

*La Vida en el Norte* [Life in the North]  
**Three Mexican Women in the Roanoke Valley**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this work was to investigate how identity is transformed by the experience of immigration. Two research questions were conceptualized in order to address the essence of the inquiry. How do Mexican immigrant women living in the Roanoke Valley describe their lives back in Mexico? How do Mexican immigrant women living in the Roanoke Valley describe their lives in the United States? Interviews with three first-generation Mexican female immigrants currently living in Southwest Virginia formed the basis of the qualitative study presented in this work. The study was designed to understand Mexican women immigrants through their personal experiences and stories.

The two main findings about their perceptions of life back in Mexico were related to lack of economic resources and the limited opportunities they had. Also, their memories of Mexico were paired with nostalgia of their loss in terms of family relations and cultural understanding. In general, the participants perceived themselves to be in a better economic position that encourages them to stay in the United States. An unexpected finding was that in all three cases domestic violence was a constant in the women's lives. However, despite the gender construction of Mexican women as passive females, the commonality in the three cases was that they looked for alternatives on how to resist violence by seeking support and resources to escape from it on either side of the border.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

The purpose of this work was to investigate how identity is transformed by the experience of immigration. To accomplish this purpose, I interviewed three first-generation Mexican female immigrants currently living in Southwest Virginia. The interviews formed the basis of the qualitative study (Mason, 1996) that I present in this work.

According to Donato (2005), in the last decade Mexican female immigration to the United States changed dramatically. In terms of numbers, the Mexican National Population Bureau (Conapo<sup>1</sup>) published that 45 per cent of the Mexicans living in the United States are women. According to Cano (2005), during the last quarter of the fiscal year, the statistics of the Border Patrol showed that 1,700 women were arrested every month along the crossing points of El Paso and Fabens, Texas, and Deming, New Mexico, a dramatic increment in the number of women who are attempting to cross the border.

Regarding research on female immigration, Ariza (2005) in reviewing the literature, asserts the need for a more analytical point of view, in which the evaluation of female migration could change from a heterogeneous perspective that addresses limited generalizations. As Ariza explains (2005) a holistic perspective can articulate better the relationship between female migration and the importance of the social process. In this sense the thesis is a partial response to this need.

### Background

In August 2001, I arrived at Virginia Tech as an international student. During the application process, just as any United States student, I had to fill out a series of forms.

On some of these forms, especially those for statistical purposes, I had the option of filling in a category about race. I did not pay too much attention to this but later, a month after I arrived; I went to a bar with some classmates. During this welcome gathering, one of the classmates, as a “joke,” called me a “dirty Mexican.” In the beginning, I did not understand what he meant. I thought he was disrespectful and his “joke” sounded discriminatory to me. After this experience, I started thinking about the power of labels and how race issues worked together, and in addition, how my nationality made me a target for discrimination. For the first time in my life I was being looked as the “Other.”

#### The “Other”

As Robert Darnton (1984) points out, to understand a way of thinking, one should begin with the idea of capturing otherness, meaning, to understand and look for the cultural values in which a person or a situation is immersed, in order to comprehend some attitudes that appear completely opaque to us. “When we cannot get a proverb, or a joke, or a ritual, or a poem, we know we are on to something” (p. 5). In my particular experience my classmate’s joke was absolutely understandable to me; I realized I was “on to something” within American society. After that experience, I started to think about the relationship between the “joke” in the American context and the thousands of Mexicans who cross the border illegally every year and who are now living in this country. The “joke” solidified, in one second, all the stories I had heard about discrimination against Mexicans in the United States.

I am a single, middle-class female from Mexico City, with no familial history of immigration to the United States. Regardless of what I had heard about discrimination against Mexicans, I had never experienced it first-hand. More alarming was the fact that,



before the incident, I had felt protected because of my situation as a student and my knowledge of the English language. What I realized in that moment was that academic and social equality do not prevent discrimination. If I could be an easy target for “jokes,” how it would be for those living without any knowledge of the language or with a questionable legal situation? For that reason I began to investigate what life was like for Mexicans immigrants living in the United States.

### A Long Journey Begun

I wrote my undergraduate thesis in Mexico on two 19<sup>th</sup> century newspapers, *El Diario de México* and *La Gazeta de Caracas*. The main goal of the project was to inquire how those newborn newspapers helped to create an imagined community (Anderson, 1991) that later would help to form the nation. One of the most interesting outcomes of this project was to find and follow in these newspapers what David Brading (1991) called “creole patriotism,” a concept that relies on the idea that the creoles created an incipient identity that later on formed some of the Mexican and Latin American national myths. Since this first work, I became interested in how identity is created, in the understanding that identities are socially constructed (Anderson, 1991), a theme that founded the basis on my research on identity issues.

When I came to Virginia Tech as an international student, my intention was to explore in depth identity and imagined communities in 19<sup>th</sup> century media. However, while doing my master’s degree, I held a Teaching Assistant position at Virginia Tech and for the first time taught Spanish as a foreign language. In *Vistazos* (Lee & Van Patten, 2002) the textbooks we were using for the course, the first literary piece presented was a poem by Luis Maguregui, a Chicano writer born in El Paso, Texas. His poem

especially caught my attention because of the force of his suggestion: crossing the border signifies that you leave everything you are. “Everything I am is worthless in front of the bright possibility of getting a job in Chicago.” My first thought was: “This is not true.” I tried to understand what he was saying, but everything I thought about drove me to the idea of self-renunciation. A lot of questions about the self and identity came to me. Do you leave everything behind to get a job in some other place? How do things change? How is identity transformed, changed, or modified with the experience of immigration? What have other Mexican women experienced living in Southwest Virginia? The idea of incorporating life experience with identity soon came to me.

To begin with this project, I talked to Dr. Jacqueline Bixler, the Area Studies program coordinator. She suggested that I speak with other faculty members who might be able to help me. I talked to several people and finally ended up at Dr. Gresilda Tilley-Lubbs’ office. When I first went into her office, a long line of students was waiting for her. I waited with them and finally after a while I was able to speak with her. Dr. Tilley-Lubbs was well-known in the department because of her service-learning program. The service-learning course was planned as a cultural immersion experience to facilitate language acquisition. Without knowing this, I was very skeptical about a service-learning program that sounded to me as it were more focused on charity than in real change for the people involved, the Mexican immigrants living in the Roanoke Valley.

Despite all my doubts, I went to see Dr. Tilley-Lubbs. She listened to my proposal to research identity in the Roanoke community. Her first suggestion was to read her doctoral dissertation. I went back home and skimmed it quickly. Without realizing it, I became more and more involved in her dissertation, *Crossing the Border through*

Service-Learning: The Power of Cross Cultural Relationships (Tilley-Lubbs, 2003). In this work Dr. Tilley-Lubbs examined the relationships that were formed between the students enrolled in the service-learning program and the Latino community living in the Roanoke Valley.

While reading Dr. Tilley-Lubbs' dissertation, I realized that one important piece of her work was the qualitative methodology she applied to the investigation. She interviewed participants of the service-learning class, both students and Latinas. My interest was to go out in the field and interview other Mexican women living in Southwest Virginia. I came back to talk with Dr. Tilley-Lubbs and she became my advisor and my companion throughout the journey. Her work with the Latina community opened the door for me to meet the Latinas I later interviewed for this study.

#### The Research Project Emerges

During fall semester 2003, Dr. Tilley-Lubbs organized, with the help of her students, a "Latina Empowerment Group" [LEG]. This group was organized to discuss themes that were important to the Latinas, including themes that could help them to make their lives easier in the United States. The participants in the group were Mexicans and Hondurans; however, for my own research I decided to select participants only from Mexico because of my national origin. To accomplish my objectives, Dr. Tilley-Lubbs and I decided that I would conduct a series of interviews with Mexican women currently living in the Roanoke Valley.

Data collection in the field consisted of interviews with the women in addition to frequent visits to their houses and active participation on the women's group. I also collected data in my personal journal, in which I recorded reactions, conversations, and

the interactions with the participants. The study was designed to understand Mexican women immigrants through their personal experiences and stories. Understanding that identity is a social construction within the framework of cultural negotiations, the purpose of this study was to investigate how the identity of recent Mexican immigrant women was transformed by coming to the United States.

### Overview

In chapter two, I introduce the concepts by which I use to frame the study and define identity. I explain the complex relationship between Mexico and the United States, the presence of Mexican migrants in the United States, and the construction of a Hispanic/Latino identity in the United States.

In chapter three, I present the details of the research design and the methodology used for data collection. I present the participants in each case study in chapters four, five, and six. Finally, in chapter seven, I present a summary of the findings by answering the research questions in a cross-case analysis, and the implications of the study for future research.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

In this chapter I will introduce the concepts in which I frame the study. I will define identity as socially constructed. I will also talk about Mexican immigration to the United States, the differences between migrants and settlers, and the need for a gender perspective to explain the process of settlement. Finally, I will explain the creation of the Latino community, the construction of a discourse about immigration from the United States government perspective, and its consequences in everyday life. I also provide a brief review on immigration and domestic violence.

### Defining Identity

As Tatum (2000) points out, the concept of identity is complex; as she says identities are “shaped by individual characteristics, family dynamics, historical factors and political contexts” (p. 9). In this same view, Alcoff (2003) asserts that personal constructions of identities are not only individually defined but immersed and determined by social identities that are imposed by social interactions. As she says, “Individuals make their own identity, but not under conditions of their own choosing” (p. 3). In this sense, the negotiation of identity has to do with the interconnection of two main axes: the personal self-made identity and the social identity attached to socially constructed meaning.

Also, it is important to acknowledge that identities have to be understood within their cultural location and in relation to the historical epoch. In this sense, we accept the idea that, “Identities are essentially social objects, gaining their intelligibility and force only within a social realm,” rather than, the “ontological individualism or the notion that selves have or can achieve an independence from the outside social domain” (Alcoff, 2003, p. 5).

Alcoff (2003) explains that during the modern period the four main notions of identity recognized nowadays were invented: race, class, gender and nationality. The concept of race was arguably developed by the anthropology of Kant and diverse biological explanations. Class emerged as an “objective social location” within the emergence of capitalism. Nationality was produced with the development of the nation-state; and sexuality, referring to gender, “developed as an identity rather than a practice in the context of the creation of alternative communities in which individuals could develop whole ways of life in new and different forms” (p. 5).

For Alcoff (2003), these four differentiations in identity construction are integrated into “progressivist teleologies and natural conceptions of difference” (p. 5). She explains that the labeling, classifying, and creating of diverse typologies of natural races emerged simultaneously with what Foucault called the “classical episteme” (p. 5). In other words, with the creation of typologies, the construction of categories produced politics of differentiation, meaning that identities are imposed in different ways such as colonialism, racism, sexual subordination, national conflicts, specific group histories, and structural positions that play a main role (Alcoff, 2003).

### Mexican Migration

In the context of international migration, socially constructed identities are in constant exchange and negotiation. When someone crosses the border, the continual process of cultural exchange is more noticeable (Campbell, 1995). One of the best descriptions of the relationship between Mexico and the United States is by Anzaldua (1991):

[The] US Mexican border es una herida abierta [an open wound] where the Third World grates against the First and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country –a border culture (p. 25).

This relationship presents diverse problems that need to be discussed. Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) explains that contemporary Mexican migration and settlement<sup>2</sup> need to be understood within large structural transformations. In this sense, we have to think about the relationship between the two countries in the context of global capitalism.

Several authors have referred to the history of Mexican migration to the United States (Anzaldúa, 1999; Gonzalez & Fernandez, 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Tilley-Lubbs, 2003). Agreeing that Mexican immigration to the United States is not new and also that it is the result of economic domination.

Gonzalez and Fernandez (2003) explain that the constant flow of Mexican immigrants to the United States has not been limited to recent history. Immigrants “stand both at the center of history and of a process of imperial expansionism that originated in the last three decades of the nineteenth century and continues today” (p. 29). In contrast, this hegemonic position towards Mexico resulted in a culture of border crossing that signifies “the breaking apart of the social fabric of the Mexican nation and its resettlement in enclaves across the United States as a national minority” (p. 29). In the words of Alvarez, Jr. (1995), the history of Mexican migration, “Illustrate[s] the contradiction, paradox, difference, and conflict of power and domination in contemporary global capitalism and the nation-state, especially as manifested in local-level practice” (p.447).

Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) and Gonzalez and Fernandez (2003) point out there has been a reductionism in the explanations about the regular flow of Mexicans to the United States, with the constant being the push-pull model thesis that is used to explain the causes of migration. The model lies in a simple explanation of the relationship between two parts that work independently from one another. On one side, the push country sends and supplies people because of

overpopulation and the lack of resources that motivate the population to consider a significant move. Meanwhile the pull country, the one that demands, usually experiences a shortage of labor that attracts the ones in need. (cf. Gonzalez & Fernandez, 2003). Several authors agree that this model is not sufficient to explain the whole phenomenon (Dussel Petters, 1998; Gonzalez & Fernandez, 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994).

Chiswick (1986) and Dussel Petters (1998) maintain that, contrary to migration from other nations, the motivations for Mexicans to cross the border are mainly economic. Some important differences in terms of the economic patterns that have not received sufficient analysis are the differences between low wages in Mexico and high wages in the United States and the gap between gross domestic product per capita in Mexico in comparison to the United States (cf. Dussel Petters, p.56).

Also, many authors agree that one explanation of why immigration occurs is not enough (Chavez, 1992; Dussel Petters, 1998; Gonzalez & Fernandez, 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Paredes Bañuelos, 2003). Even when the demand for labor power is critical to understand immigration, other important variables like cultural, regional, familial, economic, and legal issues need to be considered. In this regard the research done by Paredes Bañuelos (2003) explains that El norte [The north] represents more than employment and dollars.

Hondagneu-Sotelo's (1994) questioning of the push-pull model thesis is that macrostructural studies of immigrants tend to overlook the active participation of people in the process of migration, failing to explain the diversity of immigration patterns such as border commuters, seasonal migrants', and settlers. Those differences help to understand the diversity of the social patterns on immigration, the variations of gender, generation, class, and culture in



immigration that usually stay obscure in the macrostructural perspective. For this reason, we will establish the differences in immigration patterns in order to understand the settlement process.

#### Differences between Migrants and Settlers

In order to comprehend the complexities of immigration it is necessary to differentiate between the types of immigrants. Chavez (1992) and Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) indicate that many Mexican migrants decide to settle in the country despite the insecurities of living in the United States without a permanent legal residence status and despite their intention to stay just for a short period of time.

Chavez (1992) explains, a migrant comes to the United States and returns to the country of origin in a relatively short period of time, a period that can last from a few days or months to even a couple of years. In this category are farm and agricultural seasonal workers. On the other hand, a settler is one who resides in the country for a longer period of time that can be for years or even for a lifetime. For many settlers, the distinction is not clear. Those who stay as settlers might hold the dream of returning to their country, even while they stay raising a family and working. Their stay in and departure from the country has multiple variables and returning can be caused by the death of a family member or many other unpredictable situations.

The passage from one society to another is also a long process. Chavez (1992) identifies three main stages in this process. The first stage, he explains, is the separation from the known social group or society. As he indicates, "For undocumented migrants, crossing the border is a territorial passage that marks the transition from one way to another. No matter how similar it may seem to the way of life left behind, or how many relatives and friends await the new arrival, life in the United States is different for the undocumented immigrant." (p. 4)

The second stage is the transition characterized by what Chavez calls the “liminal” phase, meaning that immigrants remain outsiders until they accumulate enough links of incorporation such as secure employment, family formation, the establishment of credit, capital accumulation, competency in English, and so forth. However, as Chavez explains, “Even individuals who have accumulated a great number of such links may find full incorporation into the new society blocked because of their undocumented status and the larger society’s view of them as illegal aliens” (p.5).

Finally, the third stage is the incorporation into the new social group or society that includes the acquisition of the appropriate knowledge, experience, and behaviors to successfully complete the proper rituals. As an example of proper rituals, Chavez (1992) identifies the ceremony of naturalization for new citizens. However, as he implies, after the naturalization process, other questions arise. For instance, does the large society imagine immigrants to be part of the community? Or, to what extent do immigrants imagine themselves as being part of the community? I will later talk about these two important issues.

#### Settlement and gender

An important relationship that has to be described is the connection between settlement and gender. In migration theory, the work of Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) about Mexican immigrants in California formed the basis for further research on the theme. Different from Chavez (1992), Hondagneu-Sotelo’s (1994) analysis highlights the presence of women and entire families in migration. In this way, the research done on temporary Mexican migrants, a population dominated by males, changed by considering women and their influence on settlement. As she explains “In fact, the Mexican undocumented settler population appears to be nearly evenly composed of women and men (...) [and] the well-established, long-staying

undocumented immigrant population reflects a balanced sex ratio” (p. 2). Following her analysis, Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994, 1998, 2001) recognizes the importance of women’s activities that facilitate and prompt the settlement of documented and undocumented immigrants.

As she underlines, we need to be careful with using the concept of gender. Gender is not a variable to be measured but a “set of social relations that organize immigration patterns” (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994, p. 3). It is important to understand that the study of gender is not simply to document the presence of women or to ask the same questions to immigrant women that had been asked to immigrant men but to comprehend how gender relations display the cultural ideals, practices, and ideas of femininity and masculinity that shape opportunities and life decisions. In this sense, gender “facilitate[s] or constrain[s] both women’s and men’s immigration and settlement” (p. 3). However, the immigration literature based on gender analysis has been focused exclusively on women, as if men were without gender. Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) considers the study of gender relationships in the family, to draw attention to the ideological and cultural meanings embedded in what she considers people to identify as the most experientially salient social relations in their lives.

#### Mexican Patriarchal Traditions

The ideal of the passive, maternal, self-sacrificing, and long-suffering woman has permeated Latin American culture and society. This idea has been reinforced by the cult of the male known as machismo, a behavior that demands and encourages the superiority of males with aggressiveness and authoritarian behavior, and the acceptance of this behavior by women of all social classes. Men should be sexually assertive, independent, and emotionally restrained, have absolute authority over their wives and children, and serve as the family breadwinners. On the other hand, Pescatelo (1973) coined the concept of marianismo which consists of “exalting

[women's] femininity and their ability to produce human life from inside their body" (Pescatelo, 1973, p. 90). Women should remain dependent, subordinate, responsible for the domestic chores, and selflessly devoted to their families and children (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Lopez, 2004; Pescatelo, 1973; Paternostro, 1999).

As Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) and Behar (1991) explain, this idea has been traditionally caricatured by the Anglo observer who sees the Mexican and Chicano male as a given model, without observing more deeply the diversity of family relations. As she points out, although the construction of the macho figure or the marianist model might inform people's actions, they are not patterns of behavior in themselves. In this sense, urbanization, industrialization, and migration have altered the map in gender relations in Mexican society. The peasant model where women were constrained to the domestic sphere and males were allowed to have total autonomy has been changed. Mexican females have been incorporated into professional spheres such as nursing, teaching, and other professions, changing and challenging traditional patriarchal ideals that mandate that women should stay in their traditional roles as mothers and housekeepers.

In immigration research Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) analyzes how marriage patterns have been shifted and renegotiated by the separation, conflicts, and new living and working arrangements that have gradually changed gender relations. With the recompilation of the information the author was able to examine the reconfiguration of gender.

#### A Women-Centered Theory of Settlement

As Chavez (1992) and Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) explicate, settlement is a process that goes through several stages. In a schematic way the process can be reduced to a simple equation: "[T]he longer immigrants stay, the less likely they are to deliberately live in extreme frugality

and to work as many hours as possible, and hence the more likely they are to permanently settle” (p. 16). However, this simple assumption needs to be understood in a broad perspective.

Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) explains that settlement is a long process that is characterized by the unification in one country of place of residence and employment. When settlement finally occurs, immigrant workers and their families insert themselves into a web of community institutions, educational systems, and communitarian associations such as clubs and churches. They also establish contact with the health department and other social institutions.

As Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) points out, gender dynamics contribute to a deep understanding of the process. For instance, when the phenomena is visualized from the microperspective, meaning household and family establishment, or from the macro perspective, which emphasizes the reunification of labor maintenance and renewal, the presence of women and the entire family is key to explaining settlement.

In contrast to seasonal labor, “Settlement is characterized by both family reunification or formation and the joining of maintenance and renewal in the new country” (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994, p.17). In this sense, when the family reunites in the United States, no longer enjoys the resources they generated back in Mexico. The immigrant family discovers that they must purchase their daily sustenance resources in the United States, an economy with higher prices. Undocumented immigrants have to face the inconveniences of not having basic protections such as medical assistance or access to higher education, and most of the time they earn a smaller income than United States citizens do (Chiswick, 1986). However women are more able to see better opportunities for themselves and their children, in contrast to the hard work they have to do in Mexico without proper compensation.

Chavez (1992) explains that immigration is selective. “Undocumented migrants are subject to many life-threatening experiences in crossing the border and then in working in the United States” (p. 121). Many immigrants are young and most of them in the family-formation phase of their life. Many undocumented immigrants are in the childbearing period of their lives, either those who marry here or who are joined by their spouses are likely to have children born in the United States. When this happens, not all the members of the family are undocumented immigrants, therefore, it is difficult to call this family an “illegal alien family” or an “undocumented family” since the family now contains one or more United States citizens. Chavez uses the term “binational family” to refer to families that consist of both undocumented immigrants and United States citizens or legal residents.

#### The construction of the Latino community

According to Chavez (1992) there are two questions concerning immigrants that need to be addressed: 1) To what extent do immigrants imagine themselves part of the larger community? And, 2) Does the larger society imagine immigrants to be part of the community?

To answer these questions we have to recall the concept of imagined communities coined by Anderson (1991). Like Mato (1998) explains, going beyond the possible interpretations of the idea of imagined community, the adjective “imagined” is not opposite to “real,” but it “emphasize[s] the existence and importance of a mental image of such proposed community” (p. 282). In this sense, the community is imagined because the members of the smallest community will not be able to know all their fellow members, but in their minds they will have the image of their communion, in the sense of a deep and horizontal comradeship (Anderson, 1991).

However, as Mato (1998) explains, the representations of identity are produced and circulated by multiple social actors. In this sense, one of the questions is who imagines the

community and how. Yahow (2003) points out that, “Group identity is constructed in interaction with the state and other groups” (p. 88).

In the United States, Flores (2000) explains there was a need of an identity that could name and organize the presence of the people from all Latin America that settled in the United States. As he explains, the term mostly used has been “Spanish,” term that relies on the idea of a unifying language and culture suggesting common Iberian origins and characteristics (Flores, 2000). However, one of the main problems of using such denomination is that, “[T]he reality [is] that many of those so designated do not even speak Spanish as a first language, or at all” (p. 96). According to Rochin (2000) the problematic aspect of the creation of a single category in which we can fit all the population from Latin America or from Mexico is that the entire group is not homogenous at all.

The two names usually used to respond to this question are Latino and Hispanic. Like Flores (2000) points out, “To complicate the picture beyond recognition, there is even the suggestion that ‘Latinos’ be used to refer to those citizens from the Spanish-speaking world living in the United States and ‘Hispanics’ to those living elsewhere” (p. 96). Other authors question the term “Hispanic” as used by the government to construct a homogenous group referring to people from Latin America or those who speak Spanish (Tilley-Lubbs 2003; Yahow 2003).

However, as Flores (2000) explains, in between the choice of words, the underlying truth is that which would seem to define experiences -migration and settlement- become of secondary importance; in the end all Latin America is swept in the “Hispanic” container. As he clarifies “Hispanic” or “Latino” cannot explain easily differences between Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Dominicans, Colombians, Salvadorans, and all other Latin American nationalities.

“[T]he search for a name, more than an act of classification, is actually a process of historical imagination and struggle over social meaning at diverse levels of interpretation (Flores, 2000, p. 102).”

In this process of historical imagination, some writers have gone to the core of the system of differentiation and hierarchy to understand social relations. Chéla Sandoval, a Chicana<sup>3</sup> feminist, explains what she called “la conciencia de la mestiza.” A term that revalorizes the notion of mixed identity. For her, la meztiza [the mixed blood] is born in life in the “crossroads” between races, nations, languages, genders, sexualities, and cultures (Sandoval, 1998).

On the other hand, Tilley-Lubbs (2003) explains that the battle for social justice through political identity and power began in the 1940s and 1950s with early Mexican activists such as Berta Corona, Ernesto Galarza, and Luisa Moreno. During my research, I discovered the literary works of Ana Castillo and Sandra Cisneros, then later Cheri Moraga’s and Gloria Anzaldua’s portraits of themselves in American culture looking for a place through literature. As Saeta (1997) points out regarding the literary work of Ana Castillo, “Writing can dream and invent new possibilities. It is the Utopian space where the long-silenced Other begins to speak heretofore unheard things, -where authority is questioned, tradition subverted, privilege challenged” (p. 133).

These are some examples of how immigrants in the United States have contributed significantly to the imagination of the community looking for incorporation. However, the government has also constructed a discourse about immigration that has brought specific consequences in every day life to those that have crossed the border.



## Legal Construction of Identity

Different authors (Gonzalez & Fernandez, 2003; Hondageneu-Sotelo, 1994; Chavez, 1992; Mendelson, 2004) have explained how several changes in the law and the perception of undocumented immigration have shaped the concept of “illegal alien” or “undocumented immigrant” in a negative way. The United States–Mexico border has been marked by different periods that run the gamut from open to severe restriction. The border policy has been shifted in regard to immigration due to historical factors such as labor recruitment that encouraged the “bracero program,” to a relatively new era of seclusion that resulted in the implementation of initiatives like San Diego’s “Operation Gatekeeper” established in 1994, “Operation Hold-Back-the-Line” in El Paso, Texas (1993) and “Operation Safeguard” in Nogales, Arizona (1995). These programs were implemented to reinforce the presence of border patrol agents, employing cutting-edge technology such as aircraft flights along the borderland, underground sensor detectors, and the building up of a steel-reinforced fence with the purpose of stopping the crossing of illegal goods and people through the border. (cf. Mendelson, 2004)

Gonzalez and Fernandez (2003) explain that the constant flow of Mexicans into the United States has been perceived as a problem because immigrants affect welfare, education, culture, crime, drugs, budgets, etcetera. As Mendelson (2004) points out the problem of immigration has created a meaningful category that has powerful consequences in the daily experiences and life of those who fall in this category.

Recalling Collier (1998), Mendelson (2004) reflects on how the legal system creates “new orders and identities” and how the whole system of power creates subjectivities. Yarrow (2003) affirms that the proclamation of the self identity is illusory, because the state acts through its agencies, employees, and paper forms to create identity. For example, when filling out a form

required by the state, the form “became” the state because they often ask individuals to self identify into a race-ethnicity category. For instance, the hospital or any other office in fact does not want to know the race-ethnic identity of a child, but the state does. This is one of many examples of how “policy and administrative practices concerning race-ethnicity play a role in constructing an individual identity” (Yahow, 2003, p.88).

In terms of legal issues, the law also produced a constructed and imposed identity. Another example is the Immigration Reform and Control Act [IRCA] of 1986. In general terms, the act created a subordinate category that offers some undocumented immigrants legalization while denying it to others. As Mendelson (2004) explains, the law has three major provisions:

[T]he establishment of employer sanctions against those who knowingly employed “illegal” immigrants; the creation of an “amnesty” program that offered immigrants who had been continuously present in the United States since January 1, 1982 an opportunity to apply for permanent resident status, and the establishment of three classes of immigrant agricultural workers eligible for legalization (p. 53).

The IRAC Act had several consequences; the provisions solidified the category of ‘illegal immigrant’ as a distinction that proscribed and marginalized those who fail in that social group.

Also as Mendelson (2004) elucidates, the IRCA did not fulfill the needs of all immigrants to acquire legal status. From a gender perspective, Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) explains, that males were more favored by the Act in contrast to women. Males were able to ask for letters from former employers; meanwhile women who worked as informal domestics and baby sitters had less means to prove they were actually employed. In terms of the provision about agricultural workers the law excluded those working in factories, restaurants, and other types of employment.

Finally, the provision that had the most far-reaching impact was the sanctions applied to the employers. The IRCA created a culture of ‘paper checking’ that impacted miles north of the border. Previous to the law the consciousness about the immigration status was only the competence of the border patrols and checking points, after the law all the employers were required to verify the legal status of all immigrant workers. As Mendelson (2004) points out, the creation of the notion of “illegality” reproduced the physical borders of the nation-state.

In recent times, undocumented immigrants have been confronted by a new situation that merges legal as well as political narratives that frame immigrants’ experiences. Since September 11, 2001 there has been a new awakening of general concern about border security that created the U.S.A. PATRIOTIC Act. “The Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act” passed in 2001 as a response of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. In general terms, the act reorganized the former Immigration National Services (INS) now called United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) under the direction of the Homeland Security Department (2002). The Homeland Security Act of 2002 reorganized the immigration and border patrol placing both of them under the Homeland Security Department. As Mendelson (2004) points out, in practice, the changes in the law linked national security, terrorism, and immigration. The state tightened its control over immigrant mobility and the daily life of legal and illegal immigrants, reflecting, perpetuating and reinforcing the social context in which immigrants are viewed as a social problem and a threat to the national state.

#### Domestic Violence and the Intersection of Race, Class and Gender

In terms of the social structure, the IRCA and other laws like Proposition 187<sup>4</sup> shaped the legal identities and as a consequence also shaped relationships, opportunities, and legal rights. In

the study conducted by Mendelson (2004), the life stories of the women she interviewed were powerful reminders of how laws and political processes influence in a considerable way the life, possibilities, and rights of those women.

Sokoloff and Dupont (2005) indicate that traditional feminist perspective on domestic violence usually emphasized the common experiences of battered women. As they explain the feminist perspective was used to forge a strong feminist movement to end women's abuse. However, many scholars are questioning the traditional methods of defining and measuring domestic violence with the purpose of recognizing the need to give voice to women who have been marginalized from the white, middle class, feminist movement.

These researchers emphasize that domestic violence cannot adequately be understood without granting importance to the fact that different cultures define violence differently (Yoshihama, 1999, in Sokoloff & Dupont 2005). Yoshihama's (1999) research and findings suggested that the definition of domestic violence is incomplete when it does not include specific forms of abuse that are particular to women's cultural backgrounds. She points out that some respondents to her research consider culturally specific forms of abuse more severe than acts traditionally seen as part of domestic violence, such as pushing, grabbing, slapping, and throwing objects, acts that to some extent many women did not consider being abusive at all. Sokoloff and Dupont (2005) assert, "These findings suggest that there are different [cultural] definitions of domestic violence as well as varying perceptions of what constitutes severe versus milder forms of abuse." (p. 42)

Nevertheless, that does not mean that domestic violence is relative (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005; Yoshihama, 1999). What the authors assert is that women must be able to express their concerns about how violated they feel within a cultural framework that is meaningful to them,

understanding that culture can be crucial to recognize and combat domestic violence. However, it is also important to point out that there is no one simplistic notion of culture, but cultural experiences of violence are also mediated through structural forms of oppression, such as racism, colonialism, economic exploitation, heterosexism, and the like.

In terms of gender, Sokoloff and Dupont (2005) also question the prime role that gender inequality has had in the traditional explanations of violence against women. As they explain, “The traditional feminist perspective argues that violence against women is a consequence of socially constructed and culturally approved gender inequality” (p.43). Though they argue that this approach has been far superior to prior theoretical models that blamed the victim for her circumstances and pathologized battered women, there is still a need for examining other contributing factors such as the intersection with class. “Although controversial, there is considerable empirical evidence suggesting that the most severe and lethal domestic violence occurs disproportionately among low-income women of color” (Sokoloff & Dupont, p. 44).

Also, there is a need to revise the institutionally regulated services, such as state agencies that govern public housing, and welfare in order to help battered women. Like Solokoff and Dupond (2005) assert, in some cases the lack of institutional support is another level of violence experienced by battered women, which occurs in ways that are racialized as well as gendered and classed (p. 44). In summary, it is important to consider that “We exist in social contexts created by the intersections of systems of power and oppression” (Sokoloff & Dupont, p. 43).

### Summary

In this chapter I have explained the concepts in which I frame the study. Specifically, I define identity as a socially constructed concept. In this sense, I said that personal constructions

of identities are not only individually defined but are immersed in and determined by social identities imposed by social interactions.

Also, in the context of international migration, several authors referred to the history of the Mexican migration to the United States, all in the agreement that it is not new and it is the result of economic domination. However, many authors concur that one explanation about why immigration occurs is not enough. In this sense, macrostructure studies of immigrants tend to overlook the active participation of people in the process of migration, failing to explain the diversity of immigration patterns such as border commuters, seasonal migrants and settlers.

In migration theory the important work of Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) pointed out the significant presence of women and entire families in settlement. As she explains, gender is a set of social relations that also organize immigration patterns, meaning that, understanding gender dynamics helps to have a deeper appreciation of the process. Women play a main role in settlement.

Regarding the presence of people from Latin America in the United States, Flores (2000) explains that there was a need of an identity that could name and organize the presence of people from all Latin America that have settled in the United States. Moreover the classification is actually a process of historical imagination and struggle over social meaning at diverse levels of interpretation. Some of the answers were given by Chicana/os, like Anzaldua (1991). However the United States government had also constructed a discourse about immigration with consequences in every day life.

Different authors (Gonzalez & Fernandez, 2003; Hondageneu-Sotelo, 1994; Chavez, 1992; Mendelson, 2004) have explained how several changes in the law and the perception of undocumented immigration have shaped the concept of “illegal alien” or “undocumented

immigrant” in a negative way. Pointing out that the United States–Mexico border has been marked for different periods that run from an open border to severe restriction, Gonzalez and Fernandez (2003) explain that the constant flow of Mexicans into the United States has been perceived as a problem because immigrants affect welfare, education, culture, crime, drugs, budgets, etcetera.

In the social structure, laws like IRCA Act and other laws like Proposition 187 shape the legal identities and as a consequence also shape relationships, opportunities and legal rights. The state tightened its control over immigrant mobility and daily life of legal and illegal immigrants, reflecting, perpetuating, and reinforcing the social context in which immigrants are viewed as a social problem and a threat to the national state. In this order, the legal construction of identity also plays a role in domestic violence. As Sokoloff and Dupont (2005) explain the definition of domestic violence is incomplete if we do not consider specific forms of abuse particular to women’s of diverse cultural backgrounds, and that the experiences of violence are mediated through structural forms of oppression, like racism, colonialism, economic exploitation, etcetera.

### Chapter Three: Methodology

In this chapter, I present the methodology used for the study. I describe the qualitative methods used for the research. I explain how I entered the Latino community in Roanoke, the settings where the research was developed, the criteria for choosing the participants, the participants and the limitations of the research.

#### Personal Statement

While being an international student in the United States, I found myself in several circumstances that constantly made me question the conceptions, representations, or understandings of what being Mexican meant in this country.<sup>5</sup> Interested in these social interactions, I started looking for information about life for Mexicans in the United States and how coming to this country changed their identity.

#### *Me as the "Other"*

At the time when I first started doing the research, I met on several occasions with my main advisor Dr. Tilley-Lubbs. At one of those first meetings we were discussing whether I should attend the weekly meetings with the women's group in Roanoke, so I could learn more about the participants in the program. On one occasion Dr. Tilley-Lubbs pointed out for the first time that I would be the "Other." "Quizás tu familia es para ellas una de esas familias para las que iban a trabajar allá en México." [Probably your family would be for them one of those families they used to work for, back in Mexico]. My advisor at that moment was more aware of the socioeconomic, educational, and background differences between the Mexican immigrants in the program and me than I myself was.

As Behar (1993) precisely described it, being from the middle class situates me on the side of the "imaginary Mexico,"<sup>6</sup> in the tradition of Elena Poniatowska and Cristina Pacheco,



Mexican writers who cross back and forth across the borders of Mexican society writing about everyday life and bringing to the discussion the voice of many men, but principally women, who have been marginalized by the dominant discourse (Poniatowska, 2004).

*Working on the Hyphen*

One of my main concerns was how I was going to close, bridge, or fill the gap between the Mexican women living in the Roanoke Valley and myself. Being part of the educated elite gave me the power of the word (Freire, 1987). The question was who has the right to talk about whom? How could I portray the Mexican immigrants without “Othering” them in my privileged position of being the writer? (Fine, 1998). Every time I walked into one of the houses of the women in Roanoke, I felt the heavy burden of my culture. Why aren’t you married? Do you have children? Are you single? What do your parents think about you living in the United States? Where did you study English? What does your father do for a living? Why are you studying so hard if you will end up getting married and having children? What it is to be a woman in Mexico, or in general terms in Latin America, is a very important issue (Paternostro, 1999). Women are expected be wives and mothers above all. All these questions were always on the table, all of them showing me my own identity as a middle class, well-educated woman.

Freire (1970) points out, “Dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized” (p. 151). One of my main purposes was to have an open dialogue with the women, instead of acting like they were “depositing” their ideas on me. I wanted to build dialogue with the women in order to understand them within a holistic perspective. For this reason, I present myself in some of the vignettes. In this way I can work the hyphen<sup>7</sup> by bringing my personal experience. I

wanted to draw a deeper understanding “that we are all multiple in those relations” (Fine, 1998, p. 135).

### The Research Questions

When someone crosses the border the continual process of cultural exchange is more noticeable (Campbell, 1995). As Geertz (1995) points out, the limits of where one culture begins and another ends cannot be clearly defined. To explain an event or a singular success, it is necessary to understand the frames of interaction into which this event is inserted. Given that cultures are in constant negotiation with one another, a fundamental intermixed-ness of cultures becomes apparent. The complement to this process of exchange is a process of comparison with, and juxtaposition to, other cultures.

Understanding that identity is a social construction within the framework of cultural negotiations, the aim of this study was to investigate how identity is transformed by the experience of immigration. To accomplish this purpose, I conceptualized two research questions in order to address the essence of the inquire (Mason, 2002). The research questions are:

1. How do Mexican immigrant women living in the Roanoke Valley describe their lives back in Mexico?
2. How do Mexican immigrant women living in the Roanoke Valley describe their lives in the United States?

### The Research Design

#### *Qualitative Research*

The research design is a case study using qualitative research methods. As Mason (2002) explains, qualitative research is a methodology used to comprehend a social process by meaning or experience in a “rounded way” rather than “attempting to understand, for example, causal

patterns by analyzing connections between static or snapshot variable[s]” (Merriam, 1998, p. 135).

“Thinking qualitatively means rejecting the idea of a research design as a single document; qualitative research is characteristically exploratory, fluid and flexible, data driven and context-sensitive” (Merriam, 1998, p. 23). In this sense, qualitative research, rather than having a hypothesis, surfaces from a situation that captures the attention of the researcher. While being in the women’s group I met different women from Honduras and Mexico, but three of them especially interested me. As Carger (1996) describes, she was especially touched by a boy and his family while she was doing research about an after-school program; after meeting the child she decided that instead of sampling the whole group of participants in the program, she was going to do a case study about this particular boy. In my case I was captivated by Patricia, Sandra and Margarita.<sup>8</sup>

### *Crossing the Border through Service Learning*

I met the Mexican women living in the Roanoke Valley through Dr. Tilley-Lubbs, who has been working with the Latino community in the area since 1999 when she started serving as interpreter for the health department. As a full-time Spanish instructor at Virginia Tech, she decided it would be a good idea to place the students in the homes of the Latino families, so that the students could enter the community and learn about it, while at the same time the families would have an interpreter or translator, a service lacking at that time in Southwest Virginia. Therefore, she started the service-learning class in spring of 2001 (Tilley-Lubbs, 2003).

The following spring, with her students Dr. Tilley-Lubbs organized a “Latina Empowerment Group,” with the purpose of organizing meetings with the Latinas once a week so they could receive useful information that might help them learn about life in the United States.

The group met every week during spring 2003 and fall 2003. I went to almost every meeting during fall 2003. Conversely, during the spring semester of 2004, while I was enrolled in the service-learning class, the meetings changed from every week to once a month.

During the first semester that I attended the women's group meetings, I was engaged with some of the women more than others, this way I started building a relationship with the participants in the research. During this semester I visited the houses of a number of women in the group some weekdays and weekends. Sometimes I went with the student with whom the family was paired and at other times I drove from Blacksburg to Roanoke by myself. By the end of the fall semester I had decided which women I was going to interview based on their different characters, cultural backgrounds, and levels of education. I wanted to have a diverse group of women from different regions of Mexico living in the United States.

### Contextual Framework

#### *Latinos in the Roanoke Valley*

According to Tilley-Lubbs (2003) the Latino community in the Roanoke Valley had grown perceptibly in the last five years, from "1, 359 people to 2, 679 or 1.1% of the total population" (p. 2) in Roanoke City. As she explained, the Latinos that are part of the service-learning program are representative of the immigrant population in Southwest Virginia.

Even though I am Mexican and some of the participants in the women's group felt more comfortable sharing with me their experiences in the United States, and asking me for help, at the beginning some of them were reserved and did not accept me immediately. The reason why they kept secret their information is because they were trying to protect themselves because of their legal status. After I had been going to the meetings for a while the women were very excited about having me come to visit them in their homes. By visiting the homes of the families

living in Roanoke, I could perceive that most of them live spread across the city. In general terms, there is not a main zone where you can find a ghetto or a community. However, there are some families living close to each other in some building complex across the city (Tilley-Lubbs, 2003).

### *The Places*

My research is mainly situated in the Roanoke Valley, specifically in the houses of the Mexican women I interviewed in Roanoke City and in the church where the service-learning meetings take place. Roanoke is a city approximately 40 miles away Blacksburg, where Virginia Tech is located. But because Blacksburg is situated in the Appalachian Mountains, the trip takes more or less one hour (Tilley-Lubbs, 2003). During the fall semester I usually rode with different students enrolled in the class. However, when I started visiting the families in Roanoke, I drove by myself; I wanted to have one-on-one interaction with the participants apart from the relationships they had established with their service-learning partners.

### *Roanoke.*

The Roanoke Valley metropolitan area is comprised of Roanoke City, Roanoke County, Salem, Botetourt County, Craig County, Bedford, Bedford County, Floyd County and Franklin County, with more or less 360,000 inhabitants. The valley is located in southwest Virginia. The city itself has a population of one hundred thousand people. According to the 2000 Census in Roanoke City, 65% of the population is considered White and 25% African American. There is not a classification for Hispanic or Latino, the classification named as “Other” is 3% (Tilley-Lubbs, 2003). Most of the families participating in the program live in Roanoke City but one of the women I interviewed lived in an adjacent community outside the city.

## The Participants

### *The Women's Group*

During spring 2004, 50 families were part of the women's group (Tilley-Lubbs, personal communication, February, 14, 2005). Most of them had participated in the service-learning program before, and they were used to having a student visit their homes every week. Their educational levels varied, ranging from having completed second grade to having completed high school and courses in technical education. The Mexican participants in the group were also from different regions of the country, all demonstrating regional variations of culture within Mexico. I decided to interview representatives from San Luis Potosi, Mexico City, and Oaxaca to have a perspective from different regions of the country. I had had no cultural experience with any Hondurans, so their class and cultural markers were more difficult to understand. The participants in this research are here with their husbands or partners and children.

### *Three women in the Roanoke Valley*

#### *Patricia.*

Patricia is a petite woman. She looks like she is in her early twenties but she is actually in her early thirties. She has a doll face, big eyes, nicely outlined lips, and a turned-up nose. However, she has an aggressive expression and she complains a lot during the meetings. Patricia is from the northern part of Mexico. At the time of the study, she had come to the United States eleven years ago, but she had lived in California and Texas. She was the mother of three children: Octavio and Lupita, who were born of her first marriage, here in the United States, and Rosa, born of her relationship with Raul, her current partner. Rosa was born in the United States.

In terms of her socioeconomic background, Patricia is from a working poor rural family. According to what she told me, her father is part of a community of laborers that ran a sugar

factory back in her hometown in Mexico. She is one of the most educated women in the group. She completed the equivalent to high school and technical courses to become a secretary. She worked for a short period of time before getting married.

*Margarita.*

Margarita has a fragile look because she is slender. Like Patricia she looks like she is in her mid-twenties, but she is actually in her early thirties. Margarita rarely wears makeup. She has thin lips and dark straight hair. Margarita is a constant participant at the meetings. At the beginning; she appeared to be shy, but once I got to know her better, I learned she could be a very talkative person. She is from Oaxaca, in the southeastern part of Mexico. Margarita had been in the United States for almost five years and she came directly to Roanoke. She is here with her husband Omar, her son little Omar born in Mexico, and her two daughters Marta and Gisela, who were born here in the United States.

As for her socioeconomic status, Margarita came from one of the poorest regions in Mexico. It seemed inappropriate to ask her openly, but according to what she told me and the information I could find about her hometown, she is from a region that is mostly indigenous. Of the three women I interviewed and the participants in the women's group Margarita is the one who has the least education. When I asked her how far she went in school she told me she finished elementary school, the equivalent of grades one through six.

*Sandra.*

Sandra is tall, which gives her a sense of assertiveness and security. Sandra is in her mid-thirties and she looks her age. She wears her hair in layers; and she has a beautiful smile. She is always well groomed and her manners are very proper. She is a constant participant at the women's group and she usually shares her opinions. Sandra is originally from Mexico City. She

had been living for five years in the United States and she has only lived in Roanoke. She is here with her husband Luis, her daughter Ana, and her son Ismael who was born here in the United States. By the end of the interview process, she was pregnant again.

Regarding her socioeconomic status, Sandra is from one of the oldest and traditionally marginalized neighborhoods in Mexico City. She told me that her mother worked two shifts in a restaurant, which was the equivalent of MacDonald's, in order to support her three daughters while they attended school.

She completed the equivalent of middle school in Mexico City and then she moved to Ciudad Juarez where she started working at different jobs to help with the family income. After gaining some work experience Sandra became a secretary in an accountant's office, until she and her husband decided to move to the United States.

#### Data Collection

As Coffey (1999) explains, observation and participant observation are usually methods that refer to the researcher immersing himself or herself in the setting to generate data. The main purpose of this technique is to give the observer a firsthand experience a range of dimensions, in and of that setting. As he points out, "These might include: social actions, behavior, interactions, relationships, events, as well as spatial, location, and temporal dimensions. Experiential, emotional, and bodily dimensions may also be part of the frame" (Coffey, 1999).

For the purpose of this thesis I immersed myself in the community and I frequently participated in the women's lives. I was also a constant participant in the women's group. I usually took notes and kept track of the visits in my personal diary. However, the main sources of data were the interviews I conducted with Patricia, Margarita, and Sandra.



*The Interviews*

As Mason (2002) asserts, it is harder to conduct qualitative interviews than to formulate a questionnaire for asking predetermined questions. She says “Good qualitative interviewing is hard, creative, active work” (Mason, 2002, p.67). Nevertheless, Seidman (1998) reflects on the value of interviewing by pointing out that, “Telling stories is essentially a meaning-making process” (p. 1). When people tell a story they select details of their experience. They reflect on them and give them order, thereby constructing a meaning for their own experience. This way, the purpose of interviewing is not to get concrete answers to questions or to formulate a hypothesis, but to understand the experiences of other people based on the meaning they make of those experiences. For this reason, I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews, in order to understand the personal meaning of the experiences of immigration for each of the participants.

As Seidman (1998) recommends, I tried to conduct a series of three semistructured interviews (see Appendix A), using open-ended questions to guide the interviews. However, some constrictions of time on the part of the interviews made the process difficult. I managed to interview Patricia and Sandra three times, but the constrictions of my time and Margarita’s busy schedule made it almost impossible to conduct three interviews with her. In this case, I condensed interviews two and three into one session, but I managed to get together with her at least three times. I tried to keep as closely as possible to the structure in order to maintain the focus on the interview (Seidman, 1998).

I taped the interviews with Patricia, Margarita, and Sandra. In the three cases, I prepared and read an informed consent form. The Internal Review Board [IRB] form was both in English, especially translated for the university and in Spanish (Appendix A) for a clear understanding for the participants. I tried to explain to them as clearly as possible the interview process rather than

only leaving the document for them to sign. I made it clear that they were not obligated to participate in the interview. I also stressed that they did not have to answer any question they preferred not to discuss.

### *Limitations*

One of the challenges about writing this thesis was language. My native language is Spanish, which is Patricia, Margarita, and Sandra's native language as well. The task itself was difficult with the amount of translation<sup>9</sup> and the limitations in my own expression in English, making difficult the final writing process.

Other difficulties were the constrictions of time and the busy schedule that both the interviewees and I had. Most of the time, I had to arrange the interviews in order to be able to drive from Blacksburg to Roanoke and back, and it was really hard to make time to spend with them. In some cases, it was impossible to conduct the interview without background noise, or without the children, the husband, or the immediate family interrupting us. It was complicated enough to get together with each woman. I could not ask them to stop taking care of their children during the time I was with them. Most of the houses were noisy and most of the time the television, the stereo or both were on, or there were many times where the little children were crying. This also made some of the interviews difficult to transcribe; because the noise made it difficult to hear what we were saying.

### *Ethical Issues*

Because of the immigration status of some of the interviewees and the participants in the women's group, some ethical issues arose. I was lucky to build a strong relationship with each of the women presented in the case studies and most of the women in the group. To keep their anonymity, I asked each of the women to choose a pseudonym to protect their identity. In the

process of the interviews and the writing of this work I present the data in a way they cannot be easily recognized. However, as Merriam (1998) points out, “At the local level, it is nearly impossible to protect the identity of either the case or the people involved” (p. 217). Other service-learning participants may be able to recognize them by the data I included; for this reason, I omitted some personal information that could be important for the participants. I wanted to avoid as much as possible any possibility of endangerment or humiliation, although in no way could the omissions interfere with the specific research questions I explore in this study.

#### *Other Sources of Data*

##### *Fieldnotes.*

I kept fieldnotes and journals. I tried to journal the events within 24 hours in order to record as accurately as possible the experience and the events. I tried to write down the fieldnotes in as systematic and orderly a fashion as possible (Emerson, 1995) in order to make sense, filter, and select the information that was helpful to further analysis.

##### *Participant Observation.*

Mason (2002) points out that entering a setting or a situation to be observed is a process in which the observer is involved not only in observing but also in participating, interrogating, listening, and communicating, as well as in a large range of other interactions. As she says, this process can be more challenging than simply conducting interviews. Many things happen at the same time and “may be less clear-cut and will probably be subject to more frequent negotiation and renegotiation than if you are an ‘interviewer’; and you may involve yourself in your setting for lengthy periods of time” (p. 87).

*Roles.*

During the research I performed two roles. I was part of the group as a participating member of the class and as an observer. I also played the role of a cultural mediator. Many times Patricia, Margarita, and Sandra relied on me to gather information from several social services offices or asked me to talk on their behalf.

*Confirmation of Data.*

Each of my three interviews with the women occurred while I actively participated in the women's group and in the service-leaning class. I heard their stories and I contextualized them into social situations rather than pretending to be windows into their minds. I am aware that we "tell ourselves in different ways to different people, in accordance with who we think they are, and how they want them to see us" (Mathews, 2000, p. 29). As Mathews (2000) points out, people are not chameleons; to a large degree, they are who they say they are and "to argue different would be to insult them" (p. 29).

While participating actively in the meetings, I had the chance to confirm the data. Sometimes the women reflected on their lives as I was taping the interview. After transcribing the interviews, I came back to talk to them again in order to confirm the data. In some cases I realized I had misunderstood their expressions and I had to go back and ask if I was misinterpreting their words (Seidman, 1998).

## Data Analysis

Organizing the data can be the most difficult task. As Mason (2002) points out, the data needed to be sorted and ordered, so the researcher could make interpretative sense of them. It is important to say that organizing the material is not analytically neutral, or as she says "[I]n choosing or devising a particular system, you are at the very least making certain assumptions

about the kinds of phenomena you are cataloguing and the kinds you are not (...), as well as how and in what form you will be able to retrieve them later on” (p. 148).

For the purpose of the thesis, I organized the data thematically (Ryan & Bernard, 2003) based on specific events and the interviews. I attempted to present each of the women as a particular case followed by cross-case analysis, to help build a general explanation. I tried to be careful in presenting each case to not depend on simple descriptions. For this reason, in each case I include interpretation and analysis. In presenting the case studies, I followed Merriam’s (1998) guidance to make sense of data by consolidating, reducing, and interpreting data.

#### *Consolidating the Data*

The first step in organizing material, Merriam (1998) suggested is to bring all the data together in order to organize them in a retrievable manner. I interpreted the data by organizing them in common themes that emerged from the interviews with Patricia, Margarita, and Sandra. Because of the amount of data I collected I decided to narrow the study within the overarching theme of identity focused on the life of the women back in Mexico, their lives here in the United States, and domestic violence as an important theme that emerged in each of the interviews. Since I worked with three case studies, the next step was to do a within-case analysis, followed by a cross-case analysis.

#### *Interpreting the Data*

Merriam (1998) suggests three steps to interpreting data. For the first level, she suggests the organization of the data chronologically or topically. At this level the data are presented as a narrative that has to be mostly descriptive. For the second level, she suggests moving from description to abstraction using concepts that would describe the phenomena; here the data have

to be classified into schemas that consist of themes or categories. Finally, on the third level she points out the importance of making inferences, developing models, or generating theory.

My first step of interpreting data involved reading the first formal taped interviews with the participants and the data collected while I was visiting the families. The second step was organizing the data into common themes and selecting the themes that were repeated in each interview. Finally, I had to choose from the emergent themes that help to understand how identity was transformed by the experience of immigration. The themes are: a) life back in Mexico; b) life in the United States; and c) and domestic violence.

### Presenting the Case Studies

#### *Case Studies and Vignettes*

As Merriam points out, there are several ways to present the data. In this particular work I chose presenting each of the women in separate cases in order to show the complexities that each of the woman's life presents in itself. I also wanted the reader to be immersed in the setting and to become part of the study. I also included the voices of the participants in order to make them present (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

#### *Portraiture*

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) explain portraiture as a method of inquiry and documentation. As they say, it combines “systematic, empirical description with aesthetic expressions, blending art and science, humanistic sensibilities and scientific rigor” (p. 3). In this work I chose to create portraits in order to present the cases in a way that the reader could follow me and be immersed in the experience and the richness of each narrative.

In the portraits, I give an account of the way I met each of the participants, their children and their homes, and I tried to show in detail the atmosphere in each of the houses as well as the

lives of these Mexican women in the United States. In chapters four, five and six, I include detailed portraits of Patricia, Margarita, and Sandra.

*Writing vulnerable*

“Writing vulnerable,” the epistemic perspective presented by Behar (1996) states that the most important debates in anthropology are related to questioning the role of the researcher, the relationship with the community, and how the personal point of view affects the description of the settings and the results of the investigation, when personal experience ends and scientific observation begins.

Our methodology defined by the oxymoron “participant observation” is split at the root: act as a participant, but don’t forget to keep your eyes open. (...) when the money runs out, or the summer vacation is over, please stand up, dust yourself off, go to your desk, and write what you saw and heard. Relate it to something you’ve read by Marx, Weber, Gramsci, or Geertz and you’re in your way to doing anthropology (p. 5).

In the occidental tradition the researcher goes to field work to “explore and understand” things. However, as Geertz points out, a culture cannot be “penetrated” (or studied as a monolith) by an outsider, because the forces of that culture (and the observer’s culture) surround and enmesh the “observer” in a confluence of cultural interactions (Behar, 1996).

In “writing vulnerable,” Behar teaches us that we as individuals not only think about our research as impersonal social facts, but rather as a constant negotiation of our identities in specific settings and structures of power. As she says, writing vulnerable is also a challenge in itself. “The worst thing that can happen in an invulnerable text is that it will be boring. But when an author makes herself or himself vulnerable, the stakes are higher: a boring self-revelation, one

that fails to move the reader, is more than embarrassing: it is humiliating” (p. 13). In this thesis, I take courage, hoping that I can take the reader into my personal tunnel.



## Chapter Four: First Case Study

I present each woman as a different case study. Each case contains a history of my relationship with each participant, a description of her family, a description of her home, and her story related to migration and identity. Like Seidman (1998) suggests, I tried to be faithful to the words of the participants, trying to keep the order the information as it appeared in the interviews.

## Patricia

The first time I met Patricia was at the women's group. It was about the second or third time I was there when she came and told me she wanted me to help her with her divorce. She was looking for a translator to talk with the lawyer. Patricia has been living in the United States for 11 years and her English was fair enough to communicate on a daily basis but not good enough to have a conversation with a lawyer.

I thought that translating in regard to legal matters for Patricia was a huge responsibility. I felt insecure about my English but I saw a good opportunity to be more in contact with Patricia. At that time Patricia did not seem very approachable; she can be very distant and sometimes rude. I had seen her before at the women's group but she looked so defensive that I was almost scared to talk to her, she seemed like she was about to start a fight. When she approached me, I did not know what to expect because of her attitude. I wanted to know what happened with this woman that made her look so defensive. That was the challenge for me, so I asked her if she had the lawyer's phone number. Patricia told me she was going to look for it.

Patricia and I are almost the same age; she is in her thirties but she looks like a woman in her early twenties. Patricia is very concerned about her image, and constantly worried about her

weight “Estoy a dieta es que estoy bien gorda.” [I am on a diet because I am very fat] I do not consider that she is fat; she is the mother of three children and she keeps her figure although she is a little bit chubby.

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*Patricia’s constant reference to her weight reminded me of Paternostro’s (1999) description of what it is to be a woman; as she says, one of the duties and responsibilities of being a woman is to be pretty. In this way, Patricia’s constant worries about her weight tell me how much the social construction of the female identity affects her everyday life. She was very concerned about it and she often talked about how much weight she has put on in recent years.*

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The first time I went to her house I had a hard time finding the way there. She gave me her address and told her husband to give me directions. Her husband gave me directions to find a gas station and told me to call from there. From the gas station I had to climb a hill and after the hill, and a curve, I passed by a cemetery on my left and a few houses on my right. The houses were small and they kept getting smaller until I found the old brick apartment complex, and I wondered if that was the right place. As soon as I arrived I heard some music, merengue, some salsa, maybe. A man was outside and I asked him if he knew Patricia and her family, so Patricia’s neighbor sent his daughter to show me the apartment, since the neighbor’s daughter was a friend of Lupita, Patricia’s daughter. I parked my car just to the left of a big red truck that looked brand new to me; later Patricia told me it was her husband’s truck.

---

*Tilley-Lubbs (2003) explains there is not a main concentration of the Latino community in the Roanoke Valley, causing a lack of sense of unity. However, there is a high concentration of Latino families in some apartment complexes that house some 8 to 10 families. Later, visiting Patricia I learned that in this apartment complex there were several families from different areas of Mexico and Central America. Chavez (1992) explains that most undocumented immigrants in the San Diego area were dispersed throughout the county; because of the mix many of them cannot be differentiated among citizens and legal residents, from whom they not different in any noticeable ways. He explains that one of the reasons why there are not formal communities of Latinos is because of their immigration status; they try to keep themselves from being visible to immigration services so they can avoid deportation. In Patricia's case she is a permanent legal resident but I learned later that some of the people living in that apartment complex are there without a proper visa.*

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Patricia's family consists of two daughters and an older son. Lupita was seven years old and Rosita was eighteen months. Patricia's older child Octavio was ten years old. That day I met Patricia's partner, Raul, who is from Guanajuato. Raul is and looks very young. He wears a mustache and looks like a very strong person; little Rosa looks like her father. She was eighteen months old by the time I was doing the research; she has lighter skin than her sister and brother, curly hair, and green eyes. I did not learn until that day that Lupita and Octavio were from Patricia's marriage.

Patricia lives on the first floor; her apartment has a door with two small windows on either side. When I knocked on the door, Lupita opened it. She looks like her mother, with dark

hair, big eyes, and a turned up nose like Patricia's. Patricia came to the door, she had Rosa in her arms, and she invited me to come in.

The first time I visited Patricia, it was a sunny day at the end of winter, the beginning of spring. It was sunny outside and when I came into the house I noticed how dark the inside was. Patricia left the apartment door open so we could get some fresh air. Patricia lived in a modest two-bedroom, one-bathroom apartment with a small living room area and a kitchen. Inside the apartment, the living room couches were too big for the space. Most of the time when I visited, the television was always on and the center of attention in the house. Sometimes they have both the stereo and the television on at the same time. The place was really loud with the children going in and out, slamming the door and turning the television on every time they entered.

My purpose was to visit and talk with Patricia; I asked her if she would be willing to participate in the study. Raul came in and out, since it was a Sunday. Patricia told me that on Sundays he likes to play soccer with his friends. Patricia looked a little annoyed. Later she told me that she likes me to visit on Sunday because she can do something different. Raul decided to go and play soccer. Patricia, Lupita, Rosa, and I stayed home. Octavio went out with Raul in the big truck.

Raul came back with some Mexican style bread. He gave me some for my house. Raul, said that the bread was brought by one of his friends from "*Norte Carolina*" [North Carolina] because they don't like the bread that is baked in the Mexican *panadería* [bakery] in Roanoke. Patricia offered me some coffee, but when I asked for milk, they were out of milk. Patricia told me they did not have time to go and buy the groceries for that week. I asked Patricia if she

drives. She does, but she prefers to go with Raul. Patricia complains because Raul prefers playing soccer to going to the store to buy groceries with her.

At the end of the visit Patricia asked me again to help her with the divorce. She got the lawyer's name. I felt that Patricia wanted to tell me more about the lawyer but I got the feeling she was embarrassed to talk about it in front of Lupita. When she came to say good-bye, she was almost whispering, and she had a small piece of paper another student had given her when she was going to visit her as part of the service-learning class.

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*The service-learning students function as translators and cultural mediators (Tilley-Lubbs, 2003), and an important point about this situation was that Patricia's resource to learn about a reliable lawyer was through one of the service-learning students. The student had told Patricia that the lawyer helped her mother with her divorce and that the lawyer was supposed to help women.*

---

Patricia told me that in order to go to the lawyer's office she could take a day off from work. I went back to Blacksburg, and called the number she gave me, but it was a wrong number. I looked for the name on the Internet, and when I found it, I called the office and got an appointment in three weeks. I called Patricia back because I was not sure if she wanted to wait that long. I got the appointment, but I was concerned because it was far off from the time I had scheduled the interviews.

## Legal Construction of Identity

I managed to visit Patricia before the appointment at the lawyer's office. I went to her house and I took my tape recorder with me. I started the first interview with Patricia. During that visit Patricia and I sat at the kitchen table, and I read her the IRB form that I had prepared and she signed her consent to use the interview data for the study (Appendix 2).

During this first interview I asked Patricia how her life was back in Mexico. Patricia describes herself as being from a working class family.

*"...bueno yo nací en Ahuehuena, Agua Buena, San Luis Potosí, ahí estudié hasta el primer grado de primaria, ahí había un ingenio de caña de azúcar, ahí hacían azúcar y era todo lo que hacían ahí me parece, y entonces, cuando yo cumplí, iba a cumplir siete años todos los obreros, este... bueno, el ingenio, parte del ingenio lo pasaron a un lugar que se llama Tambaca entonces todos los que trabajaban ahí los obreros que ya eran de planta, les hicieron casas, hicieron una colonia en ese lugar que se llama Tambaca y ahí nos movimos, pues toda la familias de obreros, verdá, todos los obreros, nos fuimos a vivir a Tambaca, la colonia obrera de Tambaca así se llama, bueno, donde viven mis papás."*

[...well, I was born in Ahuehuena, Agua Buena, San Luis Potosí. I studied there until first grade. There was a sugar mill there, they made sugar, and that was the only thing they did there, I guess. And when I was, when I was going to turn seven, all the workers, well, the sugar mill, they changed the sugar mill to another place that is called Tambaca, so, all those workers that were part of the factory. They gave them houses; they built a colony<sup>10</sup> in that place that is called Tambaca. So we moved there, well all the workers

families. All the workers, we moved and settled in Tambaca. The workers colony of Tambaca, that is the name, well, where my parents live.]

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*In the intersection of ethnicity, class, and gender, it is important to point out that economic reasons are popularly known as one of the main causes of migration to the United States. Like Paredes Bañuelos (2003) explains, unemployment and the lack of economical resources are the main forces that drive immigrants to the United States. However, in Paredes Bañuelos' (2003) and Chavez' (1992) research about the reasons for leaving, they both agree that the personal stories of immigrants uncover a complex display of motives for migration. Patricia's reason for coming to the United States was her marriage; however, describing herself as from a working class family defines her social class identity.*

---

Patricia is one of ten children, six women and four men. During this first interview Patricia talked about her life as a child in San Luis Potosí, in the northern part of Mexico. The capital city is San Luis Potosí City but Patricia is from a small town. Nonetheless, Patricia is one of the most educated women in the women's group. She finished high school and studied to be a secretary in a technical academy. During this first interview Patricia constantly referred to having a good life while she was living with her family.

*"... bueno pues vivíamos bien, bueno yo me acuerdo de mi niñez, que vivíamos bien a gusto..."*

[...well, we lived fine, well I remembered that during my childhood we had a good life...]

...and having a good example from her parents:

*“... y de mis papás pues ¿qué te puedo decir?, que son lo máximo para mí, como te estaba diciendo hace rato, pues que, yo nunca los oí discutir, nunca los oí levantarse la voz ni nada, o sea que, yo no sé, se me hace fueron bien, ... algunos de mis hermanos y yo nos hemos desviado, como se dice del buen camino, bueno, no creo que ninguno nos hayamos desviado del buen camino, pero mal ejemplo nunca tuvimos de mis pa’s, mis papás siempre buenos, pues hasta ahorita, bien buenos.”*

[... and, about my parents, what can I tell you? They are the best for me, how I was telling you, I never heard them raise their voices, nothing like that, I mean, I don’t know, I think they were good... some of my brothers and I we have turned aside from the good way, well, I don’t think we have turned aside, but, we never had a bad example from my parents. They were always good, so far, they are very good.]

Patricia talked about her brothers and sisters and how much she likes having a large family, especially when all the siblings get together in Mexico with her parents. After a few minutes I had to stop the interview because Patricia started crying while remembering her house and how her family life back in Mexico was. I taped approximately 30 minutes. I was shocked; I did not expect her to have this reaction during the interview. I just stopped the tape and waited until Patricia felt better. I put away my tape recorder, deciding to go back to Blacksburg. The next time I would see Patricia was the day we were to go to the lawyer’s office.

I went with Patricia to see the lawyer and interpret for her. We had to wait until the secretary said “Mrs. Smith is waiting for you.” The office was cold; it was another cold day at the beginning of spring.



Mrs. Smith was waiting for us in her office; she was for me the perfect example of how I perceived the Southern woman. She was a thin woman in her fifties; with her blond and gray hair cut in layers like Farrah Fawcett from the 80s'. Her clothes too had a 80s' feeling to me; a long black skirt, a white blouse, and a brocade velvet vest.

During the meeting we talked about how to file for the divorce, Mrs. Smith told us, that she needed to send a notice to Patricia's former husband. In that moment Patricia got anxious and very nervous about the possibility of him learning where she and her children live.

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*Patricia's anxiety caught my attention. During the lawyer's visit and before Patricia was evasive about the answers she gave me. Later that day in a private conversation she told me about her husband being abusive for years, and I understood her attitude. Patricia's anxiety reminds me Mendelson's (2004) description of Vicky. "Vicky arrived at the legal assistance office at where I was volunteering in our small Northern California town of Napa with visible anxiety" (Mendelson, p. 2, 2004). Both Patricia and Vicky suffered from anxiety related to their husbands' abuse.*

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Patricia asked if there would be another option, because she wanted custody of the children too. Mrs. Smith said there was no choice; she had to send a letter to the last residence where they had lived together and set up a public announcement in the local newspaper that the divorce was going to handle in court. If Patricia was lucky he would not learn about it, but there was a chance he would and he would know Patricia and the children were living in Virginia.

---

*As with other women interviewed by Mendelson (2004) that day I learned that Patricia never called the police; there were no official records about the abuse. Patricia was scared to call the police because she was illegally in the country by the time she was living with her husband even though he was an American citizen. For that reason there was no evidence of abuse and in that case there was no chance to place a restraining order in the event that her husband show up for court.*

---

When I asked Patricia during the first interview what was her family's reaction when she told them that she was coming to the United States, she answered that they were very sad and they did not want her to leave.

*"...o sea que les dije que me iba a venir para acá, de hecho nunca les dije ya me voy, sino les hablé "ya estoy acá", para, como venia ilegal, no quería que mi mamá estuviera con pendiente de la pasada, que me fuera a pasar algo, (...) pero bien triste, mi mamá no quería que me viniera, (...)"*

[...I mean, I told them that I was coming here, in fact, I never told them when I was leaving. Instead, I called them, "I'm already here" because since I came here illegally, I did not wanted my mother to be worried when I was going to cross, that something would happen to me, (...) but, very sad, my mom did not want me to come, (...)

---

*As Mendelson (2004) concluded about Vicky, Patricia was very aware that being undocumented placed her in a precarious location in society. "Vicky was aware of her precarious legal status and of the constant threat of deportation, about which her abusive*

*husband reminded her often as a technique to control and subdue her”( p. 2). As with Vicky, Patricia told me that she waited for a long time until he finally legalized her immigrant status. I remember Patricia saying how worried she was about identity theft. She keeps her social security number almost like a sacred thing. Getting her permanent residence card popularly known as a “green card” caused her a lot of pain, she said. In this sense, Patricia perceives all the years she suffered from domestic violence as the pay back for her permanent resident card. As in Mendelson’s (2004) description, Patricia was constantly scared of being deported because of the threats of her husband. When we visited the lawyer Patricia asked her if the divorce would affect having her permanent resident card. In fact, that was another reason why she had not gone to see a lawyer before. She asked the lawyer if she was going to lose her residency card because of her divorce.*

---

Patricia agreed to file for divorce hoping that her former husband would learn of it. When we asked Mrs. Smith about how much the divorce would cost she said that with her hours, the total would be \$1,200 dollars. Patricia said that the price was too much but she wanted to finish the divorce situation as soon as possible. We said goodbye to Mrs. Smith and later we had to write a check to the secretary. I waited until Patricia finished the check and then she turned to me and asked me if I could write the check for her, she did not know how to spell the numbers in English. Most of the time she asks one of her children to spell words for her.

#### Gender Construction of Womanhood

After the meeting with the lawyer, Patricia and I went to have lunch because she wanted to thank me for all the trouble of going with her to the lawyer’s office. We went to one of the

Mexican restaurants in downtown Roanoke. This was the only time we were alone: all the visits before and all the visits I did after this one, someone would be with us: her children, her partner, a relative, etcetera.

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*As Hondegnau-Sotelo (1994) points out, in a system of patriarchal relationships women's roles are always related to taking care of the children, the house duties, and the husband's needs. Only on this occasion, Patricia was not taking care of her everyday duties but other than that she was always busy and doing housework. This was the only time we had the two of us alone and this was the reason why she finally could open up and tell me about her relationship with her former husband.*

---

During this informal conversation that I could not tape, Patricia told me about the time her husband was abusive to her. I asked Patricia's permission to use the information that she shared with me during lunch. At this moment, I understood why she fell into tears when I was doing the first interview.

Patricia shared with me the story of how she finally decided to leave the husband who had abused her for years. It was not until he hit her on a Mother's Day that she decided to leave him.

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*In Mexican culture the mother is one of the most powerful symbols (Paternostro, 1999). The moment he crossed the line of beating her on a regular basis to beating her on Mother's Day was an unsustainable situation for her.*

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After hitting her on that Mother's Day he tried to make it up to her, so he sent her to Mexico to visit her mother. For the first time Patricia talked to her parents about the abusive situation she was in. On this occasion, Patricia said it was enough. She decided to stay at her mother's house and she decided that she was going to leave him behind. Patricia was so scared to confront her former husband that she gave him the news by phone.

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*On this occasion family support was fundamental for Patricia's decision. It was interesting to notice that for Patricia's father, education was a fundamental goal to improve his children's lives. Patricia was encouraged by her family to complete a technical education as a secretary so if things did not work with her and her husband she would have an education to take care of herself.*

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During the second interview Patricia referred to the importance of education for her parents. I asked her why she thought her parents put so much emphasis in sending their children to school. She answered:

*"...porque mi papá decía que si él no nos iba a dejar dinero, o así cosas materiales nos iba a dejar la herencia del estudio, (...) porque con eso (...) podíamos nosotros salir adelante por nosotros mismos, como el día de mañana que nos casáramos como nosotras de mujer, nos iba mal, nos podíamos separar y buscarnos un trabajo y salir adelante, o sea que él a todos nos trató de dar, a todos estudio."*

[...because my father said that if he was not going to leave us money or material things he was going to leave us study, (...) because with that (...) we could make a future by ourselves, like tomorrow, if we would get married, as women, things would go wrong, we could separate and look for a job and make it, I mean, he tried to give us all, studies.]

---

*When Patricia told her parents the situation she was going through they did not hesitate in helping her to leave her abusive husband. However, I agree with Mendelson (2004) when she explains that many of the women she interviewed were discouraged from leaving their husbands by friends and family while living in the United States. In Patricia's case the lack of a social network that would help her made it more difficult to leave the house while she was on the other side of the border (Mendelson, 2004).*

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Patricia's life with her former husband was hard from the beginning. She lived in a small house back in Texas and told me her children were having more economic resources than she had when she was at the same age, but she had to live with a man who hit her. All her family relations were back in Mexico and she felt she did not have any economic resources to sustain herself and her two children.

After leaving her husband Patricia decided to come back to the United States. On this occasion, she came directly to Roanoke because a cousin of hers lives in the city. Patricia met her current partner at her work place. Because she did not have a car he offered to drive her home. After a while they went from being friends to being in a relationship. By this time

Patricia's cousin was not as friendly and kind as she was in the beginning. Patricia told

me that her cousin was tired of her children and she was getting desperate because of her precarious economic situation. When Raul asked her to move in with him she saw a great opportunity to leave her cousin's house.

However, Patricia has ambivalent feelings about her partner. Patricia admitted that she cares a lot about Raul but she is not deeply in love with him. Still she is grateful to him because he accepted her despite her having Lupita and Octavio from her marriage. She feels she owes him something and for this reason she helped him buy the truck, telling me all her savings were used for the truck.

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*In the construction of womanhood in a patriarchal society, Paternostro (1999) explains how being a woman means having a husband. Interestingly enough, that Patricia cannot think of being a single woman and having her children by herself. Nonetheless the fact that with her new partner Patricia ended up working more, paying his bills, and having to accept criticism from his family because of her former marriage. For example, when Raul went out to play football Patricia was upset because she wanted him to help her more with housework and taking care of Rosa. I saw some arguments between them because of this reason. However, Patricia assumed that being a good wife means supporting her husband and being a woman means having a husband (cf. Lopez, 2004).*

---

After lunch we went back to Patricia's house. We picked up Rosa from the daycare and then we went to her house. I met Raul's father that day. After a long day with the lawyer, I

decided to go back to Blacksburg. The next time I was going to see Patricia we were going to have the second interview.

#### The House as a Place of Fear, Intimidation, and Insecurity

Before the second interview we went to the clinic because Rosa was feeling sick and Patricia wanted the doctor to see her, thinking the baby had an ear infection. During the doctor's visit, I had the chance to see Patricia going through the health system, and in fact, she understands and can communicate in English more effectively than I thought because she used to tell me how bad her English was. Most of the visit she managed to talk to the nurse who made an effort to speak some words in Spanish while checking Rosa's chest. After the clinic visit we went to Patricia's house and I asked her if I could tape the second interview.

Patricia was more open to talking about her relationship with her estranged husband and all the years of abuse.

*"...fíjate yo tenía mi forma de vestir, o sea yo me, me crié mi personalidad sola de cómo vestirme, entonces cuando, cuando yo me casé (se queda callada), ...todo eso cambió porque, este, ...el papá de mis hijos, de Lupita y Octavio, no me dejaba vestirme como a mí me gustaba, o sea, no me dejaba ser como yo era, como yo. A mí me gusta platicar con la gente ahora, de hecho cuando empecé a trabajar, ...o sea no le gustaba que yo le saludara a nadie, que yo hablara con nadie, todo le molestaba. Él, ...yo en realidad no tenía personalidad cuando yo vivía con él, yo era como él quería, era como él quería que yo fuera, o sea me impuso una personalidad que no era la mía, entonces, este, así, así fuimos, fui yo cambiando más, este, como, me vestía yo bien aseñorada todo..."*



[...Look, I had my own style of dressing, I mean, I developed my own personality of how to dress, so when, when I got married (she keeps quiet), ... all that changed because, well, the father of my children, Lupita and Octavio, he did not allow me to dress the way I liked. I mean, he did not let me be the way I was, like me. I liked to talk to people like now, in fact when I started working ...I mean, he did not like me to say hello to anyone, to talk to any one, everything troubled him. He ...I did not have a personality when I lived with him, I was like he wanted me to be, I was the way he wanted me to be, he imposed on me a personality that was not mine. So I mean, that way I changed, I mean, the way I dressed, I dressed like an old woman.

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*I decided to insert this passage about how Patricia experienced domestic violence, here in the form of emotional abuse, in the private sphere to show how certain experiences mark individual identity (Tatum, 2000). Patricia does not identify herself as a battered woman, but by listening to her and observing some of her behavior, I can see how the scars remain in her personality. She constantly told me she feels insecure; sometimes she is sad, feels tired, and has no patience to take care of her children. From the description she gave me, I inferred that Patricia suffers what is called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. As it is explained in the Department of Veterans Affairs website this disorder is common among people who have had a traumatic experience. The most common symptoms are fear, anxiety, and irritability; self image and views of the world become more negative. Some people suffer from nightmares and repetitive memories of the events that were traumatic in the past. As Patricia told me her life is full of fear, she felts constantly threatened and she actually started a fight at her work place.*

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When Patricia talked about Raul she expressed that she feels scared about the possibility of him hurting her, although she rationalizes that he is not going to harm her.

*“Ahora también, como por ejemplo, él toma [hablando de Raul] pero yo sé que él, él toma, que no me va a agredir, no me va a insultar. Entonces, cuando él toma, nomás desde el momento en que él va a comprar sus cervezas ya siento yo como algo, me da como bastante coraje y miedo, y él me dice “¿por qué te enojas?, es una cerveza nada más, ¿por qué te enojas que tome?” No es eso sino que yo pienso que él va a agredirme, inconscientemente, tal vez, yo pienso...”*

[Now also, for example, he drinks [referring to Raul] but I know that he, he drinks but he is not going to hurt me, to insult me. So, when he drinks, since the moment he is going to buy his beers I feel something, I feel a lot of rage and fear, and he says to me “Why are you angry? It is only a beer, why are you angry that I drink?” But is not that, it is that I think that he is going to hurt me, unconsciously, maybe, I think...]

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*Price (2002) explains that the idealization of the house as a space of peace, intimacy, and security has led to the perpetuation of the spaces of violence for battered women. As he explains, the house is more a space of terror and danger than the ideal representation of the home. He points out that because of this apothecotic representation of the house, violence is many times obscured, denied or overlooked. Patricia’s experience recall Price’s article:*

*The memory of the physical pain is vague. I remember, of course, that I was hit, that I was kicked. I do not remember when or how often. (...) One can remember that one had*

*horrible physical pain, but that memory does not bring the pain back to the body.*

*Blessedly, the mind can remember these events without the body reliving them. If one survives without permanent injury, the physical pain dims, recedes, ends. It lets go. The fear does not let go. The fear is the eternal legacy. (p. 32)*

*In this passage, as Price points out, one of the most dramatic consequences of domestic violence is the legacy of fear.*

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#### La Vida en el Norte [Life in the North]

The last time I interviewed Patricia was the next week after we went to the clinic. Once again we visited the doctor's office so they could see if Rosa's ear was better. After I went with Patricia to buy some medicines at the pharmacy, we had lunch, and she said: "*¿Dónde está tu grabadora, Marcela?*" [Where is your tape recorder, Marcela?] I was glad she asked.

This interview with Patricia was shorter than the second one, but she pointed out some interesting issues. I asked her how was her life different here in the United States than her life back in Mexico. She said she likes to live here because she has the tranquility provided by having a job.

*"Yo aquí me siento bien a gusto, me siento, no sé yo creo que como segura, que por mí misma puedo salir adelante sin la ayuda de mi familia. En México era diferente porque, aparte de que era soltera, yo viví todo el tiempo de soltera en México, o sea no viví de casada, dependía de mis papás, entonces, este, pues me sentía a gusto también, pero ahora es diferente. Ahora estoy casada y tengo niños, entonces ya, es más diferente, o*

*sea, ahora los niños dependen de mí, como yo dependí de mis papás tengo quien dependa de mí.”*

[I, here, I feel good, I feel, I don't know like safe, that by myself I can make it without my family's help. In Mexico it was different because, besides the fact I was single, all the time I lived as a single woman in Mexico, I mean, I did not live as a married woman, I depended on my parents, so, I felt good, but now it is different. Now I am married, I have children, so now it is different, now the children depend on me, like I depended on my parents, I have someone to depend on me.]

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*Tatum (2000) points out “Integrating one’s past, present, and future into a cohesive unified sense of self is a complex task that begins in adolescence and continues for a life time(...) The salience of particular aspects of our identity varies at different moments in our lives” (p. 10). In Patricia’s case the relationship between changing her social status of single woman to married woman was directly bound with her crossing to the United States. It is interesting to notice that she identifies her life in Mexico with being part of her family while her life in the United States is related with her sense of independence.*

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Later, Patricia continued talking about her life in the United States.

*“(…) Pero pues aquí vivo bien contenta en Estados Unidos, me encanta la vida del norte, pero bastante.”*

[(...) I live very happy here in the United States, I love life in “*el norte*” [the north] a lot.

I asked Patricia to explain what she meant with “*la vida en el norte*” [life in the north]:

*“...oooh, pues levantarte todas las mañanas, ir a trabajar, hacer de comer, ir hacer el quehacer, acostarse, levantarse, y al otro día hacer exactamente lo mismo, (se rie), esa es la vida del norte, pero el fin de semana tú puedes salir a la tienda y vas y te compras lo que tú quieres porque trabajas tienes tu dinero, puedes comprarte lo que tú quieras, entonces puedes ayudar a tu familia. Lo que más satisfacción te da es que tu familia te pide dinero y le puedes ayudar, eso te hace sentir bien. Ayudar a los que están en México, y eso es lo bonito, para mí.”*

[...oh, well, wake up every morning, go to work, fix meals, do house chores, go to bed, and wake up, and the next day, do exactly the same, (she laughs), that is life in the North, but, during the weekend you can go to the store and you buy what ever you want, because you work and you have your money, you can buy what ever you want, and then you can help your family. What gives you more satisfaction is that if your family asks you for money you can help them. That makes me feel good. Help those that are in Mexico, which is the nice thing for me.]

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*Hondaugneo-Sotelo (1994) explains, for women crossing the border produces a process in which patriarchy weakens. As she says, women are integrated on a large scale to a more active public and social role; also, in the changing of gender relationships, women gain power while men lose it because the women are incorporated in the decision making process. Patricia told me she was overwhelmed with household chores but the independence of earning her own money empowers her. She feels more comfortable, independent, and able to decide how to organize her own income such as deciding to send money back to Mexico.*

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### What All This Means

As Chavez (1992) points out, crossing the border is a physical and symbolical experience that marks the beginning of a transitional phase of being part of the new society. In Patricia's case many intersections of identity take place. Her transition faced two important passages. In the first place, she entered a new society. And in the second place, she faced a new stage as a married woman.

Chavez (1992) explains: "The moment undocumented migrants illegally cross the U.S. – Mexico border they enter a *liminal* space, one 'betwixt and between' categories in a number of senses (as cited in Chavez, Van Gennep, Turner, 1992). Therefore, being part of the new society is a long process that goes through different stages such as crossing the physical border itself, finding a place to stay, finding a job, forming a family, learning about the local culture, establishing bonds and contacts with friends and family living in the same location, learning the language, and in the best case moving from undocumented status to legal residence. However, as he says the process is not linear and it depends on several circumstances. In many cases immigrants can find a job or finally settle down but that does not warrant that they would not remain isolated from the larger society.

In Patricia's case she has been living in the United States for eleven years and she has already gone through several stages such as acquiring legal residency. However, she is able to communicate in English, her level of proficiency is not good enough to sustain a whole conversation. While we were talking to the lawyer I had to translate for her, but I could see how she understood the automatic processes she has learned by going to the clinic with her children.

In this *liminal* circumstance, the construction of social identities plays a main role. In Patricia's case her identification as illegal made her more hopeless to deal with domestic violence. As Sokoloff and Dupont (2005) assert, "We exist in social context created by the intersections of systems of power (e.g., race, class, gender, and sexual orientation) and oppression (e.g., prejudice, class stratification, gender inequality, and heterosexist bias)" (p. 43). In this sense, they point out that gender inequality has been privileged as the main explanation for domestic violence; however, they explain, the important dimension of gender inequality is that it is also modified by other systems of power and oppression. In Patricia's case, gender inequality, paired with her legal status, makes her more vulnerable to stay in an abusive relationship. Mendelson (2004) explains "Women with no legal or political identity, limited legal recourse, and virtually no entitlement to public and social benefits have to undertake a particular set of calculations about their own well-being and the well-being of their children when deciding whether to leave their abusive husbands" (p. 24). In Patricia's case the decision to leave the house was not made until she returned back to Mexico and her social networks were strong enough to help her leave the house.

Finally, in this case, the construction of womanhood also played an important role. The socially constructed place of a woman was deeply rooted in Patricia. However, as Hondaugne-Sotelo (1994) points out, in coming to the United States patriarchy weakens. In Patricia's case her insertion into the labor force empowered her by giving her a sense of independency. For her, even the whole process of becoming a settler and being included in the larger society has been a long journey. However she can see the benefits of being in the United States by having a job that lets her buy goods.

### Summary

In summary, Patricia is an example of the long process of settlement. Even though she has been living in the United States for eleven years she has not been able to incorporate herself completely in the American society. It is important to notice that Patricia came to the United States because she got married. While married to her former husband Patricia lived in domestic violence; her former husband abused her verbally, emotionally and physically. In this case, Patricia could not leave the house and the abusive situation until she visited her family in Mexico and gain their support to leave the husband. Finally, Patricia returned to the United States because she feels that here she can have a better job, and her children have better economic resources and opportunities.



## Chapter Five: Second Case Study

## Margarita

Margarita is a constant participant at the women's group and she used to go to almost every single meeting. However sometimes she looked like she was misplaced or she did not quite understand what was going on. Margarita is the mother of three children, one older boy and two girls. Marta and Gisela were two and four by the time I was doing the interviews. They are as thin as their mother and they look so similar that one might think they are twins. In the first place, I thought the girls had a language problem because they barely talk and they look so shy and quiet. Later, Margarita told me they were born with a problem in one of their ears. Both girls have the exterior part of their ear closed but they still have the ear canal open and functioning although there is no external opening. On the other hand, the oldest boy looks like a tough guy, he has an angry look on his face and he seems to be very defensive. Little Omar was named after his father and he was 8 years old.

I had a hard time getting together with Margarita to interview her. By the time I was doing the interviews she was working two jobs, one in the morning cleaning houses and one working at Wendy's.

Following Seidman's (1998) advice, I asked Margarita if I could visit before beginning the interviewing process. Margarita was excited and wanted me to visit her but she did not have the time, making it difficult for us to schedule an appointment. After some arrangements and the news that she was quitting one of her jobs, I went to her house. She gave me her address and I looked on the Internet for driving directions. I got in my car and drove all the way to her apartment.

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*When I went to the houses of any of the women in the group, I had the impression of going into the deep United States with borders within itself. To visit Margarita one has to cross some physical borders of Roanoke. In my mind the city is divided by the railroad. Once I went further I found myself on the other side. On this other side, houses look older and I noticed people walking on the road, unlike in the other parts of the city. Margarita's house is on this side. My trip to Margarita's house reminded me of Behar's (1996) words, "The border, the unforgiving border of race and class, I discovered doesn't begin in Laredo" (p. 23).*

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By the time I was doing the research, Margarita lived with her husband, her son, her two daughters, and her younger brother who was staying with them. At the same time she was expecting another brother to come across the border to live with them.

After our meetings Margarita and her family moved to a bigger house, but for the purpose of this work I will describe the apartment where she was living while I was doing the interviews. Margarita's old apartment was one section of a Victorian style house. When I first saw the house from the outside, I thought it was only for one family. Later, when I went inside I realized the house was divided into three or four separate units. The whole family lived in a small section of the house in two bedrooms, one small improvised kitchen, one bathroom, and an area that I guessed was supposed to be a living room but was used by Margarita's children to watch TV.

The first time I visited, Margarita received me at the door. She was quiet because the two girls were sleeping; I had to jump over them to get to the kitchen. The girls were sleeping on the floor covered by a red carpet and I noticed a table. Under the table there was a television sitting

on the floor. Margarita's living room was small but the amount of clutter all over the place seriously reduced the space. Coming through the door I realized that near the TV on the floor was a washing machine. I asked Margarita about the washing machine because I could see the big perforation they had drilled to connect the water pipes in the bathroom. Margarita said that her husband made the connection and the landlord was complaining because of the bucket, but she did not care, she said she had too many clothes to wash. The whole room was cluttered with several items waiting for her husband to repair them. Margarita told me that they do not have a couch because the living room was too small, so we went to the kitchen to sit down.

The kitchen was a dark place; I believe that it was in the middle of the house because the apartment was a section of the Victorian house separated in small sections. There was only one small window in the kitchen. It was hot; I understood why Margarita was dressed with shorts and a T-shirt at the beginning of spring.

During this first visit Margarita asked me to call the Social Services office at the hospital so she could get Medicaid for the two girls who were born here and consequently are United States citizens. It took me a long time to call the hospital, but most of all it took me a lot of time to understand what she wanted me to do. I was frustrated with her because she assumed I would know what to do. I was totally lost about Social Services in the United States, and I was totally lost trying to understand Margarita and the Medicaid system.

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*Margarita reminds me of Carger's (1996) description of Alma and the struggles they went through while she was following Alejandro, a child she met while doing research about an after-school program. Referring to Alma, the mother, she said: "She spoke of her and her*

*husband's own minimal literacy in Spanish and English. She told of her frustration in having to find cousins, friends, or neighbors to accompany her to the doctor's office, the bank, the pharmacy because she needed help to read and write. [...] A simple dream for many, but not for Alma and her children. They had no one to help them with homework or read them a story. Even a note home about a school event was a struggle for this family.”(p. 2) In this same way, Margarita struggles with notes, homework, Social Services, and even understanding her own son who most of the time talks to her in English. During my visits I noticed that Omar speaks to his mother in English. Margarita understands enough to communicate with him at a very basic. Omar points out the objects at the same time that he says the word in English, Margarita then understands that he wants a cookie or that he is hungry.*

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I spent most of the visit with Margarita trying to figure out the children's Medicaid situation. I decided to leave after asking Margarita if she was willing to participate in the interviews.

#### A Long Journey before the United States

I arrived at Margarita's house in the morning for the first interview. I asked her if we could tape the interview, and as soon as I started the tape recorder and asked her the first question, she stopped talking. She said she was nervous because of the tape recorder and when I asked her, how her life was back in Mexico; she just moved her head down and said: “*No quiero acordarme*” [I don't want to remember].

---

*Seidman (1998) points out that pauses, laughter and tears in the interview are very important to frame how the person feels about a specific situation. I had the impression that Margarita did not see this interview as the opportunity to share her story. As Paternostro (1999) points out, Latin American culture, different from the United States culture is not a culture of the confessional where people go to a television show or write a book about how they recover from alcoholism, drugs, or something else. In this case Margarita did not want to speak out about her story, which later she told me was one of poverty and suffering back in Mexico.*

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After a long silence Margarita opened up a little bit more.

*“Nací en un pueblo que se llama Valle Nacional en Tuxtepec, Oaxaca y, mmm, ¿qué mas? Y mmm, ¿qué te iba a decir?”*

[ I was born in a town called Valle Nacional in Tuxtepec, Oaxaca, and, mmm, what I was going to tell you?]

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Margarita’s reluctance to talk at the beginning of the interview caught my attention; I assumed that it was hard for her to open up the memories of her childhood and actually her whole family situation back in Mexico. Besides, during that week Margarita was very concerned about her brother coming across the border and she was concerned about his journey more than anything else. Crossing the border implies not only walking for hours hiding to avoid deportation. Depending on what point of the border they are crossing, undocumented immigrants are exposed to the dangers of hours spent crossing the desert in Arizona, with the risk of getting lost and dying from dehydration, or drowning on the river, walking for hours and getting lost by

walking through the mountains (Chavez, 1992). Also, some of the crossing points are used by drug dealers and some immigrants are assaulted by bandits that take advantage of their precarious and exposed condition. For women the dangers of crossing include the possibility of being sexually assaulted and raped (cf. Tilley-Lubbs, 2003). The next time I saw Margarita, her brother was still on the other side and the actual coyote<sup>11</sup> had charged them twice for the service besides the fact that all the attempts to cross over failed.

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In a few phrases Margarita summarized her life. She told me she started working in a store as a clerk where they sold clothes for special occasions such as first communions and baptisms. I asked Margarita at what age she started working, and she said she was nine or ten years old. She was very specific when she said she finished basic school and after that she had to work to help her mother.

*“Fui a la escuela hasta (...) sexto grado nada más (...) ahí ya no pude estudiar (...) porque... mi mamá y mi papá ya no tenían dinero para que yo siguiera estudiando... y de ahí empecé a trabajar para ayudar a mi mamá. Cuidé, cuidaba a una señora, tenía una tienda donde hacía ropa para... primera comunión, ropa para... bautizos, y hacía tocados... para los niños que salen de la primera comunión, de la primaria que llevan sus flores, ayudaba a ella... y ahí, me salí de ahí y tuve que irme a México a trabajar con una familia que es de ahí de mi mismo pueblo pero ellos viven en México, y con ellos yo trabajaba... tenía como 13 años yo creo... y ya de ahí vine al pueblo”*

[I went to school until sixth grade, no more. Sixth grade because I couldn't stay in school... because my mother and my father did not have enough money for me to stay in

school... I started working to help my mother. I took care of a lady. She had a store where they sew clothes for first communions, clothes for baptisms, flower crowns for the children for their first communion, and after graduating from basic school... I helped her ... later, I left this house and I had to go to Mexico [City] to work with a family, they are from my same town but they live in Mexico, I worked with them... I was like 13 years old, I guess, and then I came back to the town.]

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*According to the National Census of Population, Valle National is populated by a large indigenous community. I was never comfortable asking Margarita, but I had the impression that she was from an indigenous background and I was not sure about Spanish being her first language. When I was talking with her and transcribing the tapes I noticed that Margarita does not always use indirect object pronouns and she has to ask me several times to tell her a word in Spanish to finish her train of thought.*

*When I first started the interviews with Margarita I remembered Esperanza, the peasant women that Behar (1993) interviewed. As Behar explains, Esperanza is a woman of the border because of her indigenous condition. Behar says that Esperanza is a mestiza, in the sense that is recognized by the official discourse as the resemblance of the Mexican Mesoamerican indigenous population; but on the other hand, she is excluded from the Mexican elite that aspires to form part of the Western civilizing project. “[I]n Mexico a mestiza like Esperanza is indian for purposes of exclusion and non-indian for purposes of inclusion” (p.17). Margarita in many ways reminds me of Esperanza.*

*Gordon explains (2005) San Juan Bautista Valle Nacional, Margarita's hometown belongs to the region of the Chinantec Valley where the predominant language is Chinantec, which is divided into four main spoken dialects, although Spanish is also used by language speakers. Knowing this supports my hunch that Margarita's first language is not Spanish, although I cannot be sure without asking her.*

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During the first 10 minutes Margarita told me with few details her long journey before coming to the United States. I tried to ask her questions during the interview, but Margarita's efforts were driven to finish the story very fast, I asked her for deeper explanations but she was quiet and reluctant to speak. In her brief summary Margarita told me she had worked from the age of nine or ten until she turned twenty-two and married her husband Omar. During these years she moved back and forth from her home town to several states in Mexico. She lived in Mexico City, in the state of Chiapas and in Tabasco<sup>12</sup>, most of the time working in domestic service until she moved to the United States.

*"...sí me gustaba porque ella [la señora para la que trabajaba] era muy buena conmigo, y si me gustaba, este yo trabajaba, hacía de todo en esa casa, hacía comida, lavaba ropa, limpiaba la casa, de ahí regresé de México, volví al pueblo otra vez, estuve un tiempo con mi mamá... porque ella me llamaba que yo regresara, porque yo tenía la costumbre de que cuando yo me iba yo no quería regresar al pueblo, por lo mismo de que no hay trabajo, no hay dinero, y yo no me quería regresar, entonces yo duraba un año, dos años, ... de ahí regresé y llegó una tía mía de Chiapas y me dice vámonos a Chiapas "allá vas a trabajar, si quieres estudiar vas a estudiar", y yo le dije "estudiar no", ...trabajé allá*



*como dos o tres años creo y de ahí regresé otra vez... y ya de ahí estuve en mi tierra otra vez, y ahí estuve ...un tiempo y de ahí volví a irme a trabajar a Tabasco... tres años o cuatro años, de ahí regresé otra vez a mi pueblo y de ahí me casé con Omar.”*

[yes I liked it because she [the woman I worked for] was very nice with me, and yes I liked it, I mean, I worked, I used to do everything in that house, I cooked, I washed clothes, cleaned the house, later I returned from Mexico [City], I returned to town again, I stayed some time with my mom...because she called me to come back, I was used to the fact that when I left the town I did not want to come back, so I stayed away from one year, two years [away] ... then I came back and one of my aunts from Chiapas came, and she told me to go with her to Chiapas, “You are going to work there, if you want to study you can study,” she said, and I said “I don’t want to study”... I worked there for like two or three years I think, then I came back again, and I was in my town again, and I was there for a while, and then I went back to find a job in Tabasco... three of four years, and then I went back to my town and I married Omar.]

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*According to Berumen Barbosa (2003) Oaxaca is one of the six states with the highest levels of marginality and poverty in Mexico. The criteria used to determine the characteristics of poverty in the region were taken from the Mexican National Census of 2000. These criteria included difficult access to small towns and communities, scarcity of fertile soils for cultivation, poor living conditions, as well as a high density of indigenous communities. Also they found important high levels of malnutrition in children, illiteracy rates among adults, scarcity of employment, unemployment, migration, lack of public services such as water, electricity, sewer,*

*access to medical services, access to recreational services, etcetera. Among the living conditions they quantify that 43% of the population lives in a house where the floors are made of earth, 54.1% lives in a house built with walls of light materials (such as wood or cardboard panels, and reed), 72.4% lived in a house with ceilings of light materials (metallic or asbestos panels, tiles or cardboard panels). When I asked her to describe her house she actually pictured a similar house with earth floors and wood panels.*

*After a while I was concerned about the depth of the interview. I felt her story was so synthetic and dry that I was going to end up with few data for the research. However I learned that Margarita in fact had something to tell me and she wanted me to listen. What did Margarita want me to know about her identity back in Mexico and her identity here in the United States?*

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#### Domestic Violence through a Cultural Lens

Besides Margarita's constant references to the poverty situation in which she and her family lived, she narrated several incidents of domestic violence. I remembered Margarita from the women's group because when we were at the end of one meeting she came and asked Dr. Tilley-Lubbs if she needed to go to court, because Omar hit her a week before the meeting and she had called the police.

I wonder if Margarita related this event to me because I was present when she told Dr. Tilley-Lubbs, and for this reason she was willing to talk about this theme. Margarita told me the story of how she met her husband and how after a little while of being married he became abusive with her.

*“Yo trabajaba en un restaurán ahí en el pueblo, trabajaba en la cocina haciendo de comer, (...) y él trabajaba de chofer, (...)y yo lo conozco ahí y es mi novio, [sonríe] y luego nos casamos...”*

[I used to work in a restaurant, here in the town, I used to work in the kitchen preparing food, (...) and he worked as a bus driver, (...) and I meet him, and he is my boyfriend [she smiles] and then we got married...]

I asked Margarita if she had a wedding and she said that her family did not want her to marry him because he already had a woman he used to hit.

*“Mi mamá no quería a él, no lo quería, dice, porque él había tenido primero una mujer, vivió primero con una mujer pero él la golpeaba mucho a ella, y ella lo dejó. Entonces ella se fue, y enseguida se juntó con un hombre y él siguió sólo, y luego él me conoce a mí, y luego, (...) al principio él no me pega, y después él me golpea y me golpea, y yo me separo de él pero yo tengo como, como cuatro o cinco meses de estar casada con él, y yo estoy embarazada...”*

[My mother did not like him, she did not like him, because he lived with another woman before and he hit her a lot, so she abandoned him. So, she left and she immediately started living with another man, and he continued by himself, and then he met me. And (...) at the beginning he does not hit me, and later he hits me and he hits me, and I left him but I had been married to him for four or five months, and I am pregnant...]

---

*Domestic violence was a recurrent theme in Margarita’s interviews. Different from Patricia, Margarita still lives in a situation where she can suffer domestic violence. However,*

*like Sokoloff and Dupond (2005) explain, we need to explain domestic violence in a specific sociocultural background. During the interviews Margarita referred to events related to domestic violence several times. However, for her domestic violence includes hitting but she does not refer to any verbal, psychological, or emotional form of abuse. “Yoshihama’s (1999) findings suggest that our definition of domestic violence is incomplete if it does not include the specific forms of abuse that are particular to women’s cultural backgrounds” (Sokoloff & Dupond, 2005, p. 42). In her personal tale Esperanza, a Mexican peasant interviewed by Behar (1993), also refers to abuse and domestic violence as a constant. Esperanza was able to stop an abusive situation because her husband decided to abandon her, although she rehearses many forms of resistance such as fighting over her right to keep her land in order to challenge the patriarchal system in which the men has the predominant property and rights.*

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Margarita continued:

*“... me casé en octubre y (...) en octubre, noviembre, diciembre, en enero yo quedo embarazada de Omar, él no quería que yo tuviera hijos enseguida, no dentro de dos años, tres años, no yo quiero ponerme nada para no tener hijos yo quiero tener un hijo, y ya me embaracé a los tres meses, y luego ya, él sigue lo mismo [me sigue golpeando] no cambia, entonces yo me separo de él por ocho meses, nueve meses.”*

[... I got married in October, and (...) October, November, December, January I got pregnant with Omar. He did not want me to have children immediately, not until two or three years, but I did not want to take anything for not having children, I wanted to have a

child, and I got pregnant after three months, and then, he keeps being the same [he keeps hitting me], he does not change, and I left him for eight, nine months.]

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*It is interesting to notice that Margarita was the one who decided to have a child immediately after getting married. I asked her later why she wanted to have a child so quickly and she said that she was tired of taking care of other children. Like Oechmichen (2000) points out indigenous women that go out of the community have more chances to get a job in the city because of the gender assumption that relate women with domestic work such as cleaning, taking care of the house, cooking and taking care of children for wealthier families.*

*Also as Behar (1993) recalls about the Mexican peasant Esperanza in a society dominated by a patriarchal perspective, “[M]otherhood was the only avenue where she [Esperanza] could gain a sense of self-worth” (p. 169). When Margarita decided to have a child during her first years of marriage she was also reinforcing herself as a married woman.*

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*“Me voy con mi mamá. Me dice mi mamá, “ay déjalo, tú puedes encontrar otro hombre bueno, que no te pegue porque él te pega”, me dijo, “¿qué cosas haces tú?”, “yo no he hecho nada” le digo, “nunca le hago nada” le digo, siempre estoy en la casa, no me encuentra en la calle, nada. Esa es su mamá que, dicen que le echaba chismes a él, no sé de qué porque yo todo el tiempo estaba en la casa, ... y ya este, él dice, regresa “yo voy a cambiar, ya nunca te voy a pegar” y a los nueve meses regreso con él, y sí cambia, él no me golpea ya, si cambia.”*

[I decided to go back with my mom, my mom told me “leave him, you can find another good man, that would not hit you because he hits you, she said “what do you do?” “I haven’t done anything” I said, I never tell him anything” I said, I am always in the house; he does not find me in the street, nothing. That is his mother that, they say she is making up gossips, I do not know about what because I was all the time in the house, and then, he came back and he said “I will change, I will never hit you again” after nine months I returned to him, and he changed, he does not hit me, he changed.]

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*Margarita decided to leave the abusive situation at the beginning of her marriage with the support of her family relations while she was living in the same city her with her mother. As we can see, even in this situation of support Margarita’s narration showed the complexities and contradictions of a system mainly dominated by males. On one side Margarita was able to leave the abusive situation with her mother’s permission and support, but on the other her mother first asked her if she was fulfilling the expectation of what is being a good woman. As Margarita said she stayed taking care of the house while her husband lived to work without going out of the house so people would not see she was a woman of the street (cf. Behar, 1993); ‘being a woman of the street’ has the negative idea that women are more exposed to sexual encounters with other men outside of the house.*

*As Supriya (1994) points out, while she was doing research about testimonies in a domestic violence shelter in Chicago, many women at the beginning of the process position themselves in patriarchy through their verbal discourse because they see themselves as committing a wrongful and shameful act by leaving their husbands. Supriya explains this way*

*they reinforce the presence of an authority figure and subject themselves to this figure even if it is in a virtual presence. Margarita did not get her mother's permission until she definitely demonstrated that she was not doing anything wrong by saying she stayed at home. Later in the second interview when I asked Margarita if she would go back to Mexico she definitely said that she would not go back because she was mistreated by her sister and mother-in-law, also.*

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Margarita continued:

*“ya me golpea hasta aquí que ya no me golpeó otra vez, ya no me golpeaba él ya, y yo le dije si tú me vuelves a golpear yo me voy a separar de ti, me voy a ir lejos donde tú no vas a verme a mí ni a tu hijo le dije, “...sí voy a cambiar”, me dijo. De ahí él se viene para acá, el niño tiene tres años él se viene para acá, a los tres meses que él llega aquí yo llego aquí también, tiene tres meses aquí cuando yo me vengo para aquí.”*

[He does not hit me, until here, he hits me again, he did not hit me, and I told him if you hit me again I will leave you, I will leave where you cannot see me or your son again, I told him ... “Yes, I will change” he said. Then he came here, the boy was three years old when he came here. Three months after he arrived I came here. He had been here for three months when I came.]

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*Margarita was very concise about how life was back in Mexico. She also gave me some details about her father's behavior and how he used to mistreat her mother. During the second interview I asked Margarita if her father used to hit her mother and she said that I had misunderstood her. She later explained to me that her father used to drink and leave her mother*

*and siblings for many months while he was lost apparently getting drunk. For that reason, Margarita referred to her mother being mistreated because she suffered from the constant abandonment of her father and sometimes he insulted her when he came back drunk, but he did not hit her.*

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Finally we finished the interview that day because Margarita's husband arrived. Omar is a strong man with dark skin and hair. He works in construction so I can see he was strong compared to Margarita and me. During my stay he drank four beers and I noticed that he started to look a little bit drunk. I spent more than four hours that afternoon with Margarita, her children, and her husband.

#### On the Other Side

Margarita invited me to have lunch. "*Voy a cocinar enchiladas de mole,*" [I will cook enchiladas de mole] she said. I was looking forward eating Margarita's enchiladas of mole; I assumed they were going to be delicious because mole is one of the typical dishes of Oaxaca. I imagined she cooked the best mole or at least she knew where to buy Mexican products of good taste and quality, but unfortunately Margarita cooked the enchiladas a day before so I could not get to taste them. The day of the interview Margarita was preparing cheese empanadas<sup>13</sup>.

We sat down again in the dark kitchen in the middle of the house. Margarita was dressed in a light t-shirt, blue shorts, and sandals. We were in the middle of April and it was cold enough to wear a sweater outside, but I was terribly hot in the small kitchen. Margarita was cooking, and I watched her making some tortillas. Before I started taping the interview Margarita was very talkative and excited that I was there again with her. I asked Margarita if I could take out the tape



recorder and as soon as the recorder was on the table she got scared and quiet. The girls started crying and especially little Marta, who stayed in the kitchen trying to get her mother's attention and crying loudly.

During this second interview Margarita start talking about how the whole episode of Omar hitting her happened. She told me how the children sleep in the same bedroom as they do and how they were yelling; crying and how later they were with "susto" [scared or afraid]. Margarita's bedroom was on the back of the house and I can imagine there was no way she could escape from Omar, realizing how thin she is and how big Omar appeared to me. I could see Margarita's face of frustration and anger while she was telling me what had happened.

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*Behar (1993) in her account asked herself how it would be if Esperanza, the Mexican peddler, came to the United States. As she describes it, Esperanza would be the image of "La India Maria" in the movie "Ni de aqui ni de alla" [Nor From Here or From There] in which the character Maria came to the United States to serve as a maid. Margarita does work as a domestic. Also listening to Margarita I remembered many of the passages in which Esperanza suffers from domestic violence. Certainly Margarita crossed the border as a result of her husband's will. Margarita was not working as a maid by the time I was doing the interviews, but in fact she had kitchen jobs and sometimes she cleaned houses for her husband's boss. Another interesting fact was that Margarita encountered on this side of the border more opportunities to receive help for domestic violence.*

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Margarita recounted what happened as the focus of the incident but later she referred to how she decided to call the police. As she said, she was aware that there was help available for women because in the past Omar yelled at her while a couple was visiting them and the women told her that if he hit her, she needed to call the police.

*“...empezamos a pelear, y esa mujer oyó lo que él me decía, bien feo me decía, yo nomás lloraba. Y me dice “el día que él te pegue, tú llamas a la policía y ellos vienen, y se lo llevan a la cárcel a él porque él te está golpeando a ti. Si tú golpeas a él, a ti, a los dos se los llevan a la cárcel,” me dijo. Y yo le dije, sí le dije, “tú no te dejes que él te, que él te pegue, no te dejes, porque aquí ayudan mucho a las mujeres que golpean, que los hombres las golpean”. Entonces yo ya sabía.”*

[...then we started fighting, and that woman heard what he was saying to me, horrible things he was saying to me, I was crying. And then she said “If one day he hits you, you call the police and they come, and they take him to jail because he is the one who is hitting you. If you hit him, then they take both to jail” she said. And I said, “Yes”, “Do not let him, do not let him hit you, because here they help women that are hit, that men hit them”. So, I already knew.]

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*Although different from the women interviewed by Mendelson (2004) Margarita resisted violence by calling the police; apparently she was more upset and angry by being hit by her husband than by the fact that she does not have the proper documentation to stay in the country. However, like Sokoloff and Dupond (2005) indicate gender, race, class, and the structural perspective have to be considered in order to provide better social services to women at risk.*

*“We are of the opinion that one without the other will not provide battered women from diverse backgrounds with the kinds of personal and social change required for safety and growth at the individual and communal levels” (p. 40). Margarita was able to receive help from the police but her lack of language resulted in the inability to go to court.*

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Margarita explained to me during the interview the reasons why she could not go to court:

*“Sí fue a corte [Omar] pero como yo no le entiendo al papel yo no pude, yo no fui a corte porque no sé ni qué decía eso, (se ríe), yo tenía corte. [Le pregunte si tenía un documento a su nombre de la corte] Sí y yo tenía corte, y después como yo estaba enojada con él, él me dijo que por qué no había ido. Yo no entiendo nada de esos papeles, yo no le entiendo nada. Dice que otra vez que él me pegue o algo yo, que yo me, que a mí me van a meter a la cárcel, dice.”*

[Yes he went to court [Omar], but because I do not understand the paper I could not, I did not go to court because I did not know what that said, I had court [I asked her if she had a document with her name to go to court] Yes, I had court, and then because I was angry with him, he asked me why I did not show up. I do not understand a word on those papers, I do not understand. He says that the next time he hits me or something, I am, I am the one who they are going to take to jail, he says.]

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*Even when Margarita found a better way to resist hitting she was in fact limited by the fact of lacking the language to follow the process. In this sense, Margarita was unable to seek*

*for further attention once she called the police. The intersections of gender, class, and ethnic inequality played an important role in the subsequent events after Margarita called the police. Even though she was resisting violence she could not follow the resolution of the judge when he called her to declare. In this case we have to consider that Margarita did not find enough institutional support from Social Services and the coercive controls from the state and other agencies. As many authors had pointed out, this “is another level of violence experienced by battered women, which occur in ways that are racialized as well as gendered and classed” (as in Sokoloff & Dupond, 2005; Coker, 2000; Razack, 1998; Stark, 1995; p. 44).*

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At the end of the interview I asked Margarita how she imagines the future for her daughters and how their life is different from her life. As she says:

*“Muy diferente, que la comida que ellas de eso tienen aquí yo no lo tenía. Mi mamá no podía [comprar], mi papá, mi mamá no podían comprarme nada porque no tenían dinero. Nosotros no conocíamos, no conocíamos fruta, no conocía el yogurt, no conocía cosas que uno le puede dar, yo le puedo dar a ellas.”*

[Very different, the food they have here I did not have it. My mom could not buy me anything because she did not have money. We did not know about fruit, yogurt, I did not know about thing that one can give them, I can give them.]

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In the case of Margarita she wants to stay here because she felt that her daughters have a much better life. However, it was difficult for her to say in detail what she wanted for the children. Just as Chavez (1992) and Hondagneo-Sotelo (1994) indicate that the return of the

family depends on several conditions such as the death of family members back in Mexico that can prompt the return, Margarita told me that her husband sometimes thinks about going back because he is concerned about his extended family, as much as she is. Margarita wants to stay but she considers the fact that she is away from her family like her mother and other siblings to be important.

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I asked Margarita how she imagined her daughter's future:

*“Pues sí pues, puede imaginar algo muy bonito pero si, si no se puede, no se puede. (...) Él dice que cuando ellas [las niñas] se operen nos vamos a México, nos vamos para México. (...) Y él dice que si, que si ellos las operan nos vamos de aquí, pero yo no me quiero ir. (...) No me quiero ir, me gusta.”*

[Well yes, once can imagine something very pretty, but if you can't, you can't. (...) He says that when they [the girls] have surgery we are going to Mexico, we are going back to Mexico. And he says yes, that if they do the surgery we leave, but I do not want to go. (...) I like it here, I like it.]

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*In Margarita's case, her decision to stay in the United States has to do with the access of a better life for her and her children. As Hondganeu-Sotelo (1994) explains, the importance of women in the settlement process is fundamental because they play a key role in the development of communities and the establishment of social networks that would help assist the family and provide it with the assistance of social services. As she explains, “[A]s traditional family patriarchy weakens, immigrant women assume more active public and social roles, and these*

*activities ultimately advance their families' integration in the United States"*

*(Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994, p.148). As Margarita explained, she thinks it is important that they stay until they get the surgery for her two daughters. Other reasons she gave were the access to school and materials provided by the school system, access to social services such as programs like Medicaid and the WIC<sup>14</sup> program, public assistance, and the possibility of having access to food and a job that will pay her enough to cover basic living conditions.*

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#### What All This Means

When talking about Esperanza, Behar (1993) reflects on Esperanza's mestizaje, not only in terms of being of mixed blood, but also talking about the in-between of cultures. Like Behar expressed about Esperanza, she was visibly Indian and yet invisibly Indian. In terms of identity Margarita is also part of the "profound Mexico" moving around the country trying to escape from poverty and looking for a better life. As Behar explained, Esperanza was very aware of the cultural and class differences between the two of them. During my interview with Margarita I felt that she did not want to talk about her life back in Mexico because of the poverty that she lived. When finally, after her long immigration journey around Mexico, Margarita settled down, the hard economic circumstances prompted her husband's decision to look for a better opportunity in the United States.

In terms of her gender identity Margarita's immigration was defined by her husband's decision to come to the United States (Oehmichen, 2000). But as she expressed she would rather be in the United States than with her family back in Mexico waiting for her husband to return. Even when she misses her immediate family, like her mother and siblings, Margarita sees more

access to education and better living conditions for herself and her children (Hondagneo-Sotelo, 1994).

During the interview Margarita refers to events involving domestic violence as part of her life, however she considers her husband's abuse until the moment that he hits her but she does not refer to any verbal or emotional abuse. Nonetheless, we have to consider Sokoloff and Dupont's (2005) assertion that "(A)lthough culture is crucial to understanding and combating domestic violence, we cannot rest on simplistic notions of culture. Rather, we must address how different communities' cultural experiences of violence are mediated through structural forms of oppression, such as racism, colonialism, economic exploitation, heterosexism, and the like" (Sokoloff & Dupont, p. 45).

#### Summary

Margarita's case is one example of hard living conditions back in Mexico. I was not able to confirm she is from an indigenous community but she is from Oaxaca a state that is characterized for their indigenous population. For Margarita crossing to the United States was her husband's decision, but even though she missed her family she had found access to Social Services better for her and her children, including protection to prevent domestic violence.

## Chapter Six: Third Case Study

## Sandra

When I first met Sandra she was the one who came to me and started the conversation. She asked me where I was from and what I was doing here in the United States. Because I am from Mexico City, I told her I am a *chilanga*.<sup>15</sup> Sandra told me she was a *chilanga* too, she was born in Mexico City but she moved with her family to Ciudad Juarez. Sandra caught my attention because of the fact that she was from my city but also because she used to live at the border. How would life in the border be and how differently she perceive living in the Roanoke Valley, a place in the United States, which is not characterized as the typical immigrants' destination in the United States?

Sandra was one of the most participative women in the group. She expressed her ideas clearly and she always had an opinion about the theme that we discussed each week. During the semester of the interviews Sandra was paired with Andrea. Andrea was born and raised in the United States but her grandparents were from Spain and Argentina. Andrea was fluent in Spanish and the two of them were having a good time during that semester. Sandra asked me if I was visiting any family but in any case she invited me to her house.

The first time I went to visit Sandra, I went with Andrea. She invited me to go with her so I could learn well how to get to Sandra's house. On the way we had to go past downtown Roanoke exit and I started to wonder where we were going. I felt like we just turned around a couple of times and then we got into a back road. I totally missed the exit number and Andrea's directions of how to get to the back road. The next time I visited Sandra by myself I got lost. On both sides of the road I saw the image of the suburban America big houses with two or three cars



parked outside. “This is nice”, I thought. “Is this where Sandra lives?” We kept going and going and the beautiful homes began to disappear; we were going too far from Roanoke City, and I was getting anxious. After a couple of minutes Andrea pulled over off the road and then I saw the tiny green trailer that seemed almost lost in the middle of the field.

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*I formed my first impressions about the United States by what I had seen, heard or learned from popular culture. According to this perspective I thought that living in a trailer was the worst place to live in the United States. In the movies, people talk about “trailer trash” and I thought everyone that lives in a trailer would be “trailer trash.”*

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Everything was green in Sandra’s house. The outside of the trailer was green, and the inside was decorated with green wall paper. Sandra had done a very nice job decorating the place, matching with the wallpaper and a green carpet with a comfortable living room to sit on. On the outside the house looks small but it has a living room and dining room, two small bedrooms for the children with their own bathroom on one side of the house, and on the other there was a larger bedroom for her and her husband with their private bathroom too.

By the time I was doing the interviews Sandra had two children, Ana and Ismael, and she was here with her husband Luis. Ana was ten and her little brother Ismael was four. By the end of the research Sandra was expecting another child; she had a baby girl. Ana wears glasses, and she reminds me of my friend Ana from back in Mexico, because they both are well-groomed. I have the impression that Ana is an extraordinary student or at least, a very good one. Later in the conversation her mother said that she does well in school, again like my friend Ana. Ana is

always taking care of her little brother Ismael, like my friend Ana, who also took care of her little brother; I had the impression that they both were very maternal. Ismael is a shy boy; he used to hide from me when I visited them.

When I came in the door my first feeling was that I was definitely in a Mexican house. I tried hard to think about what in that house reminded me of a Mexican house. I was excited; everything there shouted Mexico to me. Sandra invited us to come in and sit in the living room. Immediately, she offered us a delicious glass of lemonade, just the way I expected things to be when you go and visit people in Mexico. Sandra was preparing some corn tortillas recently cooked in the *comal*<sup>16</sup>, and I could feel the smell of the corn and the tortilla. I was so excited when she gave me a warm, soft, handmade tortilla with salt, just exactly the way it is done in Mexico. Sandra cooked chicken soup, chicken in chile sauce and the handmade tortillas for us to eat.

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*That was the first time I went to a house where I did not have to worry about the slang I was using. At Virginia Tech I have some friends from Colombia, the Dominican Republic, and Argentina. We all speak Spanish, however, we tend to smooth down the slang we use for different things or we adopt a particular way to say something in order to create a neutral Spanish; even with the other women at the group that are from different parts of the country, we always have little differences about the words we use. At Sandra's place I did not have to worry about it. I could say everything that came in my mind and she would understand me. We talked about Mexico City and how much we both missed it. As Flores (2000) explains the construction of what is being Latino or Hispanic in the United States relies on the idea of a common language and*

*culture. However, as he explains each group rather prefers to have their own national denomination. In those countries, there are several cultural differences that rank in between socially constructed identities such as class, race, gender, and local cultural differences such as place of birth.*

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By the end of the evening I asked Sandra if she wanted to participate in the interviews, she got very excited and she agreed to participate in the research.

#### From a Broken Family

When I went to visit Sandra for the first time for the interview Sandra was happy to see me and we sat on the brown couch. Before I could ask her anything Sandra had questions for me. She was very curious about me and my family and in that moment she asked me how many brothers and sisters I had. I explained to Sandra that my one sister lives in Spain and my brother was in Mexico with my parents. Sandra expressed her concern about my family situation and her opinion about me being here alone in the United States. On this occasion Sandra asked me if I did not feel bad “abandoning” my parents and leaving my brother, instead of me and my sister, to take care of them. Sandra on several occasions let me know what she thought about me.

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*Sandra’s comment gave me an idea of how she saw and perceived how a good woman should be. Women should stay at home (Paternostro, 1999) and in Sandra’s perception I was breaking the rules by living away of the house. Later in the conversation Sandra said that because my sister was with her husband it was “ok” to be in Spain, but I should not have left my parents.*

*In terms of the research, Behar (1993) described interviewing Esperanza as a challenge. Esperanza in her own way challenged and questioned what Behar was doing. As Behar expressed, Esperanza was not the passive “informant” that every anthropologist expects to encounter. Esperanza was assertive and directly questioned with her attitude Behar’s work as a researcher. In this case, Sandra was the one with whom I established a relationship where she expressed her opinion and questioned me on several occasions. She actually prepared herself and thought about every single question in advance. She asked me to come to her house at certain times that were most convenient for her, when Ana was at school and she had already finished all her housework. The interviews with her were lengthy and each time we talked for long periods of time, two or three hours at least.*

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I didn’t know how to answer, so I just decided to go ahead with the interview. I gave her a hard copy of the questions and I asked if she could sign the informed consent (Appendix 2) that I had prepared for the interviews. She was ready to answer my questions and she actually asked Ismael to leave us alone so we could talk.

I started the interview asking Sandra how was her life back in Mexico. She answered by pointing out how comfortable she felt there, where everything was familiar to her and she could manage by herself to do everything without help.

*Me gustaba, en sí me gustaba, por la vida social, o cómo yo me desenvuelvo más allá, porque hablo mi idioma, sé las calles, sé andar allá, sé todo...*

[Well I liked it in itself, because of the social life, or how I moved there because I speak my language, I know the streets, I know everything!]

I asked Sandra to tell me more about her life when she lived in Mexico City; I was actually surprised by her quick answer and her detailed description of her life back in Mexico.

*“Nací en la ciudad de México, este vivimos ahí hasta que yo tenía 15 años. (...) De esa fecha para abajo no fue nada agradable mi vida, fue una vida muy dura por eso nos tuvimos que mudar a Ciudad Juárez. Mis papás separados, este fue una vida de pobreza, de hambres, de todo, se puede decir. Mi papá era alcohólico (...) todo el día estábamos solas porque mi mamá trabajaba y se tenía que doblar turno, para, pues ganar más dinero. Éramos tres mujeres, pues sí, dos hermanas y yo y mi mamá.”*

[I was born in Mexico City and we lived there until I was fifteen years old. Before that my life was not nice; it was a very hard life. That was why we had to move to Ciudad Juarez. My parents were separated, it was a life of poverty, of hunger, of everything, you can say. My father was an alcoholic (...) and we were alone all day alone because my mom worked and she had to work two shifts to earn more money. We were three women, well yes, two sisters and me, and my mom.]

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*Sandra was very descriptive about her living situation back in Mexico City. In a few sentences Sandra defined herself as being from a poor family. I asked Sandra to describe where she used to live in the city she mentioned that she used to live in “la colonia Guerrero” [Guerrero neighborhood]. This neighbor is one of the oldest in downtown Mexico and it is also famous for being a rough place, next to Tepito, one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in the city (Gonzalez Gamio, 1998).*

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Sandra continued:

*“Mi casa eran dos cuartitos, uno, teníamos una sola cama, que dormíamos todos arrumbados, las cuatro, pues éramos cuatro mujeres, este, el otro cuarto, ...era una sola cama cabía, era todo lo que teníamos, ...y un ropero para guardar ropa. En el otro [cuarto] teníamos la mesa, y un baño pequeño, y afuerita, teníamos un cuartito como que era la cocina, todo pequeñito.”*

[My house had two small rooms, in one, we had one bed, we all slept in there, the four of us, because we were four women; in the other room... there was only one bed because it was everything we had ...and a locker to keep our clothes. In the other [room] we had the table, a small bathroom and outside we had a small room that was like the kitchen everything tiny.]

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*In many ways Sandra’s description of her house reminded me the fictional work of Ana Castillo (1994) “My Mother’s Mexico.” While listening to Sandra’s description I pictured how Ana would perceive her life in the United States and her mother’s life back in Mexico City. As Ana Castillo describes:*

*Our life in Chicago was not suburban backyards with swings and grassy lawn. It was not ample living rooms and your own bedroom. It was not what I saw on TV. And yet it was not the degree of poverty in which we all found ourselves immersed overnight (...) Home for tío Leonel was a single dark room in a vecindad. Vecindades are communal living quarters. Families stay in single rooms. They share toilet and water facilities. The women have a tiny closet for a kitchen just outside the family’s room, and they cook on a griddle on the floor (p. 32).*

*Life for Ana and Ismael was not suburban life either; it was the little trailer house and the small rooms, but it was not the degree of poverty that Sandra continued to describe, the hunger she and her sisters felt, and the difficulties they had with her father before moving to Ciudad Juarez.*

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#### First Migration: Ciudad Juarez

*“Como te digo mi papá era alcohólico, era de las personas tomaba y aparte de que no nos mantenía, no nos daba gasto, él quería exigir sus derechos como hombre de la casa, quería que le diéramos de comer, este, se quedaba ahí, nos rompía los vidrios, pues era una vida infernal. (...) Esta tía que vivía en Ciudad Juárez, ya tenía mucho más tiempo viviendo ahí, y una vez que falleció uno de mis tíos, mi tía llegó a México y pues vio la situación de mi mamá, y la invitó a irse para allá [Ciudad Juárez], para que allá trabajara. Estábamos, pues más que bien buscábamos la tranquilidad de nosotros y la de ella, y este, nos fuimos para Ciudad Juárez.”*

[As I told you my father was an alcoholic, he was one of those that used to drink, beside the fact that he did not support us, he wanted us to feed him, he stayed there, he used to break the window's glasses, it was a life of hell. (...) This aunt, who lived in Ciudad Juarez, she already lived there for a long time, and one of my uncles died, and my aunt came to Mexico [City] and she saw my mother's situation and invited her to go there [Ciudad Juarez] We were looking for our tranquility, ours and hers.]

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*Sokoloff and Dupond (2005) explain that women resist violence in many ways, which includes silence, avoidance of confrontation, confrontation itself, hiding, talking back, hitting back, challenging physical control, contemplating and resisting suicide, and looking for both informal and institutional help. In Sandra's case the assistance her mother received from the aunt helped her and her daughters to avoid violence and escape from the abusive situation they were living as a result they all moved to Ciudad Juarez.*

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*“Nos fuimos para Ciudad Juárez, ahí trabajó mi mamá y mi hermana, ahí, y yo al principio me quedaba en la casa, no iba a la escuela ni nada, le ayudaba con el quehacer, les hacía todo porque mi mamá y mi hermana trabajaban, y mi hermana menor iba a la escuela, tos, yo era como ama de casa. En Ciudad Juárez, hay mucha maquiladora, mucha maquiladora americana y pues ahí hay bastante trabajo. Tiene la ventaja de que ahí podía entrar la gente, los menores de 16 años, los de 16 años. Porque para México es más difícil [trabajar] creo yo, no sé ahorita cómo esté, porque en ese tiempo a los 16 años yo ya podía trabajar... Empecé a trabajar ahí en una zapatería.”*

[We went to Ciudad Juarez; my mother and my sister worked there, and at the beginning, I stayed at home. I did not go to school or anything, I helped with housework. I was like a housewife. In Ciudad Juarez, there are plenty of “maquiladoras” [assembly plants], a lot of American assembly plants, so there is plenty of work. The advantage is that a lot of people could get in there, those that were less than 16 years old, well those that were 16 years. Because in Mexico it is more difficult [to get a job], I think. I don't know how it is



right now, because at that time, when I was 16, I could work already. I started working in a shoe store.]

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*Sandra and her family as well as many young women undertook the journey to Ciudad Juarez. Livingston (2004) describes how thousands of women from remote villages across Mexico and other cities migrated to Ciudad Juarez in the last decade seeking jobs. “Although maquiladoras [assembly plants] have operated in Mexico since 1965 under the Border Industrialization Program (BIP), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has helped to create 1.2 million jobs in Mexico since being implemented on January 1, 1994. Over one quarter of these jobs are in Ciudad Juarez” (p. 60).*

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Even Sandra did not work in the *maquiladora* [assembly plant] at the beginning. She changed her job in the shoe store because her mother did not allow her to leave to Monterrey and become a supervisor.

*“Mi mamá no me dejó irme a Monterrey, tuve muchos problemas [con ella] y eso, no puede, y me salí de ahí enojada, por orgullo. Ya no pude trabajar ahí [en la zapatería] y me fui a la maquiladora que te digo. Ahí en la maquiladora tuve bastante tiempo, estuve como cinco años. Era... le llamábamos, procesadora, ay... ¡procesadora de cupones! Ya ves que aquí en los Estados Unidos se usan los cupones de comida, de productos, los que recortan las revistas, de periódicos de todo eso, que tú vas a la tienda recortas los cupones y te hacen descuentos. Entonces todos esos los mandan para la maquiladora*

*para procesarlos, entonces va uno cupón por cupón metiendo claves, una clavecita digamos de los cupones.”*

[Mi mother did not let me go to Monterrey, I had a lot of problems [with her] and so, I could not, I left angry and for pride. I could not work there [at the shoe store] and I went to the *maquiladora* [assembly plant] that I told you about before. I was there for a long time, five years. I was, how did we call it? Processor, oh! Coupon processor! Do you see that here in the United States the coupons are used for food, for products? That one can cut them from the magazines, the newspaper, all that, that you go to the store and cut the coupons and they give you a discount, so all of them were sent to the *maquiladora* [assembly factory] to be processed. So one has to go coupon by coupon entering the codes, a little code on the coupon let's say.]

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*It is important to say that Sandra quit her job at the shoe store because her mother did not allow her to leave the house; her mother preferred her to stay rather than going by herself to Monterey city. For that reason, Sandra began working in an assembly factory. Even though her job was not directly related to assembling in the strict sense of the word, Sandra had a tedious and repetitive job characteristic of this kind of factories. Livingston (2004) asserts, “The maquiladoras [assembly factories] primarily employ young women. The managers claim that women are better suited to factory work because of their manual dexterity and their ability to tolerate tedious and repetitive work” (p. 61)*

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Later in the interview Sandra reflected on the sense of independency and tranquility her mother and sisters had because of the jobs they found in Ciudad Juarez. After working in the factory Sandra changed jobs again. She explained to me that she started working at a paint distribution store. She worked there for a while and she actually met Luis, now her husband. After some time of dating, Sandra got pregnant with her daughter Ana and she married him.

#### Second Migration: the United States

Sandra's decision to come to the United States was marked by the many difficulties she had the year before she decided to immigrate. As she told me after getting pregnant she married Luis reluctantly because of the bad experience she felt her parents' marriage was. After Ana was born Sandra's mother got sick with cancer and she died a month later. As Sandra said that year was full of "tragedies" that later influenced her decision to cross the border.

*"En febrero... mi mamá se pone mal otra vez, le diagnosticaron cáncer (...) y mi mamá fallece en un mes. En Mayo, este, choca mi esposo, lo meten al bote, porque iba tomado. Perdimos el coche y pues perdimos dinero porque tuvimos que pagar la fianza... tuvimos que pagar los daños y luego se le ocurrió chocar un carro americano, entonces pues es más difícil porque con las aseguranzas no podías hacer trato personal como con otras personas. Entonces tuvimos que pagar bastante dinero, pagar para que lo sacaran, un show. En Junio, como al mes de eso, choca mi hermana también, se parte toda la cabeza."*

[In February my mother got sick again, she was diagnosed with cancer (...) and she died a month later. In May, my husband was in a car accident; he went to jail because he was drunk. We lost the car, and we lost money because we had to pay so they can let him go

out of jail... we have to pay the damages and the car was American, so it was more difficult because with the “aseguranzas” [insurance] we could not get a verbal deal, like with other people. So we had to pay a lot of money so they would let him go, a huge mess. Later in June my sister was in a car accident too and she got hurt.]

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*Paredes Bañuelos (2003) says the scarcity of employment and economic resources is one of the main reasons why many people cross the border. However, she explains that “el norte” [the north] represents much more than dollars and employment. In this sense, economic needs influence the decision to immigrate, but also her ideal perception of “el norte” [the north]. In Sandra’s case, what she called her tragedies, her mother’s death and all the problems she had with her husband’s and sister’s car accidents were difficult circumstances that turned the balance to see “el norte” [the north] as an option of a better life for her and her family.*

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Afterward Sandra also explained how also her relationship with her husband turned to a point of crisis and constant fight and harassment on his side.

*“Mi esposo y yo empezamos a tener muchísimos problemas él empezó a celarme más, porque yo trabajaba allá [en la distribuidora de pinturas]. Como yo te digo, trabajaba con puros hombres, él ya sabía cómo estaba. Pues sí puros hombres, pero yo me llevaba bien con mis compañeros. Siempre, este, tuve que me respetaran, porque como yo era su jefa ellos me tenían también que respetar, y nos llevábamos muy bien, pero él nunca entendió. A mí me daban otras oportunidades en este trabajo y pues gracias a él pues no,*

*no pude. No gracias, verdad desgraciadamente por causa de él no pude yo aceptarlas porque [el me decía] –“qué casualidad, que esto y que lo otro”.*

[My husband and I started having a lot of problems because he became jealous because I worked there [at the paint distribution store]. As I told you, I worked with a lot of men, he knew how it was. Well a lot of men yes, but I got along with them. I always made them respect me because I was their boss and they had to respect me, we got along but he never understood. I was offered some opportunities in that job, and thanks to him, I couldn't [take them]. Well, not thanks to him, unfortunately because of him I could not accept them, because [he used to say] “what a coincidence, this and that.]

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*Livingston (2004) mentions that many women living in Ciudad Juarez are inserted in the family economy. Pointing out that, “Often a desire to escape the confines of poverty and domesticity motivates their decision to move to Juarez. Their migration creates a new phenomenon of mobile, independent, working women living in the city” (p. 61) Sandra’s mother’s decision to move to Ciudad Juarez was motivated because of their poverty and family situations. After years of working, Sandra perceived that her husband became jealous of her job opportunities. In the interview Sandra explained to me that when she met her husband he was the supervisor and later she took his position because sometimes he was not very responsible with his job. Like Oehmichen (2000) points out, physical and verbal violence can be interpreted as an alternative that some males have in the construction of their masculinity once their role as the provider of the family has been targeted (cf. Oehmichen, 2000, p. 343).*

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She also reflected on the scarcity of economic resources and how she decided to migrate. *“Y especialmente, por estar pagando cosas de que chocó, de que arreglar carros, de que esto, nunca teníamos dinero. Entonces llegó un momento que le dije –“hasta aquí ya basta, o arreglamos esto o qué, te me vas para allá o qué, yo me voy y nunca más me vuelves a ver porque esta situación no puede seguir así. Y gracias a Dios entendió, se vino para acá con mi prima. Ya no aguantaba, llega un momento en que te hostigan tanto en que tú dices, ya no se puede, ya no se puede. Pobrecito mi esposo, ahora me dice que sí, pues, que él sabe que esta mal, pero en ese momento eran sus reacciones. (...) Y no me puedo quejar de que me golpeará, y hasta la fecha, no, si me da yo le doy (se ríe).”*

[And especially, because we were paying for the cars he hit, and because of this and that, we never had money. So there was one time that I said, “That’s enough, or we fix this or what, you go there or what, or I will leave you and you will never see me again because this situation can not continue.” And thank God he understood. He came here with my cousin. I could not handle it any more. There is a point that you cannot handle the situation any more, you just can’t do it, can’t do it. My poor husband now he says that he knows it was bad, but in that moment those were his reactions. I could not let him hit me, until today if he hits me I will hit him back (she laughs).]

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*For Sandra, coming to the United States was not only driven by looking for an alternative to poverty but also Sandra looked at immigration as an option to resist domestic violence in the form of verbal abuse that her husband had started (Sokoloff & Dupond, 200). For him, not*

*having a stable job and relying on her ended up in a lost of control and the lost of his masculine role.*

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That day the interview was lengthy and Sandra shared with me details about her life in Ciudad Juarez, her relationship with her husband, her sisters, her mother and her husband's family. Sandra was very expressive and I had to stop the interview because she started crying. Still Sandra decided to keep talking and at the end of the day I went back to Blacksburg late at night.

#### Life on the Other Side

The next time I went to Sandra's house she received me as enthusiastically as always I was a little late and Ana came from school and she stayed with us for a while. Sandra was ready to start the interview. She actually said that she thought about the questions during the weeks in between and she was ready to start. Later that day Sandra shared with me about her vacations and she showed me a photo album of her family back in Mexico.

This interview was as lengthy as the first one. In general Sandra talked about three main themes that describe how different is her life here in the United States. She talked about better economic opportunities, access to social services, and her family relationships.

*“En el aspecto de que por ejemplo, aquí no se nos ha hecho difícil para nada subsistir, aquí hemos salido más de vacaciones, eh, mi esposo tiene pues dos muebles [carros], no muy nuevos pero tampoco muy viejitos, buenos, porque son buenos, que era imposible tener en México, o si los teníamos era una cosa espantosa porque era bastantes gastos. Yo pienso que la mayoría de la gente en México no puede tener dos carros, a menos que*

*tenga una posición económica bastante buena, pero dentro de nuestro nivel social, como yo le llamo, nuestra así, no creo, no. Podemos salir más seguido a comer a la calle, cosa que en México sí salíamos pero una vez al mes yo creo, y trabajábamos los dos. O sea y a pesar de que él gana, para aquí es el mínimo, (...) y yo estoy en la casa y tenemos más oportunidades. O sea, sí hay veces que decimos, ay esta semana no traemos dinero, pero, no nos quedamos sin comer.”*

[One aspect for example is that it is not hard for us to live, we have gone on vacations, and my husband has two cars, not too new, but not as old, good, because they are good. In Mexico it was impossible to have [a car], or if we had them they were a lot of expenses. I think that the majority of people in Mexico cannot have two cars; at least they have a very good social position, but people in our social level, as I call it, no, I don't think so. We can go out to eat, a thing that in Mexico we did, but once a month I think, and we both worked. I mean, even that he earns the minimum wage, what it is here the minimum (...) and I am here in the house, we have more opportunities. I mean, sometime we said, this week we don't have money, but we don't suffer from hunger.]

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*Sandra's descriptions of her new economic opportunities are similar to Hondagneu-Sotelo's (1994) findings regarding the influence of women to stay in the United States. As Hondagneu-Sotelo points out, an immigrant family has to purchase daily sustenance resources in the United States in an economy with higher prices, and in many cases undocumented immigrants have to face the inconveniences of basic protection, leading to a situation in which most of the time they earn a smaller income than United States citizens. However, women are*



*more able than men to see better opportunities for themselves and their children, in contrast to the hard work they have to do in Mexico without proper compensation. Sandra like the other women reflected on the opportunity she has of staying at home and not having to work herself. Despite the fact her husband earns minimum wage, she and her children can have better living conditions.*

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*“Otra de las cosas que me gusta es que yo no estoy trabajando, estoy cuidando a mis hijos. A veces, si me gustaría seguir trabajando porque yo siempre trabajé y me gusta ganar mi dinero y me gusta contribuir con la casa. Pero, pierdo la oportunidad de estar con mis hijos, de hacer la tarea con mi hija, de cuidar a mi hijo chiquito, y mi idea y mi sueño siempre fue eso. Estar en mi casa con mis hijos, y cuidar a mis hijos, o sea, atender a mi esposo, jajaja. Pero sí me gusta, pero me hubiera gustado trabajar. O sea, pero no, no me quejo y es uno de los sueños que también teníamos mi esposo y yo, que yo dejara de trabajar algún día (...) y creo que gracias a Dios ya lo cumplí, como te digo, no tenemos gran cosa, pero, pero, estamos a gusto.”*

[Another thing that I like is that I am not working; I am taking care of my children.

Sometimes I would like to be working because I always worked, and I like to earn my own money and help with the house. But I lose the opportunity to be with my children, to do homework with my daughter, to take care of my little son, and my idea and my dream always was that. I wanted to be in my house with my children, to take care of my children, I mean, to take care of my husband [she laughs]. Yes I like, I would have liked to have a job. I mean, I am not complaining, it was another dream my husband and I had,

that I would stop working one day (...) and I think that thanks to God I realized it. As I told you, we don't have big things, but, but, we are fine.]

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*I found Sandra's idea of staying at home as one of her dreams extremely interesting. In her ideal construction of womanhood (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Paternostro, 1999; Pescatelo, 1987) Sandra was more inclined to accept her duties as a dependent subordinate, responsible for domestic chores, and devoted to her family and children; rather than the independent and working woman she was when she had a job in Ciudad Juarez. However, I cannot say that Sandra had a passive attitude towards her relationship with her husband. Later she will tell me, her husband takes seriously her opinions about the decisions they make for the family. As Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) explains:*

*Nuclear families who migrated together were characterized by a less rigid form of family patriarchy than were the families who migrated in states. These families were characterized by shared decision making between spouses, and also by access to social networks composed of the wives' kin. Unlike the pattern of family stage migration, in these families the men did not enjoy uncontested, unilateral power, and the women participated in decision making about migration. These women were well positioned to act assertively in the migration process because of their income-earning work and their experience in sharing family authority (p.190).*

*In this sense, Sandra had a great influence in the migration process and she shared the family authority with Luis.*

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Sandra pointed out the social services to which she had access in the United States. She said she enjoyed the attention she received when her son Ismael was born and the benefits of the WIC program and Medicaid for the children. However, what caught my attention more was that Sandra was aware of the resources available for children and women that protect them from domestic violence.

*“Las mujeres maltratadas (...) hay bastante ayuda también para ellas. Aunque sean indocumentadas no hay problema, aquí hay ayuda para ellas. Hay ayuda, hay refugios cuando el hombre golpea bastante a la mujer. La llevan a las mujeres y las tienen en un refugio y les dan ayuda psicológica y a los niños también. Al marido lo detienen, le ponen si amerita cárcel o de plano que ya no viva con ella, hasta que la mujer, se sienta capaz y les ayudan a buscar trabajo, a buscar apartamento, o sea, que no están solas pues, pero no se deben de dejar.”*

[Battered women (...) there is a lot of help for them too. Even if they are illegal there is no problem, there is help for them. There is help; there is refuge when the men hit the woman too much. They take the woman and they have them in the refuge and they give psychological help for them and the children. They put the husband in jail, if it is necessary, or a restraining order so he won't live with her any more, until the woman feels capable of looking for a job, an apartment. I mean, they are not alone and they should not let someone hit them.]

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*Livingstone (2004) points out, “Mexico’s judicial system provides little recourse for women who are victims of male violence, particular if it is domestic. (...) A woman in Mexico*

*cannot file domestic abuse charges unless her injuries take longer than fifteen days to heal” (p. 67). Sandra’s perception of the lack of institutional assistance from the judicial system in Mexico makes her value the help that she can gain in the United States in case of domestic violence.*

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We had to stop the interview because Sandra was getting ready to go to the grocery store with her husband and children.

#### Economic Stability vs. Family Relations

I came back for the last interview with Sandra and she was as nice as always. This interview was not as lengthy as the others but we had a good time anyway. When I asked Sandra how she imagines herself in the future, she explained:

*“A la vez me gustaría regresar y a la vez no. Tengo ganas de ir visitar, pero como que no, muy animada estoy para regresarme no, quiero hacer cosas allá y todo, pero a la vez me da miedo regresarme. No sé por qué, jaja, se me hace que se me va a acabar esto que tengo, mi tranquilidad, no sé, pienso yo, no lo sé (...) Aunque sí a veces extrañamos mucho allá, Juárez, mis hermanas, y Luis pues su familia y todo.”*

[I would like to go back and at the same time I would not like to go back. I would like to go and visit, but I would not like to go back. I would like to go and do things there but at the same time I am scared. I don’t know why [she laughs] I feel like I am going to lose all this that I have, my tranquility, I don’t know, I think, I don’t know. Although, there are many times that we miss there a lot, Juarez, my sisters, and Luis, well his family and everything.]

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*Like Chavez (1992) points out, “[D]espite lacking a guarantee of full incorporation, over time undocumented immigrants develop the kinds of ties to the local economy and society that result in their staying and settling in U.S. communities (p. 186)” In this sense, the factors balance the decision to return to the country of origin encourage immigrants to stay. In many ways they develop social ties that despite their legal status affirm their intention to continue in the United States. (Chavez, 1992) In Sandra’s case, what she considers her “tranquility” balances her decision to stay in the country despite her feelings of missing her sisters and her husband’s family.*

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#### What all This Means

In terms of her social position Sandra placed herself as in a family characterized by poverty, back in Mexico City where she was born. Her father’s alcoholism and domestic violence were one of the many threats she and her family lived. In order to resist violence her mother left Mexico City to Ciudad Juarez in northern Mexico.

After moving to Ciudad Juarez her mother, sister’s and her gain family stability and the benefits of a job in the many *maquiladoras* [assembly factors] in the city. Sandra’s family is one of the many examples of women moving to Ciudad Juarez. However, after getting pregnant with her daughter Ana and marrying her husband Luis, Sandra’s stability was threatened by the constant harassment of her husband. Like Oechmichen (2000) and Livingston (2004) propose the participation of women in labor and public sphere weakens patriarchal relationships and men feel threatened when women participate in the labor market. In this sense, Sandra’s case is not an

exception. According to Livingston (2004) “Juarez has the highest rate of domestic violence in Mexico, and it has increased dramatically since 1993” (p. 70).

Sandra’s migration to the United States was prompted by what she considers many tragedies that occurred in her life. Livingston (2004) pointed out that Juarez is one of the cities where women suffer the most of domestic violence in Mexico. Following her mother’s pattern her move to the United States represented resisting domestic violence.

On this side, Sandra had found access to social services such as the WIC program and Medicaid for her children; even though she missed her family and the independency she felt when she was living back in Mexico. Sandra’s case however is paradigmatic in the sense that even if she is at her house in charge of her family and children she feels that she did not lose the power she had in the decision making for the whole family. Like Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) explains Sandra participation on her family decision is the result of a share authority in the household that was established before the migration.

#### Summary

In sum, Sandra has immigrated two times in her life, the first one prompted by her mother to escape from her father’s domestic violence, and the second encouraged by her to avoid her husband’s harassment when he felt threatened in his authority. However, I cannot say Sandra is a weak or dependent women, on the contrary even though she is now a house wife, she feels that she has not lost her authority in the decision making process in her family. Sandra’s case she was able to negotiate her gender identity by becoming a housewife, however, she was also able to stop the violence by empowering herself in the making decision process of the family.

## Chapter Seven: Findings and Implications

In the individual case studies, I organized the narration according to the themes that emerged in the interviews, presenting each of them as an independent entity. In this chapter, I will do a cross-case analysis examining the findings of the three case studies, seeking for similarities and differences, in order to answer each research question individually. Also, I will present suggestions for the implications for future research.

The overarching theme of the research was how identity is transformed by the experience of immigration. To answer this overarching question I conceptualized two research questions that I will answer individually.

How do Mexican immigrant women living in the Roanoke Valley describe their lives back in Mexico?

How do Mexican immigrant women living in the Roanoke Valley describe their lives in the United States?

*How do Mexican immigrant women living in the Roanoke Valley describe their lives back in Mexico?*

The main theme that emerged from the interviews to answer the first question was poverty in terms of scarcity of money and difficult living conditions they all had back in Mexico. Chiswick (1986) and Dussel Peters (1998) establish macroeconomic factors such as poverty, scarcity of economic resources, the constant economic crises in Mexico, and the differences in the income between the two countries, are the main influences that motivate Mexicans to cross the border. Patricia, Margarita, and Sandra identify themselves as being from poor or working

poor class background. In the description of their lives back in Mexico they talk extensively about limited the resources and opportunities they had.

However, there was not a similar perception about the availability of economic resources. Each woman represented differences in socioeconomic backgrounds resulting in differences in how they perceive yearnings. These differences run the gamut from providing some material comforts and sustenance, to yearnings to escape conditions of poverty and scarcity of material resources (Ibarra, 2004). For instance, in Patricia's case she described herself as being from a working class family; her perception of her life back in Mexico was not as difficult as the one described by Margarita or Sandra. Margarita, on the contrary, described herself as poor; her memories of back home were related to a economic serious lack of resources such as suffering from hunger. Sandra, whose circumstances were those of in between Patricia and Margarita, described herself as being from a poor background and later as working poor. In general, they described the limit economic resources and opportunities lacking for people of lower socioeconomic circumstances.

Another important theme that emerged regarding their perception of life back in Mexico was a common feeling of nostalgia and a lost of cultural understanding. In all three cases they expressed that they miss their extended family and friends, and also the independence and spatial mobility they had back in Mexico. In same way Ainslie (1998) explains:

The immigrant simultaneously must come to terms with the loss of family and friends on the one hand, and cultural forms (food, music, art, for example) that have given the immigrant's native world a distinct and highly personal character, on the other (p. 287).



In this sense, Patricia, Margarita, and Sandra, like other immigrants, have to deal with the loss of their culture that they try to reproduce in the United States, for example in the preparation of food, decoration of the house, and preferences in entertaining.

In summary, the two main findings about their perceptions of life back in Mexico were related first to lack of economic resources and the limited opportunities they had, and second to their memories of Mexico, paired with their nostalgia of their lost in terms of family relations and cultural understanding.

*How do Mexican immigrant women living in the Roanoke Valley describe themselves in the United States?*

Chavez (1992) and Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) explain that daily apprehension of living in a foreign country such as not knowing the language, employment security, racism, and lack of proper legal status might encourage seasonal migration instead of settlement. However, despite those apprehensions many migrants prefer to stay in this country. Patricia, Margarita, and Sandra also express their desire to stay in the country despite of living with some of the apprehensions mentioned by Chavez and Hondagneu-Sotelo. In terms of knowing the language in all three cases the women are in the process of learning English. Patricia is the only one who is able to communicate in English on a basic level; however she expressed her desire to learn more English. Margarita and Sandra on the other hand expressed that they feel frustrated because they cannot speak the language. They do not refer to the theme of employment insecurity specifically; although in all three cases they express they have more economic stability and in consequence they would like to stay in the United States. In Margarita's and Sandra's cases the difficulties are related with not having proper legal status to stay in the country. Some of the consequences are

living in a constant fear of being deported, and inaccessibility to some social services like health insurance, and higher education for the children that are not permanent residents or citizens (Chavez, 1992).

In a gender perspective the three women verify Hondagneu-Sotelo's (1994) assertion that, "[I]mmigrant women advance settlement along three structural dimensions that constitute and define it" (p.199). Those structural dimensions mentioned by Hondagneu-Sotelo include a) the construction of community social ties, b) the access to private or institutional forms of assistance, and c) stability in employment instead of eventual or seasonal jobs. In regard to common social ties, Patricia, Margarita, and Sandra have children that were born in the United States, providing an important social tie that gives them roots and makes more difficult the decision to go back to Mexico. As Chavez (1992) mentions, they have become transnational families, in the sense that some members of the family have Mexican nationality and the children are United States citizens.

In terms of access to assistance, such as receiving benefits from public and private agencies, Patricia, Margarita, and Sandra have received the benefits of the federally funded nutrition program Women, Infants, and Children [WIC]; the children that were born in the United States receive Medicaid; and they all have children in the school system. They also receive the benefits of the service-learning program. In this sense, the benefits given by the public and private agencies are in contrast with the lack of social services back in Mexico. In each case the women reflected on the importance of each service that helps them cover basic needs such as food, health, and education; the service-learning program provides assistance in learning English.

In terms of employment Hodagneu-Sotelo (1994) explains that the presence of women and the whole family changes the pattern of eventual or seasonal jobs that characterize seasonal male migrants, thus encouraging stability of employment. In this sense, the fact that they have become transnational families advances the need for them and their partners to have stable jobs in order to sustain the family in the United States. In Patricia's and Margarita's cases, they work and share the responsibilities of the family income. Although Sandra stays at home and takes care of the children she also encourages her husband to have a stable job.

In conclusion, in all three cases the women perceived themselves to be in a better economic position that encourages them to stay in the United States. They also have children who are United States citizens and for that reason they receive the benefits of some public and private agencies that help them to cover basic needs they could not cover back in Mexico.

### *Domestic Violence*

When I began this research project, I did not plan to write a thesis about domestic violence; I conceptualized a thesis about identity. However, one of the main themes that crossed the three cases was domestic violence. This theme was a constant in each case because it had a strong impact in the lives of Patricia, Margarita, and Sandra. Like Behar (1991) conveys, I was concerned about how to present this theme without reproducing the stereotype of the Mexican women as a suffering victim or presenting Mexican males as despicable machos. As she explains, this representation of Mexican women and men was already portrayed in academia by the image of the Mexican long-suffering woman that engendered abnegation and the infinite capacity for humility and abnegation, called marianismo. However, marianismo can lead to an

image that stereotypes and overlooks the complexities of gender relationships in the sense that Mexican women can be perceived as passive receivers of violence.

In order to be true to their words, I needed to present this theme that was important enough for Patricia, Margarita, and Sandra to construct the narration of their lives, back in Mexico and in the United States, around the theme of domestic violence. Just as Behar (1991), recalling anthropologist Lynne Phillips explains “[I]f we are to produce histories that empower our subjects, it is time to allow for other women’s ‘misbehavior,’ what she describes as ‘their different ways of making sense,’ to ‘take over’ our research projects” (p. 270). In Patricia, Margarita, and Sandra’s cases their “misbehavior” drove the research to their accounts of domestic violence. I had to learn to listen to their stories and recognize their personal motivations, understanding that in the first place talking about the violence in their lives is the first form of resistance (Supriya, 1996).

In the three cases, the socially constructed images of what is being a good woman (Hondagneou-Sotelo 1994; Paternostro 2001; Pescatello, 1987) informed their actions in their relationships with their husbands, and in Patricia’s case with her former husband and with Raul her current partner. In all three cases, the women had the underlying assumption that a woman is only complete with a man. But, in the three cases also they fought against domestic violence, helped by the resources that were available to them, challenging the common assumption that Latina women are socialized to be nurturing and submissive (Gondolf, 1998). The intersection of gender, class, ethnicity, nationality, and structural social factors such as issues of power, privilege, and equity influenced the circumstances in which Patricia, Margarita, and Sandra suffered domestic violence, and the decisions they made in order to escape from it, or to resist it.

As Behar (1991) describes it was difficult to place Esperanza, a Mexican peddler whom she interviewed, on the side of the long suffering women, but it was difficult also to create Esperanza as an image of the exemplary feminist with a story of redemption. As she says, Esperanza's transgressions against patriarchal ideology were tied up in paradoxes; in the same way Patricia, Margarita, and Sandra's stories were tied up with the paradoxes of what the socially constructed norm considers to be a good woman and the resistance to domestic violence. As Behar (1991) concluded, "[A]mbiguously gendered rather than passively gendered, [Esperanza] points out the possibility of true gender transformation" (p. 296). In the same way, I cannot place the stories of Patricia, Margarita, and Sandra either on the side of exemplary feminist redemption or on the side of the long suffering Mexican women.

It is important to say that violence was present in each case. However, Patricia did not suffer domestic violence back in Mexico. In Margarita's case her mother suffered verbal and economic abuse from her father; after getting married Margarita suffered from domestic violence in Mexico and she still suffers from abuse in the United States. In Sandra's case, her mother suffered domestic violence; to resist the violence her mother decided to move to Ciudad Juarez. After Sandra's marriage, her husband Luis abused her verbally and emotionally. To resist violence she decided to move to the United States, where she no longer suffers from domestic violence. The differences in each case depended on the resources available for them to escape, fight back, or resist the violence regardless on which side of the border the domestic violence was.

In Patricia's case the violence started when she crossed the border. It was on this side that her husband, who was Mexican-American origin, that abused her while they were living in

California and Texas. Patricia's case in many ways echoes Mendelson's (2004) study of battered women in California. The women that she interviewed were married to American citizens, but they came to the United States as illegal immigrants waiting for their husbands to sign the petition for them to acquire permanent residency. The legal identity imposed by the state made more difficult Patricia's the decision to leave the house, among other reasons that are common for battered women that decide not to leave. Like Gondolf (1998) explains immigrants might be reluctant to report the abuse because of the fear of legal problems, the loss of social services or in some cases deportation. However, different from Patricia, Margarita overcame her "illegal immigrant" identity to seek for help, although her inability to speak English limited the resources available for her.

Also, Patricia's family relationships were all back in Mexico and she was not able to find the family support to leave the situation until she went back to Mexico and reestablished her social networks. In the sense of family networks, the three women shared that their families helped them to get out of the violent situation. Patricia went back to Mexico to seek support; Margarita was helped by her mother at the beginning of her marriage when her husband hit her, and in Sandra's her sisters supported her when she decided to move to the United States. It is important to say also that on this side of the border, Margarita substituted family support for institutional support; she was able to seek help by calling the police. Meanwhile Sandra was able to take control over the violence when she and her family moved to the United States.

In Sandra's case, in order to resist violence she encouraged her family to move to Roanoke, just as her mother resisted violence when they moved from Mexico City to Ciudad Juarez. In Juarez, Sandra gained family stability and the benefits of a job in one of the many

*maquiladoras* [assembly factors] in the city; however, her stability was targeted by the harassment of her husband's jealousy. Oechmichen (2000) and Livingston (2004) propose that the participation of women in labor and the public sphere weakens patriarchal relationships and men feel threatened when women participate in the labor market. In this sense, the violence that Sandra lived in Ciudad Juarez was a consequence of the disequilibrium between gender relationships.

In conclusion, in each of the three cases domestic violence was a constant theme that emerged from the interviews, but more important was the fact that Patricia, Margarita, and Sandra fought back in order to resist the violence. Specifically in Margarita's and Sandra's cases they were resisting domestic violence even before crossing the border. These findings challenged the stereotype that perceives Mexican women as passive females. In all three cases the gender construction of what it is to be a good woman (*marianismo*) informed the lives of Patricia, Margarita, and Sandra but gender expectations were in constant negotiation. In the same way that the findings of Abraham (2000), in her study of Asian battered women, helped to recognize that women's strategies of resistance include a wide range of tactics such as avoidance, confrontation, hiding, talking back, etcetera; in this research the findings included returning to the home country in Patricia's case and immigration in Sandra's case as forms of resistance.

In sum, in all three cases domestic violence was a constant in the women's lives. However, despite the gender construction of Mexican women as passive females the commonality in the three cases was that they looked for alternatives for how to resist violence by seeking support and resources to escape from violence on either side of the border.

*How identity is transformed by the experience of immigration?*

To begin, I would like to return to Maguregui's poem, as presented at the beginning of this chapter, which served as the starting point of this research. How much of what immigrants are before and after crossing the border is changed? Or is it like Maguregui's poem that says "everything I am is worthless in the face of the luminous possibility of getting a job in Chicago."

In general terms Patricia, Margarita, and Sandra are in the process of incorporating themselves into United States society (Chavez 1992). And like many immigrants, they hold the dream of returning to Mexico, but they have stayed raising their families and working. As Chavez explains (1992) the passage from one society to another is a long process. Patricia, Margarita, and Sandra are in different stages of incorporation. In Patricia's case she has gained a lot of knowledge and experience of how life is in the United States to live here, including the passage from being an illegal immigrant to permanent resident. However, Patricia's knowledge of the language is limited; this is one reason why she has not fully become incorporated to the new society.

Margarita's and Sandra's cases are more difficult, even though they also had accumulated links to the United States by establishing employment, forming a family, having children that are American citizens, and gaining knowledge of social assistance, they do not have the proper documentation to stay in the country. Like Chavez explains, "Even individuals who have accumulated a great number of such links may find full incorporation into the new society blocked because of their undocumented status and the larger society's view of them as illegal aliens" (p.5). As Mendelson (2004) conveys the creation of legal identities impact the everyday life of those that crossed the border without appropriate documentation. In this sense, Margarita



and Sandra have to face the problems of not being able to acquire legal status to stay in the country; being “illegal” in this country has political, economic, and personal consequences that they have to confront.

In Patricia, Margarita, and Sandra’s cases immigration has been a negotiation of identity. Macrostructural factors (Dussel Peters, 1998) determined immigration in the three cases; they saw themselves back Mexico as being from a low socioeconomic background, with a lack of economic resources and opportunities, and this perception prompted their decision to immigrate. On this side of the border their decisions to immigrate and the construction of their personal identity caused Patricia, Margarita, and Sandra to see themselves in better living conditions with access to more economic resources. However, the social construction of identity as immigrants and moreover “illegal aliens” in Margarita’s and Sandra’s cases has consequences in their everyday lives that marginalize them from the rest of the American society. Like Alcoff (2003) points out, “Individuals make their own identity, but not under conditions of their own choosing” (p. 5).

Moreover, Hondagneou-Sotelo (2001) describes how recently the campaigns against illegal immigration have resulted in a generalized xenophobia that concerns all immigrants, including those who are in the country with legal authorization. “Immigration status has clearly become an important axis of inequality, one interwoven with relations of race, class, and gender” (p. 13). In this sense, the transformation of identity started when Patricia, Margarita and Sandra crossed the border, they are overall first perceive as immigrants by the society they chose to move in. The construction of identity has to be negotiated between two national identity different groups.

### Implications for Future Research

In the narrations about their lives back in Mexico Patricia, Margarita, and Sandra referred extensively to the nostalgia they feel about leaving their families, friends and what was familiar to them back in Mexico. In general terms they miss the weather, costumes, and social relationships, to an extent all we can name as cultural understanding. In the process of cultural mourning (Ainslie, 1998) some questions about future research emerge in relation of how do they perceive their relationship to their country or as it is said in Spanish to “*la patria.*” How do they transmit their feelings to their children about a country that did not give them enough opportunities for them to stay but at the same time is the place in where they have their cultural and family ties?

Another important finding was the fact that Patricia, Margarita, and Sandra have gained knowledge of how to live in the United States; however none of them can speak English fluently. Not being able to speak the language has important consequences in terms of the opportunities they have living in this country. By the time I was conducting the interviews learning English did not seem to be their first priority. Future research is needed to explore the factors that hinder their learning English.

In terms of the domestic violence in the three cases the women were negotiating to stop the violence either in Mexico or in the United States, the differences in each case were the resources available each women had to stop the violence. Back in Mexico the three women rely on the help of family and friends. In the United States in Patricia’s case it was difficult for her to seek for help out of the household, Margarita on the contrary changed family support for institutional support. The dissonances in Patricia’s and Margarita’s cases lead to several

questions about future research on the theme. Besides her illegal identity what were the factors that constrained Patricia from seeking help. And in Margarita's case, considering her illegal identity what are the factors that encouraged Margarita to call the police? More research can be done on the factors that constrain or facilitate Mexican immigrants to seek for help in a domestic violence situation, if the resources are available for them.

In Sandra's case it is important to consider further research about how wages and jobs change family dynamics but not in the understanding that wages and jobs necessarily lead to gender equality (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2003). In this sense, in all three cases it is important to consider for further research the relationship between class and domestic violence.

### Conclusion

After a long journey we have heard the voices of Patricia, Margarita and Sandra, their experiences as immigrants and their stories of life in the United States. In all three cases the findings are related to their feelings of cultural loss once they cross the border and their personal feeling of economic gain on this side. As they told me, they have more material possessions but they felt they left contact and socialization and now they live isolated lives; permeating every aspect of their lives including domestic violence, an unexpected theme that emerged in the interviews. Crossing the border has given them some of the American dream of having money and material comforts but is not the American dream of inclusion and the white America middle class.

In conclusion, the stories of Patricia, Margarita, and Sandra are only three of the many stories of women crossing the border everyday. They lived in the margins of Mexican society because of economic exclusion and limited opportunities. On this side of the border they have

found access to basic social services and everyday they gain more knowledge of how to live in the United States. However, their identity as immigrants, with or without legal status makes difficult their stay in the country, particularly after September 11, 2001 when strong campaigns against immigrants and illegal immigrants began to generate an atmosphere of exclusion that makes their lives more difficult in the United States.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Consejo Nacional de Población (Conapo)

<sup>2</sup> Chavez (1992) makes the difference between migrants and settlers. Migrants are those who stay for a relatively period of time (months or a couple of years). Settlers reside in the country for a longer period of time years or a lifetime.

<sup>3</sup> According to Tilley-Lubbs Chicano is a term used to designate those who are born in the United States of Mexican parents. It is also a term used as a political statement of solidarity and union.

<sup>4</sup> Proposition 187 was specifically designed to deny access to education and social services, like health care and public benefits, to immigrants. In the practice, the law specifically required public officials, such as teachers, lawyers and police officers to check the immigration status of any person they came in professional contact. The law finally was declared unconstitutional before it took effect. However, it created a culture in which immigrants were under scrutiny and were viewed and treated as deviants (*cf.* Gonzalez & Fernandez, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> I understand culture in the sense that Geertz (1973) defines it as a “web of significances.” Thus culture is a system expressed in a symbolic form. Geertz conducted his analysis through a semiotic point of view, and tried to interpret the meanings that lie behind an “insignificant” behavior.

<sup>6</sup> Bonfil Batalla (1987) differentiates between the *Mexico profundo* [the profound Mexico] that recognizes the legacy of the indigenous tradition and population back in the times of Mesoamerica, and the *Mexico Imaginario* [Imaginary Mexico] which is the Mexico inhabited

by the elite, “The world of those who deny the Indian legacy of Mexican culture and embrace the Western civilizing project as their own” (As in Behar, 1993, p. 10).

<sup>7</sup> To *work the hyphen* means “creating occasion for researchers and informants to discuss what is, and is not, ‘happening between,’ within the negotiated relations of whose story is being told, why, to whom, with what interpretation, and whose story is being shadowed, why, for whom, and with what consequence” (Fine, p.135).

<sup>8</sup> In order to protect their identity I used pseudonyms to refer to the participants in this work.

<sup>9</sup> All translations in this thesis and about the interviews are mine, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>10</sup> Worker’s settlement

<sup>11</sup> According to Chavez (1992) a *coyote* is the guide-for-hire that helps people cross illegally into the United States. However, some *coyotes* have been notorious for accepting the money and abandoning the people when they encounter a difficult or dangerous situation.

<sup>12</sup> Chiapas and Tabasco are in the Southeast of Mexico.

<sup>13</sup> The cheese empanadas were hand-made corn tortillas with cheese inside, fried in a pan.

<sup>14</sup> WIC is a federal funded program designed to assist low income women, infants and children up to 5 years old who are at nutritional risk. The program provides food supplements such as infant formula, juice, infant cereal, eggs, milk, cheese, dried beans or peanut butter, tuna and carrots. (*cf.* WIC website)

<sup>15</sup> Chilango is a depreciatory name that people from other states give to people from Mexico City, because it is the common knowledge that people from the country are taken advantage when visiting the city. During the 80’s and early 90’s the aversion was so serious that

the walls of some places mainly in the northern states of the country were painted with the legend “*haz patria, mata un chilango*” [make a nation kill a chilango].

<sup>16</sup> A “comal” is a Mexican round and flat skillet that is mainly use to cook tortillas.

## Appendix A

## VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

## Informed Consent for Participants

**Title of Project:** “What Is Being Latina? Construction of Identity in Mexican Immigrants and Mexican-American women.”

**Investigators:** Marcela Uribe, Dr. Gresilda Tilley–Lubbs, Dr. David Moore.

**You have been invited to participate in the thesis research project that looks at identity in Mexican and Mexican American women. I would like to thank you for being part of this project; by doing so, in your own voice, you will give me the information I cannot get elsewhere.**

## Purpose

To begin I would like to tell you that it is very important to me that you will be a volunteer in this project. The main purpose of this study is to document the experiences of Mexican women who have immigrated to the United States and how these experiences have changed their lives. This two-part study is part of my thesis research to obtain my Master’s degree. In the first part I am going to interview you, so you may tell me about your life in the United States, your life back in Mexico and how you think you have changed since moving to the United States. In the second part, I would like you to allow me to participate in a day of your life. You don’t have to do anything different from normal, besides letting me be with you and learn more about a day in your life, just like a “shadow,” very close to you.

## Procedures

As I have stated above, your role in this study is to allow me interview you. In order to give you all of my attention, I would like to record our conversation. I will only use this tape to transcribe the interview, and the tape will be returned to you as soon as possible, so you can do as you like with them. By transcribing our conversations, I can remember and study everything you have told me. For the interview I would like you to choose a nickname in order to stay anonymous. I will call you by this name during the interview, and I will use this name on the paperwork also. In this way no one will know about whom we are talking.

I would need to interview you two or three times. The interviews will take place at any time you are available. We can do them in your house or any place that you feel comfortable. The interviews will last about one hour and a half to two hours. In case we do not finish the interview in one session, I will ask to meet you again so that we may finish. We will always do this at a time that is convenient for you.

During the interviews, I will ask you about your daily life in Mexico and your family. Then I will ask you to compare your life in Mexico with your life here. I want you to feel comfortable sharing your life with me and you can answer with as much or as little detail as you like. I would also like you to ask when you do not understand a question or the purpose of that question. If I ask you something that is too personal or makes you feel uncomfortable to talk about you can tell me that you would prefer not to talk about this issue. I will not be upset if you decide not to talk about a specific subject. I feel sincerely fortunate that you are willing to share your life with me.

Risks

There should be minimum risks for you participating in this project. You have the right to answer or decline any question if you would like. If you choose not to answer or participate in the interview, it will not affect your life in any way. Also, you can finish the interview at any time.

#### Benefits

There are no direct benefits to you. However, by sharing your experiences, you are allowing others to better understand life as an immigrant. I personally believe that it is important to share this part of immigration history that is not widely known or appreciated.

#### Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

When the results of the investigation are made public, the real names of the participants will not be used. With this in mind, I would ask you to be as honest and open as you feel comfortable being. Your experiences, your feelings, and your thoughts are what I am interested in, nothing else.

#### Freedom to Withdraw

You are free to withdraw from participation in this study at any time. In this case, just inform Señora Kris or myself that you do not want to participate in this study anymore. By signing this consent form you are verifying that you have read and understood the Informed Consent and the terms and conditions of this project. You are also saying that I answered any questions you might have had about the project and your participation. Finally, you accept that you are a voluntary participant; you have consented to let me use any information I obtained in my thesis and in any oral or written presentations, so long as your anonymity is protected. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw without any problem at any time. You will still be

welcome to participate in the *Crossing the Border, Closing the Gap* project with Señora Kris.

I thank you in advance for sharing your life, your story, and your feelings. Thank you again.

Signature, Date

Investigators: Marcela Uribe (540) 200-46-15

Dr. Gresilda Tilley-Lubbs (540) 774-9262

Chair IRB, Dr. David Moore. (540) 231-4991

## VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

## Documento de Consentimiento

**Título del proyecto:** ¿Qué es ser latina? La Identidad en las mujeres Mexicanas y México-Americanas.

**Investigadoras:** Marcela Uribe, Dra. Gresilda Tilley-Lubbs, Dr. David Moore.

**Me gustaría invitarla a participar en el proyecto de tesis que trata de la identidad en las mujeres mexicanas y México-Americanas. Antes que nada quiero agradecerle que usted acepte formar parte de este proyecto, ya que participando en él, usted de viva voz me provee de información que en ningún otro lugar puedo obtener.**

**Objetivos**

Para empezar quiero decirle que es muy importante para mí que usted acepte participar como voluntaria en este estudio. El principal objetivo de esta investigación es recuperar la experiencia de las mujeres mexicanas que han emigrado a los Estados Unidos y cómo esta experiencia ha cambiado su forma de vida. Este estudio lo llevo a cabo porque es parte de mi investigación de tesis, con la que pretendo obtener el título de maestría. Este estudio consta de dos partes. En la primera parte yo voy a entrevistarla para que usted me hable de cómo es su vida en los Estados Unidos, cómo era su vida en México y cómo piensa que ha cambiado usted en este tiempo. En la segunda parte, me gustaría que usted me permitiera estar un día completo en su vida. Usted no tiene que hacer nada diferente a lo que hace ahora sino simplemente permitirme estar con usted y saber como es un día en su vida y estar ahí como su “sombra”, de cerquita.

**Procedimientos**



Como le he dicho su papel en es estudio es que me permita entrevistarla. Así que para que yo pueda ponerle toda mi atención me gustaría poder grabar nuestra conversación. Yo sólo voy a utilizar esta cinta para poder pasar la entrevista en papel y luego yo le voy a entregar el casete para que usted haga lo que quiera con él. Así yo puedo estudiar y recordar todo lo que usted me diga. Para la entrevista me gustaría que usted escogiera un nombre diferente al suyo para que así haya absoluta discreción y guardemos completamente su identidad. Yo la voy a llamar por este nombre en la entrevista y este nombre también va a ser el que yo utilice en la tesis. Así nadie sabrá de quien estamos hablando.

Quizá tenga que entrevistarla dos o tres veces. Las entrevistas las podemos hacer en el tiempo que sea más conveniente para usted. Las podemos hacer en su casa o en donde usted se sienta más cómoda para que podamos platicar. El tiempo que duran las entrevistas es de una hora quince minutos a dos horas. En caso de que no terminemos la entrevista le pediré que nos volvamos a juntar para continuar y terminar. Siempre lo haremos en el tiempo que a usted le convenga.

En las entrevistas yo le voy a preguntar sobre su vida en México, cómo es su familia, qué hacía allá antes de venir a los Estados Unidos y después le pediré que compare cómo es su vida aquí. Yo quiero que siempre se sienta a gusto de compartir su vida conmigo y me puede contestar con tanto detalle como usted quiera. También me gustaría que me pregunte cuando no entienda la pregunta o el objetivo de la misma. Si yo le pregunto algo que le parece demasiado personal o si le molesta hablar de algo, puede decirme que prefiere no hablar de ese tema, sin ningún problema. Francamente me siento muy afortunada de que usted quiera compartir poco de su vida conmigo.

### Riesgos

No debe haber casi ningún riesgo para usted participar en este estudio. Usted tiene el derecho de no contestar cualquier pregunta si no quiere. Si usted escoge no contestar o decide no participar en las entrevistas esto no le va a afectar de ninguna manera. Usted puede terminar la entrevista en cualquier momento que quiera.

### Beneficios

No hay beneficios directos para usted excepto que me dará a mí, como mexicana, y a las personas de los Estados Unidos la oportunidad de compartir sus experiencias y su vida en este país. Así yo personalmente creo que se da a conocer una parte de la historia de la migración que muchas veces se desconoce.

### Límites del anonimato y la confidencialidad

Cuando los resultados de las investigaciones se hagan públicos, no se va a usar ningún nombre verdadero de ningún participante. Pensando en esto, yo le pido que usted sea tan honesta y abierta hasta donde se sienta a gusto. Lo que yo busco es que usted comparta conmigo sus experiencias, sus sentimientos y sus pensamientos, nada más.

Cuando yo comparta su historia con otra gente la voy a llamar por el nombre que usted escogió. Por ejemplo, yo diré <<María es de un pueblo de Jalisco, ella nació allí, pero se crió en la Ciudad de México. Ella siente nostalgia por haber dejado el país.>> Claro que María no es su verdadero nombre. Es importante aclarar que a pesar de todos mis esfuerzos por proteger su anonimato éste puede verse comprometido. Por mi parte yo no diré su verdadero nombre, ni compartiré ningún detalle que la comprometa.

### Libertad de retirarse del estudio

Usted se puede retirar de participar en este estudio cuando quiera, solamente le pido que me informe o le informe a la señora Kris de que usted ya no quiere participar. Al firmar abajo usted dice que leyó y entendió el permiso de autorización y las condiciones de este proyecto. También dice que se ha contestado cualquier duda que tenga sobre este proyecto y sobre su participación. Finalmente, usted acepta participar voluntariamente y me da su consentimiento. Si usted participa, puede retirarse del proyecto a cualquier hora sin ningún problema. Yo le agradezco de antemano esta oportunidad de conocer un poquito de su vida, sus sentimientos y su historia. Mil gracias.

Firma, fecha

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### Curriculum Vitae

Marcela Uribe, born in Mexico City in 1975, received her Bachelor's Degree in Latin American Studies at the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico (UNAM). At Virginia Tech she completed the program in Latin America Area Studies to receive a Master's of Arts in History. During her time as a master's student, Marcela served as a Graduate Teaching Assistant, as a Spanish Instructor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, teaching Elementary Spanish courses. Marcela is currently completing her Ph.D. in Education.