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Women in Transition: The Mexican Family, Migration, and the Mothers of Casa de los Angeles is broken into three parts: methodology, history of migration and gender roles, and in Mexico, the examination of interviews from mothers in San Miguel de Allende. Methodology explores the various ways historian collect oral histories. I focus my research on ten historians’ works that study the challenges with collecting oral history.

The history of migration and gender roles is titled “Women in Transition: A Study of Migration History, Sending Communities, and Women’s Gender Roles in Mexico.” This studies a brief history of migration beginning with the Bracero Program of 1942. Following the history, I analyze women’s roles within sending communities. Sending communities are part of the transnational community, where the people in the communities either migrate or remain at home while family members leave to find work. The last part is titled “Women in Both Worlds.” This section concentrates on the women who migrate to the United States and their expected role as a woman in the household.

The final section is titled “The Women of San Miguel de Allende.” The section spotlights the ten interviews from mothers at the non-profit organization, Casa de los Angeles. This section brings together the women’s stories of migration, family, and life at Casa de los Angeles.

Key words: Methodology, Mexican migration, sending communities, family, gender

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Women in Transition: The Mexican Family, Migration, and the Mothers of Casa de los Angeles

by

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Introduction

During the winter of 2007, I lived in San Miguel de Allende. I worked the non-profit organization Casa de los Angeles. Upon arriving at the center I organized my project goals with the founder of the center, Donna Quathamer. She and I discussed my project of interviewing the women of Casa de los Angeles. Now, almost a year later, the women’s stories have been written.

Women in Transition: Family, Migration, and the Mothers of Casa de los Angeles is broken into three parts: methodology, history of migration and gender roles, and in Mexico, the examination of interviews from mothers in San Miguel de Allende. Methodology explores the various ways historian collect oral histories. I focus my research on ten historians’ works that study the challenges with collecting oral history.

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The final section is titled “The Women of San Miguel de Allende.” The section spotlights the ten interviews from mothers at the non-profit organization, Casa de los Angeles. This section brings together the women’s stories of migration, family, and life at Casa de los Angeles. My purpose in collecting the mother’s stories is to examine migration and family in a Mexican community. Methodology, a brief history, and the women’s stories combine to provide an understanding into my thesis.
Methodology

Last year I was fortunate enough to travel to San Miguel de Allende (SMA) and intern at a non-profit childcare center, Casa de los Angeles (Casa). Beyond my necessary intern work, I conducted research within the center. I interviewed ten women who were part of the Casa community. My interviews provided me with ten individual experiences, unique family stories and diverse opinions about migration to the United States.

Here, I break down my examination of methodology into two parts. In “My Methodology,” I begin with my personal methods of how I conducted my research and what processes I followed to obtain an abundance of information about the SMA community. Following this section, in “Methodology in the Field,” I study how other oral historians have interviewed and documented their experiences in collecting an oral history. I concentrate on the process of collecting data, the diverse fields associated with oral history, and the controversy that can exist when pulling together stories to be published.

My Methodology

I began the thesis process by taking the Honors College’s “Introduction to Thesis” course in the fall of 2006. At this point, I knew that I was going to Mexico the following winter. Since I was pursuing both an Honors and International degree, I needed to create a thesis that brought together history with my experience in Mexico. To begin, I found a mentor who would be willing to help me with the thesis process. Dr. Nicole von Germeten of the history department agreed to work with me on my thesis. I was currently enrolled in her class, “Problems in Latin American History: Men and Machismo in Mexico,” where issues of immigration, gender roles, and family were addressed throughout the course.
My mentor, the International Studies office and advisors helped me with the process researching for my thesis while abroad. My Honors College advisor and thesis mentor worked with me to create a detailed list of objectives for my work. In addition to my project goals for my thesis, I signed up for Linguistics 209, a course that examines cultural diversity in a non-western culture. I found the course very beneficial in my day to day interactions with the people within my community and discovered my own cultural habits and values.

I arrived in Mexico on January 4th, 2007. When I was not working at my internship in San Miguel de Allende, I traveled around the city and throughout central Mexico. Taxi drivers and shop owners were generally willing to talk to me about the area of SMA and their feelings towards the United States. I built my ideas for a thesis and gained an understanding for the area by visiting the neighborhood and talking to community members. In one instance, I met a man who was planning to leave SMA for the US with a group of friends. A week after he and I had spoke he had returned to SMA saying that the US border patrol had caught him on the border, supplied him with food and water, and sent him home by bus. Though the border patrol sent this young man back to Mexico, he was not willing to give up. He was already planning another trip for the following month.

Many people told me stories about attempting to migrate to the United States. In many instances I met people in a taxi or while visiting a village, and they would describe to me their experiences of migrating to the US to earn money to send to their mother or build an addition to their home. My internship allowed me the to travel on many of weekends. I visited Guanajuato, Mexico City, Patzcuaro, Erangaricuaro, Dolores Hidalgo, and even participated in a horseback ride that took my co-workers and I to a small ranch on the edge of SMA. On every trip, I listened to the stories that people told about local politics, education, and migration.
As I collected stories from various people, I could not carry out any official interviews until I gained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Oregon State University. Unfortunately, I did not apply for IRB approval until I was already living in SMA, Mexico. With the help of my mentor, Dr. von Germeten, we received IRB approval and I began the process of interviewing ten women at Casa de los Angeles. Founder Donna Quathamer supported my project at the center and allowed me to approach women in the center interviewing with me.

Once approved, I began interviewing. Many of the women who agreed to work with me were those I knew from daily contact. The women varied greatly in age, education, and experiences. To conduct my interviews, I used a digital recorder. This allowed me to later review the interviews multiple times.

I conducted interviews wherever the women preferred. Some wanted to be alone while others insisted the interview take place in the center’s courtyard with the children. Before the interviews would begin, I passed out consent forms (in Spanish) and explained the purpose of my research verbally. If the women agreed to being interviewed I would ask if I could use a recorder for translation purposes. In all cases the women allowed the use of the recorder. After the interviews, I returned home to download the interviews and begin the note-taking process.

Upon returning to the United States, I began organizing my interview data, journals, and photos. In the spring after I returned from Mexico, I met with a visiting professor, Zaragosa Vargas, from University of California, Santa Barbara. After discussing the topic of immigration and women’s lifestyles in Mexico, Vargas provided me with a helpful bibliography that introduced me to some important researchers in the field. I learned how to write a research paper from Professor von Germeten. As a student in her history 407 seminar, I learned how to approach a large paper, research both secondary and primary sources, footnote cited works, and
present the work to the class. I used these researching and writing skills for my thesis. The collection of articles, books, and bibliographies outlined and narrowed my focus for all three of my papers. Throughout this past year, Professor von Germeten and I have met to discuss the thesis progress. After organizing the thesis into three parts and preparing out a detailed writing schedule, I began researching, analyzing, and writing my thesis.

My mentor and I broke my thesis into three parts. I begin with methodology; continue with a brief background history of sending communities and women who migrate or stay-at-home families, and end with an analysis of the interviews of the women I worked with in SMA. The synthesis of methodology, history, and interviews creates awareness of cultural diversity, academic processes and oral history.

**Methodology in the field: Process, experiences, and controversy**

Oral history is the collection of personal stories or testimonies delivered through methods such as interviewing or storytelling. Other terms used do describe oral history include “life history, self-report, personal narrative, life story, oral biography, memoir, and testament.”¹ The field of collecting stories varies in collection process, interpretation and documentation. The diversity in oral history collection may lead to controversial results. Controversy stems from how the collection process took place, whether or not the storyteller was aware of the purpose of the interview, and the validity of the interpretation of the results.

Oral history collection crosses many different academic disciplines. An anthropological collection of stories differs from a sociological collection. For example, an anthropologist’s method may be to build rapport with their subjects, either individuals or communities, while a

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sociologist often collects data through formal surveys, questionnaires or interviews. The diverse methods of collecting oral history allow for researchers to go beyond statistics and pull together unique experiences that humanize the research.

In order to provide methodological background and explore issues relating to oral sources, here I focus on ten academic works from sociology, anthropology, history, literary disciplines. They includ the following: Candace Slater, linguist and author of *Dance of the Dolphin*, traveled to the Amazon to collect folklore stories describing mythical dolphin; Luise White, author of *Speaking with Vampires*, like Slater, traveled to collect a history of folklore. White travelled to Africa to examine vampire legends and their role in the communities. Authors Gloria Gonzalez-Lopez and Pierrette Hondaneu-Sotelo both used sociological methods for collecting oral reports. Gonzalez-Lopez created formal groups and interviewed Mexican immigrant families in Los Angeles. Hondaneu-Sotelo, in much of her writing, uses a combination of sociological data collection and interviews to convey her ideas. Jeffrey H. Cohen studies the culture of sending communities in Southern Mexico by using anthropological and sociological methods. Cohen reports his research using graphs and diagrams as well as personal anecdotes. Anthropologist Matthew C. Gutmann studied machismo in Mexico City by living within a community with his own family and then described his interviews and personal experiences. June Nash also lived with a family to explore the lifestyles of a Bolivian tin miner. Paul J. Vanderwood researched the history of a popular saint in Tijuana, Juan Soldado. He mainly used historical sources, but also took oral reports from visitors to Soldado’s shrine. John Burdick, in *Blessed Anastacia*, narrowed his oral history collection to women. He interviewed them to collect views on women, race and Christianity in Brazil. Finally, Elena Poniatowska, author of *Massacre in Mexico*, included very little information about her methodology of
collection, but provided a book almost completely made up of anecdotes of people affected by violence in Mexico City from 1967 to 1968. This wide variations in methodological inspires the oral historian to create their own combination of methods that best suits their project.²

Various possibilities exist for creatively bringing together multiple stories, such as focus groups, individual internships, community stories, and reoccurring visits to the area. Valerie Raleigh Yow, author of *Recording Oral History*, explains that during the oral historian’s collection process, social scientists must remain cautious to avoid manufacturing evidence. In some cases, social scientists have moved towards gathering quantitative research rather than concentrating on qualitative investigation. Qualitative research gathers information, not to make broad generalizations, but to understand the relationship between the stories gathered.³

In order to collect stories in qualitative research, oral historians must prepare themselves with appropriate questions or goals for the interview. Leading questions from the interviewer could influence the narrator’s response. Open-ended questions broaden the interviewee’s ability to answer in their own words, divulging what information they feel comfortable sharing with to the interviewer. For example, Slater’s method consisted of visiting various villages within the Amazon and surrounding cities to focus on the local tales about dolphins and their mythological power. Slater mentions that she was careful to formulate questions that did not give away too

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³ Yow, 5.
much about the diverse tales to the storytellers. Slater’s interviewing style acknowledges that even the formation of questions can persuade the interviewees’ responses.

Alice Hoffman observes that oral historians face the task of writing a historical work that incorporates interviews to create reliable and valid research results. Reliability establishes consistency while validity reveals conformity of stories collected. Oral historians believe that diverse claims to past events, emotions, and opinions transform the historians’ position from researcher to oral archivist. Not all stories are reported, but the collected data might be archived, not appearing in the final transcript. Oral collection of statistical data can provide helpful visuals that allow researchers to use the data in context rather than depending upon individual anecdotes or community opinions. For example, Cohen uses graphs and diagrams throughout his book to produce a work with reliable and valid facts while Gutmann focuses more on personal stories and experiences to support his thesis. Burdick, who researched women race, and popular Christianity in Brazil, ends his book with the question of accuracy, writing that the readers assume researchers have accurately determined what the data represents. He states that coming to conclusions based on consistency and conformity leaves room for readers to question whether the researchers accurately interpreted the data or failed to write without including personal biases.

To hold an interview, the researcher must work around the narrator’s needs. In Slater’s case, her research began when community members started to tell folk tales about the mythological dolphins of the Amazon, in a casual social setting. In contrast, Gonzalez-Lopez

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4 Slater, 4-5.
6 Hoffman, 91.
7 Cohen, 12-3.
8 Burdick, 200.
created and scheduled focus groups of forty Mexican women and forty Mexican men in Los Angeles. She conducted the interviews in private offices, classrooms, and homes of the interviewees.9 Gonzalez-Lopez’s methods encouraged comfortable boundaries for her subjects, because she felt they might feel vulnerable due to her questions relating to their sexuality. In one case, Gonzalez-Lopez arrived at a narrator’s home where she was greeted by the woman’s husband and children. As Gonzalez-Lopez entered the home, the narrator showed off her image of the Virgin of Guadalupe and other religious artwork. She continued to lead Gonzalez-Lopez to her bedroom, stating, “If we are going to talk about sex, well… we need to go to the bedroom.”10 Gonzalez-Lopez’s experience exemplifies the leniency of scheduling that must take place for the interviewee to feel comfortable. In the case of scheduling interviews, the interviewer awaits the narrator. The narrator has the story and should be allowed to tell it when they feel most ready.

Oral history involves ethical decisions. Several scholars explain key concerns for the well-being of the narrator. The interviewer organizes the interviews and in some cases, must follow strict guidelines for beginning the interview. Receiving consent from the narrator is crucial in collecting data. Oral historians sensitive to the stories of their subjects avoid victimization by asking for permission to interview.11 Asking and introducing any recording material to the interview allows the interviewee choose whether or not they feel comfortable with using the voice recorder.12 Composing open-ended questions allows for interviews to follow the interviewers’ storytelling rather than directing responses from yes/no answers.13 In the case of interviews by Gonzalez-Lopez, the process of women sharing their stories evolved from quiet

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9 González-López, 9-10.
10 González-López, 14-5.
12 Yow, 95.
reservation about discussing their sexuality to eventually reporting extremely personal experiences, proving that oral history should be collected carefully and with a foundation in ethics.14

Oral historians must cope with tremendously difficult situations. A controversial aspect of conducting interviews is that they might lead to the resurfacing of past, harmful personal experiences. Narrators also fear that researchers will find ways to exploit their stories. Ken Plummer, in *Telling Sexual Stories*, collected stories that included coming-out stories of homosexual experiences and recovery narratives from rape victims. Instead of exploiting those he interviewed, he used his research to help sociologists’ link individual stories to social structures.15 Gonzalez-Lopez faced controversial conversations with both men and women. *Erotic Journeys*’ subject matter touched on harmful subjects such as harassment, abuse and rape.16 In Slater’s case, the stories were pleasant for her subjects but she personally struggled with working in Amazonia. Slater encountered in-country culture shock but needed to overcome her own discomfort to continue her research.17 Interviewers recognize the importance of listening, respect and personal wellness for encouraging a positive experience for all concerned.

Placing the subject in the context of culture must take into account understanding of individual differences in gender, race, and social class. Peter Friedlander’s article, “Theory, Method and Oral History” provides an example through the study of diverse populations in the Appalachians. Friedlander studied the United States region of the Appalachians where migrants, first generation Slavs, and second generation workers lived. The research addressed issues of workers’ attitudes towards authority managements, the union, and society. Differing social

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14 Gonzalez-Lopez, 13. The better the rapport with the individual, the more confident the narrator is in retelling their personal stories. 
15 As cited in González-López, 11. 
16 González-López, 17. 
17 Slater, 11.
groups and perspectives led to conflicts in his sources, but also the potential for further investigation among the Appalachian communities. In order to distinguish between differing cultural groups, historians attempt different methods of research. Burdick visited small churches and congregations which allowed him to build relationships with the women and investigate the culture’s devotion. Slater analyzed her stories according to people’s daily lives. With the research in hand, she weaved together the stories from the city dwellers, rural farmers, shop owners, and mothers to reach her overall goal of collecting the diverse folk stories of dolphin in Brazil. To better connect to the community, some researchers live amongst families they are researching. While researching Bolivian miners, Nash lived with Rojas’ family, improving her understanding of the families living situation and routine. Family life and conflict within the family opened Nash’s awareness to the family dynamics. For researchers to understand presented data, they dive into the culture which facilitated their understanding of life beyond their own.

Many of the oral histories previously mentioned come from cultures outside of the scholars’ personal experience. Reviewing content from other cultures risks misinterpretations by researchers. When Vanderwood researched Juan Soldado, he and his assistant researchers worked within the community to gain a better understanding of the cultural devotion of the Tijuana community. Vanderwood’s assistants conducted interviews near the site of the shrine learn from those who devoutly prayed to Soldado. In contrast, Burdick’s focus on gender issues, racial stereotypes, and religious values led him to fully immerse himself into Brazilian

19 Burdick, 20-22.
20 Slater, 12.
21 Nash, 13.
22 Vanderwood, 265.
life to prepare himself with core knowledge to later help conduct interviews and work within low-income, urban communities. When Burdick went to Anastasia’s shrine, he realized that the location was too busy for any interviews, so he built relationships with community members and interviewed them separately. In both cases, Vanderwood’s and Burdick’s research focused on a culture outside of their own.

For her book, *Speaking with Vampires*, Luise White conducted interviews addressing the African mythology of vampires during the colonial period. White and her assistants interviewed over 130 people throughout Uganda, Kenya, and Zambia. White speaks to the importance of storytelling in her research. She challenges the strict formulas which follow stable text and inserts orally collected materials to add experiences and ideas to terms and images. The terms used for vampires in Africa varied in meaning, increasing White’s work to document varying cultural meanings within different regions. These kinds of cultural obstacles face all historians. In-depth cultural understanding before the interviewing process helps work through cultural differences. For that reason, White supported her conclusions with diverse storytelling elements from various African cultures.

In many cases, participating in community studies leads to problems with methodology. The researcher must constantly test the boundaries of researcher/subject relationships. Engaging in a community studies project supports the researcher in working within their own interests, but must consider the interests of the community. For example, Nash worked within mining communities in Bolivia, documenting testimonies of miners as well as her own personal experiences. While carrying out multiple interviews, one narrator stood out. Nash felt as though

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23 Burdick, 2.
24 White, 8.
25 White, 9-11.
26 Yow, 190.
she was chosen by Juan Rojas as the person he wanted to narrate his life story. Nash’s story of finding Juan Rojas created difficulties because Nash felt that her relationship with the Rojas family at times became emotionally stressed, making the separate spheres impossible to maintain. Nash interacted carefully with the Rojas family. She mentions her hesitation to exchange life histories with Juan Rojas, though she recalls cases where the Rojas family called upon her for advice when having encountered difficulties. Nash took a similar path to that of Gutmann, because she immersed herself in the community instead of remaining an onlooker. Nash even describes how the Rojas’ family asked her to be the godparent of their baby, Juan Manual.

What happens to the relevance of the research once the relationships become close? One concern is that the scholar produces a biased work, filled with personal feelings and opinions rather than theoretical understanding. However, Gutmann supports relationships within his research and acknowledges the challenges with researching subjects who become friends and family. Gutmann addresses the theory of separate spheres in describing his research of machismo in Mexico City. He recalls that his own presence in the Santo Domingo community affected how his friends there felt and behaved concerning male gender roles in parenting and the household. In his case, the idea of leaving a place such as Santo Domingo “untouched,” is not the research goal. Instead the goal is to become involved and gain a deeper understanding of the research topic. This was also true in my research. My work and research coincided, allowing me to meet the women I would interview and build relationships with them. My concern was that I could not leave a community “untouched.” In support of my methodology, Gutmann and Nash strongly

27 Nash, 7.
28 Nash, 8.
29 Gutmann, 247.
support social interactions with research subjects, and believe that involvement within the community improves stories rather than harming the communities.

Methods of collecting oral history data vary greatly. One approach is the anthropological method, which seeks cultural data rather than documenting historical fact.\(^{30}\) Gutmann exemplifies this method. Gutmann’s goal of studying Mexican men in Mexico City led him to living in a working-class neighborhood where he documented daily conversations and personal experiences as research.\(^{31}\) With the goal of creating a fresh analysis of masculinity and modernity in Mexico City, Gutmann moved from the United States to Mexico for an extended visit. He mentioned time being a key factor in building a rapport within the community. After a year of living in the community, Gutmann sat with a friend and asked the same questions he had asked six months before. The second time, he received more developed and significantly different answers. Gutmann gained information through long-term interpersonal relationships and community development.\(^{32}\)

The academic community debates the legitimacy of diverse oral history collection methods. Though oral history is considered an acceptable method of collection, criticisms of methodology constantly surround the researcher’s work. Some historians withhold support for oral history because they believe it is too subjective. Other historians warn against the interpretations and opinions obtained through interviews because of the dangers of the researchers’ self-interest and biased understanding of the material.\(^{33}\)

To some historians, recording interviews does not ensure perfect results. Pulitzer-Prize winning historian Barbara Tuchman writes in “Distinguishing the Significant from the


\(^{31}\) Gutmann, 3-5.

\(^{32}\) Gutmann, 8-10.

\(^{33}\) Dunaway, 9.
Insignificant” that collecting oral history adds to quantity of information, not quality. Referring to the tape recorder as “a monster with the appetite of a tapeworm,” Tuchman states that only small portions of recorded oral history provide insightful research, while most of the collection should be regarded as trash. According to Tuchman, the historian will encounter unimportant data whether or not a recorder is present. She believes that the historians’ skills as a researcher are found in their ability to distinguish between the significant and irrelevant data during the collection of oral history.

Many authors explain why they believe their methods help them achieve useful results. Cohen qualifies his work throughout his introduction, reviewing his methods of data collection and interpretation. He clearly states his reasons for researching the history of movement, the impact of migration, and the importance of money sent home from migrant workers in rural Oaxaca. He reviews his sociological methods and then provides a clear history of the Oaxaca communities he worked with for over six years, while including citations from other works and his personal interviews. Cohen’s work and that of fellow oral historians must provide a list of methodology techniques to gain approval from critics who question the researcher’s subjective approach. Methods differ according to the author’s goals. Cohen conducted research for his book by interviewing communities and taking a detailed survey and consensus. Hondagneu-Sotelo gathered information from subjects in participant-observations, in-depth tape-recording interviews, and informal conversations. Hondagneu-Sotelo gathered information from her target population to create an understanding of gender roles of Mexicans throughout

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34 Barbara Tuchman, Distinguishing the Significant from the Insignificant” in Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology, ed. David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (Walnut Creek, 1996), 96.
35 Tuchman, 97.
36 Cohen, 7-8.
37 Cohen, 156-169.
38 Hondagneu-Sotelo, xx.
immigration. Oral history can include both folklore and sociological studies. Slater’s book, *Dance of the Dolphin*, is a good example of an oral history of folklore. The sociological method approaches the collection oral history as an opportunity to conduct “depth interviewing” which attempts to recall the deep, multilayered experience of the individual.\(^{39}\) The written work consists of themes used regionally throughout the Amazon and themes found in all stories collected.

Some methods of collecting individual stories combine oral history methodologies with personal missions. Poniatowska’s collection of interviews in *Massacre in Mexico* provides readers with an insight into the Student Movement of 1968 within Mexico City and the massacre at Tlatelolco.\(^{40}\) Poniatowska, a reporter at the time, collected testimonies throughout the protests and massacre, interviewing activists, parents, students, professors, community members, and journalists with the goal of denouncing the current regime in Mexico.\(^{41}\) The primary sources collected by Poniatowska pull together the events leading up to the massacre and then describe the massacre from multiple points of views. The combinations of narratives supported Poniatowska’s mission to publicize the truth about Mexican conditions to the world.

Once researchers collect the data for their projects, they must choose their methods for using the primary sources. Each scholar adapts their approach to their data and sources. Poniatowska organized her book by creating a mosaic of stories from similar and opposing community members. Poniatowska organized testimonies, included protest chants and posters

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\(^{39}\) Dunaway, 16.

\(^{40}\) Poniatowska, 199.

and published the collection. She documented the August 13th demonstration by including chants such as, “Books yes – Bayonets no!” while including student commentary.42

Poniatowska’s literary style contrasts with to Cohen and Hondagneu-Sotelo’s sociological writing style. Cohen and Hondagneu-Sotelo used quantitative and qualitative methods such as interviews, surveys, and historical background specific to their material. Poniatowska, a native of Mexico, had family involved in the Student Movement of 1968 and collected interviews from people she knew from within the student movement. Cohen, Hondagneu-Sotelo, and Poniatowska organize their collections of information to support their thesis, but do so in dissimilar styles.

Other scholars also use their sources in a creative way. Slater effectively used the dolphin stories to explore the cultural beliefs of the region. Her book entertains the readers by recounting folklore.43 Gutmann, using his personal experiences, writes in an observational style of writing. His study continually includes examples life from the people within his research community, but also from his own life experiences. In one event, Gutmann studies the differences between imaginary fathers and genuine fathers and then states how fortunate he was to have his seven-month-old daughter with him as a field assistant to his research.44 Gonzalez-Lopez tends to use more direct quoting from primary sources. Many times she will present a question that she asked her interviewees and then rewrites interviews word for word in small, block quotes.45 Authors’ diverse styles of writing and data collection helped me create a way to interpret my personal research.

42 Poniatowska, 24-5.
43 Slater, 94-5.
44 Gutmann, 66.
45 Gonzalez-Lopez, 64-5.
Community involvement can promote cultural understanding for the researcher. Yow argues that unless the project centers on community’s life, the goals of the researcher may have little meaning for community members.46 Personal testimony allows researchers to incorporate a current cultural understanding which helps develop the stories being collected.47 On the other hand, Vanderwood wanted to understand the devotion found in the people in Tijuana to Juan Soldado, a convicted rapist who was executed in the 1920’s. While mainly using historical sources, he also deemed it important to collect reports from devotees visiting Soldado’s shrine.48 Though both Gutmann and Vanderwood studied the local community, they had dissimilar research goals. In the community of Santo Domingo, Gutmann focused on socially constructed gender differences while Vanderwood concentrated on a historical figure. Vanderwood’s research took a historical approach instead of following Gutmann’s anthropological methodology. Their different approaches to collecting data reflect the differences in their subjects.

Victor Davis Hanson, author of Mexifornia: A State of Becoming, takes a dramatic approach to his research. Unlike Cohen’s book, which has academic goals and strove for objectivity, Mexifornia, based on the same topic of immigration and social conditions, uses a great deal of opinion. Hanson states that he hopes to solve the “illegal immigration problem.” Early in his introduction, he suggests a remedy: “far less illegal immigration and a more measured policy of legal immigration, along with a stronger mandate for assimilation.”49 He based his work on personal anecdotes, excluding any citations from primary and secondary sources.

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46 Yow, 199.
47 Yow, 13.
48 Vanderwood, 295.
49 Victor Davis Hanson, Mexifornia: A State of Becoming (New York, 2003), xii.
sources. Though the subject matter closely relates to Cohen’s work, the result differs greatly, and the reader questions Hanson’s reliability.

Hanson’s methods of researching drastically differ from academic methodology. In contrast, Gutmann, Cohen, Gonzalez-Lopez, Nash, and other oral historians must find ways to accurately document their community interactions so as to minimalize personal opinion and address cultural biases. To document the researchers’ community interactions, though they do not have complete security in recalling interviews, they do have access to tools that can assist their research techniques.\(^{50}\) Such techniques include the use of video or audio recording. Researchers prefer visual recording due to its ability to capture body language as well and audio. In some cases the audio and visual recording techniques may lead to the narrator’s reluctance to participate, in which case the interviewer must show respect to the narrator’s choice to refuse participating in the interview.\(^{51}\) The tools an oral historian chooses to use help with documentation and accuracy.

One of the most controversial oral histories is *I, Rigoberta Menchu*. Menchu’s testimonies of the Guatemala Mayan genocide of the 1980’s are controversial due to the stories’ content and data collection methods. Menchu described life during the Guatemalan Civil War. Her stories were collected by Elisabeth Burgos-Debray. Some critics say Menchu copied the experiences of fellow community members and fabricated contributions to their communities. Though she did experience some of her own stories, she also told stories taken from other Mayan communities. Her stories and activism to end violence in Guatemala earned her the Noble Peace Prize in 1992.

\(^{50}\) Yow, 35-6.
\(^{51}\) Barbara W. Sommer and Mary Kay Quinlan, *The Oral History Manual* (Walnut Creek, 2002), 17.
Following Menchu’s publication, anthropologist David Stoll thoroughly researched Menchu’s story, verifying and debunking sections of Menchu’s testimony.\textsuperscript{52}

In Stoll’s view, documentation of the experiences Menchu “never had,” tarnished the public’s ability to read the testimony as a direct account of what happened during the Guatemalan Civil War.\textsuperscript{53} However, her stories seem more valid when they are examined in a cultural context. Menchu did provide the public with an accurate picture of life in Guatemalan communities. The controversy developed through academic disapproval of methodology in \textit{I, Rigoberta Menchu}. Stoll conducted researched that found flaws in Menchu’s methodology, and this led to his accusation that her book was unreliable.\textsuperscript{54} In oral history, researchers cannot guarantee truthfulness in interviews and interactions with subjects. The researcher faces many obstacles: cultural differences, personal biases, knowledge of the subject, and many more. The goal for the researcher is to provide a story of historical significance and validity. Menchu brought the world’s attention to the social injustices taking place in Guatemala and fought for indigenous rights. Though her testimony received some academic disapproval, it promoted social justice and human rights awareness around the world. At present, opinions of Menchu’s testimony waivers between historical accuracy and methodological malpractice.

Researchers’ awareness of how conflict or social differences affect cultural interactions force the researcher to address their own cultural understandings in light of the culture they are studying. Gutmann discusses the Durkheimian idea of researchers being the invisible hand in collecting social facts. To Gutmann, the anthropologist’s methods of understanding lead him or her to realize that they are a product of society and all researchers must recognize their own

\textsuperscript{52} Arturo Arias, ed. \textit{The Rigoberta Menchu Controversy} (Minneapolis, 2001), 20-22.
\textsuperscript{53} Larry Rohter, “Tarnished Laureate” in \textit{The Rigoberta Menchu Controversy} ed. Arturo Arias (Minneapolis, 2001), 58.
cultural accountability. Slater’s cultural interactions Brazilians left her bewildered and at times, angered. When Slater recognized this behavior, she caught herself from imposing her own beliefs into the other culture. In some cases, she dodged issues of her own opinion and never told any narrators or communities that she did not believe the stories they shared with her. Nancy Scheper-Hughes studied social conditions in Brazil where she documented her experiences with violence in her community and throughout Brazil. In her introduction to her study, she writes that her experiences with the drastic cultural differences made her feel as though she “groped blindly to understand the context of actions of political repression” in Brazil. All historians must address their own feelings of culture shock, anxiety, and understanding by realizing the goal of their own work.

The process of understanding how to research and how to avoid methodological errors is impossible without studying different types of methodology. The knowledge of specific techniques improves the interviewer’s ability to collect oral histories and the interviewee’s confidence in the researcher. After gaining an understanding of methodology, Burdick addresses the issue of self-criticism. He states that researchers must avoid two methodological “temptations.” First, researchers must avoid taking collected transcripts that researchers would rather not hear and then consigning them to an inferior position, place, or condition. Second, researchers must not rush to conclusions as to which views are the most predominant. The research must be judged thoroughly. Oral history follows rules and processes to promote effective, positive research. The necessary steps taken create a strong piece of work that can be read and used by others to better understand a culture’s individual story.

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55 Gutmann, 9.
56 Slater, 7, 13.
57 Nancy Scheper-Hughes
58 Burdick, 202.
This review of interviewing, interacting across cultures, and addressing personal values adds to my personal research. My relationships with the women of Casa de los Angeles allowed me to address issues of family, machismo, poverty, and migration. The women welcomed me into their communities and told me their life stories. I followed my own methodology, only to discover that many historians before me had not only accomplished the same tasks, but included a detailed ‘how-to’ process of collecting cross-cultural stories. My experience with writing this paper has improved my awareness of my own cultural habits and heightened my creativity and energy towards collecting oral histories.
Women in Transition: A Study of Migration History, Sending Communities, and Women’s Gender Roles in Mexico

Ballad of the immigrant\textsuperscript{59}

Mexico, my homeland
Where I was born Mexican,
Give me the benediction
Of your powerful hand.

I’m going to the United States
To earn my living;
Good-bye, my beloved country,
I carry you in my heart.

Don’t condemn me
For leaving my country,
Poverty and necessity
Are at fault.

Good-bye, pretty Guanajuato
The state in which I was born.
I’m going to the United States
Far away from you.

Introduction

The process of immigration from Mexico to the United States draws negative attention to Mexican migrants. Since the creation of US-Mexican border, the act of migration between the United States and Mexico has existed. Border crossing exists for many reasons. Earning a living through work in the United States offers a common reason for passage from Mexico to the United States. The US and Mexican governments have administered programs to promote documented transnational work. For example, in the 1940’s-1960’s, the Bracero Program encouraged transnational commuting of guest laborers from Mexico to the United States. Though

the US Government terminated the Bracero Program in the 1960’s, transnational labor continues to exist.

In the following study, I examine migration from three perspectives. First, I provide a brief background of the history of migration from Mexico to the United States. In the second section I discuss sending communities within Mexico and document how the families’ function while loved ones are away from the home. In the third and last section I evaluate the culture of Mexican women in both worlds. The final section includes analysis of both gender roles within Mexican communities and families as well as women’s expected responsibilities and experiences while living in the United States.

The challenge throughout the paper is one of overgeneralization. The studies and research I have used in my paper do not cover the diverse functions or actions of every group. Not everyone believes in the ideals within the paper. The image of gender, importance of family, and experiences both in Mexico and abroad vary greatly. But this brief introduction to the social and economic life of migrant families helps us understand the statements made by the women of Casa de los Angeles in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, which I explore in the final section of my thesis.

A Brief History of Mexican Immigration and the Bracero Program

The history of US-Mexico migration began in 1848 with the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. In the treaty, Mexico lost one-third of its land to the United States. Mexicans, who lived on the land that the US now claimed as their own, struggled with the option to either become US citizens or return to Mexico. In the 1900’s, the migrant movement across the border existed with
few US restrictions. At this time, the limited restrictions of passage between the United States and Mexico allowed for families to cross with little concern for governmental interference. In the 1920’s, the US government increased restrictions for passage by collecting border taxes and fees.

The rising cost for crossing the Mexico-United States border promoted undocumented passage in the early twentieth century. In the 1920’s, the United States taxed immigrants $9 to enter the country. In 1928, the Department of State increased regulations on immigration by adding another $9 charge for visas and $3 reentry permits for immigrants leaving the country and planning to return. Sociologist Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo addresses the hypocrisy of the Anglos’ actions by quoting a simple statement that refers to American expansionism in the 19th century: “It’s not the Mexicans but California that migrated to the United States.” For immigrants traveling over the Atlantic to the United States, the taxes and fees to enter the country added to the already high cost of relocating across the ocean. Mexican immigrants avoided the $18 fees by taking through unofficial routes across the border. Migration continued to take place along the border though the United States government increased the cost for passage.

During the 1930’s, unemployment in the United States of America displaced Mexican and Mexican American families, forcing them to leave the United States. Heightened fear among US citizens of job security and providing for the family increased Anglo awareness of the border to the south. The United States government pushed Mexican and Mexican American families out of their homes, ignoring the social injustices taking place.

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60 Roger Daniels, Guarding the Golden Door (New York, 2004), 62-3.
61 Daniels, 53.
By 1941, President Lázaro Cárdenas reformed Mexico’s agricultural production, and this influenced immigration to the United States. Cárdenas’ *Reparto Agrario* redistributed Mexican federal land by confiscating *hacienda* land and developing *ejidos*. Local pueblos had controlled this land and provided the public with adequate means of agricultural production.\(^6^3\) Following Cárdenas’ presidency, large agricultural companies rented out the land owned by small scale *ejidatarios*, extorting the land and the workers. Laborers living in rural communities chose between working the rented land and facing exploitation by the capitalistic large-scale farming companies, or becoming *ejidatarios* who lived off inferior land in impoverished conditions.\(^6^4\) Mexico’s concern for the growing number of lower class agrarian workers led to interest in an agreement for laborers to go to the US to work and hopefully receive fair treatment, agricultural education, and good wages.

In 1942, the Mexican and United States’ governments funded a transnational guest worker agreement called the Bracero Program. The original purpose of the Bracero Program was met during the 1940’s: to send *campesinos* from Mexico to the United States to provide agricultural labor during World War II. During the first five years, the two governments worked together to accommodate needs of farmers and workers. From 1942 to 1947, under the wartime agreement, the program promoted good political and economical relations between the US and Mexican governments. However, social drawbacks affected the individual workers or braceros while the governments benefited from improved foreign relations.

The Bracero Program’s general provisions, agreed upon by both the United States and Mexico, laid out a basis for both the farmers’ duties and the contract workers’ rights and limitations. Though the Mexican government expected US farmers to follow certain

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\(^{64}\) Massey, *Return to Aztlan*, 43.
requirements written in the Mexican Farm Labor Agreement, known as the Bracero Agreement, the bracero workers constantly faced discrimination, as well as poor living conditions and prejudices.

Cultural *corridos* from the time period express the hardships that guest laborers faced as a result of this political agreement. Arnulfo Castillo’s *corrido* describes the Bracero experience: “Let him go as a bracero – To the United States. – He will see that he will work – Like a sold slave. – Before we were honorable men, - Now we have lost it all.” 65 The United States’ and Mexican governments saw economical efficiency and political cohesiveness as successful results of the Bracero Program. As seen in the *corrido*, for the individual guest worker, life within the Bracero Program consisted of demanding work, drastic cultural differences, and constant discrimination.

*Corridos* of this time period show us that the two countries failed to meet the social standards meant to protect laborers. *Corridos* describing the bracero experience included themes of exploitation, discrimination, loss of nationality, and lack of appropriate health care. In Castillo’s “Corrido de los desarraigados” (Song of the Uprooted Ones), from 1942, the composer protested the use of braceros and the migration north and again compares the situation to slavery. 66 In one stanza Castillo described the experience: “They work us like slaves – And treat us like dogs – All we need is for them to ride us – And put the bridle on us.” 67 Though the US and Mexico governments enacted specific laws to protect the social rights of the braceros, the laws were not necessarily enforced.

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66 Herrera-Sobek, 164.
67 Herrera-Sobek, 165.
The Mexican government responded to complaints of maltreatment made by the braceros by addressing political leaders in the United States. In 1943, Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Mexico addressed issues of discrimination to the Texas governor Coke R. Stevenson in a letter stating, “There are many places in your State where Mexican residents can not attend shows or places of decent amusement without exposing themselves to annoyance, criticism and protest,” and added that, “not even the families of our official representatives are safe from such persecution, or from unwarrantable molestation.”68 The public knowledge of ill-treatment of guest workers did not end the injustices taking place. Bracero workers continued to leave their homes and families behind to gain adequate wages while facing exploitation.

Sending Communities

Sending communities emerge from the transnational lifestyle that exists for many low-income families in Mexico. People looking for work either migrate to large cities within Mexico or make the voyage to the United States. Many families remain behind while only a choice few travel to the US with the promise to send their earnings back home.69 Though Mexico is not a poor country, low-income families find it difficult to earn enough wages to support a household. As a result, the Mexican immigrant work done in the United States supports both the US and Mexican economies. In cases where women are left behind, they embrace their roles in the sending communities by taking care of the family and providing an income for the household.70

The phrases “stay-at-homes” and “sending families or communities” refer to the families who remain in Mexico while loved ones migrate to either Mexico City or the United States. The

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70 Durand, 7.
mother must care for the home, the children, and provide an income for the household. From the time of the Bracero Program, men migrated north to work in the US and women entered the labor force to earn wages to support their families in Mexico. Employment of lower class women ranged from factory work to domestic service. However, women’s ability to earn wages does not necessarily lead to a greater level of independence. When women enter the public sphere to work they are paid less than men and struggle with sexual harassment and segregation in the workplace. In some sending families, fathers and husbands return home and promote patriarchy within the family while their wives take their places as domestic, private people once again.

Homes may send family members to other cities or to the North with the goal of providing for their family. The strategy applied by a family supports the goal of collectively maintaining the family formation and reproduction. Marilyn P. Davis collected stories from the Mexican immigrant community, discussing family, immigration, and communities in both Mexico and the United States. In the resulting book, Enrique, a migrant worker from Chiapas, explains that he could not support his family with his income as a truck driver in Southern Mexico. As a result, he works eighty hours a week in the United States to provide for his family. In cases such as Enrique, workers and communities respond to low wages in the work force by becoming multinational workers.

Sending communities within Mexico vary greatly. They might participate in both internal migration and international migration. For example, in the community of San Pablo Huitzo in Southern Mexico, the rail line and Pan-American Highway connect Oaxaca to Mexico City,

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73 Davis, 36.
increasing the ease of travel. The San Pablo Huitzo community continually migrates internally while other communities such as Santa Ana del Valle generally send migrants to the United States. The reasons for differing methods of migration include transportation, location, and local culture. The diverse aspects of every community create varied migration patterns for Mexicans.

To support their families, immigrants build connections beyond borders through social, familial, economic, and religious networks. The option of going north risks getting caught by US Border Patrol, not finding housing, or missing work opportunities. Building a strong sense of kinship, friendships, and paisanaje provides the foundation for acquiring work, making social connections, and finding housing. Migrants depend on the developments in border patrol numbers or United States Immigration and Naturalization Service workers (INS) in the area. Notification relays from personal connections from the borders down to connected Mexican communities.

To make the trip abroad, some groups employ people who offer the services of safe passage to the United States. This guide is referred to as the coyote. The interpretation of the name “coyote” is uncertain. According to one story, the name “coyote” comes from how the groups cross the mountains at night to avoid detection. The guides who lead the groups have a familiarity with the area, knowing which paths to take. Coyotes use their own networking to traffic human beings across the border. Coyotes demand migrant cooperation and require payments for passage, but cannot ensure safety. On May 14, 2003, nineteen undocumented immigrants were found dead in the back of a double-insulated truck, including a six-year-old

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74 Cohen, 89.
78 Davis, 105, 132.
boy. They died due to asphyxiation, dehydration and heat exposure. All paid for passage, but only few managed to escape. According to data from the Mexican Migrant Project, led by Douglas S. Massey and Jorge Durand, the cost of coyotes has declined from 1966 to 1994. The cost began at an average of $700, dropping to $200 by the early nineties.\textsuperscript{80} Prices may have continued to decline, plateau, or risen due to the heightened awareness and US concern for strengthening the border between the United States and Mexico.

Mexican families expect men to leave for the United in order to provide for the family and then return to work again in Mexico. Women also migrate along with men. The tendency for women is to cross the border through methods that ensure safe passage to the United States. Methods of passage include using fake passports or traveling with family friends.\textsuperscript{81} The goal of increasing income and supporting the family depends on safe passage to the United States.

The women who do not migrate north remain in their communities supporting their families with their own income. Dual wage earning households place women in the public sphere where they are at risk of falling victim to discrimination. Cohen’s research of Oaxaca communities discovered that of all families only 7% depended on a single wage earner’s income, while all other families pooled wages to provide for their families.\textsuperscript{82} Women’s work in maquiladoras provides women with an income, but at a cost. In many cases, women are the target for class exploitation and gender subordination.\textsuperscript{83} Women face wage discrimination, sexual harassment, and fear of pregnancy tests, which are administered regularly. If a woman

\textsuperscript{82} Cohen, 39.
testes positive for pregnancy, she is immediately fired without pay. Though these actions attack women’s rights and the policies outlined by NAFTA, the social injustices continue to take place.84

Relationships back home suffer through limited contact with the migrant worker and long periods of time passing with the migrant away from the home.85 Davis interviewed one woman about her feeling towards the possible return of her husband and she responded, “When he’s here, he’s never here, so why do I care if he ever returns or not?”86 Though the income from migration supports a household, money fails to ensure the cohesiveness of the family.

Both migrant and non-migrant homes participate in community activities in Mexico. One family pays something called “cooperation to the pueblo,” where money goes towards celebrations or needed improvements.87 This action promotes collective strength within the community. The large amount of migration to the U.S. causes communities to feel as though migration hinders cultural practices within the community. Cohen, in his study of the culture of migration in Southern Mexico, found that traditions within communities do not end because of migration. Instead, Mexico’s policies towards the privatization of communal lands and the removal of public support programs hinder community traditions.88 Traditions practiced within the communities encourage relationship-building when traveling north, but do not dictate which families must migrate. Instead, during fiestas within the communities, veteran migrants help potential migrants organize their trips to the North.89

85 Davis, 166.
86 Grimes, 99-100.
87 Cohen, 73.
88 Cohen, 148.
89 Cohen, 4.
One out of five Mexican households depends on payments from migrants.\textsuperscript{90} When a person prepares to leave home, family and relatives contribute to the payment for passage.\textsuperscript{91} The collective support promotes migration through family ties and connections. Whole communities also depend on migrants’ wages. Some communities hold the opinion that international immigration constantly provides family maintenance and improvement, further supporting migration.\textsuperscript{92} In 1996, Enrique Dussel Peters conducted research that proved that wages and employment in the US, compared to jobs in Mexico, resulted in productive short and medium term migration for individual families.\textsuperscript{93} Sending communities that have positive experiences with transnational work depend on the migrant workers’ wages and collectively support community members cross the border and find work.

While the male breadwinners work outside of the community, migrant communities expect families to continue with their daily lives and provide for the household and work through family losses, awaiting the husband’s return. Cohen describes members of a sending community who receive funds from their migrant sons. A mother explained that the family received funding from sons who had left years before. At first the sons sent home funding on a regular basis, but eventually the money slowed down. Finally, the family depended on their own income, only receiving money occasionally.\textsuperscript{94} Cases exist where extreme circumstances within the family occur, like losing a child, but families convince family members abroad to continue to work and remain in the U.S. until the workers raise enough money to support the family’s needs.\textsuperscript{95}

\textsuperscript{90} Miguel Moctezuma Longoria, “The Migrant Club El Remolino: A Binational Community Experience.” in 
Confronting Globalization: Economic Integration and Popular Resistance in Mexico, eds. Timohy A. Wise, Hilda Salazar, Laura Carlson (Bloomfield, CT, 2003), 195.
\textsuperscript{91} Cohen, 110.
\textsuperscript{92} Massey, 172.
\textsuperscript{94} Cohen, 110.
\textsuperscript{95} Davis, 146.
communities continue on with their normal routines, dealing with crises of daily life and waiting to hear back about when their loved ones will return.

**Women in Both Worlds**

Women act as a both a support system for sending communities and provide for their children in Mexico. Though women are more likely to remain in Mexico than migrate to the United States, they do cross the border and work and support their individual families in both Mexico and the US. Mexican women exist in both worlds. They participate in community celebrations that wish their men safe passage and they also prepare to travel north. Some women remain in Mexico while others their communities in search of higher wages and, in some cases, an improved standard of living.

According to the *machismo* theory of gender roles within the family, men are the heads of household and follow masculine gender ideologies. Women maintain their dutiful role by pleasing the husband and following the feminine ideology of *marianismo*, according to this theory. Sociologist Dr. Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo defines these patriarchal traditions as “ideological constructs that may inform people’s actions, but they are not themselves actual patterns of behaviors.”

However, we can use sociological, anthropological, historical, literary sources for insights into the diverse roles of women in Mexico and the changing roles of women in transnational communities.

Ceremonies of leave show these gender roles in action. Women in sending communities, like in Santa Ana del Valle, support migration as a necessary process. In some cases, communities prepare in advance for the large groups of men who plan to leave for the United States. The Oaxaca community of Santa Ana del Valle celebrated their *patrona* with various

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parities, banquets, dances, masses, and even a rodeo. Following the celebration, large groups of men migrated from the community to the United States. As men in the community leave, other men return to the pueblo from the US. The community and their families welcomed the recently-returned men. In these cases, women in the sending community had the opportunity to see their fathers, brothers, boyfriends, or husbands once again. In some families, women introduced their husbands to their children who had not been born before the men had last migrated north.97

Not all communities participate in festivals to support their men’s upcoming travels to the north. In some cases, families determine when young men will migrate. During my travels through Michoacán, I met a community leader of a small pueblo, called Erangaricuarro. In one conversation I had with him we discussed the process of migration. He recalled his experiences with families within his community and their process of choosing to send young men to the United States. In one case, a young man approached the community leader and asked for help with a troubling situation. This young man was in love with a farmer’s daughter. The young man explained to the community leader that the woman was pregnant and asked for advice. In order to divulge the truth to the farmer of his daughter’s situation, the young man and the community leader traveled to the farmer’s home to discuss both the daughter’s and young man’s future. According to the community leader, he bought a case of beer and went with the young man to the farmer’s home. After a few beers, the three men and the farmer’s wife discussed the future of their families. The farmer and his wife told the young man that he must marry their daughter and then go to the United States in order to make money to build his new family a home. While in  

97 Cohen, 49.
the United States, the farmer’s daughter would remain at her parents’ home, awaiting her husband’s return.98

The image of Mexican women historically presents the woman as the mother and domestic leader of the family, not as the migrant worker or family breadwinner. However, the structure of family has evolved with women’s participation in migration to the United States. Comparing Mexican women immigrants in the US and women in sending-communities displays changing women’s roles. After living in the US, women developed economic independence. On the other hand, while migrant women in Mexico focused on their role as a dependent within the family, they also pursued the increasing opportunities in education and employment in the United States.99

Comparing women living in Mexico and women immigrants in the US reveals gender roles in the two family spheres. Gloria Gonzalez-Lopez’s sociological monograph, Erotic Journeys: Mexican Immigrants and their Sex Lives, shows the dialogue between Mexican women in the US and their Mexican heritage. Women participants described the expected traits women should have within the patriarchal family. For many women within the Mexican society, the family is the center of social control, and gives women constant reminders of how they should behave in the domestic and public setting.100

Gonzalez-Lopez argues that the community expects women to symbolize purity. Whereas men may be viewed as aggressors, socially constructed gender traditions strictly control women’s lives, presenting model of passivity and virtue. The male macho image allows men to break marital vows and have a casa chica, a second family with another woman. The Mexican

98 Personal communication with a community leader in Erangaricuaro, Michoacán, Mexico, during a tour around Lake Patzcuaro.
99 Hondagneu-Sotelo, Gendered Transitions, 11.
ideal of *marianismo* prohibits such actions among women. Woman must exemplify honor, dignity, values, and tradition. To demonstrate purity and honor, women must remain virgins until marriage. To many women interviewed in *Erotic Journeys*, *casarse bien* meant *vivir bien* or “marrying well” (by being a virgin) and therefore live well. The pressures of remaining a virgin mean upholding family honor, but also supposedly ensure that the women’s future marriage would be financially stable and comfortable.

Central to gender roles in the Mexican community is the cult of virginity. According to Gonzalez-Lopez, the cult of virginity for a woman combines pre-Columbian and Spanish religious views that fuse to create a belief in morality and sexuality. The Catholic Church insists that women remain virgins until marriage. The combined Church influence with patriarchal society means women who do not preserve their virginity have a lower moral status. The instant destruction of women’s moral character if she has pre-marital sex supports the dichotomous grouping of women who have failed to keep their virginity versus those who have maintained their purity. Women demonstrate purity and sacredness by following their gender-specific rules. If they fail, they immediately become polluted and impious.

Experiences and research collected by anthropologists within Mexico challenge the theory of separate spheres for women and men and even the idea that two spheres may separate women and men throughout the day. In some cases, the public vs. private sphere allows men to earn money for his family while the women live a private life of family and home. Anthropologist Matthew Gutmann lived within the community in Colonia Santo Domingo, Mexico City, to research machismo. In cases found in Colonia Santo Domingo, poorer urban

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101 González-López, 40.
102 González-López, 41.
103 González-López, 38.
104 Gonzalez-Lopez, 39.
classes in the community defied the gender roles of machismo and marianismo. For example, Angela, a resident of Santo Domingo, related her experience with women’s current situation in the public sphere. Married by 1956, Angela never worked outside the home. In her case, the women’s duty as a mother, not a bread-winner, created the framework for gender roles and separation. Angela noted a significant change from her youth to that of her children.\textsuperscript{105} She remained in the home throughout her life, yet she encouraged all of her daughters to work in the public sphere. Though the underlining tradition of separate gender spheres exists, the work force evolves along with the changing gender relations in Mexico.

Transnational women commonly cross the border to find work, meet family, and send money home, when possible. When crossing the border, women often play the role of the ‘dependent.’\textsuperscript{106} Cohen’s study polled a group of immigrants and discovered that the gender ratio split with 51% men and 49% women. In this study, women were more likely to follow a man to the U.S. and 60% of all women who migrated north belonged to a family that had previously send a member form the household to the United States.\textsuperscript{107} In a study by sociologists Manuel Barajas and Elvia Ramirez, the researchers focused on whether or not women felt a greater sense of gender equality in the United States compared to their home in Mexico. The researchers found that women were not submissive in Mexico, but that women in the United States also did not feel liberated. Mexican women lived within oppressive systems in both the US and Mexico.\textsuperscript{108}

When the women reach new communities in the north they must find occupations that give protection from the INS and pay to support their children and family in Mexico. Women’s networking skills help in finding jobs and housing during the transition from Mexico to the

\textsuperscript{105} Matthew Gutmann, \textit{The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City} (Berkeley, 1996), 100.
\textsuperscript{106} Grimes, 20.
\textsuperscript{107} Cohen, 41-42.
United States. Due to connections with kin, Mexican women tend to have more diverse job opportunities compared to the migrant women from Central America. Women from Central America tend to have limited connections which restrict their choices in work. Once working, some women found their income as proof of independence from their families. The money they earn in the United States goes towards family affairs, but added a higher level of value to women’s work within their families in Mexico.\textsuperscript{110}

When arriving in the United States, many women begin work in domestic positions. For undocumented women, live-in situations lessen the risks of exposure to the INS.\textsuperscript{111} Live-in arrangements provide women with housing, but this form of work limits personal time and free hours dramatically. The risks of live-in jobs include missed wages or eighty hour work weeks, all of which are unnoticed by the employer. Undocumented women fear asking for better working conditions, because the employer could threaten these employees with deportation. Women’s inability to better their working conditions places women into situations of invisible slavery. Live-in domestic work also limits the individual’s ability to interact with friends or family. The employer’s image of “taking care of the employee, like a daughter” is alluring, but dangerous.\textsuperscript{112} Live-in domestic positions tend to readily available, but the work restricts women’s social interaction, cutting off family ties and friendships.

Activist groups, such as the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles, try to help low paid women who are in dangerous situations with pamphlets for women workers. The pamphlets promote social justice and even create an icon for women in domestic work.

\textsuperscript{109} Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, \textit{Domestica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence} (Berkeley, 2001), 53.
\textsuperscript{110} Hondagneu-Sotelo, \textit{Gendered Transitions}, 126-7.
\textsuperscript{111} Hondagneu-Sotelo, \textit{Gendered Transitions}, 131.
\textsuperscript{112} Hondagneu-Sotelo, \textit{Gendered Transitions}, 129.
“Super Domestica.” The activist groups form protests, fight for changes in US policies, and reach out to individual families. Even with a group trying to improve human rights, not all women receive help.

Interpersonal relationships can both help and hinder the women’s migrant experience. Research of women’s social interactions in migrant communities shows connections formed in women’s groups, along with the struggle for independence within their families. For single immigrant women, families and kin provide the most support. According to Hondagneu-Sotelo, if those options disappear, women might attach to a man as one way to survive and provide for their children. Unmarried immigrant women tend to support one another by using networking to find jobs and homes. Within groups, women build friendships and help new migrants by welcoming them into the community. This is not to say that the friendships are perfect. Friendship can take advantage of women, and limit the overall trust within migrant communities.

Women who migrate with families add to their responsibilities because they are not only wage earners, but also mothers. Migration from Mexico to the United State leaves women without sufficient resources to raise and support their children. Long work days and low pay characterize women’s labor expectations. Although women work in the United States, they continue to bear the burden of domestic work in the home. The family support system in the US may include the presence of godparents who sponsor children in the US in case of family

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113 Hondagneu-Sotelo, Domestica, 225.
114 Hondagneu-Sotelo, Gendered Transitions, 135.
115 Hondagneu-Sotelo, Gendered Transitions, 138.
116 Hondagneu-Sotelo, Domestica, 25.
117 Hondagneu-Sotelo, Gendered Transitions, 121.
Mexican women in the US look towards community to help with raising their children when the family structure is not large enough to support everyone.

The Mexican communities in the United States help the entire group as a whole. Women use the community as a resource. The trend for finding work is through family and friends. At times labor contractors open positions for work, but many times the families depend on one another to find job opportunities. Communities come together to take care of children while others work. Neighbors, friends, and kin create a supportive network for women who struggle with the loneliness that accompanies the experiences of immigrating to the United States and leaving one’s families.

The history of Mexican migration to the United States reveals economic hardship, transnational families, and how women’s lives have changed throughout the years. 160 years after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, the border remains a popular topic of discussion. The sending community sends families to the north, and manages the separated home. Women play a large part in keeping communities and families together as well as supporting the household through their own migration to the United States. To begin to understand the culture of Mexico’s transnational communities, we must learn about the Mexican history, families, and women who live in both worlds.

118 Cohen, 50.
119 Massey, 150.
120 Hondagneu-Sotelo, Gendered Transitions, 116.
The Women of Casa de los Angeles

Introduction

This collection of interviews from the women in San Miguel de Allende (SMA) provides some insight into life in a small childcare center in Central Mexico. My goals in collecting the interviews were to hear another side of the story of migration and to document experiences of family, migration, and the non-profit organization, Casa de los Angeles.

My freshman year at the university President Bush ran for re-election against John Kerry. The border between the United States and Mexico was a popular and controversial topic. I saw that year, was racism and fear towards Mexican and Latin American immigrants. I researched the lifestyle in Mexico where family members would say goodbye to their migrating sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, fathers, and even mothers. I knew that those who crossed the borders undocumented to find work faced racism and poor working conditions. Since my freshman year at Oregon State University I have continued to research family life, migration, and human rights of migrant workers in the United States.

In the winter of 2007 I interned at Casa de los Angeles (Casa) under the guidance of the founder, Donna Quathamer. In preparing for my internship I continued to take Spanish classes and enrolled in a history class titled “Problems in Latin American History: Men and Machismo in Mexico.” The class centered on gender roles in Mexico from the colonial period to modern day. Readings such as The Meanings of Macho by Matthew C. Gutmann and Erotic Journeys by Gloria Gonzalez-Lopez focused on gender roles within the Mexican society. Reading these books before leaving for Mexico provided me with a foundation for my own research.
Upon arriving in Mexico City, I toured the Zocalo, the National Palace, the Metropolitan Cathedral, Chapultepec Park and the Museum of Anthropology. The following day I explored the Basilica of Guadalupe and the Teotihuacan Pyramids of the Sun and the Moon.

After a few days of traveling around Mexico City, I arrived in SMA. I lived in a studio apartment two blocks from Casa, where I would be working for the next three months. I met Donna during a busy night at Casa. Donna and her current troop of volunteers were decorating the center and organizing gifts for the children to celebrate the Dia de los Reyes.

This organization began seven years ago as a free daycare center located in the heart of SMA. It is a safe haven for the children of mothers who come from the outskirts of town to work or to sell their wares at the local Mercado. Often these children were being left home alone before this center was established. Currently the center provides childcare for fifty families, caring for over eighty children. The center includes rules for every woman to follow. Casa does not charge women money for the childcare services. Instead, the women are expected to work one hour per day in the center, cleaning, cooking and helping in the classroom. In addition to this, every woman must supply a liter of milk every month and must attend the monthly meetings at the center. These meetings include community presentations, changes in scheduling, and welcoming new mothers to the center.

Casa is now a community center in which mothers find the support they need to make a better life for their families. Besides help with their children, these families receive medical care, home and bathroom construction, transitional housing, summer camp, and food bank support. The center has fifty women on their waiting list for the childcare services. Communities within SMA and throughout the United States have provided Casa with the funding to construct and operate an additional childcare center in SMA. The building is expected to open in the fall.
Donna has worked hard to help others by concentrating on building relationships of mutuality that respect the dignity of each individual.

Donna worked with me to write out a detailed work plan and schedule for my three months of internship. One of my top priorities was to interview women at the center about family, Casa de los Angeles, and migration. With her support, I began organizing interview questions for my thesis. I brought with me a digital recorder as well as my laptop to collect the women’s stories. Donna and volunteer Dave Rodriguez helped me with the translation process.

My daily schedule included working and research grants, teaching students at the center, and helping wherever I was needed. I enjoyed working at the center where I could build a rapport with the women who worked while their children were in class. In meeting the women’s children, I found it easy to enter in conversation. Volunteers from the United States constantly pass through the center, generally staying for one to two weeks. I was lucky to be able to stay for a more extended period and get to know the mothers’ and their children’s names. Donna and other mothers helped me by sharing background stories of the center and the individual mothers.

As I continued to work, women came to me to tell their stories, even before I began my interviews. I chose my interview subjects by asking who may be interested and then by individually approaching mothers who spoke to me on a regular, informal basis. I limited my interviews to only ten women, interviewing them only once. Throughout the following pages I use both my personal experiences and the interviews to develop on aspect of women’s lives in Mexico. The women I interviewed were incredible storytellers. All shared their diverse opinions towards migration and heartfelt feelings of the importance of family. Throughout the interviews, women expressed sorrow about childhood experiences, showed hope towards new opportunities,
for both their children’s future and their own provided by Casa de los Angeles, and expressed contrasting opinions of migration to the United States and its effects on their families.
Biographies

Leti, 35-40 years old: Cook at Casa de los Angeles, mother:
Leti welcomed new visitors and prepared food for the entire daycare center. This included breakfast and large lunch. Generally the lunches were cooked to serve nearly eighty people, depending on how many volunteers were present at the center. Leti has four children. Her twins were two-years-old at the time of the interview, Leti was able to work close to her children. At this time, Leti was pursuing her secondary school degree at the local adult night school. Leti has lived in the United States working in both California, and North Carolina, but most of her life was spent in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico.

Elisabel, 20-25 years old: Mother
Elisabel worked one hour a day at the center. Her daughter, age four, ate lunch at the center. Elisabel’s son, only eighteen months, remained in the daycare center throughout the day. Elisabel has worked in pharmacies, factories, and in domestic work. She has lived her entire life in San Miguel de Allende but hoped to migrate to the United States as soon as her children were old enough.

Maria Lena, 35-40 years old: Mother:
Maria Lena worked one hour a day at the center as well. She had two children at the daycare center. Maria Lena’s husband did not support the family which left Maria Lena as the sole provider for her three children. She cleaned homes throughout San Miguel de Allende. Before
having children, Maria Lena lived in the Chihuahua for three years and worked in El Paso, Texas for six months.

**Male, 30-35 years old: Teacher at Casa de los Angeles, mother:**

After enrolling her children in Casa de los Angeles, Male found work and supported her family alone. Eventually, she was hired at Casa de los Angeles to work with the one to two-year-olds group. She was patient and experienced in working with volunteers who only spoke English. When her children graduated from the center, she remained working for Casa de los Angeles. She and all of her family lived in San Miguel de Allende, for their entire lives.

**Maria, 40-45 years old: Teacher at Casa de los Angeles, mother:**

Maria received the job as teacher at Casa de los Angeles. She loved the opportunity to work closely with her family. As a single mother, she needed to find ways to provide for her family that did not leave her children alone throughout the day. When I spoke to her she was attending nursing school on a scholarship from Casa de los Angeles. Maria assisted the local doctor in all of the weekly check-ups for the children at Casa de los Angeles. Maria five children, two of which still go to the center for lunch after school. Maria has lived in the campo of San Miguel de Allende and within the city her entire life. She has many family members, including one son, who live in the United States.

**Mari, 35-40 years old: Teacher at Casa de los Angeles, mother:**

After speaking to Donna Quathamer, Mari decided to go to the center four years ago. She grew up in the outskirts of San Miguel de Allende on a ranch. At sixteen she moved to Guanajuato
where she became a mother. She was a single mother and built her own daycare center by offering childcare to friends and neighbors. A few weeks after this interview, Mari quit her job at Casa de los Angeles. She had to support two daughters in middle school, but her boyfriend was willing to care for her family. Mari lived in La Paz, Guanajuato, San Miguel de Allende, and other towns throughout central Mexico. Though she had family who migrated to the United States, she herself has never left Mexico.

**Rosa, 25-30 years old: Mother:**

Rosa was married with three children. Both were young enough to be in daycare throughout the day. To support her family, she cleaned homes while her husband also worked in town. With both parents working, she could not afford childcare. Grateful for being accepted by Casa de los Angeles, she called the center her second home. Rosa was from a small community near the Rio Bravo in Coahuila. She had only lived in San Miguel de Allende for three years. Many family members and friends of hers had migrated to the United States, but Rosa has no desire to cross the border. For Rosa, this would be a dangerous and even deadly option.

**Lola, 40-45 years old: Teacher at Casa de los Angeles, mother:**

Lola was one of the first women to receive help from Casa de los Angeles. She was married, and had a large family. She had five children to provide for and the youngest two were twins. When I worked at Casa de los Angeles, Lola’s sons, called the “Gordos,” and her daughter would remain at the center in the morning and go to school in the afternoon. At the center, Lola worked with the youngest group, babies who range from five to ten months old. Lola has lived in San Miguel de Allende for all of her life. Her husband, however, has worked in the US at various times.
**Marta, 25-30 years old: Mother:**

Of my interviews, Marta was the newest mother at the center. She had one child at the center and other children who attended public school. She was married but lived away from her family. This made childcare very difficult for her. Marta’s husband was working in the United States at this time. She had been at the center for only one month. Though her mother lived in Guadalajara and her husband and other family members lived in the US, she remained in San Miguel de Allende.

**Erica, 30-35 years old: Teacher at Casa de los Angeles, mother**

Erica was one of the few employees hired as a teacher before her children attended Casa de los Angeles. Erica was married and trained as a teacher. She was proud to work in daycare because she believed in helping children build confidence and provide an early, necessary education. She lived in Leon, Celaya, and San Miguel de Allende with her husband and family. She never lived outside of Mexico, but her husband had migrated to the United States early on in their marriage.
Family, Migration and Casa de los Angeles

Each individual woman told her own story of family, migration, and her time at Casa de los Angeles. Throughout the following section I will be examining the diverse experiences of childhood and motherhood, being a part of the sending community, feelings towards migration, and expressing future goals of the women. No one’s story completely parallels another. The most important aspect of this section presents the voices of women who have lived through the challenges of being a low-income working mother in a transnational community.

The childhoods of the mothers motivated the mothers to improve their situation in life and provide more opportunities for their children. Maria grew up on a ranch where her family grew beans, corn, goats and cows. She remembers how different her childhood was from the childhood of her children today. By living out in the campo, Maria had limited access to educational opportunities and worked at a young age. Her mother had fourteen children. As of the younger siblings, Maria watched her older brothers continue on with their education while she stayed at home. Maria recalled this as being very difficult for her. She dedicated her life to learning, but her family could not afford her the opportunities of education. Now, Maria looks back at her life and says that though her childhood was a difficult time for her, it was beautiful because she had learned so much about family.

Maria Lena faced a similar childhood, growing up on the outskirts of San Miguel de Allende. Though her family farmed for a living, her father migrated to the United States, leaving the children and mother behind to take care of the farm on their own. The statements from the women who grew up in low-income households did not complain about the childhoods. They made promises. The women found ways to overcome their past and provide for their children. Leti is a special example of one woman who courageously found ways to change her children’s
experiences from her own. As a young girl, Leti’s mother worked many hours to support her family. Leti recalled her father as being unemployed and an alcoholic. In tears, Leti described her mother’s struggle to keep the home together. Her mother sold tamales, atole, and tortillas in order to send her children to school. Though Leti did not attend school past the sixth year, she had seen her mother’s struggle to providing for a family, and incorporated her mother’s strength and dedication into her own life.

Not many mothers at the center attended school past the sixth year. Some teachers hired came to the center with teaching credentials while other women were mothers at the center before becoming teachers. Erica, who taught two-year-olds, began working at the center as a mother. She could not pay for childcare and had no family to help watch the children during the days that she worked. As a result, she interviewed at Casa de los Angeles and was welcomed into the little community. Eight months later, Erica interviewed for an open teacher opportunity at the center and was hired. Both Lola and Maria began working at the center after their children attended daycare for a few months. Lola and Maria had no official training, but remained to work at the center for a long period of time. Eventually, Maria applied to further her education with a scholarship from Casa de los Angeles. While I interned at Casa de los Angeles, Maria spent the weekends traveling to Queretaro to attend nursing school. Leti, too, continued on with her schooling by attending night classes in San Miguel de Allende, with the goal of receiving her high school diploma. Leti and Maria were a part of the daycare community for a few years before pursuing additional educational opportunities.

For many mothers, the ability to provide for their families was a huge achievement in itself. Though Rosa and her husband both worked, she still needed inexpensive childcare. Because of low wages, Rosa needed to work, find daycare for her children, and support the
household. After her husband became unemployed, the family depended on Rosa’s wages but left her without any methods of childcare. When I asked about her husband’s role in the family, she explained that she was lucky because he was not a machista. She went on explaining that he was not lazy, he did not expect to be served, and he helped around the house and with the children. Rosa felt that though they had a low income, she and her husband worked together to support the home. Marta, another new, married mother to the center worked in the mercado to support her family. Though work monopolized her day, she found time to work at the center and see her children. Maria Lena felt also that her work throughout the day still allowed her time to visit and care for her children. Maria Lena worked full-time in cleaning houses throughout San Miguel de Allende. With the available childcare and support system provided by Casa de los Angeles, Maria Lena told me that had been planning to finish her high school education.

Many women have lived most all their lives in San Miguel de Allende. Elisabel, Mari, and Male all grew up with fathers who either migrated constantly or became alcoholics. Elisabel’s father worked within San Miguel de Allende hotels. She remembered that when her father lost his sight due to drinking, her mother became to sole supporter of the family. In order to help her mother, Elisabel left school and worked to support the family. Around San Miguel de Allende, Elisabel has worked as a painter, a cashier, at CASA, a non-governmental organization for adolescents, and in the hotel industry. When I met Elisabel, she was cleaning three homes everyday. San Miguel de Allende attracts a large ex-patriot community from the United States and Canada. Elisabel wanted to learn English so as to better communicate with her employers who could not speak Spanish. Male’s father, like Elisabel’s, was also an alcoholic. The constant drinking led to her father’s unemployment which pushed Male into the workforce as a young
girl. She and her siblings worked on the streets by selling whatever they could. Mari, too, spent most of her childhood struggling for a better life.

Though the women struggled with their family lives, many remained close and participated in religious activities. When I asked if the importance of religion in their childhood was different from that of their children’s, many said ‘no.’ All of the women I interviewed identified as being Catholic. Casa de los Angeles did not require a religious affiliation to be admitted into the daycare center. Still, in many cases, the women predominantly identified with being Catholic. Mari mentioned that she would go to church every week as a child and now did the same with her own children. Lola had a similar story, stating that religion had the same importance in her children’s lives as it does in her own. She was born Catholic and so were her children. Marta had seen many differences in her children’s lives from her own childhood, but stated that even though her children have different educational opportunities; their belief in Catholicism has remained constant throughout their lives.

Close to the end of the interviews, I asked how migration to the United States had affected their lives. Every woman had either migrated to the US or had a loved one in the United States. Three women’s stories of migration stood out to me. For these women, crossing the border meant economic stability and higher living standards. Leti, Maria Lena, and Elisabel all have their own migrant experiences. Leti left for the United States for economic reasons and to be with her sister. After working for almost a year and a half in stores and restaurants in Los Angeles, California, Leti moved to North Carolina to work with her sister. There she found work but spoke very little English. After six months in the North Carolina, she returned home. Though her sister continued to live in North Carolina, Leti remarked that she would never go back. She came to the understanding that there was no way to make money in Mexico, but the money she
made in the US brought her unhappiness. While in the United States she encountered racism and felt sad for leaving her family in San Miguel de Allende.

Maria Lena experienced the sadness that went along with migrating as well. She left her home, alone, to earn money to continue her education. In part, she was curious about the United States. Two of her brothers had worked in the United States and sent money home. Maria Lena lived in Chihuahua for three years and then crossed into El Paso, Texas for an additional six months. She returned to San Miguel de Allende and did not mention any interest in returning to the United States. The third story comes from Elisabel. She is the younger of the mothers I interviewed. She had never been to the United States. In a contradiction to how many of the women felt about migration, Elisabel wanted to live in US. She had plans of buying a house and supporting her children through school. She said she was waiting for children to grow a little older, and then she would plan a trip to the United States. The money and the dangers of crossing concerned her most. While sitting in the interview, Elisabel described her connections to the US and her plans for migration. Upon arriving, her sister-in-law in Dallas, Texas could help her find a job, and she even mentioned eventually contacting me for domestic work opportunities. Though many women in the center experienced the harmful affects of migration, many women agreed that migration was necessary in their lives.

I want to tell six women’s personal experiences with sending loved ones to the United States. I am going to start with the women who have been involved with the center for a longer period of time. Maria, for example, has had four brothers cross without documentation. The brothers left without any way to communicate or with any plans of where they would be and when they would return. As a mother, Maria had a son leave for the US. She had limited to no contact with him. She felt lost. She has no idea where or who her son is today. Lola’s husband
migrated one year after they were married. He has since gone multiple times. Lola mentioned that she once heard her son say, “When I finish school here, I’m going to go!” The fear of sending her husband was that he may never return. Like Lola, Erica’s husband goes back and forth from Mexico to the United States. Erica said, “It is very difficult for the sending family to work without the husband, but it is also hard for the husband. The children are without their father… two years without their father. They do not know him.”

The women who had recently arrived at the center had similar feelings. When Elisabel’s boyfriend went to the US, she was alone, without any help with her family. He wanted to return, but needed to continue working. Elisabel mentioned that though she has a large family in the US, they do not visit; they go to the north to find work, provide for their children and cut contacts with family and friends in Mexico. Marta expressed feeling of worry when her husband left to the US, alone. When he lived in the US, he was very sick. Without any connections and only having little money, he could not support his family, he could barely support himself. He remained in the US for two years, not knowing his own children. Marta felt that this was the most difficult aspect of migration. The family breaks down and the wife becomes the sole provider for the household.

When family members leave for the US, they return, having new experiences and even character changes. One of Maria’s brothers moved to the United States and married another Mexican immigrant. They now live in the US with their children. They return to Mexico once a year for five to seven days at a time. She remarked on how nieces and nephews do not speak Spanish and have lost their Mexican culture. Maria’s ex-husband temporarily migrated to the US. He began a cycle of two years abroad and five months home. Eventually, Maria saw changes in his behavior. He contributed less and less to the family, expecting Maria to provide for the
children almost alone. His character changed for the worse and he more violent and an alcoholic. Maria’s negative and harmful experiences with her husband led her to leaving him and starting a new, safe home for her children.

When the women, their children, or their husbands left for the US, they faced many challenges in both crossing the border and finding jobs. Rosa, who grew up near the Rio Bravo, said that going to the US was dangerous and difficult. For some people she had met, they told her that they preferred to die then to remain in Mexico. Living near the river, Rosa heard various stories of men, women, and children dying while crossing the Rio Bravo. But why do people die to cross? Erica explained to me how the Mexican economy was bad and that making money in the US was easier. When Mexicans arrive in the US they face discrimination and racism, but that matters less when workers can effectively provide for their family. For Erica, both countries have their problems and benefits.

Leti and Mari discussed the limited rights Mexican immigrants have in the United States. Mari described a situation where her families could not afford to stay in Mexico. As a result, the men in the family travel north for work. Though they remain in the US for a limited amount of time, many return to find their families changed. The migrant workers have also had new experiences working in unwelcome, racist environments that ignore the rights of undocumented workers. Leti said that migrating was sad, but necessary. Though immigrants suffer from discrimination and work extremely difficult positions, the work supports large homes for a long period of time.

For many women that I interviewed, they felt that the economy was the leading reason for migration to the US. Male explained that many families needed to go, though it was sad, the money helped families immensely. Crossing the border was a respectable way to provide for the
family. Maria Lena said that migration leaves many children growing up alone. With fathers living in the US for years at a time, they return to their children who do not recognize them. This leads to the separation of families. Maria’s feelings towards migration put an emphasis on the importance of happiness and how money can interfere with families’ in a negative manner. She explained that, “We all want a beautiful life. Going to the US to earn money is difficult and destroys families, it abandons loved ones. Women die crossing. Earning money when you don’t live with your family is not beautiful. I don’t know what happened to my son. I don’t know if her’ married, a drunk, or working. It is sad.” Maria ended by saying that she hoped the US and Mexico could provide working visas for men crossing the border. This was her dream.

During the interviews, I asked how the women found out about Casa de los Angeles. They all told me about their interviews to become part of the center. To be admitted into Casa de los Angeles, the women fill out an application, interview with Donna, the founder and Miguel, the director of the center. Following the interview, Donna and Miguel make a home visit and then arrange plans for accepting the mother and her children into Casa de los Angeles. Leti found Casa de los Angeles when she was having problems with her children’s father. She had twin babies and a four year old who needed daycare. When she arrived at the center, Donna explained that the mothers did not pay money to drop their children off. The women needed to work for one hour a day at the center and donate one liter of milk every month. Leti followed all of the center’s rules and even volunteered for more than her required time. For Leti, Casa de los Angeles opened new doors for her family. Marta heard about the center through Leti, who recommended that Marta apply. Male, too, found the center through word of mouth.

Elisabel, who lived in San Miguel de Allende her entire life, listened to people talk about the center. Since Elizabel worked during the day, she needed daycare for her one year old. She
found a place in town, but was paying 200 pesos a week. This was beyond her budget. By December 2006, Elisabel’s application was accepted at Casa de los Angeles and she finally felt comfortable with her child’s daycare.

Casa de los Angeles allowed for women to work, live with affordable childcare, and see their children throughout the day. Rosa called Casa de los Angeles her second home. She felt accepted and welcomed any time she at the center. Leti, too, felt that she was given a gift when accepted at the center. Not only did she have care for her children, but she was eventually given a job at the center which allowed her to work with her children throughout the day.

Maria’s story of working at the center was most profound. She explained her hesitance to going to Casa de los Angeles. The rules overwhelmed her. Donna and Miguel required all mothers to have their children at the center no later than 9am. Maria did not care much for schedules. To her, 9am meant 9:30am or later. She did not really pay attention to punctuality. By being at the center, Maria found herself becoming more disciplined with her time and lifestyle. The center provided Maria and other mothers with support groups where they talked about building confidence, finding jobs, and supporting their own families. Many of the mothers have similar struggles with family and finances. Through support groups, the women of Casa de los Angeles created an outlet for their own frustrations, but also made friends with women who had gone through similar situations of raising a family as a single mother.

The support groups and scholarships from Casa de los Angeles provided women with the ability to help on another find their own goals for their futures. Women such as Leti have the opportunity to pursue their high school diploma. Maria attended to classes in Queretaro to become a nurse. Though the women have all struggled to support their families, they have found ways to increase confidence in their children as well as in themselves.
The women of Casa de los Angeles have unique lives and stories to tell. Migration and family life both provide happy and sad experiences for everyone. Every woman was concerned about how they could provide for their families. Casa de los Angeles lessened their worries by providing safe, affordable care to their children. Women became more confident and used their support groups to realize their potential as a mother in San Miguel de Allende. Though every woman had their own story, each one was dedicated to helping their children improve their futures. The mothers all showed unconditional love for their families and commitment to welcoming volunteers and new mothers to Casa de los Angeles.
Bibliography