a more nuanced approach that recognizes the current moment of people's mobility and globalization? Additionally, how does knowledge of a "valued" culture (e.g., U.S. white culture) become a form of currency?
2. How do Winter Texans negotiate their relationship with the increasing border violence in the region?
3. Although a majority of Winter Texas are from lower middle-class/working class backgrounds, there are variations in the amounts of spendable monies that they possess. How do Winter Texans negotiate their class background when confronted with other Winter Texans from more affluent socioeconomic backgrounds? And how do they navigate the poverty and violence that surrounds their "golden retirement" location?



4. Given the effect of Western tourism on international communities of color, how do local Tejanos and Mexicanos – who are American citizens – negotiate the increased racial tension with the influx of Winter Texans?

### 5.1 Findings

The primary findings are chapter specific and summarized within the respective chapters:

1) Compound Communities: Fortifying Socio-Economic and Racial Barriers within Border Towns; 2) “A Poor Man’s Miami”: Blue-Collar Tourism on the Turbulent Mexico Border; and 3) Framing and Defining Difference: Living as Others within the US. This section will synthesize the main finding to answer the project’s four central questions.

1. How are the definitions of social and cultural capital expanded from a traditional understanding into a more nuanced approach that recognizes the current moment of people’s mobility and globalization? Additionally, how does knowledge of a “valued” culture (e.g., US white culture) become a form of currency?

A. Due to increased human mobility, social and cultural capital was once site specific and now expands or retracts depending upon the location where the capital is being used.

Retirees leave their sending communities as working-class seniors and arrive in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV) as Winter Texans, acquiring social capital through the network of other Winter Texans and cultural capital by relocating to a community of color and being “Winter Texans,” which also holds symbolic capital. Given the prominence of white US imperialism, race, whiteness, and ethnocentrism became spendable commodities for Winter Texans upon their relocation to the LRGV. Because local Tejanos are bi-cultural and bilingual in a border region, the nation-state treats their communities differently than other US citizens, and Winter Texans use this signal from

the nation-state to demand that their whiteness and US white culture has value, and therefore should have increased access to goods and services.

2. How do Winter Texans negotiate their relationship with the increasing border violence in the region?

B. Very simply. Denial. Winter Texans actively avoid acknowledging the violence that surrounds them. If they were to become aware of the omnipresent threat that is around them, then they would need to rethink their decision to migrate seasonally to the LRGV. In turn, this would challenge their constructed “golden retirement”, and the years that they have traveled to the region. Moreover, it would call into question the years of dedication and sacrifice required to save enough money to retire seasonally, even to the LRGV. It is easier to ignore the violence than to confront one’s life choices, or limited life choices.

3. Although a majority of Winter Texas are from lower middle-class/working class backgrounds, there are variations in the amounts of spendable monies that they possess. How do Winter Texans negotiate their class background when confronted with other Winter Texans from more affluent socioeconomic backgrounds? And how do they navigate the poverty and violence that surrounds their “golden retirement” location?

C. Avoidance. Both questions are answered in that one word. Winter Texans from lower-socioeconomic backgrounds consciously choose to avoid Winter Texans that are more affluent. Since Winter Texans acquire new capital when they arrive in the LRGV, evidence showed that some Winter Texans abuse other people with that capital, including other Winter Texans. As such, Winter Texans from variant economic backgrounds rarely interacted, at least publically. Similarly, if Winter Texans are living among local

populations, like those at VICC, they avoid leaving their immediate locations. In doing this, they are making a deliberate decision to remain in their communities and refrain from contact with the local populations, unless they are seeking goods or services. If they have alternative properties in different locations, Winter Texans identify with the more notable retirement locations and avoid identifying with the “lesser” LRGV. This avoids the economic condition that requires their seasonal retirement to the LRGV, a condition dependent on the revenue from the property in the notable location.

4. Given the effect of Western tourism on international communities of color, how do local Tejanos and Mexicanos – who are American citizens – negotiate the increasing racial tension associated with the influx of Winter Texans?

D. Since the local population cannot self-segregate through use of governance like the Winter Texans, they have developed defense mechanisms that help them survive violence. When possible, local populations choose not to live in Winter Texan communities as a means of escaping the structural violence wielded by governing bodies. The social violence occurs more often in Tejanos workplaces, and they deploy varying strategies to deflect the violence. Given the place of employment, some use the structural “sameness” of large, commercial businesses to highlight Winter Texans’ behaviors as purely performative and without substance. This allows for patience and personal distance in that the employee is able to demonstrate to the Winter Texan that there is no difference, despite Winter Texan demands to be recognized as such. Conversely, some Tejanos challenge Winter Texans by directly contradicting preconceived notions of “sameness” imposed on them. By speaking intelligently on complex subjects and in multiple languages, they disrupt the flat, singular interpretation Winter Texans impose on

Tejanos. A verbalized, derogatory stereotype imposed on Tejanos, and Mexicanos, they are bringing to light the hidden nature of whiteness and racial violence, making the Winter Texans accountable for their unspoken privilege, and exposing social violence.

## 5.2 Theoretical

The theoretical cases for social and cultural capital in conjunction with white US domestic migration need further investigation in order to increase our understanding about how it functions in communities of color. Additionally, research examining US retirees needs greater focus given the “baby-boomer” generation reaching retirement age.

Social and cultural capital operate outside of the monetary system, yet are part of a currency structure assigned to readable patterns and behaviors (Bourdieu 1984). This framework suggests that social and cultural capitals are spendable commodities that can be used to access resources. It is noted from this study that the dominant white US culture and race became a currency for those possessing them when immersed in a community of color. These cultural capitals were used to create, access, and maintain exclusive spaces within the LRGV, and enabled white only enclaves to develop and thrive. The existence of white segregated communities within a largely Latino demographic speaks to the overwhelming power and control that racism and whiteness have in the US. Moreover, the governmental structures used by Winter Texans to secure their spaces mirrors that of the internal checkpoints established by the nation-state. If we understand that the nation-state establishes laws that govern and define citizenship, which means access to rights, then we can interpret the HOA at VICC as doing much the same thing in that the HOA is functioning as a gatekeeper that either secures rights to VICC or denies them. Barth (1969) asserts that ethnic identities become more salient in

borderlands, or spaces with fluid boundaries, due to an inclusion/exclusion process.

Cohen (1985) describes that process as the symbolic construction of community in that individuals use boundaries to validate their identities.

The framework for performance studies suggests that actors project an idealized performance when confronted with an audience of observer (Goffman 1959). This study's findings support that argument in that Winter Texans denied or avoided events or persons that would challenge their idealized performance of "golden retirement." Surrounded by overwhelming evidence that opposes the idyllic conception of "golden retirement," Winter Texans opted to disengage from their environment, and each other, in order to maintain the illusion of grandeur and decadence that accompanies seasonal, traveled retirement. Lesser known are the conversations that were had privately among Winter Texans couples that, perhaps, discussed the violence that surrounded them. Even still, beyond privacy and in the gaze of onlookers, Winter Texans performed a flawless projection of self-indulgence in the face of contradictory conditions. Aside from the omnipresent violence that surrounds them, Winter Texans have limited monies and are mocked for their tight-fisted financial practices. Given that they need to save money before spending, the financial resources necessary for the "lavish" spending required to retire seasonally to the LRGV necessitates years of dedication, discipline, and strict budgeting. As part of a habituated practice, Winter Texan's greatest expenditure was cultural capital in its most perfected performance. Winter Texans avoided contact with people and places where those capitals were devalued or held no value.

The theoretical framework about stigma and performance suggests that individual acknowledgement of one's own stigmatization does not disway or alleviate contempt

(Goffman 1963). Evidence noted in this study supports this argument in so far as Tejanos are aware and discuss their marginalized status yet voice frustration at the experience.

### 5.3 Future direction and direction of further research

The scale of this inquiry is multifaceted and extensive. More case studies examining these phenomena variant settings are required for further investigation into the evolution of social and cultural capital. Exploring the following future research strategies can help develop a greater understanding:

- What are the conditions of the Winter Texans sending communities? How has their primary living experience influenced their retirement performance? How do Winter Texans present their seasonal retirement to members of their sending communities, and what stories do they tell upon their return?

It is important to understand the communities that the Winter Texans come from in order to fully interrogate their social performance while in the LRGV. Cultural patterns vary by region, and Winter Texans are coming from multiple locations within the US and Canada. Understanding how they use their social and cultural capital in their sending communities will highlight variations that may arise based on their new location, and newly acquired Winter Texan social capital. The reports about their experience to family and friends will bring forward an additional dynamic of performance in that they are creating an image of their “golden retirement” for a new audience of observers. I am curious to know how they are representing themselves, and their seasonal retirement.

- Do Winter Texans view themselves as two separate identities? By that, do they understand themselves as one person in their sending communities and someone

else in the LRGV? Are they experiencing a rite of passage with their seasonal migration? If so, how does the process transform their understanding of themselves and their experience?

Shifting from production into purely consumption, Winter Texans are moving through a life phase that has been cultivated by social messaging to be a celebration of consumption. It is important to note how migration is participating in Winter Texans interpretation of changing life phases and to what degree it influences their sense of self. Moreover, examining how Winter Texans view their migration in the broader scheme of life will further our understanding about their movement, memory, and sense of self.

- Given that Winter Texans project immunity to the violence surrounding them, I would be curious to know how many of them have been victims of violence in the LRGV.

The statistical data on violence will show if Winter Texans are in fact as immune to violence as they project. If Winter Texans are experiencing significantly less violence than local populations, then I would interrogate what factors were participating in their greater security. Is whiteness operating as a shield protecting Winter Texans from harm, or are there other events intersecting to create a barrier? If they are not exempt from the violence, then I would further examine what purpose it serves for them to project safety when they are victims of crime. I would need to directly survey Winter Texans about their experiences as victims of crime since local law enforcement does not collect data on Winter Texans, or their communities.

- How does medical tourism influence Winter Texans decision to travel to the LRGV, and how does that impact their conception of “golden retirement”? Do they avoid discussion of their medical needs and financial dependency on discount medications from Mexico like they do other experiences that challenge their performance? How does that related to the Canadians who theoretically have access to inexpensive medication under a national health care system? Are they seeking services, medication, or, perhaps, not participating in medical tourism?

Given the pharmacies that dot the Mexico border-communities and the documented phenomena of medical tourism, I would investigate how medical tourism was contributing to the allure for Winter Texans traveling to the LRGV. I would also aim to examine the economic and social impact of medical tourism on the neighboring Mexicano communities. Due to the high number of pharmacies on the Mexico side of the border, one can speculate that medical tourists are successfully bringing their illegally purchased medications into the US. I would investigate how social and cultural capital are participating in Winter Texans bringing their illegally purchased medications back into the US given the high degree of scrutiny and surveillance at the border-crossings.

- What purpose does it serve to hide the locations of the multiple government compounds constructed in the LRGV?

Since the buildings are permanent structures and the locations are known to local populations and criminal elements, the need to disguise the compounds is called into question insofar as the criminal element – people the nation-state



purport to monitor – already know that they are there. The disguising of the locations is not about the criminal element, but something else. And it is that something else that would be the focus of further inquiry.

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