BORDERLANDS TRANSNATIONALISM: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF POLITICAL, GENDER, AND FAMILY TIES ON MEXICAN IMMIGRANT LIFE IN SOUTH TEXAS

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ABSTRACT

BORDERLANDS TRANSNATIONALISM: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF POLITICAL, GENDER,
AND FAMILY TIES ON MEXICAN IMMIGRANT LIFE IN SOUTH TEXAS

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This dissertation examines the immigrant experience of Mexican families residing in the

Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV), a borderlands region geographically located along the Mexico-

U.S. international border. From both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border, this research explores

factors affecting immigrant family life. Specifically, this study examines how and to what extent

Mexican and U.S. state-adopted policies, gender arrangements, and family relations entice

LRGV immigrant families to engage Mexican or U.S.-based resources — and why they are more

involved in one option rather than another. Two approaches are employed to theoretically

capture the behavior of two distinct types of immigrant families: a *transnational model* focusing

on how family life is shaped by numerous external conditions that transcend national borders,

and a *settler model* that examines how family life is shaped within the U.S. This study uses

qualitative data gathered between winter 2009 and fall 2010 in the South Texas-Tamaulipas

border corridor. Twenty-nine in-depth interviews among ten Mexican immigrant families were

conducted; in the field, five local nongovernmental and governmental organizations

representatives were also interviewed. This study found that all ten families engaged

themselves in politics in varied ways, from embracing Mexican political activism to simply

coping with Mexican institutional corruption and institutional racism in the U.S. This research

also concludes that urban families, with greater access to education and labor opportunities,

are more egalitarian than families from rural environments. The geographical proximity

between the rural communities of Tamaulipas and LRGV fosters a constant flow of rural

gendered values and practices from Mexico into the Valley. Finally, data reveal that Mexican-

focused families benefit from their transnational extended family resources to reconcile work

and parenting demands. Of particular significance is the emotional, financial, and childcare

support *abuelas* (grandmothers) residing in Mexico provide to immigrant families living in South

Texas.

Para Tita, Marita, y Alan

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INTRODUCTION

Statement of Purpose

Mexican immigration to the U.S. has been widely researched and its contribution to the

contemporary international immigration scholarship is well documented (e.g. Bustamante

1997; Cornelius 1992; Durand, Massey, and Parrado 1999). In examining previous research on

international migration patterns of Mexican groups and communities, two distinct models are

salient: a settler[1] approach focusing on the movement and relocation of people from one place

to another — implying permanent settlement, and a sojourner[2] approach focusing on a

migratory, but temporary, movement of people across and between borders (Cornelius 1992).

While the settler and sojourner approaches have shaped and influenced important research, it

has to be argued that international migration patterns differ, even among Mexican groups.

Neither approach necessarily provides a better insight into the immigrants who retain their

homeland ties. As an alternative, the transnational approach expands our understanding of

migration

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[1] Historically, much scholarship on the settler approach has been associated with the highly contested assimilation approach, which according to Park (2005), it refers to societal expectations of "the immigrant [to] readily take over the language, manners, the social ritual, and outward forms of his adopted country" (Pp. 34). However, other approaches have attempted to answer issues on the settlement process that the traditional model on assimilation could not do it such as the bumpy-line approach (Gans 1992), the neo-assimilation approach (Alba and Nee 2003), and the segmented assimilation approach (Portes and Zhou 1993).

[2] Sojourning is defined as the circular and temporary movement of people across borders (Siu 1952: 34). States prevent immigrants' permanent settlement by restricting immigrants' biological and social reproduction in the U.S. (Bustamante and Alemán 2007: 80).

> ...as a multi-level process (demographic, political, economic, cultural, and familial) that involves various links between two or more settings rather than a discrete event constituted by a permanent move from one nation to another (Gold 1997: 410).

This dissertation delves closely into the family lives of Mexican immigrants residing in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV), a region geographically located along the Mexico-U.S. international border. This dissertation focuses on factors affecting immigrant family life and, specifically, the strategies families follow — based on available options — to cope with larger constraints. The study's central questions are, "how, and to what extent, do Mexican and U.S. state-adopted policies, gender[3] arrangements, and family relations entice LRGV immigrant families to engage Mexican or U.S.-based resources?" and "why are they more involved in one option rather than another?" I also observe individuals and families who rely on nation-specific or transnational resources, study and address what areas they use these resources (for example, work, gender, family, politics), and how it affects their self-identity, social outlook, and economic status. This study examines qualitative data gathered between winter 2009 and fall 2010 from across the South Texas-Tamaulipas border corridor. Twenty-nine in-depth interviews within ten Mexican immigrant families were conducted. In the field, five local nongovernmental and governmental organizations representatives were also interviewed.

A Comparative Approach: Transnationalism and Segmented Assimilation

Because contemporary Mexican-U.S. patterns of migration incorporate a variety of actors, social situations, social forms, and motives, several theoretical models have emerged to explain

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[3] Gender, as a social structure, organizes institutional and individual life around a binary set of woman and man practices (Lorber 2005: 5).

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the complexities of Mexican immigrant family life. I employ two approaches that theoretically

frame the behavior of two sets of immigrant families: a *transnational* model focusing on family

life shaped by multiple external conditions extended across national borders, and a *settler*

model focusing on family life shaped entirely by the U.S. larger society.

Gold (1997) defines transnationalism as the demographic, economic, political, cultural, and

familial processes that link two or more settings (Pp. 410). The transnational model, from

Gold's perspective (1997), has the capacity to bridge the larger and individual approaches of

the contemporary migration literature. While his work acknowledges that broader conditions of

society shape immigrants' lives, it also recognizes that immigrants have the capacity to uniquely

cope with the constraints they face in their daily interactions.

In my own research, I concentrate on the influences of politics, gender issues, and family

linkages across borders in order to examine their effects on family behavioral patterns. I define

transnationalism as an intersection of larger political, gender, and family components of social

structure that constructs a unique matrix that enables us to understand the organization,

formation, and viability of Mexican immigrant families along the Mexico-U.S. border. This

definition is broadly synthetic in nature and intent; it also includes the micro social and

economic conditions that prompt border Mexican immigrants to seek transnational resources.

Other researchers' work (Levitt and Dehesa 2003), for example, refers to the

implementation of inclusive policies as political strategies by governments to regain the

attention and strengthen the allegiance of communities abroad. Portes (2001) similarly

identifies political activism across borders as reflective of nation-state adopted policies

designed to reinforce immigrants' sense of national membership (Pp. 185). Meanwhile, Hirsch

(2003) refers to gender as a large structure built into institutional and individual life, patterned by social and cultural differences, and attached to feminine and masculine characteristics (Pp. 3). Gender, as a collective social order, permeates borders and impacts both male and female relationships (Hirsch 2003). Along these same lines, Rapp (1999) refers to family as a set of individuals related by blood, marriage, and ideological codes who live together or distant (Pp. 181). Romo (2008), in this same way, envisions distant families as larger kin arrangements intended to aid in the reproduction and maintenance of family life beyond physical borders. Family, Romo (2008) suggests, facilitates the reinforcement of the homeland culture and traditions through child-rearing practices (Pp. 95).

In contrast, the settler model presumes distinct and predictive patterns of population movement from one place to another that result in permanent settlement (Portes and Borocz 1989: 615). Permanent settlement, however, has been improperly associated with the traditional concept of assimilation. This contested model highlights societal pressures to incorporate immigrants into primary groups so they can experience upward social mobility and become immersed into a homogenous identity (Park 2005: 35). Present research has shifted from this traditional approach. There are several types of identified assimilation, such as bumpy-line[4], the neo-assimilation[5], and segmented assimilation. I concentrated on the segmented assimilation model.

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[4] Gans (1992), in very general terms, argues that assimilation is not linear, instead, there are large society forces such as education and media that precludes a straight-line integration path.

[5] Alba and Nee (2003) suggest that large streams of immigration, a labor segmented market, and race may affected negatively immigrants' adaptation path, however, assimilation even in this social environment is inevitable.

This model offers a different viewpoint of the assimilation experience. Zhou (1997), for instance, defines segmented assimilation as an integration path shaped by the interaction between receiving societal conditions (such as race, class, place of residence) and individual-level factors (e.g. English proficiency, age upon arrival, length of residence) (Pp. 984). From the interaction between these two sets of determinants, segmented assimilation presumes three different pathways of adaptation: an upward integration pattern, in terms of acculturation and economic mobility into a middle-class status, a downward adaption and acculturation pattern into the lower-strata levels of society, and a middle-class mobility pattern with a strong connection to the immigrant community (Zhou 1997: 984).

In this paper, I examine the effects of U.S. adopted policies, gender arrangements, and family relations on family adaption paths. I define this model as a set of unequal happenstance that is shaped by interactions between individual-level components, state-adopted policies, and gender arrangements[6], and influenced by family values and expectations along the border.

Chavez (2008), for example, refers to the U.S. state-adopted policies as national political strategies specifically designed to prevent the construction of community camaraderie among Mexicans living in the U.S. Chavez's (2008) argument is based on a historically negative U.S. reception associated with the social construction of Mexicans as a racial or demographic threat — like illegal aliens, drug-dealers, and smugglers — to the U.S. mainstream society. Acker

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[6] Note however, as a theoretical model, segmented assimilation does not take gender as an element of analysis. For purposes of this research, and based on scholarly evidence (see Fouron and Glick-Schiller 2001: 540) that shows gender as a key element of the family settlement process, I decided to include gender as a significant factor to understand immigrant families who engage U.S. based resources.

(1992) refers to gender as a social structure that, in spite of its equality gains, still organizes social institutions along men and women lines (Pp. 567). Since gender has a significant influence on the migration process, according to Goldring (2001), it redefines immigrant family integration paths. For instance, a women's proclivity to permanently settle may overshadow dithering men's reluctance. Barret and McIntosh (1998) refer to family as a set of specific living arrangements around social and cultural norms dominant in society. The U.S. family organization, they say, is dominated by individualistic ideological stresses, independence, and self-sufficiency as fundamental components for the creation and sustainability of family life.

New Insights

Unlike previous research on Mexican immigration that strictly considered longer-distance transnational case studies between the U.S. and Mexico (see Rouse 2004; Smith 2006), this research project undertakes a study of how the use (and non-use) of transnational resources influences immigrant family patterns in a region geopolitically located near Mexico. Two components of this research project are salient: demographics and proximity to Mexico. The Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV), as one of the most Mexican densely populated regions in the U.S. and its proximity to Mexico as a borderlands region, "…allows one to see more clearly those social, cultural, and family linkages that bridge two nations" (Márquez 2008: 167). It also creates an impression that *all* immigrant families in the LRGV engage to some degree in transnational life. This issue provokes a comparison of both sets of families and explores the exogenous and endogenous conditions in which transnational life operates. This work also studies the absence of these variables, contributing new insights into international migration studies.

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Data and Methods

The project includes qualitative data gathered between winter 2009 and fall 2010 in both the Lower Rio Grande Valley and across the border in Tamaulipas. Collected data primarily came from in-depth, personal interviews conducted with Mexican Immigrant families and legitimate governmental officials; participants were referrals by University of Texas-Pan American alumnus. My research includes an extensive collection, transcription, and analysis of field notes from interviews on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. Due to the ethnographic nature and specific purpose of this research, a convenience purposive sample was utilized to select families participating in the study.

Twenty-nine in-depth interviews within ten Mexican immigrant families were conducted. Each family member was interviewed separately. Five interviews were conducted with key official spokespeople representing the McAllen's Mexican consulate office, Instituto Municipal de la Mujer en Reynosa (IMM), Sistema para el Desarrollo Integral de La Familia en Reynosa (DIF), Child Care Management Services (CCMS), and Mujeres Unidas nongovernmental organization. While interviews from both sets of families were collected only in Texas' Lower Rio Grande Valley, official interviews were conducted and key field data were amassed from both sides of the region.

To analyze the interviews and field data, I drew on a three-step process — coding, thematic analysis, and description (Loftland, Snow, Anderson, and Loftland 2006: 232). I initially open-coded interviews into analytic patterns from participant families and officials by conducting multiple readings; the qualitative software *Atlas ti6* and a more focused strategy were then used to identify previously unreported patterns and anomalies. Once patterns were identified,

a thematic analysis was created to highlight and distinguish similarities and differences in the interviews. Finally, my field notes provided ample material to describe, in greater detail, interactive patterns between environments and study participants.

Research Questions

Drawing upon transnational and segmented assimilation approaches as my central frameworks and in-depth interviews and fieldwork as my qualitative methods, I address the overarching objective of this research project through the following specific research questions:

1. How do state-adopted policies of both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border influence national membership behavioral patterns? How does the Mexican immigrant family, who engages in political transnationalism, differ from the Mexican immigrant family that favors U.S.-based resources?

2. How does gender, as portrayed on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border, sustain inequalities or redefine relations between women and men? Do Mexican immigrant families, who engage in transnationalism, show more or less egalitarian practices than Mexican immigrant families that adhere to the U.S.-based gender order?

3. How do family practices — particularly parenting as it is viewed from both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border — affect children? How does the Mexican immigrant family, who utilizes kin resources across the border, differ from families that favor U.S.-provided resources?

Significance

To appreciate the significance of the transnational model, much of the immigration scholarship has documented its mere existence and numerical incidence (Portes 2001: 183). A study conducted by Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller (2003) found that at least three of every 10 Colombian, Dominican, and Salvadoran immigrants engaged in political and economic transnational activities (Pp. 1238).While transnationalism seems to be numerically exceptional, it is important to emphasize its importance as an emerging concept. The rationale posited in

this argument is in its potential numerical expansion across several immigrant groups, the expansion of personal and community linkages across borders through the use of technological innovations and cheaper transportation, and the growing attention paid to immigrants residing abroad (Portes 2001: 187-190). This, in turn, encourages more immigrants to engage in transnational practices making this emergent model worthy of further research.

Segmented assimilation, as a coexisting model in this project, provides the theoretical support to explain immigrants' behavioral patterns affected by external conditions during the settlement process. The significance of this settler approach, as an alternative explanation to traditional models, centers on its partial disassociation from the normative concept on assimilation as a *universal* settler model (Zhou 1997: 987). Segmented assimilation posits that, although a pathway to upward mobility remains relevant, it rejects the idea of assimilation as synonymous with upward mobility. Incorporation into the mainstream, according to Zhou (1997), is precluded or enhanced by the interaction between larger factors (like race and class) and individual components (such as level of education) thereby rendering immigrant populations especially vulnerable. Mexicans, as the largest Latino population group in the U.S., offer a unique opportunity to examine divergent models of immigrant behavior and, of particular significance, the exploration of adaptation paths immigrants follow.

The U.S. Bureau of the Census concluded on July 1, 2002 that the Hispanic population is now the largest minority group in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau Report 2003). This finding is especially important to people of Mexican origin because they comprise 60% of the total Latino population (Guzmán 2001: 2; Sáenz 2004: 5); immigration remains a pervasive demographic aspect of Mexicans in the United States. Recent research demonstrates that, after

the 1960s, Mexican-origin population growth in the United States was spurred by immigration.

Rumbaut, Foner, and Gold (1999), for instance, state that since the 1960s México has

contributed 28% of all immigrants to the United States (p. 1259). Bean and Stevens (2003) also

point out that U.S. immigration policies have influenced Mexican immigration flows (Pp. 47).

The Immigration Act of 1965 effectively eliminated national origin quotas in favor of family

preferences, but the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 prodded a shift from

seasonal migration to permanent settlement thereby contributing to an increase in migration

from Mexico. Because of these reasons, both positive and negative attention on people of

Mexican origin has increased[7]. To attain a greater understanding of the implications of this

demographic shift it is necessary to conduct further empirical research on the Mexican[8]

population.

Now that Latinos are the largest minority group in the U.S., immigrant families have become

a focal point of unabashed media attention and undue public scrutiny. Beginning on Oct. 21,

2009, CNN broadcast a prime-time, special, 2-day report "Latino in America" (O'Brien 2009). As

the largest and fastest growing minority group in the U.S., Soledad O'Brien reported, Latinos

continuously reshape communities across the nation with key social, economic, and familial

implications. Of particular importance is the report's emphasis on Latino immigrant families. It

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[7] According to Acuña (2007), before the Immigration Act of 1965 Mexico did not have a national quota, after, the new policy imposed a 40,000 documented immigrants' cap (Pp. 253). Yet, as Hondagneu-Sotelo (1997) has noted, this cap on Mexican admittances has served to encourage more Mexican undocumented immigration into the U.S.

[8] Wherein previous immigration policies encouraged seasonal migration rather than settlement, in 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) reversed the sojourning pattern of the Mexican migrant population to a permanent settlement (Durand, Massey, and Parrado 1999).

prompts scholars, as Gilgun (1992) suggests, to pursue empirical research on intra-family dynamics and between families and outside systems (Pp. 24). But Gold (2000) reminds us that, while the significance of examining the interaction between outside systems and immigrant families require envisioning them as "…rational collectives, capable of developing strategies to cope with the contingencies presented by their social and economic circumstances" (Pp. 82), it remains equally important to examine how families shaped by conflict between men and women with specific needs affects the decision making, adaptation, and identity processes (Gold 2000: 83).

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters. Following the introduction, I review the literature and explain why border immigrant family life is contextualized within the transnational and segmented assimilation analytical frameworks. In Chapter Two, a detailed description and rationale of the methods utilized in this study is offered. Closer attention is given to the research questions, data collection techniques, sampling strategy, data analyses, and limitations of the study. In the third chapter, I provide a demographic portait of the Texas-Mexico border and a definition of the traditional Mexican immigrant family. In Chapter Four, I offer an account of how state-adopted policies in both Mexico and the U.S. entice immigrant families to utilize nation-based resources. In the fifth chapter, I present a thorough description of how border immigrant family life is influenced by gender arrangements on both sides of the Mexico-U.S. border. Chapter Six provides a detailed description of the transnational strategies developed by Mexican immigrant families as they struggle to reconcile work with parenting demands. Finally, in Chapter Seven, I conclude this study by summarizing key findings;

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particular attention is given to methodology and scholarly contributions to the sociological

literature.

CHAPTER ONE

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RELEVANT LITERATURE

This chapter is organized in a twofold format. First, it provides a theoretical argument to frame the research project, then undertakes an integrative approach — a theory that frames structure and agency as mutually constitutive — to explain the relationship between the larger society and individuals. Secondly, it reviews relevant literature that touches upon central components of the dissertation project.

To clarify the subject, Giddens (1984) and Risman (2004) provide exceptional insights into the analyses of social life on structural and individual action levels. Today, as in the past, a theory that situates structure as constraint and individual action as human agency[9] remains relevant; it encourages social scientists to consider structure and individual action as two mutually shaped and affected — but opposing — systems (Risman 2004: 431). The principles of this approach help distinguish the roles larger social structure play — in terms of state-adopted policies, gender arrangements, and family relations — on both sides of the Texan-Mexican border, and help identify how and why Mexican immigrant families engage transnational resources over U.S. based ones (see Figure 1).

I used two major approaches to theoretically frame the engagement of immigrant families: a *transnational* model focusing on immigrant life affected and influenced by politics, gender issues, and family ties across borders, and a *settler* model focusing on immigrant life shaped

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[9] According to Risman (2004), human agency is constituted by the actions individuals take to shape, resist, and challenge social institutions that constraint them (Pp. 431).

primarily by the U.S. society. In doing so, this section charts literature and selective examples of

academic work from multiple disciplines (Sociology, Anthropology, Political Science, etc.) by

scholars who have already laid the groundwork in these areas. Lastly, I explain — by using

literature centered on both models — why the descriptions of immigrant family life in the U.S.-

Mexico borderlands can also be so elusive.

Figure 1 An Explorative Framework

Contributing Factors	Social Unit of Study	
Mexican Based		Transnational Engagement
Political Gender Familial	Border Mexican Immigrant Families	Action
U.S. Based		U.S.-Based Engagement
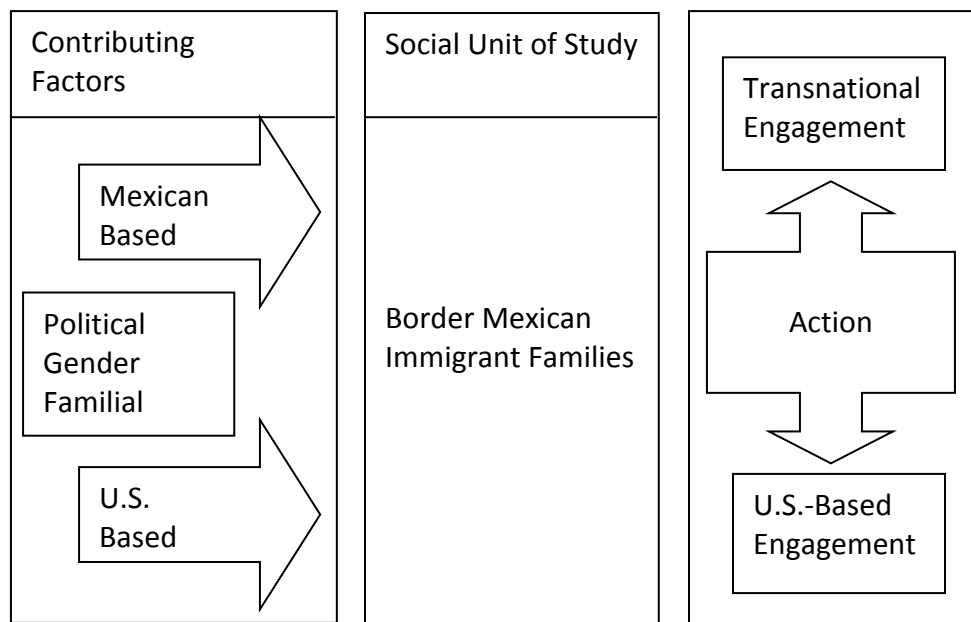
A Transnational Perspective

Gold (1997) refers to the transnational[10] approach as a flow of ideas, people, and resources

across national settings shaped by political, economic, cultural, and familial components (Pp.

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[10] Similarly, Guarnizo and Smith (1998) define transnationalism as the spatial mobility of migrants, exchange of ideas, and construction of linkages across national borders (Pp. 11). According to this concept, the organization of transnational life is shaped from above and from below. While the former refers to actions taken by governments and corporations, the latter refers to the actions taken by migrants and community organizations (Guarnizo and Smith 1998).

410). Gold (2000) also suggests that the creation and maintenance of these linkages is affected by the interaction between broader social structures and individual actions. The underlying argument is that the organization of transnational life in communities abroad is shaped by the "…actions of nation-states, multinational corporations, and social and political movements, as well as the actions of migrants themselves" (Gold 2000: 74). This also means that social life — in a transnational sense — is not only undertaken by border crossers, it includes people who infrequently move or do not move at all. Rouse (2004) similarly points out that transnational life takes place in a tied social space across borders (Pp. 7).

Rouse's (2004: 25) research on transnational social space construction, for instance, uses the "socio-spatial" subjective construction of space as a "migrant circuit" to situate the place where members conduct their everyday life activities (Pp. 31). Rouse (2004) empirically suggests this transnational social space contributes to the development of what he calls a "transnational migrant circuit — a single community spread across a variety of sites" (Pp. 30), as he describes in his concrete study between the cities of Aguililla, Michoacán and Redwood City, California.

The "transnational migrant circuit" between Aguililla and Redwood City has been constructed, according to Rouse (2004), as a result of a socioeconomic asymmetrical relationship between Mexico and the United States. America's labor-market — a demand-driven engine for Mexican migrants intended to fulfill specific labor shortages in the *maquila,*[11]

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[11] Maquiladoras are assembly-type factories mostly located along the Mexican side of the U.S.-Mexico border. Because of the nature of an assembly line, women are favored over men to work in repetitive and monotonous tasks. Although people working in the assembly lines are

low-wage service industry, and agricultural arena — provides many Mexican migrants with job opportunities. However, it also precludes and discourages permanent settlement and integration. Rouse (2004) suggests that limited social mobility and limited work opportunities for Aguilillans and their children (beyond the labor and service sectors) have reconfigured the social space in which they exist. As such, Aguilillans are prodded to search for more sustainable livelihoods — particularly entrepreneurial opportunities — in Mexico (Rouse 2004: 29).

In terms of social life, Rouse (2004) depicts transnational social space between Aguililla and Redwood City as a single arena where relationships are reproduced despite their geographical distance (Pp. 30). This transnational social space facilitates political, economic, cultural, and familial activities in which Mexican migrants participate in "decision-making" and "familial events" despite the significance of national boundaries (Rouse 2004: 30). The expansion of technology — such as telephone access — allows people in Aguililla and Redwood City to remain mutually connected in a single transnational social space (Rouse 2004: 30).

Similarly, Smith (2006) compares transnational life between Ticuani, Mexico and New York City by using political, gender, and assimilation components (Pp. 9). Transnational migration emerges from the immigrants' ability to negotiate membership and communal identity through the maintenance of practices across national boundaries. According to Smith (2006), the influence of technology and civic institutions (hometown organizations) create and maintain transnational life in a single community space between Ticuani and New York (Pp. 64). Although the concept of community remains highly contested. Unlike Rouse (2004), who

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prodded to get a certain degree of specialization in their tasks, the repetitive nature of the work does not require people to be highly skilled (personal field notes).

prefers to use the term "migrant circuit" to contextualize transnational life, Smith (2006) argues

that "community" has its merits. It facilitates the analysis of the social construction of a single

community based on specific historical, regional, and local characteristics (Smith 2006: 5).

Transnational practices, defined as activities related to the mobilization of "…people, ideas,

exchanges, material resources, and multi-sited projects…" are components that facilitate life

across national boundaries despite the significance of borders and national identities (Smith

2006: 3-4). According to him, transnational practices combined with technological advances

contribute to the transformation of community life, as in Ticuani and New York City (Pp. 64).

The substitution of regular "snail mail" for telephone, for instance, changes the way in which

members conduct their transnational community life. The use of video tapes and access to

direct flights between New York City and Mexico City also enhances the influence of decision-

making *Ticuanenses* from New York have on the public and private lives of *Ticuanenses* in

Mexico (Smith 2006: 64).

However, even a transnational community established between Ticuani and New York City

has its shortcomings; life is deeply gendered considering it is mostly men that make most key

political decisions for hometown improvements. According to Smith (2006), class and status,

particularly when associated with education, create a socially stratified community that

influences the social and political decision-making process. Old *Caciquismo*, a form of bossism,

has been gradually replaced by hometown committee-ism from New York City, creating a new

hierarchy and displacing people originally from the same community and residing in Ticuani.

Still, this community subsists because there is common middle-ground between members of

the transnational Ticuani-New York City community, which cooperate for the benefit of

Ticuanenses (Smith 2006: 84).

As mentioned, Rouse (2004) argues that transnational social life emerges and is maintained as a necessity because of limited life opportunities and social mobility between Aguililla and Redwood City. On the other hand, Smith (2006) suggests transnational social life emerges and is maintained because of a strong initiative between collective agency — underscoring the desire of Ticuanenses from New York City to benefit the community of Ticuani. Smith (2001) also suggests that transnational social life between Los Angeles and Mexico emerges and flourishes because of immigration and economic public policies (such as IRCA 1986, NAFTA 1994, Dual Nationality by Mexico). In this way, Smith (2001) wrote "[It is] a politically produced outcome of historically specific policy initiatives" (Pp. 78). Smith (2001) argued that the "Dual Nationality" policies passed by Mexico benefits communities in both Mexico and Los Angeles. Two assumptions underpin Smith's (2001) argument; the first suggests that the longer Mexican migrants maintain a transnational social life, the longer they will be continue sending remittances and empowering local communities in rural and urban areas of Mexico. The other alludes to the benefits of living a transnational life manifested in a limited, but steady, rise of immigrant influence on the policy-making process of the localities where they live in the United States (Smith 2001: 78).

A vast amount of the literature, based in long-distance transnationalism, has driven the scholarly research between Mexico and the United States. While this scholarship provides important elements of analysis, there is little research that provides in-depth information on how transnational life operates in region geopolitically adjacent to Mexico. A serious attempt to correct this research gap has been made by Rangel-Ortiz (2008) and Romo (2008). Yet, to speak

of these transnational studies as research conducted in a geographical region contiguous to

Mexico, it is quite debatable. In spite of this, Romo (2008) makes a case:

> "…San Antonio, although not physically located within the territory traditionally defined
> as the border, is a transnational border city and an important area in which to study
> transnational children and families (Pp. 77)."

Drawing on this notion, Rangel-Ortiz (2008) examined entrepreneurship patterns by affluent

Mexicans operating between San Antonio and several Mexican cities. This study explores how

entrepreneurship affects the construction of transnational socio-cultural identities of wealthy

Mexicans that rely more on family ties than institutional capital for entrepreneurial ventures.

According to Rangel-Ortiz (2008), several Mexican entrepreneurs find it particularly difficult to

cope with the constraints of adapting themselves to the business environment of the U.S. This

particular situation alienates Mexicans from the United States local business culture thereby

making them more dependent on family and friends as reliable sources of capital. As a result,

Rangel-Ortiz (2008) research suggests, most transnational entrepreneurs use ethnic ties as

strategies to overcome the multitude challenges they face while doing business in the U.S.

(Pp.102).

Romo (2008) similarly examines the reproduction and maintenance of social ties between

Monterrey and San Antonio. However, the focus of Romo's (2008) study centers more on the

construction of transnational identities influenced by the educational, cultural, and family ties

on San Antonio's Mexican and Mexican American residents. Of particular importance are the

impact traditions, customs, and extended family make on newer generations. Romo (2008), for

example, found that grandparents contribute greatly to the reinforcement of culture and

identity by engaging grandchildren into Spanish-speaking conversations and Mexican media

exposure (Romo 2008: 95). This is not to say that city-dwelling Mexican immigrants are insulated from the larger American society. But as Romo (2008) quoted in one of the interviews, "…[people] continue feeling Mexican, and at the same time, we are trying to accept American policies. But as far as possible, we follow much of the Mexican culture" (Pp. 93).

Although the contribution of transnational literature is vast, it also creates the impression that most immigrant families only engage in transnational life while scholars shy away from other settlement behavioral patterns too difficult to explain with a single theory. To understand this variant of scholarship, Zhou's (1997) segmented assimilation theory was used to frame the settlement conditions of immigrant families affected by their context of reception.

A Settler Approach: The Segmented Assimilation Perspective

Zhou (1997) refers to the segmented assimilation approach as "…a middle-range theory that concerns why different patterns of adaptation emerge among contemporary immigrants and how these patterns necessarily lead to destinies of convergence or divergence" (Pp. 984). Acculturation and economic integration are salient components in this adaptation process. The interaction between these two factors may lead migrants to at least three possible outcomes: upward mobility, where migrants acculturate and integrate into the middle class segment; downward mobility, where migrants neither acculturate nor integrate; and concomitant economic integration and preservation of ethnic values and solidarity, or "lagged acculturation" (Portes and Zhou 1993: 82; Zhou 1997: 984). These possible outcomes originate from the interaction between the larger structure and individual-level determinants where the former includes race, parent's social class, and the place of residence, and the latter involves education, language proficiency, place of birth, age of entry, and length of residency (Zhou

20

1997: 984). Along with these migrants' characteristics, the process of adaptation is also precluded (or enhanced) by the migrants' context of reception. Portes and Rumbaut (2006) defined the context of reception as the positive or negative factors that affect immigrants' adaptation into a society where access to better life opportunities are conditioned (or enhanced) by immigration policies, labor prospects, and ethnic community resources (Pp. 94).

In examining the Mexican experience, if history is a point of reference, a growing body of literature has already documented the social position of Mexicans in the United States as an oppressed minority (Acuña 2007). Social scientists suggest that the socio-economic status of Mexican immigrants is affected by current social and economic upheavals, thus limiting their life chances and negatively impacting their (upward) social mobility.

Rodriguez (1993), for instance, implies that America's economic transformation from an industrial to a post-industrial society specifically impacted Latino immigrants. It created a labor market environment that positions inner-city immigrants as a convenient source of low-wage, service-oriented labor. The lack of English proficiency and education, Rodriguez (1993) argued, aggravates even more immigrants' conditions by creating a social environment of isolation that reduces their opportunities to experience upward mobility (Pp. 125)

According to Portes and Rumbaut (2006), poor ethnic networks also contribute to the perpetuation of a racially stratified secondary labor market filled mostly by Mexicans. Because this secondary labor market is plump with lower status jobs offering limited social mobility, local citizens tend to reject them. The secondary labor market, therefore, is occupied mostly by immigrants — recruited through ethnic networks — willing to work under these conditions. In the United States, this has led to Mexicans being identified as a ripe source of cheap manual

labor, a racially predetermined notion that implies Mexicans — as a group — are well-suited for lower-wage type of jobs (Portes and Rumbaut 2006: 100).

Valdez (2006), in a study with census data, tested the segmented assimilation theory and found two divergent mobility outcomes between low- and high-skilled Mexican workers associated to their length of residence and nativity (Pp. 414). Valdez's work reveals a pattern of downward mobility between low-skilled jobs and earnings, and an upward trend among skilled workers. In the former, Valdez (2006) theorizes that a combination of individual attributes and a hostile reception economically position Mexicans as a "working poor" group. In the latter, it is argued that higher skilled Mexicans are better prepared to integrate themselves into the mainstream society despite adversity attributed mostly to nativistic policies and blatant discrimination (Valdez 2006: 419).

Accounts that do provide exceptional insights on the subject also focus on the cultural aspects of the assimilation process. Muñoz, Goldberg, and Vargas-Chanes (2002), for instance, found that Mexican children who settled in Iowa with their families follow a bicultural pattern of adaptation. This study poses the argument that a bicultural outcome is predicted when immigrant families prod children to assimilate linguistically (that is, to become proficient in English) and when families entice the same children to appreciate their mother tongue and home culture (Muñoz, Goldberg, and Vargas-Chanes 2002: 68). However, the work also determined that cultural assimilation is precluded by the racist and discriminatory conditions of the local educational system. This situation, Muñoz *et al.* (2002) suggest, produces an oppositional attitude in children against the white culture, which precludes upward mobility and "…full societal integration" (Pp. 72).

Parra-Cardona, Cordova, Holtrop, Villarruel, and Wieling (2008) conducted a study in the Midwest that found foreign-born and U.S.-born Latino families make significant efforts to raise physically, emotionally, and mentally healthy children while living in a negative social environment laced with prejudice and discriminatorily conditions (Pp. 166). As a way to overcome this adverse reception in schools, hospitals, and workplaces, Parra-Cardona *et al.* (2008) point out that foreign-born families utilize resilience as a coping mechanism when dealing with local discriminatory conditions (Pp. 169).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provide a conceptual argument — a theory that frames structure and agency — to approach my dissertation project. I also present a glimpse of the relevant literature related to the transnational and segmented assimilation approaches of my overarching conceptual framework. This review of literature, as noted, is brief because in Chapters Four, Five, and Six I decided to expand and connect a larger amount of contextual work with my ethnographic findings. In each chapter, I provide detailed accounts of relevant literature from multiple international sources (Mexico and the U.S.) and disciplines (Sociology, Anthropology, Political Science, etc.) that touches upon the role state-adopted policies, gender arrangements, and family relations make on the Mexican immigrant family life.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODS

I employ a mixed-method approach that includes field research, in-depth interviews, and partial observations. Between winter 2009 and fall 2010 I gathered data from across the South Texas-Tamaulipas border corridor. Twenty-nine in-depth interviews within ten Mexican immigrant families were conducted; in the field, five local nongovernmental and governmental organizations representatives were interviewed. Using *La Frontera* as the research setting, I chose these qualitative methods because of the nature of my research questions and because of the issues of accessibility to private and public information, my own personal interest, and the financial and emotional impact (as Warren and Karner 2007 illustrates: 64) of my project.

As an ethnographic project, this dissertation follows the principle of the field as a fluid social space where "…the public-private continuum of settings" interacts with participants and researchers (Warren and Karner 2007: 64). In my research, the field —as fluid social space — is represented by the continuum between the South Texas-Tamaulipas borderlands region and the private homes of Mexican immigrant families. To get a better understanding of the research questions, I used convenience and purposive sampling techniques to recruit Mexican immigrant families as participants. I contacted families utilizing an informal set of community networks and referrals by students of the University of Texas-Pan American[12].

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[12] As of Fall 2009, 89.3% of the undergraduate student enrollment is of Latino origin (Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness 2009: 7). I have been taught in this university for three years. I still keep contact with many former students who have attended my classes. I asked several of them to refer me families who could voluntarily participate in my research project.

As such, I organized the chapter into four major sections. In the first, I present the specifics of my research questions and highlight access, personal interest, and cost as major factors that influenced my decision to conduct field research. In the second part, I discuss data gathering techniques; I argue that a mixture of various techniques is better suited to the nature of the research questions. In the third section, I describe the sampling criteria used to select and contact family participants. I conclude this chapter with a description of the limitations of the study.

Research Questions

The questions of how and why immigrants engage transnational and nation-specific resources remain one of the most debated areas of the international migration scholarship (Kivisto and Faist 2009; Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004). The primary rationale for this research is to understand the impact state-adopted policies, gender arrangements, and family relations have on immigrants, then examine the process by which these factors influence immigrants' decisions to engage either transnational or nation-specific resources. I address these key issues in the following questions:

1. How do state-adopted policies of both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border influence national membership behavioral patterns? How does the Mexican immigrant family, who engages in political transnationalism, differ from the Mexican immigrant family that favors U.S.-based resources?

    I use a twofold approach when addressing these questions. The first draws on Portes' (2001) studies to help contextualize the relative significance of Mexican political ties on border immigrant family life. Portes (2001) refers to political transnationalism as nation-state efforts —

on the federal, state, and municipal levels — to expand institutional ties to migrants abroad by promoting more inclusive public policies and fostering a strong sense of national membership (Pp. 190). These transnational political efforts include the promotion of cultural events, literacy programs, voting rights, and the extension of consular services abroad. The underlying reason for these nation-state efforts, Levitt and de la Dehesa (2003) stated, is to reinforce the political connection between migrants abroad and at home (Pp. 592).

The second draws on Zhou's (1997) academic work to help explain the influence American-adopted policies have on family settlement patterns. A pathway to middle-class life is paved by a positive reception. According to Zhou (1997), the central idea of this argument is that members of immigrant families are better positioned to take advantage of educational opportunities and, thus, achieve upward mobility. In contrast, immigrants encountering hostile (receiving) social conditions experience downward mobility and seclude themselves within the margins of their own ethnic community boundaries. In spite of adverse receiving conditions, others manage to exist in both worlds — a middle class life with strong ties to the immigrant community (Pp. 984).

The intent of this research question is to compare the behaviors of two different sets of immigrants in a borderlands region so people can better understand to what extent Mexican immigrant families are more involved in one approach rather than another along the border. Why do some participate more than others? What factors contribute to this behavior? Who takes advantage of these institutional programs and who does not? What are their characteristics? Are there varying degrees of participation? If so, how come some immigrant families take advantage of some programs and not others? How do hostile receiving conditions

affect the settlement process of immigrant families? How do families cope with an adverse

context of reception?

2. How does gender, as portrayed on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border, sustain
    inequalities or redefine relations between women and men? Do Mexican immigrant
    families, who engage in transnationalism, show more or less egalitarian practices than
    Mexican immigrant families that adhere to the U.S.-based gender order?

Lorber (2005) defines gender as an organizing principle of society (practices and processes)

around a binary division of people: men and women (Pp. 9). Gender not only shapes and

organizes family, but influences the migration process as well (Mahler 2003: 290). To address

the specific relationship between gender and transnationalism, I draw on the Hirsch (2003)

definition of gender as a social force that permeates borders. Hirsch (2003) indicated that

gender practices transverse borders thereby sustaining inequalities and/or redefining divisions,

hierarchies, and relations between men and women.

It has long been acceptable to associate immigrant family life with a patriarchal structure

(Díaz Guerrero 1975). While a degree of patriarchal ideology remains relevant in the immigrant

family setting, new research no longer depicts the immigrant family as a fixed and static entity

based on an absolute patriarchal structure (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992). In this way, Pyke (2004)

pointed out, migration has reconfigured the immigrant family and household structure in terms

of gender dynamics by adopting a U.S. family model. There, women parlay the typical

expressive feminine role into one of more autonomy, independence, and power (Pp. 260). Yet

gender remains significant as an organizing principle of family decisions, as Baca Zinn (1994)

suggested, but within a power continuum between patriarchal and egalitarian structures (Pp.

169).

The idea is to examine the behavior of two sets of immigrants so we can understand if

immigrant families engaging in transnationalism enjoy more or less autonomy, independence, and power than families who do not participate.

3. How do family practices — particularly parenting as it is viewed from both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border — affect children? How does the Mexican immigrant family, who utilizes kin resources across the border, differ from families that favor U.S.-provided resources?

Rapp (1999) defines "family" as a set of immediate and distant individuals related by blood, marriage, and ideological codes (Pp. 181). Here, two family structures — nuclear and extended — constitute social life. The first sees family as a social unit comprised of a married couple and children, distant from the kin network. The second views the family as an extension of the nuclear unit, ready to be used when it is necessary. Bengtson (2001) suggests that a small, but growing, proportion of families are reflected by both of these familial definitions. Of particular interest is the assistance extended families provide to nuclear units as a coping mechanism to reconcile work with parenting demands. Today, as Bengtson (2001) indicated, more families depend on multigenerational ties not only to supplement, but in many cases to replace, several traditional family functions — like parenting (Pp. 6).

Viewed as individualistic, independent, and autonomous entities, nuclear families remain relevant as an ideal type of family to emulate (Popenoe 1993). The nuclear model, from an ideological standpoint, encourages young adults to sever ties from parents and other extended family members. However, families organized around the nuclear model represent a small and decreasing proportion of societal family arrangements. Social, economic, and demographic transformations have affected relations within family and between families. According to Bengtson (2001), children benefit from family solidarity as an alternative to supplement parenthood. Unlike nuclear families stressing individualism over familism, immigrants use

family ties as a strategy to aid in the reproduction and maintenance of family life (Baca Zinn and Pok 2002: 93).

Given this understanding, I examine the behavior of two sets of immigrants to determine how family ideologies shape parenting roles. How do parents reconcile parenting with work and educational demands? To fulfill these parenting needs, how do opportunities in geographical proximity of Tamaulipas and South Texas shape the utilization of extended family resources across borders? Is there a transnational dimension in this process? How do families who use Mexican family ties differ from those who engage U.S.-based resources?

A Qualitative Inquiry

This dissertation employs a qualitative inquire model. In answering these research questions, I utilized an inductive approach that is very qualitative oriented in nature. My position as a qualitative researcher provided me with an ethnographic perspective to describe detailed accounts of social interactions between the larger society and individual groups (Dorsten and Hotchkiss 2004: 123; Gilgun 1992: 24). I also used the attributes of a qualitative inquiry to give participants the power to vocalize their significant life events. More importantly, I utilized an inter-subjective approach — neither objective nor subjective in narrative style (Warren and Karner 2007: 9) — which provided me the opportunity to interpret participants' social life through the prism of my own sociological lens.

Access, Personal Interest, and Cost

As Loftland, Snow, Anderson, and Loftland (2006) suggested, starting the work in familiar environments eases access to the field setting and prods intellectual curiosity about the

research topic (Pp. 12). This approach has important implications, in terms of relationship to the setting and personal biography. I am a member of a Mexican immigrant family; we reside on the U.S.-Mexico border region of the Rio Grande Valley in Texas and maintain a house in Monterrey, Mexico. My wife and I have two children — now 23 and 25 — who were born stateside, but raised in two worlds and two cultures — American and Mexican. After continuous negotiations, my wife and I consciously decided to socially raise our children between with the Mexican and American influences intact. In spite of several constraints, we embarked on a family life that alternated between Texas and Monterrey. We knew that, in order to experience upward mobility, we would have to adapt ourselves to the prerogatives of the mainstream society such as language and education. However, limited life and job opportunities in the U.S. and strong kinship ties to Mexico also shaped part of our transnational lives. I therefore thought my own family (my wife, children, and I) could be utilized as a research mechanism to gain greater insight into the study participants' family lives.

I understand that, many times, access into a family is hindered (or facilitated, if it is the case) by factors embodied to the researcher's personal attributes such as gender, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality, as Bailey (2007: 67) indicated. I facilitated my induction into the Mexican immigrant family by following a schematic process; I used "family" as an aggregated unit of study. This approach, where families seek families with similar immigrant experiences, racial and ethnic background, and class attributes, not only enhanced rapport, but also created a trustful and lasting relationship.

Note that although our embodiment as Mexican immigrant family facilitated our research in the LRGV, access into the most intimate parts of family life was sometimes difficult. In our case,

education — as a system of power — favored some families over others. According to Lorber (2005), this power differentiation takes place when education intersects with other systems such race/ethnicity, class, and gender (Pp. 9). Although I positioned my family in this research from an insider perspective, our educational attainment precluded this intention. We shared familial characteristics similar to other participants, such as the migration experience, ethnicity, language, economic, social, cultural, and some religious components that made us view ourselves as "insiders." Yet my family members — my wife, children, and I — have all achieved an educational status that also makes us view, and feel, like outsiders. Because of this educational attainment — a daughter earning a master's degree in educational psychology, a son earning a bachelor's degree in sociology, a mother and wife who works as an elementary school teacher, and a father and husband earning a doctorate from Michigan State University — our family is committed to practices that improve our social position vis-à-vis participant families. These educational conditions cause us to consider ourselves as outsiders.

Nevertheless, sharing similar life experiences, as Baca Zinn (2001) suggests, enhances a researcher's credibility facilitating access to data in a greater detail (Pp. 161). "Knowledge" and "familiarity" of the participants builds rapport across time (Berg 2006: 184). This includes similar life experiences between participants and researchers. Sharing a researcher's "personal biography" (Warren and Karner 2007: 54) produces a "…greater access to a deeper level [of data] — a member's inner worldview and perspective" (Neuman 2009: 272). In terms of immigration research, Gans (2000) also suggests that more insider empirical work is needed (Pp. 82). This is scholarship that unveils insider topics and creates a reflexive social environment. Research produced with an insider view, through the lens of "personal

biography," gradually builds rapport and trust with participants.

Data Collection Techniques

I used two methods of data collection — observation and in-depth interviews — in the course of this research. In the former, Neuman (2009) points out that the main instrument for data collection is the researcher, particularly when observation is used as one of the main techniques for collecting data (Pp. 276). In the latter, Warren and Karner (2007) emphasize that in-depth interviews are particularly useful when the research questions are directed towards participants' biographies and narratives (Pp. 116). According to Baca Zinn (2001), both techniques reveal different empirical realities and enhance the quality of the research by diversifying data collection techniques (Pp. 165).

Observation

Warren and Karner (2007) suggested using observation when the researcher is interested "in behavior and interaction" (Pp. 117). I utilized observation as a data collection technique because I examined factors that influenced transnational and nation-specific family patterns in the LRGV and Mexico (e.g. Mexican consulate, community centers, and neighborhoods). In the private settings of immigrant families' home, I utilized a "partial observation" technique to assess their engagement in transnational and/or nation-specific resources. This means that even though participants knew my role as researcher, I did not participate fully as a member of that field setting (Bailey 2007: 79; Dorsten and Hotchkiss 2004: 132).

In-Depth Interviews

Warren and Karner (2007) also recommended using in-depth interviews when the

researcher is interested "in biography and accounts" (Pp. 117). I utilized in-depth interviews as data collection technique because I examined the immigrant family, as an aggregated unit, that was influenced by political, gender, and familial factors in multiple settings. The type of interview I conducted is the unstandardized (Berg 2006: 94) although it is assumed that such interviews serve only as supplements of field observations. In this case, however, they function as a key source of data. Unstandardized interviews followed the conversations model based in an informal questionnaire (see Appendices A and B); rapport with Mexican immigrant families was established by conducting interviews in Spanish (or English when it was the case). To supplement this data collection, I also interviewed key officials representing the Mexican consulate office in McAllen, Instituto Municipal de la Mujer en Reynosa (IMM), Sistema para el Desarrollo Integral de La Familia en Reynosa (DIF), Child Care Management Services (CCMS), and Mujeres Unidas (MU). While I conducted my interviews in the family setting, I observed interaction, body language, lifestyle, and surroundings as well (I developed an instrument to facilitate my research questions—see Appendices C and D).

<div style="text-align:center">Sampling Criteria: Convenience Purposive</div>

Qualitative social research, which is time-consuming and tedious, uses smaller population samples than quantitative research. Quantitative sampling focuses more on a representative population sample to infer its findings to given a population (Neuman 2009: 88). Since qualitative research does not extrapolate research findings to a given population, quantitative scholars see this issue as a methodological weakness (Babbie 2007: 313). In contrast, qualitative researchers using non-probability samples focus more on the examination of the social life in specific cases regardless of the number of informants. Qualitative social research underlines

"the actor's perspective through detailed interviewing and observation" (Denzin and Lincoln 1998: 10). Within this qualitative sampling framework, Bailey (2007) recommends not using convenience criteria because it is "…the weakest form of sampling…"(Pp. 64). Warren and Karner (2007), in contrast, point out that the nature of the research questions prods the fieldworker to select a specific convenience sample which can be supplemented with fieldwork data (Pp. 129).

The Dissertation Sample

In order to capture a rich description of the respondents' life events and social world, I identified and selected ten participant family units from a non-random population sample distributed between Roma and Brownsville, Texas (see Table 1). Within those ten families, I conducted twenty-nine in-depth interviews. In addition, five interviews were conducted with key officials representing the Mexican consulate office in McAllen, Instituto Municipal de la Mujer en Reynosa (INM), Sistema para el Desarrollo Integral de La Familia en Reynosa (DIF), Child Care Management Services of Texas (CCMS), and Mujeres Unidas nongovernmental organization (see Table 2). Finally, I conducted fieldwork in the itinerant Mexican Consulate Office of McAllen, the Mexican Customs and Immigration Area located at the Reynosa-McAllen point of entry, and the Borderlands region (the Lower Rio Grande Valley and *la Frontera* from the Mexican cities of Matamoros to Miguel Aleman). Participant families qualified for this research project by following two operational conditions: at least one family member — preferably a parent — must be (1) first generation and (2) of Mexican origin. I contacted the participant families by referrals from former students of the University of Texas-Pan American and through my own social networks.

As mentioned earlier, family interviews took place in the participants' homes. I thought that, as a methodological strategy, the Mexican immigrant family setting could be better understood if another Mexican immigrant family conducted the fieldwork. I asked my wife and daughter to assist me in this research endeavor, and they agreed. My wife is an elementary school teacher and a native Spanish speaker. She has extensive training as an educator and, due to the nature of her job, good social skills with families. My daughter, who is completing her graduate work in the educational psychology field at the University of Texas-Pan American, is a native Spanish speaker as well as a fieldworker trained by the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research. As women within the Mexican immigrant familial context, they had better access to gender-specific information than me (as a man) in terms of quality of data.

Most interviews lasted between 1.5- 3 hours. Participants dictated the language of choice — English and/or Spanish. I explained to families, in general terms, the purpose of the research project. I also asked each member of the participating families and governmental officials to sign an informed consent (or assent in the case of minors) and permission to tape-record the interviews. Lastly, I clarified that participation in this dissertation project was strictly voluntary. I thought thoroughly about giving families some a token of appreciation, but decided not to do it. Although many researchers have a tendency to give a small stipend as a sign of gratitude, in my dissertation project I believed that — because of cultural reasons — families would feel economically used and money, specifically, can be interpreted as an insult. Rather, participants' contributions were fully noted (in confidential terms) in the acknowledgement part of this dissertation work. As a major ethical component of this research project, I promised participant families confidentiality in terms of nondisclosure of names and specific cities where they reside.

Table 1 LRGV Families

				Border Mexican Immigrant Family Sample			
Families	Name	Place of Birth	Date of Arrival to the U.S.	Level of Education	Citizenship	Occupation	Religion
Barajas							
Husband	José sr	Guanajuato	1947	Bachelors	USA	Professional	Catholic
Wife	Emma	Brownsville		High School	USA	House	Catholic
Daughter	Esme	Brownsville		Bachelors	USA	Professional	Catholic
Daughter	Grise	Brownsville		Bachelors	USA	Professional	Catholic
Son	José jr	Brownsville		High School	USA	Professional	Catholic
Rios-Gallegos							
Husband	Ramón	Camargo	1992	High School	MX	Business	Catholic
Wife	Tina	Camargo	1971	Bachelors	MX	Employed	Catholic
Daughter	Mirna	Camargo	1993	High School	MX	Student	Catholic
Son	Romeo	Camargo	1995	N/A	MX	Student	Catholic
Alvarez							
Husband	Carlos	Houston		High School	USA	Employed	Catholic
Wife	Aileen	Reynosa	1997	High School	MX	Business	Catholic
Daughter	Carla	McAllen		N/A	USA	N/A	Catholic
Daughter	Liz	McAllen		N/A	USA	N/A	Catholic
Daughter	Lore	McAllen		N/A	USA	N/A	Catholic
Sánchez							
Mother	Monica	Reynosa	1983	No School	MX	Employed	Catholic
Daughter	Marla	Rio Grande		N/A	USA	Student	Catholic
Son	Manu	McAllen		N/A	USA	Student	Catholic
Romo							
Husband	Rafael	Rio Bravo	1987	No School	USA	Employed	Catholic
Wife	Raquel	Reynosa	1987	No School	USA	House	Catholic
Daughter	Mara	McAllen		N/A	USA	Student	Catholic
Son	Tino	McAllen		N/A	USA	Student	Catholic
Son	Gino	McAllen		N/A	USA	Student	Catholic

Table 1 (cont'd)

							Border Mexican Immigrant Family Sample

Families	Name	Place of Birth	Date of Arrival to the U.S.	Level of Education	Citizenship	Occupation	Religion
Enriquez							
Husband	Mario	Edinburg		High School	USA	Unemployed	Protesta
Wife	Maria	Mexico DF	2003	No School	MX	Employed	Protesta
Daughter	Magda	Edinburg		N/A	USA	Student	Protesta
Son	Eli	Edinburg		N/A	USA	N/A	Protesta
Mendoza							
Mother	Sonia	Matamoros	1983	High School	MX	Unemployed	Protesta
Daughter	Erica	Houston		Bachelors	USA	Employed	Catholic
Grandson	Eric	Rio Grande		N/A	USA	Student	Catholic
Mendez							
Husband	Victor	Reynosa	N/A	Bachelors	MX	Employed	Catholic
Wife	Vilma	Reynosa	N/A	Bachelors	MX	Employed	Catholic
Son	Vicente	Big Springs		Bachelors	USA	Student	Catholic
Robles							
Husband	Rico	Reynosa	1981	No School	MX	Employed	Protesta
Wife	Flor	Reynosa	1981	No School	MX	Employed	Protesta
Son	Marlon	Mission		High School	USA	Student	Protesta
Daughter	Victoria	Mercedes		Bachelors	USA	Student	Protesta
García							
Husband	Miguel	M. Aleman	1984	No School	MX	Employed	Catholic
Wife	Dulce	Roma		No School	USA	House	Catholic
Daughter	Elena	Roma		High School	USA	Student	Catholic

In addition to in-depth interviews, I triangulate my data gathering techniques with

fieldwork. I asked a Mexican official at the McAllen consulate, who is responsible for the

itinerant consular services across the LRGV, for permission to collect ethnographic data. I

documented the impact of the services offered by the consulate to people who sought them.

Closer attention was paid to the location of this itinerant consulate, target populations, and

services offered. Other fieldnotes were gathered from the Mexican Immigration area located in

the Reynosa-McAllen point of entry. I particularly focused on the interaction between Mexican

immigration officers and immigrants. The collection of these ethnographic data was

accomplished because I continuously crossed the border between the LRGV and Mexico. I

maintain a home in Monterrey, therefore I was subjected to the same treatment (and

constraints) immigrants experience on a daily basis. Lastly, I trekked through the Borderlands

region of the Lower Rio Grande Valley and Mexico to document — with fieldnotes and

occasionally with photography — community life, landscape, and people.

Table 2 Key Official Informants and Fieldwork

Key Official Interviews and Fieldwork				
	Key Official Name	Key Official Position	Location of the Interview	Location of the Fieldwork
Mexican Consulate in McAllen: Mexican Official Representative of IME*	Claudia	Consular Liaison	LRGV	LRGV
Sistema para el desarrollo Integral de la familia en Reynosa (DIF)	Irma	Director	Reynosa	The Border
Instituto Municipal de la Mujer en Reynosa (IMM)	Ruby	Director	Reynosa	The Border
Child Care Management Services	Omar	Executive Officer	Denton	D-FW
Mujeres Unidas nongovernmental organization	Reyna	Liaison	LRGV	LRGV

* IME stands for *El Instituto de Mexicanos en el Exterior* (Institute of Mexicans Abroad)

Variations of Data

I did not plan to use Mexican immigrant families as a control, in terms of variables, during

this study. To achieve a Border Mexican immigrant family comparable sample, I interviewed

two sets of immigrant families: one who maintains multiple ties between the U.S. and Mexico

and the other who relies more on U.S.-specific resources. I utilized the same questionnaire for

comparison, which provided me the opportunity to garner new insights and a better

understanding of the similarities and differences of both sets of Mexican immigrant families.

Lastly, my daughter served as a research assistant and transcribed the recorded conversations

in the original language of the interview — English or Spanish. I translated data originally

transcribed in Spanish and, thus, take full responsibility of the accuracy of the translation.

Analyses of Data

Warren and Karner (2007) emphasize that analysis of data is a time-consuming task, just as

the data collection stage is (Pp. 187), and Bailey (2007) suggested "…that data analysis is more

of an art than a technique" (Pp. 125). Therefore, I used a threefold schematic step process to

analyze the interviews and fieldwork: coding, thematic analysis, and description (Bailey 2007;

Loftland, Snow, Anderson, and Loftland 2006).

My initial step was to open-code the interviews and organize my data into analytic patterns

through multiple readings (Warren and Karner 2007: 191). I subsequently used a more focused

coding strategy and utilized specialized qualitative software called ATLAS ti6. The data were

then codified into three categories: (1) national membership; (2) gender; and (3) child-rearing.

In the second step, I used thematic analysis as a strategy to analyze the interviews. I created

themes related to "…recurring patterns, topics, viewpoints, emotions, concepts, events, and so

on" (Bailey 2007: 153). Specifically, I underscored each family's differences and similarities, then looked for patterns.

Finally, to supplement the analysis of my interviews, I used a descriptive strategy to organize my fieldnotes. This involves, according to Bailey (2007), "…detailed descriptions of the setting, interactions, and observations that have occurred over a prolonged period of time" (Pp. 136). I also used fieldwork photography as a visual supplement to examine family life in a large setting. These mixed-data analyses strategies enabled me to organize my writing process in a thematic narrative associated to recurrent patterns of my ethnographic work (Loftland, Snow, Anderson, and Loftland 2006: 232).

The Narrative Writing Style

The writing process of this dissertation is designed around a thematic narrative. It organizes the narrative in selective themes that attempt to bring light to the research questions from "…abstract analytic concepts" (Loftland, Snow, Anderson, and Loftland 2006: 232). Drawing from McDowell (1996), I introduced — in major narrative style— a polyphony authorial dominance model. Since there are more similarities than differences (racial-ethnic origins, similar migration transitions, and family structure) between us, I chose to write in a *polyphonous* style. This is style in which participants' voices are heard through the author's narrative.

A Concluding Remark: Limitations for Research

Previously, I have illustrated the strengths of the research methods used in this dissertation project. Conversely, this section explains the nature of several research limitations as they

relate primarily to two specific issues: the social position of the researcher's family vis-à-vis participants, and the subjective interpretation of the research findings.

An article by Gans (2000), about the need for more empirical research from an insider's perspective, inspired me to pursue an insider topic. During the conceptualization, collection, analysis, and interpretation of data for this project, I remained acutely conscious of the nature of my position as an inner-scholar. I was able to share my personal, familial, and social conditions with the participants, yet remained somewhat socially separated. As Baca Zinn (2001) noted in her own research, "though I was an insider in ethnic identity, I was not an insider in the organization or in the community in which I had chosen to conduct research" (Pp. 162). Even though I considered myself part of the community, community members held an opposing view in regards to key aspects of social life such as education, class, gender, and immigration status. For example, in spite of my attempt to engage in equal dialogue during interviews, a feeling of unspoken discord sometimes developed between the participants and me. This was generally associated with educational attainment. In order to avoid what Acker, Barry, and Esselved (1996: 69) call a pattern of exploitative relationship between participants and researchers, I shared many personal and educational experiences and rationalized the value of social mobility. I explained how I was impacted by education, how life chances and opportunities increased as a direct result of it, and how these positive influences inspire others to complete or continue their education. But families sometimes did not reciprocate. My efforts did not always eliminate overt and covert differences, but at least it prompted ongoing dialogue.

Despite multiple limitations insider scholars face, Baca Zinn (2001) points out that the most

frequently voiced objection is that "…the 'subjectivity' of researchers will lead to bias in data

gathering and interpretation" (Pp. 160). As mentioned earlier, I neither planned to conduct an

objective nor subjective study; my work exists more in what Warren and Karner (2007) calls an

intersubjective arena (Pp. 6). While I conceptualized, collected, analyzed, and interpreted data

using accepted scholarly procedures, I also recognize that this study embraced families'

biographical connections.

I live, on daily basis, what I study; this is one of several reasons why I chose this particular

research topic. Admittedly, it is extremely difficult to detach myself from the research and

maintain a bias-free environment. Despite these limitations, my ultimate goal is to reveal a

scholarly illustration of the social life of Mexican Immigrant Families in a borderlands region.

CHAPTER THREE

THE RESEARCH SETTING: A TEXAN-MEXICAN BORDER, *LA FRONTERA*

I chose the Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV) and its Mexican border region as my research setting. This is an area also known as *El Valle* or The Valley. It is located in the *southernmost* part of the Texan-Mexican border (see Figure 1). It is characterized by Great Plains scenery and a distinctive subtropical climate. It has hot and humid summers with a mild winter season that people from the Midwest and Northeast praise and seem to enjoy. *El Valle,* divided by the *Río Grande* River on the U.S. side or the *Río Bravo* if in Mexico, stretches approximately 100 miles over the Starr, Hidalgo, and Cameron Counties with 11 ports of entry crossing into Mexico.

Along this *Frontera* — a place in constant flux — three twin cities emerge as the main hubs of the border region. Brownsville and Matamoros, located next to the *Río Grande* River mouth at the Gulf of México, are vibrant trade and export centers for the agricultural, fishery, and *maquiladora* industry of the region. McAllen, located upstream from the *Río Grande* delta and about 10 miles from Reynosa, is a major retail, banking, and tourist center serving Mexican nationals and U.S. retired seasonal migrants living in the area. Reynosa, across the river, is the largest manufacturing city of the border with its vibrant *maquiladora* and oil industries. Upriver, in a contrasting landscape deeply associated with the asymmetrical economic development of the region, Roma and Miguel Alemán eke out their living mostly from farming, ranching, and low-wage service activities. This has relegated them to the less developed cities of *La Frontera* (Anderson and Gerber 2008: 32-33).

The Texan-Mexican border is a place where two similar, but contrasting, worlds meet. It is a region of common history, cuisine, linguistic patterns, and ethnicity (Anderson and Gerber

2008: 32) and an area with asymmetrical economic positions (Ruiz 2000: 65).

Figure 2 The Río Grande Valley, *La Frontera*

Source: http://webhost.bridgew.edu/jhayesboh/musica/Mexico.html
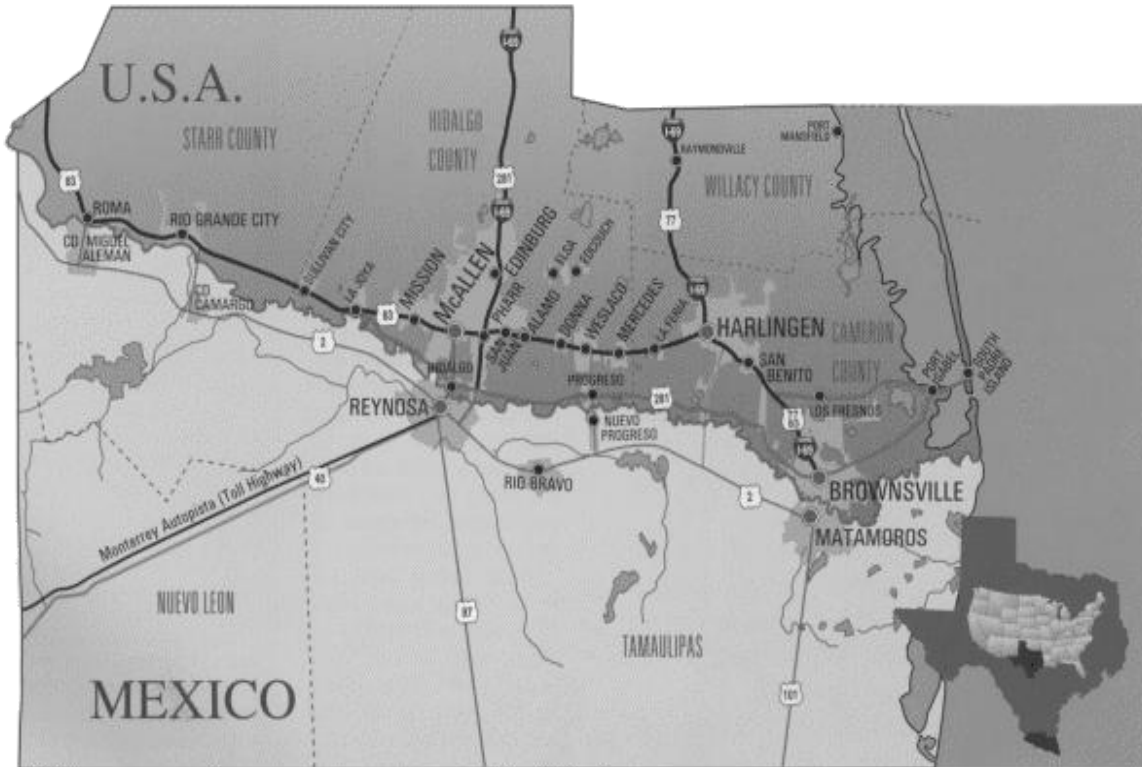
In the Lower Rio Grande Valley today, as in the past, Mexican origin people comprise between 77% and 85% of the total population of the South Texas border region (Acuña 2007: 72; U.S. Census Bureau 2000b). This distinguishes it as one of America's most predominantly Mexican-origin regions.[13]

This chapter examines the Texan-Mexican border as a research setting. I draw from Gieryn's

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[13] By 1900, Mexican origin people comprised 85% of the whole population in the Rio Grande Valley (Acuña 2007: 72). I calculated the average percentage of the Mexican-origin population for the Hidalgo, Starr, and Cameron Counties from the U.S. Census Data.

(2000: 465) approach of place as a sensitive sociological concept to delve closely into *La Frontera* as an interconnected place of distinctive geographical locations with fluid boundaries. This not only offers me the opportunity to view the borderlands region as a physical place, but it also allows me assess the area through the unique lens of objective diversity. More importantly, this approach helps to visualize *La Frontera* as an elastic social space.

I have divided this chapter into four main sections. In the first, I define the Texas-Mexico border. Rather than just defining the physical border by utilizing a conventional geopolitical approach (Sharp 1998: 6), I offer a more abstract definition of it based on Anzaldúa's (2007) interpretation of Borderlands. In the second part, I offer a traditionally accepted demographic picture of the region. However, closer attention is placed on the socioeconomic data from both sides of the border. In the third section, I identify Mexicans in the LRGV. By underscoring class, religious, and generational differences, we can appreciate the diversity of Mexicans as a population group. I conclude this chapter with a definition of the Mexican immigrant family, with particular emphasis on those residing in the LRGV. The Valley's geopolitical proximity to Mexico allows for the examination of the interactions between the Mexican immigrant family and *La Frontera*.

Defining the Texas-Mexico Border

Defining this region of *La Frontera* has always been an elusive job, and this is especially true today (House 1982: 56). Most scholarship, study, and research about the Texas-Mexico border will generally follow a twofold approach. On one hand, literature from a geopolitical context defines the border by using economic and demographic components to physically delimit the border (Sharp 1998: 6). On the other, literature from border studies draw on concepts related

to asymmetrical relations of power exemplified by the borderlands (Anzaldúa 2007: 25) and interaction (Bustamante 1989: 10) approaches. Anzaldúa (2007) defines the border by using racial and ethnic components to delimit the place where two asymmetrical worlds, Mexican and White, collide to create a third entity — the borderlands. Here the border emerges as a dividing line used to "…define the places that are safe and unsafe, [and] to distinguish *us* from *them*" (Anzaldúa 2007: 25). In essence, it is an abstract and physical place where Mexicans have historically been treated as undesirables (Stern 2004: 301). Bustamante (1989: 10) looks at the borderlands as a space with no geographical international boundaries. Subsequently, it is defined by the scope and intensity of interaction and activities between people living on both sides of the U.S. and Mexico border (see also House 1982: 55).

The Geopolitical Approach: Texas

The border is physically defined, in the geopolitical context, as a boundary region between Texas and Mexico. According to Sharp (1998), forty-three Texas counties comprise the border region, running from El Paso to Corpus Christi with its northernmost boundaries at Interstates 10 and 37 (Sharp 1998: 6). Three regions encompass the border area: Central South Texas, Lower South Texas, and the Upper Rio Grande. The Lower Rio Grande Valley forms part of the Lower South Texas region and is composed mainly by Cameron, Hidalgo, and Starr counties (Jamail and Gutierrez 1992: 7).

Within the geopolitical approach, the LRGV border area is characterized by two predominant factors — poverty and race or ethnicity. According to Sáenz and Ballejos (1993), "…the terms 'poor' and 'Hispanic' are relatively synonymous in the Valley" (Pp 103). In 2004, 32% of the LRGV population lived in poverty. In 2006, more than 91% of that number were

Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau 2006). These figures are salient to Mexicans. Many of the LRGV

residents are trapped in a vicious cycle of inequality that begets poverty.[14] According to Sáenz

and Ballejos (1993), this perpetual condition crosses generations due to institutional failures in

providing proper education, better employment opportunities, wages, adequate housing, and

appropriate health care (Pp. 103).

To illustrate this social issue in terms of education, Richardson, Resendiz, and Cavazos

(2006) conducted a study of high school drop-out rates by Mexicans in the LRGV area. They

concluded that institutional factors — such as economic needs, the necessity to participate in

agricultural migrant labor workforce, immigration status, and lack of parental support —

dramatically influenced Mexican students' decisions to drop out of school (Richardson,

Resendiz, and Cavazos 2006: 245). Their study also concluded that limiting students' access to

education hampered their ability to capitalize on other life opportunities such as better

employment (Richardson 1999: 18), equal housing (Snipp, Horton, Jensen, Nagel, and Rochín

1993: 188), and healthcare (Torres 2004: 155). Hence, perpetual poverty is one of the main

components defining the LRGV border region.

The Geopolitical Approach: Mexico

In Mexico, parts of four States comprise the Texas-Mexico border region: Chihuahua,

Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, and Tamaulipas. The region runs from Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua to

Matamoros, Tamaulipas, with southernmost boundaries at federal highways 45, 49, and 40

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[14] Poverty, according to Eitzen and Baca Zinn (2004), is "...a standard of living below the minimum needed for the maintenance of adequate diet, health, and shelter" (Pp. 180).

(Sharp 1998: 7). Unlike the U.S. with its four levels of political governmental representation (federal, state, county, and municipal), Mexico organizes its political governments into three levels — federal, state, and municipal. Counties, as governmental entities, are nonexistent in Mexico (Aguayo Quezada 2002: 26). Tamaulipas, the Mexican state adjacent to the Lower Rio Grande Valley region, is represented in this study by the cities of Miguel Alemán, Reynosa, and Matamoros. These cities are south of the Rio Grande and comprise the Mexican version of twin-cities that neighbor Roma, McAllen-Hidalgo, and Brownsville, respectively (Ruiz 2000: 68).

Geopolitically, two factors that characterize these cities are the availability of cheap labor and the demand for tourist and commercial facilities. According to Sklair (1989), the institutionalization of a Border Industrialization Program (BIP), lower wages, and a privileged geographical position near to the U.S. entice multinationals firms to open plants along the border. The *maquiladora industry* has become the major beneficiary of these economic opportunities. Individuals, companies, and corporations have eagerly taken advantage of these "profit-making opportunities," particularly because of the immediate access to a steady source of cheap, feminized labor (Ruiz 2000: 73). In spite of this, jobs at *maquiladoras* help ease economic and social pressures on Mexican border cities from continuous streams of its own internal migration (House 1982: 212). Commerce and tourism, Ruiz (2000) points out, represent two additional core components of border life. Countless people routinely and regularly transverse the area to shop, access healthcare, and fulfill personal obligations. Others cross to experience and enjoy the night life, regional cuisine, and to buy craftwork from Mexican folk artisans (Ruiz 2000: 86).

The Borderlands Approach

In a "metaphorical" interpretation of the border that has been severely criticized for creating "unscientific" scholarship about border studies (Staudt and Spener 1998: 17), the Borderlands Approach uses racial, ethnic, gender, and sexuality components to describe the asymmetrical social position of Mexicans in relationship to Whites in the LRGV (Anzaldúa 2007). In what Warren and Karner (2007: 15) call *autoethnography* — a variant of qualitative research used by scholars to reflect and write about life experiences from an emotional or analytical perspective — Anzaldúa (2007) reflects upon and writes about her oppressive experiences as a women, lesbian, and Mexican growing up in the LRGV area. Borderlands, in this context, refers to an abstract site where two asymmetrical cultures — sharing the same space — collide (Anzaldúa 1998: 165).

House (1982) also refers to the borderlands as the "…frontier between the advancing civilizations of Anglo-America and Latin America [where] the Rio Grande has never been a clear-cut and finite cultural divide" (Pp. 2). Here two asymmetrical worlds operate as buffers in a single abstract space between two racially, linguistically, economically, and socially contrasting countries. The borderlands then become a space defined more by the interaction of individuals rather than by geographical limits, according to Bustamante (1989), and are the human displacement by-product of historical and asymmetrical relations between the United State and Mexico (Pp. 15).

While geopolitical and borderlands studies contribute to the definition of the border and provide important elements of analysis, they also have flaws. Each approach addresses varying issues that reflect divergent positions. The plurality of these positions, however, synthesize

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opposite perspectives and offer a better understanding of the border and its Mexican-origin

population. For practical methodological reasons — accessibility, interest, and convenience —

the Texas-Mexico border is analyzed in both geopolitical and borderlands approaches. In terms

of geopolitical criteria, the counties of Starr, Hidalgo, and Cameron were chosen to define and

characterize the U.S. (northern) side while the Mexican cities of Miguel Aleman, Reynosa, and

Matamoros mark the southern boundary. In terms of borderlands criteria, this region is defined

as a social space where — in spite of its historical asymmetrical relations of power —

interactions between people of both countries are important components of everyday life.

Demographics of the South Texas-Mexico Border

This research does not purport to be a demographic study. Rather, in descriptive terms, it

offers a glimpse of the research community's demographic and socioeconomic data. As Gold

(2002) suggests, qualitative studies that rely on fieldwork and interviews aspire "…to be

descriptive, not definitive" (Pp.24). Thus, I illustrate the demographic characteristics of the

Lower Rio Grande Valley and, to a limited extent, its twin-cities in Mexico (albeit with data

limitations).

Demographic Data: LRGV

Mexicans in the LRGV have historically comprised as much as 85% of the total population

(Acuña 2007: 72), yet by the year 2000[15] the area experienced a marginal decrease in Mexican

population growth. In Cameron, Starr, and Hidalgo counties 77% of the total population is of

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[15] I calculated the average percentage of the Mexican-origin population for the Hidalgo, Starr,
and Cameron Counties from 2000 U.S. Census data.

Mexican origin (U.S. Census Bureau 2000b). This leaves the Blacks and Whites as "residual categories" in the area (U.S. Census Bureau 2000b). Still, the 2000 U.S. Census reveals important data in terms of age, sex, and family structure across all population categories in the LRGV as worthy of analysis.

In relation to age, sex, and family structure the LRGV population is inherently young, according to the 2000 U.S. Census. While the median age is 32.3 years in Texas, in the LRGV the median age is 27.4 years (U.S. Census Bureau 2000b; U.S. Census Bureau 2000c). In contrast to all of Texas, whose largest age-specific groups range from 25-54 years of age (43.6%), the Hidalgo and Starr counties' largest age-specific groups include the categories of younger than 5-11 years (22.8%) and 25-44 years (27.4%). Cameron County age-specific group of 25-54 years (37.4%) is the exception; it reflects the age-specific group patterns of the state (U.S. Census Bureau 2000b; U.S. Census Bureau 2000c). Although Texas experiences minimal difference between the sex female/male ratio of 50.4% and 49.6% overall, the LRGV region — on average — shows greater divergence; there are more women than men, 51.7% to 48.3% (U.S. Census Bureau 2000b; U.S. Census Bureau 2000c). The 2000 U.S. Census also depicts the LRGV border region as "family community oriented." Unlike the rest of Texas — which is composed of family households 71% of the time — the LRGV family household composition is, on average, 85%. In Starr County, for instance, 66.5% of the total households consist of married-couples and the language predominately spoken at home is Spanish (90.4%). Similarly, Hidalgo and Cameron County households consist of married-couples (65% and 60.8% respectively) where Spanish is the preferred language at home (82% and 78.3% respectively) (U.S. Census Bureau 2000b; U.S. Census Bureau 2000c).

Socioeconomic Data: LRGV

In predominantly rural Starr County, according to Jamail and Gutierrez (1992), the main

occupations relate to agriculture and ranching activities (Pp. 10). While 22.2% of the employed

population works in agriculture and construction, the 2000 U.S. Census reports that 33.7% also

work in the educational, health, and social services industry. Conversely, they have a per capita

income of $7,069 in an area where 30.3% of households make less than $10,000 annually (U.S.

Census Bureau 2000a). These data imply that the occupational composition of Starr County,

with its pervasive and rampant poverty, reflect the limited work opportunities residents' face in

the area. Because 47.4% of the families live in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau 2000a), O'Hare and

Johnson (2004) emphasize that the Starr County is — arguably — one of America's poorest

places (Pp. 12).

Figure 3 Starr County Boundary Line

Unlike Starr County, Hidalgo and Cameron counties' primary job opportunities relate to

Mexican trade, retail businesses for Mexican shoppers, and tourism. According to Jamail and

Gutierrez (1992), most, though, are positions in the low-wage, service-oriented labor force (Pp.

9). The 2000 U.S. Census indicates that 12.95% of the people employed in Hidalgo and Cameron

counties work in the retail trade and 26.55% work in the educational, health, and social services

industry. Whereas the per capita income in all of Texas is $19, 617, in Hidalgo it is only $9,899

and in Cameron it is $10,960 (U.S. Census Bureau 2000b; U.S. Census Bureau 2000c). Hidalgo

and Cameron counties, according to these figures, are marginally socioeconomically better than

Starr County in the LRGV region.

Demographic Data: Miguel Alemán, Reynosa, and Matamoros

As previously mentioned, the Mexican state that borders the LRGV is Tamaulipas. Its major

cities in this region are Miguel Alemán, Reynosa, and Matamoros[16]. Demographic research

conducted by Aguayo Quezada (2002) found that, between 1990 and 2000, the cities of

Reynosa and Matamoros increased their population annually 4.40% and 3.39% respectively (Pp.

59). Thus, it is not surprising that 31.4% of the total population of Tamaulipas live in the cities of

Miguel Alemán, Reynosa, and Matamoros where the sex female/male ratio is 50.26%, 50.69%,

and 49.31% respectively (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía e Informática 2000). In

the State of Tamaulipas the median age is 26 years while in these border cities the median age

averages 24.6 years (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía e Informática 2005). As such,

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[16] I calculated the average percentages for the cities of Miguel Aleman, Reynosa, and
Matamoros from the 2000 Mexican Census data and 2005 preliminary counting.

the Mexican borderlands population is quite younger than its counterpart in the LRGV

borderlands region.

Socioeconomic Data: Miguel Alemán, Reynosa, and Matamoros

Mexican border cities are by far more urbanized and densely populated centers, unlike the

LRGV. Still, development differences among these Mexican border cities are contrasting. For

example, Miguel Alemán borders Starr County and maintains its status as an agricultural

community with limited industrial and service sector investments. Its main economic activities

include ranching, agriculture, and fishing activities; Miguel Alemán's per capita income peaked

at an equivalent of $7,376 in the year 2000 (Consejo Nacional de Población 2000; Instituto

Nacional para el Federalismo y el Desarrollo Municipal 2005a). While Miguel Alemán's per

capita income is marginally higher than Starr County ($7,069), it is too low for the U.S.

economic standards.

Unlike the city of Miguel Alemán, according to Ruiz (2000), Reynosa and Matamoros, both

benefited from the Border Industrialization Program and NAFTA[17] in the 1960s and 1990s, (Pp.

85). Although agricultural activities remain significant, Reynosa — as the most industrialized,

urban, and populated city in Tamaulipas — relies on the oil and gas industries and the

maquiladoras to provide economic stability to the region. According to the Consejo Nacional de

Población (2000), Reynosa's middle-class — with a per capita income of $9,174 — benefits from

higher wages paid by the oil and gas sectors. On the other hand, *maquiladoras* employ a high

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[17] The acronym of NAFTA stands for the "North American Free Trade Agreement."

rate of women paying lower-wages which in turn creates an environment of working-poor

(Instituto Nacional para el Federalismo y el Desarrollo Municipal 2005b; Sharp 1998: 27).

Similarly to Reynosa, Ruiz (2000) points out that Matamoros has taken advantage of both the

maquiladora program and the international trade while keeping a more diversified economy

that remains entwined with agricultural, tourism, and fishing activities (Pp. 85). Matamoros' per

capita income, at the time of the study, was $9,429 (Consejo Nacional de Población 2000).

Identifying Mexicans in the LRGV

Despite Mexican-origin people's diversity in terms of social, religious, class, and

generational differences, Whites generally do not differentiate between Mexican-Americans

and Mexican immigrants. This paper uses the social construction of "Mexican" as a distinctively

racial/ethnic group[18] (Baca Zinn 1998) [unless otherwise noted]. The author relies on Ortiz

(1994) and Bean, Corona, Tuiran, and Woodrow-Lafield's (1998) definition of "Mexican-origin."

They are people of Mexican heritage, born in the United States (of any generation), or

immigrating here with or without proper documentation. Mexican-origin people's diversity is

explained in a multitude of ways.

As mentioned earlier, poverty is pervasive and deeply entrenched in the LRGV's Mexican

communities. According to Richardson (1999), two social positions are salient. The first defines

Mexicans as "…undocumented, uneducated, dark-skinned, and eager to work" (Pp. 95). The

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[18] Although society separates race and ethnicity as two different characteristics, the reality is that racial and ethnic (racial/ethnic) groups emerge out of similar historical and social conditions of oppression (Baca Zinn 1998: 39). This is why race and ethnicity are used together in this paper in order to contextualize the conditions of inequality of racial and ethnic minority groups.

second position — a privileged stance — is reserved for wealthy, light-skinned Mexicans that live and shop in the region. Class, in convergence with race and/or ethnicity, mirrors a population polarized by a virtually nonexistent Mexican middle-class (Mier, Flores, Robinson, and Millard 2004).

In terms of Mexican religious diversity, Vila (2003) has produced some scholarship on religion and borderlands. According to him, Mexican loyalty to the Catholic Church implies that being Mexican literally means being Catholic (Pp. 21). Although Protestantism has gained traction, it still remains marginal and is considered the "other" religion by Catholic Mexicans in the border region (Vila 2003). This is not to imply that the relationship between Mexicans and the Church is stagnant. Religious positions within the Catholic Church have been — and continue to be — highly contested. In contrast to the view that being Mexican means being Catholic, Anzaldúa (1998) argues — in a more critical approach — that the Virgin of Guadalupe, the main holy representation of Mexican Roman Catholicism, "…has been used by the Church to mete out institutionalized oppression: to placate the Indians and *Mexicanos* and Chicanos…to make [them] docile and enduring" (Pp. 164).

The Mexican population in the Texas borderlands is generationally diverse. According to Padilla and Argilagos (2008), in terms of generational diversity, more than a quarter of the 28% foreign-born population in the border counties is Mexican (Pp. 37). It is common to encounter families of multiple generations and with different immigration statuses living together; this makes discovering or uncovering generational differences in the Mexican family problematic. That means, according to Richardson (1999), that despite a common language, family customs, and links to either or both Mexico and the U.S., intergenerational social relations are fluid and

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continuously evolving (Pp. 152). Nevertheless, we have to remember that migration from

Mexico in this area has been uninterrupted and unrestricted. Generational diversity is typical in

the Mexican family.

Defining the Mexican Immigrant Family

The family, as a social institution, is a fluid entity that changes and evolves over time and

across spaces. According to Giddens (2000), "[t]he family is a site for the struggles between

tradition and modernity, but also a metaphor for them" (Pp. 53). As such, family structures

emerge out of economic, political, and social conditions related to historical and geographical

circumstances.

Family composition in the United States results from global and local socio-economic

transformations. For example, the U.S. economic transformation from an industrial to post-

industrial society has redefined the country as well as families. The deindustrialization process

of the U.S. has radically transformed the romanticized postwar notion of the modern family (a

male wage earner, a full-time housewife, and two children) into a vast array of progressive,

fluid, and dynamic family settings that now define the postmodern family[19] (Stacey 1990: 17).

Here, immigrant families are not the exception, according to Baca Zinn (2000), "[t]he

postmodern rubric applies well to immigrants, whose family configurations are in constant flux"

(Pp. 50). In general terms for the immigrant family — particularly for Mexicans — today's

immigration familial studies centers the analysis on adaptation processes out of the racial,

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[19] I use the postmodern concept (Stacey 1990) as a way to contextualize the diversity and
fluidity of today's family arrangements (Pp. 17).

social, and economic conditions of immigration (Pp. 258). As Pyke (2004) provocatively states:

> …immigrant families constitute a wide range of dynamic family types: the extended, the nuclear, the transnational, the reunited, and the female-headed household, and those forms, such as co-residence groups, that are newly constructed out of the conditions of immigration (Pp. 257).

Recent scholarship has highlighted these as evolving forms of the family structure. Studying the Mexican immigrant family from a diverse perspective, for example, encompasses a spectrum of family arrangements. Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (2000) describe how Mexican transnational families — immigrant families in which one spouse or partner works abroad while the other remains "home" — sustain or maintain the family dynamics by rearranging their transnational parenthood responsibilities. The use of phone calls, letters, and photos becomes crucial in the reduction of the effects of physical and — especially — emotional separation (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 2000: 288). In this way, migration transforms assumed gendered interactions, for both men and women, as they attempt to reshape their existence to maintain an established transnational livelihood (Pribilsky 2004).

The binational family, a term coined by Chavez (1992), refers to immigrant families composed of a mix of immigration-legal and undocumented members. For example, one partner may hold an undocumented status while the other may be a U.S. citizen or a permanent resident. Other cases involve children born in the U.S. to undocumented parents. A mix of two or more nationalities and citizenships differentiates these families (Chavez 1992: 129).

This analysis, as Baca Zinn (2000) suggests, is relevant in identifying the Mexican immigrant family since much of its reconfiguration enlightens us to a new set of social conditions that make diverse and fluid family structures increasingly visible (Pp. 50).

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Figure 4 The Bustamante-Falcón Immigrant Family

Mexican immigrant families on the U.S.-Mexican Border were asked to participate in this dissertation project; this is what Gilgun (1992) calls "qualitative family research" (Pp. 24). This type of research encompasses the conceptualization, collection, analysis, and interpretation of qualitative experiences within and between family milieus (Gilgun 1992: 24). By using the immigrant family as an aggregated unit of study, it allows for the examination of "...persons who mutually define themselves as family, are in committed relationships, have a shared sense of personal history, and who usually but not always have legal and biological ties" (Gilgun 1992: 24). Because current scholarship shows that Mexican immigrant families along the border are shaped by diverse patterns of constraints and opportunities (see Márquez and Romo 2008),

qualitative family research principles have been utilized to document and analyze the interaction between the Mexican immigrant family and their existence along the U.S.-Mexican border.

In what follows, I offer an analysis of my empirical findings. Each chapter examines the relationship between individuals and the larger society. I view state-adopted policies, gender arrangements, and family practices in both Mexico and the U.S. as contributing factors in the construction of family. I use what Risman (2004: 432) calls a theory that frames structure and agency as mutually constitutive to explore how and to what degree specific social forces entice families to utilize Mexican and U.S. resources. In doing so, I attempt to rationalize how and why immigrant families undertake these opposing forces. This assessment brings the immigrant family to the forefront of relevant discussions and identifies the Lower Rio Grande Valley-Tamaulipas area as a unique region of borderland studies.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF POLITICAL PRACTICES ON MEXICAN IMMIGRANT FAMILY LIFE

Introduction

Hofferbert (1990) defines "policies" as public programs intended to influence social behavior (Pp. 13). The central idea of this definition is that specific societal issues prompt the intervention of the state to change, control, regulate, and influence social conduct. The process is quite complex. The state, for instance, engages in behavioral pattern recognition—recurrent social indicators representing a specific social issue—to create public programs with attainable goals to deliver specific target actions and achieve desired social effects (Hofferbert 1990: 38-56). This chapter examines the role of state-adopted policies — in both Mexico and the U.S. — as public programs intended to influence immigrant family life.

I have organized this chapter in three major sections. In the first part, I illustrate how the Mexican-adopted policies entice a handful of immigrant families, residing in the LRGV, to engage transnational resources. In doing so, I demonstrate the extent to which immigrant families are more involved in Mexican, rather than U.S., resources and to understand what impact it has on their family life. In the second part, the roles of U.S. adopted policies — associated with xenophobic and nationalistic discourses — are interpreted as national public programs intended to politically disengage Mexicans of community life. I use data from my in-depth interviews and observations to understand immigrant families' involvement in U.S. over Mexican resources and opportunities. Lastly, the chapter concludes by summarizing the effects of Mexican and U.S. policies on immigrant life along the border.

Mexican Policies

The public view about Mexican migration generally takes a preconceive position, unabashedly assuming that Mexico fails to have an emigration policy. However, studies of international migration demonstrate that Mexico today, as in the past, does indeed have emigration policies in place. Serious attempts to address and correct these scholarly deficiencies have been made by Durand (2005) and Fitzgerald (2009).

These studies delve closely into how state-adopted policies affect Mexican emigration patterns. Durand (2005: 15-25) and Fitzgerald (2009: 36-69) examine Mexican state-adopted policies by chronologically organizing the analysis into five stages beginning with the early twentieth century when the high mortality rates prompted a strongly dissuasive policy against Mexican migration to the U.S. Then, between 1940 and 1964, Mexican migration policies shift. That is when Mexico and the U.S. negotiated details of the Bracero Program that allowed sponsorship of Mexican migration to the U.S. under governmental supervision. Durand (2005) and Fitzgerald (2009) continue to study and analyze migration policies from 1965 to 1990, which later change, as a model of complacent governmental oversight emerges; the Mexican government displays overt apathy toward its own community abroad. In the early 1990s, however, Mexico reverts its *complacent* model and institutes a series of *damage control* policies in order to forge new international relationships. The Program for Mexican Communities Abroad (PMCA), the Presidential Office for Mexicans Abroad (OPME), and the Institute of Mexicans Abroad (IME) are all examples of Mexican-sponsored policies that were implemented. Finally, in the early 2000s, Mexico and the U.S. initiated conversations about true comprehensive immigration reform. After the tragic events of Sept. 11, 2001, the U.S.

unilaterally withdrew from these negotiations. Mexico, meanwhile, diligently worked to foster

ties with communities abroad (Durand 2005: 15-25).

Domestic Policies Abroad

With respect to this "damage control approach" and after years of institutional indifference,

a historical policy shift occurred in the 1990s. As Durand (2005) has noted, the Mexican state

finally recognized the social, cultural, political, and economic importance of the Mexican

communities abroad. Yet, the rationale behind Mexico's newly adopted migrant policies

remains complicated. González Gutiérrez (2006), for instance, attributes this new policy

approach to the "…Mexican State efforts to attend the inclusion needs of communities residing

abroad" (Pp. 182). Smith (2003), similarly, characterizes this policy shift as an *acercamiento*

(closeness) strategy "… to intensify, broaden, and institutionalize the relationship with

Mexicans in the United States, thus significantly changing migrants' actual and potential

membership practices" (Pp. 306). Other scholars, Alarcón (2006) for example, attribute the

creation of *damage control* policies as an institutional response to the demographic, social, and

economic changes of emerging Mexican communities abroad (Pp. 163).

In the early 1990s the Mexican government created the PMCA as the first institutional

effort to link Mexico with Mexican and Mexican American communities in the U.S. According to

González Gutiérrez (1993), the PMCA has three broad objectives:

> *to strengthen the links between Mexicans of both sides of the border in six principal*
> *fields: business, tourism, culture, education, sports, and health and social welfare; to*
> *improve the image of Mexican Americans in Mexico by disseminating information about*
> *their struggles and goals; and to promote a better understanding of Mexico's reality*
> *among Mexicans in the United States (Pp. 231).*

González Gutiérrez (1993) points out that within two years of the creation of the PMCA

(around 1992), the program had only partly succeeded. The consulate's staff in charge of the PMCA, for instance, actively engaged in events related to Mexican and Mexican American issues but the task of improving Mexican Americans' public image in Mexico did not fare well (González Gutiérrez 1993: 232). Then in 2000, along with the PMCA, then-president Vicente Fox created the Presidential Office for Mexicans Abroad (OPME) headed by Juan Hernandez, a Mexican American scholar (Cano and Delano 2007: 714). The OPME's intent was to address — at the presidential or executive level — Mexican nationals and Mexican Americans' concerns, particularly on issues related to remittances and immigration reform. In 2003, however, the government fused the OPME with the PMCA into a community and governmental driven autonomous organization — the Institute of Mexicans Abroad (IME) (Alarcón 2006: 163; Cano and Delano 2007: 714). The Mexican government billed this as a means of avoiding duplicity of functions and reducing tensions between agencies.

According to González Gutiérrez (2006), the IME serves as a mid-level entity linking Mexican communities abroad with representatives of the Mexican government (Pp. 200). It remains an autonomous institution with the capacity to bridge governmental and community resources and to engage in educational, health, and economic projects that benefit people of Mexican ancestry abroad. Three collegial bodies represent the IME as a complex, decentralized agency of the Foreign Ministry. The IME is governed by the National Council for Mexican Communities Abroad (Consejo Nacional) — with its 11 Ministries dealing with migration issues — and the IME Advisory Council (CCIME) — with 156 representatives from Mexican communities abroad.

The CCIME is comprised of 105 community leaders, delegates of each Mexican state, and 10 representatives of Mexican/Latino organizations abroad elected every three years. An

immigrant residing abroad, and appointed by the Ministry of Foreign Relations, heads the IME

as its executive officer. As a shared governance entity, collegial decision-making prevails

between these three branches, yet, it is responsibility of the IME's director to implement

advisory council recommendations (Cano and Delano 2007: 714).

As a new strategy to execute council recommendations, and thus foster ties abroad, the

IME utilizes its 46 consulate offices in the U.S. In each office[20], IME's personnel dedicate time

and effort to coordinate projects derived from recommendations such as educational

programs, health promotion, and community improvement activities. Evidence accumulated

over the past decade has already shed light about the role of several IME's sponsored projects

on communities abroad[21]. Itinerant consulates, however, as a relatively new IME program,

there is little meaningful academic research undertaken. In order to help provide specific

examples in the Mexican policy repertoire, in what follows is a brief account on the role of

itinerant consulates in the LRGV.

Engaging Political Ties Abroad

The itinerant consulate, an initiative of the then-Mexican consul in Boston Carlos Rico

Ferrat, was created in 1999 and was also referred to as "mobile consulates," according to

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[20] In terms of education, the IME coordinates service delivery activities related to literacy, distribution of books, teacher exchange, elementary, and secondary schooling. In relation to health, the IME sponsors *ventanillas de salud* (health windows) in selective consulates and organizes a yearly Binational Health Week event. In terms of community organization, the IME acts as an institutional liaison between the three levels of Mexican government (municipal, state, and federal) and Mexicans abroad to support migrants' communities of origin infrastructural projects (e.g. 3 x 1: each governmental level matches funds provided by Mexican communities abroad) (González Gutiérrez 2006-206).
[21] See González Gutiérrez (2006) for a detailed review of the IME activities.

Montero-Sieburth (2007). The initial purpose of the itinerant consulate was to make consulate

services available to people with limited resources, who lived in remote areas, and did not have

the financial means or ability to make the trip to the Boston Consulate (Montero-Sieburth 2007:

19). Throughout the years the concept of the itinerant consulate expanded to all 46 offices

across the U.S. and increased their service scope in a more comprehensive way for Mexican

communities abroad.

Figure 5 Itinerant Consulate Sign in Starr County

As a one of the most densely Mexican populated area in the U.S., the importance of the

Lower Rio Grande Valley for the Mexican government is evident. Within a 60-mile range, two

consulate offices support Mexican communities there. One, located in Brownsville, serves the

counties of Cameron, Kennedy, and Brooks. The other, located in McAllen, serves Hidalgo,

Starr, and Willacy counties. In the McAllen office, particularly, the organization and promotion

of itinerant consulates derives of collaborative efforts between local organizations (e.g.

churches, community, health, and educational) and the IME office of the consulate. As we can

see in the figure five, publicity is fundamental in every event, however, to maximize access to

services offered by both consulates and nonprofit organizations to immigrants and local

communities is necessary to have an adequate marketing strategy[22]. When I asked the Ríos-

Gallegos family about this specific issue, Ramón said,

> *The itinerant consulates,* I say, are very accessible because they always are on the move.
> It is very practical and simple for people to access their services. Perhaps the only issue,
> I think, is to advertise them [consulates] little bit more in the radio. Here [Starr County]
> people listen a lot the radio. I am not sure how much the consulate officials are involved
> with the radio, but they could use it to promote more the itinerant consulates. I say this
> because I knew about this event in *Radio Esperanza* (Translated.R-G.17:44).

Most people I observed used itinerant consulates for documentation purpose, particularly

in their quest for a *matricula consular*[23]. It was even more apparent during the holiday season.

Families wanted to process their paperwork before leaving the U.S. to avoid any entanglements

with Mexican officials. Others, meanwhile, came specifically to get the *matricula consular* for

identification purposes and to open bank accounts. The consulate usually handled between 50

and 60 applications during each event. The waiting time of approximately 30 minutes to

complete the paperwork offered attendees a small window of opportunity to discover, seek, or

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[22] I observed, for instance, the combined effort between the San Martin de Porres Catholic
Church, Colonias Unidas Organization, "La Unión del Pueblo Entero" [L.U.P.E.] Association and
Claudia Trujillo as the IME representative to provide consular services such as Mexican
documentation (e.g. passports, birth certificates, *matricula consular*) and make accessible
health, cultural, and educational programs to the Mexican community.

[23] Matricula consular refers to a consular identification card (ID). According to Délano (2009),
the matricula consular works as a form of a valid identification in lieu of state issued cards.
Many financial institutions, cities, counties, and police departments accept the matricula
consular to facilitate the identification of individuals. It intends, as Délano (2009) describes,
also to smooth the settlement process of migrants abroad, particularly, those who cannot get
state issued IDs and social security numbers, mostly, undocumented status migrants (Pp. 793).

obtain services from local community organizations.

Consulate officials and volunteers not only distributed basic information on educational

services sponsored by the consulate, but they also encouraged attendees to take advantage of

local educational resources[24]. On one occasion Claudia Trujillo (the IME representative) asked

me to assist an immigrant family with University of Texas-Pan American's admission process. I

later managed to interview the family about their experiences with the itinerant consulate:

> *How did you know about the mobile consulate?* While I [Tina] was driving, I also was listening to *Radio Esperanza.* That's how I knew about the consulate in Starr County. Then, I wrote all the information about that event: where, when, and what time, and since I was in town I decided to go.

> *So, you make use of the consulate every time it goes to your town?* In fact, I wasn't aware that the Mexican government offered mobile consulates. I knew about it because of the radio station. I remember that day, after I finished my day of work, to drive directly to the consulate. I did not even tell my husband. I went into the mobile consulate looking for Claudia Trujillo.

> *How did you know about her?* She was in the radio. In fact, she mentioned that she [Claudia] would be in the consulate giving information about local educational opportunities for children with vague immigration statuses. That statement caught immediately my attention so I decided to go and ask her information about who should I talk to discuss the specific case of my daughter. If they could refer me a person to help me with the admission process of my daughter into the University of Texas Pan American.

> *Did Claudia help you?* At the beginning she doubted and then she told me that a person from the university was in the event. She wanted talk to you [the researcher] before she could give me an answer. I felt relief when Claudia referred us to you [the researcher]. At that moment, I was very grateful because of the strong and sincere *support* from the consulate (Translated.R-G.05:07).

I was able to provide the student's family information about the requirements and

opportunities of attending the University of Texas-Pan American. I later introduced the student

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[24] It provides information about literacy, elementary and secondary schooling completion programs.

to an admissions and financial aid advisor. As shown in Figure 6, nonprofit community health

clinics delivered vision and diabetes screenings while nameless volunteers distributed flyers

about clinic locations and services in Hidalgo and Starr counties. The consulate also made a

significant effort to guide the Mexican community toward U.S.-based services and programs,

where applicable. Texas Department of State Health Services representatives, for example (see

Figure 7), distributed pamphlets addressing issues related to family and community health.

They even provided information about individual and family service eligibility.

Figure 6 Health Workers Delivering Eye Exams in Starr County. For interpretation of the references to color in this and all other figures, the reader is referred to the electronic version of this dissertation.

These examples illustrate how Mexican state-adopted policies — like the itinerant consulate

— serve communities abroad, and how immigrants capitalize on consular and community-

based services. Unlike previous attempts largely intended to simply bolster nationalism, recent

policies now include gauged services aimed at promoting migrants' wellbeing in the community

where they reside. The IME, in this way, not only enhances the positive image of the Mexican

government abroad, but it also entrenches itself in the settlement process of many immigrant

families living in the United States.

Figure 7 A Texas State Worker Offers Information to Immigrants

While the analysis of domestic politics abroad provides important insights into

governmental involvement, migration politics at home are an intrinsic cog in the system. As

previously mentioned, much of the scholarly research has focused on the positive impact of

state-adopted policies abroad, which is geared toward reinforce migrants' national allegiance.

However, as I later discuss, further attention is needed on policy issues that negatively affect

Mexican migrants at home.

Migrant Policies at Home

As a part of the inclusive Mexican adopted policies on communities abroad in 1989, according to Favela Gavia (2004), the government created the *Paisano* Program (Pp. 292). Seeking to rebuild trust and establish relationships — after years of institutional abuse and neglect — the Mexican government established and implemented the *Paisano* Program to prevent acts of corruption and extortion — *mordida* — by state officials toward migrants entering and leaving Mexico (see Favela Gavia 2004: 293). Whether this program is successful or not remains unclear. Roldan Davila (2004), for instance, says that in spite of many complaints filed by Mexican migrants against abusive Mexican federal, state, and municipal officials through the *Paisano* Program[25], they still face prolonged maltreatment and extortion.

The continuance of corruption patterns linked to governmental institutions calls into question the significant attempt by the *Paisano* program to prevent *mordida*[26] practices. Poorly designed state policies, intended to support migrants abroad, negatively affect migrants at home. The fact that officials interpret and create migration policies without accountability precludes a sense of communality to Mexico[27]. In this context, it is difficult to understand institutional corruptive behavior without critically examining the role the National Institute of

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[25] I cite the Paisano guide instead of the Law of Nationality (Ley de Nacionalidad) published in March 1998 and revised in January 2005 because migrants have a more realistic access to the guide rather than a hard copy of the law *per se*.

[26] According to Richardson, Resendiz, and Bustamante (2006), *mordida* in Mexico refers to institutional and cultural bribing practices: "The practice of la mordida seems to have become entrenched in Mexico, not because people like it, but because it has been institutionalized into both the culture and the structure of Mexican society" (Pp. 223).

[27] Personal fieldwork and interviews.

Migration (Instituto Nacional de Migración—INM) plays as, typically, the first institutional contact migrants in-transit to Mexico make.

The INM is a federal level agency charged with planning, executing, and supervising migratory services. At the points of entry and border checkpoints, its main role is to process and verify migratory documentation. The INM does have authority to approve or reject entry into Mexico. However, a questionable interpretation of any migration policy gives INM officials the opportunity to solicit a bribe.

There are several patterns of bribery observed along the border Mexican region. As a condition to prove citizenship and approve entry permits, for instance, INM officials require presentation of the *matricula consular*. However, Mexican immigrants have other options to demonstrate citizenship, such as birth certificates, passports, and military identification cards, according to the 2009 *Paisano* guide. Furthermore, if migrants or dual nationals living abroad lack any of these documents to prove citizenship, declaring under oath their Mexican citizenship has been deemed sufficient (Instituto Nacional de Migración 2009: 7-9). However, INM officials manage manipulate the interpretation of these requirements in ways that benefit themselves.

Superficially, it sometimes appears that officials are unprepared to tackle basic issues of citizenship as they relate to Mexican migrants and dual nationals living abroad. Mario, who has crossed the border for years, describes his experience with INM officials who seem ignorant about Mexico's nationality policy:

> When I have been asked about my citizenship, I say that I am Mexican American — they did not like that. I have been told by *la migra Mexicana* to step out of the bus. Once on the ground, in a very rude manner, they said, "What are you, *Americano* or *Mexicano?*" "You have to make up your mind" "You are either Mexican or American" "You cannot be

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both *Mexicano* and *Americano*" (Translated.E.11:00).

It is readily apparent that these government officials are only feigning ignorance. Instead, they simply manipulate the interpretation of state-adopted polices in ways that benefit them best. Migrants travelling by car, for example, must obtain an automobile permit. It is a relatively simple procedure: first, INM window, then on to Custom officials, and lastly, payment — *Banjercito*[28]. But it is the first step that is the most problematic. INM officials require proof of Mexican citizenship and legal residency abroad (e.g. green card[29] and certificate of naturalization[30]), but many refuse to issue an entry permit unless migrants specifically produce the *matricula consular*. If it is not available, INM officers let you know it is bribe time.

When families accompany migrants, the problems are compounded. Before March 1, 2010, a birth certificate and state-issued identification card or driver's license were considered enough evidence to establish citizenship status and residence in the United States. As a consequence of the latest policy changes, U.S. citizens now need passports[31] (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores 2010). This policy creates confusion and promotes extortionate practices. INM officials, for example, have asked for (bribe) money by implying that Mexican immigrants'

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[28] Banjercito is the official bank of the Mexican armed forces. As a way to prevent acts of corruption, the government assigned Banjercito authority to process migrants and tourists' car permits, paperwork and payments (personal fieldwork and www.banjercito.com.mx).

[29] U.S. alien permanent resident cards are also known as green cards.

[30] According to article 12 of the Ley of Nacionalidad (2005), after March 1998, all Mexican born individuals with two or more nationalities, when they enter or leave the country most do it as Mexican nationals (Pp. 3).

[31] As of March 1, 2010, the new policy requires passport or passport card for non-Mexicans visiting the country.

American-born children need American passports to enter Mexico; under Mexican law, they are Mexican nationals[32].

Travelling by other means does not protect people from these malicious acts either. At borderline checkpoints, INM officials demand the *matricula consular* — and only the *matricula consular* — as mandatory proof of citizenship for migrants' residing abroad. If they fail to produce the *matricula consular,* officials simply ask for a bribe to let the travelers pass. If migrants refuse to yield to the demands, officials threaten prolonged interrogations, delays, and even detention unless a bribe is offered. With no matricula consular, little recourse, and no desire to become immersed in such constraints and complications, migrants routinely pay the *mordida* and move on. Lines of up to 10 migrants giving officers $20 each to let them continue the trip are routine sights. I talked about this issue with an INM official and was specifically told, "if you live abroad and want to come [to Mexico] you need to process your matricula consular. Period."

Many migrants driving into Mexico also face mistreatment and extortion by transit authorities if they are unfamiliar with the local driving laws. In America, for instance, if a person gets a traffic ticket it means literally a citation; the individual has the right to contest the charge and penalty in a municipal court. In Mexico — in Reynosa particularly — if an individual with a foreign license plate is issued a traffic ticket, it literally means a fine. According to the city code,

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[32] Many immigrant families, as Chavez (1992) already has noted, are in fact *binational* families (Pp. 129). A mix of immigration-legal status members alludes to this family arrangement. According to the Mexican constitution, children born in other country of parents born in Mexican territory are Mexican born children (Camara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Union 1917: 30-II)).

the offender must immediately pay the fine. If a driver cannot or will not pay the traffic fine,

the car gets impounded (Republicano Ayuntamiento de Reynosa 2009: 35). Unsuspecting

migrant drivers get pulled over in the middle of the night and are told by police officers to

follow them to the nearest police precinct to pay the fine. Migrants driving alone often want to

avoid a potentially unsafe or unpleasant situation and this, again, gives local transit officers the

opportunity to ask for a bribe in exchange of letting migrants continue their trips.

We can conclude in this section that Mexican adopted policies send contradictory messages

to migrants living in Mexico and abroad. It is undisputed that domestic politics abroad foster

strong ties between the government and communities by providing resources, information, and

services to immigrants. It is equally true — but not as well documented — that domestic

politics at home, reinforced by institutional corruptive practices, play a contradictory role in

shaping a sense of communality. In what follows, on the other side of the border, I examined

the role American policies play on Mexicans immigrants as I attempted to understand how their

social position has been constructed in this contiguous region with Mexico.

U.S. Policies

Scholarly evidence accumulated over the years has shed some light into the U.S. policy

interpretation of Mexicans as a foreign/racialized population group (Bean and Stevens 2003;

Chavez 2008; Stern 2004). This section examines the historical policy-making process that has

shaped Mexicans' social positioning as a minority group in the United States. Richardson (1999)

traces the marginalization of Mexicans in South Texas back to the late 19th century when

American colonization displaced Mexicans landowners mostly by using legal or violent

measures. Mexicans, as a result, had limited work options except to join the migrant flow and

respond to America's now-historic demand for labor[33]. Mexicans not only proved to be diligent

and hard workers, but also to be a good source of reliable, cheap, and disposable labor in the

American agricultural and industrial business sectors. Throughout the years, the America's

government created legislation specifically designed to exclude *other* population groups (e.g.

the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act), yet Mexicans retained a major role in the American labor

force. With passage of the 1917 Immigration Act, for instance, agricultural and industrial

business lobbyists successfully pressed legislators to grant a contract labor clause to Mexican

workers that would allow them to enter and work in the U.S. The xenophobic and *nativistic*

public discourse reflected in the 1924 National Origin Quota Act effectively restricted Eastern,

Southern European, and other non-white immigration to America, but not Mexicans[34].

Although the 1924 legislation is one of the most restrictive policies ever enacted, Mexicans

again were exempt from the 2% quota. This positioned them as a major source of cheap and

disposable manual labor for the years coming (Stern 2004: 301-305).

   In spite of this quota exemption, the 1920s decade was not particularly easy for Mexicans.

Xenophobic and nationalistic stances prevailed in many political circles, and immigration issues

were largely in the public discourse. Stern (2004) similarly suggests that the social and legal

position of Mexicans was vague and full of contradictions. In fact, Chavez (2008) alludes to this

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[33] According to Richardson (1999), land was the main cause of divergences between Whites and Mexicans. There were three forms on how White settlers appropriated the land of the Lower Rio Grande Valley from *Tejano* rancheros. Intermarriage: Tejano brides married Whites in order to blend into the new culture. Legal system: the ignorance of how the new legal system worked regarding property taxes played a significant role in the loose of their landownership. Violence: literally, White settlers went into Tejano ranches and killed the owners.
[34] This legislation set a 2% quota for each population group listed in the 1924 Act from the 1890 census figures.

decade — when Mexicans began to migrate into the U.S. in large numbers — as the time when the concept of "illegal alien" begin to emerge. After July 1, 1924, for example, everyone (including Mexicans) entering the U.S. without a visa was subject to deportation. Legislators enacted strict laws criminalizing entry into the U.S. without proper documentation — a misdemeanor for first timers and a felony for repeated offenders. As described by Stern (2004), this type of policies affected particularly Borderlands Mexicans:

> Mexicans' vague legal status made them especially vulnerable: they could be categorized as nonresident aliens (usually migrating across the border for seasonal labor with the intent of returning), commuters recognizable to immigration inspectors or carrying documentation, or American citizens certified by passport or identification. These slippery categories meant that many Mexicans, if they were undocumented or looked "suspicious," could easily be classified as "aliens" subject to removal by the Border Patrol (Stern 2004: 305).

America's nativistic discourse made Mexicans the subject of many racialized stereotypes. Mexicans were stigmatized as diseased, dirty, and morally undesirable and, thus, permeated policy-making processes. Chavez (2008: 27) and Stern (2004: 325) have long suggested that the enforcement of 1924 Act[35] laid the foundation for the illegal alien moniker thrust upon Mexicans. Americans, therefore, considered them foreign, alien, and prone to crime regardless of their immigration and citizenship statuses. As a result, the creation of the Border Patrol provided the state with a gate-keeping arm to screen, sift, and reject the unwelcome. The peak of this policy implementation and enforcement against Mexicans occurred in the 1930s and resulted in massive, indiscriminate deportations, including U.S. citizens of Mexican ancestry as well (Acuña 2007: 163).

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[35] The 1924 National Origin Quota Act creates the Border Patrol on May 28, 1924.

A decade later, the U.S. Congress passed the Act of April 29, 1943 and the United States and Mexico officially begin their first major temporary agricultural labor program (Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services 2003a). While this program was designed to alleviate the agricultural labor shortage that existed during World War II, it served as the forerunner for what would become a guest worker program. The Act of July 12, 1951 provided the legal and operative framework for the Mexican Bracero program that continued until to December 31, 1964 (Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services 2003b). Scholarly evidence accumulated over the years shows, however, that guest worker programs were crafted for two reasons: to profit from cheap labor, and to create restrictionist migration laws that prevented the integration of temporary migrants and their families into society (Gamboa 2000: 158). Historically, guest worker programs were enacted primarily to keep migration a temporary event. But the use of restrictionist laws underscores the materialist and racist roots of all guest worker programs, which is to legally — but explicitly — prevent the integration of racialized groups from developing countries (e.g. Mexicans) into the U.S. society.

On the basis of unequal distribution of power between majority and minority groups, Healey (2007) points out to race as the social force that permeates social, economic, and political institutions leading to systemic patterns of unequal treatment and, thus, institutional discrimination (Pp. 22). The LRGV, as a place where two societies meet, is a good example of how race and ethnicity, as a dimensions of power, influence community life. Jose Barajas, who came to the U.S. in 1947 as a three-month-old child, provides a vivid illustration of his experience as a Mexican immigrant in the Valley:

> Growing up being *Mexicano* was not the best thing of the world to be, I am not saying that I was ashamed of it, but you know you try to become as much *Americano* as

possible. *What was the social environment in those days that made you think in that way?* A lot of discrimination. *Discrimination?* Yes, even for Mexican Americans born in Texas and the United States… we were painted with the same brush, *regardless…* but within the group of Mexicanos, if you were Mexicano from Mexico that was even lower down (B.10:15).

Jose lived in Mercedes during the 1970s but, given the prevalence of institutional and individual discrimination toward Mexicans, he did not like the city. Jose wanted a place where being Mexican did not matter. He simply thought of himself as another American, not as much as a Mexican. He wanted a place to coexist and enjoy the core American values — a strong work ethic, education, and a friendly family environment where he could raise his children in a healthy way. As a response against the larger patterns of discrimination and racism of the region, Jose and his family moved from Mercedes to Brownsville and started a new life. As Jose recalls:

> There is a world of difference between Brownsville and Mercedes. It is like two different worlds. *I did not know that.* Okay. The divide line in Brownsville was those who have money and those who don't. It didn't matter what color you were as long you have money in Brownsville. If you have no money as White, Black, or Mexicano, you were in the lower scale… It was more economic distinction than ethnic distinction. Mercedes was a totally different thing… are you familiar with the Valley at all? *Yes…* Highway 83, from Harlingen to McAllen, one side the Highway 83 was Mexico *chiquito,* the other side was the white side of town. In every town except in Donna the south side was little Mexico, the north side was the white side. In Donna was the other way around. In Donna the south side was the white side. In all other places the north side was the White side, the south side was the Mexicano *chiquito* because that side got flooded and land was cheaper… when I was going to school I did not see any white kids until I got to Junior High School in Mercedes. If you live on the north side of the 83, you went to schools on north side. If you live in the south side, you went to schools there. It was not until I got into Junior High School that we were with a group of people we did not know. *However,* when I got to Brownsville, I immediately noticed the difference. I came here in 1972 and there were still a lot of the same thing in Mercedes, there was none of that here in Brownsville. It is okay to live here (B.13:02).

Despite the discriminative pressure to keep Mexican migration seasonal, Jose managed to find a place to permanently settle in the LRGV region. Unlike other towns and cities of the

region, Brownsville was a place that — for Jose — emphasized personal merit over racial

preconceptions, provided the progressive economic, racial, political, and social environment to

raise his children, and offered employment opportunities. Although previous immigration

policies enticed Mexicans to keep migration seasonal, a few Mexican immigrants — Jose

included — managed to find a favorable place to settle in, establish their lives, and integrate

themselves and their families into the mainstream society.

Ironically, the Immigration Reform and Control Act of November 6, 1985 (IRCA) evolved the

migratory structure of the Mexican migrant population into a permanent settlement (Cornelius

1992: 183-185). It provided amnesty in 1986 to undocumented individuals under specific

conditions[36]. This policy shift had monumental implications. Because this legislation mandated

physical residency in the United States, non-agricultural undocumented migrants who qualified

to become permanent residents were barred from traveling to Mexico while the administrative

process[37] took place. After legalization, former Mexican immigrants were required to remain in

the United States for at least six months in order to maintain their documented status. In this

way, IRCA allowed sojourners of both genders to establish legal households in the U.S. and later

relocate other family members through the family reunification program. According to Chavez

[36] Note however that not all-seasonal migration swiftly became permanent. IRCA's special
provisions for Special Agricultural Workers (SAWs) did not make it mandatory to reside
continuously in the U.S. SAWs were allowed to travel back and forth to and from México while
they were adjusting their immigration status. Although in a short-term basis IRCA did not
modify the seasonal migration patterns for agricultural workers, once permanent residency was
granted, they were required, also, to show a *bona fide* disposition to reside permanently in the
U.S. (Durand, Massey, and Parrado 1999).
[37] According to Fischer (1993) main qualifications for immigrant status adjustment were: 1)
continuous undocumented (illegal) residence from January 1, 1982, and 2) documented
evidence (hard copies) of continuous residence.

(2008), however, instead of improving mainstream America's image of Mexicans, it worsened it.

<center>Post IRCA Challenges</center>

In the 1990s, as Chavez (2008) points out, the historical and socially constructed public image of Mexicans as foreign, alien, and criminal remained. An alarmist cry about the *reconquest* and invasion of the southwest — both based on migration and high birth rates — were added to the national public discourse (Pp. 77).

Before the implementation of IRCA, as Durand *et al.* (1999) contend, the majority of the Mexican migration was temporary. Although fertility rates were high, in comparison to other non-Mexican people, migration was the major contributor to the Mexican population growth in the United States. Since migration into the U.S. was seasonal, the main family/household[38] depiction was a separated family unit. This physical separation allowed wives, left behind in México, to conduct their reproductive labor while husbands maximized wages in the U.S. doing their productive labor (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1999).

After 1986, according to Bean and Stevens (2003), approximately 2 million Mexican undocumented migrants changed their immigration status under IRCA provisions (Pp. 55). This massive legalization, Greenwood and Tienda (1998) suggest, turned previous patterns of

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[38] I use interchangeably the concept of family/household. Glenn (1999) defines family as a social unit tied by blood or marriage that conducts productive and reproductive labor, among other tasks (p. 79-80). Rapp (1999) describes households as the "…empirically measurable units within which people pool resources and perform certain tasks" (p. 181), usually production and reproduction of labor, consumption, and socialization.

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temporary migration into permanent settlement and impacted Mexican fertility[39] rates in the

U.S. (Pp. 292-295). This is reflected by Bustamante's (2004) net immigration estimates, which

found natural increase to be more consequential than net migration (58% *versus* 42%) as a

predicator of the Mexican-origin population's rapid growth in the 1990s. Although these figures

are important, research by critical demographers and anthropologists (Chavez 2004; Ginsburg

and Rapp 1991; Roberts 1997) suggests that mainstream interpretations of high fertility rates

may be interpreted as a tangible demographic threat to the White population. High fertility

rates, associated to what Colen (1990) calls a "racially stratified reproduction in a White

society," are seen as atypical sexual behavior. Because biological reproduction becomes

racialized, biological reproduction in combination with social preservation produces fears about

the non-White population growth (Ginsburg and Rapp 1991). For many privileged White

females, biological reproduction may be encouraged and considered a positive life-event. Yet

for racialized and lower-class females, sexual reproduction is viewed negatively (Chavez 2004:

175; Ginsburg and Rapp 1991: 316).

Monica, a mother of two children who has lived in the Valley most of her life and struggles

to achieve economic stability, commented on one of her traumatic childbirth experience with

nurses and doctors in a major hospital of the area:

…that was horrible, I remember being in labor pain so I went to the hospital. The

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[39] Since, as Sáenz (2004) points out, Mexican population growth is not only a consequence of migration, but also of natural increase — excess of births over deaths, the two phenomena are interdependent. Departing from Greenwood and Tienda (1998) assumption, permanent settlements shape Mexican fertility because of "…1) the intensity of the flows over time; 2) the highly concentrated settlement patterns of recent and earlier arrivals; and 3) the reproductive behavior of foreign-born women" (Pp. 292).

doctors did not admit me that time because I was not ready, so I went back home. Then, the pain came back and I went for a second time to the hospital. They [hospital staff] admitted me with no problems. They were very nice, but when the nurses and the doctor came to my room that totally changed. *How come?* One of the nurses was telling me that we Mexicans come to the U.S. to have babies for the check [welfare], food stamps... The doctor who was delivering the baby also asked all the time for the father… Where is the father? Where is the father? Where is the father? My mother told him that the father was not present and that he will not be present! After, the doctor looked at me asking… then, how did you get pregnant? Why the father is not present? Just imagine that situation in labor pain! Other nurses made same comments about me, laughing and laughing, that we Mexican women just want to have so many children to get welfare. *Did they tell you all those comments in English or Spanish?* In Spanish, so I could understand them (Translated.S.9:25).

Monica's example represents just one case of how Mexican high birth rates, as an unintended effect of the U.S. immigration policy influenced by permanent settlement patterns, not only exacerbated the public discourse against Mexicans as invaders and criminals, but also prompted the shaping of new policy that brought attention to the U.S.-Mexico border.

In the 1990s, according to Nevins (2010), the policy shift of the U.S. immigration enforcement agencies against unauthorized immigration changed from "pursuing" to "deterring." Three major Border Patrol paramilitary missions evolved from this new approach designed to prevent unlawful entries into the United States: Operation Blockade in the Juarez-El Paso crossing (September 19, 1993); Operation gatekeeper in the Tijuana-San Diego area (October 1, 1994); and Operation Rio Grande in the Matamoros-Brownsville corridor during the fall of 1997 (Nevins 2010: 104-117). After the tragic attacks of September 11, 2001, the U.S.-Mexico border again became a geopolitical point of tension and disharmony. A public clamor to control the border from Texas to California emphasized that the border was a doorway for potential terrorists.

Post 9/11 Challenges

I have lived primarily in the Northern and Southern parts of Texas, specifically, the Dallas-Fort Worth and McAllen-Brownsville areas. I started the doctoral program at Michigan State University in 2002 and visited the Midwestern and Northeastern parts of the U.S., including the U.S.-Canada borderlands area. I found that, unlike the Southern area of Texas where the Border Patrol has a constant presence, permanent checkpoints[40] were nonexistent along the nation's Northern border. Afterwards, I wondered about this differentiated treatment and, more importantly, about its racial and social implications.

According to Chavez (2008) and Nevins (2010), the social construction of the borderlands as an unsecure place where illegal people, drug-dealers, and smugglers cross over into the U.S. without any kind of control has permeated the national political body. After the 9/11 attacks, Chavez (2008) says, a new negative public discourse — this time promoting the border as a long-stretched place where terrorists may enter the U.S. and carry out an attack (Pp. 36) — has emerged. This negative connation prompted the adoption of new policies, mostly related to border security issues. As a result, then-president George W. Bush signed the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 and the Secure Fence Act of 2006, which resulted in the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI)[41] and the construction of a border Wall between Mexico and the U.S.

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[40] For clarification purposes, in the southern border, checkpoints staffed by Border Patrol agents are usually located between 20 and 60 miles from the Mexican-U.S. borderline. Anyone who intends to go north must pass this inspection. The federal government created these checkpoints to deter and prevent essentially undocumented migration, human trafficking, and drug smuggling (American Civil Liberties Union of Texas 2009: 26).

[41] WHTI requires American citizens to have a passport by June 2009 to re-enter into the U.S.

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In this context, I found U.S. Border Patrol checkpoints, as permanent state-of-the-art

technological facilities designed to monitor and control population movements, unique to the

Southwestern border. Anyone going north must stop at the checkpoints located on U.S.

Highway 281, known as the Falfurrias, and the U.S. 77 — called as the Sarita — have to prove

citizenship (see the map provided in Chapter Three). In contrast, the enforcement of

immigration policies through Detroit checkpoints is considered passè.

Enforcement methods of immigration laws also differ for people of Mexican ancestry.

Unlike Whites, whose citizenship may be hardly questioned, Mexicans are overly scrutinized.

The rationale is that it is difficult to differentiate between an undocumented and documented

Mexican (e.g. Green Card holder or a U.S. Citizen). Thus, Mexicans crossing the checkpoints are

far more perused, and thus harassed, than any other population group.

People who travel by air also experience the hassles of the informal U.S. Border Patrol

checkpoints inside of each airport. I remember myself many times being harassed by Border

Patrol officers both in the airport and on the road. For instance:

> I recall an incident that happened between U.S. Border Patrol officers and me. While
> walking in the McAllen airport lobby with two other white friends, a female officer
> began intently staring at me even before I reached the TSA checkpoint. After a few
> doubtful moments the officer finally approached us, but seemed to ignore my two
> friends. Instead, she queried me. "Sir, are you a U.S. citizen?" I confirmed, with a strong
> accent of a native Spanish speaker, that I was. I then remember her asking "So, you are
> a naturalized citizen?" Because her demeanor and that specific comment upset me, I
> paused for a moment before responding, "Does it make any difference?" After awkward
> moment of silence, she walked away speechless.

While doing fieldwork I found Mexican immigrants, who routinely cross border checkpoints,

to encounter several type of questions — such as "where were you born?" "Where do you

work?" "Where are you heading?" "What is the purpose of your trip?" — that reflect some

suspicion of citizenship. If a person is a naturalized citizen, the officer often initiates a round of new questions regarding naturalization. "Why do you still speak English with accent?" "Do you have family in Mexico?" If the answers do not satisfy the officer, the person undergoes a secondary inspection where the car is usually searched and the individual temporarily detained.

Much like in other areas of the U.S., institutional disengagement is part of life in the Valley. However, this form of exclusion against Mexicans has been harsher after the implementation of the WHTI, which now requires anyone crossing the border into Mexico or Canada to have a passport for re-entry into the U.S. In what the American Civil Liberties Union attorney Robin Goldfaden calls a "blanket race-suspicion," the State Department systematically denies U.S. passports to people of Mexican ancestry, natives of the LRGV, and born by midwives (American Civil Liberties Union of Texas 2008b). Issues of race, ancestry, and national origin often preclude the validity of documents — e.g. birth certificates — of many U.S. citizens of Mexican origin. Midwife-assisted birth certificates, for example, do not provide enough evidence to establish U.S. citizenship. Additional documentation, such as baptismal certificates, Texas health immunization records, school records, and letters from the Texas Midwifery Board, are often required to demonstrate true citizenship (American Civil Liberties Union of Texas 2008a). One may view these situations as atypical and isolated cases, but I observed it firsthand. After the implementation of the WHTI, for example, Vicente, an undergraduate student, applied for the U.S. passport. He wanted to earn some college credits in a summer study abroad program. The State Department denied Vicente's application:

> Let me tell you something, in my last semester of college, around 2008, I planned a trip to Spain… a study abroad program. I wanted to visit Europe. That was the first time my U.S. passport was denied. I had to cancel my trip. I bitterly swallowed that rejection. But, it is 2010 and I still don't have a passport. This means that if I want to cross into

Reynosa for a wedding of a friend, a *quinceañera* of a family member, I will experience some delays in the bridge. Look, I wanted so much to make that trip to Europe. I had everything ready but the passport. It was hard to cancel my study abroad because of a State Department decision. Now, in 2010, the fact that I still do not have my passport is even more painful (Translated.V.24:21).

People, and specifically my relatives in Reynosa, told me that I am in a similar situation to the people of old Germany (referring to the Post WWII treatment of West and East Germans), trapped on one side of the border because of a virtual/legal fence… the passport (Translated.V.6:23).

After Vicente applied for the U.S. passport, he has resubmitted new evidence twice without receiving a positive response from the State Department. I then asked Vicente how he managed to keep your life connected to Reynosa?

Well, I always carry a backpack every time I cross into Mexico. I bring my passport application, a copy of the birth certificate, proof of U.S. residence, my driver's license, and the social security card every time I cross the bridge. I do not want to be isolated from Mexico and my family so we hired an immigration lawyer, one of those who are familiar with these issues of citizenship. You know that I am not the only one in this situation and I do not think I will be the last one (Translated.V.15:23).

To understand this dilema, Higginbotham and Andersen (2006) offer clarity on the issue of citizenship, social exclusion, and race. Citizenship, as a dimension of power, is patterned by a set of *de jure* and symbolic attributes of national membership that help distinguish citizens from non-citizens. *De jure* citizenship, for instance, refers to a set of membership rights to allow and restrict participation in social and civic events; it both grants and limits access to certain privileges (for instance, the right to a passport). Symbolic citizenship refers to the membership rights of minority groups who, regardless of nationality, are treated unequally (Higginbotham and Andersen 2006: 168). This implies that social institutions have used *de jure* and symbolic citizenship to deny membership rights to racially minority groups in the U.S.

Discussion

I have examined the role of Mexican and U.S. policies as social factors that affect immigrant family life. By using selective examples from pioneer scholars, who have already laid the groundwork in this area of interest, I attempted to identify the similarities and differences between families who engage Mexican resources and those who utilize U.S. ones. The Mexican approach, for instance, differs in that it uses institutional resources to strengthen links between communities abroad and Mexico and makes aggregated services more accessible. This helps ease immigrants' settlement into the U.S. But they are also similar because Mexican institutional corruption and U.S. nationalistic and discriminatory policies serve to politically disengage immigrants from both places.

In particular, this study reveals many different patterns of political engagement — from embracing Mexican political resources to resisting both countries' actions. The interviews offered descriptive and rich examples of how immigrant families manage to embrace Mexican political ties abroad while coping with institutional corruption at home. The Rios–Gallegos family, for example, commented on their experience about living in two *Mexicos*:

> *Is the Mexican government concern about your situation?*
>
> Ramon: I said that at least on the U.S. side, the consulate is concerned about us and expressed a desire for an *acercamiento* (connection) to people. On the other side (Mexico) is the opposite. On this side, when we go to the consulate there is a trustful relationship. Here, you ask for services without fear (Translated.R-G.23:10).
>
> We feel safe here (Starr County) around the police. In Mexico, we fear the police. You cross the border by car and the police see money. It gets uglier every time you cross the river. In fact, there was a time in which the person in charge of the city chamber of commerce had to make several complaints to the municipal mayor against police officers to solve this issue. We commended this intervention because the corruption was truly exaggerated (Translated.R-G.28:02).

While the Mexican consulate's effort to intensify a relationship with immigrant communities in the border seems to be genuine, governments at home send contradictory messages. Institutional corruption is the norm. This is not to say that migrants do not respond accordingly. Migrants' strong commitment to keep family linkages intact challenges the validity of the situation. However, the proximity of two asymmetrical societies and the intensity of border crossing, as a local manifestation of borderlands transnationalism, makes it difficult to understand what information is exchanged and what is challenged. Levitt (2001), for instance, says that "migrants send or bring back the values and practices they have exposed to…" as social remittances to stimulate change (Pp. 55). The insight underlying this argument, from Levitt's (2001) ethnographic work between Boston and the Dominican Republic (D.R.), is that change in the political structure of the D.R. can be achieved when transnational migrants bring the U.S. notion of integrity back home with them as a social remittance (Pp. 122). I found, however, that although the practice of *mordida* is not necessarily exchanged, it is also unchallenged. This argument is consistent with previous work that I coauthored:

> the practice of *la mordida* seems to have become entrenched in Mexico, not because people like it, but because it has been institutionalized into both the culture and structure of Mexican society (Richardson, Resendiz, and Bustamante 2006: 223).

I also observed in my fieldwork other families reject their links to Mexico. We talk about border families who have settled in the U.S. and are very animate about the social cost of crossing the border, in terms of being exposed to corruptive practices. Although these families recognize their Mexican ancestry, they feel unconnected to their homeland. Instead, many develop strategies to cope with racist and discriminative behavior in order to achieve the American dream. In doing so, for instance, the Barajas family described their relocation

experience from Mercedes — a place where race was key — to Brownsville — where merit was

more valued. Jose found a community where his family could find employment, education, and

financial stability. Jose Junior commented that although Mexico is present in their lives, it is

more from a genealogical, not familiar, standpoint:

> [Mexico is present in my life] only because I don't like the feeling when I was little of not knowing where I came from... That always bugged me… that was just very me… I do find and feel an attachment to it from, like I said, a genealogical standpoint. Knowing where I came from, I can convey to my future generations (B. 1:08:25).

> For the most part… I did not feel connected to the Mexican part, and it has surfaced… in the past 10 years. Because I got older I began to think about my future. So, when I begin to realize that if it does not come from me, it would be lost. And my children will not be able to know that part of me. I feel that responsibility. *Jose [father]*: you know I started seeing with him that difference when he was in Boston. When he called home, he said, "we are gonna have a *cinco de mayo* celebration." What do we celebrate? See, in Boston, New York, Houston (it) is a big deal. Here in the Valley (it) is not because the Valley is like Mexico. In Mexico *cinco de mayo* is *cinco de mayo*, just another day (B.1:17:44).

The Barajas family case represents one of several immigrant families who were assertive in

their integration process. They transformed challenges into opportunities to ease their family

adjustment into mainstream America. Others still face hostility from racially driven U.S. policies.

Victoria, a graduate student, described her experience and frustration with the U.S. State

Department:

> *Is there any difference on how the state department treats non-Mexican people outside the Valley?* I say yes because these stories [rejecting passports to U.S. citizens] are not heard in northern states, they take place here, in the Valley (V.7:43).

> *So, you feel like a second-class citizen.* Of course, I feel treated as criminal. Look, I am in prison in the country where I was born. I cannot cross the border to visit my family. It is very unjust. During Christmas the whole family usually meets in Mexico. Because of this, we are the only family that does not know what to do. My grandparents are very old, in their 80s, and I am not able to see them. Still, my grandparents want to see my dad, but he, my mother, and siblings do not want to leave me alone in home during this season. I feel very guilty because I am affecting my family (Translated.V.15:41).

We are thus in a position to observe that many U.S. policies consider Mexicans *foreign*

nationals. While the historical stereotype portrays Mexicans as bandits, who come from across

the border and still position them as second-class citizens (Acuña 2007: 282), others — like the

Barajas family — adapt to the conditions of a hostile society.

Therefore, we can conclude that while some families develop coping mechanism to live

under the constraints of the *worst of two worlds* and maintain their familial links with Mexico,

many others manage to live under the conditions of a hostile American society. I found,

however, that Mexicans often live with a permanent sense of collective and individual

resentment against both places.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GENDER ARRANGEMENTS ON MEXICAN IMMIGRANT FAMILY LIFE

Introduction

Lorber (2005) defines gender as an organizing principle of institutional and individual life around a set of cultural and social norms attached to feminine and masculine characteristics (Pp. 5). The underlying idea is that gender differences are part of the larger society that creates institutions and personal relationships patterned by gender inequality. In each society, however, gender inequality transforms into diverse dimensions. Given that a complex interplay of gender inequalities encircles a variety of institutions, actors, and social situations, it takes on different forms in other societies (Lorber 2005: 5).

In this chapter, I focus on labor and power as a large-scale basis of gender inequality. To accomplish this, I use the most articulated account of gender as a structured system — offered by Connell (1987) — to explain my argument. In terms of labor, the central idea is to view the division of labor as a part of a larger initiative created to profit from the unequal gender distribution of domestic work, both paid and unpaid. To speak of free labor is to imply that housework is not work *per se;* it is women's work. Under this notion, men benefit by engaging mostly in paid work. To think of paid work is to envision a gendered work force, skilled and trained to fulfill the objectives of a profit-driven society. This leads to the following point: given that gender divisions are built into social institutions, the relationship between gender and power implies a patterned organizational structure dominated by men with women as subordinates. This is not to say that power is universal and relegated to all men. There are class, race, and sexuality conditions that also position men in marginal places. Even in the family

arena where the idea is prevalent that men dominate marital relations, there are external

conditions (such as employment and immigration status) that erode male domination at home

(Connell 1987: 91-118). I apply this argument to understand the Mexican and U.S. based

influence of gender, as a collective social order, on family life.

I have organized this chapter into two major sections. In the first part, I examine gender

order on both sides of the border as larger factors affecting immigrant families. I use labor,

education, and religion as major attributes to gauge gender's impact on family relations. In

doing so, I examine how and why immigrant families engage Mexican and U.S. gender orders,

and try to understand what impact it makes on their lives. Lastly, I conclude by offering a

summary of the effects of gender, from both sides of the border, on male and female relations.

Similarities and Differences of the Mexican and U.S. Gender Order

To appreciate the extent to which Mexican gender order permeates borders and sustains or

redefines people's relationships, it is crucial to understand gender as it is lived in Mexico. The

first step is to review Mexican history and determine how gender evolved. The academic

literature on women and men relations centered on patriarchy — an organizing principle of

gender and sexual practices that legitimizes men's dominance and women's subordination

(Lewis 1951: 52). This research situated Mexico as a latent example of a patriarchal society in

which men's institutional authority shaped the gender order in terms of social, economic,

political, familial, and sexual relations (see Canak and Swanson 1998: 71 for a further critique

on the subject). Here, two major principles defined a patriarchal society that pressured women

and men to conform to rigid codes of gender behavior: *machismo,* an overtly display of physical

and sexual aggressive masculine behavior, and *marianismo*, a patient, respectful, and obedient

female behavior associated to the religious view of the Virgin Mary. Induced by a male-dominated societal order, *machismo* and *marianismo* — as organizing principles of social life, Stevens (1973) argues — intended to control not only relations, but also life opportunities between women and men (Pp. 59-62).

Although this argument reflects a negative and static view of gender in Mexico's past — stereotypically driven in Mexico today and based on the assumption that gender is fluid and evolving — serious attempts to repair these deficiencies in scholarly research have been made. Many studies using a more complex set of arguments provide exceptional insights into the current state of gender in Mexico. Oropesa (1997), for instance, found that male dominance "…is neither universal nor insurmountable" (Pp. 1310). The inclusion of women in labor markets and their educational attainment have reorganized the gender order from male domination to egalitarian arrangements. The basis for this argument is that employment and education "facilitate satisfaction with decision making because it foster egalitarian relationships" (Oropesa 1997: 1311). Yet to speak of changes in the gender structure is not to say that employment and education have somehow amplified women's working conditions. There are also other factors relating to the structure of labor market opportunities, education, and religious ideals that foster women's economic dependency on men and relegate the social and economic position of women to marginal places (Diaz Barriga Sánchez 2008: 312).

Similarly in the U.S., gender — as a social structure — compels people to conform to complementary feminine and masculine behaviors. Gender, as an organizing principle of social life, permeates social institutions and pressures both women and men to follow dissimilar gender practices that solidify men's power and control of women. Although different feminist

movements[42] over time have promoted equality between genders, it is not surprisingly that this struggle to end inequality has spanned three centuries and remains unfinished.

In the 19th century, for example, first wave feminism — or the suffragist movement — strived for equal voting and reproduction rights as well as access to higher education, property, and earnings. Eventually, at least in the U.S., this social movement accomplished its goals to some degree. In time, feminism — as a social movement — underwent second and third waves. Second wave feminism questioned why women suffer oppression and began to offer and implement remedies. Today, the third stage diversely confronts the gendered social order and addresses varying forms of oppression faced by people of color. It aims to end gender and race inequality as its basic premise (Lorber 2005: 1-18).

In spite of many equality gains feminism has achieved, today — as in the past — gender as a social force continues to differentiate men from women. Acker (1992), for instance, suggests that after years of struggle for equality, institutional structures (e.g. politics, religion) remain entrenched along gendered lines and is mostly dominated by men (Pp. 567). The shaping of what Acker (1992) calls "gendered institutions" — in terms of practices, processes, ideologies, and power distribution — maintains a system that benefits men over women (Pp. 568). As such, it is difficult to understand a community littered with gender inequality unless we situate employment, education, and religion as key factors that affect family relations.

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[42] Because gender inequality transpires in different dimensions, there is not a monolithic theory that explains the entire complex interplays of inequalities; rather, feminism has evolved different ways to confront it.

Gender on the Borderlands

While doing fieldwork in both sides of this borderlands region, I observed gender in daily

lives. As mentioned in chapter three, the border area between Matamoros and Brownsville,

and Miguel Aleman and Roma, is far from being a homogenous region. Rural and urban

components make it quite diverse and gender arrangements vary from one place to another.

The two gender structures, situated in rural and urban environments, influence life from male-

dominated to egalitarian behaviors. I observed, for instance, that rural communities tend to be

more traditional concerning gender practices than urban areas are. Rural dwellers observe

stricter codes of gender behavior while people from urban settings are more egalitarian. Sonia,

a woman who has spent most of her life living in both sides of the border, shared similar views

about the gender arrangements of this region:

> Juan, when we talk about Rio Grande City, you know that we talk about (the city of)
> Camargo. *Camargo?* If you think about it or even if you search the Internet, this happens
> because most of the descendants of Rio Grande City came from Camargo. You will find a
> lot of Garzas, Garcías, Martinez, Lopez, and Muñozes. Here, family relations are strong. I
> tell you this because I used to live in that region. I spent few years with my ex-husband
> in Comales, two kilometers from Camargo, and all his family was in Rio Grande. Life in
> Camargo and Rio Grande is traditional, very similar to Miguel Aleman and Roma. Totally
> different to what happen in Reynosa and McAllen, and Matamoros and Brownsville.
> Because I have lived in this region for years, I thought many times… here the only thing
> that divides Miguel Aleman and Roma, and Rio Grande and Camargo, is the river… the
> customs and traditions are the same, not to say the way of thinking [referring to the
> local ideology]… Here, the concept of women also is very similar. When you talk with
> people in their 70s and older, who live in Rio Grande, their position about women is that
> they have to take a submissive attitude, regardless. Look Juan, we talk about the U.S.!
> Please! (Translated.M.33:00).

Erica, Sonia's daughter, commented on her gendered experiences of living between the

asymmetrical cities of Rio Grande and Brownsville:

> …Men in Rio Grande are jealous and they expect from you to show submissive
> behavior… Also, women don't talk back. Men decide about almost everything. *How*

come? Well, if you speak out, men will tell you, *"shut the fuck up!" Where does this (ideology) come from, for example, in your case?* From his [Erica's former partner] family customs. They were raised in Rio Grande. The grandfather is like that, the father is like that, and the son (my ex-partner) is like that [meaning that across generations, the three men have showed strong tendencies to demean women]. They are all the same: unfaithful, alcohol abusers, and verbal and physical women abusers. The grandfather, the father, and my ex are very much the same. *Is this a Río Grande City thing? Is it the same in Brownsville?* No! I think Río Grande is a special case. You know, I have lived in Brownsville and had some boyfriends, but they are not like that. There, life is different (Translated.M.29:56).

These narratives reflect the Valley as neither a homogeneous rural place and nor an urbanite metropolitan area. Specifically, these narratives indicate an exchange of conventional gender arrangements between Tamaulipas' rural communities and rural areas of the Valley. It shows a region more associated with the traditional male dominant practices of rural communities than the progressive arrangements found in urban settings. Labor, education, and religion appear to be key components for understanding the variety of gender arrangements along both sides of the border. Given this, further clarity in the subject is necessary.

Employment

In Mexico's today, Ariza and de Oliveira (2002) argue, employment oftentimes undermines male dominance. Mexican women utilize income as the main venue to negotiate gender relations. Employment also decreases women's economic dependency and enhances their position to negotiate monetary distribution in home. It also improves women's self-esteem and empowers them to create ideal scenarios to contest gender and promote further change (Ariza and de Oliveira 2002: 61-65). In this way, Ariza and de Oliveira (2002) assert, employment income — as an economic factor — fosters egalitarian relationships and enhances the social position of women in the family milieu and the larger society overall. A variant of scholarship,

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however, sees employment not as an empowering factor but as a perpetuating aspect of gender inequality. Diaz Barriga Sánchez (2008), for example, suggests that the marginal position of women in society is largely associated with the unequal structure of the Mexican labor market in which women's work opportunities are limited to the low-wage *maquiladora* industry and many service sectors. Accordingly, the monetary contribution of women (38.5% of men) is mostly treated as a supplemental resource reflective of their marginal position in society (Diaz Barriga Sánchez 2008: 349). To think of limited access to higher wages not just as monetary loss, but also in terms of lessen power to negotiate, allows one a clearer view of how the gendered order reproduces privileges and perpetuates inequalities.

By contrast to the U.S.'s today, to speak of women's entry into the labor market as a right gained over the years is beyond any dispute. The labor force participation of all women 16 and older, for instance, increased from 32%, in 1950 to 59%, in 2005. The most striking thing about this increment, however, is the expansion of the labor force participation of married women with children from 19%, in 1950, to 69% in 2005 (Cohany and Sok 2007: Chart 1). These figures imply that gender inequality has somehow diminished in America because of women's increased participation in the labor market. Nevertheless, academic scholarship shows that gender inequality remains an ambiguous issue in the occupational distribution and wage earnings. Women's Bureau figures still show a significant concentration of women and men in occupations along gendered lines. As of 2008, women in professional occupations such as engineering and computer science represented only 13.5% and 24.8% of the workforce while in education and healthcare field they represented 26% and 23.6% of the professional labor force, respectively (U.S. Department of Labor 2009: Table 11). Note, however, that gender inequality

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is not only contextualized in terms of numbers. Women's equal treatment and mobility

opportunities in higher-paid male-dominated occupations are, according to Acker (2006),

conditioned "…only if the women function like men… [sharing]… many of the same

characteristics, such as strength, aggressiveness, and competiveness" (Pp. 443). Yet, as

Manzano-Diaz (2010) points out, women with same credentials and labor experience as men

still earn less money "…despite the fact that women hold the majority of post-secondary

degrees in this country" (Online Citation). For example, as of 2010, women only make 83 cents

to every dollar men make on median weekly earnings (U.S. Department of Labor 2010: Table 2).

This earnings gap, according to Eitzen and Baca Zinn (2004), appears to be associated to the

low-wage women's occupational concentration, lack of educational attainment, and limited

labor experience (Pp. 263). Dunn (1996) additionally suggests discriminatory practices in the

labor market play a key role in this inequality gap (Pp. 62).

Employment on the Borderlands

Unlike the *Frontera Chica*[43], I found that people living in urban places such as Reynosa and

Matamoros are more progressive in attitudes about gender arrangements than in those living

in rural settings. As the most industrialized and populated cities of Tamaulipas, Reynosa and

Matamoros offer more employment and educational opportunities; there is a greater emphasis

there on women's equality. I observed that, in spite of the lower wages women earn in the

*maquiladora*s, their participation in the labor market provides them job opportunities that

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[43] *Frontera Chica* is a colloquial terms used to describe the border region between Reynosa and
Miguel Aleman.

otherwise would not be available. Sonia, a woman who has live both in the Valley and

Tamaulipas, shared her experience as an employee of a *maquiladora;*

> …One month after of being hired and working as a laborer with no experience at all, I was offered the position of supervisor. Probably they [the management] saw potential… I remember the owner of the maquiladora calling me into his office… then, I was in a conference room surrounded by industrial engineers, all men. That was an odd moment because many of those men wanted the position… and look[ed] at me… I was the chosen one, a person with no education. Then, I started to build leadership [skills] to manage between 400 and 500 employees. It was not easy, but I worked really hard to make it happen. I stayed from sunrise to sunset in the *maquiladora* showing the laborers how to work efficiently.

> *How did you manage, as a woman in a leadership position, to supervise women and men without conflict?* They, women and men, did not see me as a woman and supervisor; they saw me just as another supervisor. I remember having a trustful relation with my workers. If they [workers] had a family problem, many times, they shared with me and I listened. In fact, I was a good listener.

> *Was it the same with men?* It was the same, men and women. You know what was funny? I had problems with the educated men of the company, but I don't remember any with the laborers. I treated them in a considerate and professional way that I felt too close to them. I treated my employees as I wanted being treated (Translated.M.18:01).

In contrast, employment opportunities are very limited in the rural parts of the *Frontera*

Chica, as noted in chapter three; most workers are relegated to agricultural, ranching, small-

scale retail, and low-wage service-oriented jobs. Unlike Reynosa and Matamoros, migration

from other Mexican states is almost nonexistent. I found, by talking with people who have lived

and worked in this region for generations, the involvement of women in paid work to be very

marginal. The majority of women stay in home doing household work and taking care of

children. Men, on the other, seldom help in household chores; but are heavily involved in

fatherhood. These social conditions appear to stifle women's financial independence and

position men as the ultimate authority in home.

In the Valley, historically, women and men have worked side-by-side in the agricultural

fields as migrant workers. Today, both work in more diversified — but still low-paid — service

jobs. Working opportunities remain limited to retail, fast food chains, grocery stores, and

agriculture. Manufacturing is virtually nonexistent in the area. Women who also work in male-

dominated occupations usually face hostility, resentment, and harassment. Aileen, a young

woman with three children, commented on her experiences as the only female worker in her

field:

> *Are you okay with the type of work you do?* No! This is a tiresome work, and no, I am not
> happy. *Tiresome because you have to wake up early and work so many hours, or just it
> does not pay?* No, the thing with my work is that it pays very well, but in this field
> [bakery delivery] I am the only woman who distributes bakery products in the Valley for
> my brand. There are no women. I am the only woman for example that serves Wal-
> Mart. This is a kind of work for men. You have to carry a lot of things, many times very
> heavy. It is very tiresome because it requires a lot of your time. It drains you a lot. Also,
> because I work mostly around men, sometimes I feel that my self-esteem is too low. In
> fact, I was telling one of my friends that I feel bad because I cannot fix my hair or dress
> properly for a woman in this work environment…Because all distributers are men, I do
> not like that they [men] can take advantage of that, make an annoying comment, or
> harass me in the workplace. That's the reason why I do not use makeup or even fix my
> hair…I don't listen and talk to them, period! *How long have you been working in this
> field?* About a year, since last July [2009]. *So, do you plan to keep this job in the future,
> regardless?* No! I want get educated. I am taking college credits in South Texas College
> (Translated.A.25:00).

Although the labor market is constricted for people with only high school diplomas, others

with more education compete on another level and in a different environment; this includes

jobs opportunities at local school districts, community colleges and universities, *Maquiladora*

management, and with municipal, state, and federal governments. In spite of all these job

opportunities, the participation of women in paid work does not enhance their social standing

in a male-dominated region. Many times a women's wages are treated as marginal incomes.

The most striking thing about this situation is that, regardless of the women's financial

contribution, gender ideology still relegates them to caregiver roles and they remain

economically dependent on their male counterparts.

Education

In Mexico today, Oropesa (1997) argues, schools — as agents of change — erode local male

dominant practices by spreading progressive middle-class principles of gender relations. This, in

turn, empowers women to resist their subordinated position in the Mexican society (Pp. 1311).

Education, Zabludovsky (2007) says, also offers women better job opportunities, wages, work

conditions, and the unparalleled possibility to foster egalitarian relationships and transform

institutions (Pp. 38). For decades, however, girls' educational attainment have hardly passed

the elementary school level (Arizpe 1993). Two issues, Post (2001) asserts, underpin this

argument and rationalize the underrepresentation of girls in the middle school level: poverty

and sibship order. In the former, families living in poor communities send fewer girls to the

middle school than boys. In the latter, younger siblings (mostly girls) attend middle school in

higher numbers than older girls. In both scenarios, preferential systems negatively affect the

fate of poor and older girls by making them the most likely candidates [over male siblings and

younger girls] to drop out of school and perform domestic housework (Post 2001: 485). Despite

the advancement of Mexican women in educational settings (Zabludovsky 2007), the gender

educational gap remains at 35% on the national level and of 75% in the southern states (Frías

2008: 228). Girls and women are enticed and influenced to conform to dominant gendered

codes of behavior by the relationship between a male-oriented heirarchy and social conditions

associated to education (Diaz Barriga Sánchez 2008: 365). Although this influence is declining,

Zabludovsky (2007) and Frías (2008) suggest, girls and women still experience overt and covert

pressure to leave school at early age — under the assumption that an education is unnecessary to get married, raise children, and perform housework.

In America today, unlike in other developing countries — particularly Mexico[44] — access to elementary and secondary public education (1-12 levels) is considered a universal right. Gender inequality, in terms of access to basic public education, is beyond any dispute. Instead, as Buchmann, DiPrete, and McDaniel (2008) elaborate, education is more about "…the ways in which girls and women are advantaged in some aspects of education, as well as those in which they continue to trail boys and men" (Pp. 320). This means that, despite improved equity and gains in education, society continually sends a differentiated gendered message. These refer to accounts of discriminatory practices that heighten gender differences, often covertly and overtly embedded in curriculum and textbooks biases. Sadker, Sadker, and Steindam (1989), for instance, provide striking descriptions about gender inequality in school curriculums which entice more boys into mathematical and science fields and restrict more girls to literature and humanities disciplines (Pp. 47). Two similar studies produced by Evans and Davies (2000: 268) and by Zittleman and Sadker (2003: 62) found that, while textbooks portray boys and men in a very aggressive and competitive image, women's invisibility remains pervasive in much of the academic literature.

Education on the Borderlands

Reynosa and Matamoros offer greater educational opportunities than other borderlands

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[44] In Mexico, kindergarten, elementary, and middle school (K-9 level) is mandatory, but attendance is not enforced (personal field notes).

communities. One can find multiple educational opportunities, from public and private to

kindergarten through college and university level coursework. Children, of both genders, do not

need to commute or relocate to access education beyond the middle school. In these urban

areas, the gender ideology is more egalitarian than in rural settings. However, limited economic

and familial resources continue to restrict women's access to education. For instance, Sonia,

who once wanted to be a medical doctor, remembered her frustrated educational experience

in Matamoros:

> I remember that when I finished high school, I also was very disappointed because there
> was no money to continue the medical school. *No money?* No, because of a scholarship,
> I finished my high school. But, when I got accepted into the medical school, I had no
> economic support. It was very hard to accept it. I even questioned myself about why I
> finished high school if I have no future. I thought that everything I have accomplished as
> a student was worthless (Translated.M.57:23).

In the rural part of la *Frontera*, however, I observed how the Mexican state neglects

children by failing to provide sufficient educational resources. Children of both genders, who

live in these relatively isolated places, benefit only from elementary and middle school

education opportunities. Attaining high school and college instruction require children to make

a long commute or even relocate to Reynosa, Matamoros, or in some cases across the border.

This is the case, however, in which gender ideologies differ. While parents hesitate to let girls

move into an urbanized setting where educational opportunities flourish, boys on the other

hand are encouraged. There are two main arguments that support this gendered behavioral

pattern. The first sees girls as individuals who do not necessarily need an advanced education

to raise children and maintain a household. The second perceives major cities as threatening

places for girls to be alone. These social conditions again appear to benefit men over women,

thus, reflecting a male dominance ideology in the community.

Although it is understood that access to education in the U.S. is universal, at least at the K-12 level, the issue in the LRGV relates more to attainment than to access. For example, as of 2000, only 19% of the population 25 age and older held a high school diploma or its GED equivalent, and 6.8% of the population same population group earned a bachelor's degree (U.S. Census Bureau 2000b: 2). These figures somehow show that the educational system in this region fails boys and girls equally. Aileen shared how being a full-time worker has heightened her desire to finish college and, thus, improve quality of life:

> …this morning I was checking [the college website] to take more classes. I tell you this because since I graduated from high school I have been taken college credits… one class per semester… obviously it's taking me years and years to finish. I only take more classes when I can… like the summer. This past fall, I did not attend college because of the holidays, but now since more classes are offered by internet, I want to try one more time. *You want to graduate soon?* Yes! I want to graduate. *What major you chose?* That's the problem, because I have been changing majors so many times… now, I am majoring in speech therapy. But, I know it will take a lot of time, I only have completed about 40 and something credit hours in so many years (Translated.A.28:29).

Assuming that education empowers women to question the male dominance order, these narratives show an opposite trend. The interviews reveal the continued existences of a gendered order that oppresses women and empowers men. Erica, a young 24-year-old, recalled a life-altering, bitter experience with her high school sweetheart,

> …to him [ex-boyfriend] my education was never a priority. I told him and his family that after graduation I wanted go back for my masters. They told me literally, when are you *fucking gonna* end? It will take you another four years to finish school, when, when… Erica! Then, I told him about applying to the graduate school… a Ph.D. program… he made fun of me and laugh for little time. He looked at me and said, you as a doctor! Please…and started making fun of me again. *Perhaps, he took that attitude because he saw your education as a threat in your relationship?* No, he does not appreciate education. He makes fun of me when we talk about what I want to do in the future… But, he forgets when we were in high school and I did his homework. *What did you do to correct this situation?* I had to leave him. I moved out of our place in Rio Grande and got temporary shelter in Brownsville, with friends (Translated.M.55: 01).

Religion

In Mexico today, religion — as a social structure — is also patterned by gender. Emerson, Mirola, and Monahan (2010), for example, point out that religions, across all spectrums, create their own notion of *normality* about gendered behavioral codes which affect women and men relations (Pp. 136). In Mexico today, compared with other Christian and non-Christian religions, Catholicism is very much the norm. As of 2000, almost 88% (87.99%) of the Mexican population is Catholic, 7.27% is Christian — protestant, evangelical, and biblical, and 4.74% identify as non-Christian —Jews, Atheists, and others (Aguayo Quezada 2002: 66). The Catholic Church, Diaz Barriga Sánchez (2008) argues, plays a significant role in reinforcing gender differences and maintaining a male dominant order (Pp. 357). Juárez Cerdi (2000) similarly found that protestant and evangelical churches entice women to conform to male dominant biblical codes of behavior (Pp. 87). In both cases, religion utilizes rituals, symbols, values, and norms to induce both genders into male dominant practices associated to womanhood and manhood ideals. Yet, to speak of these religious constraints is not to say that women do not resist them. In fact, they do. However, power differentials associated to employment and education diminishes or enhances women's agency to contest the religion order (Juárez Cerdi 2000: 82).

In the United States today, academic research shows religion, as an institution patterned by gender inequality, mostly dominated by men (Johnstone 2007: 255). As of 2007, Christians constitute 78.4% of all religions in the U.S., which includes Protestants (51.3%), Catholics (23.9%), and other Christian groups 3.2%; non-Christian groups add to the other 20.8% (Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life 2008: 10). According to Johnstone (2007),

Christianity — as America's foremost dominant U.S. religion — perpetuates the idea that

women and men have different missions in life. It presses individuals to adjust themselves to

rigid gendered codes of behavior by excluding women from many organizational practices and

regulating gender relations. Although the inclusion of ordained women in the organizational

structure of many protestant groups is a reality, in others — like the Catholicism — remains

unthinkable. The ordination of women, despite its steady increments (from 2.3%, in the 1960s

to 13.8%, in the 2000s), it is exceptionally marginal (Johnstone 2007: 259-260). Similarly,

religion permeates everyday activities by shaping individual and collective behavior, McGuire

(2009) says. Many Christian groups, for example, exercise significant influence over sexual

behavior within and beyond the family milieu (restrictions on premarital, extramarital, and

other sexual activities that deviate from the norm), to regulate reproduction (use of

contraceptives), and to discourage divorce — in many cases despite the overtly evidence of

spousal abuse (McGuire 2009: 64-65).

Religion on the Borderlands

   During my fieldwork along the border, I observed many little towns (like Camargo and Diaz

Ordaz) and saw how social life evolves and revolve mostly around religious activities. While

attending church, I found Catholic priests — particularly — used religious arguments to prod

couples to conform to strict gendered codes of behavior. For example, as the main pillar of the

family, a woman's life must be centered on family needs — especially in aspects related to

motherhood and spiritual values. It is a moral justification often utilized by priests to keep

women in a subordinated position in the family setting and in the community level. My

observations also revealed a significant exchange of gendered values and practices between

Mexican rural communities and the immigrant families of Rio Grande City and Roma that regulated community life. During our conversation, Sonia and Erica described their experience as women in a very religious setting:

> Sonia: I have seen Catholic Churches in Rio Grande full of people every weekend. Because these towns are very Catholic, they don't like other *religions* like Jehovah Witness and *Cristianos.* Other Churches have no place over there. The Catholicism is very strong there. Rio Grande and Roma are something special, I would say... more Rio Grande. Erica: when my ex and I were together, we went to the Catholic Church. His family is very religious. Because of this, *la abuela* [the grandma] always says, if he [the ex-partner] hit you, don't say anything. Wait here until you heal... we support you. Just don't make him [ex-partner] angry so he does not have to hit you again. *So, were you blamed all the time for any discussions in your relationship?* All the time! When we engaged in heated arguments, *la abuela* says, why you don't keep your mouth shut so we can continue with our lives... look at my daughter! [ex-boyfriend's mom] she has been married for 40 years. But I said to her, yes... 40 years of emotional, domestic, and physical abuse. I don't want that life (Translated.M.34:35).

The Valley's social life revolves around Church activities, particularly on weekends and especially since it is has such a robust religious community. That region is also home to one of the most sacred Catholic shrines in the United States — the Basilica of San Juan. It is customary for Catholics from all over the community to attend a mass at least once a year in the San Juan Church. Religious services are conducted in Spanish or English, or both; the topic of most sermons remained very traditional and gendered oriented.

In many urban areas — primarily in Reynosa and Matamoros — I observed a gender order more egalitarian. The vast job opportunities for women seem to benefit their position. The *maquiladora* industry — operating 24 hours a day and seven days a week — requires workers to adjust their schedules to meet factory needs. This includes working weekends, day and night, and that ultimately affects family life and church attendance.

The most striking thing I observed about gender dynamics in Reynosa and Matamoros,

however, is that women and men come to these cities with little to no previous international migration experience. Because these new settlers scarcely cross into the U.S. side, I found family networks between Tamaulipas and the Valley to be virtually nonexistent. It appears that progressive gender arrangements of this urban population hardly reach into the U.S. borderlands area[45]. When these egalitarian practices arise, women not only question the privileged position of men, they also present an alternative idea of gender relations. For instance, Maria, who was born in Mexico City and later migrated to Reynosa before moving to the Valley, shared her experience about family life and religion. Despite being a devoted Christian, Maria rejected the stereotypical religious image of a submissive woman:

> *Maria, to what degree religion affects your marriage?* Well, if we talk about religion, we [Mario and Maria] have not followed ours the way we should. Because my marriage did not work the way I wanted, I got so close to my church. I remember having problems. So, I said to Mario — let's attend marriage sessions in the Church, it may help. He never wanted. Then, I got closer to the church, but Mario kept coming late home… sometimes he did not bother to come at all. I remember being upset all the time because of that.

> *But, doesn't the Christian Church support a family headed by the husband?* Yes, you are right. The Church teaches us that the husband is the head of the family. But, I don't necessarily agree on this. Let me tell you why. A person, who is considered the head of the family, has to live by example. That means not making me angry because he does not come home. Perhaps, he is having an affair and I don't even know about it. So, you [the researcher] tell me what kind of respect he deserves! Mario also is very cynical. He tells me, how come you don't cook for me anymore? I said to him, how come? You still coming home four at the morning, please! So, don't expect me to wake early to cook you a meal and do your laundry! We don't live anymore at those times in which women were submissive and quiet, not anymore! Even as a religious person, I am a modern woman! (Translated.E.1.34:23).

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[45] I refer to new settlers to women who migrate to the regions from other parts of Mexico to work in the *maquiladora* industry, mostly from Veracruz.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I delved closely into gender as an organizing principle of rural and urban community life in the LRGV. I found that a Mexican male-dominated environment substantially influences gender relations. This is not to say that the U.S. ideology of gender arrangements does not reach the Valley; it does. However, it appears to be more associated to urban cities than rural communities. Women's working and educational opportunities are greater in urban places, too.

In contrast, I found the urban and egalitarian Mexican notion of gender hardly permeating the border. Because most urban residents — who have migrated from other Mexican States to work in *maquiladoras* and other industries — do not have established meaningful links (like family) in the LRGV, the exchange of egalitarian ideas between urban Tamaulipas and the LRGV seems to be nonexistent, or at least minimal. In addition, the gendered exchange of ideas and values, between rural settings across the river, obscures the flow of more urban and progressive arrangements to the region.

Thus far, the argument is negative. To make this point is to imply those women who live in the Valley conform to submissive — if not passive — gendered codes of behavior. I found, however, that women vigorously resist this oppressive gendered order. They do so by following strategies based on available options. While working and educational opportunities empower women to contest a male-dominated urban environment, women from rural towns often have to leave these places because of their limited resources — just as Anzaldúa (2007) did it in the 1980s. Those women who stay, nevertheless, have to face labor, education, and religion constraints that undermine their position in the family and at the community level.

CHAPTER SIX

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FAMILY RELATIONS ON MEXICAN IMMIGRANT FAMILY LIFE

Introduction

Rapp (1999) defines family as a set of individuals related by blood and marriage, who live both together and distant (Pp. 181). Specific living arrangements, around a group of ideological codes, also define family as a social form (e.g. people related by adoption and religious rituals). True to its underlying definition, these ideological codes organize family life around a set of social and cultural norms. Yet, to speak of family is not say that we acknowledge a universal definition. In other societies, family differs, morphs, and emerges into different forms shaped by a vast interaction of external and internal conditions.

Given this understanding, I focus my examination on family relations of two organizational units, the nuclear and extended (Newman 2009: 283). According to a census definition, a nuclear family consists of a married[46] couple, with or without children, living together in the same household (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2010). Extended families[47] are those members beyond the reproductive couple and their children, but close enough to the core unit to function as a support system. This includes grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins among

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[46] I acknowledge that many nuclear families do not consist of married couples necessarily, particularly in non-U.S. based societies, but I use the official definition for purposes of this project.

[47] I found definitions about extended families to be confusing. Esteinou (2007), for example, posits that extended families are family members (e.g. grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.) who live and reside in the same household unit of a nuclear family (Pp. 312). Newman (2009), on the other, says that extended families are family members who do not reside in the same household unit of a nuclear family (Pp. 6). In order to keep a consistent argument in my narrative, I use Newman's (2009) definition for extended families.

others (Mirande 1985: 157). Built on previous research that analyzes the rearrangement of long-distance parenting practices across national borders (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 2000; Taylor and Behnke 2005; Thorne, Orellana, Evan Lam, and Chee 2003) and drawing on what Bengtson (2001: 11) calls "opportunity structures for interaction," this chapter examines how families reconcile their everyday constraints (such as work, school, etc.) with those of raising children in a borderlands place like the Tamaulipas-LRGV region. In doing so, I closely delve into Mexican-influenced families who negotiate their parenting functions beyond the nuclear unit and make use of extended kin as a parental[48] resource in a transnational context. Lastly, I offer a summary of the findings.

Similarities and Differences of the Mexican and U.S. Family Structure

Historically, much of the literature on Mexican family life has emphasized a strong community inclination over personal interests (Lewis 1951). In Mexico today, however, the organization of family life — although different — still reflects a cohesive structure exemplified particularly by the participation of kin in childrearing activities. To conceptualize the relationship between extended and nuclear families, scholars turn to familism as a useful analytical framework. In very general terms, familism, as a solidarity network, aids in the reproduction and maintenance of family life by providing economic, emotional, and parental support to family members, nuclear and extended alike (Esteinou 2007: 324). According to

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[48] Parenting in this way refers to the process of caregiving to raise well-adjusted children to become physically and mentally healthy adults (LaRossa, Simonds, and Reitzes 2005: 247). Alternative parenting, similarly, refers to alternative arrangements of caregiving between nuclear and extended families to raise children.

Canak and Swanson (1998), it is difficult to understand nuclear and extended family relations

unless we understand the concept of familism as an organizing principle of family life in Mexico.

Since relations in these families are fluid and dynamic, "...the line between nuclear and

extended families is often blurred in México" (Canak and Swanson 1998: 101).

The nuclear family is not a new social phenomenon in Mexico. Esteinou (2005) has

documented that nuclear families were already an important component of social life in the

mid of the 20th century (Pp. 12). In the 1940s and 1950s, for instance, families were structured

as married couples with children and guided by specific divisions of productive and

reproductive labors (Esteinou 2005). The nuclear family became particularly significant to

people in the urban settings of the Mexican society (Canak and Swanson 1998: 101). The social

structure in place then compelled families to conform into gendered expressive[49] and

instrumental[50] codes of behavior (Esteinou 2004: 10). Unlike the 1940s and 1950s, in Mexico

today, family is no longer as envisioned as an idealized institution, but as an entity affected and

transformed by larger societal forces. The participation of married women in the labor market

continuously reconfigures intra- and inter-family relations, with important implications on

parenting roles and responsibilities.

Unlike the Mexican case, much early research about the U.S. family has focused on the

strengths of the nuclear family over the qualities of diverse family forms (Popenoe 1993: 528).

Today, however, as Bengtson (2001) reviews, "families are changing in both forms and

meanings, expanding beyond the nuclear family structure to involve a variety of kin and nonkin

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[49] It was expected that women must stay home, raise children, and do the housework.

[50] It was expected that men act as providers.

relationships" (Pp. 4). The implications are important and the emergence of diverse family forms has brought increased visibility to the importance of multigenerational bonds as central source of family support (Bengtson 2001: 5). In times of need, for instance, help may trickle downward in the form of financial assistance or as supplementing or replacement parental resources. Although Bengtson (2001) sees the nuclear family as an anachronism, Popenoe (1993) envisions this type of nuclear family as ideal for young people in future generations.

To think of the nuclear family as the basic unit of society allows one a clearer understanding of why the idea of a normative family still is pervasive in the U.S. society. The nuclear family emerges as a byproduct of the late 1800s and early 1900s industrial and modern forces of U.S. life necessary for the progress of society (Aulette 2007: 27). It transforms the traditional family — based on kin support and large family sizes — into a modern family elegantly organized around emotional and individualistic principles of productive and reproductive labor. According to Popenoe (1993), it was conceptualized to fulfill the needs of the industrial times by constructing a "…family consisting of heterosexual, monogamous, lifelong marriage in which there is a sharp division of labor, with the female as full-time housewife and the male as primary provider and ultimate authority" (Pp. 528). Through the years, Cavan (1978) suggests, the ideology emanated of this family structure became normative mostly in urban settings, with important social and economic implications for family relations. For example, living in a very competitive society where individualism is highly regarded, social forces entice parents and children into separate lives once children reach adulthood. Children are expected to move away from their parental home and create their own nuclear unit, acquire financial independence, and begin to rely more on institutional resources rather than family assistance (Cavan 1978).

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Although the nuclear family structure remains a strong ideological goal today, the broader social and economic transformations make this type of family an American prize too difficult to attain.

Family Relations on the Borderlands

Stacey (1990) argues that the deindustrialization process and the inclusion of women in wage-work have transformed the romanticized notion[51] of the modern family into one more fluid and dynamic family condition—"…diverse, fluid, and unresolved" (Stacey 1990: 17). Because the Valley has not been immune to the U.S. social and economic upheavals, Richardson, Resendiz, and Verma (2006) similarly argue that families confront new challenges in a postindustrial era (Pp. 87). Of particular importance is the insertion of women into the workforce and the resultant family implications. One of the first effects associated with this is the reconfiguration of intra- and inter family relations. For example, of all females (16 years and older) who resided in the LRGV as of 2000, 44% were part of the labor force while 38% were fully employed (U.S. Census Bureau 2000b: 3). Although the issue of why almost this 38% is important, the issue to actually examine is how dual earners and single mother families reconcile parenting responsibilities with working and educational demands. Literature on the subject suggests that many families cope with this situation by relying on familism as an alternative parenting mechanism to manage the needs of raising children (Hurtado 2003). It appears that the central idea of having a cohesive family organization beyond conjugal

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[51] We talk about family life organized around a division of instrumental and expressive gendered practices.

relationships is to raise physical and emotional healthy children.

Extended Family Support

The most complex account of familism is found in Ramirez and Arce's (1981) work. It posits the argument that Mexican families make use of familism as a solidarity network that provides different kinds of support in times of need. To support their argument, they organize familism into a four-fold explanation. Demographic familism, for instance, refers to the distinctive characteristics of the family, family size. Normative familism relates to the emotive interdependence, unity, and solidarity between nuclear and extended families. Behavioral familism refers to the interaction between nuclear and extended families for the benefit of the family, and structural familism refers to the quality of interactions between families (Ramirez and Arce 1981: 3-17). Familism, as Dill (1999) suggests, also consists of fictive kin networks. This is an extended family system based on religious customs and socioeconomic components that tie Mexican families by *compadrazgo* (co-parenting) and *godparenhood (ahijados)*. Being a godparent creates a moral and economic obligation to the godchildren, extending family networks beyond bloodlines (Dill 1999: 163).

Consistent with previous scholarship on Mexican families (Baca Zinn 1994; Ramirez and Arce 1981), this research study found similar family organizations between Mexicans in the U.S. and Mexico. The most relevant similitude is the utilization of familism as a support system — one that is intended to help working nuclear families with parental needs such as childcare, educational, and childrearing assistance. Unlike U.S.-focused families, who benefit from a greater access to institutional resources, Mexican families are specifically enticed to use extended kin ties to reconcile work with parental demands. I recollect, for example, attending a

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family relations conference sponsored by the University of North Texas-Denton. By coincidence,

I sat with the person in charge of the childcare management services for the entire State of

Texas. As we engaged in a brief conversation about the scope of services the agency provided

to different population groups, I found some notes from this dialogue worth sharing :

> Juan: what is the main service you provide?
>
> Informant: childcare services for families who work or attend school.
>
> Juan: what population groups you serve the most?
>
> Informant: mostly whites and blacks. They are the ones who apply for childcare services.
>
> Juan: what about the Mexicans?
>
> Informant: Oh no… they have their own support network. Mexicans prefer to use relative care [family assistance] than official support. In fact, we are not really concerned about Mexicans because they know how to take care of their own.

There are, however, two arguments against the use of relative care as a preferred choice:

institutional alienation of Mexican immigrants as a racialized group, and lack of official access to

childcare support. To cope with this situation, my participant families were often compelled to

seek out and utilize extended kin resources as a viable option for survival. In fact, one of

options the regional "opportunity structures for interaction"[52] offer is the access to

transnational extended family resources between Mexico and the United States. Many

Mexican-based immigrant families rely or are dependent on extended family support, mostly

from *abuelas* (grandmothers) from Mexico. This transnational family assistance serves as a

parenting resource to help cope with the region's social and economic constraints. For instance,

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[52] Bengtson (2001) refers to it as the opportunity geographical proximity offers families to engage kin resources (Pp. 11).

in order to reconcile work life with parenting needs, it is customary to send children to Mexico

during weekends and summer school breaks. Usually grandparents, sometimes godparents or

other relatives, take care of these children. An indirect, but positive, outcome is that this

multigenerational parenting engagement — between the two countries — apparently

reinforces an emotional attachment to the homeland and aids in the preservation and

inheritance of the Mexican culture and language. Sonia, from Matamoros, described her

distinctive role as *abuela* in supporting Erica as a single parent in a transnational context:

> *Erica, I noticed that Eric (your son) speaks only English, How did that happen?* …I have
> two jobs and attend school full-time. So when I lived in Rio Grande, my ex (partner's)
> parents raised Eric. *Do they (grandparents) speak English and Spanish?* Both, but they
> educated Eric in English. *So they do not talk in Spanish at all?* Yes, when they are mad.
> They curse in Spanish a lot.
>
> Sonia: I think that's an evil strategy. *How come?* Yes, because they want to manipulate
> Eric's future. Because Eric is the only grandson, they want to convince Erica that he will
> inherit all their land. They want to control Erica and Eric's life.
>
> *Erica, are you going to let this happen?* [Sonia answered] Now that Erica has moved to
> Brownsville, she needs to enroll Eric in a bilingual school. The kid needs to learn
> Spanish… to speak Spanish. This will benefit him along the years. Now that we are closer
> than ever, we need to communicate.
>
> Erica: since I only have my mother to help me from now on, Eric needs to know what is
> going on. I do not see myself having more children so I need to invest in him… I know
> that with the help of my mother I can do it. Between my mother and me, we will raise
> him. *How?* You know, as a binational kid… in two worlds. He has no choice. Because I do
> not plan to go back with my ex, I only have my mother… I know she can help me.
>
> Sonia: I see Eric in six months being fluent in Spanish. *What else?* We will interact more
> and he will know who I am. Eric does not know much about me… everything is going to
> change. Erica: I agree, Eric loves my mother so much, it cannot be otherwise
> (Translated.M.1:19:21).

To understand the relationship between nuclear and extended families, scholars frame

multigenerational support as a key familial resource to cope with societal constraints. Bengtson

(2001), for instance, argues that divorces and demographic changes position the extended

multigenerational family as a nurturing and a socializing resource reserve for the nuclear unit

(Pp. 5). Riley and Riley (1993), similarly, indicate that in spite of the larger societal influence on

families to conform into the nuclear model, families do still use traditional kin solidarity as a

vital resource in times of need (Pp. 185). Multigenerational extended families represent a latent

network of kin connections ready to be used as safety nets and as an alternative source of love,

support, and comfort for the well-being of children (Riley and Riley 1993). Although it is

understood that multigenerational assistance operates as a supplemental resource, as a

Bengtson (2001) has demonstrated, grandparents quite often serve as replacements at nuclear

family functions. I found that a*buela*s not only provide, but — in some cases — represent the

nuclear family as the key source of stability, inspiration, and structure to children. This is

especially important when single mothers try to balance work life with motherhood demands.

Monica, a single mother of two small children, commented how she managed to work and raise

her children in a transnational context with the help of her mother:

> I remember when I worked from Friday to Sunday how my mother took care of my
> children. All weekend, she was in charge of my kids. I was in this situation for almost
> three years.
>
> *Why?* Because of my job, I only worked part-time on weekends, night shifts, from 5
> evening to 1 in the morning. I stayed in home from Monday to Friday, so I was with my
> kids before and after school, but at weekends my mother took them to Reynosa. They
> left Fridays and came back Sundays at evening. Look Juan, I used to live in a small school
> bus for so many years. I could not see where I am now [implying that she has achieved
> some upward mobility] without the help of my mother. I can feel the difference. You
> know, with my savings in less than six months I even bought a computer for my children.
> Before, that was unthinkable.
>
> *How did you convince your mother to help you with the kids?* I did not have to convince
> her. She offered me the help. In fact, the help went both ways. *How come?* My children
> love my mother, and she could not see herself without them the weekends. You know

how the solitude is… but, to be honest, I am not sure where we would be ended without my mother's help. To her, my two kids are more her children than grandchildren.

So, I am sure they [children] like to be in Mexico? No, they like to be with my mother. Because of school, they have all their friends on this side [Texas]; they do not really have friends in Reynosa. *Do they speak Spanish?* Yes, but only to us. Between them it is more English (Translated.S.45:23).

It appears that the U.S. and the Mexican governmental actions prod several participant families to follow a transnational strategy as more viable option to obtain parental support. For example, in spite of widespread alienation and discrimination Mexicans experience in the Valley, they somehow favor the socioeconomic advantages of the U.S over Mexico. However, the lack of access to childcare facilities obliges families to seek and use resources from their relatives in Mexico to survive. Although families would rather limit their children's exposure to government corruption, gender inequality, and sexism of Mexican border towns, they follow a survival strategy based on all available options to maximize the needed resources. Participant families recognize that transnationalism is not a preferred choice, but rather a constraint decision derived from the actions of both the U.S. and the Mexican governments.

Other families mostly use familism as a source financial and emotional support. Although the cost of living is relatively cheap in the valley, it remains difficult to live on just one income and simultaneously make ends meet. In this way, families see extended kin more as an alternative source of economic relief. Familism is the bedrock of stability for the emotional drain and financial hardships endured. Tina, a mother of two children, shared her struggle on issues of financial hardships, citizenship, and raising children. When I asked her about what role her parents played in this situation, she commented:

Are you already a U.S. citizen? Not yet, *what else you need to qualify?* Money, in fact, we haven't tried to apply [for citizenship] because we chose to buy a house. We

expended all the money we have saved on our house. You know that we used to live in a little mobile home. *Yes, your husband told me about it. Was it very uncomfortable?* Very uncomfortable! Very uncomfortable! Thank god we have this house now, but all the money we have saved it was used to buy this house. It was very expensive! *Is it important for you to become a U.S. citizen?* Yes, it is very important. In fact, I thank God because we are saving some money to pay the application fees. I do not want to be financial limited anymore. My husband said, let's stay a little longer in the trailer while we save more money, but I said no. *How come?* Well, in that little trailer house my sister, her kid, and my family lived all together. We were six people living in a mobile home of one bedroom. It was very difficult. But in the same time we did not pay rent. The lot and the trailer belong to my parents. Without their support, we would not be able to overcome our housing and financial hardships. We sacrifice the citizenship money, but we are happier now (Translated.R-G.42:17).

Unlike traditional American families where children reach 18 and move away from parents for different purposes (college, work, marriage, etc.) and create their own households, Mexican children stay in the nuclear family until they get married (Canak and Swanson 1998: 101). Even in these circumstances, it is a well-accepted practice to engage extended family resources for a myriad of purposes. This way, Mexican children gradually construct new solidarity networks between nuclear and extended families to sustain the new nuclear units. Rumbaut (1997) points out that Mexicans, in particular, make use of familism as a support system when they need it, "…a high score in this measure of felt collectivist obligations to the family contrasts with the pull of individualistic values in the American milieu" (Pp. 35). This implies that family ties, particularly in reference to familism, facilitate parenthood practices through extended family support.

Other Sources of Family Support

While doing fieldwork I also had the opportunity to observe how a U.S. ideology entices families to follow the nuclear, individualistic, and independent model, detached from the extended kin. In mostly urban settings families reconcile work life with parenting demands by

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utilizing other sources of family support like maids and nannies. Aileen, a mother of three small

girls, commented on her situation:

> I work full-time and I do not like to cook and do the laundry. That does not mean that I do not do it. I do not like it, but many times I have no option. *Who has more time to do household chores and take care of children?* [Aileen] I am the one who has a more flexible schedule. But I have my own approach, even though I recognize it sounds bad! I tell my siblings and my husband that I prefer to pay someone else who can do all that [housework and childcare]… because I do not like to do it! (Translated.A.1:07:14).

Due to the nature of work opportunities, clearly demonstrates how spouses negotiate their

household responsibilities. It appears that some families favor other sources of support [maids

and nannies] rather than extended family assistance. Maria shared similar views. Although the

nature of Maria's situation is different, paid-support (a nanny) provided her the opportunity to

reconcile work with childcare demands beyond the extended family and spousal assistance,

> *How do you [referring to the couple] manage to work and take care of the kids?* Mario: oh, she is good at that. Maria: but, I would like to see him helping me more. I am the mother and father… at the same time.

> *So, when the babysitter is not around you are the one who takes care?* All the time, and when Mario and me are present, it is only me again. Mario: let me clarify that, I do not agree with you. Because I am receiving unemployment benefits, you know that I offer myself to take care of the kids. I told you many times that you can let go the nanny while I am here. You pay her eight dollars per hour, multiply that by eight hours a day, and then by six days. You are losing money. Maria: yes, he has told me that I can save money, but I said no.

> *Why?* Because I trust her [the nanny], I will not let any people to live in my home, especially because of my children. She [the nanny] has been working here for almost eight months, and I can see how she loves my little boy. She is a woman of about 50 years old who takes care very well of him. I do not want to lose her. If I reduce her days of work, she will leave. She is Mexican, a very poor person who needs the job. I feel very grateful to have her in my home.

> *Let me ask you about your mother, does not she help you?* No! *What about your sisters?* No! I do not count on my mother and my siblings at all. And…you know…that is odd because many friends do not believe it. But, that is the way it is. *Is it because you do not have a good relationship with your mother?* No, but I think it happens because my

mother took care of my sister's three children. My mother helped her a lot, so I am not sure if my mother is tired of caring children. I think so, or I do not know. That is odd. Don't the *abuelitas* [grand moms] have to love their grandchildren so *much*? It is different in my case (Translated.E.1:11:33).

Many families, who enjoy an exceptional job security that provides long-term financial stability, have the ability to afford institutional resources. Although the availability of childcare facilities is vast, it is also quite expensive. For that reason, families with limited access to institutional resources count on maids and nannies as reliable sources of family support. This is not say that nannies are parental substitutes. But the proximity of *bordertowns*, as Mendoza (2009) has cleverly documented in her ethnographic study between Nuevo Laredo and Laredo, does provide exceptional nonkin support to families who otherwise cannot afford childcare.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I began by examining the arrangements nuclear and extended families use to reconcile work with parenting demands. The organization of family life in this border community reflects not only the value Mexicans give to familism as a parenting resource, but also the increasing importance locals place on multigenerational bonds (e.g. abuelas) as key sources of supplemental support. Evidence from this research, however, clearly showed that many families' engagement on extended family resources from their Tamaulipas' relatives is prompted by the American government's alienation and discriminatory actions. The lack of access to American-based family assistance, for instance, encourages immigrant families to utilize resources from their *abuelas* across the border. Immigrant families do so in spite of the gender inequality, sexism, and governmental corruption on the Mexican side of the border. It appears that families follow a transnational strategy based on available options for survival and

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to maximize needed resources. Although transnationalism is not a preferred choice, children benefit from this kin support that transcends borders by supplementing and often replacing nuclear parenthood roles.

I found, for instance, *abuelas'* assistance to be crucial specifically when both parents work or attend school. Grandparents help to more widely distribute the social cost of raising children between nuclear and extended families. *Abuelas* from Mexico not only function as a source of childcare, but also as mentors (where children look up at their grandparents for reliable family support). To speak of childcare as the only assistance parents and children get from *abuelas* does not fully explain the other benefits nuclear units receive from these family networks. Immigrants' engagement in Mexican family care also factor on the emotional attachment, promulgation, and maintenance of the Mexican culture among children.

Results from this research are consistent with what Rothenberg (1995: 45) refers as "…feelings of loyalty, reciprocity, solidarity…" that maintain and connect families through a caring and emotional network. Barros Nock (2006), for example, found that *abuelas* — as a form of multigenerational support — provide important emotional, social, economic, and linguistic assistance to nuclear families with children (Barros Nock 2006: 136). The *abuelas'* commitment to the maintenance of nuclear families impacts children's values, beliefs, customs, and language of choice (Barros Nock 2006: 289). This scholarship, however, focused on long-distance family relations. In contrast, I delved closely into the immigrant experience of Mexican families residing in South Texas, a borderlands region geographically located along the Mexico-U.S. international border.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has attempted to shed light on the complexities of international migration between Mexico and the U.S. Although a variety of actors, social situations, and motives make these migration processes difficult to understand, this study provides a rare insight of transnational processes in the borderlands area between Mexico and South Texas.

This dissertation focuses on the factors that affect Mexican immigrant family life on the border. The study's central question is, "how, and to what extent, do Mexican and U.S. state-adopted policies, gender arrangements, and family relations entice LRGV immigrant families to engage Mexican or U.S.-based resources, and why these families are more involved in one option rather than another?" I use two approaches to theoretically frame the behavior of two sets of immigrant families: a transnational model focusing on family life shaped by multiple external conditions extended across national borders, and a settler model that focuses on family life shaped by the U.S. society. This dissertation delves closely into family relations of Mexican immigrants who live on the Lower Rio Grande Valley, a borderlands geographical region near to Mexico.

The study included qualitative data gathered between winter 2009 and fall 2010 in the South Texas-Tamaulipas border corridor. I conducted twenty-nine in-depth interviews within ten Mexican immigrant families. While doing fieldwork on the border, I also interviewed five representatives of local nongovernmental and governmental organizations. Participants were contacted by referrals from students of the University of Texas Pan American as a part of a convenience purposive sample strategy.

Given this understanding, I have organized this chapter into three major sections. In the first part, I address the relevance of my research findings as well as the limitations. In the second, I discuss the need for additional research specifically about the related violence effects of the Mexican War on Drugs on border family life. Finally, the concluding part of this chapter focuses on the scholarly contribution of this dissertation to the sociological literature.

Findings Overview

Unlike traditional studies of transnationalism between Mexico and the U.S. (see Rouse 2004; Smith 2006), this project found two research components significant. The first sees the entire research setting of the Tamaulipas-LRGV border corridor as a transnational social field. The second uses the similar ethnic composition of the social field to understand the extent the Mexican and the U.S. governments, gender arrangements, and family relations shape border family life.

Data from this study found both the Mexican and the U.S. governments to be hostile, yet in different ways. In the Mexican case, for example, while government actions were propelled by corruptive practices at home, consulates abroad made significant efforts to attract the attention of immigrants. This was to not only regain and retain Mexican nationalism, but to also improve the welfare of immigrant communities (by offering supplemental services from nonprofit organizations and state agencies like health screenings, educational brochures, etc). However, corrupt actions from municipal, state, and federal governments at home obscured the government's political contribution to communities abroad. I observed that an inconsistent implementation of state-policies (e.g. *matricula consular*) not only sends immigrants a contradictory message, it also creates a sense of resentment and confusion. For that reason,

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the ambiguous position of the Mexican government actually decreases immigrants'

commitment to the homeland and reduces consulate efforts to build trustful relationships with

communities of the region.

In the U.S. case, I found the government to be racist and discriminatory. Racially driven U.S.

state-adopted policies, for example, position the Valley's immigrants in the margins of society

and portrays them as suspicious individuals deserving constant surveillance. In this place,

loyalty and citizenship are part of perpetual queries. Families in this study expressed a sense of

individual and collective resentment against the U.S. institutions. This is not to say that a sense

of resentment implies a passive stance when contesting racist policies selectively applied to

Mexicans. Participants and organizations coped with this situation by litigating these policies in

the courts. In fact, while doing fieldwork on the border, the situation grew so bad that the

American Civil Liberties Union of Texas decided to open an office in the Valley "…to address the

many civil rights issues that confront this 'Constitution-free zone'"(Burke 2011).

Findings from this research project also showed a family life organized by different patterns

of gender arrangements — from a male dominance structure to an egalitarian form. Urban

families, with greater access to education and labor opportunities, were more egalitarian than

families from rural settings. In fact, in rural Tamaulipas I observed gender relations to be much

more male dominated. Participant families showed a higher pattern of wives economically

dependent of their husbands. I observed that certain social conditions associated with

education, employment, and religion impacted the social position of women as oppressed

individuals. Unlike in other regions farther from the border, this finding is particularly

significant. Other research has demonstrated that networks weaken male dominated practices

(see Hirsch 1999). The geographical proximity between the communities of Tamaulipas and the Valley, however, lets rural Mexican gendered values and practices flow into South Texas. In this way, rural-Mexican male dominance environments not only permeate the border, but also shape the gender arrangements of the LRGV. I found power to be more significant than networks, specifically in the rural region. As a means to cope with this gendered ideology, many women not only responded by leaving their partners, they also moved out of the Valley.

I also found that alienation and discrimination in the U.S. entices immigrant families to utilize parental resources from their extended family members on the Mexican side of the border. The lack of access to parental assistance leaves limited options for survival. Although families would favor not address the gender inequality, sexism, and governmental corruption from Mexico, they need resources from their Mexican relatives (specifically *abuelas*). Thus, as a coping mechanism to reconcile parenting with work demands, transnational engagement is viewed as a strategy based upon available options, not a preferred choice. Most telling from this study is that many children benefit from transnational multigenerational bonds (that is *abuelas*). The regional structures of opportunity between the LRGV and Tamaulipas allow grandmothers to function as sources of emotional, financial, and childcare support. In this study, the transnational engagement of extended family resources by Mexican-focused families, positioned *abuelas* as essential figures in children's lives. I found these family and *abuelas* relations to be significant on children's emotional attachment to the Mexican culture. This is not to say that all immigrant families, with limited access to institutional resources, depend upon transnational extended family resources to reconcile work with parenting demands. Because of the geographical proximity to Mexico, others make use of Mexican

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nannies and maids to supplement parental support.

In conclusion, I found both the U.S. and the Mexican governments to be hostile toward immigrant families. Also, I observed a borderlands region patterned by gender inequality and sexism. In spite of all these constraints, the lack of access to parental resources enticed families to seek and use resources provided by Mexican relatives across the border. Many immigrants felt trapped in this oppressive situation, but the need to rely on family support across the border forced them to adapt (rather than contest). The most striking thing about this research is the immigrants' engagement in transnational resources as a strategy based on available options for family support. In this way, transnationalism is an approach that many would like to avoid.

There are, however, a number of major limitations in this study that I would like to highlight. First, I suggest that a more thorough account of this research can be accomplished through longitudinal research analyses. I understand that documenting immigrant families as an aggregated unit over time is difficult. I believe is also challenging to look at families who are in a constant state of movement. Nevertheless, more knowledge can be achieved if future research delves more closely into the experience of immigrant families for longer periods of time. Second, as a qualitative social research project, I do not assume that the findings of this dissertation can be generalized or equally applied to other settings or population groups. However, from a sociological perspective, I found my study relevant and appealing to other scholars in other border regions.

Future Research

In the light of the events taking place along the U.S.-Mexico border — a consequence of the

violent War on Drugs initiated by the Mexican President Felipe Calderón — much has changed in the South Texas-Tamaulipas corridor. The intensity of cross-bordering patterns from the LRGV to Mexico, for example, has been reduced. Daily death tolls have mounted from Matamoros to Miguel Aleman as result of heavy urban and rural shootouts between members of organized crime (*Carteles*) and between Mexican law enforcement (including the Armed Forces) and *Carteles.* The most striking thing about this event is that in early November 2010 an unknown and large number of families abandoned the town of Cd. Mier (see the Map I provided in page 43 for further reference) literally seeking refuge in the neighboring cities of Miguel Aleman and Rio Grande City. As of today, Cd. Mier remains abandoned, mirroring a ghost town for more than two months.

While finishing the last stage of my fieldwork, several participants shared a thoughtful concern about my vulnerable position as researcher in the Mexican borderlands area. After careful consideration, I decided to restrict my fieldwork in Mexico. However, more in-depth and comprehensive work is needed to understand the implications for Border Mexican immigrant families. Today, few deny that people from both sides of the border are trapped between the worst of two worlds. Future research should also examine more closely how the Mexican War on Drugs and the U.S. militarization of the border affects the construction and maintenance of linkages between the Tamaulipas and LRGV border corridor. It would be worthwhile to delve closely into cross-bordering patterns affected by border violence to measure it effects on the maintenance and retention of family transnational life.

Contribution to the Sociological Literature

In general terms, findings from this research are consistent with previous academic

literature on Mexican migration patterns (Smith 2006; Valdez 2006). On the one hand, Smith (2006) suggests that state-adopted policies contribute to the maintenance of transnational life in single community spaces (Pp. 64). On the other hand, Valdez (2006) argues that a combination of personal attributes (lack of formal education and limited English proficiency) and a hostile social environment (U.S. nativistic policies and discrimination) contribute to the perpetuation of the image of Mexicans as a working poor group (Pp. 419). Most of the literature, however, has focused on long-distance transnational processes between Mexico and the U.S. In contrast, the entire research setting of this project is, in fact, a transnational social arena. In addition, while other scholarship focuses on the flow of values and practices from the U.S. to Latin America as progressive social remittances that promote change (Levitt 2001), this study found that transnational engagement retains traditional values about family, gender, and religion in the host society that many immigrants would like to avoid. Rather than seeing transnationalism as potentially liberating (e.g. Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Blanc-Szanton 2003), this dissertation sees it as a constraining force.

Finally, this research adds to the growing literature on research methods. I suggested that immigrant families are better understood if other immigrant families conduct the ethnographic work. I asked my wife and daughter to assist me in this research endeavor, and they agreed. My wife is as an elementary school teacher — a native Spanish speaker — with extensive training as an educator; she helped me to grasp patterns that I would have overlooked. My daughter, who is completing her graduate work in the educational psychology field at the University of Texas-Pan American, has extensive training as a fieldworker and had better access to different or gender-specific critical information than me (as a man). Using this "immigrant

families researching immigrant families" approach, I suggest new insights and a better understanding of the Mexican immigrant family life in the Lower Rio Grande Valley are produced.

APPENDICES

The Border Mexican Immigrant Family Open-Ended In-depth Questionnaire
(English version)

Date: _____   Identification Number: _____

Field Interviewer: _____

Name: _____
City of Residence:_____
County of Residence: _____
Family Size: _____
Date of Arrival to the U.S._____

Birthplace:
Husband:_____
Wife:_____
Daughter (s):_____
Son (s):_____
Other (s):_____

Level of Education:
Husband: _____
Wife: _____
Daughter (s):_____
Son (s):_____
Other (s):_____

Citizenship (if naturalized, when?):
Husband: _____
Wife: _____
Daughter (s):_____
Son (s):_____
Other (s):_____

Occupation:
Husband: _____
Wife: _____
Daughter (s):_____
Son (s):_____
Other (s):_____

Religion:
Husband: _____
Wife: _____
Daughter (s):_____
Son (s):_____
Other (s):_____

1. Please share your life experience prior to your migration to the U.S.:
a. Were you satisfied with your life in Mexico, please explain?
b. Were you treated differently (e.g. because of your class, gender, race, religion, etc) in Mexico, please explain?

2. Nowadays, do you take advantage of Mexican institutional programs such as?
   a. Consular Missions (e.g. matricula consular):
   b. Dual Nationality
   c. Health Coverage
   d. Cultural Events
   e. Literacy Programs
   f. Voting Rights
   g. Joint Investments (yourself, home town association, and the government):
      If so, who told you about it? How did you get access to it?
      Do these programs benefit you family life somehow?

3. Explain in what ways have these institutional programs influenced your lifestyle to what can be described as Mexican?

4. Do you have friends outside of the Mexican community (think about work, school, or any other setting)? If so, do you considerer yourself part of this new community? What do you have in common?

5. Explain what do you understand as American customs? [Once defined] in what ways do you organize family life around American customs [only if it applies]?

6. What type of work you did in Mexico? What type of work you do now? Do you see any difference? In what ways?

7. Are you satisfied with the type of work you do? Please elaborate on it.

8. Explain how did achieve your level of education?

9. What is your primary language inside home and outside home? Do you have any rules about it? Explain.

10. What social class you see yourself and family, and how did you achieved it?

11. Are you satisfied with your place of residence, explain?

12. Have you talked to your children about college, explain?

13. Do you and your partner engage in paid work, explain?

14. Do both equally contribute economically to the expenses in home? What percentage, explain?

15. Who does the following chores, how often, and how willing, explain:
    a. cooking
    b. grocery shopping
    c. housekeeping
    d. laundry
    e. taking care of children

16. How and who disciplines and rears children, explain?

17. Who makes major and minor decisions on how to spend money?

18. Do you see yourself sided with Mexican or American customs and culture on ways to organize family life, household duties, and decision-making?
    a. If you see yourself sided with the Mexican way, elaborate on what you consider Mexican customs.
    b. If you yourself sided with the American way, elaborate on what you consider American customs.
    c. If you see yourself sided with both, elaborate.

19. Please elaborate in what ways do you expose your children to the Spanish language and Mexican traditions?

20. In what ways do you promote children's bonding to Mexico?

21. Please elaborate in what ways do you expose your children to the English language and American traditions?

22. In what ways do you promote children's bonding to the U.S.?

23. What are your goals/aspirations for your children in terms of social mobility?

24. Where do you prefer to raise your children? Please explain why, advantages and disadvantages.

25. How often you go to Mexico and who you primarily visit there? Elaborate.

26. Do you expose your children to Mexican and/or American TV and music? How often and why you choose one over the other? Or, perhaps if it is the case, why you combine both?

27. How often and who primarily you call to Mexico? Elaborate on the reasons.

28. How often and who primarily you and children email and chat to Mexico? Elaborate on the reasons.

29. Do you still send handwriting letters to Mexico? If not, please elaborate on it[53].

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[53] Several questions were paraphrased from Márquez (2000) questionnaire (Pp. 181).

APPENDIX B

The Border Mexican Immigrant Family Open-Ended In-depth Questionnaire
(Spanish version)

Fecha: _____   Identification Number: _____

Entrevistador (a): _____

Nombre: _____
Ciudad de Residencia:_____
Condado de Residencia: _____
Miembros en la Familia: _____
Fecha de Arribo a los Estados Unidos:_____

Lugar de Nacimiento:
Esposo: _____
Esposa:_____
Hija (s):_____
Hijo (s):_____
Otros (s):_____

Nivel de Educación:
Esposo: _____
Esposa:_____
Hija (s):_____
Hijo (s):_____
Otros (s):_____

Ciudadanía (Si es naturalizado/a, proveer fecha):
Esposo: _____
Esposa:_____
Hija (s):_____
Hijo (s):_____
Otros (s):_____

Ocupación:
Esposo: _____
Esposa:_____
Hija (s):_____
Hijo (s):_____
Otros (s):_____

Religión:

Esposo: _____

Esposa:_____

Hija (s):_____

Hijo (s):_____

Otros (s):_____

1. Por favor comparta sus experiencias en México antes de inmigrar a los Estados Unidos:
    a. ¿Se sentía satisfecho con su vida en México? Explique
    b. ¿Fue tratado diferente (por razones de clase, genero, raza, religión, etc.) en México?

2. ¿Usted ha participado en algún programa de gobierno cómo?
    a. Misiones consulares
    b. Doble Nacionalidad
    c. Cobertura Medica
    d. Programas de alfabetización
    e. Votar
    f. Mejoras en su comunidad de origen (en la cual participen usted, organizaciones comunitarias, y algún nivel de gobierno)
    Si es el caso, ¿quién le dijo acerca de estos programas? ¿Cómo obtuvo acceso a ellos? ¿De alguna manera esto programas beneficiaron la vida de su familia?

3. ¿De qué manera estos programas han influenciado su forma de vida que lo hacen identificar más con costumbres Mexicanas? Explique

4. ¿Convive con otros individuos fuera de la comunidad Mexicana (piense en lugares como el trabajo y escuela)? Si es al caso, ¿se siente parte de esa comunidad? ¿Qué tienen en común usted y esta comunidad?

5. ¿Explique qué entiende como costumbres Americanas? [Una vez definido] ¿Explique las razones de por que organiza su vida familiar alrededor de costumbres Americanas [solo si es el caso]?

6. ¿Cuál fue su ocupación en México? ¿Cuál es su ocupación ahora? Explique qué diferencias nota.

7. ¿Está satisfecho con el tipo de trabajo que desempeña? Si es el caso, por favor explique.

8. ¿Cuál es su nivel de educación? ¿explique razones por las que llego a tal nivel?

9. ¿Cuál es la lengua que usa regularmente en casa y fuera de casa? ¿Cuál son sus reglas al respecto? Por favor explique.

10. ¿En qué nivel social se mira usted y su familia, y como llego a el??

11. ¿Está usted satisfecho con el lugar y área donde vive con su familia? Explique.

12. ¿Ha hablado acerca de la universidad con sus hijos? Explique.

13. ¿Usted y su esposa reciben salario por el tipo de trabajo que desempeñan? Explique.

14. ¿Usted y su esposa contribuyen por igual económicamente para el mantenimiento del hogar? ¿Qué porcentaje? Explique.

15. ¿Quién hace los siguientes trabajos domésticos, que tan seguido, y que tan de acuerdo, explique?
    a. cocinar
    b. comprar el mandado
    c. limpiar la casa
    d. lavar la ropa
    e. cuidar a los niños

16. ¿Quién y como se disciplina y educa a los niños, explique?

17. ¿Quién hace las decisiones acerca de cómo gastar el dinero, explique?

18. ¿Con que tipo de cultura y costumbres se identifica en cuestiones de deberes domésticos y toma de decisiones familiares, las Mexicanas, Americanas, o ambas?
    a. Si se identifica con las mexicanas, por favor explique.
    b. Si se identifica con las americanas, por favor explique.
    c. Si se identifica con ambas, explique.

19. Por favor explique de qué forma expone sus hijos al español y tradiciones Mexicanas.

20. ¿De qué manera influye en sus hijos promoviendo lazos con México?

21. Por favor explique de qué forma expone sus hijos al inglés y tradiciones Americanas.

22. ¿De qué manera influye en sus hijos promoviendo lazos con los Estados Unidos?

23. ¿Cuáles son sus aspiraciones y metas para que sus hijos puedan tener mejor oportunidades de vida?

24. ¿Dónde prefiere formar a sus hijos? Explique por qué, ventajas y desventajas.

25. ¿Qué tan seguido va para México y quien es la persona que más visita allá? Explique.

26. ¿Qué tanto deja a sus hijos ver y oír Televisión y música Mexicana y Americana? ¿Explique

qué tan seguido, y por qué prefiere una sobre la otra, o si es el caso, por qué ambas?

27. ¿Qué tan seguido llama a México por teléfono y quien es la persona con la que más habla allá? Explique.

28. ¿Qué tan seguido usa usted y sus hijos el correo electrónico y el chat a México y quien es la persona con la que más se comunican allá? Explique.

29. ¿Aún sigue escribiendo cartas a mano para comunicarse a México? Si no es así, ¿por favor explique por qué?[54]

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[54] I translated this Spanish version from the original English version.

APPENDIX C

Systematic Observation Instrument
(Field Notes Organization Chart)

1. Individual Level:

    - Participant displays images pro-Mexico (e.g. soccer Mexican team t-shirt).
    - Participant engages on Mexican issues, or otherwise.
    - Participant reads literature in Spanish from Mexico (e.g. newspaper, magazines, and books), or otherwise.
    - Participant displays in their household setting any documents proving political and community affiliation pro-Mexico (e.g. matricula consular, electoral card), or otherwise.
    - Can the participant speak and understand Spanish, English, or both?
    - Participant appears to have a good job and satisfactory income (if it applies), or otherwise.
    - Participant appears to be intensively active with his/her extended family activities (in the U.S. and Mexico), or otherwise.
    - While the interview, who does the cleaning chores (e.g. cleaning the living room table)?
    - While the interview, who does lead the conversation (e.g. posing a question to the wife, but responded by the husband)?
    - Who appears to discipline children?
    - Do children appear to be bonded to Mexico (e.g. TV, music, internet, trips), or otherwise?
    - Do participants appear to be tired because of over-working (e.g. overtime, two shifts, two or more jobs)?
    - Do participants appear to value education (e.g. high school or college diplomas hanging in the living room and bookshelf full of books)?

2. Household Level

    - Participant's family dwelling (e.g. single, multiple, rented room, etc).
    - Pay rent/own.
    - How far is the house from elementary school, middle school, high school, health clinic, hospital, grocery store, Movie Theater, public transportation, pharmacy, and bank services?
    - Participants appear to be okay with the quality of the schools and health care.
    - Participants seem to enjoy their house.
    - Participants live in a nice neighborhood.
    - Participants appear to be religious.

3. Community Level

    - Geographic Characteristics (e.g. boundaries with neighbor communities).
    - Population Distribution (class).
    - Migration (a population highly mobile).
    - Work and economic opportunities.
    - Does the community have reliable public transportation?
    - Most used mode of transportation.
    - Direct public transportation between the community and Mexico.
    - Educational facilities (K-12 system, vocational school, college).
    - Local television channels (non cable and cable) from Mexico.
    - Religious attendance.
    - Health Care coverage (U.S. and Mexico).
    - Main employers in the community (female/male driven).

Instrumento de Observación Sistemática
(Notas de Trabajo de Campo)

1. Individuo:

- La familia participante muestra afinidad en sus cosas con México (e.g. camiseta de futbol, bandera de México etc.).
- La familia participante le gusta (o no) relacionarse con México.
- La familia participante lee (o no) literatura en español (e.g. periódico, libros, revistas).
- La familia participante muestra (o no) en su casa imágenes y documentos de afiliación política Pro-México como la matricula consular, y la tarjeta electoral.
- La familia participante habla y entiende Inglés, Español, o los dos.
- La familia participante parece tener estabilidad laboral y un buen ingreso económico.
- La familia participante (o no) mantiene lazos activos con su familia extendida (e.g. padres abuelos, tíos, tías) en México.
- Durante la entrevista ¿quién atiende al grupo investigador en términos de snacks, limpieza etc., la mujer o el hombre, o los dos géneros?
- Durante la entrevista ¿quién domina la conversación, la mujer o el hombre, o los dos géneros?
- ¿Quién parece disciplinar a los hijos?
- ¿Les fascina a los niños hablar o ir a México (si aplica) o conectarse a través del Internet, chat, o televisión mexicana?
- La familia parece estar cansada de trabajar en exceso.
- Los participantes valoran la educación (tienen diplomas colgados o estantes de libros).

2. Hogar/Casa

- Casa de la familia participante (unifamiliar, multifamiliar, traila, etc.)
- Renta o dueño.
- Que tan lejos está la casa de la primaria, secundaria, clínicas, hospital, tienda de víveres, cine, transportación publica, farmacia, y bancos.
- La familia participante parece estar de acuerdo con la calidad de las escuelas y servicios médicos.
- La familia participante disfruta su casa.
- La familia participante vive en un barrio agradable.
- La familia participante parece ser religiosa.

3. Comunidad

- Las características geográficas de la comunidad.
- Nivel social de la comunidad.

- La comunidad parece ser muy móvil (se mudan constantemente).
- Oportunidades de trabajo y económicas en la comunidad.
- La comunidad tiene buen transportación pública.
- ¿Qué tipo de transportación usa predominantemente la comunidad?
- ¿Hay transporte publico directo entre México y los Estados Unidos?
- ¿Qué tipo de oportunidades para la educación tiene la comunidad (high schools, escuelas vocacionales, universidad)?
- Canales de televisión por cable y no cable de México.
- La comunidad parece ser religiosa.
- Cobertura de servicios médicos en los Estados Unidos y México.
- Principales empleadores en la comunidad (para mujeres y hombres).

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