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Honors Thesis

EXPLORING THE BORDER IDENTITY OF THE RESIDENTS OF AMBOS
NOGALES: A PILOT STUDY

By
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Submitted to Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment of graduation requirements
for University Honors

Sociology Department
Brigham Young University
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ABSTRACT

EXPLORING THE BORDER IDENTITY OF THE RESIDENTS OF AMBOS NOGALES: A PILOT STUDY

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Bachelor of Science

This thesis is a mixed-methods pilot study seeking to explore Border Identity among the residents of Ambos Nogales. Border Identity is a concept that has been widely debated in Border Studies yet is still under-researched. This thesis adds to the existing literature by conducting survey and interview analyses to determine the essential characteristics that make up Border Identity in today's political climate. It also serves as a pilot study meant to encourage further research on the Border and Border people. This thesis provides important suggestions for future Border research and amplifies the voices of the Residents of Nogales.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title	i
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgments	v
Table of Contents	vii
List of Tables and Figures	xi
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>History of the Border</i>	<i>3</i>
1821-1836: Mexico Independence and Texas Revolution.....	3
1845-1846: Mexican-American War.....	4
1854: Gadsden Purchase and Early Nogales	5
1918: Battle of Ambos Nogales	7
Nogales 1940s to Today.....	8
<i>Border Identity</i>	<i>17</i>
The Border and Border People	17
Border Identity	19
<i>Methods</i>	<i>21</i>
Study Design	22
Questionnaire	23
Interview	25
Field Work Operations.....	27
<i>Results</i>	<i>27</i>
Descriptive Results.....	28
Cross-tabulation Analysis for Sense of Border Identity.....	31
Interview Analysis.....	33
<i>Conclusion</i>	<i>44</i>
<i>References</i>	<i>49</i>

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Exhibit A in Rodriguez v. Swartz	13
Figure 2: Clothing and shoe caught on wire	14
Table 1.1: Statistical measures of demographic information for participants in the Nogales Border Identity Survey.....	29
Table 1.2: Statistical measures of demographic information and strength of identity factors for participants in the Nogales Border Identity Survey, 2023	30-31
Table 1.3: Cross-tabulation analysis on perceived sense of Border Identity and frequency crossing the Border in the Nogales Border Identity Survey, 2023.....	32
Table 1.4: Cross-tabulation analysis on perceived sense of Border Identity and Impact of Nationality and Ethnicity in the Nogales Border Identity Survey, 2023.....	33

Introduction

A few feet from the international Border between the United States and Mexico, families filled Nelson Street to watch the 25-minute 4th of July parade organized by the City of Nogales, Arizona. Nogales residents dressed in red, white, and blue readied themselves to combat the 103° heat anticipated to arrive soon. The parade consisted of typical small-town showstoppers: big trucks pulling decorated caravans, beauty pageant winners, and appearances from local veterans, police, and firefighters. The condensed crowd welcomed and cheered for their local community heroes. Standing among the crowd, I couldn't help but notice the steady claps, occasional honks, and the song "Party in the USA" surrounding Nogales's typically quieter streets. The parade occurred in downtown Nogales, where the once-lined streets with colorful storefronts now featured dark windows, steel roll-up doors, and "For Sale" signs.

Despite this, the streets were filled with children eagerly waving and scrambling to catch the candies being thrown at them, parents shielding their kids from the sun, and friends greeting each other while watching the stream of trucks decorated with American flags drive by. In almost any other US town, this behavior would have been expected on the morning of the 4th of July. However, most other towns don't have a 30-foot steel wall decorated with razor-sharp concertina wire cutting through them. Nor do most parades feature two U.S. Border Patrol agents on horses marching their way through a crowd of mixed reactions.

Nogales, Arizona, located in Santa Cruz County, is the home of a little less than 20,000 people, a population that has been slowly decreasing over the last few years (United States Census Bureau). Its crown jewels included the grocery store Food City,

the historic downtown scattered with the few surviving small businesses, and the Mariposa Shopping Center, which houses local favorites like Marshalls and Ross. Other than shopping, there is little to do in Nogales. No news outlet would have heard of it if Nogales were in any other state or just a bit further north. Yet, Nogales, Arizona, has reached news stardom because of its infamous sister city, Nogales, Sonora, found on the other side of the US-Mexico Border wall.

In many ways, Nogales, Sonora is the exact opposite of Nogales, Arizona. Nogales, Sonora experienced a 20.2% increase in population from 2010, bringing the total to 264,782 people in 2020 (Gobierno de México, n.d.). Nogales, Sonora is also significantly bigger than its American sister city, occupying 647 mi² of land compared to 20.83 mi² (Rosales, 2009; Nogales, USA). Unlike the dwindling downtown of Nogales, Arizona, the Mexican side has a booming downtown area that includes people selling *elotes* and *tostilocos*, countless shops and restaurants, and a street full of vendors ready to spring on tourists.

The people of Ambos Nogales (ambos meaning “both” in Spanish and commonly used to refer to both Nogales, Sonora, and Nogales, Arizona) are often excluded from discussions surrounding the Border. Known as Border People or *Fronterizos*, residents of Ambos Nogales are frequently characterized as straddling in-betweeners who find themselves adapting, creating, and transporting new cultures and ideas between both sides of the wall. Thus, the people of Ambos Nogales can transcend borders.

Living on the outskirts of two different countries, the people of Ambos Nogales are often forgotten in research. As citizens of a community divided by an international Border, the unique lifestyle and interactions of Ambos Nogales drew me to this

population. In an attempt to amplify the voices and experiences of the residents of Ambos Nogales, I conducted a mixed methods study to understand Border people and the critical factors that make up their identity. Specifically, this study explores the complex realities of Border Identity and its influences on the population of Ambos Nogales. More so, this study serves as a pilot study to encourage further research.

The structure of this study is outlined as follows: First, a general summary of key concepts that help contextualize life in Ambos Nogales. This is followed by a literature review of the existing discussion surrounding the Border, Border people, and Border Identity. Third, the study design and data collection techniques will be described. Key results from the survey and short-form interviews will then be shared. Finally, this study will discuss the results and convey limitations to aid future research.

History of the Border

The following section provides a general summary of important events that have influenced the socio-political creation of the Border, particularly in Ambos Nogales. Slightly over 200 years of history is unique in such studies. However, it provides context for life on the Border, the relationship between both communities and the impact that legislation from both countries has had on this community.

1821-1836: Mexico Independence and Texas Revolution

Following the Mexican War of Independence, 1821 marked the year that Mexico was liberated from Spain. The triumphant achievement resulted in an expansion of Mexico's territories, encompassing Northern Mexico and what is now the Southwestern United States (Schlereth, 2014) As a newly independent country establishing its government, Mexico was particularly vulnerable, causing them to allow Anglo

Americans to begin to fill in its new and less inhabited territories. Modern-day Texas was among the areas where Anglo Americans began to settle due to its cheap land and policy which protected indebted people from being returned to the United States (Henson, 2021).

The Mexican government attempted to maintain control over the new settlers by requiring them to learn Spanish and convert to Catholicism; however, these new settlers rejected their conditions (Keller, 2016). In 1828, Mexican General Manuel de Mier y Teran reported that Anglo Americans outnumbered Mexicans 10 to 1 in Eastern Texas. Sensing tension and a growing revolution, General Teran advised Mexico to take action. On October 2, 1835, the escalating conflict between the Mexican government and Texas finally reached its breaking point. The six-month-long revolution ended with Texas gaining its independence from Mexico and petitioning to be annexed by the United States government (Keller, 2016; Reichstein, 1989). The Texas Revolution initiated the long and complicated history of the United States and Mexico fighting over the Border and its disputed lands. While Texas wasn't officially annexed by the United States until 1845, the tension between Mexico and the United States had already been ignited and would continue to build.

1845-1846: Mexican-American War

The often glanced-over and forgotten Mexican-American War forever changed the course of both countries, as it defined the US-Mexico Border and led to approximately 115,000 people becoming American citizens by conquest (Montoya, 2016). After Texas formally became a state in 1845, the United States and Mexico now had to dispute their official border. The United States claimed the Rio Grande as their

border, while Mexico fought back and stated that the border went up to the Nueces River, a few miles north of the Rio Grande (Office of the Historian, n.d.). This area between the Rio Grande and the Nueces River became highly disputed as both countries saw it as their own. The animosity between Mexico and the United States continued to build to the point that both countries considered each other a national threat. In 1846, President Polk of the United States further strained relations with Mexico when he sent General Taylor's troops into the disputed territory in Texas (King, 2000). This act angered Mexican President Paredes, who considered this an invasion of Mexican land. Soon after this invasion, Mexico and the United States declared war on one another (King, 2000).

The two-year-long war ultimately concluded with ratifying the Treaty of Guadalupe in 1948. The long-debated treaty resulted in a clear Texas border along the Rio Grande and Mexico losing over half of its land (Reeves, 1905; King, 2000). The long-lasting impact of the Mexican-American War had a drastic effect on Mexican citizens, who were given one year to either return to Mexico or become American citizens (Montoya, 2016). While these people weren't considered "stateless," they nevertheless felt the impact of the Border crossing them into a country in which they were denied the full privileges of citizenship (Aranada, 2018).

1854: Gadsden Purchase and Early Nogales

While most of the US and Mexico Border was established through the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, the 29,670 square miles that determined Arizona and part of the New Mexico border weren't official until the 1854 Gadsden Purchase (Schmidt, 1961). Included in this purchase is the territory that makes up Nogales, Arizona.

Early Sonorans would quickly settle on naming their side Nogales, while the dry and hilly terrain on the American side would be known by many different names. The Anglo Americans who settled in the land would first call it Issactown, then Line City, until finally deciding on sharing the name Nogales with their neighbors (Arreola, 2017). The choice of sharing a common name reflects their interconnected relationship (Arreola, 2017).

To solidify their relationship further, the Sonoran Railroad connected the port city of Guaymas to Nogales on October 25, 1882 (Boyd, 1981). Before this point, Sonora was isolated due to the Gulf of California on its left, the rugged Sierra Madre desert, and the Apache and Yaqui tribes occupying the North and South. Due to the strong presence of the Yaqui community in the South, communication and travel from the southern part of the state were blocked, restricting travel to and from the rest of Mexico (Salas, 1992;). The railroad's completion initiated social and economic change in the area, ending Sonora's isolation and leading to the exportation of wheat and other products to the US, as well as an increase in people coming to Sonora for work (Salas, 1992; Cardoso, 1980). While the railroad led to much economic change, some locals were worried about the implications of a more transient relationship with the United States. The local Sonoran newspaper, *La Constitución*, published its hesitations, expressing concerns that the railroad would undermine their culture and change their lifestyle (Unknown, 1880). Their concerns were justifiable as the creation of the Sonoran Railroad, which cut through Ambos Nogales, forever changed the area. What once was a small and isolated town began to evolve into an important trading post, an industrialized hub that continues to

attract workers today, and an influential case study in understanding the fluid and dynamic nature of culture and identity.

1918: Battle of Ambos Nogales

The Battle of Ambos Nogales was a one-day battle that would forever change border interactions between Mexico and the United States. During the mid-1800s, Nogales Arizona and Nogales Sonora were separated by a pyramid of quickly assembled stones. This landmark would become a permanent steel moment in 1891 known as Monument 122. For years, residents of Ambos Nogales would pass the monument, freely crossing the Border to visit their counterparts (Rochlin & Rochlin, 1976).

In the early 1900s, a global shift would change how these two communities interacted with one another. As a result of the United States' involvement in the European wars, the United States felt a need to increase its border security. American citizens were now required to register for passports, indicating that the free transit both countries shared was halted. In addition, the Nogales Border was now decorated with inspection stations and soldiers along International Street. Residents of Nogales Sonora, who had always maintained a close relationship with their counterparty, found these new conditions challenging to adjust to. Tension between the two communities would soon begin to arise. (Salas, 1997; Parra, 2010).

Conditions between the two countries would worsen as *Nogalenses* repeatedly reported abuse by the American soldiers, who at this point had killed at least two Sonoran residents who had attempted to cross into the United States illegally (Parra, 2010). Tension finally climaxed on August 27, 1918, when a man returning from the United States, already on Mexican soil, was ordered back into the US by a customs inspector

suspicious of his package. Mexican *celedores* [agents] told him to ignore the order. Soon, an unknown shot was fired, and the Battle of Ambos Nogales commenced (Parra, 2010).

As the battle between the two cities intensified, the Nogales, Sonora mayor, was killed by a bullet coming from the Arizona side while attempting to de-escalate the situation. His death further rallied Sonorans. The battle lasted only a few hours and ended with representatives from both countries frantically meeting the next day to work towards a peaceful de-escalation of the conflict. Within a few days, both Nogales returned to their regular trade relations (Parra, 2010). While the relationship between the two communities returned rather quickly, underlying tension remained. General Cabell of the Mexican government suggested that the best way to maintain the peace would be to erect a “two-mile-long border fence in the middle of international street” (Parras, 2010, p. 23). This two-mile-long fence would be the first permanent border between the US and Mexico. Over time, this boundary would continue to evolve into the steel wall present today, forever serving as a physical separation of a united community.

Nogales 1940s to Today

The 1940s signified much change in international politics due to the undeniable impact of World War 2. As millions of young American men left the United States to serve during the War, the United States desperately needed additional help to cover their newly formed agricultural gap. They turned to Mexican migrants to supplement this need, resulting in the bilaterally agreed upon Bracero Program that allowed Mexican migrants to legally enter the United States as “seasonal agricultural workers” (Mandeel, 2014). Believing that this program would result in new skills and better pay, Mexicans living in Central and Southern Mexico rapidly began moving North (Mandeel, 2014; Ericson,

1970). With the splurge in populations and as an attempt to capitalize off the local border economy, the Mexican government passed the National Border Program (*Programa Nacional Fronterizo, Pronaf*), which sought to improve the Border aesthetically by creating new schools, enhancing the Border crossing experience and building new shopping centers to encourage tourism (Mungaray, 1988; Rumbaugh, 1970).

A few years after strengthening the infrastructure of Mexican border towns, 1964 would bring the controversial conclusion of the bilateral Bracero Program, which, throughout its 22-year duration, brought an estimated 4 million Mexicans to work in American fields and railroads (Martin, 2020; Library of Congress). As a response, the Mexican government passed the Border Industrialization Program, which was meant to “absorb” the thousands of unemployed Mexicans moving back to Northern Mexico from participating in the Braceros Program (Dorocki & Brzegowy, 2014; Sklair, 1992; Martin, 2020). This program permitted foreign-owned factories, most American-owned, to work along the Border “duty-free on the condition that they exported all of their products.” (Dorocki & Brzegowy, 2014; Sklair, 1992). The creation of this program led to the first *maquiladora* [factory] in Nogales, Sonora, in 1967, initiating the *maquiladora* boom along the Border (Hellman & Kopinak, 1997). The *maquiladora* industry has since expanded beyond initial expectations, practically becoming synonymous with the Border itself. This is especially evident in Nogales, Sonora, where there are more than 100 plants and 34,000 jobs provided by these *maquilas* (Pavlovich-Kochi, 2014).

The late 1960s also marked the viewing of the Border as the entrance for illegal drugs and unwanted migrants (Timmons, 2017). In 1969, after campaigning as an anti-drug president dedicated to ending the flow of illegal drugs in the United States,

President Richard M. Nixon targeted Mexico. This led to the short-lived but impactful Operation Intercept, which aimed to combat heavy drugs by requiring a meticulous search of all crossers (Timmons, 2017; Gooberman, 1974;). Although Operation Intercept lasted less than a month, its exclusionary border-focused legislation would set the norm for every subsequent president (Timmons, 2017).

The focus on Border issues continued into the Clinton administration, with President Clinton promising a “get-tough policy” at the Border (Clinton, 1995). Having drafted a 5-point plan, the Clinton administration focused on fortifying popular urban points of entry, where most illegal crossings were happening. This strategy aimed to force crossers to take more deserted routes where Border Patrol would have a higher advantage in finding them (Spotts, 2002). The underlying belief was that migrants would be apprehensive or wholly disillusioned with crossing the extremely dangerous mountainous and desert area around the Border (Spotts, 2002). One of the critical components of Clinton’s plan included increasing Border Patrol agents, specifically in the Tijuana-San Diego area, which at the time was the place where most illegal crossings took place (Hing, 2001). As an unexpected result, immigrant crossings began shifting from California to Arizona (Office of the Inspector General, 2002). In response, Clinton passed Operation Safeguard, meant to strengthen the 300 miles along the international Border in Arizona (Cornelius, 2001). Programs like this would continue to emerge throughout the Clinton administration, unfortunately leading to severe consequences (Spotts, 2002). Regrettably, unlike what the Clinton administration predicted, dangerous crossings persisted, resulting in a doubling of Border crossing deaths since 1995, with the majority of the increase occurring in the Arizona desert (GAO, 2006). The unforgiving

Sierra Madre desert, a natural border for centuries, has remained a popular route for hopeful crossers.

In 2006, ignoring the property and environmental laws placed to protect the land and the rights of the people, a 700-mile fence would soon be erected (Garret, 2014). The Border wall, as it now stands in Nogales, Arizona, is 30 feet tall, made of steel bollards spaced four inches apart, with just enough space between the pillars to look through (Prendergast, 2020). This man-made Border has forever influenced the community of Nogales, often serving as a reminder of the tension that exists along it.

On the night of October 10th, 2012, the Border wall played a role in the death of 16-year-old Nogales, Sonora native José Antonio Elena Rodríguez (Azcentral, 2022). As a young boy, walking home from playing basketball on the Mexican side, José was walking *Calle International* [International Street] when Border Patrol officers on the Arizona side received a 911 call that two men were climbing over the wall from Mexico. (Yuhás, 2015). The men climbed the fence into the United States and then were able to hide from the growing number of police officers and Border Patrol agents arriving at the scene (Binelli, 2016). Within a few minutes, the agents saw two men struggling to climb back into Mexico; upon yelling commands to come back down, they soon heard several rocks coming from the Mexican side, a tactic used to distract the officers (Binelli, 2016; Yuhás, 2015). Grainy surveillance footage from two Border Patrol-operated cameras, at this point, shows two individuals on the Mexican side making “throwing motions,” it is unclear if these are the same individuals that had climbed the fence (O’Dell, 2017). José is then seen walking *Calle Internacional* towards the two individuals (O’Dell, 2017). It is then that Border Patrol Agent Lonnie Swartz walks toward the fence and shoots 16 times

into Mexico, all within 34 seconds (O'Dell, 2017; Binelli, 2016; Carroll, 2018; Azcentral, 2022). Sixteen-year-old Jose was shot ten times, “*at least* 50 feet away (in terms of on-the-ground distance) from the agents” (Nevins, 2012). Eight of those shots struck his back, with the first one likely striking “in the middle of his back as he was running.” The other two were in his head (Ingram, 2018; Carroll, 2018).

In the aftermath of the shooting, Lonnie Swartz became the first agent to be charged with murder for “shooting and killing a Mexican national across the international border” (Burnett, 2015). Figure 1. displays evidence used against Swartz in the Rodriguez v. Swartz case; the image shows the white building where Jose was killed and his distance from the Border wall. Following an initial trial and mistrial, Swartz was eventually found not guilty of involuntary manslaughter, with the jury unable to reach a consensus regarding voluntary manslaughter (Ingram, 2018).

Figure 1.

Exhibit A in Rodriguez v. Swartz



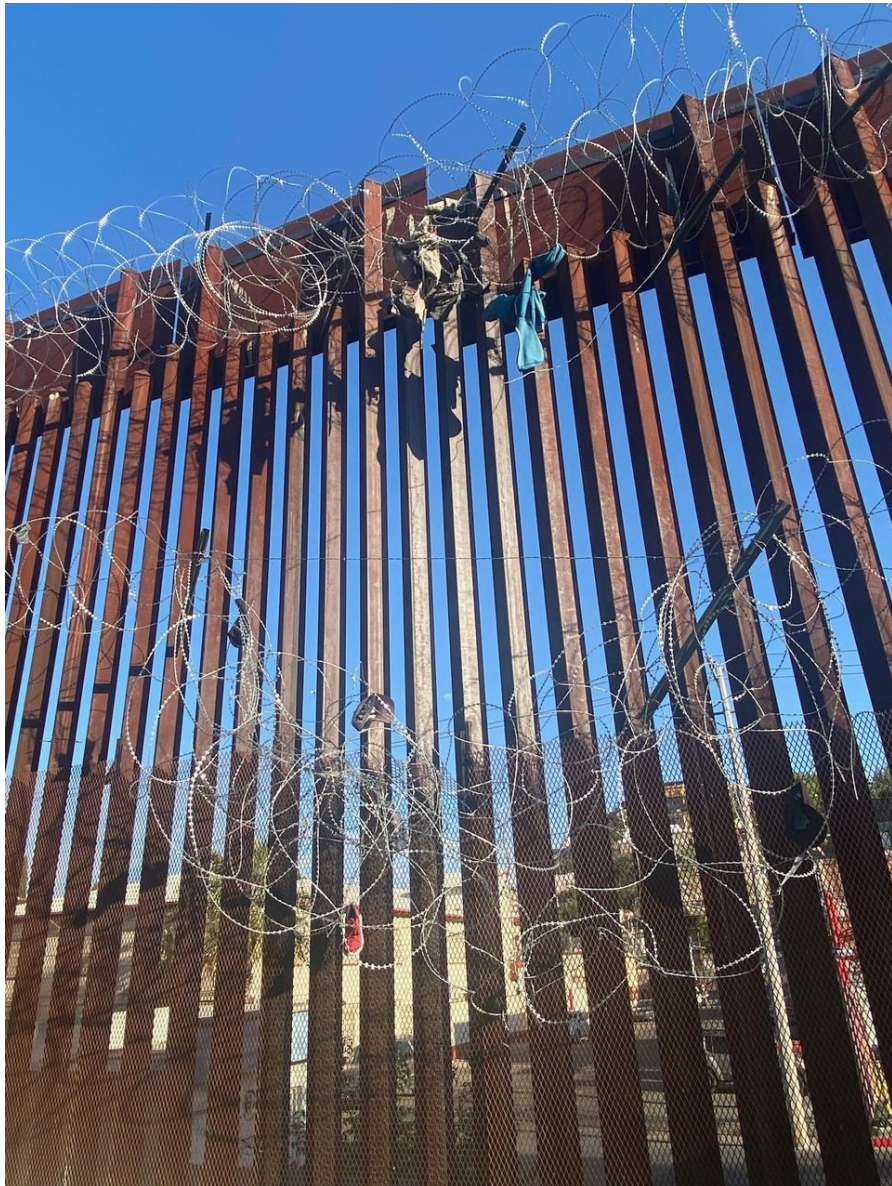
Note. The photo display location where the incident occurred and was used as Exhibit A in Rodriguez v. Swartz. From Rodriguez v. Swartz, by ACLU, 2014 (<https://www.aclu.org/cases/rodriguez-v-swartz>)

The death of José Antonio Elena Rodríguez is still remembered painfully in this community (Tavitian, 2022). A portrait of him forever lives in Nogales, Sonora, right below the fence, serving as a reminder of violence and death along the Border. His memorial isn't alone; a brief drive along the Border showed me various thoughtfully placed flowers and clothing caught by the razor wire scattered throughout the fence. Razor wire first came to Nogales during the Trump presidency (Dorado Romo, 2024; Burns, 2019). The City of Nogales, Arizona, quickly condemned the dangerous addition, passing a unanimous city council resolution calling for its removal (Rosenberg, 2019). A resolution draft stated that coiled concertina wire at the ground level is “typically only

found a in war, battlefield or prison setting” (Phillip, 2019). Despite the City’s resolution and the mayor’s threat to sue, a statement by the Customs and Border Patrol indicated that the locations where the wires would be added were “outside of the town’s jurisdiction” and that “currently there are no plans to remove the concertina wire” (Rosenberg, 2019). The razor-sharp wire still hangs around the perimeters of Nogales, Arizona, ranging in coverage.

Figure 2.

Clothing and shoe caught on wire in Nogales, Arizona (own photo).



The Border continues to remain one of the most debated and politicized topics today, with much of the discussion focusing on migrant crossings. This simultaneously leaves the people of Ambos Nogales centerstage yet forgotten. The city of Nogales, Sonora, now boasts a population of 264,782, a 20.2% increase compared to 2010 (Gobierno de México, n.d.). While Nogales, Arizona, is hovering below 20,000 people, experiencing only a 0.4% percent change from April 2020 to July 2022 (U.S. Census).

Physically, the two cities are very different. Both downtowns are located on their respective sides of the Border. Nogales, Sonora has an extensive downtown that is easy to get lost in as the crowded and disorganized streets are lined with endless shops, restaurants and *panederias*. The regional *Norteña* music fills the streets, and if you aren't careful, a persistent salesman from the various tourist shops will spring on you. Beyond the tourist section, you'll find a courtyard filled with high school kids buying afterschool churros, proselytizers yelling from the pavilion, and a row of taxi drivers asking where your next location is. Despite being so intertwined with one another, Nogales, Arizona, is the exact opposite. The downtown consists of three long and empty streets adorned with the few family businesses that have managed to survive. The town is quiet, and while I think locals like it that way, it has had a problematic impact on the town's economy.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, 3.4 million people used the Nogales pedestrian crossing port that would lead them straight into the downtown area in 2019. Additionally, 3.4 million personal vehicles and 6.8 million passengers crossed in 2019 (Research and Innovative Technology Administration, 2016). This frequent crossing contributed to 60-70% of sales tax revenue in all Arizona border communities (Arizona Office of Tourism). Sonia, a woman I met while living in Nogales, Sonora, was among these numbers. As a

Sonoran native, she would cross the Border every few weeks to buy cheap clothing at second-hand shops such as Savers. She would then bring this clothing back and sell it in front of her house. This was a popular career choice for many women and contributed to Nogales's extensive tianguis [swapmeet] culture.

To a lesser extent, this relationship also goes the other way. Using data from CLAPR, the University of Arizona polled 775 Arizonians on how often they traveled to Mexico. The poll found that 30% of those surveyed had traveled to Mexico from Arizona in the last year (Latino Decisions, 2019). Indicating that 31% of visitors specified visiting family, while 30% cited medical/dental as the primary reasons for crossings. The market for this is evident as a dozen dentist offices with signs saying “We Speak English” stand directly in front of the Border on the Mexican side.

The COVID-19 pandemic stalled much of the typical way of life. In April 2020, in an attempt to minimize the spread of COVID-19, the United States collaborated with Mexico and Canada to halt non-essential travel across the United States (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2024). Unknown then, the Border would be closed to non-essential traveling until November 2021. This led to a 44.67% decrease in pedestrian travel, 31.99% in personal vehicles, and 42.03% in passengers traveling through the Nogales ports of entry (Research and Innovative Technology Administration, 2016). Much of the world took an economic hit during this time. However, Nogales, Arizona’s economy, especially took a hit as a downtown reliant on foreign shoppers (Woodhouse, 2022).

In 2024, the world and Ambos Nogales are still recovering from the effects of COVID-19. Port crossing numbers are beginning to increase, though some still fall below

pre-pandemic numbers (Research and Innovative Technology Administration, 2016).

Businesses are optimistic about recovery, yet there is still much more to go. As a community whose history has been centered on its international relationship with its neighbor, Ambos Nogales is in a unique position that is often overlooked.

Border Identity

The Border and Border People

The Mexican-American Border has always been defined by the people who occupy it. As the permanent home of millions of people, the Border is viewed as a “mystical” place in which the identity and culture of the Mexican and American residents who live on the outskirts of their respective countries, referred to as “border people,” are debated (Bustamante, 1992).

As scholars have attempted to understand the Border and Border people better, the literature has been heavily influenced by trying to define what the Border is. While aiming to “demystify” the Border, influential founders of Border Studies have debated their interpretations of the Border and Border Identity (Bustamante, 1992). Gloria Anzaldúa defines the Border as “*una herida abierta* [an open wound] where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country- a border culture.” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p.3). This creation of a third country indicates that the Border is inherently different than the rest of Mexico and the United States. Similarly, Bustamante describes living on the Border as being “on top of a fence that looks at two different lands that are neighbors” (Bustamante, 1992, p.486). The uniqueness of living on the Border leaves academics debating whether Border people have created a new “border identity” (Vila, 1997).

“Border people” or “*fronterizos*,” as they are commonly known in Spanish, are typically characterized by two general categories. Referred to by different names, the categories distinguish Border people based on their interactions with neighboring countries. The first group, referred to as national borderlanders or border reinforcers, are characterized as people who rarely interact with *el otro lado* [the other side] (Martinez, 1994; Vila, 2005). This group mainly engages with businesses and people from their home country and spends most of their time there. Alejandra and José, a couple I met while living in Nogales, Sonora, for six months, would fall under this category as lifelong *Nogalenses* [the nickname given to people from Nogales, Sonora] Alejandra and José had never crossed into the United States despite having adult children who now lived in the United States—often saying “*tengo todo lo que necesito aquí*” [I have everything I need here]. Border reinforcers also emphasize safeguarding their cultural identity and protecting it from the other side (Vila, 2005). Border reinforcers may accept certain aspects of the other side’s culture, such as English words that begin to blend into everyday Spanish found on the border, such as “*Dame un raite en tu troca!*” Or the creation of Tex-Mex food, they are truly distinguished by their determination to keep rejected cultural aspects that are viewed as too American away from their side (Vila, 2003).

The second group, identified as transnational borderlanders or border crossers, are the opposite of national borderlanders (Martinez, 1994; Vila, 2003). Their lifestyle consists of frequently crossing the Border, even for daily tasks such as shopping, working, and going to school on the other side (Martinez, 1994; Velasco Ortiz & Contreras, 2014). Border crossers understand the Border as a transient space from which

culture and ideas flow in and out of. They view themselves as hybrid products of both the United States and Mexico and view this as an advantage to living on the Border (Vila, 2003). *La Familia Lopez* [the Lopez family] would exemplify this group. As a family that consists of a Mexican mother and two Mexican-American daughters, the Lopez family lives in Nogales, Sonora, but crosses the Border every day so that the young daughters can attend school in Arizona. This commute means the family will wake up early to pass through the Border checkpoint; the mother will then return to Mexico for the day and repeat the process to pick them up once school is done. This is a somewhat complicated daily routine that they have mastered.

Border Identity

The theories regarding Border people and their identity have adapted over the years as they have been influenced by the period from which they surfaced and the culture of the research scholar (Zúñiga, 2007). In the mid-1970s, Miguel León-Portilla initiated the discussion as the first Mexican scholar to research Mexico's Northwest, referring to it as a "*Norteño*" [Northerner] culture (León-Portilla, 1990; Zúñiga, 2007). As an early scholar in the field, León-Portilla recognized two potential theories regarding Border Identity (León-Portilla, 1990).

The first of these theories viewed the Border in terms of "Mexicanism," arguing that due to the strong presence of the United States, Mexicans on the Border must display a stronger sense of *Mexicanidad* [Mexicaness] (Vila, 2005). Thus insinuating that Mexicans on the Border are stronger Mexicans than Mexicans in other parts of the country (León-Portilla, 1990; Vila, 2005; Zúñiga, 2007). This theory contributes to the separation between Mexicans and Americans, establishing clear "us" versus "them"

rhetoric (Zúñiga, 2007). As well as causing Mexicans to identify *Mexicanidad* as “anything that is not identified as American [lo gringo]” (translation by Vila, 2006). The belief that Mexicans on the Border must display a stronger sense of *Mexicanidad* leads to the rejection of a distinct hybrid Border Identity. While proponents of this theory acknowledge that specific values and traditions may be shared across the Border, an emphasis is placed on Mexicans’ commitment to safeguarding their culture, land, and *Mexicanidad* (Bustamante, 2000). Mexican scholars Margarita Nolasco and Maria Luisa Acevedo, who reject the creation of a hybrid identity state,

“The northern border is thus an area of interethnic friction in which, although there is a continuous exchange through which goods and values pass from one side to the other, it does not lead to the creation of a mestizo border culture, since it is prevented by the cultural gap between both countries, socially unbridgeable because it is based on asymmetrical power relations and economic dependence” (my translation from Spanish). pg 15)

The second potential theory also discusses *Mexicanidad* and its relationship with the United States. This theory, especially emphasized by American Border scholars, views the culture along the Border as “*porosas*” [porous] and “intimate” (Vila, 2006; Canclini, 2000; Robe, 1981). This suggests that aspects of both countries are sneaking in and being absorbed by one another. Supporters of this theory recognize the “transculturation” of both cultures as a hybrid identity (Robe, 1981; Vila, 2006). While this theory accepts the influence of both countries on one another, it has, at times, been used to minimize the strength of *Mexicanidad* on the Border (Monsavis, 2000).

Scholars have since moved away from discussing the Border in terms of the strengths of *Mexicanidad*, choosing to criticize theories that attempt to define the Border by “only one side” (Zúñiga, 2007). Instead, recent scholars seek to recognize the complex

relationships along the Border (Vila, 2006; León-Portilla, 1990). Modern studies have emphasized intersectional identities by researching the previously neglected Mexican Americans, Indigenous communities, and other groups found along the Border (Vila, 2005; Velasco, 2015; Martinez, 1997). As well as researching the role that globalization has on the identity of Border people and recognizing that proximity with culturally different people doesn't always result in the hybridization of cultures (Ortiz, 2010; Velasco, 2015).

The distinctive life experiences of Border people have been at the center of various Border Studies scholars on both sides of the Border. While the field of study is growing, many of the studies conducted on Border Identity focus on going south to north, choosing to emphasize the influence that American culture has on Mexican culture while rarely going the other way (Campbell, 2005). This focus represents frequent pitfalls made in Border Studies that do not account for the transient nature of the Border from which many different types of people come and go in any direction, nor does it highlight the experience of border reinforcers and national borderlanders. Furthermore, many of these influential studies were done decades ago, failing to completely apply to today's political climate. This gap in the literature indicates that much remains to be understood about how the Border can shape one's identity and the complex and unique life of Border people.

Methods

This study has been designed to better understand the essential characteristics and factors that contribute to Border Identity for the Ambos Nogales residents. Serving as a pilot study, this research was conducted to encourage further research on the border towns

found along the United States-Mexico Border. Results from this study will be helpful in conducting future research that is better equipped to handle the current political climate found on the Border and how it influences the residents of border towns. This section will provide an overview of the study design, survey and interview questionnaire, and fieldwork.

Study Design

This study was conducted using a mixed-methods approach to investigate whether the residents of Ambos Nogales feel a sense of Border Identity. Data used in this paper were gathered as part of a study that was approved and reviewed by the BYU Institutional Review Board (IRB 2023-154, 6/2/2023). The sample for this study were residents of Ambos Nogales. Researchers Emily Rodriguez and Lacey Paulsen stood on Morley Street, near the Morley pedestrian crossing in downtown Nogales, Arizona. An additional survey station was set up further up Morley Street during the 4th of July Parade. Using convenience sampling, pedestrians walking by were invited to participate in a quick 5-minute Qualtrics survey via iPad. All participants were required to sign a consent form before beginning. Many participants felt uncomfortable using iPads to participate in the survey; in these cases, I would read the questions aloud and help clarify as needed. The survey's final question asked respondents if they would like to participate in a quick 5-10-minute interview with one of the researchers. Participants who agreed to participate in the short interview were interviewed on the spot using voice recording from a password-secured iPad. Survey participants were compensated for their time with a cold drink, while survey participants were compensated with a hand sanitizer or lotion valued at \$2.

Participants qualified for the study if they were over 18 and lived in either Nogales, Sonora, or Nogales, Arizona. A total of 53 respondents were surveyed overall, with the sampling size being constrained by time and budget. Of these respondents, 16 were men and 37 were women. Language preference remained consistent, with 50 respondents choosing to take the survey in Spanish, whereas only three opted to take it in English. Regarding cultural identity, 44 respondents considered themselves Mexican, 2 Americans, and 7 people considered themselves Mexican Americans.

Questionnaire

All participants completed a quick 16-question survey covering questions relevant to the study. The questionnaire began by asking participants about their preferred language, after which they were presented with survey questions in Spanish or English. The survey would then ask background characteristic questions such as gender and age range. Following these questions, the questionnaire asked about their interactions with the Border. Included were questions on how long they've lived on the Border, how often they crossed, and their main reason for crossing. To ensure that the survey was simple and remained within the 5-minute time frame, responses for these questions were multiple choice, except asking about the purpose of crossing the Border, which included a fill-in-the-blank, "other" response option. Following these questions, the survey sought to understand better key identity characteristics and how important these characteristics are to shaping the participant's identity.

The survey also asked participants to identify their ethnicity. Considering the sample and our location, answers for this question included "Mexican, American, Mexican American or, Chicano, or Other." Participants were then asked to rate how

much they would say their ethnicity shapes their identity. Participants were asked to choose from “Not Strong at All,” “Slightly Strong,” “Moderately Strong,” “Very Strong,” and “Extremely Strong.” Similarly, participants were asked to identify which side of the Border they live on, their religion, and their work. The following questions asked them to rate how strongly they would say [blank] shapes their identity. While conducting the fieldwork, I noticed a gap in the survey, which I felt could be answered by asking participants if they felt a sense of “Border Identity” in addition to a Mexican and American identity. Unfortunately, this question was added after a few participants had already taken the initial survey, resulting in only 37 respondents answering the question.

The survey's final question asked respondents if they would like to participate in a 10-minute interview immediately after the survey. Most respondents finished the 16-question survey within 5 minutes. All participants were thanked and compensated for their time.

The data from this survey were used to conduct two cross-tabulation analyses. These tests were conducted to help determine the association between Border Identity, crossing frequency and strength of nationality or ethnicity. Border Identity was operationalized using Rodriguez Ortiz's previously defined definition: the ability to adopt aspects of culture from neighboring countries to create a new culture and identity, gradually reconstructing their lives in this way (Rodriguez Ortiz, 2010). This variable was collected from the question that asks participants, “Do you feel a sense of “Border Identity” in addition to a Mexican Identity and an American Identity?” Respondents selected Yes, No, or Maybe.

Crossing frequency was determined by asking respondents how often they cross the Border, with the following multiple-choice options: daily, a few times a week, a few times a month, a few times a year, or never. To conduct the analysis, this question was transformed into a continuous variable instead of a categorical one. The data were recoded to estimate an average depiction of participant's Border crossings in a year. For this study the data were recoded to Never being 0 days a year, yearly being 3, monthly being 36, weekly being 156, and daily 365.

Participants were also asked how strongly they feel their nationality/ethnicity influences their identity. While nationality and ethnicity are typically separate factors in most studies, in order to avoid any discussion that could lead to participants disclosing their immigration status, participants were instead asked to select what they consider themselves as and were given the following options: Mexican, American, Mexican-American, or Other. Participants were then asked to rate how much their nationality/ethnicity influences their identity. Respondents chose from extremely strong (5), very strong (4), moderately strong (3), slightly strong (2), and not strong at all (1). This was then turned into a binary variable that combined respondents who selected slightly strong and not strong at all into "weak" influence with respondents who indicated moderately, very, extremely strong into a "strong" influence.

Interview

Participants who agreed to an interview were interviewed on the spot. All interviews were audio recorded using an iPad and were coded and transcribed. I followed an interview guide while also having the flexibility to ask questions according to the flow of conversations. The interview guide was divided into three sections.

The first of these sections asked about their life on the Border. Participants were asked about their experiences on the Border and why they chose to live on the Border. Such questions included asking how they perceive the Border has changed in the last few years, advantages, disadvantages, and misconceptions of living on the Border. I also asked how they felt living on the Border differed from living in other parts of Mexico or the United States.

The second section of the interview guide delved into identity. After defining cultural identity, participants were asked how they would define their cultural identity. They were also asked to identify events that have most shaped their identity and if others in this area would share similar experiences. Participants were then asked to reflect on how living on the Border might contribute to this identity.

Finally, to determine the critical intersections that makeup identity, the final section of the interview guide further asked them to explain how they would differentiate between different cultural aspects. Participants were asked if they felt a sense of Border Identity that differed from Mexican and American identities. The interviews concluded by asking respondents if there was anything they wished people knew about them and their community.

Of all 53 survey respondents, a total of 10 respondents chose to participate in an interview. Two of these participants recorded their interviews together. All interviews were confidential, and audios were deleted after being transcribed. Interviewees were compensated with a small hand sanitizer or lotion valued at \$2 for their time.

Field Work Operations

All fieldwork operations were completed from June 28th to July 6th, 2023, in Nogales, Arizona. The study aimed to receive between 50-80 survey responses with 10-12 short-form interviews to supplement. Considering that most shops in the downtown area closed early in the evening, I found that the most productive time to administer surveys was between 10 am and 12 pm. However, Paulsen and I typically stayed till 3 pm. Survey stations were set a few feet away from the pedestrian crossing, which resulted in a higher population of Nogales, Sonora residents. Considering the notable difference in population between the two cities, an oversample of Nogales, Sonora residents was to be expected.

As I was conducting the fieldwork, I noticed a disproportionately high response rate of older and retired individuals. In an attempt to reach a more comprehensive sample, a station was set up during the Fourth of July Parade with the goal of targeting younger respondents. Other locations were scouted as well, but for a variety of reasons, none of them had as much success as the original location on Morley Street.

Fieldwork ended after two weeks once the budget was exhausted. At the end of the two weeks, 53 surveys and 10 interviews were conducted. While the number of surveys was under the target goal, I was ultimately satisfied with the results. Due to the reasonable mistrust of data collectors on the Border, finding respondents willing to participate in a survey and interview was more challenging than I had anticipated.

Results

The analysis of the fieldwork is made up of three sections. The first of these sections is descriptive results, which characterize the sample and outcome rates. The

second section uses cross-tabulation analysis to determine the relationship between Border crossing frequency, Border Identity and the strength of nationality and ethnicity. The final section provides the codes and analysis of the ten short-form interviews. This analysis is conducted with the goal of better understanding Border Identity while also investigating the strengths and shortcomings of this pilot study with the hope that it will inform future research.

Descriptive Results

The descriptive results of this study are summarized in Table 1.1, demonstrating the survey results of all 53 respondents. This table represents interesting initial findings while also highlighting limitations. The most relevant variable to this study is found in Table 1.1, which asks respondents whether they feel a sense of Border Identity in addition to an American or Mexican Identity. The table demonstrates that 54.05% of participants said “Yes” to identifying with a Border Identity. While 21.65% of the respondents said “No” and 24.32% said “Maybe.” While highlighting the descriptive results, we see that 69.81% of the respondents were female, whereas only 30.19% were male. Additionally, the biggest age group highlighted in this sample is over the age of 60 (45.28%) who have lived on the Border for over 20 years (88.68%) and who cross the Border a few times a month (41.51%) with the main reason being for entertainment (69.81%).

Table 1.1: Statistical measures of demographic information for participants in the Nogales Border Identity Survey, 2023

VARIABLE	MEAN/PERCENT (%)	SD	MIN	MAX	N
Feel Sense of Border Identity					37
Yes	54.05				20
No	21.65				8
Maybe	24.32				9
Gender					53
Male	30.19				16
Female	69.81				37
Age					53
18-29	11.32				6
30-44	32.08				17
45-59	11.32				6
60+	45.28				24
Time Lived on Border (in Years)					53
>1	3.77				2
1-5	3.77				2
6-10	0.00				0
11-15	0.00				0
16-19	3.77				2
20+	88.68				47
Estimated Days Crossing the Border (Per Year)	120.41	119.26	3	365	53
Never	0.00				0
A Few Times a Year	11.32				6
A Few Times a Month	41.51				22
A Few Times a Week	32.08				17
Daily	15.09				8
Main Purpose in Crossing the Border					53
Entertainment (shopping, movies, etc.)	69.81				37
Visiting Family and Friends	16.98				9
Business (work, school, meetings, etc.)	7.55				4
Other	5.66				3

Table 1.2 also showcases specific demographics while also presenting information on the strengths of identity factors. As is demonstrated, this sample mainly

identified as Mexican (83.02%), with 33.48% of the sample very strongly or extremely strongly viewing their nationality or ethnicity as an important influence on their identity. This sample also mainly surveyed people from Nogales, Sonora (75%), with 33.93% of respondents indicating that their location very strongly or extremely strongly influences their identity. Religion was also indicated to be an essential identity factor. In this sample, 61.54% identified as Catholic, and 35.85% of respondents felt that their religious beliefs very strongly or extremely strongly influenced their identity. Finally, 24.53% of the sample worked a manufacturing job, while 24.53% of the sample were retired. This resulted in 36.54% of the population viewing their work status as very strong or extremely strong, influencing their identity.

Table 1.2: Statistical measures of demographic information and strength of identity factors for participants in the Nogales Border Identity Survey, 2023

Variable	Mean Percent (%)	SD	Min	Max	N
Nationality/Ethnicity					53
American	3.77				2
Mexican	83.02				44
Mexican American	12.21				7
Strength of Nationality/Ethnicity in Identity					53
Not Strong at All	6.63				11
Slightly Strong	10.16				7
Moderately Strong	12.72				11
Very Strong	20.75				15
Extremely Strong	17.73				9
Home City					53
Nogales, Arizona	25.00				13
Nogales, Sonora	75.00				30
Strength of Home City in Identity					53
Not Strong at All	16.98				9
Slightly Strong	20.75				11

Table 1.2 (continued)

Variable	Mean Percent (%)	SD	Min	Max	N
Moderately Strong	28.30				15
Very Strong	24.53				13
Extremely Strong	9.43				5
Religion					52
Protestant	17.31				9
Catholic	61.54				32
Mormon	1.92				1
Christian	3.85				2
Atheist	3.85				2
Other	3.85				2
Nothing in Particular	5.77				3
Prefer Not to Say	1.92				1
Strength of Religion in Identity					53
Not Strong at All	24.53				13
Slightly Strong	13.21				7
Moderately Strong	26.42				14
Very Strong	28.30				13
Extremely Strong	7.55				3
Work Industry					53
Agriculture	1.89				1
Manufacturing	24.53				13
Education	1.89				1
Food Services	3.77				2
Retail	3.77				2
Government	3.77				2
Vendor	9.43				5
Stay at Home Parent	1.89				1
Retired	24.53				13
Other	9.43				5
Not Currently Working	15.09				8
Strength of Work Industry in Identity					52
Not Strong at All	26.92				14
Slightly Strong	17.31				9
Moderately Strong	19.23				10
Very Strong	26.92				14
Extremely Strong	9.62				5
Averaged Strength of Work, Religion, and Home on Identity (scale 1-5)	2.83	1.06	1.00	5.00	

Cross-tabulation Analysis for Sense of Border Identity

This study was designed to gain a better understanding of Border Identity by testing its relationship with crossing frequency and strength of ethnicity on identity. Two cross-tabulation analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between estimated days crossed per year, strength of ethnicity on identity, and perceived Border Identity. Using the survey questions, the data were prepared in a STATA format for analysis.

Table 1.3 demonstrates the results of the cross-tabulation analysis, which indicates that respondents who feel a sense of Border Identity (that is different from a Mexican or American identity) cross the Border more frequently than respondents who said “No” and “Maybe.” Respondents within the sample predominantly crossed the Border a few times a week or a few times a month, as demonstrated by the 28 participants who reported crossing the Border between 36 to 156 days a year. The Pearson chi-square test was also conducted to assess the association between Border Identity and Border crossing. The chi-square test statistic is 6.8861 with a corresponding p-value of 0.332, which exceeds the significance level of 0.05, indicating that there is no statistical significance between Border Identity and Border Crossing.

Table 1.3: Cross-tabulation analysis on perceived sense of Border Identity and frequency crossing the Border in the Nogales Border Identity Survey, 2023

Do you feel a sense of Border Identity?	Estimated Days Crossed the Border (Per Year)				
	3 Days	36 Days	156 Days	365 Days	Total
Yes	1 5.00%	8 40.00%	6 30.00%	5 25.00%	20 100%
No	2 25.00%	4 50.00%	2 25.00%	0 0.00%	8 100%
Maybe	0 0.00%	4 44.44%	4 44.44%	1 11.11%	9 100%
Total	3 8.11%	16 43.24%	12 32.43%	6 16.22%	37 100%

** Pearson chi2 (6) = 6.8861 Pr = 0.332

Table 1.4 illustrates the findings of the cross-tabulation analysis, revealing that respondents who indicate that their ethnicity strongly shapes their identity also identify with a Border Identity. The table also demonstrates that the majority of the sample, 28 people, perceive a strong influence of their nationality or ethnicity on their identity. The Pearson chi-square test was conducted to assess the association between Border Identity and the influence of nationality or ethnicity on identity. The chi-square test statistic is 1.6130 with a corresponding p-value of 0.446, which exceeds the significance level of 0.05, indicating that there is no statistical significance between Border Identity and the influence of nationality or ethnicity on identity.

T 1.4: Cross-tabulation analysis on perceived sense of Border Identity and Impact of Nationality and Ethnicity in the Nogales Border Identity Survey, 2023

Do you feel a sense of Border Identity?	The Impact of Nationality/Ethnicity on Self		
	Does Not Strongly Impact	Strongly Impacts	Total
Yes	5 25.00%	15 75.00%	20 100%
No	3 37.50%	5 62.50%	8 100%
Maybe	1 11.11%	8 88.89%	9 100%
Total	9 24.32%	28 75.68%	37 100%

** Pearson chi2 (6) = 1.6130 Pr = 0.446

Interview Analysis

Chicana scholar Gloria Anzaldúa identifies the Border as “the lifeblood of two worlds merging,” for residents of Ambos Nogales, this translates into viewing the Border as the epicenter of cultural and economic possibilities intertwining. As inhabitants of a transient community, respondents eagerly viewed their proximity to the Border as a

significant advantage and were enthusiastic to highlight many of the resources and initial components that drew them to the Border. For many of the residents of the Border, specifically Sonoran respondents, an important aspect that attracted them to Ambos Nogales was the belief that there are more work opportunities along the Border than in other parts of the country. Emphasized by Rosita, a Nogales, Sonora resident who states, “... *Hay mucho oportunidad de trabajo. Oportunidad de trabajo es lo más importante.*” [... There are lots of job opportunities. Job opportunities are the most important thing.] Rosita’s comment illustrates the importance of job security to the people of Nogales and encourages the belief that there is an abundance of job opportunities on the Border from which anyone can benefit.

The belief that there is more work in Ambos Nogales than in other parts of Mexico has led to an influx of internal migration as people from Central and Southern Mexico move North in search of jobs. The growth of the *maquiladora* industry, especially prevalent in Nogales, has strengthened this assumption (Pavlakovich-Koch, 2014). Guadalupe, a woman who moved from Southern Mexico to Sonora at the beginning of the *maquiladora* boom in the late 1960’s describes, “... *la industria maquiladora ha crecido mucho, dándole trabajo a gente aquí en Nogales...*” [the *maquiladora* industry has grown a lot, giving work to the people here in Nogales...] As the *maquiladora* industry expands and more jobs are created, Nogales continues to be viewed as a city where work opportunities are available.

Beatriz, another woman who moved from Morelos, Mexico, to Sonora 20 years prior, says,

“Aquí hay mucho trabajo sino en una fábrica, otra fábrica, otra.... puedo entrar en la que yo quiera. Puedo entrar. Yo aquí escojo en cual entrar. ¿Para el

sur...no. Allá el trabajo está muy escaso, muy mal pagado. Tiene que tener uno mucho estudio para poder agarrar un puesto bueno allá.. Aquí pues solo tengo la secundaria y estoy trabajando muy bien, en la [Nombre de la Fabrica] trabajo yo. Y pues ya tengo 5 años. Y muy bien, me pagan bien. Trabajo viernes, sábado y domingo. Y, vengo ganando 3000 pesos.”

[There are many opportunities to work here, if not in one factory, then in another factory. I can work wherever I want. I can find work. Here I choose where I want to work. In the South... No. Over there the work is scarce, and they pay bad. Here I only have a high school degree and I'm working good in [Factory Name], I work there. And I have 5 years working there. And it's really good, they pay me good. I work Friday, Saturday, and Sunday and I earn \$3000 pesos.]

Beatriz's comments show the impact of the maquiladora industry on Nogales residents and how they are influenced by it. Beatriz shares that she has proudly been earning 3000 Mexican pesos, approximately USD 175, without a college degree, which wouldn't have been possible in her home state of Morelos. The experiences of Guadalupe and Beatriz, two Southern Mexican women now living in Nogales, Sonora, highlight the perceived disparities between Southern and Northern Mexico. Thus contributing to the notion that the two regions are economically and culturally distinct, with more economic opportunities found along the Border.

In addition to highlighting work opportunities found along the Border, respondents also emphasized their proximity to both countries and their access to a transient lifestyle. Rosita, from Sonora, explains, “*Pues tenemos la ventaja de que tenemos los Estados Unidos aquí de un ladito. Eso es un gran ventaja.*” [We have the advantage that we have the United States next to us. This is a great advantage.] For many from Nogales, Sonora, living on the Border means having access to more resources than if they lived in other parts of the country. Manuel, who was originally from Mexico but has lived in Arizona since he was young describes, “*La ventaja es mía, que tengo doctor, tengo acceso, tengo todo lo que allá no iba a tener.*” [The advantages are mine, I have a

doctor, I have access, I have everything that I wouldn't have over there.] These comments further emphasize the notion that living in Ambos, Nogales, provides more resources and opportunities because of its Border status.

While residents of Ambos Nogales mentioned unique work opportunities and resources, the main advantage they stressed was their ability to seamlessly cross into their neighboring country for mundane daily or weekly activities. Julia, a Nogales, Sonora resident, shares that the main reason she crosses is “*para venir de compras*” [to go shopping]. Lola, who lives in Arizona describes crossing into to Mexico when she misses the food, “*Si quieres unos taquitos ricos, te cruzas y comes muy agusto.*” [If you want some delicious taquitos, you cross and eat very comfortably]. These remarks illustrate the ease with which residents of Ambos Nogales navigate both sides of the Border. For activities such as shopping or eating tacos, we see that the Border serves as their gateway into a culture they feel comfortable exploring, further highlighting the interconnectedness of the community.

Misconceptions of the Border

As a heavily politicized topic, many people associate the Border and Border people as violent. When presented with the chance to address these misconceptions, residents of Ambos Nogales rejected negative notions of their town and highlighted their sense of safety and community.

While residents of Nogales acknowledge violence along the Border, they feel that it does not accurately represent their community. Julia from Sonora says “*Donde quiera hay delincuencia, vandalismo, todo eso, donde quiera hay eso... no es problema [para mí].*” [Wherever you go there is delinquency, vandalism, all of that, wherever you go...

it's not a problem [for me]. Comparably, Guadalupe defends the portrayal of Mexico by criticizing the gun violence in the United States, “...*Aquí en Estados Unidos matan y en 1 minuto matan 20...5...15... personas, verdad?*” [...Here in the United States, they kill, and in 1 minute they kill 20... 5... 15... people, right?]

Guadalupe and Julia's comments demonstrate their feelings of safety and security despite acknowledging violence in Nogales. While they recognize violence in Nogales, they refrained from characterizing the Border as dangerous, essentially arguing that Nogales is no more dangerous than any other part of the world.

Manuel has a similar reaction; when asked if he considers the Border as dangerous, he says, “*No, no creo. Nunca me ha sucedido nada... Me ven los policías, los saludo, me saludan todo tranquilo. Haya [Nogales, Sonora] lo mismo.*” [No, I don't think so. Nothing has ever happened to me... The cops see me, I greet them, they greet me back, all is calm. Over there in [Nogales, Sonora], it's the same.] As a consistent crosser, Manuel confirms his sense of security living in Nogales and provides insight into his relationship with authority on the Border. Manuel identifies a positive relationship with police on both sides of the Border, even sharing that many of the officers have a nickname for him, “*Chinito.*” Manuel's comments highlight the relationship between authority and a sense of safety on the Border. For many on the Border, interacting with Border authorities is a typical routine that is not as heavily politicized. Yet, even with the general sense of safety on the Border and with Border authority, the disproportionately high crime rate in this area proves that these relationships and feelings are more complex than they initially may seem.

Within these complexities is distinguishing Ambos Nogales from other Border towns. Despite Ambos Nogales sharing many of its unique aspects with other Border towns, Manuel from Arizona argues that Nogales is unlike other Border towns because Nogales is “una frontera buena” [a good Border], implying that other border towns are “bad” or more dangerous. Beatriz from Mexico uses identical language as Manuel stating, *“Pues a mí se me hace muy buena la frontera, no es verdad que hay mucho malo [...] Muy excelente ese.”* [Well, this seems like a good Border to me; it’s not true that there’s a lot of bad. [...] It’s very excellent.] These quotes again demonstrate the sense of safety that residents of Ambos Nogales feel. While they are willing to disregard or contextualize the violence in Nogales, they are unwilling to provide the same grace to other border towns. This further establishes the camaraderie within the community. Even Antonia, who vocalized the belief that Nogales, Sonora was more dangerous than Nogales, Arizona, still identified Ambos Nogales as better than other Border towns. While referencing crime in Nogales, Sonora, she states,

“Mira, por ejemplo. Aquí con nosotros en Arizona estamos a gusto porque no hay... no se ve tanto [crimen]... estamos tranquilos. Y allá al otro lado sí hay cositas que... pero no tan fuertes como en otras fronteras. Aquí todo bien, está un poco más calmado. Sí, porque tengo familia también allá en Nogales, Sonora, y si, ya está un poquito mal la frontera, pero no tan fuerte como en otras partes.”

[Look, for example, here with us in Arizona we are comfortable because you don’t see much [crime]... we are calm. On the other side, there are a few things... but not as strong as other borders. Here, all is good and calm. Yes, because I have family over there, in Nogales, Sonora, and yes the Border is a little bad, but not as bad as other parts.]

Though there is some tension in how residents of the small town of Nogales, Arizona, perceive its big city neighbor, Nogales, Sonora, it is evident that the two communities are still interconnected. Antonia later adds, when describing Ambos Nogales and its

closeness with one another, “*Nogalitos está muy chiquita. Y ya nos conocemos.*”

[Nogalitos is small. And we all know each other.]

Although residents of Ambos Nogales rejected negative notions of their community, they still called for additional resources and support from both governments. The COVID-19 pandemic was a significant obstacle that impacted both communities, as it led to the temporary closing of the Border, which halted the transient nature of both communities. Fatima, a Nogales, Sonora resident says, “*La pandemia Nos atrasó mucho en muchas cosas, pues desde que cuando cerraron la frontera, el impacto del dólar se nos fue muy arriba... muchas, muchas diferencias hubo, pues en ese entonces ahora ya no hay tantas tiendas como antes, también todo eso no a pegado.*” [The pandemic set us back in many things since they closed the Border, the impact of the dollar went very high... there were many, many differences. Since then, there are not as many stores as before, also many things haven’t stuck.] As a frequent crosser, Fatima’s comments highlight the aftermath of dividing a community so reliant on one another. Clearly viewing the Nogales community as interconnected, Fatima demonstrates Sonorans’ influence on Nogales, Arizona, and its dwindling downtown by emphasizing her critical role as a consumer. Fatima’s comments showcase the perspective of Sonoran consumers who were welcomed by locked storefront gates once the Border reopened. Meanwhile, Antonia, a worker for her family-owned business in downtown Nogales, Arizona, displays the burden the pandemic has placed on business owners.

“Fue un impacto grande porque casi no hubo ventas. Por ejemplo, aquí se cerró un mes. Un mes. Creo que todo abril se cerró y en mayo, ya mi hermana dijo que iba a abrir y yo me acuerdo que le dije a [Name], le dije, pero dicen que va a estar más peor. Pues sí dice mi hermana, pero me voy a cuidar, yo igual te necesito que abras la tienda porque no tengo dinero para pagar la renta. Aquí

pagan muy pagan mucho [...] pero sí, ha bajado mucho las ventas. Abajado muchas las ventas.

[It was a big impact because there were almost no sales. For example, we were closed for one month. One month. I think all of April was closed and May. Then my sister said she was going to open. I remember that I told [Name], I told her, but they say it's going to be worse. My sister says, 'Well yes, But I'm going to take care of myself, I still need you to open the store because I don't have money to pay the rent.' And here they pay a lot [...] but yes, sales have dropped a lot. Many sales dropped.]

Antonia and her family share the same struggles that many small businesses faced during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, unique to border towns, especially Nogales, Arizona, business owners were left stranded when much of their clientele were prevented from crossing, making it difficult to survive. Even two years after the restrictions were lifted and the Border reopened, many businesses struggle to return to pre-pandemic levels.

The handling and aftermath of the pandemic have left residents of Ambos Nogales, consumers and merchants alike, calling for more resources. Fatima states, "*Pienso que falta muchos recursos*" [I think we lack many resources.] Later, adding that Nogales needs a "*mejor gobierno*" [better government], meaning "*Alguien que en realidad se preocupe por la gente*" [someone who truly cares about the people]. Antonia similarly adds, "*Me gustaría que hubiera más trabajo, más trabajo aquí y que hicieran los presidentes de aquí en Nogales, Arizona... hicieran algo por Nogalitos. Sí, hay que saliera adelante.*" [I would like there to be more work, more work here, and that the presidents here in Nogales, Arizona, would do something for Nogalitos. Yes, we have to move forward.] Antonia's comments resonate deeply with Fatima's as both women demonstrate a love of their community and a desire to see it as it once was. As engaged

citizens, they also express frustration with both governments who actively influence both communities yet have failed to provide the necessary resources for their constituents.

A call for more resources is a clear contradiction from previous perceptions of the Border. As prior respondents noted, the Border is viewed as the epicenter of economic opportunities, yet as Fatima and Antonia's comments show, the Border has its limitations as a community heavily influenced by the legislation of the two countries. Ultimately, we see that the residents of Ambos Nogales are adamant defenders of their community who still recognize the need for additional resources.

Border Identity

Understanding the experiences of the residents of Ambos Nogales and how they perceive the Border helps establish the framework for understanding how this community comprehends Border Identity. One of the last questions interviewees were asked was whether they feel a sense of Border Identity. Initially, the question was met with indifference by many. Fatima and Rosita, who were interviewed together, didn't have a definitive stand. Fatima said, "*Pudiera ser que si. Pudiera ser que si.*" [It could be so. It could be so.] When asked again, Rosita simply shrugged. Fatima and Rosita's disinterest in the question demonstrates that a perceived Border Identity isn't as relevant in the daily life of residents of Ambos Nogales. This suggests that the influence of the Border may not be recognized as a specific or unique identity by Nogales residents. Laura, from Mexico adds to this belief as she strongly responds to the question with "*No, no.*" This further indicates that the effects of, and even the existence of, a Border Identity may not be fully recognized.

The question of Border Identity was generally met with confusion. Manuel answered the question by commenting on the culture of Ambos Nogales, “*Hermosos todo... No me quejo ni allá ni de aquí.*” [All are beautiful... I don’t complain about over there or here]. When I rephrased the question to if he thinks that the people of Nogales, Arizona would identify with a Border Identity, Manuel answered “*Ándale*” [Exactly]. Manuel’s comments displayed the difficulties in attempting to measure “identity.” While he believes that most people in Nogales would resonate with a Border Identity, it is evident that he wouldn’t be able to describe exactly what that entails. Lola similarly recognized a Border Identity but struggled to distinguish it from other identities or cultures, “*Fíjate que, Pues ya te acostumbras, yo creo.*” [Well, you get used to it I think]. Her comments showcase that, whatever the Border Identity may be, it’s difficult to compartmentalize.

Claudia was alone in identifying Border Identity as transient and connected to globalization. Claudia stated, “*Es que mira, yo pienso que la identidad fronteriza es porque pues está uno aquí en la frontera ya hay más facilidad de venir a comprar aquí.*” [Look, I think that the Border Identity is, because, since you are here on the Border it is easier to come and buy here.] Her comments seem part of an underlying belief that what makes the Border unique is its relationship with both countries. The convenience of the Border is highlighted throughout the interviews; however, this is the only instance of it being identified as Border Identity.

The concept of Border Identity to the residents of Ambos Nogales was confusing to understand and difficult to define. One attempt to understand occurred when I asked the follow-up question: Is Border Identity equivalent to Mexican identity? Julia eagerly

answered, “*Ándale, Si*” [Yes, Exactly]. Her response rejects the theory that Border Identity is separate from a Mexican identity. Many respondents shared a similar understanding, as many identified with a Border Identity but had difficulty separating it from other identities.

Guadalupe and Beatriz, two women originally from southern Mexico, provided a unique perspective on their understanding of Border Identity. As women not originally from the Border area, they provided more concrete examples of what Border Identity embodies and how it differs from other parts of Mexico. Guadalupe states,

“No es que sea malinchista, pero a mí me gusta porque... el sistema de aquí, como hay mucha tranquilidad. Muy diferente. Porque allá hacen fiestas y como vive uno... en fraccionamiento. Las casas están muy pegadas, entonces la gente se emborracha y [suena] la música a altas horas de la noche. Allá no hay autoridad que les pare el alto. Aquí es como más tranquilo.”

[I'm not a *malinchista* [traitor], but I like it because the system here... like there is a lot of tranquility. Very different. Because over there they throw parties and how one lives... in subdivided houses. The houses are very close together, so people get drunk and the music plays late at night there. There is no authority that can stop them. It's calmer here.]

Guadalupe's experience as a Mexican woman from the South, illustrates an outsiders perspective on Border Identity. Her emphasis on not wanting to be labeled as a “traitor” to her home region demonstrates the cultural differences between the Border area and other parts of Mexico. Especially as Guadalupe contrasts the lifestyles in both regions, insinuating that Nogales is more organized and secure.

Beatriz, another women originally from southern Mexico, also chose to negatively differentiate the South from North by saying, “*Pues porque aquí son muy, es como si fuera todas las personas estudiadas y como que allá, como si no tuvieran estudios. Así siento yo.*” [Well because here they're very, it's like all the studied people, and over there

it's like they haven't studied. That's how I feel]. This distinction, though not accurate, showcases that Southern Mexicans view people from Nogales and their lifestyle as different from theirs. This leads to the argument that while residents of Ambos Nogales don't readily recognize identity factors and cultural aspects that make them unique, outsiders do.

The various reactions to whether a Border Identity exists indicate the challenges that arise when attempting to measure and interpret identity. Many of the respondents demonstrated an indifferent and often uninterested response, implying a minimal perceived understanding of Border Identity among residents of Ambos Nogales. While residents recognized the influence of both neighboring countries, they struggled to distinguish it as separate from their national identities. The exception was residents of Nogales who were originally from Southern Mexico who were able to differentiate Nogales as unique from different parts of Mexico. While the uniqueness of Nogales was evident to the respondents, it is clear that a collective understanding of Border Identity is not distinctively recognized. Thus emphasizing the call for more research regarding Border people and identity.

Conclusion

This study aimed to facilitate further discussion regarding residents of the Border during a politically intense climate by seeking to better understand Border Identity and establishing the feasibility of larger-scale studies like this one. While this study had a small sample size that does not represent the Ambos Nogales population or residents of other border towns, this study displays the realities of conducting in-person interviews and surveys with a population such as Nogales.

This study adds to existing Border Studies literature as a modern small-scaled mix methods pilot study. Though the following findings represent a small sample size, they are still meaningful and serve as a starting point for future research. Through this research, it was observed that 54.05% of people surveyed identify with a Border Identity, demonstrating the prevalence of Border Identity among the people of Ambos Nogales. Using cross-tabulation analysis, it can be concluded that respondents who identify with a sense of Border Identity cross the Border more frequently than those who don't claim the identity. Additionally, the analysis found that respondents who indicated that ethnicity strongly shapes their identity also tend to identify with a Border Identity. While the Pearson chi-square test indicates that the association between Border Identity and Crossing Frequency, as well as Border Identity and the strength of nationality/ethnicity are statistically insignificant, future research should continue to research these factors on a larger sample. A larger sample size would enable more advance and meaningful analyses, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of these relationships.

Ultimately, while most people state feeling a sense of Border Identity, interview analysis indicates that respondents have a difficult time defining the characteristics and implications of possessing a Border Identity. One finding rejects previous literature which views the Border as a "third country." Respondents in this study were firm on establishing their *Mexicanidad* and dismissed the idea of a Border Identity being separate from a Mexican identity. Additionally, non-border natives provided valuable insight into Border Identity as they could better describe the uniqueness of Ambos Nogales than Border natives. This finding adds to the recent shift in Border Studies that seeks to understand a more holistic approach to the Border. Including recognizing the

heterogeneous nature of the Border, such as southern Mexicans who have moved and adapted to the Border. While a comprehensive understanding of Border Identity was not achieved through this study, participants' willingness to talk about aspects such as the importance of work, proximity to both countries, and their connectedness to the community serves as strong guidelines to better understanding Border Identity.

This study showcases that while residents of Ambos Nogales recognize the impact that living on the Border has on their daily lives, it is not explicitly identified as a Border Identity. While Border Studies have initiated the discussion surrounding the identity of *Fronterizos*, this study shows that much work is left to better understand the complex identities found along the Border. This study also highlights the need to continue discussing the Border and the people who have made it their permanent home, especially when it comes to ensuring that they receive the resources necessary to combat the negative effects of COVID-19.

Future research should look past this study's limitations. Pablo Vila identified the following pitfalls of Border research (2003). The first is "confusing the American side as equal to the whole Border." Pablo Vila rejects only studying "the border crosser." This is a limitation of the study. While I surveyed a few people who did not cross to the other side often, the majority would have fallen into the border crosser category. Unfortunately, due to financial contractions and institutional limitations, I was unable to survey people in Mexico, which would have increased my ability to find border reinforcers and present a more holistic perspective. Future research should conduct fieldwork on both sides of the Border while deliberately seeking to sample residents who would not be considered

border crossers. This limitation further indicates that the results of this study better represent border crossers than Border people as a whole.

Vila also mentions the tendency to oversimplify the complex relationship between different groups found on the Border (2003). For instance, the illustrative hierarchy and the tendency of “othering” that occurs on the Border. Demonstrated by the complex relationship between Southern Mexicans and Northern Mexicans, Mexicans and Mexican Americans, and Mexicans and Anglo Americans. While this relationship is complicated to convey over surveys and quick interviews, longer interviews may be able to explore these complicated relationships better. For the purpose of this study, these relationships were not explored in an explicit choice to avoid any questions that could lead to discussing immigration status. Future research should be sensitive about asking further identifying questions.

Vila also describes “confusing sharing a culture with a sharing of identity” (2003). Vila rejects the notion that sharing a culture immediately means a unified sense of identity among the participants. He illustrates this with the example of Mexican Catholics and Mexican American Catholics, who view each other's practice of the religion as different. While his point stands and can be seen in the confusion that the Border Identity question brought during the interview, I would argue that Border Identity should instead be viewed as an important identity that intersects with many other identities. I also argue that this intersection may be less prevalent and recognizable in the lives of Border people than typical Border Studies may suggest. Regardless, future research should continue exploring and theorizing Border Identity's influence.

As I sat in the largest 4th of July festival the town had ever seen, I was surrounded by *musica nortea*, *elotes*, and jalapeño peppers. I saw people strutting in their Mexican boots and matching sombrero while wearing a \$5 Old Navy American flag shirt. While the results of this study are not generalizable, my goal is that the residents of Ambos Nogales are not treated as the outskirts of both countries. This unique and complex population deserves additional resources and research. By better understanding the critical factors of Border Identity, we can better assist and empathize with a population that has so often been forgotten.

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