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ECUADORIAN CULTURE IN MIGRANTS´ ADAPTATION PROCESSES: AN ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLEGES AND CULTURAL ADAPTATION STRATEGIES FROM A MALE PERSPECTIVE

Project prior to obtaining the Bachelor's Degree in International Studies

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Cuenca – Ecuador

2025

To my greatest sources of inspiration and role models: my mother, Carmita Espinoza, the most generous and hardworking woman; and my father, Rubén González, the best man and the wisest. I also dedicate this to you, Ecuadorian migrant men, who sacrifice many aspects of your lives when you migrate and find yourselves on U.S. soil

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply grateful to Mgtr. Mónica Martínez for her great support and guidance throughout this entire process—for teaching her students, through her actions, the value of empathy and solidarity during our university life.

To Mgtr. Damiano Scotton and Mgtr. Adrián Alvarado, for their valuable teachings and for being my sources of inspiration and professional admiration. I also thank them because every class they taught was filled with vocation, love, and passion for their educational field.

To my parents, Rubén and Carmita, for being my greatest and most unconditional source of support; to my siblings, Diego and Lucy, for taking care of me, believing in me, and encouraging me to be better; to my aunt, Edith, for her constant support and the trust she placed in me. To Scarleth, my great friend, for her support and unwavering friendship.

To Gretel, Alisson, and Paloma, for being part of that group of friends who encouraged me to grow and keep learning—for all the experiences we shared.

To Angie, for her friendship and great support throughout these years—for all the moments, the laughter, and the tears we shared.

To you, friend who is now on U.S. soil, because you inspired me to carry out this graduation project.

To everyone who was part of my university life and helped make it a memorable time.

ECUADORIAN CULTURE IN THE ADAPTATION PROCESSES OF MIGRANTS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES OF CULTURAL ADAPTATION FROM A MALE PERSPECTIVE

ABSTRACT

If we conceive of culture as the guide for our way of thinking, feeling, and acting, we will likely be able to understand human behavior. Ecuadorian culture influences multiple aspects of the adaptation process of Ecuadorian men living in the United States. Far from their homeland, Ecuadorians tend to replicate cultural aspects to feel closer to home. This research explores the challenges and cultural adaptation strategies that Ecuadorian male migrants have implemented in the United States. The methodology used follows a qualitative and descriptive approach, and the methodological tool applied was triangulation. In-depth interviews were conducted with a group of Ecuadorian migrants and specialists in the fields of human mobility, anthropology, and psychology. In addition, relevant theories in the area of study were explored and analyzed. Today, as in past decades, in Ecuador, men have been the ones who predominantly migrate to the U.S., influenced by multiple factors. I highlight the importance of making the male voice visible, a voice that, for many decades, has been silenced by various pressures and expectations.

Keywords:

Culture, migration, cultural adaptation, cultural challenges, cultural identity, emotional repression.

LA CULTURA ECUATORIANA EN LOS PROCESOS DE ADAPTACIÓN DE LOS MIGRANTES: UN ANÁLISIS DE LOS DESAFÍOS Y ESTRATEGIAS DE ADAPTACIÓN CULTURAL DESDE UNA PERSPECTIVA MASCULINA

RESUMEN

Si concebimos a la cultura como la guía de nuestra forma de pensar, sentir y actuar, probablemente seremos capaces de comprender el comportamiento humano. La cultura ecuatoriana influye en múltiples aristas en la adaptación del hombre ecuatoriano en suelo estadounidense. El ecuatoriano, lejos de su tierra natal, tiende a replicar aspectos culturales para sentirse cerca de casa. Esta investigación explora los desafíos y las estrategias de adaptación cultural que el hombre migrante ecuatoriano ha implementado en Estados Unidos. La metodología utilizada posee un enfoque cualitativo, de corte descriptivo; la herramienta metodológica empleada fue la triangulación. Se realizaron entrevistas a profundidad a un grupo de migrantes ecuatorianos y a especialistas en el área de: Movilidad humana, antropología y psicología. A su vez, se exploraron y analizaron teorías en el área de estudio. Hoy, así como en décadas atrás, en Ecuador, la figura masculina ha sido quien principalmente ha emigrado a EE. UU., múltiples son los factores influyentes en esta decisión. Resalto la importancia de visibilizar la voz masculina, una voz que, durante muchas décadas, ha sido silenciada por diversas presiones y expectativas.

Palabras clave:

Cultura, migración, adaptación cultural, desafíos culturales, identidad cultural y represión emocional.

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Introduction

"The homeland is a memory... Pieces of life wrapped in shreds of love or pain; the rustling palm, familiar music, the orchard now without flowers, without leaves, without greenery" (Miró, 2024). Even after many years away from their homeland, Ecuadorian migrant men carry their country with them into foreign lands, holding on to memories of where they grew up. The study of migration is vast; migration has been analyzed from multiple perspectives. There are various factors that motivate human displacement—among them, economic, political, social, and environmental reasons stand out. The primary destination of Ecuadorian migration has been the United States, with men making up the majority of this flow. The phenomenon has also expanded to European countries, particularly Spain. When a migrant moves to a new territory, they face various challenges—not only during their journey (especially in the case of irregular migration) but also cultural challenges in the new environment. A permanent migrant, upon arriving in a culture different from their own, undergoes a process of cultural adaptation.

This research seeks to answer the question of how Ecuadorian culture influences the cultural adaptation processes of Ecuadorian migrant men who have emigrated to the United States. In general, existing studies on migration have focused on the experiences of women or families, often excluding the male perspective and their adaptation processes. Furthermore, this study aims to identify the role of gender within culture and migration processes, the elements of Ecuadorian culture that influence adaptation, and the strategies Ecuadorian men have developed during their adaptation in the United States.

To understand the evolution of male thought, the ages of the interviewees range from twenty to fifty-seven years old. In-depth interviews served as the qualitative tool that enabled a better understanding of the cultural challenges and strategies these men have developed to adapt to life in the United States. This research aims to contribute to migration and cultural studies from a male perspective. Understanding masculine realities in migratory contexts made it possible to propose recommendations based on the lived

experiences of the interviewees. This work is structured into five sections: the first addresses the theoretical framework and literature review; the second presents the methodology used; the third outlines the results obtained; the fourth focuses on the case study analysis; and the final section offers conclusions and recommendations derived from the research.

Justification

This thesis is justified essentially on three main grounds. First, it contributes to migration studies by focusing on the male perspective, a subject with limited academic attention. Second, understanding the challenges faced by Ecuadorian men in the United States can inform the development of public policies that address the difficulties they encounter. Finally, within the complex current Ecuadorian migratory context—exacerbated by the immigration policies of the Trump administration—this research highlights the urgent need to address the mental health of Ecuadorian migrants, an issue that has neither been explored nor adequately addressed.

The idea for this thesis stems from the intention to "give voice" to a vulnerable group. Typically, migration studies with a gender focus have prioritized women, a vulnerable group facing significant challenges, particularly in irregular migratory contexts. However, from a strictly male perspective, there are intentional or unintentional research gaps. Traditional Ecuadorian culture regards men as the primary providers for the household; this and many other factors influence the sense of responsibility men feel when they migrate. For decades, Ecuadorian men have repressed their feelings, particularly when it comes to expressing emotional distress. In contrast, Ecuadorian women are more open in expressing their emotions. These cultural aspects influence how migrant men experience and navigate challenges in foreign environments. This work seeks to contribute to migration and cultural studies and to give voice to those who usually remain silent about what they feel.

CHAPTER 1
THEORETICAL FRAMEOWORK AND STATE OF THE ART

1.1. Theoretical Framework: Historical and Conceptual Foundations

1.1.1. The Inevitability of the Human Species: Migratory Mobility

What is migration? The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines it as the movement of people away from their usual place of residence, either within their country or across international borders. From a demographic perspective, IOM distinguishes between two types: international migration—when people move to a different country—and internal migration—when they relocate within the same country (IOM, 2024).

Today, more people than ever are living outside their country of origin. According to the United Nations Population Division, as of 2020, North America hosted approximately 21% of the world's international migrants (United Nations, 2024).

Researchers have long sought to understand this complex and multifaceted phenomenon. While most migration studies focus on economic and demographic dimensions, there is still a significant gap in addressing the cultural and psychological aspects of migration (Micolta León, 2005).

This study explores the role of Ecuadorian culture in shaping the adaptation experiences of Ecuadorian male migrants in the United States. The following section outlines historical events, key concepts, and theoretical approaches that form the foundation for this research.

One of the earliest contributors to migration studies was Ernest Ravenstein, who analyzed human mobility during a time of growing emphasis on rationality and individual freedom. He suggested that people make migration decisions based on rational calculations aimed at maximizing gain with minimal effort. Ravenstein argued that the core driver of migration lies in the stark economic disparities between sending and receiving countries—differences in income, employment opportunities, and labor distribution. His work laid the foundation for future migration theories (Micolta León, 2005).

Among the most influential theoretical perspectives is the neoclassical theory of migration. As Arango (2000) notes, this theory was not originally developed to explain migration, but it can be effectively applied to it. Its key elements include rational choice, labor mobility, and wage differentials. Broadly speaking, it views migration as a response to differences in relative prices of production factors. Individuals migrate in pursuit of better economic conditions, after evaluating the costs and benefits of doing so (Lee, 1966; Massey et al., 1993).

Arango (2000) explains that migration arises from the unequal spatial distribution of capital and labor. In regions with scarce labor and abundant capital, wages tend to be higher; in contrast, regions with labor surpluses offer lower wages. As a result, workers migrate to areas with better economic returns, gradually leading to a leveling of wage differences. According to this theory, migration will continue until these wage gaps close.

Another important perspective is Wallerstein's World Systems Theory (2004), which focuses on the structural inequalities embedded in the global capitalist system. Development pressures and uneven economic growth across countries push people from the global periphery toward more developed centers. Wallerstein highlights the role of global power structures and the political economy in shaping migratory flows.

Similarly, Everett Lee's Push-Pull Theory (1966) argues that migration is a process involving a place of origin, a destination, and multiple intervening factors. People are pushed to leave their country due to negative conditions and are pulled to move to other countries due to attractive prospects. Lee identifies four critical components: push factors (e.g., unemployment, insecurity), pull factors (e.g., job opportunities, higher wages), intervening obstacles (e.g., travel costs, immigration laws), and personal factors that influence an individual's decision to migrate.

In addition to these factors, social networks—such as family and community ties—play a crucial role in facilitating migration. These networks reduce both the emotional and economic costs of migration and help newcomers integrate into the destination country (Massey et al., 1993).

Despite the increased attention migration has received in recent decades, there is still no single theory that fully explains the phenomenon. As Arango (2000) points out, this is common in social sciences, where human behavior is highly variable and difficult

to predict. The diversity of migration contexts, actors, motivations, and socio-economic conditions makes it nearly impossible for one theory to capture the full picture.

According to the IOM (2022), a migrant is someone who moves away from their habitual place of residence—either within their own country or across borders—temporarily or permanently, for a variety of reasons. Ecuador's Organic Law on Human Mobility defines an emigrant as an Ecuadorian who intends to reside temporarily or permanently in another country (excluding short-term travel), while an immigrant is a foreign national who seeks to settle in Ecuador, also temporarily or permanently (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility, 2017).

There is always a "why" behind every migration story. People migrate for a wide range of reasons—social, economic, familial, educational, political, or environmental reasons. The United Nations also notes that persecution, climate change, and severe human rights violations are increasingly common drivers of migration (United Nations, 2024).

Historically, migration has been driven by environmental, political, and economic factors. Early human populations were forced to relocate due to natural events, particularly in the absence of tools to manage environmental challenges. Political migration results from complex national crises or a rejection of the prevailing socio-political order. Economic migration, typically voluntary, stems from financial hardship and the desire for improved living standards (Micolta León, 2005).

The economic dimension of migration was already emphasized by Ravenstein in the 19th century. As cited by Arango (2000), Ravenstein argued that economic motivations outweigh any other factor—poor laws, taxes, or even climate conditions—in explaining why people migrate.

Throughout history, human mobility has been a strategy for survival. Initially, people migrated to meet basic needs such as food and shelter. Later, as societies developed, people began to migrate in search of better opportunities and to improve their families' quality of life. According to Gutiérrez et al. (2020), globalization has further intensified migration by making transportation and communication more accessible and affordable.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Ecuador has experienced a significant increase in net emigration. More people are leaving the country than entering it. In 2021, 2022, and

2023, the migration deficit exceeded 81,000, 99,000, and 121,000 people, respectively. However, the actual numbers may be higher due to many migrants bypassing official border controls. The United States remains the main destination for Ecuadorian migrants, with an estimated 800,000 Ecuadorians currently residing there. Despite the risks, many continue to seek new and often dangerous routes to reach their destination (IOM, 2024).

1.1.2. The Guide to Our Decisions: Culture and Cultural Adaptation

First, it is necessary to define the word "culture." Culture has various conceptualizations. The definition that academic scholars in Psychology and Anthropology agree upon, in a concise manner, is that it is a way of life. The way we think, feel, and act is based on patterns that we have acquired in a social environment, and these patterns are part of what the word itself means (Páez et al., 2005). In a broader sense, considering human behavior and beliefs as a foundation, culture is defined in Chapter II of the book *Social Psychology, Culture, and Education* as:

"Behavioral patterns that occur because people value and follow certain norms and action orientations. These shared values play key roles in the psychological functioning of individuals, and those that are central are reflected in texts and collective behaviors" (Páez et al., 2005, p.3).

Culture is evolutionary, meaning it can change. Different cultures adapt to changes or transformations within their communities. Culture consists of various elements, including historical past, melodies, family, beliefs or convictions, and sociocultural rules. The latter are expectations or beliefs about what is considered appropriate or normal for a particular society. Furthermore, within these norms, are the roles that are expected to be fulfilled by either females or males (Amnesty International, 2017). This is key to understanding the strong influence that both culture and gender roles have when deciding who assumes the responsibility of migrating.

Culture can be measured in relation to other cultures. Hofstede (1991; as cited in Farías, 2007) understands culture as a mental structure within a collective that differentiates one group of people from another. In 1980, Hofstede proposed four dimensions of a country's culture (variables of a nation that can be compared to another), which are: 1. Power Distance, 2. Uncertainty Avoidance, 3. Individualism, and 4. Masculinity. Later, in collaboration with Bond, they developed a fifth dimension called "Long-Term Orientation."

As Hofstede (1991; as cited in Farías, 2007) states, the first dimension, in concise terms, refers to the extent to which people are willing to accept the differences in power that exist within a society. When a community has a high value in this dimension, it reflects an acceptance of hierarchical differences. The second refers to the level of discomfort that society feels towards the unknown. A high value in this dimension indicates a strong rejection of uncertainty. The third refers to how much people value autonomy and self-sufficiency compared to collective action. The fourth compares masculinity to femininity. In a more masculine culture, traits such as success and competition prevail; in a more feminine culture, collaboration and valuing people are prioritized. The last refers to how much people are willing to wait for a future benefit, whether social or emotional (a high value in this dimension indicates a willingness to wait).

When an individual encounters a culture different from their own, they integrate parts of this new culture, undergoing a process. The Royal Spanish Academy (RAE) calls this process acculturation. In their words, acculturation is the “adoption and assimilation of cultural elements of one human group by another” (RAE, n.d.).

This process not only affects the immigrant who encounters a different culture but also the nationals of the receiving country, although generally, one culture is considered to be "above" the other in terms of subordination (Retortillo Osuna & Rodríguez Navarro, 2008).

Berry (1990, as cited in Retortillo & Rodríguez, 2008) has conducted multiple investigations in the field of Transcultural Psychology, and along with other scholars, developed the Acculturation Model. This model explains the situations that immigrants face regarding their culture and the interaction with the new one. Berry distinguishes four acculturation strategies. In integration, the person maintains their culture of origin while simultaneously participating in the new receiving society. In assimilation, the person fades away from their cultural practices by choice and relates more closely to the new society. In separation, the person highly values their roots and refuses to relate to the receiving culture. In marginalization, the person shows little interest in preserving their roots or participating in the new society.

On the other hand, the "melting pot" theory was one of the first to explain the cultural adaptation of immigrants. The immigrant, regardless of their ethnic and cultural

roots, gradually acquires the foreign culture as their own and relates to others to develop a shared culture. This pioneering theoretical approach lacks the complexities present in the journey of adapting to a new sociocultural context; consequently, other approaches have been developed with definitions related to this process, such as acculturation, adaptation, and assimilation, which, through specific contexts, seek to explain the reactions of immigrants in migratory contexts (Ferrer et al., 2014).

The term "melting pot" originated from a successful play presented by Israel Zangwill in 1908 in the United States. The root of the play was to portray the United States as a melting pot for races from Europe. Zangwill saw the U.S. as a place where all the races from Europe merged and transformed (Retortillo et al., 2006).

It is worth noting the prior theoretical contribution, since the melting pot theory originated in the United States and portrays the country as a fusion of existing cultural diversities. This study will compare the process of cultural transformation experienced by Ecuadorians in the United States, a sociocultural context that differs from their own. In line with this theoretical approach, the Ecuadorian migrant in the U.S. undergoes a process of cultural transformation when adapting to a new cultural environment.

Another fundamental theory to explain the cultural adaptation process was developed decades ago by a frequently cited figure named Kalervo Oberg (1951) mentions in his work titled *Cultural Shock* that in order to overcome cultural shock, it is crucial to understand the connection between culture and the person, which could explain what happens when an Ecuadorian migrant arrives to a different sociocultural environment. The author explains that people are not born knowing how to speak a specific language or which hand to use for the fork or utensils when eating, among others. In other words, human beings are not born with culture; they learn it. In this sense, the author conceptualizes culture by stating that “the culture of any people is the product of history and is constructed over time through processes that, for the individual, are largely unconscious” (Oberg, 1951, p.6).

According to Oberg, Cultural shock has affected a majority of the human population with varying intensity. The term could be defined as “an occupational illness of people who have been suddenly relocated abroad” (1951, p.1). Cultural shock is seen by the author as a disease with its own characteristics, as it has its own etiology, discomforts, and even its own remedy. In other words, the author emphasizes that, just as there are

factors or causes that trigger the phenomenon, there are also consequences and solutions to this situation that, in one way or another, have unpleasant effects on the human species.

When a person enters an unknown culture, much or all the elements of their own culture fade away. It does not matter whether it is a man or woman experiencing cultural shock; in the author's words, both may feel as "a fish out of water." Feeling unfamiliar with a new cultural context causes frustration; in response to this feeling, the person resists the new environment. A simple way to identify whether a person is going through this process: cultural shock is reflected in complaints about the host country and its population. Oberg mentions several indicators of cultural shock, among which are excessive hand washing, concern about water, food, lost gaze, fear, anger, resistance to learning the foreign language, and others (Oberg, 1951).

Oberg distinguishes four stages within cultural shock. The first, called the "Honeymoon" phase, can last from days to half a year. While for the temporary foreign individual it can be a satisfying and happy experience, for the permanent foreign individual, the situation turns contrary to the first, as they face the realities of daily life, and anxiety becomes prevalent. The second stage arises from complications and challenges (school situations, language barriers, mobility, shopping, etc.) that the foreign national faces and is characterized by an aggressive attitude. Along with fellow nationals, they criticize the country, its population, and ways of life. Instead of acknowledging the situation they face, the way they express themselves makes it seem as though the citizens of the host country are responsible for the complexities of the individual experiences (Oberg, 1951).

The third stage of cultural shock is characterized by the person beginning to find their place in the new cultural context. Although the person still faces complexities, their attitude reflects calmness and superiority in relation to the host population. In this stage, criticism disappears, and they joke about situations that were once difficulties. There is a willingness to help others who have started the process. This stage is the path to improvement. Finally, in the last stage, unlike the first, anxiety is absent, although there may still be situations of tension. The individual now enjoys food, drinks, and traditions. Even if the person leaves the country permanently, they will miss not only the host country but also the social environment they have formed. Ultimately, in the last stage, the individual adapts (Oberg, 1951).

Another theory, also used in various studies about immigrant assimilation, was that of Milton Gordon in 1964. Gordon's model consists of three phases: acculturation, structural assimilation, and the formation of a common identity. The immigrant person incorporates elements from the least profound, such as clothing or manner of speaking, to more profound elements, such as principles or perceptions of life. Meanwhile, the receiving society undergoes little change. In the second phase, once the culture is assimilated, the immigrant establishes social relationships (friendships, family, etc.) with nationals. In the last phase, both nationals and immigrants have a shared sense of belonging, destiny, and common identity (Retortillo et al., 2006).

Finally, Young Yun Kim's theory of transcultural adaptation is also essential for this study. Kim (1988, as cited in Aldaya, 2000) explains that the transcultural adaptation of migrants in a new cultural context is the result of extensive and regular contact with a foreign culture. Adapting means reducing feelings of anxiety and uncertainty, which are part of dealing with strangers. Kim considers various elements that influence this process, such as communication skills, participation in the new cultural context, social environment, emotional and psychological aspects of the migrant facing uncertainty, and identity changes resulting from the status of being a migrant. Kim argues that, during this process, the incorporation of aspects from one culture by another inevitably involves distancing and even forgetting one's own cultural elements.

Kim's (1988; as cited in Aldaya, 2000) transcultural adaptation process consists of four stages. In the first stage, the migrant assimilates the characteristics or cultural aspects of the host culture; this stage is called "assimilation." Secondly, the migrant, while learning new cultural practices, unlearns some of their own; this stage is called "learning-unlearning." In the third stage, the migrant incorporates the learned cultural aspects into their life, such as principles, perceptions, or beliefs of the host culture. This stage is known as "imitation-adjustment." Finally, the migrant actively participates in the new sociocultural world, and this stage is called "integration."

1.1.3. Gender Roles and Masculinity: An idea of what it means to be a man

Gender roles have been conceptualized by the World Health Organization as "social constructs that shape behaviors, activities, and opportunities considered appropriate in a given sociocultural context for all individuals" (WHO, 2018).

The article "Gender Role and Family Functioning" indicates that throughout human history, certain values have been transferred through customs, cultural aspects, and religious practices, which are related to the roles that men and women should play in a specific social environment. Generally, the female figure assumes the reproductive role and the care of their descendants, while the male is responsible for meeting the needs of the family. The article emphasizes that women are subject to far more domestic and child-rearing duties than men (P. Herrera, 2000).

Ecuador, like other Latin American countries, is a society where the male figure is the head of the household and holds authority over decision-making within the family. Historically, in Ecuador, it has been men who migrate to other countries to provide economic support and improve the well-being of their families. It is also worth mentioning that the number of women migrating has increased in recent years (Cardoso & Gives, 2021).

Minello (2002), in his article "Masculinities: A Concept in Construction," argues that research on men, also known as "Men's studies," originated in the 1970s. These studies focus on moving away from the perception of men as the "legal representatives of humanity"; instead, they study them as individuals with unique experiences within each society, history, and culture. Existing studies on masculinity allow for an appreciation of its transformation. These studies have increasingly become broader and more complex. However, masculinity implies a relationship between the individual and society, where society determines the individual, and vice versa.

The author mentions Gayle Rubín, who, in 1975, in her study on gender perspective, explains matters concerning masculinity, the importance of analyzing power dynamics, the history of gender, and the subordination of the female sex. Decades later, in the 1990s, studies on men and masculinity multiplied. Minello explains that the most explored research topics include sexuality, reproductive well-being, domestic violence, male self-perception, and machismo. He emphasizes that it is not possible to speak of a single type of masculinity; it does not have a unique type or definition (Minello, 2002).

Claterbaugh (1990; cited in Minello, 2002) classifies masculinities into 6 types, considering social and political factors. The first is characterized by the perception of men as dominant beings, providers, and protectors, which are "natural" attributes; this corresponds to conservative masculinity. The second sees masculinity as a social product,

where male domination can change, corresponding to pro-feminist masculinity. The third views men as beings tied to legal and social aspects that are unjust; this refers to the men's rights movement. The fourth explains that masculinity arises from deep dynamics that are outside and beyond consciousness; it corresponds to spiritual development. The fifth explains that masculinity arises from the strata of society. The sixth type of masculinity refers to specific groups, such as men of color and homosexual men.

For Seidler (1994; cited in Minello, 2002), masculinity should not be understood through the classical theoretical foundations of scientific studies. He states: "We need to seriously take into account what men think about themselves, that is, listen to men and allow them to have experiences." (Seidler 1997, p.3 cited in Minello, 2002).

1.2. State of Art

The article "International Migration in Ecuador: Its Causes, Consequences, and Current Situation" argues that studies on the beginnings of Ecuadorian international migration date back to the early 20th century. The reasons for this migration include the commercialization of the Panama Hat with the U.S., the economic situation caused by the world wars, and the lack of government support for the agricultural sector in Ecuador. Initially, the migration phenomenon was directed towards the United States, later expanding to countries like Spain and Italy (Paladines, 2018).

Since the mid-20th century, the majority of Ecuadorian migrants were young men, primarily heading to New York or Miami. However, since the early 2000s, female migration from Ecuador has largely directed towards Spain. According to Paladines, in line with the work of and Hernández (2008), women migrated to Europe because the risks and costs were lower, and the linguistic advantages made adaptation easier. While remittances sent by migrants have reduced poverty in Ecuador, migration has had profound social and familial consequences (Paladines, 2018).

Three stages of migration from Ecuador are identified, starting in the mid-20th century. In the first stage, during the 1960s, migration flows were mainly directed northward to countries such as the United States, Canada, and Venezuela. During this period, most migrants were able to regularize their migration status. In the years before this, migration from the southern part of Ecuador was primarily directed to New York

due to the crisis of the toquilla straw industry (Herrera et al., 2005). In the second stage, from 1980 to 1998, migration was characterized by a predominantly male rural population from the provinces of Azuay and Cañar. Despite the tightening of U.S. immigration policies starting in 1993, Ecuadorian migration continued, largely driven by the success of previous migrants. Finally, the third stage, from the late 1990s and into the 21st century, saw increased participation from women and migration from urban areas (Herrera et al., 2005).

On the other hand, according to Gutiérrez et al. (2020), in line with Rodicio and Sarceda (2019), not all cases of human displacement are advantageous. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) warns of the risks of irregular migration, where many people risk their lives in hopes of a better life. This has led to a lucrative human trafficking market, with migrants being exposed to violence, exploitation, suffocation (in containers), deadly dehydration (in the desert), and drowning, especially on routes heading northward across the Americas (UNODC, 2013).

As for the criminal routes, one of the most trafficked is from the south to the north of the Americas. It is estimated that criminal activity in this area exceeds $6 million annually, though this figure may be higher (UNODC, 2013). It is important to note that the difficulties faced by men and women during migration are not the same; therefore, the way they cope with and overcome these challenges differs significantly between genders.

In the study “Ecuadorian Migration, Gender, and Return in the 21st Century,” the implications of migration from a gender perspective were analyzed. Surveys were conducted with women in the Azuay province, and the results confirmed that female Ecuadorian migration was primarily directed to Europe. Women were employed in domestic work, such as cleaning, and many established their own businesses, such as restaurants. The data suggests that both the departure from and return to Ecuador were driven by economic and family factors. Although the women’s experiences were generally positive, they were considered part of a vulnerable group, and the established gender roles continued to shape the activities they performed abroad (Cardoso & Gives, 2021).

In the study "Mental Health and Migration," the impact of migration on the mental health of eight Venezuelan immigrants residing in Ecuador's capital was analyzed. The

author states that migration is linked to stressful experiences and feelings of fear and hopelessness, as well as cultural challenges such as language barriers and different customs. The study also mentions experiences of discrimination and violence (Montero & Delfino, 2021).

The study "Ecuadorian Society Analyzed from Cultural Dimensions" explains that Ecuadorian culture is characterized by collectivism, where being part of a group is crucial. It also highlights that there are marked hierarchical differences within the country, and religion plays an important role in the daily lives of Ecuadorians (Aguilar-Rodríguez et al., 2018).

In the research “Cultural Maintenance and Adaptation of Different Immigrant Groups: Predictive Variables,” Navas et al. (2013) analyzed the dimensions of cultural preservation and adaptation in immigrants from Morocco, Romania, and Ecuador. Participants responded to questions about their culture, the host culture, and their need to adapt to a new cultural context. The authors emphasize the importance of addressing the specific situations of each immigrant group, as each one faces unique processes and needs.

Finally, the article "Acculturation and Adaptation Processes of Immigrants: Individual Characteristics and Social Networks," conducted by Ferrer et al. (2014), analyzed how social, cultural, and individual factors influence the cultural adaptation of immigrants. It determined that personal characteristics, the methods used by immigrants to adapt, the receiving society, and support networks are key to facilitating immigrant integration.

Current Situation under Trump Administration Polices

The new executive orders under the presidential mandate of Donald Trump, the current President of the United States, cover a range of issues, including human mobility and the climate crisis. The new immigration policies revolve around border closure, the resumption of the border wall construction, the expansion of military deployment, and the suspension of the refugee protection program in the country. Trump also aims to eliminate birthright citizenship for children of undocumented immigrants born in the United States (BBC, 2025) with this executive order, which, according to BBC (2025) has been challenged by the attorneys general of more than 20 states in the country. The lawsuits argue that the executive order violates the U.S. Constitution.

Trump’s promise was to carry out the largest deportation in the history of the United States. Deportations began just days after his inauguration and have caused diplomatic tensions between the United States and certain Latin American countries, such as Colombia and Brazil, which have opposed the degrading and criminal treatment their nationals received from U.S. officials during the return process to their home countries (FRANCE24, 2025).

On the other hand, the deportation of more than thirty-one thousand Ecuadorians has significant socioeconomic repercussions. The remittances received by the country will decrease significantly, as they are a significant source of income for the Ecuadorian economy and thousands of Ecuadorian families. According to economist Elías Carrillo, the lack of employment in the country, combined with the reduction in remittances, will exacerbate unemployment. Meanwhile, economist Jorge Herrera points out that the lack of job opportunities could force people to resort to crime for survival, impacting the security of the Ecuadorian population (Coronel, 2025).

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility of Ecuador, cited by the Swiss news portal SWI (2025), Ecuador has been receiving deportation flights of irregular migrants consistently for the past 20 years, with two to three flights per week. In the past two years, more than thirty-two thousand Ecuadorians were deported. Today, several local media outlets report that deportees are being handcuffed throughout their return journey to Ecuador. This situation is evidenced by the words of an irregular migrant deported in January 2025, who had arrived in the United States seeking job opportunities and safety. Her words were: "They deported us chained up (...) we were treated worse than animals." The returned migrant stated that the treatment was akin to that of a criminal, as she was handcuffed for about 13 hours, with restraints on her hands, feet, and waist (PRIMICIAS, 2025).

The country has initiated a project to assist deported citizens, aimed at counteracting the effects of Trump’s measures and informing them of their rights and obligations as migrants. The plan includes increasing consular staff, providing free legal advice, and offering medical and psychological assistance from state entities, among other services (SWI, 2025). Additionally, Daniel Noboa, President of the Republic of Ecuador, issued an executive decree in February 2025 stating that deported Ecuadorian migrants could access an amount equivalent to one unified basic salary ($470) for three months. However, they must meet certain requirements, such as returning to the country

involuntarily and having committed no crimes in either the country of origin or abroad (PRIMICIAS, 2025).

CHAPTER 2
METHODOLOGICAL GUIDE

2.1. Methodology

Methodology is part of scientific knowledge, aimed at guiding the researcher in the steps to execute to ensure the process and results of a study are efficient and effective. There are primarily two approaches within research methodology: quantitative and qualitative. The latter, unlike the quantitative approach, does not include numerical data. It focuses on the complete understanding of what is being analyzed. Interviews, surveys, perceptions of the researcher, and descriptions are part of this approach. Its purpose is to understand societal circumstances through explanation and interpretation (Cortés & Iglesias, 2004).

As also explained by Taylor & Bogdan (1992), under the theoretical foundation of phenomenology, the qualitative methodology seeks to understand the social environment from the perspective of the involved actors. This approach strives to understand individually the perspectives and motivations underlying human behavior. The essential goal is to explore what really matters to the protagonists. It gathers descriptive information, which comes not only from their words but also from their gestures.

From this perspective, the approach used for this work is qualitative and descriptive. This approach allowed delving into the experiences, challenges, and cultural adaptation strategies that Ecuadorian men have undergone and implemented in the United States. The strategy used was triangulation. The following describes the strategies and instruments employed.

2.2. Strategy and Instruments

2.2.1. Triangulation

Okuda & Gómez (2005) explain that triangulation is a strategy that enhances the quality of both quantitative and qualitative research. In qualitative research, the researcher uses triangulation (the use of different methods to collect information) to identify trends and generate or verify interpretations of the social phenomenon being studied. It is a common misconception that triangulation should provide homogeneous conclusions. However, divergent results should be desired, as they enrich the research.

To improve the quality of this project, triangulation was chosen. It was based on three pillars. The first pillar is the study of documents through the interpretation of different texts related to relevant theories in this work. The second pillar involves in-depth interviews with Ecuadorian migrants who moved to the United States and academics knowledgeable in the fields of Human Mobility, Anthropology, and Psychology. Finally, the third pillar corresponds to the case study.

2.2.2. In-depth Interview

The purpose of carrying out in-depth interviews was to achieve a detailed and profound understanding of the interviewee's feelings, fears, joys, and more. It was important to delve into the daily lives of participants, considering all the elements that affect their experiences. These interviews did not have rigidly established questions; instead, prepared outlines guided the conversation. Although the outlines must align with the research objectives, they should not limit the interviewee from sharing their experiences, as this could enrich the research (Robles, 2011).

The in-depth, semi-structured interview was chosen as the second instrument within the triangulation process, as it allowed for a deep dive into the interviewees' histories and offered flexibility in questioning. This type of interview addressed topics such as the migration context, challenges, cultural adaptation, cultural identity, emotional well-being, among others.

It was necessary to establish specific characteristics of the group to be interviewed, such as demographic data. Doing so provided a clearer view of the commonalities among the interviewees (Robles, 2011). In this study, four common characteristics were considered for the participant group: age, gender, nationality, and having migrated to the United States.

2.2.3. Case Study

The third instrument used was the case study. It is a relevant tool in research because, according to González (2013), it allows "recording and describing the behavior of the people involved in the phenomenon being studied." This tool helps understand realities within the everyday context of a phenomenon and can be gathered from various sources, including interviews. Case studies can be descriptive, exploratory, explanatory, or predictive. They can also be unique or multiple. The former analyzes a specific case, while the latter examines several cases simultaneously.

The case studies in this work were derived from in-depth interviews conducted with the participating migrant group, through a careful selection of interviews that contributed most deeply to the objectives of this study.

2.2.4. Participants

The category shared by the interviewees is that they are migrants, regardless of whether they moved to the United States regularly or irregularly. The age range spans from twenty years to fifty-seven years. For the migrants, anonymity was chosen, while the use of names for the academics was granted. (See Table 1 and Table 2).

The following tables provide an overview of the participants interviewed for this study. Table 1 lists the migrants, including their names and ages, while Table 2 details the academics interviewed along their respective areas of expertise.

Table 1

Migrants interviewed: Names and ages

Interviewee	Age
Interviewee A	Fifty-three
Interviewee B	Twenty-four
Interviewee C	Thirty-seven
Interviewee D	Twenty-one
Interviewee E	Fifty-two
Interviewee F	Fifty-seven
Interviewee G	Twenty

Table *2*

Academics interviewed: Area of expertise and names

Area of expertise	Names
Human Mobility	Mgtr. Mónica Martínez
Anthropology	Anthropologist Mario Bracero
Psychology	Dr. Ana Pacurucu

2.2.5. Procedure

The initial contact with the interviewees, whether migrants or academics, was made through digital means. The research topic was explained, and their willingness to participate was requested through informed consent. Informed consent is a fundamental part of studies involving people. It constitutes the ethical part of the research and ensures respect for participants. Informed consent involves a process by which an individual

agrees to be part of a study freely and voluntarily, once the benefits, risks, and objectives of the study have been explained (Cañete et al., 2012).

For the migrants located in the United States, the informed consent was sent through digital means and approved before the in-depth interview. These interviews were conducted via Google Meet platform. For those who had migrated to the United States and are now residing in Ecuador, as well as for the academics in the fields of Human Mobility, Anthropology, and Psychology, the informed consent was signed prior to the in-person interview. The interviewees' voices were recorded with their consent, and the interviews were transcribed for subsequent analysis.

CHAPTER 3
INTERVIEW RESULTS

3.1. Interviewee A: “Everyone is a professional…(laughs)…except me” (laughs again) …” I wanted to be a professional and yes, it hurts.”

Interviewee A decided to migrate irregularly to the United States at the age of 18. Today, he has been living in the country for 34 years. His decision to emigrate was driven by the difficult economic situation in Ecuador, particularly the devaluation of the sucre, a currency that, at the time, "wasn't worth anything." In addition to this, his strong desire to help his parents and siblings financially and his hope of having, as he puts it, a "better life" pushed him to migrate. However, he also points out, "But you also leave many things behind: the country, your homeland; that really hurts." Although his words are accompanied by a laugh, his tone reveals the pain and love he feels for his homeland.

Upon arriving in the United States, Interviewee A states that things were not as difficult as they are now, saying: "Back then, it wasn't that hard... just one leap." He was received by relatives of his mother, whom he describes as "almost strangers." The loneliness, along with being far from his family, were especially hard experiences for him. He says, "Life is harder without anyone... no one to visit, no one to visit you." In his early years, he would meet up with other Ecuadorians on the weekends, which helped ease the loneliness. However, in his most difficult moments, he would keep his feelings to himself. To stay connected with his parents, he communicated through letters.

Regarding the challenges he faced, he mentions several: uncertainty, the language barrier, robbery, living with others, and long working hours. Despite these obstacles, he managed to adapt, learn English, and, most importantly for him, provide financial support to his family. He shares that his father, who had a knee problem preventing him from working, was very grateful for the help he provided. Although he gave up his dreams of becoming an engineer, he was able to ensure his siblings could pursue their education. He emotionally remarks, "It was like I graduated myself."

Today, he feels deeply grateful to the United States for giving him the opportunity to improve the living conditions of his family, which remains his top priority. He enjoys American culture and has incorporated it into his life. However, despite adapting to life in the U.S., his heart remains tied to Ecuador, a country that, according to him, suffers due to "bad politicians." Every year, he returns to Ecuador to visit his mother. The story

of this man, who once dreamed of becoming an engineer, is marked by difficult moments, loneliness, courage, and, above all, a great deal of effort.

3.1.1. Challenges in the New Cultural Context

At just 18 years old, upon arriving in the United States, Interviewee A faced uncertainty and confusion about what to do next. He recalls, “I arrive, and here in the big city, what do I do? How do I go? Where do I go?” The language barrier was particularly challenging, and he quickly realized the necessity of learning it. He states, “Without speaking the language, you're nobody,” which drove him to put in great effort to study English. People—supervisors, coworkers, and even criminals—took advantage of his lack of knowledge and his status as a newcomer.

He experienced labor exploitation, long working hours, and low wages. He also faced moments of danger, including being robbed twice when leaving work at 2 AM at a train station. This situation made him feel frustrated and vengeful. He explains, “They grabbed me by the neck and took my wallet.”

His coworkers, including other Latinos, assigned him the most difficult tasks. While he did not experience much discrimination due to the cultural diversity in New York, he notes that there were people who became annoyed when he did not speak English.

3.1.2. Masking Emotions

During his most difficult times, playing soccer or volleyball with friends helped him feel better. When recounting these moments, he expresses a mixture of joy and sadness, as their games often turned into conversations about Ecuador and their memories from home. To mask the loneliness he felt, he explains: “Watching TV, movies, that distracted me a bit, but… in the end, one still felt alone… loneliness is tough.” He also mentions that he did not seek anyone to share his feelings with. When asked why, he responds: “Because I started alone… I had no one to talk to, no one to share with, no one.”

Staying in touch with his family was not easy either; he would write letters to his parents, emphasizing, “Handwritten letters, no cell phones.” When asked about the content of these letters, the first thing he mentioned was, “I’m fine, I miss you, I’m working hard, I don’t know, don’t worry about me.” He adds, “I didn’t want to make my family suffer… I told myself: ‘I’ll go with whatever comes; however, it goes.” He further

reflects, “I just absorbed all of that myself… I didn’t like to share my problems with anyone; I just pushed through on my own.”

3.1.3. Cultural Identity

“I will never stop being Ecuadorian, but I have adapted quite a bit to this culture; I like this country, I feel like a part of this country, and I owe a lot to this country.” These were his words when asked about his cultural identity. Throughout the interview, references to his home country were frequent; his love for Ecuador remains strong, although he now enjoys and appreciates the American culture. He states that he has always liked it and has adapted to the United States: the order, education, freedom, honesty, hard work, and respect for the law. He adds: “These are things that are missing from our Latin American countries, or in very few of them.” He provides an example: “If someone bumps into you by accident: ‘I’m sorry, excuse me,’ and sometimes that doesn’t happen in Ecuador.” When asked what he would ask of Ecuador and the United States, he responded:

> “To Ecuador, I would ask for better politicians, because Ecuador is going through a very sad situation; the politics are really damaging Ecuador… To the U.S., I ask for nothing” (he laughs). “I’m fine, I’m stable, my family is the same… I am very grateful to this country; it gave me the opportunity to do many wonderful things, and here my son was born, and here my wife is” (Interviewee A, personal communication, March 11, 2025).

Every day, Interviewee A listens to Ecuadorian songs, particularly the “Juyayay,” his young son’s favorite song. Each day, when he returns from work, his son asks to play this song. This, he says, represents the continuation of certain cultural aspects of Ecuador and the passing of his roots onto his son.

3.1.4. Cultural Adaptation Strategies

- Learning the language was crucial to his adaptation process. Only by mastering English was he able to escape from jobs that exploited labor hours and paid unfair wages. “I tried to learn quickly to get out of that.” He attended schools and churches that offered language classes and studied on his own with a dictionary. He was always studying; he said: “I never stayed still.”
- Meeting with friends and fellow Ecuadorians on weekends to play sports and share experiences.

- Dedicating more time to learning labor skills and being willing to learn.
- "Follow what's from here," referring to the necessity of learning new customs in order to adapt.
- From his perspective, his main support during this process was God and believing in himself.
- Having a good relationship with his boss was also important, with whom he has been working for 30 years.

When asked for recommendations for other migrants going through the cultural adaptation process, he emphasizes the importance of learning the language, being open to learning new things, and recognizing that jobs in the United States differ from those in Ecuador, requiring sacrifice, willpower, and strength.

3.2. Interviewee B: "The United States should be called the United Slaves"

Participant B refers to himself as "American," a term often mistakenly used to refer to U.S. citizens. He uses this term because he has lived in two countries in the Americas: The United States and Ecuador. He was born in the United States, where he spent the early years of his life. At the age of eight, he moved with his family to Ecuador, as his parents are Ecuadorian. Throughout his life, he has moved back and forth between both countries.

Moving to Ecuador represented a significant challenge for him, not only because of the Spanish language, as he states: "It was like learning from scratch," but also due to academic issues. To complete his high school studies, with the support of his parents, he moved back to the United States. This is when he began to miss and realize the value of friendship; he kept in touch with his friends from Ecuador, the country he returned to.

At the age of twenty, with the intention of working, he moved back to the United States, but this time alone. His experience in the labor sector in the U.S. was not a positive one; he explains that people, friendships, and even the work itself were difficult. From his perspective, relationships in the U.S. — whether labor, friendship, or romantic — are based on economic interests.

Contracting COVID-19 during his stay in the United States, along with concerns about his brother, triggered his decision to return to Ecuador. Today, he enjoys social relationships and being with his family in Ecuador. He now perceives the U.S. as a

country to visit but not to live in. At 24, he works online teaching English, which he truly enjoys. In his lessons, he has implemented teaching techniques from both the U.S. and Ecuador. In one word, he perceives Ecuador as “freedom” and the United States as “repetition.”

3.2.1. Challenges in the New Cultural Context

Moving to Ecuador at the age of eight represented a major cultural shock. Regarding Spanish, he says: “It was difficult” (laughs). “Especially because kids can sense fear and they bully you.” He explains that this situation made him a shy child; he was afraid of making mistakes when speaking.

Later, when he moved back to the U.S. to continue his high school studies, he recalls having a good first year: “It was the most fun... I had ‘friends.’” This situation changed drastically the following year. “I didn’t have such a good time.” It was during this period that he realized that, from his perspective, friendships in the U.S. are temporary and based on self-interest. Feeling lonely was another challenge he had to overcome: “I felt loneliness, and things happened that I prefer not to mention regarding the bullying.” This situation sparked his desire to return to Ecuador, where he stayed in contact with friends and family.

After completing his high school studies, he returned to Ecuador, and at the age of 20, decided to move back to the U.S. to work, where he stayed for about eight months. Regarding his work experiences, he states: “There, people treat you horribly,” having been the victim of insults. “There, they ask too much from you, and it’s ugly.”

In one of his work experiences, he had to stay for a double shift because a co-worker did not show up. He says: “I couldn’t say no, for fear of being fired.” That day, he decided to take an espresso shot, which kept him awake for two days. He emphasizes that the high cost of living, especially in New York, forces people to work multiple jobs. He says: “They think you’re a robot.” Regarding the lifestyle, he states: “You wake up, go to work, go home, sleep; the next day, the same thing over and over.”

During his time working in the U.S., his mother visited him: “I was there on my own, my mom came to visit for a while... I felt at home, I felt like someone cared about me, and when she left, oh, I felt so bad... I missed her a lot.”

In reference to social relationships in the U.S., he perceives them as insincere. In his words: “You can see the masks people wear over there,” which he acknowledges also happens in Ecuador. However, in the U.S., he emphasizes: “They try to pretend to be friendly, like they have no ulterior motives... They hide their true faces.”

These experiences lead him to question: “Is this something I want? Do I want to keep living like this… working, waking up, coming home, worrying about whether I’ve slept enough?”

3.2.2. Masking Emotions

One of the key situations that led to B's return to Ecuador was seeing his brother concerned about him after learning he had contracted COVID-19. This experience made him reflect on the importance of having a family nearby. In his words:

"My brother became hysterical and cried for me. I swear, I couldn’t stand that, him suffering through a screen, and I was also suffering inside, but I couldn’t express it because of the older brother syndrome, where you have to appear strong."

Additionally, B reflects on how men tend to hide their feelings because they do not want to worry others:

"Men tend to hide our feelings more because we don’t want to worry those we care about," while women, whether in Ecuador or the United States, "express a lot... When something bad happens, they express it... We suffer internally, but well, that’s just roots, or I don’t know, tolerance, I don’t really know the truth (laughs), it’s hard to express that."

For him, everyone has a different way of expressing their emotions and troubles. He gives the example of his father, who is very reserved and quiet. In contrast, B prefers to release his feelings in a different way:

"For example, my father is very reserved and quiet... And personally, I prefer to (not saying it verbally but touching his face with his fingers as if tears were falling). Immediately, he laughs joyfully and continues, 'Getting it out and that’s it.'"

When B feels bad, he tends to isolate himself for a while until he feels better. He also mentions that he doesn't usually turn to anyone for support because he distrusts the idea that others might share his situation with others. He prefers to resolve his problems on his own, and in a short time, he feels better.

Regarding social media in the United States, B points out that it used to convey the idea that showing emotions as a man was seen as a sign of weakness. He recalls phrases like, "A man who cries is a weak man, just let him."

3.2.3. Cultural Identity

"I am American... from both the United States and Ecuador, I am American because I have lived both experiences..." These were his words when asked about his cultural identity. He sees himself as a "culturally open" person. The English language is very present in his life on a personal, academic, and professional level. He believes that English and dedication to work are aspects he carries with him from American culture. When it comes to Ecuador, he expresses: "The lifestyle is relaxed, the connections are stronger, and the food beats the U.S. in every aspect." "I love living here, but there will always be that craving of 'I'd like to visit but not live there.'" From his perspective: "Time and loved ones are the most important."

3.2.4. Cultural Adaptation Strategies

Participant B has developed stages of his life in both countries:

- In Ecuador, when faced with the language barrier of Spanish, he found it helpful to analyze the conversations of those around him and learn about the topics they discussed, as well as pick up certain everyday expressions, as he states: "Adapting to them to socialize."
- Socializing with online friends was helpful for him in learning Spanish when he arrived in Ecuador.
- In the United States, his adaptation was key with the presence of his family who welcomed him, as well as staying in contact with his parents and friends through phone calls.

Among his recommendations for adapting to a new country, he considers it necessary to be informed about the place of arrival, rental prices, food, and weather conditions.

3.3. Interviewee C: "My heart was shattered… I don't know how to explain it, I wasn't just putting my life at risk, but also my home."

Interviewee C grew up and lived in Cañar for several years during his youth. He studied accounting and auditing in the city of Azogues. In his young adult years, he met

his partner, with whom he started a family. Both led very active work lives. Together with a relative, they created a shoe factory, for which they took out loans. They had to pay off debts, and the work they were doing was not enough to cover the high costs. Later on, he and his partner started an import business for clothing and accessories from abroad. Unfortunately, their shoe factory got robbed, and those who had purchased large quantities of clothing on credit did not pay. He lost his job, and their economic situation worsened. His partner became the one who supported the household expenses. As he puts it: "The debts chased us, and we couldn't find peace."

In 2019, he decided to emigrate to the United States through irregular means after being rejected by the U.S. consulate. He has now been in the country for six years.

His brother, whom he considers a father figure, initially refused to support him in his decision to emigrate. However, he later became his greatest financial support for the journey to the United States. His brother's words were:

> "Who are you doing this with? Who did you see? Who did you talk to? I need to know the person, because the person who's going to take you, I'm going to entrust my most precious thing to them: your life." (Interviewee C, personal communication, March 15, 2025). When recounting this, his voice cracks, and his eyes fill with tears.

Although his journey to the United States was filled with fear, thirst, and long hours of walking, he arrived after a short time. He believes it was not as hard compared to the stories of other migrants. He also feels that the Virgin Mary was watching over him during his journey. Upon his arrival, family friends received him and treated him very well. Later, a friend, whom he refers to as "la vieja" (the old woman), picked him up, bought him clothes, and had already arranged a job for him in painting.

He arrived on a Thursday, and by the next day, he was already working. The following three years were almost entirely dedicated to work. Ending his relationship with his partner devastated him, and he mentions crying a lot. He did not learn English at first because he did not need it; most of the people he worked with were Ecuadorians. However, over time, he managed to get by in everyday activities. Nowadays, he enjoys American culture and the people there. He is in a good place, surrounded by his family: his mother, his partner, and his young daughter.

3.3.1. Challenges in the New Cultural Context

He had to move within the United States accompanied by a "coyote" (a person who assists in illegal border crossings). He expresses: “Being without water is desperating” and walked for around thirty hours once in the country. The uncertainty upon arriving in a new country was palpable; his words were: “I’ve arrived, but now what?” (laughs).

The main challenge was in the work environment; his previous jobs in Ecuador had been office-based. His body was not accustomed to certain types of physical work, compounded by his lack of knowledge about how the job worked, the climate, and the long working hours. His words were: “I had to learn to sand, to grab a brush, and to clean.” During the first months in the new country, he worked in painting. “Rest, because tomorrow you have to go to work,” were the words of his friend on his first night.

In the workplace, he experienced discrimination against not knowing how to do certain tasks. From his experience, the discrimination mostly came from other Latin Americans. He says: “The people who put up the most obstacles are our own people.” “They treated me badly, they tried to make me feel worse.” As for the language, he says that working only with Latinos delayed his English learning. He felt: “Like a dog, I understand, but I don’t speak.” Therefore, he only practiced English out of necessity.

Among these challenges, he also highlights frustration and loneliness. On one hand, as he says: “It was frustrating because I was making money, but I couldn’t see it, it just passed through my hands to pay debts.” “You work hard, your body gets tired, the years go by, and where’s the money I’m making?” He expresses that after four years of being in the U.S., he could finally “breathe.” He also adds: “I used to think I hope I can be with my family again someday.”

Regarding his partner, he says: “In terms of emotions, it was another thing, a pretty strong shock… I would come back from work, some days I wouldn’t even eat, I’d just go to bed.” This situation affected his communication with his partner, and the relationship broke for about a year.

His social world had significantly shrunk: “Work, home, work, home.” For two and a half to three years, he felt this way; during that time, he was paying off his debts. Food also became a challenge, as he did not like it. Moreover, he went into debt again to bring his family over. He feels that what would have eased his difficulties in the U.S. would have been: “Being with my family.”

When asked about feeling responsible for being the one to migrate, he says: “I had to have stability, I had to have a place to receive them, give them food, give them clothes, and try to give them comfort.”

3.3.2. Masking Emotions

He mentions that ending his relationship with his partner was very difficult for him. "The first three months after she decided to break up with me, I would cry at work like a child." When asked if he had any support in the U.S., he replies: "Mmm, no, I spoke to my brother." His tone lowers as he speaks. He also explains that loneliness was very present in his days.

> He recalls a New Year's Eve: “She called me… They were dancing, I was at home, the power had gone out… I was alone, and everyone was celebrating the New Year while I was at home. And she said, ‘No, stay with me.’ I told her, “No, I’m going out,’ but that was a lie. ‘Enjoy yourself, I’ll figure out how I’ll pass the time.’ I hung up the phone and started crying.” (Interviewee C, personal communication, March 16, 2025). His voice cracks as he recalls that moment.

He also explains that his experiences in the U.S. made him mature a lot. He knows cases where men, when they feel bad, turn to alcohol to "get the devil out," in other words, to vent. However, for him: “My way of getting the devil out was going to the gym… doing so much exercise that my mind would get tired, and I wouldn’t be able to think, and I wouldn’t feel bad.” “One can also cry as a man, but not in front of everyone; I liked venting with music, and I would cry… There are those who vent with alcohol, the gym, drugs, or women.” (Interviewee C, personal communication, March 16, 2025). He also adds:

“You always have to pretend to be strong.” “I couldn’t call and tell her: ‘Today was a bad day, they treated me badly, I didn’t eat, I didn’t have lunch, I didn’t have dinner, you know that I can’t afford to pay the rent’... ‘How would she feel? It’s just, ‘Are you okay? Do you have money? Did you have a snack? That’s it.’”.

3.3.3. Cultural Identity

Although he admires and enjoys American culture, especially for the education system in the country, and has adapted to the new culture, he does not feel entirely part

of it. However, he expresses: “The culture here is the best there is… when an ambulance siren, everyone pulls over, they give way… It’s a great respect; they are very polite.”

He also mentions: “The food from back home is the most delicious,” referring to Ecuador. Despite initially not liking American food, he now accepts it. He adds that his partner, with whom he cooks occasionally, prepares Ecuadorian dishes among others.

He highlights the current situation in the U.S. as being complicated, noting: "The president affects not only immigrants like us but everyone." He says that the only reason he would return to Ecuador would be to visit the country. However, if he had to be deported, he would seek to go to a country other than Ecuador unless there was a significant change in issues such as security and employment in the small Latin American country.

If he could define the U.S. in one word today, it would be "happiness." Previously, it would have been "education." From his perspective, the U.S. is like "a university of life; it teaches you responsibility, order, the value of money, the value of family, and time."

One experience with an American native, in a cell phone store, made him say to himself: “This is the place where I think my daughter should grow up.” In that experience, language was a barrier, so they used the translator. After the purchase, the American used the translator and wrote: "Thank you for your purchase and sorry for not knowing your language."

3.3.4. Cultural Adaptation Strategies

- According to his experience, having the support of friends abroad was crucial in facing a new culture. Particularly his second boss, an Ecuadorian who owns a construction company in the U.S. He expresses: “He gave me a very, very big hand, he taught me what I know,” his voice breaking slightly. While his friends: “They were there from the start... They knew how to guide me.” They recommended that he dedicate himself to one trade and learn it well, and that’s what he did. He emphasizes the importance of focusing on single craft.
- He also highlights the support from his partner in Ecuador, stating: “From a distance, she was always there for Mia (his daughter), she never neglected her.” This reflects the importance of having support in one's home country. He also mentions that she taught him to cook through video calls. Similarly, other friends

he met in the U.S. explained how things worked in the country, including insurance, rights, and taxes.

- Regarding the language, the use of the translator was his best ally. He explains that it was used in everyday situations. About the translator, he says: “Thank God, when a friend came, it was just a dictionary.” He believes that what would have facilitated his adaptation process in the U.S. would have been being close to his family. His motivation to keep working was his daughter.

3.4. Interviewee D: "The American Dream is not as it is portrayed."

Interviewee D, although unsure of what he wanted to study at a young age, knew he needed money to access higher education, something his family could not provide. As he puts it, "I had to earn money to pay for college." At the age of 18, he decided to migrate to the United States to work. Initially, he planned to go illegally, but he eventually obtained a visa through legal means. Before leaving, he prepared physically and mentally, knowing that the job he would take in the U.S. would require significant effort.

Upon arrival in the U.S., his uncles were waiting for him and had already arranged a construction job for him. Just a few hours after landing, he was already working. He did not live with his uncles for long as he did not want to be a burden, so he rented his own apartment. During the three years he lived in the U.S., most of his time was spent working, and the last six months were the least stressful. In his words, "There is no bread with cola or a break… over there, you work all day, all the time…"

Construction work was tough, with 12-hour workdays and minimal food, sometimes only eating one fruit a day. In addition to the loneliness, racism, classism, and extreme weather conditions complicated his work. Despite these challenges, he remained focused on his goal of saving money and sending support to his family.

As for U.S. culture, based on his experience, Interviewee D describes the U.S. in one word: "difficult," while Ecuador is described as "beautiful." Despite the harshness of his experience in the U.S., he believes that the wages and salaries are better than those in Ecuador, which makes him consider returning to work in the U.S. if necessary.

3.4.1. Challenges in the New Cultural Context

The hardest part of migrating to the United States for D was being away from his family and experiencing loneliness. He states: "Being separated from my family was the

worst… It’s not like your mom is there for you, your brothers, your dad, there’s no one there for you, even though my aunt was there, she had her life, and I had mine." "It was hard being alone, I had depression, or well, that’s what I felt… because I felt alone, I didn’t cry, but working made it pass."

Regarding work, although he believes he prepared himself physically and mentally, this was one of the most important challenges. During most of his stay, he worked in construction. He explains that he would wake up at four in the morning to prepare his food and travel to his workplace. His days were based on: "The next day the same, the same, and the same."

He did not always have time to prepare his meals and take them to work. "I’d get hungry, all they gave us were Gatorade drinks," or he would take with him: "One fruit only to get through the whole day, or tortillas with tomato sauce; that was the food of the whole day." Regarding work, he states: "For me, it was exploitation… but what could you do, it was money… over there, you just think about the money… and with money, the dog dances." He adds that they only had 30 minutes to take a break for lunch. Amid exhaustion and physical effort, he shares one of his experiences at work:

> "I had a problem; I fell asleep once because I couldn’t stay awake… I hid and fell asleep, and my boss caught me, he lowered my salary, but it was logical for what I did, even though I was exhausted, I still had to keep working. He lowered my salary and punished me for a week without pay."

He explains that racism was present; he worked in other states where: "People looked at you and despised you… you felt inferior." In addition to that, many times in his work, he injured his fingers, had muscle injuries, and even developed a hernia due to the heavy weights he was carrying.

> The bosses were always white; sometimes some were racist… "The white people over there don’t help at all, they don’t do anything, not like the Latinos… Some white bosses at certain job sites would only give water to them, to us, they didn’t give us anything, we had to bring our own."

In his experience, racism did not only come from American citizens but also from other Latinos. He emphasizes that this situation varies depending on the state. "Some white people are racist, classist, so depending on how they see you, they treat you… Even

some Latinos were classist, just because they had more than you… because they had more money or because they worked in something easier."

His experience with native Americans was not good; he explains: "They look at you badly, treat you differently, exclude you, try to make you feel inferior." One of his experiences was: "I was buying something, they served all the white people first, and they served me last, even though I arrived before them." He explains that he could not do anything. "This happened several times in different states I went to." He was even accused of being a thief when doing a job for a family.

Regarding the language, he states: "I didn't know almost any English, just the basics." At first, he could not understand anything, so learning it was very difficult. Additionally, his work, where he spent most of his time, was made up of Latinos. When he had to use the language, he felt embarrassed because some of them would laugh at him.

As for food, he says that it is full of chemicals, and the flavors are not the same. He believes that the chicken tasted like plastic, and the fruits, although they looked good, were not fresh.

Extreme weather was also a challenge, as he worked under the sun's rays in summer: "The heat clouds your vision… it gives you a headache," and in winter, wearing several layers of clothing was uncomfortable during work.

He even faced insecurity, recalling an incident in New York where his cellphone was stolen. "No one did anything there… I guess they didn't care; people saw and didn't care". Moreover, as an undocumented migrant, the fear of being caught by immigration authorities was always present. He says: "Waking up so early, having to work so much, sometimes not being able to eat, not being able to relax because of fear, not being able to live in peace."

He also mentions: "I used to say: Now I'm going to buy this, this, and this." He left behind the material dreams he had in his childhood to save money. "Money is for knowing how to use it; there are people who waste it." "I never could buy any of the things I wanted…instead, I saved." He focused solely on saving, and to this day, he keeps that mindset, spending only on what is necessary, which reflects the value of the effort he put into his work.

"The American Dream is not as they paint it... People think it’s about going and money raining down on you; no, you have to work hard to get the food, the money you want to send to your family" (Interviewee D, personal communication, March 17, 2025).

"If anyone is thinking of going, they should think about it once, twice, a thousand times... It’s not a dream; it’s more of a nightmare. Well, maybe they’ll have better luck than I did, but for me, it was a nightmare" (Interviewee D, personal communication, March 17, 2025).

3.4.2. Masking Emotions

"When I had a day off... Saturday or Sunday, I tried to distract myself, going for a ride or looking for something to do so my mind wouldn't feel like this, sad, lifeless." When recounting this, his voice tone lowers.

When asked if he mentioned his family when he felt lonely, he immediately responded: "No, I didn’t want to worry about them, I always said I was fine." However, regarding loneliness, he mentions: "You reach a point where... you go a little crazy, you start talking to yourself... going from a life where I was with my family to being alone, it was complicated, you couldn't sleep well, you didn’t feel hungry, it was hard." He keeps his tone low while saying this.

He continues: "It was like wanting to kill yourself... it was horrible being alone..." He even thought about it, but he told himself: "And who’s going to help them with the debts?... That’s what stopped me from thinking about it." He says this in a low tone of voice.

When he felt bad, he sought distractions, going out for drives when he had time or going to the gym. "What would I gain from crying? Better to get to work... better to look for a solution than cry, but yes, the urge to cry was there." He adds: "I didn’t like crying, no, I felt weak, in a place where you need to be strong."

The participant (D) is a man who prefers not to cry. When he felt bad, he felt he only had himself, and as he says: "Going back wasn’t an option."

When asked about what is expected of a migrant man in Ecuador and the difficulty of jobs in the U.S., he says: "In Ecuador, many people think that the man should take care of everything, all the hard work; it’s almost always been like that." "The man has to work, the man has to be strong, the man can’t cry." "It’s wrong, any man can cry, any man can

feel sad, any man can be depressed, not just (pauses, changes his voice, and laughs nervously) women." He immediately adds: "No, I'm not sexist, but some people think that."

He explains that migrant men in the U.S. work in jobs that require physical strength. When asked what he thinks about that, he says: "I see it as normal, it's always been like that... I haven't seen women working in construction." When asked if he thinks the activities migrant men do are harder than the tasks women do, he immediately replies: "I'm not being sexist, but yes... I never saw a woman carrying four or five bags of cement... I'm not saying cleaning a house is less than that, of course, it must be hard, but I think carrying that all day long, and wearing out your muscles every day, all the time, I think it's harder."

"Here, they expect the man to do everything... Some people think the woman stays at home and the man works... I think Ecuador expects a lot from (he paused before saying "people," seemed like he was going to say men) people, a lot more than some of us can give..."

3.4.3. Cultural Identity

His cultural identity lies in Ecuadorian culture, but he also considers himself adapted to the United States. He explains that it's necessary to adapt to: "The food, the people, the work, not being with family." "You have to, if you want to stay there, live." The cultural identity of interviewee D is reflected in the Ecuadorian meals he replicated in the U.S. and in the music he listened to. Even at work, he avoided using words like "okay."

For him, his family is the most important thing and the thing he missed the most during his time in the United States. "When I was there, I wanted to go back, I wanted to go back, hang out with my friends and play soccer, I wanted to be with my family again, eat good food, breathe well; I missed everything from here," and with contempt, he adds, "I don't miss anything from there." Before returning to Ecuador, he says, "I counted the months, the days to return... I was desperate to go back," and upon arriving in his homeland: "I just felt excitement, happiness."

In short, when asked about what he would ask Ecuador and the U.S., he mentions Ecuador: "That they pay more for the work we do," and explains that, in the U.S., particularly in the construction sector: "Latinos are super necessary there, and now that

they are leaving, the gringos don’t know what to do." "Latinos were everything for construction work... There wasn’t a Latino who didn’t serve in construction, we all worked." Emphasizing and raising his voice: "The gringos were the ones who didn’t work." Regarding the United States, he states: "They sometimes despise the work of Latinos, and they don’t know how important it is; they don’t consider a person working there, they think it’s easy, and when it’s their turn, they can’t do it." He would ask them to appreciate the efforts of immigrant Latinos in the United States.

When asked what he would say to an Ecuadorian migrant man who wants to go to the United States, he says: "He’s crazy, and he should prepare a lot, because it’s not going to be easy there, he’s going to cry and suffer a lot… and he should get used to it, never give up, and I hope it goes better for him, better than it did for me."

3.4.4. Cultural Adaptation Strategies

- Before going to the United States, he prepared himself physically and mentally, aware that construction work in the U.S. requires greater physical effort; he went to the gym and was aware of the implications of being away from his family.
- More than third-party support, he believes that his own effort was the foundation of his support in the U.S. He explains that when he felt lonely, he would look for activities to distract himself, and regarding his support, he says: "Not giving up, the support I gave myself, the strength I found within myself, or sometimes a call from my mom." He indicates the importance of having support from Ecuador. "Even though it may seem small here, when you’re there, a call from your mom is life, at least if you’re alone." He laughs briefly.
- He improved his cooking skills and using YouTube as a platform to learn to cook, he made: humitas, tamales, tortillas. He also looked for restaurants that sold encebollados, although, as he mentions: "It doesn’t taste the same, but it made me feel a little more alive." He also comments that he listened to Ecuadorian music and mentions Julio Jaramillo. "Cooking and playing that music while my mom called me, that was the best."
- The appreciation from his mother, who was in Ecuador, for sending him money comforted him and gave him more strength to keep working.

- He had contact with other Latinos who gave him food for his work. He mentions: "Latinos always gave us food; with Latinos, we always ate." He also mentions that some Americans did the same.
- A cousin who lives in the U.S. was also supportive. "He helped me a little... he's a gringo who's not like the others, the son of Latinos." His cousin, with phrases like: "Don't give up," showed his support.
- Regarding work, he states: "I lived surrounded by Latinos... The work wasn't that bad because they were there." "They made it feel like it wasn't really the U.S."
- Regarding food, he mentions that he would try to cook what his family made in Ecuador: "I always made soups... so I wouldn't feel so far from home... I liked making home food feel a little better."
- "Trying to make the U.S. feel like Ecuador in my mind." He explains that, to adapt, he liked to think that he was still in Ecuador.

3.5. Interviewee E: "I wanted to pursue my profession in the U.S."

Participant E's story is that of a man from a low-income family in the city of Azogues. He is now 52 years old. He married at a young age and started his own family. In his early adulthood, he sought to pursue his profession as a welder in Ecuador. To do so, he knocked on many doors and sought financial support from banks and family members, but unfortunately, none of them agreed to lend him money. Faced with this situation, he decided to migrate to the United States irregularly, accompanied by his wife's uncle. He explains: "My idea was never to migrate to this country... My profession was welding; I worked with aluminum and glass... But given the situation, many doors were closed to me, so I decided to come here."

He went to the United States at the age of 22 and says: "It was like an adventure... but upon arriving here and sitting down to think things through, I began to ask myself: when will I see my family again?" Upon arriving in the U.S., his in-laws received him, and he was reunited with his brother, who had migrated a month earlier. His relationship with his in-laws was not good; in fact, he says that he had just started getting to know them and that their relationship was not pleasant. Despite this, his father-in-law had already arranged a job for him washing dishes, an offer he rejected, as he was determined to pursue his profession as a welder.

He eventually found the job he was looking for. Although it paid less than the job his father-in-law had arranged for him, he decided to stay. During this job, he broke his foot, and a coworker encouraged him to quit and offered him another position as a welder. He did not hesitate to accept the offer.

He changed jobs, and with his new employer, he formed one of the most important friendships of his life. His boss, a wealthy Greek man, treated him like a son and encouraged him to make important life decisions. He urged him to bring his family to the United States, saying: "You can't be without your family." He also encouraged him to buy his first car and was the person who provided him with the necessary paperwork to later obtain his residency.

He affirms that he missed his family but knew that at some point, he would bring them to the United States. His boss encouraged him to bring his wife after three years of being in the U.S., even though he had not yet paid off his debt to the coyotes. Despite this, he brought her. His two children remained in Ecuador, but a few months later, they were also brought to the U.S. On the other hand, English never appealed to him; he speaks it now, but he did not make a strong effort to truly learn it.

Unfortunately, the person who had initially been his main support, his boss, got him involved in complex financial issues that led to court proceedings in the U.S.

After being in the U.S. for ten years, he returned to visit his home country. He says that things had changed, and even the country looked more beautiful, but after two weeks, he was already eager to return to the U.S. In a span of 12 years, he gradually brought over his family. Today, his entire family is in the United States.

3.5.1. Challenges in the New Cultural Context

From his perspective, he faced two major challenges upon arriving in the U.S.: the language barrier and being away from his family. Regarding the language, he expresses: "I never imagined that I would have to learn another language here... I thought I was coming to find work, but I never thought I would have to try to speak another language." The language barrier posed a significant challenge. He further explains: "In the years when we came, very few people spoke Spanish." When asked about his process of learning English, he laughs joyfully and says: "Here, English is difficult, at least for someone like me... I have a street version of the language that you pick up at work and on the streets... Perfect English? Not exactly."

As for family, he says: "No one knows the pain or the experience of leaving your family behind, emigrating to another country... alone, practically, but you have to adapt, you have to toughen up and keep going." He adds: "Leaving my wife, with my two children, of course, was hard... and coming here to be alone, I didn't quite settle in... That's why I fought to bring them." His situation became more complicated when, after three years, he went into debt to bring his wife to join him. He thought his wife would be a support, but he explains that she suffered greatly because their children were still in Ecuador. He shares some memories:

> He sighs: "My brother arrived a month before me... The first Christmas we spent here, we were locked in a room… with our feet up against a wall... Christmases for us used to be family gatherings… My brother and I were thinking: 'They must be dancing over there... they must be having fun.' Look where we are, lying in a bed with our feet up against a wall."
>
> "I come from a poor family… we had few resources, sometimes there was nothing to eat. I remember one time they made a big meal for us, chicken, meat… I remember thinking, 'I'm eating this chicken, and maybe my family back home has nothing to eat.' That's why we tried to work hard, to help as much as we could... Thank God, all my family is here now... Little by little... It took almost twelve years to have everyone together and enjoy Christmas as a family."

Although he was with his wife's family, he comments that his in-laws felt like strangers. He says: "For me, they were like new people... More than my brother, there was no one here I knew. Referring to his brother, he says: "The two of us supported each other to move forward."

Regarding work, he did not face any challenges, as he focused on the area he enjoyed and knew well: welding. His father-in-law had arranged a job for him washing dishes, but he did not accept it. His mindset was: "I don't want that; I have my profession." "I'm going to go find work in welding, which is what I know." However, in one of his first welding jobs, he broke his foot. He worked from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. At this job, he met the person who would become his source of support in the U.S., his boss.

Unfortunately, after 18 years of working together, a legal issue broke their friendship. A few years after their relationship ended, his boss passed away. Upon hearing this, he says: "I went after the car and cried."

"I fell into good hands," he comments, recalling how his boss would tell him: "When you leave this job one day, you will have another boss who will yell at you, and you will remember me," a situation he experienced. He says: "I had to start from scratch… I didn't expect to be left without a job." He had destroyed his house to remodel it and had no work. He says: "Without a job, without any income." "Starting over..." "I wasn't a boss anymore; I started being yelled at..." "I had to experience what life is really like here."

He faced the challenge of being unemployed. He says: "There was one time I was here with no job and not a cent in my pocket; I remember I was making contracts on my own, and they ran out. I was left with nothing, no money, and nothing to eat... Now, what I do is keep a reserve fund. Sometimes we're fine, sometimes we're not... I always tell my children: 'It's all a problem, but as long as you have a job, that's one problem less.'"

3.5.2. Masking Emotions

When asked about feeling pressure to hide his emotions or not share them with anyone when he feels bad, he recalls memory:

> He laughs softly and says: "You know what the problem is that my wife and I have? It's that... and you know why? Because I lost my dad when I was fourteen, my mom was still young, and she had to take care of two boys and three girls. She taught us that: 'We should never cry… we should only cry when I die'... So, because of that, my wife says: 'I don't know if you're fine or if you're not fine.' I don't know if my mom was right or wrong... There was a time when I almost lost the house, had problems with my wife, problems everywhere, but, you know, what would crying do? If I cried, the bank wouldn't give me the house back. I didn't complain to anyone, I just tried to deal with things as they came."
>
> He laughs and continues: "That's what my wife says: 'When you have a problem, I can't tell if you're having a problem,' because I often keep things to myself. What I do is lock myself in the room and get on the phone." He adds: "Sometimes, this is just an excuse because I don't know, sometimes I lock myself up and I know I have to pay this, I know I have to pay that... and sometimes I didn't have anything… So, what did I have to do? Try to figure out how to fix it... how to solve it, nothing else. He chuckles and says: "I am pretty closed off; I don't like it... But one day, I couldn't take it anymore and I started crying." His wife told him: "Look, cry as much as you need to, because honestly, you need that." He

adds: "These things are a bit reserved, like... I don’t know, maybe it’s just how we were raised."

When asked if he felt a responsibility to migrate as a man, he responds:

"I think so... Look, I’m fifty-two years old (laughs), I come from a culture where men solved things... I think that’s how it should be, nowadays I see that it’s half and half, but before... one wasn’t obligated... But in the environment I live in, my wife doesn’t earn much; in terms of money, she won’t be able to help me..." He adds: "If I think about it, I do think there’s pressure, I feel like there is... many times there are problems, but what’s the point of talking about it? I’m the one who has to solve it... it’ll take me longer to tell someone else who’ll say: 'Oh, I’m so sorry'... So I try to solve my own problems." (When answering this question, his tone of voice indicated that he had never really thought about whether he had the responsibility to be the one to migrate, he simply did it.)

He explains that nowadays, to distract himself from his problems, he rides his motorcycle, which helps lower his stress levels and allows him to stop thinking about things.

3.5.3. Cultural Identity

When asked about his cultural identity, he said: "I’m Ecuadorian, but... maybe we’ve picked up a little of the culture here." He explains that Spanish is spoken in his home, and it is a cultural aspect of Ecuador that they continue to maintain within the household. He expresses frustration with some Ecuadorian families who have abandoned their language upon arriving in the host country.

Despite this, he shares an experience of returning to his homeland after ten years visiting. He explains: "To feel like a tourist in your own land is tough." He mentions that he no longer felt accustomed to Ecuador. "I went for a month; after fifteen days, I wanted to come back." When he returned to the U.S., he felt the same way. He has only gone back to Ecuador three times and has been living in the U.S. for 30 years.

Regarding American food, he says: "It’s new... everything gets tiring, and after a while, you miss your own food... Even today, when someone goes to Ecuador, they bring us... the husks, the mote... It’s also available here, but it’s not the same." "It’s your food... it will never compare to the food from your homeland." However, when talking about

aspects of American culture that he likes, he mentions the education system: "They educate you here." He also says, "Americans are good people, they're nice."

His life is now in the U.S., his children studied and work there, so he says: "It's hard for us to go back to the country." On the other hand, even though he never liked English, he mentions the host country: "As soon as I arrived, I liked it, I adapted quickly."

When asked what he would like to see different from both Ecuador and the U.S., he says: "I would ask for Ecuador to have better conditions of equality, job opportunities... And this country, I'd ask them not to treat our people badly... be fairer and deport the people they need to deport, not the good people." Regarding the U.S., he defines it as: "The land of opportunities." Referring to Ecuador, he states: "What can I say about Ecuador? There are no opportunities there."

Lastly, to an Ecuadorian who wishes to migrate, he would say: "If you're willing to suffer for a while and work hard, whatever comes your way... go ahead, things aren't easy, neither here nor anywhere in the world, you have to make an effort and fight to get ahead."

3.5.4. Cultural Adaptation Strategies

- The most important figure in his adaptation process was his boss. He states: "He didn't treat me like a worker; he treated me like a son, and he always looked out for the best for me." "He was the foundation for me to be who I am today." Among his boss's words, the following stand out: "Look for papers, I'll help you." "Bring your wife, bring your children; you can't be alone in this country." "Get two jobs; you have to support your family." "You already have your wife here… you need to earn more money; now you just need your children."
- Working in a field he enjoys. Performing a job in a field he enjoys also helped him in his adaptation process.
- Support from his father-in-law and brother-in-law. The latter has been a source of support not only for him but also for his children. Additionally, staying in touch with his wife, while she was still in Ecuador, through calls on "Delgado Travel," was important.
- Having his family close (once he brought them to the United States). He states: "Where the family is, everything is."

- His friends also helped him. He says they helped him "relax a little and forget about his problems."

3.6. Interviewee F: “We ourselves exile to another country because we cannot see our families."”.

Participant F was born in the city of Azogues, but he spent much of his life in the province of Saraguro. He graduated as a commercial engineer and worked in both the public and private sectors during his career in Ecuador. In 2016, he emigrated to the United States. He is now fifty-seven years old. A relative who was already in the U.S. told him about construction work and encouraged him to move there. Initially, his intention was not to go to the United States, but the downsizing of his job in Ecuador, along with delayed salary payments, motivated him, and he applied for a visa at the U.S. consulate.

He obtained the visa and explained that he arrived in the United States on a Wednesday; on Thursday, he started working because his relative was a construction supervisor. He says: “I got used to earning a weekly income.” He explained to his family his intention to stay in the new country and stated: "It’s better here," and he settled in the United States. "I initially came for a month, then I thought maybe five years, and I’d go back, but no... you get used to the work and the money here."

His reason for staying in the United States was the income and "the constant availability of work." He mentions that he worked from Sunday to Sunday for the first two years, but now he has reduced his work hours and days. He expresses: "From home to work and from work to home, that’s what there is here." "Construction work is tough; it’s hard... one realizes that they need to reduce their workdays."

Two months after arriving in the U.S., his family, encouraged by him, also moved to the United States. However, they moved to a different state than him, which was difficult because he could not see his family regularly.

Regarding work, he states: “I adapted easily here because my father was a builder.” He mentions that construction work in Ecuador is different from that in the U.S., especially because of the use of advanced tools.

3.6.1. Challenges in the New Cultural Context

He perceives that, initially, there was more pressure at work to complete tasks. Some of the phrases he would hear were: "Hurry, hurry, this is for today, not tomorrow." He adds: "That's the big problem here, they pressure you a lot, sometimes it's humiliating because they shout at you or treat you badly when you don't do things quickly or correctly." He also mentions that most of the workers in construction are Hispanic.

Regarding the language, he comments that, at his job, the supervisors or main bosses are American. He explained: "You didn't know how to respond; you had to make yourself understood by gestures." Nowadays, he says he uses basic words to communicate. He also adds that learning the names of tools and materials in English was challenging. Even though he has learned the new language, he acknowledges that it is still a challenge.

He mentions that another challenge he faced was: "Learning trades." Initially, he only performed basic tasks in construction, but gradually, he improved in specific areas to receive higher wages.

He explains that, when he first arrived in the new country, he was calm because he was with a relative and had someone to talk to and share with. However, he says: "As time passed, I started missing my daughters... my concern was for my daughters." "I couldn't share with them the day-to-day... eating together, going out... it's hard for someone... alone here and they being over there...". He adds that he also missed his parents and relatives who were still in Ecuador. He mentions that the saddest part of being in another country was not being present when a loved one passed away. His father and brother died. Despite how hard it was to lose his father, he says it comforted him to know his father was now resting.

On the other hand, he explains that the neighborhood he lived in had various cultures. Regarding this, he says: "They see us as Hispanics, Mexicans, and they think we're a bit inferior, that we're only here for hard labor."

Discrimination is present at work. "They see us as nothing but work objects, work and work, and sometimes they want to abuse us because they don't pay on time." He mentions that at one point in his work, they did not pay their wages for three weeks, so the workers protested and were threatened with being reported to immigration for their

irregular status in the country. As a result, he and the other workers resorted to legal means and sued the employer.

Regarding the Ecuadorian population in the United States, he explains: “Sometimes it’s difficult to trust an Ecuadorian; most are selfish.” He says that the Ecuadorian community doesn’t support him, "they’re not supportive." Regarding American citizens, despite the discrimination, he states: “Americans are educated.” He also adds that while some Americans may get annoyed when you do not speak English well, some try to learn some Spanish. At work, his bosses have learned basic words like: "Ven acá, gracias."

3.6.2. Masking Emotions

The hardest moment for him was not being able to say goodbye to his father. Virtually, he attended prayer vigils with his family, which made him feel better since they prayed in his father’s name. He says: "Time heals the wounds."

When, for any reason, he felt sad, his way of dealing with it was through walks and attending sporting events, which he went to alone. He states: "One feels melancholy, sadness because you’re alone." He also mentions that when he felt this way, he did not tell anyone because he did not want his loved ones to feel bad or worry about him. From his perspective, simply talking about his daughters’ daily lives over a call made him feel better. He explains: "You calm down, you feel good."

3.6.3. Cultural Identity

“"One will always be attached to their roots." These were his words when asked about his cultural identity. He mentions that Ecuadorian culture is highly appreciated in the United States. When there are craft exhibitions, fairs, artists, and food events, he states: "You go, and it reminds you of your homeland, of Ecuador." He adds that, having grown up in Saraguro, when he sees people wearing traditional Saraguro clothing in the U.S., he approaches them to talk. He happily states: "I’m glad to meet a fellow countryman from the town where I lived."

He considers that he has adapted to the work lifestyle, but he would not want to make his life in the United States. He explains that English is still a barrier and that it is not often practiced, since even the neighborhood where he lives is Hispanic. He says: "I wouldn’t stay here because of the language." He also mentions that housing in the United States is very small and expensive.

He considers that, in the 8 years he has been in the United States, he has adapted about fifty percent. If he had to define the United States in a few words, it would be: "capitalism, consumption," and for Ecuador, "culture, family." For him, the most important things are family and health. In the future, he would like to return to live in Ecuador, but that's not his plan at the moment.

If he could ask something from Ecuador, it would be that the governments take more care in providing social attention to Ecuadorian migrants in the United States, through workshops and courses that allow them to be trained for entrepreneurship. He adds that these training programs should be permanent, not temporary. From the United States, he wishes for the opportunity to obtain a work permit and a migration reform that supports those who have been living in the country for years. As for his recommendations to another Ecuadorian man wishing to migrate, he says: "Be strong, determined, and have the desire to move forward."

3.6.4. Cultural Adaptation Strategies

- The use of a translator was key to communicating with the supervisors on the job. He mentions that for three years it was uncomfortable communicating this way. He incorporated English into his life through learning on digital platforms.
- Through video calls, he kept in touch with his family in Ecuador, which made him feel more at ease.
- He mentions that his neighborhood had Mexicans and Ecuadorians, which helped with his adaptation to the country.
- He says that having family visit the U.S. is: "The best thing that can happen... it's one of the joys that make you feel good when relatives come to visit."
- Learning how the transportation system works, getting to know places, and interacting with people were crucial to his adaptation and success in the new environment.
- He mentions that family, work, and job stability have helped him adapt to life in the United States.

3.7. Interviewee: G: "I feel that a man would be willing to do more foolish things for his family than a woman."

The interviewee, G, went to the United States regularly at the age of 16. His purpose was to earn money to pay for his university education and help his parents financially. He

comes from a very restrictive and emotionally distant family, so he did not find it difficult to leave Ecuador. After a few years of work, he returned to his hometown and, at the age of 20, fulfilled one of his goals from migrating to the United States: studying. Although his decision to go work in the U.S. was his own, it was also influenced by his mother, who expressed her wish for him to become independent and learn what it was like to live alone. He states:

> The decision was mine and my mom's, because she also wanted me to become independent and learn what it's like to live alone. In that sense, I think my family has been very cold, and it's good because they teach you to live alone and not to be attached to the family. Because in the end, they might all die and you will be left alone. And that has always been the thinking of my family, to let go of you early so you can learn to move on your own and not depend on anyone. So, it was very easy for me to adapt. I've never been attached to my family. I love them very much and appreciate what they do for me, but I've never felt anxiety or a need to be attached. But because my family is like that, they don't want you to cling to them, and they want you to be independent.

He also mentions that he did not have friends in Ecuador, but that changed when he arrived in the U.S., where he met an Ecuadorian and a Venezuelan, who became his best friends. Upon arriving in the U.S., he stayed with his uncles for three years. They not only provided him with a place to stay but also gave him work at a bar-restaurant.

He explains that everyone who worked at the restaurant spoke Spanish, but the job was dynamic, leaving no time to socialize with coworkers. This situation helped him interact with native speakers and improve his English. His experience in the U.S. was positive; he does not consider having faced drastic situations despite the work exhaustion and being far from his parents, with whom he contacted only a few times a month. However, he does express that he felt like a slave, stating: "I was working every day, and everything was a routine… For about three years, my life was a routine, doing the same thing every day." On the other hand, the aspect of American culture he liked the most was the freedom he had in the U.S., since in Ecuador, his parents controlled him a lot. He considers the U.S. as the land of opportunities, though he explains that those opportunities can be both negative and positive.

His attitude and way of thinking helped him overcome the language barrier. Today, he has achieved his goal of studying and helping his parents financially. Interviewee G is a person who believes that in order to support his family, one must first focus on oneself. Regarding the responsibility of financially supporting his parents, he says: "That was the goal... I feel that if I help myself, I help them because they don't have to worry about me."

3.7.1. Challenges in the New Cultural Context

He mentions that the new language was difficult, even though English had been part of his life. He says, "There's always this nervousness, like the fear that you'll be judged for not knowing the language or that someone will talk to you and put you down for being Latino." He also adds, "There's a lot of racism in the U.S., a lot of racism. And what I realize is that racism exists more with the people who are from here. Ecuadorians or Latinos are more racist with other Latinos than the 'gringos' themselves."

He explains that his "Latino accent" was very noticeable, stating, "At first, because of my accent, people were very degrading." While he doesn't consider having experienced many discriminatory situations, he highlights one instance: "Once I was at a supermarket... I don't know why, but I approached a woman to ask her something. Out of nowhere, she took off her gold earrings and put them in her purse, then put the purse in a backpack... You feel like... Like you're not accepted."

He also mentions that living with his family in the U.S. posed a challenge for him, as he could not behave the same way he did in his parents' house. He says, "It was difficult... following the rules of a house that isn't mine."

Regarding work, he does not consider it to be a true challenge since he worked with his family. However, he acknowledges that the job required significant physical effort, but not mental effort. His work hours were from 10 a.m. to 3 a.m. from Thursday to Sunday, and on the other days, from 4 p.m. to 9 a.m. The hardest part of the job was learning the restaurant's menu. He explains that, at first, he kept making mistakes: "I served the wrong dishes, I didn't understand English well." He adds that his stay in the new country was essentially about working, saying, "I think I just worked enough to generate money." From his perspective, he did not face many difficulties upon arriving in the new country, as he received support from his family—work, food, and a place to stay.

3.7.2. Masking Emotions

When he talks about his feelings and moments of sadness, he explains:

> I saw very attractive girls at restaurants, very attractive. And they would go out with people, but only for the money, and also because of their looks. So, I felt that many times it affected my self-esteem. Feeling like I wasn't within their reach. It's like having a desire for someone and realizing that someone is so beautiful, but you know you're not within reach. I think that made me feel sad. I think at that moment, being alone there really hit me. And I felt so many desires for the girls. Like trying to be with someone. I think that is what made me saddest... and knowing that my parents were struggling economically here.

When sharing his feelings with someone, he says, "I feel like it made me feel worse to tell someone. Because when I told someone, I realized what I was doing wrong. I feel like it would've been better not to have told anyone, because it's not like talking to that person helped me. It helped me to say it out loud to hear it outside my head." He mentions that one of his support figures was a cousin he shared his feelings with: "He told me... that I have to try to solve things on my own because, in the end, I'm always going to be alone in this world... it was to have someone listen to me... but we always solved things by ourselves."

Regarding his family, he says:

> They are cold. I don't remember the last time I had a hug from my dad. Maybe five years ago, I don't know. I don't remember the last time I heard 'I love you.' But I feel like it doesn't affect me. I feel like... It's good because I'm the one who says it. And I feel like they... they don't say it, not because they don't feel it, but because they were never raised in that environment. For example… I'm the one who tells them I love them, and they respond, but you can tell they feel embarrassed or like they were raised in an environment where showing affection was a sign of weakness.

Regarding why he believes men close off emotionally, he says:

> "Because I feel like it's unnecessary to explain how you feel. I feel like you don't benefit from it... That's because every man is raised in an environment where his father wasn't raised like that, and neither was his grandfather. So we

> never have a model to follow... Let's say I want to talk to my dad about my feelings. He was never raised in that environment and will never know how to listen. I'll never be raised in that environment because my dad never listened to me. My son will never be raised in that environment because I never listened to him. Because none of us were in that type of environment in the first place.

Through a personal account, he says:

> Well, let's say my dad or mom used to hit me, okay? And he would get mad when I cried because he would say that physical pain is nothing compared to emotional pain. So, I shouldn't cry over things that don't hurt. Because he feels like emotional pain hurts more than physical pain. So, he would get angry physically when I cried over physical pain. What else? Maybe that's just how I perceived it at the time. Or maybe the usual, threatening to hit me harder so I cry louder or cry for real. (Before sharing this, he laughs, becomes nervous, and hesitates to share.)

According to his perspective, the fact that men tend to repress their feelings is not only the case in Ecuador, but he also states: "I feel like that's the case everywhere." "I feel like men would do more foolish things than women for their families."

3.7.3. Cultural Identity

"I'll always be Ecuadorian, no matter what it means to me, I'm from here. My parents are from here; my whole family is from here... I like Ecuadorian culture, I like being Latino, I like having Indigenous blood." These were his words when asked about his cultural identity.

Regarding Ecuadorian food, he explains that it is what he missed most during his time in the United States: "Everything, the rice, everything, everything. Everything is so different. The rice, everything is cold. Everything is bland. The chicken tastes horrible because they add some chemicals to make it grow, which I don't like. Everything is very different." However, he also highlights that food at American restaurants is good, and he enjoyed it.

He says that among the cultural aspects of the United States, the "consumerism and superficiality" stand out. However, he also mentions that his favorite part of the country was the freedom he felt.

From his experience, he perceives the United States as the land of opportunities. He explains: “Opportunities to be the worst person of your life, opportunities to be the best person of your life, opportunities to get a job, opportunities to end up on the streets, there are many opportunities, and not necessarily good ones, but there are a lot of opportunities, there are a lot of good opportunities, but there are also a lot of bad ones. You could get into gangs, die young, overdose, you could have a business and be very successful, it depends on what you focus on.” In one word, he defines the country as “opportunities.” He adds that in the United States: “Life there is very ugly, I don’t like it. They’re all slaves to work, and I feel like they don’t live.” He also perceives both the U.S. and Ecuador as corrupt countries.

When asked about what he considers most important to him, he says:

> My focus, because without focus, I can’t take care of my family. I feel like the most important thing for me is my family, but without focus, I can’t take care of them... focusing on growth, because if I want to grow and make more money, I can support my family more, give them more opportunities. So, I think it’s about focusing and not being afraid, because even though my family is the most important thing to me, without focus, I won’t do anything. I may love my family, but if I don’t do anything to show it, it’s like I don’t love them. Because if you really love someone, you show that love through actions.

In reference to his perception of men as providers, he explains:

> I feel like there are roles that a man must fulfill, like a man, and there are roles a woman must fulfill, like a woman. Not necessarily referring to machismo, but there are things that women have... like their brains are wired differently than men’s. I feel like emotionally they’re smarter than men, and men are clumsier and rougher. So, for example, not to be sexist, but if I wanted a woman and wanted to marry her, have something more serious, I’d want to be the one who works. Of course, she can work and can say whatever she wants, but I’d like to make it easier for her to stay at home. She doesn’t have to stay at home; she can do whatever she wants, but I’d feel happy giving her that comfort, so she wouldn’t have to work. If she wants to work, fine, and if she wants to be successful, fine, I’ll take care of the baby, that’s not a problem, but I’d want to give her that ease, because I feel

she could be better emotionally for our daughter. I think there should be that balance.

"I feel like a woman can handle stress and emotions much better, and I think she's much more present than a man. I feel like men dissociate a lot. So, I don't know, I believe in that. I think physically a man's role is to protect because he has physical attributes for it. Emotionally, a woman's role is to care because she has the attributes for it. I don't think it's machismo, but I think it's about using your attributes; taking advantage of the benefits you have."

3.7.4. Cultural Adaptation Strategies

- What helped him learn the language was losing the embarrassment to speak the new language and engaging with people who came to the restaurant. He also attended a school to learn English, but it did not go well, he preferred learning at work. One of his motivations to learn the language was a girl, whom he did not understand when she spoke.
- He mentions that his personality and charisma were key factors for his cultural adaptation.
- Having the support of his family in the U.S. helped with things like food, housing, and work in the host country. However, he considers that not having that family support in the long run might have been more beneficial for his adaptation to the new culture, as he would have had to work harder to achieve his goals. He believes that while it would have been harder at first not having anyone, in the long run, he would have adapted better being alone than with

The following table summarizes the key aspects previously explored in the interviews, including difficulties faced, emotional responses, identity perceptions, and strategies for adapting to the new context.

Table 3

General Findings:Interviewed Migrants

Interviewees	Challenges in the New Cultural Context	Masking Emotions	Cultural Identity	Cultural Adaptation Strategies
Interviewee A He entered the United States irregularly	Language Loneliness Uncertainty Labor abuse Discrimination Assaults Coexistence with others. Difficulty communicating with his parents; he did so through letters.	He did not share his troubles because he did not want his family to worry; he told them he was fine, even when he was not. He played sports with other Ecuadorians and watched TV to avoid feeling lonely.	"I will never stop being Ecuadorian, but I have adapted quite well to this culture…" He appreciates the respect for the law and the value placed on education in the United States.	To learn the language, he attended schools and churches and taught himself using a dictionary. He lived alongside other Ecuadorians in the U.S. and maintained a good relationship with his boss. He focused on learning job-related skills. He believes his main sources of support for adapting were God and himself.
Interviewee B He was born in the United States; his parents are Ecuadorian. He currently lives in Ecuador.	Language Loneliness Labor abuse Discrimination He experienced bullying in both the workplace and educational settings in the U.S. He perceives social relationships in the U.S. as self-interested.	He did not talk about his troubles; he did not want his family to worry. He preferred to isolate himself for a while until he felt better.	**"I am American… from the United States as well as from Ecuador. I am American because I have lived through both experiences…"** He enjoys living in Ecuador; today, he incorporates aspects of American culture into his life.	To learn Spanish, he sought to engage with and include himself in others' conversations. He perceives that both family support in the U.S. and in Ecuador were key factors during his working stay in his birth country.
Interviewee C He went to the United States irregularly.	Language Loneliness Uncertainty Labor abuses Discrimination Climate Communication with his partner had deteriorated; ending the relationship was a very difficult situation.	He did not share his discomforts with anyone in the U.S., but sometimes he spoke with his brother, who was in Ecuador. His way of coping with his emotional struggles was through sports and music.	His cultural identity is Ecuadorian; however, he perceives American culture as the best. He highlights the respect for rules and the politeness of Americans	To learn the language and connect with others, the use of a translator was key. Support from friends and his boss in the United States, and his partner in Ecuador. Focusing on learning work skills.
Interviewee D	Language Loneliness	He did not share his discomforts; he did not want his family to worry about him.	His cultural identity is strongly rooted in Ecuadorian culture;	Prior physical and mental preparation. Living with other Latinos and support from

He went to the United States regularly.	Labor abuses Discrimination Racism Extreme climates Assault Fear of being caught by U.S. authorities Food	He went to the gym and took solo drives in his car. Focusing solely on work helped him cope with his feelings of loneliness.	however, he considers that he adapted to the new host culture. He appreciates the United States solely as a country to work in, but he does not miss anything from it.	his family in the United States and his mother in Ecuador. Recreating Ecuadorian meals and listening to music from his country of origin. He perceives that his main support was himself and his effort to adapt to the new country.
Interviewee E He went to the United States irregularly.	Language Loneliness Labor abuses Lack of work The death of his boss, a key figure during several years of his life in the North American country.	He did not share his discomfort with anyone; he believes he was raised that way. Today, to distract himself from his problems, he uses his cellphone or goes out on his motorcycle. He is aware that he represses his emotional struggles and avoids sharing them.	"I am Ecuadorian, but maybe we have picked up a bit of the culture from here." He has adapted to the host country but maintains culinary aspects and the language of Ecuador in his daily life.	He attended a school to learn the new language but was there for only a short time. He learned English through interaction with others at work. Support from his boss was key in this adaptation process, along with the support from his wife's family. Working in his field of expertise. The presence of his family, once he brought them to the U.S.
Interviewee F He went to the United States regularly.	Language Loneliness Work pressure Learning new trades Discrimination The death of his father and brother, who were in Ecuador, was his greatest challenge.	He did not share his discomforts; he did not want his family to worry about him. To distract himself from his discomforts, he goes for walks or attends sporting events alone	"I will always be attached to my roots." He considers that he has essentially adapted to working in the United States, although not to the language. His desire for the future is to return to Ecuador.	To learn the language, the use of a translator and digital media was fundamental. Contact with other Ecuadorians and Latinos, as well as with family members in his country of origin. Learning how transportation works, socializing with people, and visiting new places. Job stability and learning trades.
Interviewee G He went to the United States regularly.	Language Loneliness Work fatigue Discrimination Racism Living with others He did not feel good enough for the girls in the new country, and his self-esteem was affected.	He talked to his cousin when he felt unwell; however, sharing did not make him feel better. He perceives that he always resolved his discomforts on his own. To deal with his problems or discomforts, he speaks to them out loud.	"I will always be Ecuadorian, even if it doesn't mean much to me…" He highlights that freedom in the United States is the aspect of American culture he enjoyed the most, but that people there are only slaves to work. He does not like life in the U.S.	He attended a course to learn the new language, but it did not work for him, so he learned English through interaction with others at work. Family support upon arriving in the U.S. He perceives that his personality and charisma helped him adapt to the new country.

General Findings and Observations

What was confirmed in the seven interviews with migrants is that, regardless of whether their migration status was regular or irregular upon entering the United States, one of the most frequently mentioned challenges was primarily the language barrier. More than thirty years ago, English was even more difficult due to the absence of digital means that facilitated communication between Ecuadorians and Americans, and even between migrants and their families or friends in Ecuador. Additionally, age can hinder language learning—the older the person, the more complex the learning becomes, as was observed with the fifty-seven-year-old migrant for whom English still represents a challenge. Along this line, it is also important to note that English education begins at an early age in Ecuadorian schools and is taught over several years throughout a student's academic life. However, unfortunately, the students' proficiency in the foreign language remains limited and insufficient for effective functioning.

On the other hand, the feeling of loneliness perceived by the migrants was present on all accounts. Interestingly, although some of the migrants interviewed were accompanied by family members or acquaintances, loneliness was still prevalent. Each interviewee had their own particular way of coping with this feeling. Most of the interviewees emphasized that they missed their family very much. Furthermore, in the work environment, although experiences varied among the interviewees, some job experiences were better than others. Nevertheless, all the narratives included long working hours and the monotony of daily life; everyone expressed that, particularly in the first years, their lives were reduced to moving between back and forward from home to work and from work to home, which finally resulted in arriving exhausted to sleep.

Similarly, in many of the stories, mistreatment at work and discrimination were present; some experienced this more than others. Regarding discrimination, all agreed that it essentially came from Ecuadorians and other Latinos. Concerning food, the interviewees emphasized that the taste in the United States is very different from that in Ecuador. In their words, "it's not the same." This is an aspect of Ecuadorian culture that everyone missed and sought ways to access. It is important to highlight that each migrant faced particular challenges; among these, though mentioned less frequently, was uncertainty: not knowing what to do or where to go, especially upon first arriving in the new country. Also noted were incidents such as robberies, the climate, bullying, fear of

being caught by U.S. authorities, feelings of inadequacy, or the death of a loved one in Ecuador.

Regarding the expression of distress, the interviewees did not usually share these feelings with others, and if they did, it was with a specific person and in a limited way—for example, interviewee C spoke with his brother, G with a cousin. Concerning cultural identity, all perceived themselves as Ecuadorian; those who had lived in the United States for several years believed they had adapted to the new culture, and this adaptation was observable since they enjoyed various cultural aspects of the U.S. Except for interviewees D and G, who rejected the American way of life.

Regarding cultural adaptation strategies, the importance of learning the language stands out. In the past, this was done through traditional methods, such as using dictionaries. Today, the means used to learn and communicate are digital tools like translators or online courses. In some cases, language was learned by interacting with others at work. In all cases, the importance of having support both in the country of origin and in the host country, as well as contact with other Ecuadorians or Latinos, was evident. It was also essential to focus on learning job skills that allowed them to improve their abilities in specific work areas. Some migrants also perceived themselves as their main source of support during this process. Additionally, maintaining Ecuadorian cultural aspects in the new country was a crucial point in their adaptation.

One particular case worth mentioning is that of interviewee G. This migrant's account adds a challenge that others did not address: feeling inadequate for a woman in the United States, a situation that caused significant distress. This circumstance may have been present in other stories, especially during young adulthood; however, he was the only one to mention it. It is also noted that, despite having grown up in a family with little affection, he emphasized that his personal growth was essential to being able to care for his family, who are the most important to him. It should be noted that his personality and way of thinking were crucial to facilitating his stay in the United States. He explained that, despite feeling embarrassed when using English at work, he maintained a positive mindset and recognized that the only way to learn was by making mistakes.

Likewise, interviewee G explained that when he shared his feelings with others, for any reason, he felt worse. He also acknowledged that men have been raised in an environment where expressing distress or sharing feelings with others is not common, a

situation repeated generation after generation. In his words: “We will never have role models.” It can be added that the emotional distance within his family, coupled with his father’s punishments when he cried, is reflected in the fact that leaving Ecuador to settle for a few years in the United States and the limited communication he maintained, especially with his parents, were not greater challenges compared to the stories of the other migrants interviewed. Additionally, at twenty years old, he has a clear mindset about his intention to be the provider in his future family life. Regarding a future partner he expressed: “I would like to give her the ease to feel more comfortable staying at home.” That is, his mentality is associated with conservative masculinity. His personal and family experiences made him an independent person at his young adult age.

Finally, in particular cases, migrants perceived that their bosses were of great help in the adaptation process, as well as God, their own effort and personality, and even working in the profession they enjoyed and practiced in Ecuador. Lastly, as an observation, it is curious to note that most participants laughed while recounting difficult moments or situations they had to go through. This soft, ironic laughter could be interpreted as a way to hide the pain they felt during those difficult times.

Academics

The following table provides an overview of the interviewed academic’s professional profiles

Table 4

Profiles of the Academics

Ana Pacurucu	Mónica Martínez	Mario Bracero
Psychologist and professor at the University of Azuay.	Career diplomat, current director of the regional office six at the Ecuadorian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.	Anthropologist, professor, and researcher at the University of Azuay.

Psychologist: Dra. Ana Pacurucu: “Worldwide, it has always been thought that men should repress their emotions more.”

Physical and Emotional Changes and Influencing Factors in the Emotional State of Migrants

As the doctor explains, in general, the physical changes that people experience when moving to another country are observed in their weight, which may increase or decrease. Emotional changes include feelings such as sadness, sweaty palms, or

palpitations. On the one hand, sadness is a consequence of being away from family. On the other hand, contact with unfamiliar or new environments may cause anxiety or worry, and even nightmares.

Some factors that influence the emotional state of those experiencing a cultural shock, according to Pacurucu, include food, language, and people, even if these last groups do or do not welcome the migrant in the host country. In her words: "It's not the same to have close family members or someone to guide you, as it is to arrive at something completely unknown." The doctor emphasizes the importance of food, as migrants miss this cultural factor. Food is perceived by the doctor as a symbol of unity. Climate can also influence the emotional state of migrants, with extreme climates, particularly the early darkness of the day, causing sadness.

In foreign lands, migrants tend to seek out "potentially similar" people. In her words: "Where I can't find other Ecuadorians, I can find Latin Americans... I go towards the group." Similarly, the academic views language as a means of social connection and familiarity.

Stress in the Ecuadorian Migration Process: Differences Between Men and Women. Does Culture Influence?

From Pacurucu's perspective, how male or female migrants cope with stressful situations during migration does differ. She explains:

> As women, we always have a network, we have the grandmother, the aunt, the sister-in-law, the sister, the best friend, even the enemy, who give us their opinions; we have many voices. Men have fewer voices, but when a man migrates, there are none, there is nothing (A. Pacurucu, personal communication, March 11, 2025).

Pacurucu acknowledges that in the case of men, this situation also depends on how they were raised and educated, and it also influences them to ask: "What would my dad do?"

In her professional experience, she has observed that Ecuadorian men, when facing emotional discomfort such as sadness, turn to alcohol consumption in the company of their friends. This, in some way, helps them forget how they feel. Regarding expressing their emotions, the academic notes: "Maybe they comment on something, but culturally

it is frowned upon for a man to talk about feelings or express their situations because 'he's not man enough or not macho enough'" (A. Pacurucu, personal communication, March 11, 2025).

Pacurucu emphasizes that women find different ways to express their feelings to vent. She highlights: "But that's upbringing, that's culture, that's society, it's social class, everything is mixed in there." Unlike men, in general, Latin Americans, with certain exceptions, tend to get drunk. "All that crying, that anger, that frustration, in theory, many process it as something that goes with alcohol." "It doesn't always go with alcohol, it stays, it goes away for a while and then comes back."

She explains that half of the men with alcohol problems also suffer from depression. Alcohol consumption serves as a means because: "They cannot express their feelings, emotions." Furthermore, she adds that in a migration situation, it can be even more severe, particularly for those who migrated irregularly and far from their family nucleus, as they may see alcohol as "their only escape." Together with others, they gather to share, eat, drink, and play. Pacurucu calls this "social consumption," which is not a daily habit, "but it's what many times they miss." A man who becomes more expressive for some reason is often labeled "homosexual, weak."

The doctor explains that to reduce the emotional and cultural impact of migration, it is key to inform oneself about the country they are going to. Similarly, "disposition" is important, meaning thinking positively. Also, "neuro-linguistic programming," which refers to talking positively about plans to be developed, allows for discovering solutions to problems. Staying in contact with people from their country, as well as music and sports, also helps. Pacurucu finally mentions that the body can communicate human discomfort, such as stomach or back pain. She ends the interview with the following words: "The people who don't talk get sick."

Diplomat: Mónica Martínez: "Convincing Ecuadorians that leaving is okay, but returning is better."

Migration

Martínez explains that migration is a phenomenon that has always existed. Regarding Ecuadorian migration, particularly from the provinces of Azuay and Cañar, she points out that in the 1960s, people from these regions also migrated due to their highly valued craftsmanship in gold and silver in the United States. The diplomat

emphasizes the idea of viewing migration of Ecuadorians not just as a phenomenon of "expulsion of Ecuadorians," but as a multifaceted phenomenon. Migrating requires courage and sacrifice. As she states: "Finding new paths, seeking new alternatives."

Those who migrate are not always people without economic resources, but rather those who, in her words, have "courage, a desire for improvement, and minimal resources, who are willing to sacrifice." Today, Ecuadorian migration is paralyzed due to Donald Trump's policies. However, in the previous two years, there was a noticeable increase in migration flows from the province of Morona Santiago.

Not long ago, Ecuadorians were the ones acting as "coyotes" to smuggle their fellow countrymen into the United States. Today, with the intensification of criminal gangs at the Mexican border and the lack of control by the Mexican government, the Ecuadorian "coyote" has become an intermediary, handing people over to the gangs operating in the area. Following the closure of the Ecuadorian consulate in Mexico, services provided by the consulate have become more complicated. However, Martínez indicates that alternative solutions have been sought to support Ecuadorian migrants.

Consular Services

The consulate offers a variety of services to Ecuadorian migrants. Among them are courses, counseling, assistance, repatriation of Ecuadorians, among others. Among the services mandated by law, Martínez explains that they monitor the well-being and situation of children under the age of 18 who have been living abroad for more than six months. This involves maintaining contact between consulates and notaries, as well as issuing summonses for civil lawsuits involving Ecuadorians and for the service of legal documents.

Consulates also provide training sessions and discussions with families of migrants abroad who are in vulnerable situations, those who were forcibly returned, and those who have lost a family member during migration. These conversations about risky migration are also extended to educational centers. Abroad, consulates inform Ecuadorians about available services, such as access to social security, amnesty programs, and information on agreements that benefit them.

Unfortunately, the country lacks the budget to pay for legal consultations, so consulates provide information to Ecuadorians abroad on how to contact non-profit organizations that can help with their cases.

Additionally, there are recruitment processes in Ecuador for people seeking seasonal jobs abroad, a practice referred to as "circular migration." In the future, the goal is to establish agreements with the United States on this matter. However, the main obstacle is that Ecuador cannot force anyone to return to the country. This situation has paralyzed agreements with other nations. She notes: "The problem is how to guarantee the return... we need to change the mindset and education, convincing Ecuadorians that leaving is fine, but returning is better."

Rights

Martínez emphasizes that the rights of Ecuadorians in Ecuador are not the same as those they have abroad. Referring to the rights of migrants in the United States, she says: "The only entity that has the obligation to respect their rights is the Ecuadorian state." The challenges faced by Ecuadorian migrants, especially undocumented ones in terms of labor, education, and healthcare rights, are critical.

Ecuadorians who return from abroad, either voluntarily or forcibly, in her words: "are free to move." She clarifies that the Ecuadorian state cannot prohibit the return of its migrant citizens, but they must meet the legal requirements for entry into other countries. Under Trump's policies, Ecuadorians who are deported will not be able to apply for a U.S. visa in the future, while those who return voluntarily and meet the requirements may be eligible.

She also explains that Ecuador issues a "returning migrant certificate." This certificate allows Ecuadorians who have lived abroad for a certain period and decide to return to Ecuador to bring their household goods back tax-free.

Today, Ecuadorians are finding ways to ensure their belongings in the U.S. through power-of-attorney certifications, due to uncertainty. She notes that the persecution of migrants extends not only to those who are undocumented but also to "those with documented status who have a police record."

Gender Roles Abroad

Regarding gender roles, she states: "It hasn't broken yet... We cannot blind ourselves to the reality that in the labor market, roles are still very marked... the prejudice of a man caring for a baby... the prejudice of a woman working in construction." She

explains that construction is one area where male Ecuadorian migrants work in the U.S., as well as dishwashers, while women tend to work in childcare and elder care.

Men and Repression of Emotions

On the adaptation of migrants abroad, she explains that true integration into the new society does not happen. Based on her extensive professional experience, Martínez mentions many cases of Ecuadorian men involved in drug use, alcoholism, and homelessness. She states: "I have never had a case of a woman on the street, but many cases of men on the street... A woman, being more social, joins a family or friends' network, shares more, while a man might share a room, but he doesn't share his problems, and if he does, it's with a drink, which only exacerbates the issues."

Asked why men tend to keep their problems to themselves, she responds in one sentence: "When a man asks something, it's because he wants an answer; when a woman asks something, it's because she wants solidarity". Regarding women, she says: "We don't need answers, we have the answers, but we need to share them, and men want answers." When referring to this as a cultural situation, she says: "Absolutely, but it's not only a matter of Ecuador or Latin America; I've seen it in very different cultures, and the reaction is the same." She adds:

> A man, not being in touch with his sensitivity... we're talking about a person who emigrates without ever having had any emotional contact, whose experience of emotional connection has been with his mother, sisters, or girlfriend, because even friendship with women isn't well viewed... with that background, he arrives in a country that he doesn't understand, where he can't communicate, where he doesn't know how to make contact, not even with his fellow countrymen, let alone women... then all the burden he carries explodes. This explains why they isolate themselves.

Regarding the existence of programs or initiatives by the Foreign Ministry to address the mental health of Ecuadorian migrants, she states: "I wish I could say yes, but no... I attribute this to a lack of resources. I'm constantly fighting for support for mental health and for assistance to the staff themselves..."

Perspectives and Current Situation Under Trump's Policies

In her perspective on the need for permits to enter a country, she explains: "In an ideal, utopian world with unlimited resources, this situation would be possible. However, when it comes to Ecuador, a small country with a limited budget, it's impossible to provide services to foreigners." She emphasizes: "This is not an anti-immigrant discourse, but one in favor of Ecuadorians." "How can I offer work to a foreigner... if as a state, I'm not able to provide work for all Ecuadorians?"

She considers that the current situation under Trump's policies will help, in her words: "Focus on real problems... Why do the people from the countryside migrate? Because we still see the countryside as if it was three hundred years ago... nothing will be solved abroad if it's not solved at home." Trump's policies bring suffering, deaths, and even cases of suicide. She adds, referring to returned migrants: "The one who returns feels they have nothing to lose... And when one feels they have nothing to lose, they are easy prey for mafias and organized groups of violence."

Message to Ecuadorians

> Migration must be a right, but one that needs to be worked on before packing your bags... If I prepare myself, if I look for opportunities, and present myself as an exportable asset, not as someone expelled... I go because I want to learn, I go because I want to bring resources... Many times, we don't know who we are or what we can offer... You need to work on your identity long before migrating (Martínez, M. personal communication, March 24, 2025).

When asked about the structural changes Ecuador needs to reduce migration to the United States, she states: "For me, it's a change of mindset... Our countryside has tremendous potential that isn't seen. We can't keep having a countryside from three hundred years ago." She explains the need for young people willing to engage in research within the rural sector in the country.

Anthropologist: Mario Bracero: "In their condition as men, of masculinity, they are called to provide."

Culture

Anthropologist Mario Bracero explains that culture is a complex concept to define, and that human beings are still learning about its meaning. Culture shapes the way we are, think, observe, and face the world. In the case of Ecuadorian culture, he emphasizes

its diversity—there is no single Ecuadorian culture or way of thinking. The various ways of perceiving the world differ from one region to another.

Bracero stresses the notion that humans not only acquire culture but also learn and create it. In his words: “We are engines of culture.” He explains that culture is not innate to the human being, but rather, “we acquire it from the first day we are on this Earth” until the last day we remain here. In other words, we are constantly learning and creating culture.

Human Mobility

Human mobility has always been part of the history of humankind. Migration, however,“ceases to be human mobility when there are requirements for that movement.”In ancient times, the only barriers to movement were natural. However, with the creation of nation-states and the need for documents to enter a country, these barriers have become political rather than geographical. This shift has transformed what we used to understand as “human mobility” into “migration.”

He adds that underlying causes of migration include social problems in the country of origin, but also “life expectations and personal dreams.” Not everyone who leaves their country is in dire economic need; some do it to “prove something, to be seen, to be recognized by others, by their community, as someone who has achieved a dream.” Leaving one's country and family is often filled with pain, detachment, and uprooting.

Generally, Bracero explains that since Ecuador was colonized by Spain and began interacting with other states, “Ecuador inherited a patriarchal social system”—a reality that remains present today.

Men and Migration

> How is this patriarchy manifested? Bracero points to a recurring discourse: the man as the provider, the man in the public sphere, and the woman as the private, receiving figure—the one who stays at home and receives what the man brings. The man provides because he enters the public space to work. This has been the pattern, and it is evident in Ecuadorian artistic expressions from the time of the Republic’s formation.
>
> For example, in the novel La Emancipada by Miguel Río Frío, the protagonist Rosaura wishes to leave the private space and enter the public one. She is

interested in politics and the economy, but her father becomes her harshest judge and executioner. She ultimately commits suicide. First, she is portrayed as a woman of the street, of freedom and debauchery, and then she ends her life.

Bracero reflects, “We are a mold of what happened in Europe—of that European patriarchy, French and English. Our nation-state was built on that patriarchal model and shaped by social relationships with the region’s Indigenous peoples, who were seen as... subjects.” Thus, the patriarchal man—the one in the public space, the provider—is also the one who migrates.

He migrates precisely with the logic: “If I migrate, I will provide more. If I migrate, I will fully fulfill the moral obligation that society imposes on me.” This moral is not religious, Bracero clarifies, but social. “What is social morality? It is society’s judgment of your actions.”

If a man does not provide, society passes moral judgment on him. Even today, if a man is studying while a woman works and supports the household, this is frowned upon. Why? Because it is the man who is supposed to provide. Bracero adds, “This act of providing is a social pressure.”

Therefore, it is the man who is expected to migrate. He is the one called to endure difficulties to achieve the “American dream”—a dream that others like friends, neighbors, and cousins have already pursued: “If they did it, I can do it too.”

There is also social pressure: “What are you doing here working the land? Go do what your cousin is doing—even if it’s washing dishes—but he earns in dollars and earns well.” In their condition as men, of masculinity, they are called to provide.

Socially, a man who provides from abroad is more respected and valued. Why? Because he is in the United States. There is also an imaginary surrounding what role the man must fulfill. The man who provides from a foreign country is seen more positively under society’s moral judgment—he is considered “more of a man,” more virile, than the man who stays behind working in the fields.

Economically, he may eventually achieve that goal—but at what cost? Bracero, who visited New York in August, observed that migrants “replicate their Ecuador within the United States.”

He met individuals who told him, “What can I do if I go back? My wife is with someone else. My kids don’t love me; they only want my money.” So, what are my expectations? “I’m not from here, nor from there. I don’t belong anywhere. But just like me, there are others who don’t belong anywhere either. We become a tribe, a clan of stateless people in the same situation. And instead of crying, we have to live, smile, and do something with our lives.”

Thus, they form social nodes—spaces of belonging and hope—where they can at least survive with some joy. Playing volleyball, for example—recreating the idealized Ecuador, putting into practice social and cultural behaviors from their homeland. Though it is impossible to replicate them completely in foreign territory, Ecuadorian migrants remember that longed-for place and try to recreate it. For this, social relationships must be built in a new environment.

Responsibility to Migrate: Rooted in Masculine Consciousness

Bracero explains that the responsibility Ecuadorian men feel to migrate is “deeply rooted in their unconscious.” It is not something easily seen, but if we analyze the “discourse” and the elements that shape migration, “you’ll find there is a strong moral and social pressure.” This pressure often comes from family but also from within personal pressure, because others have done it before. Migration also grants men a certain prestige.

Challenges

Among the challenges faced by Ecuadorian migrants in the U.S. are the feelings of uprootedness—not only from their families but also from the society they leave behind. There are also labor difficulties, especially for undocumented migrants, who must adapt to new schedules and generally unfair wages.

Bracero shares what he observed while living among Ecuadorian migrants in the U.S. He met individuals who said they preferred to work long hours, not only to earn more and send money home, but also “to spend less time alone.” Loneliness brings “anguish, hopelessness, and longing,” so migrants prefer to fall asleep exhausted.

He notes that although migrants tend to form tribes or groups due to shared conditions, there can be internal rivalries. The Ecuadorian sees the American as an opportunity, while other Ecuadorians are seen as competition—over jobs, housing, even sexual relationships. Bracero emphasizes, “It’s not about malice, it’s about survival.”

Emotions

Bracero also discusses the repression of emotions among Ecuadorian men, which is related to patriarchy and inherited gender roles. However, he also highlights that Ecuadorian men living alone in the U.S. rarely form sincere friendships.

He points out that coastal men tend to be more expressive, while men from the Andes region find it harder to talk about their problems. He says, “For people from the Sierra, it’s a bit more complicated—more like crying inwardly, staying silent. And even with loved ones, they rarely speak, let alone in a foreign place where there are no loved ones nearby”.

Family relationships back in Ecuador also exert pressure for the man to stay abroad, especially because of the remittances he sends. Bracero recounts, “There’s also pressure from the family: if you left, make it worth it, stay.” If the man cries, the response might be: “Stop crying, don’t be stupid, you’re a man, toughen up.” Or: “Why did you leave then? Now you have to endure.”

He adds that men don’t share their feelings because, in truth, they have no one to share them with. “A person in a tribe where no one is truly a friend will hardly open their heart to someone. Maybe during a night of drinking they’ll cry listening to Julio Jaramillo. But the next day, they wash their face and go to work.”

Thus, feelings, emotions, subjectivity, memories, nostalgia, and dreams all become part of a heavy emotional load—more connected to suffering than to peace. “You have to turn those feelings into little balls and swallow them,” Bracero concludes.

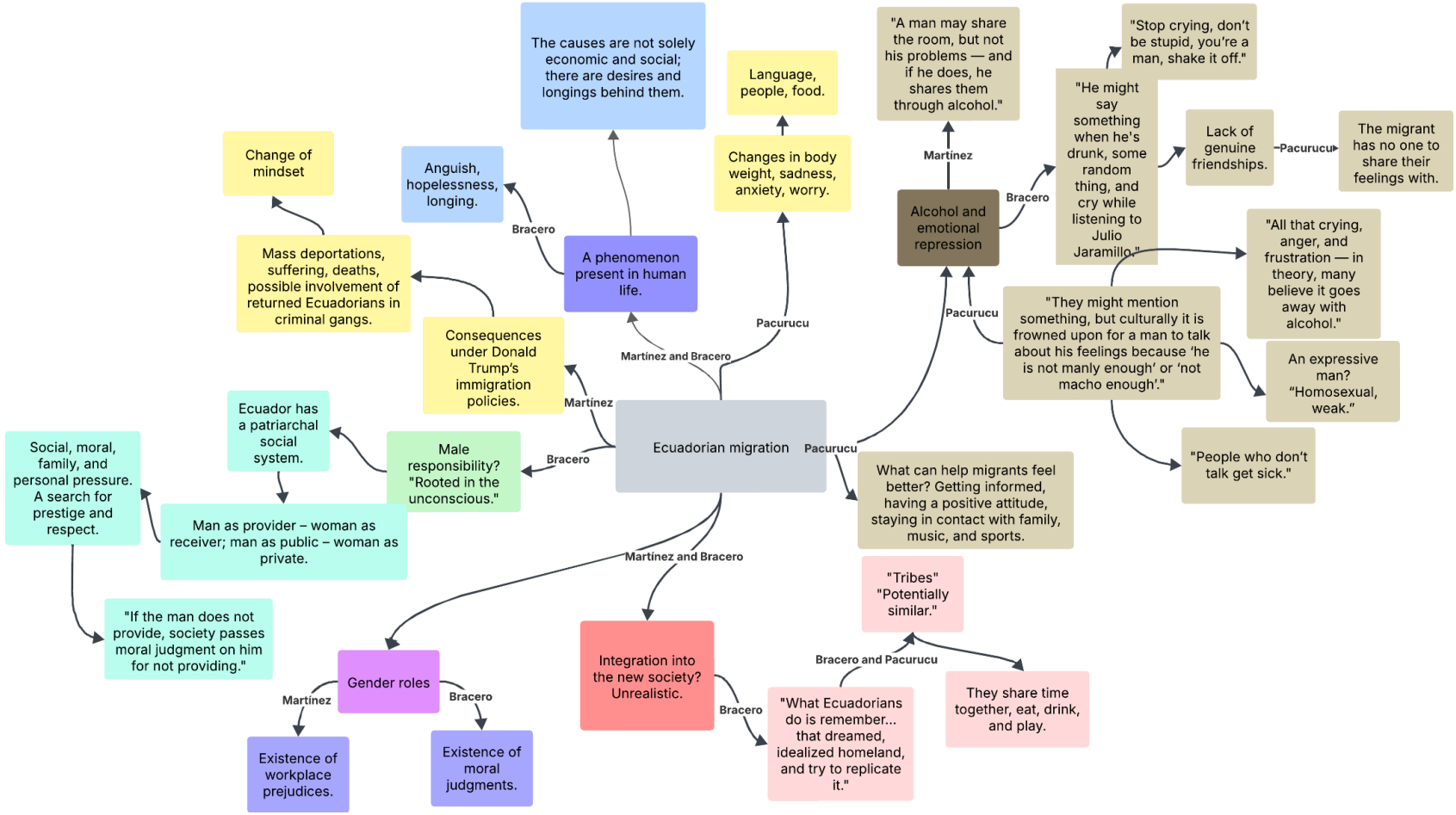
Integration into American society?

Regarding the integration of Ecuadorians in the United States, Bracero states that integration into the new society does not exist; however, adaptation to the new country does, as migrants are capable of adapting to the new system and new rules. He explains that integration implies that the host society accepts foreign individuals as part of the society—something that is nonexistent. He notes: “The migrant is not part of American society; they are part of a sector of that society, which is the migrant sector.” Within that group, there are loyalties, affinities, and even exclusions.

The following figure presents a mind map summarizing the key ideas shared by the experts interviewed. It visually connects their perspectives, showing both areas of agreement and complementary information.

Figure 1

Findings and similarities: Interviews with specialists



CHAPTER 4
CASE STUDIES

The book "*Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods"*, authored by Robert Yin, explains that analyzing multiple case studies in a research project, instead of focusing on a single case, increases its robustness and validity. If two or more case studies support the theoretical foundations, the findings will be stronger (Yin, 2018). Based on this premise, three migrant interviews were selected to be used as case studies. The depth of the interviews was taken into account, as well as age ranges that cover different stages of life of the men who migrated, with approximate ages of twenty, forty, and sixty years, to gain a broader understanding of patterns and to appreciate the evolution of the male perspective.

The first case study corresponds to interviewee D, who was selected particularly for the depth of his narrative, as it includes and adds in more detail aspects that were only briefly touched on in the other interviews. Similarly, case studies C and E were selected respectively. Case C was chosen for the breadth of his account and for being within the second proposed age range (approximately 40 years old). Interviewee E, on the other hand, was chosen due to the uniqueness of his case, which allowed for a contrast of experiences; additionally, he represents the oldest age range (approximately 60 years old).

In each of the case studies, the following theories were analyzed: the Push-Pull theory by Everett Lee, Oberg's cultural shock theory, and Berry's acculturation strategies. Furthermore, the analysis included the perceived responsibility of Ecuadorian men when deciding to migrate and the repression of emotions.

4.1. CASE STUDY 1: Migrant D

At the age of 18, facing the beginning of his university journey and driven by the desire to pursue higher education, Migrant D decided to emigrate to the United States. His primary goal was to save enough money to pay for his university studies. During his stay in the host country, he also financially supported his mother. He entered the United States legally and was received by his uncles during the first two months of his stay. He spent approximately three years in the country, primarily working in the construction sector. Today, he is 21 years old and currently studying in Ecuador. His experience in the United States was marked by intense physical labor, loneliness, and experiences of discrimination.

From the perspective of Lee's Push-Pull Theory (1966), which posits that migration is driven by unfavorable internal conditions that push individuals to leave their home country and favorable conditions abroad that attract them, several key elements of this theory are reflected in this case. The theory identifies factors of expulsion, attraction, difficulties during the migration process, and individual characteristics present throughout the migratory phenomenon.

In this regard, the main push factor observed was the limited financial resources of his family, which prevented him from continuing his education in Ecuador. Additionally, there was a pressing need to find a job that would allow him to support his mother financially and help him pay off her debts. Among the pull factors that drew him to the United States were, on one hand, the presence of his relatives who received him upon arrival, and on the other, the significantly higher wages compared to those in Ecuador, which made the U.S. labor market more attractive in pursuit of his goals.

In terms of difficulties during the migratory process, it can be inferred that the transportation costs to reach the United States represented a significant challenge, given the family's economic limitations. Nonetheless, since he entered the country through regular means, he did not face the typical dangers associated with irregular migration. Regarding his personal characteristics, it is worth noting that he is a young man with a strong desire for academic growth and a profound sense of responsibility toward supporting his mother. As revealed in the interview, his mother played a key role in motivating him during his time in the United States. Knowing that he was helping her kept him going through the physically demanding work in construction.

Upon arriving in the United States, many of his experiences can be analyzed through the lens of Oberg's theory of culture shock (1951). Oberg outlines four stages of culture shock, which migrants go through as they adjust to a new environment. These stages range from the initial frustration (for permanent migrants) or the "honeymoon phase" (typically for temporary migrants), to eventual cultural adaptation. Oberg also identifies common symptoms of culture shock, such as refusal to learn the new language, food rejection, and feelings of anger. Several of these symptoms were evident in-Migrant D's account. Although he worked mainly with other Latin Americans in the construction sector, he encountered significant challenges with the English language in other social contexts. He also expressed a strong aversion toward American food and a longing for Ecuadorian cuisine, stating: "I wanted to go back... to eat tasty or beautiful food."

Migrant D appears to have gone through three of the four stages proposed by Oberg. Initially, his longing to return to Ecuador and the sadness he expressed reflect the first stage—frustration. He stated: “It was awful being alone. I had depression, or at least I felt like it... I didn’t cry, but working helped me forget.” He also mentioned: “There comes a point where you go a bit crazy, you start talking to yourself... It was tough.” In reference to the widely cited “American dream,” he remarked: “It’s not a dream, it’s more like a nightmare…” These statements demonstrate the emotional and psychological struggles he faced upon encountering a new and unfamiliar culture.

The second stage in Oberg’s model is marked by individuals facing the daily challenges of their new cultural environment, often reacting with aggression and criticism toward the host country and its people. In this stage, people may feel a sense of cultural superiority. This is evident in his work and daily life experiences, where he stated: “The gringos over there don’t help at all, they don’t do anything, not like the Latinos...” and “I fell asleep... my boss caught me and punished me with a week without pay.” He also recalled: “I was shopping, and they served all the white people first, even though I had arrived before them.” Furthermore, he felt embarrassed speaking English because others mocked his pronunciation. These remarks, which he did not appear to make out of hostility, reflect a sense of being exploited and discriminated against in the workplace. He perceived that most of the hard labor in construction was carried out by Latinos and noted that many of the individuals he interacted with, including supervisors, displayed racist behavior. As a result, he developed feelings of inferiority stemming from the rejection he experienced.

The final two stages in Oberg’s model are characterized by gradual improvement and eventual cultural adaptation. In the final stage, individuals not only feel comfortable in the host culture but begin to enjoy its traditions and may even miss the country upon leaving. In this case, however, when asked if he missed anything from the U.S., he responded: “There’s nothing I miss from there.” His continued rejection of American food and society suggests that he never fully adapted to the new culture. Although he claimed that he did adapt and that adaptation was necessary for survival in the U.S., his description seems to reflect resignation rather than genuine acceptance: “Going back was not an option.”

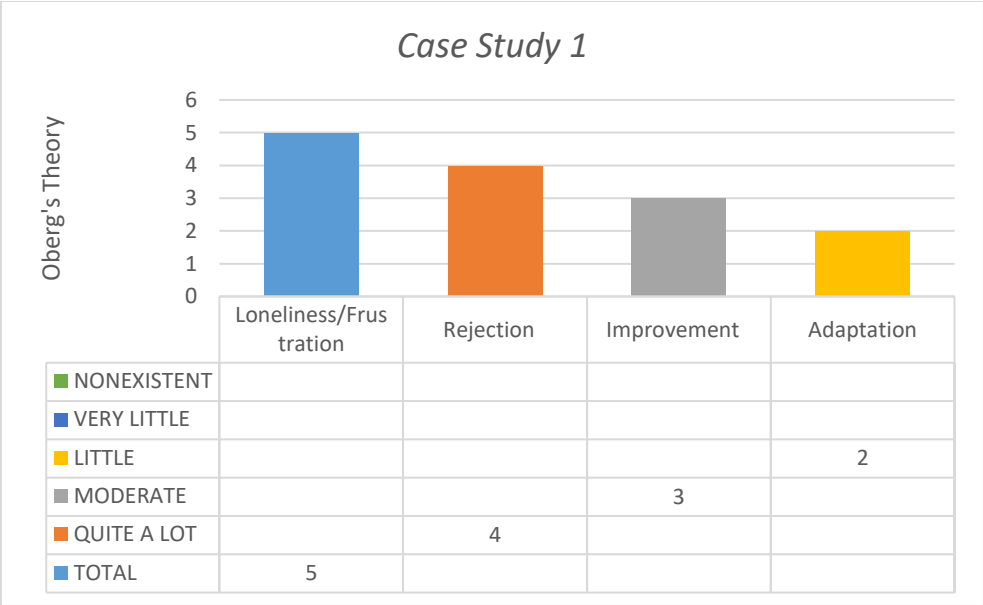
Thus, based on Oberg’s framework, Migrant D appears to have reached the third stage—adjustment. After approximately two and a half years, despite enduring difficulties and isolation, he reduced his working hours and began to enjoy his weekends by driving

around and exploring new places. This indicates some level of coping and adjustment, even if full adaptation was never achieved.

Figure 2, based on Oberg's theory, represents Migrant D's experience using four variables: Loneliness/Frustration, Rejection, Improvement, and Adaptation. Each variable is rated on a scale from 0 to 5, where 0 represents no presence of the variable and 5 represents its maximum expression. This visual model reflects the different phases of culture shock as experienced by the participant.

Figure 2

Stages of Cultural Shock – Case Study 1



Regarding the acculturation strategies proposed by Berry (1990), as cited in Retortillo & Rodríguez (2008), four are distinguished; these explain what happens to a person who migrates in relation to their culture and that of the new environment. These are: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. From this perspective, interviewee D's acculturation strategy corresponds to separation. Berry explains that this strategy is characterized by the person maintaining their cultural traits while rejecting participation in the new culture. Although this situation was not rigidly evident in interviewee D—since learning the new language was necessary—he avoided saying words like "okay" at work. However, he often listened to the late and very popular Ecuadorian artist Julio Jaramillo, preferred Ecuadorian dishes in Latin restaurants in the U.S., and watched YouTube videos to recreate them. Regarding food, he said: "It doesn't taste the same, but it made me feel a little more alive." He also stated: "Cooking and playing that music and getting a call from

my mom was the best." These are situations that show how he preserved his culture and roots in the new cultural environment.

On the other hand, he also explained that during his stay in the United States, he had suicidal thoughts; the loneliness and being thousands of kilometers away from his family posed significant challenges, as evidenced by his statements: "I tried to distract myself, driving around, or looking for something to do so my mind wouldn't feel like that—sad, lifeless." He also said this situation kept him from sleeping well and caused a loss of appetite. It is important to highlight that when he thought about ending his life, he told himself: "And who's going to help them with the debts?" He also said: "The American dream isn't what they paint it to be; people think you go and money rains on you. No, you have to break your back working to get food, to send money to your family.

These phrases summarize his sense of responsibility as a provider and as the one who migrated to support, primarily, his mother. Being a provider, is a characteristic for the Ecuadorian man. A characteristic inherited from colonial times that still persists today. (Bracero, personal communication). Furthermore, his statement: "Here they expect men to be everything… Some people think the woman should stay at home and the man should work. I think in Ecuador, a lot is expected of (he paused before saying 'people', seemingly about to say 'men') people, much more than some of us can give…" is a declaration that reveals how gender role assignments in Ecuador, at least in our mental perception, have not changed much. His phrase "much more than some of us can give" indicates the existence of strong pressure to meet certain expectations—many of them difficult ones—that Ecuadorian men are expected to follow.

"Many men believe they have to be strong, because society said so—that a man cannot cry, can't be weak, because then he's not a man. That's totally false…" This sentence exposes an idea that has influenced the behavior of Ecuadorian men. The repression of emotions is a situation that is evident not only in Ecuador but also abroad. During his stay in the new country, interviewee D explained that he did not share with his family when he felt unwell, as he did not want to worry them. He sought ways to distract himself from his emotional distress. He explained that many times, despite feeling the urge to cry, he did not. From his perspective, crying did not help. In his words: "What would I gain from crying? Better to get to work." This is a situation that anthropologist Mario Bracero also observed during his time in the United States. Bracero met Ecuadorians who explained that they chose to spend more time at work not only to earn more money to send home but also to avoid the

feeling of loneliness. This is reinforced by the phrase: “I didn’t like crying. No, I felt weak—in a place where you have to be strong.” This statement highlights the idea that expressing emotions is seen as a sign of weakness.

Unfortunately, the act of crying has often been associated with weakness, especially for men in Ecuador. Dr. Ana Pacurucu, a psychologist, explained this regarding male emotional expression: “Maybe he comments on something, but culturally it’s frowned upon for a man to talk about his feelings or to express his situation because ‘he’s not man enough’ or ‘not macho enough.’” This situation is exacerbated in migratory contexts when the man is far from his family. Bracero, for his part, states that Sierra (Andean) men in particular tend to be more emotionally closed off than Coastal men. Regarding emotional expression, Bracero emphasizes: “You have to ball it all up and swallow it…”

Bracero also explains that this emotional repression among Ecuadorian men is inherited, and furthermore, abroad, Ecuadorians cannot truly consider anyone a real friend with whom to share their feelings, as they are in a context of mutual competition. This situation is evident in the interviewee's account, where he explained that the discrimination he experienced in the U.S. came from both Americans and Latinos. Regarding the latter, he said: “Even some Latinos were classist, just because they had more than you… because they have more money, or because they work in an easier job.”

4.2. CASE STUDY 2: Migrant C

Faced with bank debts and the loss of his job, interviewee C decided to emigrate to the United States six years ago in order to pay off his debts with the income he would earn and also ensure the well-being of his family. Today, he is 37 years old. He entered the United States irregularly, after being denied entry by the competent authorities at the U.S. consulate in Ecuador. Upon arrival in the new country, he was received by acquaintances of his family, which in one way or another gave him a sense of peace. Additionally, a friend whom he calls "la vieja" ("the old lady") was his main support upon arrival. “La vieja” exempted him from rent payments and provided him with shelter and food during his first three months. Furthermore, she helped him get his first job. Today, he lives in the United States with his family. His story is marked by loneliness and hard work, but also by great admiration for American culture.

According to the previously discussed Push-Pull theory, in this case we can observe that the push factors include, first of all, that his salary in Ecuador at the time—along with his partner’s income—were not sufficient to cover the accumulated bank debts. This, along with the loss of his job, the collapse of his import business, and the fact that his daughter was growing and required more financial resources, were key elements behind his decision to leave Ecuador. As for the pull factors, the most relevant was the economic factor: the need for a higher salary that would allow him to meet his financial obligations. This is evident in his statement: “The debts were chasing us and we couldn’t have peace of mind.”

Regarding the difficulties he faced on his journey to the new country, the most prominent at first was the sadness caused by leaving his family, which became evident during his migratory narrative. Secondly, he mentioned cohabiting with other migrants, who were also pursuing the American dream. Throughout the journey, they stopped in several places with small and unsanitary spaces, where dangerous armed people were present. Another difficulty was the presence of border patrols (he explained that he felt the Virgin Mary protected him during his journey, and that is why he was not caught). He also experienced dehydration due to long hours of walking without water. He described running out of water while the sun’s rays beat down on him, along with more than thirty hours of walking, as a very desperate situation. Finally, regarding his personal traits, his perseverance and desire to improve the lives of his partner and daughter stood out.

As for the cultural shock stages proposed by Oberg, in this case we can observe feelings of loneliness and frustration in the first stage. On one hand, through a memory, he described the loneliness he went through. He explained that one December 31st—a special day usually spent with family, he was alone in his place of residence. He recalled that the power went out, and his partner called him; seeing everyone enjoying a day he used to spend with his family, he chose to lie to her and say he was going out and then hung up. He expressed: "I hung up and just cried." As he shared this memory, his voice seemed to break, and his tone was low. From the way he expressed himself, it was clear that loneliness and being away from his family were deep emotional challenges he faced in the foreign country.

On the other hand, regarding frustration, he indicated that the job was hard, and that during the first years, he worked only to earn money. However, despite the physical effort and long hours, he did not see the monetary gains, since all his income went to paying off debts, something that caused frustration.

The second stage of cultural shock is characterized by a person developing an aggressive attitude as a result of the daily struggles and expressing this as criticism of the host country and its people. In this particular case, however, the opposite occurred. The word he used to define the United States when he first arrived was "education." He perceived and still perceives the country quite positively. He referred to the U.S. with an analogy: for him, the U.S. is like "a university of life; it teaches you to be responsible, organized, the value of money, family, and time." He also stated that American culture is among the best. Moreover, based on his experiences, discrimination came from Ecuadorians. In fact, the ones who made him feel inferior and created certain obstacles, in his words, were "Our own people."

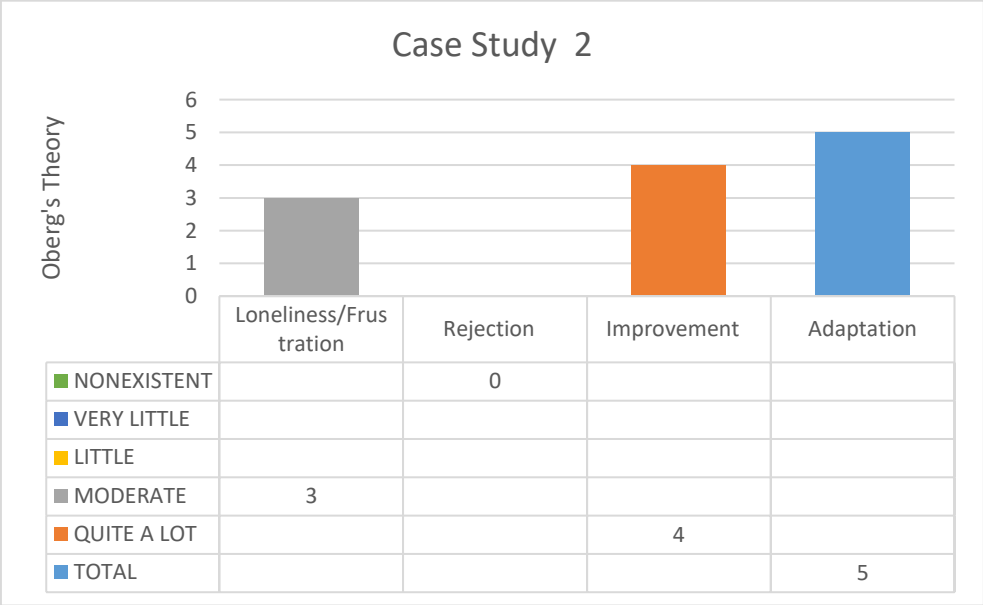
The third stage is characterized by the fact that, although there are still difficulties in the new cultural environment, the person starts to feel better. This can be seen in another of his accounts. As he worked in physically demanding jobs alongside other Latinos, practicing the new language was not common, so it took him time to learn English; he used a translator to communicate with English speakers. He explained that when he tried to buy a cell phone and communicate with an American, language became a barrier. However, the American, using a translator, apologized for not knowing Spanish and thanked him for purchasing the phone. This experience deepened his admiration for the country and its people. That event convinced him that the U.S. was the ideal country for his daughter to be educated.

The last stage proposed by Oberg is characterized by the person adapting to and enjoying the new culture. In this case, the interviewee adapted to the new culture; although he does not feel entirely part of it, he has indeed adapted. In addition to admiring American culture, today—unlike when he first arrived—he accepts and enjoys American food, the people, and even states that, if he were deported by U.S. authorities, he would not want to return to Ecuador, except to visit. In case of deportation, he would look for a different country instead of returning to Ecuador. This thought is based on the security crisis and unemployment that the Latin American country is currently facing.

The following figure illustrates Migrant C's culture shock process, interpreted through the lens of Oberg´s theory.

Figure 3

Stages of Culture Shock – Case Study 2



On the other hand, from the perspective of Berry's acculturation strategies, in this specific case, the strategy represented by interviewee C corresponds to integration. Berry explains that this strategy refers to a person in a new cultural context maintaining their original culture while actively participating in the new host society. This is reflected in the way his wife prepares Ecuadorian food in their new country, and in the use of Spanish within his family and friend circle. Additionally, although he perceives the new culture as better, he sees Americans as very polite people and participates in this social world, confronting everyday challenges.

In regard to whether he felt responsible for being the one who migrated, he said: “I had to be stable. I had to have a place to receive them, something to feed them with, something to clothe them with, try to give them comfort.” This statement accurately reflects the mindset based on the perception of the Ecuadorian man as the provider and financial head of the household. It also highlights the idea that he had to improve his situation in the United States in order to provide better opportunities for his family. So that, when his partner and daughter arrived in the U.S., they would have better living conditions than he did when he first arrived.

At the same time, regarding the expression of his distress, aside from the loneliness he previously mentioned, his partner ended the relationship due to the deterioration of their communication (he stated that he would come home from work extremely tired, sometimes not even eating and just going straight to sleep). This situation had a significant emotional impact on him. He mentioned that, during the first few months, he cried at work. When asked if there was someone who supported him emotionally in the U.S., he said there was no one, although he sometimes spoke with his brother who lives in Ecuador. To release his emotions, he turned to working out at the gym or listening to music. Pacurucu explained that these activities improve the emotional well-being of migrants. In interviewee C's words, doing this was his "way of getting the demons out." However, he also pointed out that he knows other men who turn to alcohol, drugs, or women to deal with their emotions.

One of the most powerful statements he made was: “You always act strong.” Four words that imply considering certain attitudes or personal traits as symbols of strength or weakness. One must first ask, what does it mean to be a strong person? Secondly, why has the expression of emotional distress by men been attributed to weakness? And ultimately, should not Ecuadorian men be able to show vulnerability just as women do? Certainly, part of the answer to these questions can be summed up in the word culture. The expression “acting strong” not only implies lying to oneself about how one truly feels in the new cultural context but also indicates fear and reluctance to go against social ideas of what it means to “be a man.” Interviewee C stated that there were days when he did not eat, or people treated him badly, and on some occasions, he did not have the funds to pay his rent. These were situations he refused to share with his partner, emphasizing in his own words: “How would she have felt?” In response to questions, she asked about his emotional, financial, and physical well-being, his replies were simply “yes,” even though that was not the truth.

Regarding the alcohol consumption mentioned by interviewee C, the three interviewed specialists—Pacurucu, Martínez, and Bracero—agreed that Ecuadorian men often turn to these practices to manage their emotional struggles. Martínez pointed out that this becomes more serious in migratory contexts. Pacurucu explained that since they do not express their emotions, they resort to alcohol, which they perceive as their "only escape." Pacurucu noted that many men believe that negative feelings such as sadness, frustration, and anger disappear with alcohol consumption. However, this relief is only temporary, and those feelings eventually return.

4.3. CASE STUDY 3: Migrant E

Due to the lack of bank financing or family economic support to start a business that would allow him to continue his profession as a welder, and given the responsibility of supporting his household, interviewee E decided to migrate irregularly to the United States at the age of twenty-two. Today, at 52 years old, he lives in the North American country with his family. The story of interviewee E is that of a young man determined to work in the U.S. in his field of expertise and bring his family to the country. Although his accounts include loneliness and the pain of leaving his family behind in Ecuador, they are also marked by his dedication and the significant support of one of his first bosses, a Greek man who played a crucial role in his new cultural environment.

Based on the Push-Pull theory, in this third case study, the main push factor is economic in nature, as he migrated due to the lack of financial support, which prevented him from practicing his profession. Moreover, even though he does not explicitly mention the desire to improve his family's economic well-being as a migration motive, this is an influential push factor in his decision that becomes evident in his account. His family's economic situation was very limited at the time, and before migrating, he had two small children. As for the pull factors in the new country, his brother, who had migrated a month earlier, and his in-laws—who, despite not having a close relationship at the beginning, , were the ones who welcomed him—. Additionally, he was attracted by the possibility of obtaining a job that would allow him to grow professionally and support his family.

Regarding the difficulties during his journey to the new country, he does not specify them. However, his statement: "It was like an adventure," suggests that the journey to the United States was initially exciting and intriguing. This phrase could also imply that there were no significant challenges during his trip. As for the personal characteristics of the

migrant, his determination and resolution to work as a welder stand out. He also appears to be a responsible and reliable person. In the workplace, his boss assigned him leadership tasks due to his good performance and reliability.

Furthermore, based on Oberg's stages of cultural shock, interviewee E seems to have gone through all four stages, from loneliness and frustration to adaptation. As in previous cases, the first stage is characterized by feelings of loneliness and sadness, evident in his statement: "Nobody knows the pain or the experience of leaving your family, migrating to another country… practically alone." He felt that his only support was his brother, even though his wife's parents had welcomed him in the U.S. He briefly said about his brother: "The two of us gave each other a hand and moved forward." One particular memory he shared involved both of them lying down on December 25th, resting their feet on the wall and thinking about what their family might be doing at that moment. That same day the previous year, they had spent time together with their loved ones. He said: "They must be dancing there… having fun." This statement shows that they truly missed their family and wished they could be spending that day with them.

The second stage is marked by rejection of the new environment and people due to daily challenges. This is mainly reflected in the language barrier. He explained that it had never occurred to him that he would need to learn a new language when moving to a new country. His only thought had been to work. He attended school to learn English; however, he found it very difficult and admitted he did not make much effort to learn it. He considers that he has "street English," which he picked up through social interaction at work. On the other hand, unlike the previous cases, the work environment did not pose a challenge (at least during the first years), as his boss treated him like a son, and he worked in his field of expertise. Although he experienced some instances of discrimination, contrary to Oberg's concept of rejecting the host culture, the interviewee stated: "They are good people," referring to Americans. This may confirm that he does not reject the U.S. community. From his perspective, adapting to the new country was not difficult; he liked it from the beginning.

The third stage is characterized by a gradual sense of improvement despite difficulties. From my perspective, his sense of well-being was largely due to his boss and his job performance as a welder. Working in the field he enjoyed was actually like a hobby; as he mentioned, he could weld for hours without even noticing. The respectful treatment and trust his boss placed in him, along with his steadily increasing salary, were key factors in

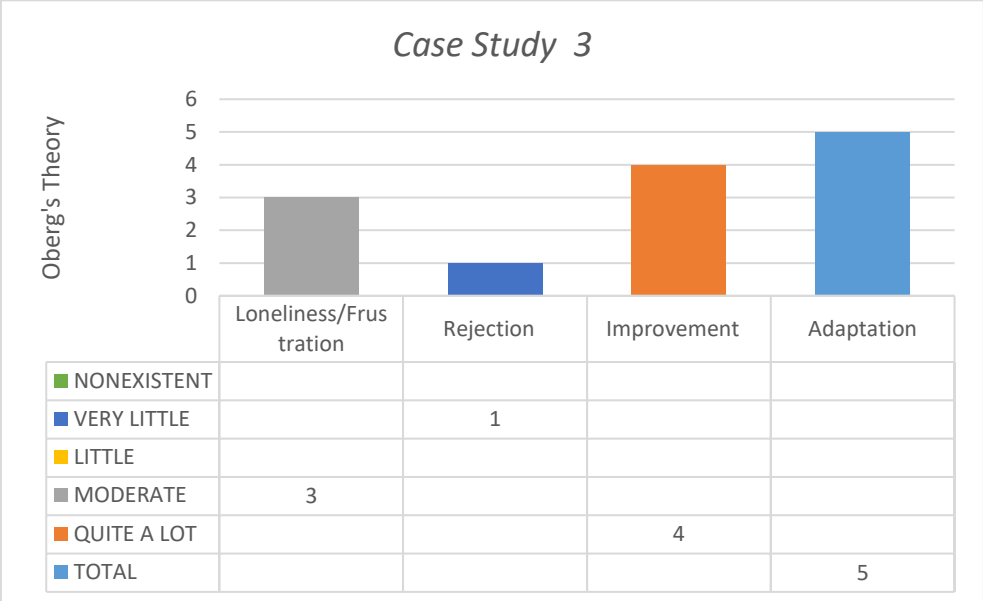
facilitating his adaptation. After three years in the country, he went into debt to bring his wife and later his children, thus fulfilling his goal of reuniting with his family.

Finally, the last stage is characterized by the person's adaptation to the new country. Oberg indicates that one implication of cultural adaptation is missing the host country and its people if one leaves it. This situation occurred with the interviewee: after ten years in the United States, he returned to visit his home country with his family. However, he said that after two weeks in Ecuador, he already wanted to go back to the U.S. Regarding his cultural identity, he continues to maintain his Ecuadorian roots. Nonetheless, as he stated, "Maybe we've picked up a bit of the culture from here too." He also mentioned that American society is very polite, saying: "Here, they teach you how to behave." Additionally, his desire to return to live in Ecuador is practically nonexistent, as he has adapted to the new culture.

The following figure illustrates Migrant E's culture shock process, interpreted through the lens of Oberg's theory.

Figure 4

Stages of Cultural Shock – Case Study 3



In line with previous cases and based on Berry's proposal, the acculturation strategy that corresponds to this case is integration. Berry explains that this strategy is characterized by a person maintaining their cultural roots while also participating in the new culture. Among the notable aspects is the preservation of the Spanish language within the family. The interviewee explained that he knows Ecuadorians who have distanced themselves from their native language. However, in his home, although English is part of his daily life,

Spanish is still spoken. Additionally, Ecuadorian food continues to be present. Regarding American food, he stated: “It will never compare to the food from one’s own land.” Every time his relatives return to the U.S. from Ecuador, they bring Ecuadorian food with them. These are ways to remain connected to Ecuadorian culture.

He has been living in the United States for thirty years and has adapted socially and professionally, a situation that was facilitated because his entire family is in the U.S., and he maintains a good relationship with the American population.

On the other hand, regarding the responsibility of being the one who migrated, he affirmed that, as a man, he held that responsibility. In his words: “I think so… I come from a culture where the man was the one who solved things… I think it should be that way… Nobody is obligated… but in the environment I live in, my wife earns little; financially she cannot help me.” Interestingly, when asked about this, the tone of his voice indicated that it might have been the first time he truly thought about it; his vocal tone reflected reflection and introspection. This situation could be explained by what Bracero pointed out in reference to the responsibility Ecuadorian men feel about being the ones who migrate: “It is deeply rooted in their unconscious.” Bracero emphasizes the need to analyze all the factors behind migratory motivations, where one can undoubtedly appreciate pressure not only at the family level but also socially, morally, personally, and in terms of prestige.

In his case, there was a need to find a job—one he could not find in Ecuador—that would allow him to support his wife and young children, who were growing and needing more resources. In the U.S., he faced the commitment of presenting himself to his in-laws, whom he had just met, as a responsible and hard-working young father. This was added to his personal desire for recognition and growth as a welder. Along these lines, his story reflects not only a responsible man when it came to migration, but also a provider and, at the same time, an empathetic man. He shared that he comes from a poor family where sometimes there was nothing to eat. One day, shortly after arriving in the U.S., his in-laws had prepared a large meal. He said:

“I remember that when I was bringing a piece of chicken to my mouth, I thought: ‘Here I am eating this chicken, and maybe my family back home doesn’t have anything to eat’… That’s why I tried to work, to help however I could… Thank God, my whole family is here now… Little by little… It took us nearly twelve years to finally be together again and enjoy a Christmas as a family.”

This short anecdote not only shows his pain and concern for his family, but also his desire to be the one who provides for them and offers them a better life—which, in fact, he did. “That’s why I tried to work, to help however I could,” was his way of expressing love for his loved ones. Furthermore, once in the country and probably in a more stable situation, he went into debt to bring his family over. He implied that he had to endure instability until reaching a point of stability, ensuring that his family would not go through the hardships he faced when he first arrived in the U.S. From my perspective, this behavior aligns with the traditional idea of “masculine strength.”

Additionally, regarding the expression of emotional distress, he recalled an episode from his adolescence: his father passed away when he was only fourteen. His mother was a young woman left widowed with four children. Facing this situation, he explained that his mother instilled in them, in his words: “We must not cry…” That phrase has had a lasting impact on his personal and family life. He mentioned that his wife, aware that he does not express his emotional distress, has often told him that it is difficult to know when he is going through a hard time because he does not show it. As a way of dealing with his emotions, he added: “Sometimes I just keep things to myself; I lock myself in the room and go on my phone… Sometimes I sit alone thinking: I know I have to pay, I know I have to pay the other bill… and sometimes there’s no money.”

These words reveal his perception of his role as the male provider within the household. He believes that crying or sharing how he feels will not help him in any way. In his words: “What good does crying do me?” or “Why tell others? I’m the one who has to solve my problems… I’ll waste more time telling people who will just say: ‘Oh, what a pity.” This last sentence reflects his perception that people may only feel sorry for him but will not help him with his problems, another example of masculine independence.

Findings: Case Studies

Before identifying common patterns and conducting a comparative analysis among the previously presented case studies, it is necessary to consider Hofstede’s proposal on cultural dimensions, which were addressed in the theoretical framework. Taking into account these cultural dimensions and comparing Ecuadorian culture with that of the United States will provide a clearer understanding of the cultural landscape that Ecuadorian migrants encountered upon arriving in the U.S. and how they faced it.

Figure 5 shows a comparative chart between both countries is shown; the orange color represents Ecuador, and the gray represents the United States. The figure was obtained using the online country comparison tool from the website "The Culture Factor Group." This company is a global consultancy dedicated to cultural analysis and strategic development worldwide (The Culture Factor Group, 2024).

Figure 4

Cultural Dimensions: Comparison between Ecuador and the United States

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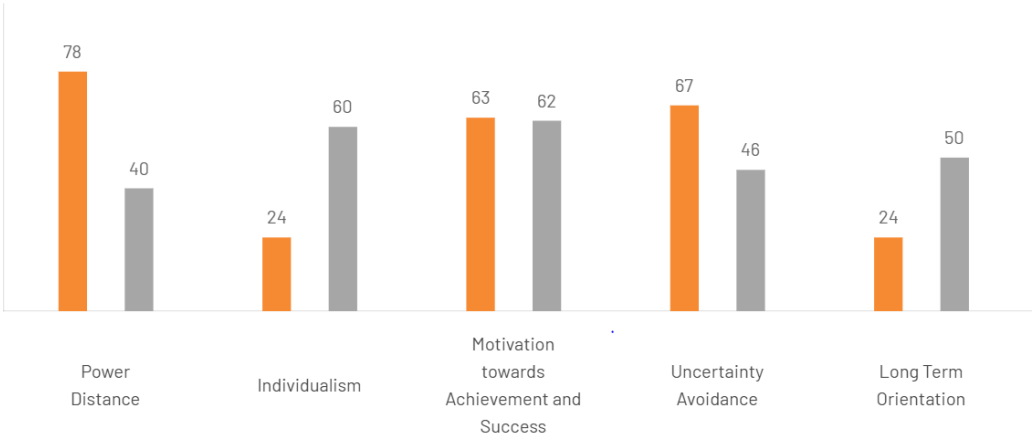

Source: The Culture Factor

Considering the first cultural dimension, power distance, it is observed that Ecuador is a country where social inequality is taken for granted; people perceive themselves as either "superior or inferior." In contrast, the United States has a much lower power distance than Ecuador, reflecting greater equality of rights. Furthermore, in the workplace, access to organizational authorities is possible, dialogue is encouraged, and there is mutual trust between managers and employees.

Regarding the second dimension, Ecuador is one of the most collectivist countries worldwide; group belonging and solidarity are crucial components of Ecuadorian culture. On the other hand, U.S. culture is individualistic, and each person is expected to take care of themselves. For Americans, socializing with others is easy, but building strong and deep relationships is not (The Culture Factor, 2024).

As for the third dimension, success and status motivate Ecuadorian society. People generally sacrifice their rest time and prioritize work, which may lead them to consume alcohol as a way to relax. Additionally, competition occurs between members of different

groups. Although the United States does not differ much from Ecuador in this dimension, American culture also values achievements and success, and they share them with others. However, more than simply "being successful," what matters in this society is demonstrating success to others.

Regarding the fourth dimension, Ecuadorian society rejects uncertainty and uses various means to avoid ambiguity. Religious faith and superstitions are important factors in this culture. Additionally, people express their emotions openly. In contrast, American society is more receptive to new ideas. Americans tend to accept ideas or opinions that differ from their own and are less emotionally demonstrative.

Finally, concerning the last dimension, Ecuador prioritizes quick results, respects traditions, and avoids long-term planning. The United States is somewhere in the middle; although it may also seek immediate rewards, it also plans for future situations (The Culture Factor, 2024).

Under this panorama, the significant cultural differences that Ecuadorians faced in the United States become evident. First, Ecuador, with its collectivist culture, tends to replicate this dynamic in the new country. Anthropologist Bracero refers to these as "tribes," while psychologist Pacurucu calls them "potentially similar" groups — groups that share characteristics with Ecuadorians, whether they are other Latinos or fellow Ecuadorians — with whom migrants form a community in the new cultural context. This situation was reflected in the migrants' interview narratives.

Regarding power distance, however, in two of the three case studies, the migrants' relationships with their bosses in the U.S. were more flexible. This contrasts with the previously mentioned marked distance between authorities and employees in Ecuadorian culture. In the United States, this relationship was reversed; boss-employee relationships were characterized more by friendship and trust. Interviewee C said about his second boss: "He gave me a very, very big hand; he taught me what I know." When he said this, his voice broke, indicating gratitude for the support received. Meanwhile, interviewee E stated regarding his boss: "He was the fundamental base for me to be what I am today."

It is observed that the "hierarchical distance" between them was somewhat reduced. However, it should be noted that both bosses, who were key figures in the migrants' experiences, were also foreigners on American soil. This situation contrasted with that of interviewee D, who experienced discriminatory situations from some of his bosses. He felt

exploited at work; he was punished with a week without pay because he fell asleep due to the long working hours and the effort involved. Additionally, he witnessed workplace favoritism when his bosses gave water to the American workers but not to the Latinos.

Regarding the motivation dimension, in migratory contexts, it can be confirmed that desires for success and achievements persist in the United States. In fact, it is important to note that the interviewees initially emigrated to achieve certain goals: to grow academically, to financially support their mother, to pay off debts, to advance professionally, and to support their families. Secondly, the interviewees, particularly during their first years in the new country, sacrificed their rest time and devoted themselves solely to work. This also reflects part of Ecuadorian culture as previously described. However, working hours and effort were significantly magnified in the workplace.

With respect to the uncertainty avoidance dimension, it was previously stated that Ecuadorian society rejects confusion at all costs, and that religiosity is a relevant factor for Ecuadorians. What can be confirmed in migratory contexts is that, particularly in study case 2, the religious factor and belief that a higher being — in this case, the Virgin — watched over him during his migratory journey to the United States is reflected. However, regarding the rejection of uncertainty, the opposite occurs. Migrants were accompanied by uncertainty in the new country: new jobs, new people, a new language, new schedules. In other words, migrants face uncertainty.

Under this panorama, aspects of Ecuadorian culture in the United States have been confirmed. Table 5 shows a comparative summary of each case study according to the previously analyzed theories. Additionally, the proposed variables of “migratory responsibility” and “repression of feelings” are included based on what was observed in the interviews.

Table 5

Comparative Table: Case Studies

Case Studies	Push-Pull Theory Push and Pull Factors	Cultural Shock Theory - Oberg	Acculturation Strategies - Berry	Migration Responsibility	Emotional Suppression
Case Study 1 21 years old	**Push factor:** economic (resources for future education and debt payment). **Pull factor:** certainty that there are well-paid jobs in the U.S. Quick economic resources to stay in the country as short as possible.	Adjustment stage	Separation	Although his main goal was to raise funds for studying, he took on the responsibility of an economic provider to support his mother. He perceived returning to Ecuador was not an option.	Suppresses his feelings; considers that crying would make him feel weak.
Case Study 2 37 years old	Push factor: economic (payment of significant debts). Pull factor: knowing it is the only way to earn enough money because wages in the U.S. are hourly. Initial support from a friend.	Adaptation stage	Integration	Feels responsibility and pressure due to his financial situation; perceives that migrating was his responsibility.	Suppresses feelings, resists sharing them with others, although sometimes shared with his brother. Able to release them in solitude.
Case Study 3 52 years old	Push factor: economic (limited income, lack of work). Pull factor: job opportunities and higher wages.	Adaptation stage	Integration	He agrees with the idea that it is man's responsibility to migrate to improve family conditions.	Suppresses feelings, rarely expresses them, influenced by his mother's upbringing.

What has been observed in the three cases is that the migratory motive to go to the United States was economic, each with its particularities. Among the prominent reasons for migration are the need for economic resources to fulfill an academic goal, the personal financial situation and that of their family nucleus, and unemployment. Likewise, concisely, they were attracted by the job opportunities and higher wages offered by the North American country. This situation has allowed them to achieve their goals through significant labor, social, family, and personal effort. On the other hand, it is observed that entering the United States irregularly more than thirty years ago was much easier than six years ago, a situation reflected in case study 3. While for the person who entered decades ago it was an adventure to reach a new country, for case study 2, it was a challenge full of fatigue and fear.

Feelings of loneliness and sadness were more pronounced in case study 1, a situation that can be initially associated with the fact that he decided to rent an apartment so as not to

bother his uncles, who had barely received him upon arrival. He was practically alone. Secondly, the treatment received at work and labor exploitation generated rejection of the new society. This contrasts somewhat with the other two case studies, where the support of their supervisors at work was an important aspect during their adaptation process. In the first case, there was no adaptation to the new culture; rejection of it and its way of life were noticeable throughout his account. His experiences in the country made him reject it. The last two cases, in contrast, have adapted to American culture. Time and personal experiences in the country positively influenced and facilitated such adaptation.

Regarding the responsibility of providing and migrating perceived by men, it is observed that this perception was more marked in the past, as explained by the fifty-two-year-old interviewee; he comes from a culture where "the man took care of things." The thirty-seven-year-old interviewee follows the same line and perceives that he had the responsibility to migrate and pay off debts he had with his partner. He also added that he thought he had to provide comfort, clothing, and food for his partner and daughter once he brought them to the United States—things he did not have when he first arrived. The case of the twenty-one-year-old migrant takes a considerably important turn with the following statement: "Here they expect the man to be everything... Some people think the woman stays at home, and the man goes to work... I think Ecuador expects a lot from people, much more than some of us can give."(It is important to note that he paused before saying the word "people," which I perceived as reluctance to express what he really wanted to say and to see my reaction to his statement, since instead of saying "men," he said "people.") This statement shows some rejection of the idea of the man as the sole provider, recognizing that many times the expectations placed on men exceed their capacity. Despite his statement, he also said that providing economic support to his mother and her gratitude gave him the strength to work even harder in the U.S. He also said that returning to his homeland was not an option. He said, "And who would help them with the debts?" In other words, given his situation, he assumed the responsibility to provide.

Finally, regarding the repression of feelings by Ecuadorian men, this has been a situation present for decades or even longer. Although, as was observed, the repression of feelings was more marked in previous years due to upbringing with the idea that "men don't cry." This was seen in the case study of the oldest interviewee. It is an issue that still persists today and continues to be part of Ecuadorian culture. In the case of the thirty-seven-year-old interviewee, it is observed that he allowed himself to cry, although in solitude, and tried to

express his discomfort. Despite this, it is important to emphasize that both cases said: “You have to act tough and keep going,” “You always act strong,” respectively. These statements reflect, first, the need to appear fine even when emotionally they were not. Second, it indicates repression of feelings in situations of emotional discomfort. Finally, it could indicate a response to the perception that expressing discomfort is a sign of weakness. Despite awareness of certain social impositions on men as providers and figures expected to do hard work, as case study 1 showed, through their relationships and statements, all interviewees continue, to a greater or lesser extent, repressing their feelings.

The case of the youngest interviewee subtly alters this panorama by recognizing: “Many men believe they have to be strong because society said so, that a man cannot cry, cannot be weak because then he is no longer a man; that’s totally false...” Analyzing the phrase “cannot be weak because then he is no longer a man,” the idea is clear: men are attributed strength and that weakness is a trait that makes one “not a man.” In his account, during his stay in the U.S., he said: “I didn’t like crying; I felt weak...” This indicates that this social idea has been immortalized over time. However, his initial statement reflects rejection of the infused idea that expressing discomfort is weakness. It is observed that this generational thinking has gradually evolved. Nevertheless, their behavior seems to be the same: repressing feelings to a greater or lesser degree. The situations men face in migratory contexts maintain this line of thought.

CONCLUSIONS

When Ecuadorian men migrate to another country, they do not only carry memories and tastes from their homeland; they also bring their way of life and culture, which they tend to replicate in the new cultural environment. The United States, a distant land, has long been and continues to be the main destination for thousands of Ecuadorians who go in search of the frequently mentioned "American Dream," with the goal of improving their lives and, in many cases, those of their closest relatives. If we recognize culture as the guide of human thought and behavior, as a social element learned and rooted in our unconscious, many of the mysteries of human behavior could be deciphered.

Ecuadorian culture influences every stage of the Ecuadorian migrant's adaptation on U.S. soil. Initially, the perception of the Ecuadorian man as a provider figure, strong, decision-maker; an ideology that Ecuadorian society acquired decades ago, when we were colonized, since we lived under a patriarchal system structure. Added to social, family, moral, personal pressure and the burden of maintaining the respect and prestige of others, these are decisive cultural factors that have influenced the Ecuadorian man’s decision to migrate. Not all interviewed migrants perceived such responsibility; some explained that they migrated out of love for their family but were never obliged to do so. Nevertheless, anthropologist Mario Bracero explained that the idea that the Ecuadorian man is the one who primarily migrates is ingrained in his unconscious mind. Similarly, Oberg (1951), decades ago, stated that culture forms over time through processes that operate outside human consciousness. That is, Ecuadorian culture influences the male migratory decision.

Along the same lines, gender roles, although to a lesser extent, still continue to see the woman as the homemaker figure and the man as the worker figure. This circumstance was also confirmed through research and specialist interviews. In migratory scenarios, in the labor area, the activities in which the man generally works are characterized by the use of physical strength, such as construction. Meanwhile, the woman plays a role dedicated to caring for others or preparing food. Today, to a lesser or greater extent, migrants still maintain a mentality of conservative masculinity.

Furthermore, the influence of Ecuadorian culture in the adaptation of migrants in the United States can also be seen in different aspects, including the way Ecuadorians think, act, and even feel. Regarding the way of thinking, the same thought was reflected in all interviewees, regardless of their age: family is the most important element in their lives, a

characteristic aspect of Ecuadorian society. This perception remains in the new cultural environment and is reflected through the longing for loved ones and the work effort most endured to provide financial support to their families. The cultural perception of family as the most important institution functions as a driving force and source of support for migrants in the United States.

Although not all perceived their migratory decision as a responsibility, the male effort for the common good is evident. Maintaining contact with their families in Ecuador played a very important role in the migrants' adaptation. Also noticeable in some cases was the influence of religious beliefs, another characteristic aspect of Ecuadorian culture. The belief in supreme beings was important in the new country. One migrant felt that God was his main support for adapting to the new environment. Another thanked God because he now lives with his family in the United States. Another firmly believes that the Virgin was watching over him during his migration journey, and for that reason, he was not captured by border authorities. This last one explained that he has a Virgin necklace that has been protecting him. These situations highlight the influence of religious aspects in the new society.

In the same vein, regarding the way of acting, the collectivist aspect of Ecuadorian culture stands out, which is replicated in the United States through the formation of groups with fellow countrymen or interaction with other Latinos. It is important to emphasize that upon arriving in the new foreign territory, the Ecuadorian encounters a culture based on individualism. One interviewee emphasized the importance of spending time with other Ecuadorians in the same migratory condition through sports. Another, on the other hand, said that the work experience was less negative because he worked with Latinos. That is, these groups imitate the collective that migrants used to have in Ecuador. It is perceived that to adapt, it was necessary to feel part of a group, although interaction among Ecuadorians in the U.S. is also marked by competition and discrimination. Similarly, replicating their own cultural aspects was important. Remembering and missing the taste of Ecuadorian food was a recurring theme in the stories, so going to Latin restaurants in the U.S., receiving food products sent by family from Ecuador, or even preparing food they used to eat in Ecuador allowed them to connect with their culture.

Likewise, regarding work, except for two case studies where they had a good relationship with their bosses, the labor area was characterized by significant effort, fatigue, and labor abuses. The Ecuadorian man is characterized as a hard worker and considers social inequality as something natural. This is magnified in the United States. For the most part,

they only worked, and despite labor abuse, there were no significant complaints. And, of course, most, as irregular migrants, had no option to file complaints. This may reflect fear, resignation, and at the same time, the Ecuadorian perception of authorities as "superior" people. This thinking, combined with social, personal, and often economic factors, makes them easy prey to injustices and labor abuses.

Unfortunately, the influence of Ecuadorian culture on migrants' adaptation, particularly regarding the way of feeling and expressing discomfort, is unfavorable for the Ecuadorian migrant man. All interviewees' accounts revealed male repression of feelings. This repression stems from upbringing and the idea that "men don't cry." Added to the idea of considering expressive men as "homosexual," "weak," or as Pacurucu pointed out, in society's eyes, an expressive man is considered "not manly enough." This has affected men at various levels and in different aspects of their lives. The convergence of multiple factors influences the repression of feelings, which is also a learned behavior. Unfortunately, mental health issues are often still taboo and have not been adequately addressed as a social concern. Ecuador lacks systems or mechanisms to support migrants' emotional well-being or mental health. There is a need to address the magnitude of this situation.

As specialists confirmed, alcohol consumption among Ecuadorian migrants is a worrying issue. Pacurucu explained that this situation worsens when migrants are away from their families. Alcohol is perceived by Ecuadorian men as a way to vent their sorrows. Martínez explained that homeless migrant men are common, but homeless women are not. This situation may be linked to the fact that women have a wide support network of people who listen and help them, whereas men do not have such support. Under this panorama, it is important to address challenges in cultural contexts from a male perspective. The most severe case observed was that loneliness, living away from the family core, combined with emotional repression, led one interviewee to contemplate ending his life, highlighting the gravity of the situation. Sports, music, hard work, solitary walks, and isolation were characteristic ways to cope with emotional distress.

Each interviewed migrant faced at least one unique challenge. It is important to highlight that male Ecuadorian migration, beyond what has been observed, involves sacrifices such as abandoning professional dreams to educate siblings, living a monotonous and repetitive life, writing handwritten letters to parents to tell them they were okay despite not feeling so, perceiving social relationships in the U.S. as self-interested (i.e., lacking genuine relationships), risking their romantic relationships, fear of deportation, the death of

someone who raised them, feelings of inferiority, and not feeling enough for women. Therefore, learning the language, acquiring new skills, the support and contact from others in the U.S. and Ecuador, replicating cultural aspects in U.S. soil, personal characteristics, and maintaining positive thinking in the face of adversity, learning how the U.S. system works, and working in areas they enjoy were strategies used to adapt in the new country.

Thus, Ecuadorian cultural elements influencing the adaptation of the Ecuadorian man highlight family, religion, language, food, music, hard work, and what has characterized the Ecuadorian man: resilience. On the other hand, although in some cases they adapted to U.S. culture, their identity is reflected in Ecuadorian citizenship. There is no total integration into the host country. Everyone in the United States somehow remains connected to their native culture. Time and personal experiences contributed to or limited migrants' adaptation in the U.S.

It is also worth noting some statements made regarding the North American country: "The president affects not only us immigrants but everyone," "Latinos are super necessary there, and now that they are leaving, the gringos don't know what to do… sometimes they despised Latino work and don't realize how important it is; they don't respect someone who works there, they think it's easy and when they have to do it, they can't." "I would ask… this country not to treat our people badly… to be fairer and only deport those who have to be deported, not good people…" "A migration reform." These statements reflect part of the current situation of Ecuadorians under the radical policies of the Trump administration. As Martínez explained, a massive deportation of Ecuadorians is expected, as well as suffering, and the possible entry of Ecuadorians into criminal gangs, since many, upon returning, "think they have nothing to lose." We do not yet really know the magnitude of the effects that the U.S. president's decisions will bring. However, it is clear that the effects are not only economic or political but also human. The United States is a country of migrants, where Latinos form an important part of the workforce. The repercussions affect not only the working Latino community but also the U.S. community.

Regarding what they would ask or say to Ecuador, migrants expressed: "I would ask for greater equality conditions, job opportunities," "That they pay more for the work we do," "What can I say to my Ecuador? There are no opportunities there." These statements, on the other hand, reflect that the lack of opportunities and low wages in Ecuador remain part of the motivations for migration.

Finally, as a reflection, it is important to emphasize the need to move toward a more empathetic and conscious world. Although the migration phenomenon is becoming feminized—that is, the presence of women in these contexts has increased—decades ago, and still today in Ecuador, it is mainly men who migrate to the United States for various reasons and circumstances. Among these reasons, the cultural factor stands out. Everything we know, we have learned. What we have learned, we replicate and share with others in our daily lives. The patriarchal system, in which Ecuador and its population still live, was also learned and, perhaps without even noticing, it has become part of our culture, part of who we are. Gender inequality, in Ecuador and other countries around the world, remains present. This inequality is part of human history, where women have been placed below men in various spheres: economic, political, social, cultural, among others. Fortunately, drastic changes have been made in favor of a more equitable relationship between men and women.

However, under this premise, I emphasize the importance of recognizing that both genders are on an uneven scale. Before the law, men and women can be equal, but culturally we are not. Both genders face an unequal balance, where significant changes are still needed for both. Both genders are bound by social expectations and pressures, often to their detriment. The change toward this equality should not only happen at the social, governmental, or political level, but it must start within oneself—a personal and cultural change. I have often heard and experienced statements about male and female behavior such as: "You can't do that because you are a woman," or "You can't do that because you are a man." While I perceive that machismo is still present in Ecuador, I also recognize the pressures faced by Ecuadorian men at a personal, social, family, and emotional level, especially in relationships. These are pressures that, as one interviewee expressed, "Expect much more than some of us can give."

Everything is culture. In the pursuit of gender equality, we must be aware of our thoughts, expressions, and ways of acting. By recognizing that both men and women are on an unequal scale and analyzing the aspects that place us in this imbalance, we could gradually change what I call our "cultural chip." Along this line of thought, and in relation to my research project, I consider it important to recognize the efforts of the Ecuadorian male community. As evidenced by the cases, migrating to another country is painful and implies significant sacrifices in many areas of their lives.

I highlight the need to also recognize male vulnerabilities and to dissolve the social idea that expressing vulnerability is a sign of weakness—not only through policies,

campaigns, and government entities, but also in our everyday environments, starting within families, among friends, and within ourselves. Male repression of feelings is exacerbated especially for Ecuadorian men in migratory contexts. Instead of crying, men laugh. This was evident in the laughter of all the migrants during their stories when talking about situations that were undoubtedly difficult. It is ironic to laugh when something causes pain.

Finally, it is vital to recognize each other, men and women, as beings with our own stories and challenges. At the end of the day, what makes us more human is our ability to feel.

I would like to conclude this research with the words of Interviewee D, who expressed:

> "Many men believe they have to be strong because society said so—that a man can't cry, can't be weak, or he is no longer a man; that's completely false... A man can cry, feel weak, and there is no problem with that... Giving up is something else... Maybe society is wrong to think that a man always has to do the heavy work. No, that's not the case. If they seek equality or equity—which are two different things—they should think differently, not that the man always does the hardest tasks." (He laughs briefly and softly) "A man's life is difficult, it's just that he prefers to keep things inside and overcome them alone." (Interviewee D, personal communication, March 17, 2025).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Creation of public policies that address the challenges faced by male migrants in the new cultural environment, based on masculine experiences.
- Establishment of psychological services at the consular and organizational levels that consider the male sacrifice in migratory contexts, the reluctance to speak about emotional struggles, and self-imposed pressure.
- Implementation of voluntary citizen participation mechanisms for psychology students, allowing them to work with Ecuadorian migrants on mental health issues.
- Promotion of emotional education within families, educational institutions, and abroad.
- Creation of social campaigns aimed at demystifying the silent sacrifice of men and promoting emotional well-being and self-care.
- Strategic plans that explain the impacts of cultural shock and the development of tools to facilitate the process of cultural adaptation.
- Development of return plans that consider the cultural shock also experienced upon returning to Ecuador, and the reintegration of those who come back with different values and customs.
- Implementation of ongoing job training in the United States, focused on entrepreneurial labor training workshops.
- Workshops focused on the correct use of male physical strength to prevent muscle injuries or future health issues in the labor environment.
- Family-level training on the challenges faced by migrants and development of tools that enable families to support male migrants more effectively.
- Awareness-raising at educational, institutional, and family levels about the impact of emotional repression in men, and promotion of male emotional expression.
- Training and promotion of the benefits of circular migration.

The following table highlights the voices of male migrants who habitually suppress their emotions, revealing what is often left unspoken.

Table 6

Male Voices

When Expressing Is Not a Custom: Migrant Male Voices		
"Life is harder without anyone… not having anyone to visit, or anyone to visit me."	"They grabbed me by the neck and took my wallet."	"That's how I started, alone… I didn't have anyone to talk to, to share with."
"I didn't want to make my family suffer… I absorbed everything on my own…"	"I felt lonely, and things happened that I'd rather not mention regarding bullying."	"They think you're a robot."
"I couldn't express it because of the older brother syndrome, the one that has to pretend to be strong."	"Men kind of hide their feelings more because we don't want to worry those we care about."	"The ones who put the most barriers are our own people… they tried to make me feel worse."
"It was frustrating because I earned money, but I didn't see it, it only passed through my hands for debts."	"I wish at some point I could see my family."	"I would come home from work, some days I didn't even eat, I just went to sleep."
"I had to have stability, I had to have a place to receive them, to feed them, to clothe them, to try to give them comfort."	"My way of getting rid of the demons was going to the gym… doing so much exercise so that my mind would get tired, and I wouldn't be able to think and feel bad."	"The life of a man is hard, but they prefer to keep things to themselves and overcome them alone."
"There's no bread with cola or resting time over there… you work all day, all the time."	"It was hard being alone, I had depression, well, I felt it… I didn't cry but by working, it would pass."	"For me, it was exploitation… but what could you do? It was money…"
"Nobody knows the pain or experience of leaving family behind, emigrating to another country… alone… but you have to adapt, you have to toughen up and keep going."	"I remember when I would take a piece of chicken to my mouth, I'd think: 'I'm taking this chicken to my mouth and maybe my family back home doesn't have anything to eat'… That's why I worked so hard, to help as much as I could…"	"The American dream is not like they paint it… people think you just go and money rains on you; no, you have to work so hard to get the food, the money you want to send to your family."
"I didn't want to worry them, I always said I was fine."	"It felt like I wanted to kill myself… it was horrible being alone… but who was going to help with the debts?"	"I didn't like crying, I felt weak, in a place where you need to be strong."
"Many men believe they have to be strong because society told them to…"	"I wanted to go back, go out with my friends to play football, I wanted to go back to being with my family, to eat nice or tasty food, to breathe, I missed everything from here."	"Even though it seems little here, when you're over there, a call from your mom is life."
"I never bought any of the things I wanted… instead I saved."	"My mom… she taught us that we shouldn't cry."	"They see us as Hispanics… and they think we're a little inferior, that we're only good for hard labor."
"People looked at you and despised you… you felt inferior."	"One time I didn't have a job… I was empty, with no money, with nothing to eat."	"You didn't know how to respond; you had to make yourself understood with gestures."

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APPENDICES

The following link contains a folder with the corresponding informed consent forms and the transcripts of the interviews with migrants and specialists in the fields of Migration, Anthropology, and Psychology.

Appendix 1

Transcribed Interviews and Consent Letters

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1y_wT405ubsV9hflu6hC0YlLL3Mwr3N7c?usp=drive_link