

From Migrant Work to Community Transformation: Families Forming Transnational Communities in Peribán and Pennsylvania¹

by Susan Rose and Sarah Hiller

Abstract All across America, Mexican (im)migrants are working and contributing to the economic, cultural, and political life of local communities on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border. While there are benefits for the migrating workers and their families, and for U.S. employers and consumers, circular migration comes with costs, especially to family life. While migration between Mexico and the U.S. has become an increasingly important economic strategy for

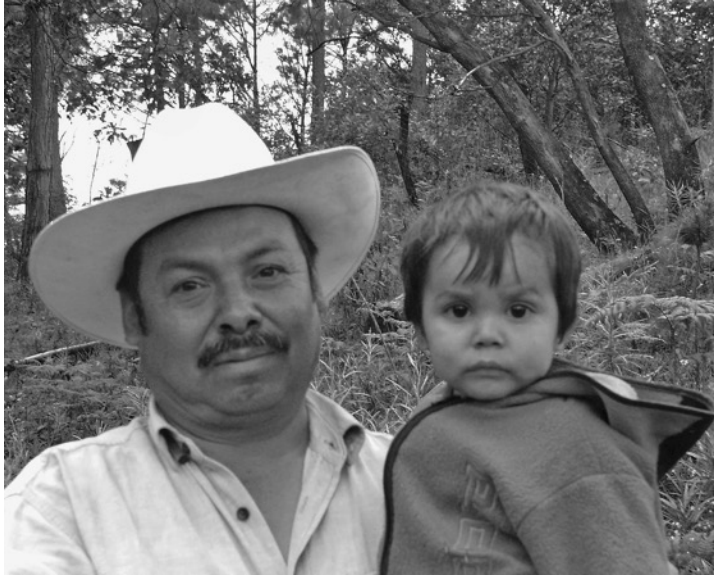
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Rumaldo, Sr. and grandson. Photo courtesy of the authors.

families, the very process that has provided for people's livelihoods has often torn families apart. Through oral histories with workers, farm owners, and government officials on both sides of the border, this paper explores the creation of transnational families and communities, and the consequences of circular migration for women, men, and children.

Keywords: transnational families, transnational communities, Mexican migration, circular migration, gender and migration

“The north has given me riches but it has robbed me of my husband.”

—MARGARITA

All across America, Mexican (im)migrants are working and contributing to the economic, cultural, and political life of local communities. While there are benefits for the migrating workers and their families, and for U.S. employers and consumers, circular migration is not uniformly experienced as a positive phenomenon, either by U.S. citizens—as evidenced by the

recent controversies over immigration policy—or by the workers themselves.² The process of circular migration comes with a toll, especially on family life. For the majority of Mexican migrant workers, “the divided household becomes a stable feature of their family life, characterized by a repetitive pattern of departures, remittances, and return visits.”³

Over the last century, migration between Mexico and the U.S. has become an increasingly important economic strategy for families on both sides of the border. Yet the very process that has provided for people’s livelihoods has often torn families apart. “The north has given me riches but it has robbed me of my husband,” laments Margarita, a young woman raising her children in Peribán, Mexico, while her husband works up north in Pennsylvania.⁴ Margarita feels loss as well as gain, and she recognizes her own and her community’s ambivalence about the impact of circular migration. Her desire for a higher standard of living, materially speaking, conflicts with her desire for a closer family life. She misses her husband, and the children miss their father whom they hardly know. While her husband may gain greater status in his home community upon returning home with savings from the U.S., he is likely to experience relatively lower status while in the U.S. Thus, the culture of migration creates contradictions for individual men and women, families, and communities on both sides of the Mexico-U.S. border. Drawing upon ethnographic research and a number of oral history interviews, this essay presents a mosaic of perspectives as it examines the impacts of circular migration and “settling in” on the development of transnational families and the consequences for family life and gender roles.

² Circular migration in this case refers to Mexican workers who come north to work for periods of time in the U.S. and then return to Mexico, and then back to the U.S. For some, this is a yearly phenomenon; others may stay for two to three years in the U.S., and then return home, and begin again.

³ Reanne Frank and Elizabeth Wildsmith, “The Grass Widows of Mexico: Migration and Union Dissolution in a Binational Context,” *Social Forces* 83, No. 3 (2005): 919–47.

⁴ Margarita, interview by Lisa Hohl, November 7, 2003, Peribán de Ramos.

A Short History of Mexican Migration

While Mexican migration can be, and often is, traced back to the loss of more than half of Mexico's territory to the U.S. after the Mexican-American War in 1848, migration from northern Mexico into the southwestern U.S. began in earnest in the late 1800s. Laborers were brought north to work on railroads that would span the continent from Atlantic to Pacific, contributing to the wealth and power of the U.S. Then as development continued, workers were needed in agriculture, cattle ranching, and mining. No one controlled the border, and people flowed unhindered between the two countries. A greater impetus for people to head northward was created by the extended period of violence, destruction, and political and economic instability that resulted from the Mexican Revolution, which lasted from approximately 1910 to 1920, and the counterrevolutionary *Cristero* wars which followed throughout the 1920s. The violence was most intense, and the movement of people greatest, in the western states of Mexico. If the threat of death and destruction at the hands of roaming bands of revolutionaries and federal soldiers was not enough for people caught in the crossfire, there was also the strong pull created by World War I. The U.S. started sending soldiers to fight in Europe, increasing the demand for workers to come north from Mexico to replace the dwindling native labor force. This resulted in the establishment of the first official labor program, now known informally as the first *Bracero* program.⁵

The war, however, was soon over, and nativism took hold in the U.S. A head tax was implemented in an attempt to control the infl of Mexican workers who were exempt from the immigrant quota laws passed by Congress at the time. These quotas were largely ineffective, however, because workers continued to be enticed northward, at times by companies who actively, and often illegally, contracted laborers. The Great Depression marked the first real effort to control migration; as unemployment skyrocketed, many contracted Mexican laborers were deported.⁶

⁵ Marilyn P. Davis, *Mexican Voices, American Dreams: An Oral History of Mexican Migration to the U.S.* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1990), 2-3.

⁶ Davis, 3.

This interruption in migration trends proved to be temporary, especially with the revitalization of the U.S. economy due to World War II. Demand for temporary, cheap labor from Mexico remained high throughout the war-related industrial boom and the growing economy of the post-war years. The *Bracero* Program, an agreement reached in 1942 between Mexico and the U.S., called for legally contracted laborers to come north to work seasonally, and then return to Mexico. It lasted until 1964, many more years than intended, kept alive by U.S. industrial and agricultural interests that grew to depend on the cheap labor. During this time, the defining characteristics of Mexican migration to the U.S. were formed; it became a temporary, economically driven migration. Men would leave their families for a few months, make more money in a week in the U.S. than they could in several months in Mexico, and then return before the holiday season began on the *Día de la Virgen de Guadalupe* [the day of the Virgin of Guadalupe] on December 12. They would leave again shortly after the New Year and the *Día de Los Reyes* [the Feast of the Three Kings] on January 6. In total, 4.8 million laborers participated in the program over its twenty-two-year duration.⁷ Due to the fact that the legitimate *braceros* were household heads and their movement across the border was unimpeded due to the papers they carried, it is presumed that most of them returned home at the end of their assignment. However, illegal migration still occurred during the *bracero* years, and many *braceros* continued to go north illegally after the program ended.⁸ The *braceros* proved to be instrumental in setting the stage for the entrenchment of migration as a legitimate economic strategy in Mexico.

Although the program ended in 1964, the movement of people gained momentum. Border control and deportation efforts increased dramatically, especially with the implementation of “Operation Wetback,” which took its name from a popular racial slur of the time (derived from people getting wet backs from crossing the Rio Grande). While it was designed to seek out and deport undocumented workers, it was no match

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Deborah Cohen, “Masculinity and Social Visibility: Migration, State Spectacle, and the Making of the Mexican Nation,” *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe* 16, No. 1 (Jan.–Jun. 2005), http://www.tau.ac.il/eial/XVI_1/cohen.html (accessed June 1, 2006).

for the laws of supply and demand. Mexico's best resource at that time, besides perhaps oil, was the number of workers it had to offer. Mexico had suffered high unemployment throughout the century, especially during the 1970s and 1980s, due to a burgeoning population and a stagnating economy. Thus, the government came to view migration as a safety valve; migrants who found work on the other side of the border would lower domestic competition for jobs and also ameliorate the dissatisfaction of the citizenry with the deeply entrenched, corrupt ruling party, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI).

The year 1986 brought landmark legislation in the form of the U.S. Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) which granted legal status through amnesty to about three million undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. at the time.⁹ While the Act was accompanied by more stringent restrictions on employers to prevent them from hiring undocumented workers, it proved to be highly ineffective. Since the 1986 amnesty, rates of illegal immigration from Mexico have continued to climb. This is partially due to the consolidation of transnational community networks created by the legalization of such a large number of immigrants. Giving undocumented workers legal status enabled them to establish themselves more permanently, look for better jobs, provide a more stable and protected environment for family members and friends migrating from Mexico, and even directly aid them in crossing the border.¹⁰

Increased militarization of the border between the U.S. and Mexico characterized the 1990s. In 1993, "Operation Gatekeeper" was initiated under the Clinton administration. Followed by a policy of "prevention through deterrence," the immigration control program significantly increased funding for the Border Patrol and concentrated efforts on strategic portions of the border.¹¹ This pushed up the costs of contracting

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Wayne A. Cornelius, "Impacts of the 1986 U.S. Immigration Law on Emigration from Rural Mexican Sending Communities," *Population and Development Review* 15, No. 4 (December 1989): 692–95.

¹¹ Wayne A. Cornelius, "Death at the Border: Efficacy and Unintended Consequences of U.S. Immigration Control Policy," *Population and Development Review* 27, No. 4 (December 2001): 662.

a *coyote* [a guide who arranges and leads illegal border crossings], and shifted the flow of people towards dangerous portions of the desert in the U.S. southwest, increasing the hardships undocumented migrants endured. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, migration patterns started to show signs of change. Earlier that year, the administrations of George W. Bush and Vicente Fox discussed the possibility of another measure of amnesty but nothing came of it after the attacks. Recently, the issue of border control has resurfaced, with Bush championing a plan of increased border control that includes building a large fence or wall, harsher and better enforcement of the restrictions on employers who use undocumented labor, and a guest worker program allowing participants three years to work in the U.S.¹² The proposed program stipulates that work visas will only be issued upon a migrant worker's return to Mexico. However, if the availability of work permits does not match the number of people in Mexico who want to come to the U.S., then illegal migration will continue. Although there are now three times as many border agents as there were in 1986, with a budget increase of 1000%, and an increase in the number of apprehensions, there is also an increase in the number of overall migrants coming across the border.¹³

The prospective failure of this initiative is of great concern to both countries. Currently, there are believed to be ten to eleven million Mexican nationals living in the U.S.¹⁴ That figure represents one out of every ten Mexicans, and does not include children who were born in the U.S. to Mexican citizens. To put this in perspective, between 1995 and 2004, the

¹² David Stout, "At Rio Grande, Bush Stresses Border Security," *New York Times*, November 29, 2005.

¹³ "Come Hither," *The Economist* 377, Issue 8455 (London), December 3, 2005, http://www.economist.com/world/na/displaystory.cfm?story_id=5249522 (accessed May 29, 2006).

¹⁴ Kevin O'Neil, Kimberly Hamilton and Demetrios Papademetriou, "Migration in the Americas" (paper presented to Policy Analysis and Research Programme of the Global Commission on International Migration, Washington, D.C.: Migration Policy Institute, 2005), <http://www.gcim.org/attachements/RS1.pdf> (accessed May 29, 2006).

U.S. allowed 1,570,470 Mexican nationals to migrate legally.¹⁵ Approximately 350,000 to 500,000 illegal immigrants cross the border between the U.S. and Mexico each year;¹⁶ over the same nine-year-period, anywhere from 3.2 to 4.2 million people migrated illegally. Increased migration has been strengthened by transnational communities, which function as a support system for newly arrived migrants, despite greater efforts on the U.S.-Mexican border to keep undocumented migrants out.

The Mexican Migration Mosaic

Working the Apples in Adams County, Pennsylvania

In order to better understand the lives of Mexican migrant workers and their families, the patterns of circular migration, and community reception in central Pennsylvania, faculty at Dickinson College designed a semester-long Mexican Migration Mosaic Project that engaged three professors and twenty-one students in ethnographic fieldwork and oral history interviewing. In the beginning of the fall 2003 semester, we met with a number of Mexican seasonal migrant workers and Mexicans who had begun to settle in nearby small towns. Interested in the patterns of community transformation, Mexican migration and settlement, labor and ethnic relations, and family and educational issues, we interviewed Mexican seasonal migrant workers who lived in the camps and worked in the orchards; crew leaders; farm owners; Mexicans seeking year-round work; their Anglo neighbors; clergy; government, health, and school officials and school teachers.

Our preliminary investigations in the first Mexican Migration Mosaic in 1998 led us to expand the study and add an international component to the 2003 Mosaic. By tracking where money orders were sent from the local Mexican store, participants in the 1998 Mosaic discovered that the majority of the Mexicans living in York Springs, now representing 25% of the total population of 581 residents,¹⁷ came from the town of Peribán

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *2004 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2006), 12.

¹⁶ "Decapitating the Snakeheads," *The Economist* 377, Issue 8447 (London), October 8, 2005, http://www.economist.com/opinion/displaystory.cfm?story_id=4488653 (accessed May 29, 2006).

¹⁷ U.S. Census 2000.

in the highlands of Michoacán. So, as the fall harvest came to its end, the Mosaic research team left Adams County and headed south for Peribán for the month of November. The interviewing process followed the movement of people and became circular as well.¹⁸ By the end of 2003, we had conducted eighty-seven video and audio-taped interviews. We also had informal conversations with some fifty migrant workers, most of whom were undocumented. Because of their immigration status, we only took handwritten notes of those conversations and used either first names only or pseudonyms, depending on the preference of the person.

Adams County

Adams County is a unique location for studying the lives of Mexicans working in the U.S., for unlike California, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, or other regions well known as destinations for immigrants from Latin America, Pennsylvania does not share a border with Mexico. It never was a part of the Mexican Republic, nor does it have a large pre-existing Spanish-speaking or Native American population, nor a long history of relations between Anglo Americans and Mexican Americans. Thus, we were able to work with a relatively new ethnic community which is in the process of negotiating its place within the culture of a region of the U.S. that, for the most part, is new territory.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Adams County has a population of 91,292, with 87,088 (95.4%) whites, 1,105 blacks, 448 Asians, and 3,323 (3.6%) Latinos. The majority of the native-born population is of German, English, or Irish background. The Latino population has been growing steadily in the last decade. In 1990, the Census recorded only 1,216 Latinos in Adams County; by the year 2000 that number had tripled. Of the 3.6% of the population that is Latino, 72% (2,366) are of Mexican origin.¹⁹

¹⁸We began interviewing people in the camps and in York Springs in September and October 2003 and then went down to Peribán de Ramos for the month of November. There we contacted and interviewed the families of those whom we had interviewed in Pennsylvania. In the process, we met more and more people who had relatives and friends living in York Springs. Many of them also wanted to send food, photos and video-taped messages up to their friends and families in Pennsylvania, so when we returned in late November, we were able to meet additional people in York Springs.

¹⁹U.S. Census 2000.



Apple pickers and bins in Adams County. Photo courtesy of the authors.

Some former Mexican migrant workers have decided to settle in the small towns that dot the county, particularly in municipalities such as Biglersville, York Springs, and Gettysburg. They, in turn, support other family members who come to work in area factories and restaurants. These more permanent residents are in the process of establishing a transnational Mexican community in Adams County, a development that has introduced the region to new degrees of linguistic, racial, religious, and cultural diversity. For this reason, the region provides a rich site for students interested in learning about ethnicity and multiculturalism in the U.S.

Agriculture

Our supermarkets are filled with glistening produce: crisp green lettuce, glowing red tomatoes, juicy pink melons. Like so many consumer products, fruits and vegetables appear before us as if by magic, ready to be selected, purchased, and brought home to eat. While we know these products come from somewhere, that they are grown, harvested, and shipped to the stores where we buy them, few people realize that virtually every vegetable and piece of fruit we eat was handpicked by a farm worker, a member of our nation's poorest and most disadvantaged class of laborers.²⁰

²⁰ Daniel Rothenberg, *With These Hands: The Hidden World of Migrant Farmworkers Today* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), xvii.

Hidden from view in the 20,000 acres of rich Adams County farmland are the people who hand-pick the peaches, pears, and apples. Row upon row of trees laden with yellow Golden Delicious, red MacIntosh, and green Granny Smith apples can be seen as one drives along Pennsylvania Routes 34 and 94 in the fall, on the way to Gettysburg or Washington, D.C. While the fruits of their labor are visible, the migrant workers who pick and prune the fruit people buy at roadside stands and supermarkets are virtually invisible.

Through the 1950s, white natives of the area, mainly descendants of German and Scots-Irish settlers, worked the orchards. By the 1960s, however, mostly African Americans, Puerto Ricans, Haitians, and Jamaicans came to work the fields. Today, the vast majority of seasonal farm laborers are of Mexican origin. Many work a circular migrant route, starting the year in Florida picking citrus fruit and strawberries, then moving up to North Carolina for tobacco and to New Jersey in early June to pick blueberries, and finally to Pennsylvania to pick apples in late summer and early fall. Adams County's leading industry is agriculture, boasting 1,300 farms/orchards in a 526 square mile rural area. From July to late October, the average farm worker fills eighty to one hundred bags of apples daily, each weighing forty-five pounds. This adds up to eight to ten bushels a day. They are paid by the bushel, and earn an average wage of between \$250 and \$300 a week, working from 6:00 or 7:00 a.m. until 5:00 or 6:00 p.m. The average work week is ten to twelve hours a day, six days a week. The work is intense: there is no overtime nor health benefits, and the availability and conditions of work are subject to the weather and the quality of a given year's crops. In the evening, laborers return to camps that rest at the edges of the orchards.

The 100 or so migrant camps in Adams County are difficult to see, or to find, even if one is looking for them. They are tucked away: trailer camps, concrete, bunker-like buildings with dormitory-style living arrangements or cots separated by curtains, and houses that provide lodging for hundreds of people each summer and fall. Most of the camps have collective kitchens. In some cases, the men cook their own individual meals of rice and beans, chicken or pork, and tortillas; in other cases they take turns cooking or one person serves as the resident

cook who prepares meals for everyone. In most cases, only housing for single men is provided by the orchard owners, although a few provide housing for families. The insurance costs and liability that come with having children in or near the orchards has increasingly discouraged this practice over the past ten to fifteen years. Among the ten camps we visited, housing some 400 people, only six women were present. Two of the six women worked in the fields; the others stayed in the camps with the children.

Farm Owners' Perspectives

Most of the fruits that are picked are “highly perishable [and] their production is seasonal and dependent upon a variety of unpredictable factors.”²¹ The success or failure of most fruit and vegetable operations, therefore, rests upon the availability of harvest workers. As Thomas Oyler, a farm owner and the Pennsylvania Regional Director for the Department of Agriculture, remarked in an interview, “Perishable fruit doesn’t take holidays, which is why there is a sense of urgency to harvest when the fruit is ready.”²²

Oyler explained why his family hired migrant laborers:

We are sometimes, as an industry, criticized for creating an environment where [migrant workers] are coming to south central Pennsylvania. We used to have a lot of tart cherries and they were hand-harvested. It was done by high school kids and grade school kids. We had a lot of kids picking cherries for us who were making school money, clothes money, spending money and vacation money for approximately four weeks in July. Well, somewhere along the way America became more affluent, and kids stopped showing up for sour cherry [harvest]. It was a phase of about ten years [in the mid 1960s to the mid 1970s], where we went from basically all local individuals to a total migrant or seasonal population harvesting cherries.

As Oyler recalled, “There was a transition from Southern blacks to Puerto Ricans and that was in the ’50s and ’60s.” Poor ethnic and racial minorities were the only ones willing to do farm labor, at least for the low wage being offered. Farm owner Jim Lott, agrees: “There ain’t anybody else who’s gonna do the

²¹ Ibid., 17.

²² Thomas Oyler, interview by Kirstin Berg, fall 2003, Adams County, PA.

work . . . You can't go down . . . and get a bunch of fifteen to twenty-five-year-olds who are gonna pick."²³ According to Oyler, it all comes down to one fact: "[We've] had it too good for too long [and] the Mexican population sees that as a way to make some good bucks and they're not afraid of hard work; that's the reality of it."²⁴

The U.S. farm labor system is a profitable industry that now requires temporary workers who are willing to do hard, manual labor for a cheap price in order to keep prices down and sales up. "Reducing the labor costs is one of the main points [in fruit farming]. We'll never get rid of the picking by hand [because] the land is too uneven and a lot of [picking] is done by sight and you have to be gentle."²⁵ According to Jim Lott, foreign migrant labor has become a necessity for the farming industry. "If these guys don't show up one year I'm sunk," Jim Lott explained. Without the migrant workers, "I can't provide for my family."

Cheap labor and cheap foods in the U.S., however, come at a price—not to the average American consumer—but to the Mexican men and women who are separated from their families upon migrating to the U.S. to earn money. Tim Sadler, former pastor at the York Springs Lutheran Church reflected:

What I've experienced [with Mexicans] is a deeply rooted family structure that is torn apart by immigration laws, by American society. We want the cheap labor and we'll close our eyes to whatever it takes to get that and then after that, whenever they have to go back to help a relative or to try to bring a relative back or a loved one, we're very quick in making sure the laws are put into place.²⁶

Many, including both Pennsylvania employers and Mexican workers, recognize the value of Mexican migrant work, which is often exploited to the benefit of others.

Migrant Worker Perspectives

I know [Anglo-] Saxons won't pick the fruit. It would go to the ground—the industry, the apple industry without the Mexicans will

²³ Jim Lott, interview by Kirstin Berg, fall 2003, Adams County, PA.

²⁴ Oyler, 2003.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Timothy Sadler, pastor at the Lutheran Church in York Springs, interview by Marjorie Hatch and Lisa Hohl, October 20, 2003.

be zero, be bankrupt. And you know and I know and the farmers know for a fact that the apple industry . . . depends on migrants, on Mexican pickers. Everybody knows that. They don't say it, but it's the fact. And this year some of the farmers found that out the hard way—that without the Mexicans, they go bankrupt.²⁷

Carlos first came to pick fruit in the U.S. in 1957 at the age of seventeen. With the exception of four years he spent shrimp fishing, he has worked picking fruit or asparagus in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. He married an American woman and now has made his home base in Florida. For the last thirty-four years, however, Carlos has been coming to the same camp in Adams County for the summer and fall to work the orchards, and he has been bringing groups of laborers with him since 1970. According to Carlos, conditions are much better now than they used to be, and they are better in the Pennsylvania orchards than in most other states where he has worked. But Carlos remembers a time when there was no hot water or indoor plumbing, and men slept outside in the orchards because they were afraid of immigration officers who would raid the camps at night:

It's a lot better than what it used to be, but it's, it's not what we wish. You know, that used to be very bad over here. Back in the '60s or '50s when I came over here, the housing conditions were terrible. We had no heat in the rooms. We [didn't] have no toilet facilities and sometimes we had no running water. It was terrible back then, but now it's a lot better, but not as good as we deserve. Should be better. Now the people, at least they have hot water, toilet facilities and blankets. It's improvement but I think it could be better.

Carlos believes the U.S. government could help the farmers more:

They could help them build places for us. We work . . . and they need us over here. The farmers need us, the industry needs us. And, I wish the federal government [would] step in and say, "well these guys, you know, they deserve it. [They're] workers and they should have a better place to live." Something has to be done about it cuz a lot of places—this is not the worst place—I mean this is one of the best places in the county. But a lot of places have small farms where they have four or five guys in a small room. It's still pitiful in some places.

²⁷ Carlos is a supervisor of farm workers in an Adams County Orchard. Interview by Angela Reynolds, fall 2000, Adams County. The following information is based on interviews of Carlos by Angela Reynolds in 2000, and by Susan Rose and Sarah Hiller in fall 2003.

Carlos spent seven years picking fruit and then became the supervisor for the camp. He does not like the label of foreman or crew leader, although he recruits, transports, and supervises people—showing them where to pick on a particular day:

I supervise the guys so they do a good job about [not] bruising and leaving fruit on the trees. And also, I tell them where to [pick]; the farmer tell[s] me that he needs so many on this orchard and I send them [to] wherever he wants them to go.

At my age, you know I'm sixty-four years old, I'm still doing it like anybody else can do it. But it's hard work . . . If you're working eight or nine hours a day, it shows. It shows on your body. If you pick apples . . . you have to carry a forty-five pound bag of fruit, plus what the bushel weighs. And if you pick ten bins, that makes 250 bushels times forty. That's the amount of pounds you get on your back every day. It's not very easy to do. We use ladders to climb up the trees. You need to know how to do it because you just cannot bring anybody from the street and say go ahead and pick this tree. It takes a while to understand how to move the ladder and how to carry bags. All the fruit's picked by hand—without bruising them. And the ones picked for processing cannot be bruised very much either [or it has to be] cut out; [the farmers] get paid less money for bruised fruit than what they get paid for nice fruit. When you pick apples for fresh fruit they have to be bruise-free because those apples, they are going to storage [and with] bad fruit, in two or three months, it's gonna be spoiled. So you have to be very careful. I think last year we pick[ed] about 200,080,000 bushels of apples, pears, nectarines, and peaches.

We usually have between forty to fifty workers, [but] there was a shortage of labor last year [2002] around the county. There's a man, our neighbor, he lost quite a few apples that went to the ground because there were not enough pickers to get it. It's hard work but yeah, I love it. I like to work in the orchards. There's a lot of things that people complain about it, like gnats or mosquitoes, stuff like that. That don't bother me, gnats don't bother me. The heat doesn't bother me. I don't know. I have to work. I can't just go inside and watch TV and stuff, I can't do it. I'm active. I play basketball, volleyball, baseball, whatever . . . I can't be sitting down. [Most of the year] I live in Florida. I have forty bushes of roses, and I go and check on my roses to see how they [are] doing during the day. I talk to them, I prune them, I spray them and I cut them and I graft them—you name it, I do it. I'm an active man, I don't like to sit around. When I die, I'll have enough time to lay down.²⁸

²⁸ Carlos, 2000.

Many of the migrant workers expressed similar motivations for coming to Pennsylvania to work: to help support their families and especially to make life better for their children. The men we talked with ranged in age from sixteen to sixty-four, though most were in their twenties and thirties.

I crossed first twelve years ago. I left my family, my new baby, my wife. After years of going back and forth, I decided to return to Mexico. I could not take being away for so long. My two boys are now ten and eleven. I want a better life for them. A better life in Mexico—they can't come here. I won't let them. I had to leave [Mexico] again. The work here in Pennsylvania is good. They pay well here, and I can make a better life. I left my boys, my wife to work in orchards. It's not easy work, but I do it well. I know my boss, he treats me decent. But this last time—I feared I'd never see my family again.

I crossed with other men I didn't know. They weren't from around me, we were too different. We walked through 106 degree heat. We crossed during a storm. We found which roads they didn't check for papers—since none of us were legal. I carried the tank of gasoline. We needed it for food. One night, I went to light it, and it exploded right in my face. I was sure I was dead and that I would never see my boys again, my wife, my home.

It's lonely here. There's not much around. I miss my family, my home. But I must provide for them. I am their father. It is my job. And so, I must cross. I must cross so that I can give them what they want, what they need. And I know I am taking care of them.²⁹

Migrant Work: From Peribán to Pennsylvania

In the municipalities of the western state of Michoacán, migration permeates all aspects of life. Michoacán is one of the top three states which sends migrants to the U.S.; in 2000, 9.4 percent of the state's population migrated.³⁰ Most migrant workers do not intend to stay in the U.S.; rather, they plan to come to work, save money, and return home to build their homes and lives there. One of the primary communities sending Mexican workers to central Pennsylvania is Peribán de Ramos (population 11,200).

²⁹ Anonymous interview with an undocumented farm worker by Joanna Sullivan, October 2003, Adams County.

³⁰ Gustavo López, "Presentación del programa de investigación sobre migraciones en el Colmich" (Colegio de Michoacán, Zamora, Michoacán, Mexico, November 19, 2003).

The town serves as the county seat of the municipality of Peribán (population 25,000), an agricultural region that produces avocados and a wide range of fruits and vegetables.

In addition to the mass migration from Peribán that began in the 1940s with the *Bracero* Program, the volcanic eruption of Paricutín in 1943 stimulated further migration. The program was mutually beneficial; it helped alleviate the labor shortages in the U.S. and supported Mexicans trying to recover from the devastating natural disaster. Paricutín had destroyed much of the farm land and displaced thousands of people. Before the agricultural potential of the volcanic ash that fertilized the soil for avocado production was realized, the unemployment levels had become insurmountable. Guillen Franco, President of the Municipality of Peribán, described the response to the economic crisis of the time: “Everyone went to the U.S., to the center of the republic or to other big cities.”³¹

For example, Rogelio who was born in Peribán in 1938, was five years old the year his father passed away and Paricutín erupted (a connection he makes as a man of sixty-five looking back on his losses). In 1956, at the age of eighteen, he went to the U.S.—to Chicago—as a *bracero*. There he began working for the Western Electric Company, moving up in the company as he learned more English. The job was not permanent, however, like most of the jobs available to Mexicans in the U.S. For many years he went back and forth between Peribán and the U.S. until he was unable to because, as a result of nerve damage caused from a work-related injury, he was confined to a wheelchair. He now lives in an apartment near the plaza in Peribán de Ramos with his sister.

Historians generally agree that the *Bracero* Program “helped to establish the major contours of modern Mexican migratory flows.”³² The Mexican laborers worked intensely and spent little of the money they earned in the U.S. because their priority was to improve their standard of living at home. It was

³¹ Fernando Guillen Franco, interview by Robert Shaw and Marcelo Borges, November 10, 2003, Presidente’s Retreat, Peribán.

³² Manuel García y Griego, “The Importation of Mexican Contract Laborers to the U.S., 1942–1964,” in David Gutierrez, ed., *Between Two Worlds: Mexican Immigrants in the U.S.* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1996), 45–85.

about earning in dollars and spending in pesos upon their return to Mexico.³³

Today Peribán continues to experience steady out- and circular-migration. Kandel and Massey argue that, “As migratory behavior extends throughout a community, it increasingly enters the calculus of conscious choice and eventually becomes normative.”³⁴ While economics is still the driving force, many young men experience migration as a rite of passage to manhood as well as a means of making money; it has become “the thing to do.”³⁵ This was certainly the case for Javier, a sixteen-year-old whom we met in Peribán in November 2003. He wanted to do what his older brothers had done—go to Pennsylvania: “It’s just something I have to do. Something I have to see and experience,” he said.

Migration from Peribán has become accepted as an economic strategy and way of life; a “culture of circular migration” has developed. Many young men see migration as a normative part of the life course, a coming-of-age ritual, as well as a way of contributing to their family’s well-being and fulfilling a man’s responsibility to his family. Although most of the men we interviewed said that there are jobs available in Peribán, they explain that those jobs pay only enough to cover daily expenses. An abundant amount of farm work, such as avocado picking and packing, can be found in Peribán, but those are subsistence-level jobs. Therefore, migration to the U.S. remains one of the few options available to those who wish to improve their economic status. The President of the Municipality of Peribán de Ramos, who is also the owner of several avocado orchards, estimated the average weekly pay for an avocado picker at 200 pesos a week—about \$18.³⁶ Newspaper reporter, Israel Estrada, gave a slightly

³³ Jorge Durand, “Circuitos Migratorios,” in Thomas Clavo and Gusavo López Castro, eds., *Movimientos de población en el occidente de México* (Mexico: Centro de Estudios Mexicanos y Centroamericanos, El Colegio de Michoacán, 1988), 25–49.

³⁴ William Kandel and Douglas Massey, “The Culture of Mexican Migration: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis,” *Social Forces* 80, No. 3 (2002): 981–1004.

³⁵ Douglas Massey, Luin Goldring, and Jorge Durand, “Continuities in Transnational Migration: An Analysis of Nineteen Mexican Communities,” *American Journal of Sociology* 99 (May 1994): 1492–533; see also Jennifer S. Hirsch, *A Courtship After Marriage: Sexuality and Love in Mexican Transnational Families* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).

³⁶ Guillen Franco, 2003.

higher figure of about 350 pesos per week—approximately \$31 per week.³⁷ Some of the best paying work available to the unskilled labor force in Peribán is found in the packing plants, although the total number of plant employees pales in comparison to the number of laborers in the avocado fields. Fidel Caballero, an *empacadora* [packing plant] owner, stated that the average pay for his packers is about 1050 pesos, approximately \$94 per week.

Jobs in Adams County pay more, even in the low paid agricultural sector. Average pay for fruit pickers was about \$250 per week in 2003. According to interviews with some migrant workers in ten different camps in Adams County and from work-history data collected by Adams County Rural Opportunities Incorporated (ROI), the average paycheck of a farm laborer did not vary greatly from Florida to New Jersey to Pennsylvania.³⁸ According to these figures (comparing high-end estimates from Peribán and low-end from Pennsylvania), migrant workers picking fruit in the Pennsylvania orchards can average fourteen times as much as those picking avocados in Peribán, and two and a half times as much as those packing fruit in Mexico.³⁹

As a consequence, out-migration remains a characteristic feature of many towns in Peribán. Several local government officials estimated that 20–30% of the population of Peribán may be living in the U.S.⁴⁰ Many migrants from Peribán hope

³⁷ Israel Estrada, interview by Robert Shaw, Kjell Enge and Marcelo Borges, November 12, 2003, Peribán.

³⁸ From pay stubs provided by migrant workers in Pennsylvania, we discovered that similar wages can be found picking oranges in Florida and cherries in New Jersey during different seasons. A number of us accompanied the staff of Rural Opportunities Inc., a service organization for migrants in Adams County, to register migrant workers so they could benefit from ROI's services and the organization could maintain its funding. The registration forms required a work history for the previous year, and some migrants provided pay stubs to show a weekly estimate.

³⁹ Most of those employed in the packing plants in Pennsylvania are white and African American women.

⁴⁰ This figure is provided by the Mexican Government 2000 census information. It is highly likely that this information includes some or all of the migrant population. It is probable that the government of the municipality encouraged families to include those in the U.S., for the purposes of national aid. Furthermore, from the employment information gathered at the same time, the workforce is only 6,617 people out of 11,500 aged 14–64. (Guillen Franco, *Informal Conversation with Robert Shaw*, November 10, 2003; Alfonso Vazquez, *Informal Conversation with Robert Shaw*, November 17, 2003 (Government Officials)).

to work in the U.S., send some money home to their families, and earn enough to be able to pay for medical needs and other necessities, such as improving their houses in Mexico by adding windows or concrete floors. The opportunity to earn money in the U.S. is attractive, despite the investment necessary to migrate to the U.S. There are hefty visa fees, and paying for a *coyote*, a person who arranges and leads illegal border crossings, can easily cost up to \$2000–\$3000 (in 2003) and up to \$5000 (in 2005), with no guarantee of a safe crossing.

As people circulate between towns and cities in the U.S. and Mexico, so does information, goods, customs, money, and culture. As a result, communities on both sides of the border are becoming increasingly transnational. By this we mean that many migrants and immigrants are building “social fields that cross geographic, cultural and political borders . . . an essential element [of which] is the multiplicity of involvements that transmigrants sustain in both home and host societies.”⁴¹ While Mexican immigration to the U.S. has a long history of people and goods moving back and forth between countries, the development of the term “transnational” is useful in distinguishing what is new about these communities. Studies have shown that the numbers of people involved in transnational activities—economic, political, religious, and social—represent a significant proportion of the population of both sending and receiving communities.⁴² Moreover, the nearly instantaneous communication facilitated by e-mail, Instant Messenger, landline and cellular telephones, and inexpensive and accessible transportation means that people remain closely connected in spite of great physical distance. Today’s migrants and immigrants are able to move more fluidly between countries and become involved in both locales simultaneously. These

⁴¹ Linda G. Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (New York: Gordon and Breach Publishers, 1994), 6.

⁴² Alejandro Portes, “Immigration Theory for a New Century: Some Problems and Opportunities,” *International Immigration Review* 31, No. 4 (Winter 1997): 799–825; Basch et al., *Nations Unbound*; Jorge Durand and Douglas Massey, “Mexican Migration to the U.S.: A Critical Review,” *Latin American Research Review* 27, No. 2 (1992): 3–42.

“distant proximities,” as James Rosenau refers to them, serve to both fragment and integrate relationships within and beyond community borders.⁴³

“The cumulative character of the process [of circular migration] makes participation ‘normative’ within certain immigrant groups.”⁴⁴ Certainly this is the case with Mexican migrants. In the process, migrant-sending communities are becoming “transnational localities” where migrants are “always present,” even in their absence.⁴⁵ All of the families we talked with in Peribán had at least one immediate family member who had gone north to work; most had multiple family members across at least four generations who had done so. For generations, families at home have felt the absences of parents, husbands, children, brothers and sisters—and anxiously awaited word about how they were doing: whether they crossed the border successfully, whether they had found work, and whether and when they would return. Some awaited financial support; approximately 7.1 percent of families in Peribán de Ramos receive remittances, with one-third of them completely dependent on them.⁴⁶

The impact of circular migration on the sending communities is mixed. Rafael Alarcón has written about the “north-ernization” of sending towns which are inflamed by a range of material goods and customs from the U.S.⁴⁷ For example, a few years ago officials and teachers in Peribán de Ramos became increasingly concerned about the creeping influences of U.S. Halloween customs. School and government

⁴³ James N. Rosenau, *Distant Proximities: Dynamics beyond Globalization* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

⁴⁴ Alejandro Portes, “Immigration Theory for a New Century: Some Problems and Opportunities,” *International Immigration Review* 31, No. 4 (Winter 1997): 799–825.

⁴⁵ Robert Smith, “Transnational Localities,” *Journal of Urban and Comparative Research* 3 (1998): 196–240.

⁴⁶ Gustavo, interview by Susan Rose and Marcelo Borges, October 30, 2003, Peribán; Casimiro Leco, “Migración Purhépecha a las montañas de Carolina,” (Colegio de Michoacán (Colmich), Zamora, Michoacán, November 19, 2003).

⁴⁷ Rafael Alarcón, “Transnational Communities, Regional Development, and the Future of Mexican Immigration,” *Berkeley Planning Journal* 10 (1995): 36–54; and “El proceso de norteamericanización: impacto de la migración internacional en Chavinda, Michoacán,” in Thomas Calvo and Gustavo López, *Movimientos de población en el Occidente de México* (Michoacán: Centre d’Études-Mexicaines et Centraméricaines/El Colegio de Michoacán, 1988), 337–59.

offi decided to initiate a town-wide *Día de los Muertos* [All Souls Day] festival at the high school. Three days before All Souls Day, parents and students at the local school went to extravagant lengths to display customs from all over the state of Michoacán for *Día de los Muertos*. The evening included dancing, music, and elaborately prepared food served in different outdoor *cantinas*. Mock graves were erected, candles lit, and people kneeled and prayed. All this was an effort to preserve the ancestral traditions of *Día de los Muertos* and to combat the more consumerist “Trick or Treat” customs and costumes brought back from migrants living in the U.S.

Settling In: Formation of Mexican Satellite Communities in Adams County

Since the beginning of the 1990s, an increasing number of Mexicans have been able to find year-round work in Adams County. While the fruit processing plants tend to hire mainly white and African American women, the Penn Poultry Chicken and Egg Plant and the Hanover Pretzel Plant have hired many Mexican workers. The workers are now, as a result, settling for longer periods of time in towns such as York Springs, Idaville, Biglerville, and Gettysburg. A few of them have been there for eight to ten years, established families, and sent their children to local public schools. Most, however, have been residents for only a couple of years, and others for just a few months or weeks. Most of these short-term arrivals are either single men or married men who have left their wives and children behind in Mexico. If they are able to save enough money, they may return to Mexico for fiesta time at Christmas or Easter each year; they may work for two to three years and then return to Mexico for a few months vacation, or they may decide to stay in Mexico.

A key element in the creation of satellite communities is the ability of Mexicans to create “mini Peribáns,” commonly referred to as “*Peribancitos*.”⁴⁸ In the small town of York Springs, Mexican residents can go to Lua’s Mexican Store to buy Mexican

⁴⁸This term is commonly used in Peribán de Ramos by almost everyone when they are referring to communities in the U.S. where many from Peribán have settled.

products, many of which come all the way from Mexico, send remittances home, and gather in a comfortable space where Spanish is spoken. Established in 1994, Lua's serves as a reminder of, link to, and provider of things from home, as well as a stable place within the York Springs community where messages can be sent and received. The majority of the store customers are Mexican but a few Anglos stop by now and then.

A pattern of chain migration has clearly been established, with family members recruiting or following other family members, especially younger brothers following older brothers who are able to take them in until they find work and their own place. The people we interviewed tended to maintain frequent (weekly or monthly) contact with their families in Peribán, and an informal network has been established where potential migrants receive information about work opportunities in Pennsylvania and the latest conditions and problems crossing the border. Such interpersonal networks are a major source of social capital, which prospective migrants can draw upon to migrate, find jobs, and housing in the U.S.⁴⁹ Considerable sums of money are also sent back to Mexico, on average about \$187 per migrant worker per month. Some migrants are having new homes constructed in their home villages with earnings from the U.S. Such is the case of Martín and Blanca, the first of a series of case studies that illuminate both the diversity and commonality of people who are living their lives on both sides of the border.

Case Studies

Blanca and Martín: A Marriage Made in York Springs

Blanca crossed the border in 1996 with six female relatives.⁵⁰ She was twenty-two, and came as a single woman, both

⁴⁹ See Michael Aguilera and Douglas Massey, "Social Capital and the Wages of Mexican Migrants: New Hypotheses and Tests," *Social Forces* 82, No. 2 (2003): 671–701; Douglas Massey and Kristin Espinosa, "What's Driving Mexico-U.S. Migration? A Theoretical, Empirical, and Policy Analysis," *American Journal of Sociology* 102 (1997): 939–99.

⁵⁰ According to S.A. Kossoudji and S.I. Ranney, "The Labor Market Experience of Female Migrants: The Case of Temporary Mexican Migration to the U.S." *International Migration Review* XVIII, No. 4 (1984): 1120–44, it was not until the 1970s that effective women-to-women networks were consolidated.

to escape a difficult family situation and to help out her mother and siblings, the youngest of which has Down's syndrome. Her hope was to make enough money to send back to her family, ten of whom lived in a one-bedroom house.

The trip wasn't so bad. We were lucky. It was summer and it was very hot. We only had to walk for a few hours. One of the women had her little girl with her who was running a fever so we had to keep stopping to let her rest. But we were luckier than many others . . . The scariest part was crossing the freeway with all the cars—running to the other side of the freeway, knowing we could be seen, without getting hit . . . All in all, it took about twenty days to make it from Peribán to Pennsylvania.⁵¹

Like many others, Blanca had originally planned to come and work for a couple of years and then return home. But one thing led to another—work, marriage, a baby—more work, more money that could be sent back home. Today, Blanca lives with her husband, Martín, and their three children, Erika, Luís, and Bianca, in a very comfortable, modest home which they rent on Main Street in York Springs. Their brick house has a cement porch in front and a swing set sits in their side-yard, protected from the street by a metal fence. Upon entering their home, one immediately faces the wall full of photos from Peribán. Along with the television set and Disney videos, the room is surrounded by images of Peribán: the plaza, annual town fairs, soccer teams, and family photos.

Blanca's family in Peribán lives in a very humble dwelling on the edge of town. The oldest of eight children (six girls and two boys), Blanca migrated in order to help her mother and siblings find a better life. Her father is an alcoholic who has not had a stable job for a long time. He does not consistently earn money for the family and only sporadically gives her mother, Maria Elena, money to buy food. Maria Elena explains: "Because we do not have a lot of money, we only eat meat about once a week. Most of the vegetables come from Ignacio's [her husband's] garden." Maria Elena cooks "a little food for many people." "Simple meals," she says, like vegetables in broth, rice, tuna fish or potato tacos. Because she is poor and has never had a steady income to support her family, Maria Elena has had to make the best she can out of what

⁵¹ Blanca, interview by Lisa Hohl and Lauren Smith, October 21, 2003, Adams County, PA; Conversations with Susan Rose, fall 2003 and spring 2004.

she has. The remittances Blanca sends home have been vital, representing a major source of support. The money has helped build two additional rooms for Blanca's brothers and sisters so they do not all have to share the one bedroom. And most of the clothes the family wears come from Blanca and other family members working in the U.S. Blanca also supported the education of her younger sister, Silvia, who now in turn is educating their younger sister, Laura. Over the years, Blanca and Martín have been able to give their families a television, a radio, and even a washing machine for Christmas.

Despite settling into York Springs, working hard in the U.S. to pay for their own living expenses and health care expenses for their daughter who recently needed back surgery, and sending money back home to help out their families, Martín and Blanca are also building a house in Peribán de Ramos with the hope of returning some day. Blanca explains somewhat wistfully, "We want to go back before our parents die. That's happened to a lot of people we know."

When they discovered we were going to Peribán later in the month, Blanca asked us to take photos of the construction of their house in order to see how much progress had been made. As they are able to put a little money aside, the construction continues—slowly, bit by bit. The roomy two-story brick house with windows and a wrought-iron fence is being built right next to Martín's parents' humble one-story house. The entry-way into Martín's parents' home is through their bedroom, which also serves as the family's living and dining room. The kitchen follows, and then another room where the rest of the family sleeps. Religious photos, statues and family photographs adorn the walls and the one bureau and mirror. On the wall is a photo of Martín as a young boy.

Martín first came to Adams County in the late 1980s as a seasonal migrant worker. He then found year-round work at the Penn Poultry Plant and a couple of years ago was able to move into a much higher paying construction job. He worked on a project at the Harrisburg International Airport, leaving home early in the morning, around 7:00 a.m., and returning home at night anywhere between 6:00–9:00 p.m. Blanca works three to four 12-hour days a week at the Hanover Pretzel Factory. "The money is good here," explains Blanca, "but the work—it separates

the family. So many hours are spent working, even on the weekends, that it's hard to keep the family together.”

When Martín first moved to York Springs in the early 1990s, he was one of the first Mexicans in the area. He recalled, “You’d see lots of Mexicans in the camps but when you walked through town, you’d see no one—no Mexicans.”⁵² Today, Blanca estimates about 60% of the people who live in town are Mexican. “Here on Main Street, you have these three houses that belong to Mexicans, one to Anglos, three to Mexicans. . . .” For the first few years, Martín would make a little extra money by selling tacos from his home every Sunday. This became a social time and gathering place for other Mexicans who were beginning to move into York Springs. At the time he was also taking care of his two young children, Erika who was four and Luis who was just a baby. The American woman he had married had left and he took the responsibility of raising the children.

In 1996, he helped Blanca and her relatives cross the border in order to come work in *el norte* [the north]. While more men than women migrate from Mexico to the U.S. for temporary work, more and more women are coming. Their primary motivation is to reunite with their families, though some migrate—as was the case with Blanca—to earn money in order to help their families back home.

When the women arrived in York Springs, Martín helped them find housing and jobs. Three years later Martín and Blanca married. Both are now legal residents of the U.S. and they have had another child, Bianca. All of the children were born in the U.S. and are U.S. citizens. Blanca and others from her family and town were able to migrate more easily to York Springs because of the existing transnational connections between Peribán and Pennsylvania, connections that are maintained largely through family networks, a major source of “positive” social capital.⁵³

⁵² Martín, conversation with Kjell Enge and Susan Rose, October 2003, Adams County, PA.

⁵³ Alejandro Portes, “Immigration Theory for a New Century: Some Problems and Opportunities,” *International Immigration Review* 31, No. 4 (Winter 1997): 799–825. But as Krissman (p. 278) also points out, such networks also can be used to recruit low-cost labor and benefit businesses at the expense of workers. Fred Krissman, “Immigrant Labor Recruitment: U.S. Agribusiness and Undocumented Migration from Mexico,” in Nancy Foner, Rubén G. Rumbaut, and Steven Gold, eds., *Immigration Research for a New Century* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2000).

Both Blanca's and Martín's families in Peribán have been deeply influenced by migration. Altogether they have over a dozen family members living in the U.S. and at least seven more who have experienced migration to the U.S. Martín is the oldest son of Luis and Celia, subsistence farmers in Peribán. Luis and Celia have nine children: three daughters and six sons. Five of their sons are currently living in the U.S. and the sixth son was in the U.S. until November 2003. Of their daughters, only one of the three lives in the U.S. with her family. However, the husbands of Norma and Alejandra, the two daughters who remain in Peribán, live in York Springs.⁵⁴

Blanca is the oldest child of Ignacio and Maria Elena. Of their six daughters and two sons, Blanca and Alejandro are both currently living in the U.S. Luis, the older of the two sons, has also migrated to the U.S. He spent two years in York Springs and returned to Peribán in July 2003. Tracing the family tree up a generation provides an interesting framework for understanding the pervasive influence of migration on Blanca's immediate family. Andres is the patriarch of the Avalos Sanchez family and the paternal grandfather of Blanca. Andres and his wife, who died in 1988, had twelve children who lived to adulthood. Of the twelve children, all five of their sons have migrated to the U.S. at least once. Andres also migrated but then spent the last twenty-five years working for the town of Peribán as the water man. Although migration has led to the separation of this tight-knit family, it has been used consistently as an economic strategy in the Avalos Sanchez family and helps maintain the family.⁵⁵

Blanca and Martín's oldest daughter, Erika, now fifteen, is the first in the family to become bilingual and bicultural, with a foot comfortably and confidently in both worlds:

I don't think it's really that hard. I am influenced in Mexican [things] when I'm here at the house—from religion to the way we eat the food in our house. Especially because we always talk Spanish, and we're always watching Spanish news and everything. I wake up and when I go to school, it's definitely more American.

⁵⁴ Multiple conversations and interviews with Luis G. S. and Celia R. with Kjell Enge, Lisa Hohl, and Susan Rose, May 2003; November 7, 2003; June 2004.

⁵⁵ Multiple interviews with twenty family members by Lisa Hohl, November 2003; Interview with family members by Susan Rose, June 2004.

I have English. The way I talk with my friends is very different than the way I talk with my parents. Of course, [I eat] American food at lunch. I was telling some of my friends today that I eat American food in the morning, and Mexican food in the afternoon every single day. It's not very hard.⁵⁶

Erika was the exception, however, among young people we interviewed. Many others found it more difficult to negotiate the liminal space between cultures.⁵⁷

Many of the other Mexicans now living in York Springs are related to Blanca or Martín either by blood or by marriage—three are Martín's brothers. In a few short years, York Springs has become an ethnic enclave where people by and large speak Spanish, shop at Lua's, the local Mexican store, and go to the Spanish mass that was started in 2001 in Gettysburg. Outside of work and school, they have little interaction with Anglos.

Down the street from Blanca and Martín live Cruz and her husband. While they initially planned to come to work in the U.S. for two or three years, seven years later they still find themselves in York Springs.⁵⁸ The couple has two children, one who was born in Peribán and the other in York Springs. Cruz speaks only Spanish, her husband some English learned at work; their nine-year-old daughter, who goes to school, speaks both Spanish and English but only Spanish at home; and her little brother, age five, speaks only Spanish. They live in an apartment complex just off Main Street with a number of other Mexican families and men. Cruz's brother, Juan, who's in his early twenties, lives with them. Juan has been working in York Springs for about four years—and just recently, Javier, their sixteen-year-old brother, joined them. When we first met Javier in Peribán in November 2003, he told us he wanted to go north. He had not yet told his parents, but by February 2004 he had crossed the border and was living and working in York Springs, building

⁵⁶ Erika, interviews by Michael Henry, Lauren Smith, Mara Waldhorn, October 24, 2003, York Springs, PA; and by Lisa Hohl and Lauren Smith, October 21, 2003, York Springs, PA.

⁵⁷ See Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters, 1987); and Cristina Igoa, *The Inner World of the Immigrant Child* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 1995).

⁵⁸ Cruz's aunt, Maria Guadalupe, lives across the dirt road from Martín's parents in Peribán de Ramos. We first met Maria Guadalupe and her family and Cruz's father, Rumaldo, Sr., and his family when we were taking photos of Martín and Blanca's house for them.

chicken houses eight to ten hours a day with his brother Juan. Another brother, Rumaldo, Jr., had worked in York Springs for two years but returned in early 2003 to be with his wife and family.

As Peggy Levitt, in her comparative study of transnational communities, points out, most “migration begins in and spreads through social networks” which she defines as a set of interpersonal ties connecting migrants, return migrants, and non-migrants in the sending and receiving countries through kinship, friendship, and attachment to a shared place of origin.⁵⁹ Once a network is in place, it becomes more likely that additional migration to that region will occur. The risks and costs of migration are lessened because there is a group of experienced migrants who are there to provide at least temporary housing, support, and advice.⁶⁰

While neither migration nor these kinds of transnational connections are new, several factors have increased “the intensity and durability of transnational ties among contemporary migrants, including ease of travel and communication; sending states’ heightened economic dependence on migrant remittances; purposeful efforts by sending states to create ‘diasporic’ nations that include migrants who reside permanently abroad; the social, economic and political marginalization of some migrants in their host countries; and a social climate that tolerates greater ethnic diversity.”⁶¹ While many earlier immigrant and migrant groups, such as the Irish, Italians, Polish, Greeks, and Chinese, also remained involved in the affairs of their sending communities, a number of characteristics signal the likelihood of more permanent transnational communities developing today. Rather than attempting to assimilate into the host society, the Mexican community in York Springs is an example of the kind of transnational village that is most likely to last and keep its members focused on the sending community. According

⁵⁹ Peggy Levitt, “Migrants Participate Across Borders: Toward an Understanding of Forms and Consequences,” in Foner et al., eds., *Immigration Research for a New Century*, 460.

⁶⁰ Levitt, “Migrants Participate Across Borders: Toward an Understanding of Forms and Consequences”; Massey et al., “Continuities in Transnational Migration: An Analysis of Nineteen Mexican Communities”; Krissman, “Immigrant Labor Recruitment: U.S. Agribusiness and Undocumented Migration from Mexico.”

⁶¹ Levitt, 461.

to Levitt, such transnational villages “involve small, well-defined numbers at both ends of the migration spectrum who are in touch with one another on a regular basis; whose community members know one another personally; and whose non-migrants’ level of economic dependence on migrants is high.”⁶² Like many other migrant and immigrant groups before them, the Mexican community in York Springs is in transition, “a community currently in-the-making.” Rather than a closed system, it is a community in flux, with fluid movements of people back and forth. It remains to be seen how many return to Mexico and how many stay permanently in York Springs or elsewhere in the U.S.

This pattern of circular migration can be tracked generationally as well as geographically. In 1970, Cruz’s father, Rumaldo, Sr., and his best friend, Gustavo, crossed the border together to do farmwork in California. They were both in their mid-teens, married, and beginning their families. Later, Rumaldo, Sr. and his wife, Magdalena, became *compadres* and *comadres* [a system of co-fathers and co-mothers that builds and sustains social networks in Mexican communities] with Gustavo and Maria Guadalupe (who is also Rumaldo’s sister). During the late 1990s and early 2000s, six of their sons and one daughter lived and worked near one another in York Springs. While Cruz and her family, and Rigoberto (Gustavo’s and Maria Guadalupe’s son) and his family seem to have settled in York Springs, some of the other sons (age sixteen to thirty-seven) participate in circular migration flows between York Springs and Peribán; still others—like Rumaldo, Jr.—have chosen to go back home to Peribán.

Back Home in Peribán: Alfreda and Rumaldo, Jr.

Rumaldo, Jr. worked for two years in York Springs and then returned home to his wife, Alfreda, and their family in early 2003. In their early twenties, the couple has *fi* children—Magdalena (age *fi* is the oldest girl, and the twins, Marazul and Jessica (two months old) are the youngest at the time of our interviews in October 2003. Alfreda seems overwhelmed by the *fi* children, but others are around to help out, and it makes a

⁶² Levitt, 465.



Gustavo, husband of Maria Guadalupe. Photo courtesy of the authors.

difference that her husband is now at home with them. While many women reported that their husbands seemed restless after being home for a couple of month and ready to return to the north,⁶³ Rumaldo, Jr. seems quite content to be driving the tractor and tending the avocado orchards that his father and grandfather own collectively with Gustavo and Maria Guadalupe.

The family is close-knit and loving. Rumaldo, Sr. is clearly saddened and concerned about his other children who live so far away. He and Magdalena talk about the house “that belongs to Juan” and Juan’s chickens. They show us the trees Juan has planted, pointing out his favorite one. Then as the extended family gathers to send their love in a video-taped message to those in York Springs, both father and son tear up. Magdalena and Rumaldo, Sr. know it is an economic necessity to go north for work in order for their children to improve their life chances, but they worry a lot about their children.

⁶³ Loli, Blanca’s aunt, commented that she is fortunate that her husband did not forget her while he was in the U.S. Many others we spoke with talked about men returning to the community and quickly becoming bored, frustrated, or annoyed with life in Mexico. Now that they had international experience and greater freedom up north, they often preferred their new lifestyle.

Engendering Migration

Given the strong network that has been established within the growing Mexican community over the last decade in Adams County, more and more women are coming north to be with their husbands, and in some cases, to work. While the research on Mexican migration has tended to focus on men's migration motivations and experiences, recent work has made clear the importance of considering gender when analyzing migration dynamics and decisions.⁶⁴ Consistent with the recent literature, the men we spoke with cited work as the primary reason for migrating, while the women spoke of holding the family together. Many of the women were afraid that if they did not follow their husbands to the U.S., they might be abandoned or that their children would grow up without a father, as was the case with many of their neighbors.⁶⁵ Some, like Blanca, came to escape difficult family situations and to look for work. And still others wanted to be with their husbands. As Jennifer Hirsch has reported, the younger generation of Mexican women is

⁶⁴ Jennifer S Hirsch, *A Courtship After Marriage: Sexuality and Love in Mexican Transnational Families* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003); Kandel and Massey, "The Culture of Mexican Migration"; Marcela Cerutti and Douglas Massey, "On the Auspices of Female Migration Between the Mexico and the U.S.," *Demography* 38 (2001): 187–200; Jennifer Hirsch, "En el Norte, la Mujer Manda: Gender, Generation, and Geography in a Mexican Transnational Community," in Foner et al., eds., *Immigration Research for a New Century*, 369–89; Patricia Pessar, "Engendering Migration Studies: The Case of New Immigration in the U.S.," *America Behavioral Scientist* 42, No. 4 (1999): 577–600; Luin Goldring, "Gender, Status, and the State in Transnational Places," in Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, ed., *Gender and U.S. Immigration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 341–58; Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Gendered Transitions: Mexican Experiences of Immigration* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994); Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, "Overcoming Patriarchal Constraints: The Reconstruction of Gender Relations among Mexican Immigrants Women and Men," *Gender and Society* 6, No. 3 (1992): 393–415; Paulina de los Reyes, "Women and Migrants, Continuities and Change in Patterns of Female Migration in Latin America," in Pamela Sharp, ed., *Women, Gender and Labour Migration: Historical and Global Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 275–89.

⁶⁵ For a discussion of gender differences in migration, see Shawn Malia Kanaiaupuni, "Reframing the Migration Questions: An Analysis of Men, Women, and Gender in Mexico," *Social Forces* 78, Issue 4 (June 2000): 1311–47; Cerrutti and Massey, "On the Auspices of Female Migration Between the Mexico and the U.S.," 187–200; Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Gendered Transitions*; Toravsky-Unda, Louise, "If God Will It: Mexican Migrant Work and the Women Left Behind" (Presentation at Oral History Association Meetings, Portland, OR, September 30, 2004).

more concerned about having a companionate marriage based on intimacy and friendship rather than a more traditional one characterized by respect but also greater distance, sacrifice, and suffering.⁶⁶

Two of the women who have settled in York Springs with their families did not want to lead the life their mother, Angelina, had led. Angelina has been married to their father, Pedro, for forty-three years. For each of those years, Pedro worked in the States, going back home to Peribán for three months over the Christmas holidays. In many respects, his life has been separated between *trabajo* [work] “over there” in the U.S.—and *vida* [life/family] “over here” in Mexico. Pedro and Angelina had ten daughters, all of whom are now married. Two of them live with their husbands in York Springs, where their father continues to work pruning trees. Angelina, whom we met first during a visit in York Springs while she was visiting her daughters and again in Peribán later in the fall, said she used to be very lonely and sad but then she grew used to this way of life and she now prefers to stay in Peribán in order to take care of their home. Two of her daughters, however, have chosen and have “been allowed” to come north to be with their husbands.

The Women Left Behind

While more women are coming north, the majority of wives we interviewed in Peribán emphasized that their husbands had “not invited them to go.” In most cases, these couples had young children. This is congruent with the findings of Kanaiaupuni who argues that women are less likely to migrate than men when they have young children.⁶⁷ Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo reports similar trends in her study of Mexican women who traditionally have stayed behind.⁶⁸

“The north has given me riches but it has robbed me of my husband.”

—MARGARITA AND JESÚS

⁶⁶ Hirsch, *A Courtship After Marriage*; see also Kandell and Massey, “The Culture of Mexican Migration.”

⁶⁷ Kanaiaupuni, 1318.

⁶⁸ Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Gendered Transitions*.

Margarita, Blanca's sister, is a twenty-seven-year-old woman with two young children. She lives in Peribán with their two children while her husband, Jesús, works in York Springs. Jesús has been working in the U.S. for most of their marriage. Like Blanca, Margarita recounts her childhood as a difficult and unhappy one. Blanca only briefly mentioned the subject of domestic violence and depersonalized it by saying that "some husbands are alcoholics and some wives very timid and conformist," but Margarita did not hesitate to express her opinion about her parents and childhood. "I hate to remember my childhood. I have never liked my childhood," she said. "Since I have been able to understand what was going on, I knew that I did not like the way my mother thought, that I did not like the form in which my father acted." Describing her parents, Margarita says,

My mother was a woman who conformed a lot; [she was] very timid. She never fought for herself. She was not even capable to denounce her husband the day he abused his daughter. Nor was she capable to say "I will only have two children because I see that I cannot live with more because this man does not work." She was always very conforming. She saw how things were and how her husband was. He hit her and did not work . . . and she, she was a woman who always said, "Be quiet, you do not know. When you are married, you will know." Because of this, I do not like remembering my childhood.⁶⁹

Margarita married in 1995 when she was nineteen and three years later her husband migrated to the U.S. His goal was to make enough money to bring the couple out of debt since employment opportunities were lacking in Peribán at the time. Jesús stayed in the States for two years, returned to Mexico for two months, and then set off once again for another two-year stay in York Springs. When her husband finally decided to travel the couple was in a crisis *muy grande* [a terrible financial crisis] and had many debts. After his trip they were able to get out of debt and even began making improvements on their house. Margarita expresses how she feels when he leaves: "When he leaves it makes me sad because he's leaving, but happy because I have the hope of having something. If he goes north, I buy furniture, I dress the girls, I buy them whatever I feel like . . . but at the same time it is sad."⁷⁰ Margarita says

⁶⁹ Margarita, interview by Lisa Hohl, November 7, 2003, Peribán.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

that her husband *does not invite* her to travel with him. Instead, she stays home in Peribán engaging in the day to day aspects of raising her children on her own in her husband's absence, and she works cleaning houses for extra money. Jesús sends money orders to the family every two weeks, much of which has been spent on the improvements to the house. Margarita eloquently expresses the contradictions and ambiguity that come with being part of a transnational family:

Because of the U.S. I have my house; because of the U.S. these girls live like queens, both of them. Because here, when my husband is here, it is very difficult to have disposable diapers, it is difficult to buy furniture; here one earns only to eat. Because of this, when he goes, I am sad because he leaves, but I am happy because I keep hope that I will have something.

Margarita appreciates what the money from the U.S. has done for her family but she also longs for the day when she and her husband “can be together again, to go out and do what we please, to be like boyfriend and girlfriend.”

Margarita says she wants her husband to come home, but also understands that if he is not in the north, she will have to give up many things. Margarita speaks of the *maravillas*, or wonders, that her husband and some of her friends have experienced in the north. She says that she wants to go, but then flatly states, “*es que no nos quiere llevar*” [it's that he doesn't want to take us]. Margarita and Blanca's brother, Luis, comments that he would not bring his wife to the U.S. because women have too much power and freedom there.⁷¹ Mexican women do have a higher rate of labor force participation in the U.S. than in

⁷¹ Carlos, two generations older than Luis, expressed the same thoughts but he ultimately did marry a woman from the U.S. In his interview, he reflected: “I have my ways before, I thought it was the way, I would grow up, you know, a woman was made to stay home and have children and stuff like that. That was my culture before. And so I didn't think, you know, [an] American woman was going to do that, so I say there ain't no way I can get married in the U.S. But somehow you know, I kept talking to my girlfriend and one day I say, ‘Carmen, I wanna tell you something,’ and she knew what it was I was going to say and said, ‘Don't tell me nothing.’ I said, ‘Well.’ So I kept trying and trying and trying 'til one day she say, ‘ok,’ so one day I went to ask her stepfather about her. He got mad at me and broke the windshield on my car. They didn't like me you know because the life that I was having . . . But one day we decide we ran away . . . It was 1963, she was seventeen years old, legal by then.”

Mexico, and as Hirsch argues, the U.S. migration experience is associated with a shift in marital ideals that are characterized by greater cooperative decision making and a less gendered division of labor.⁷² It is widely believed by Mexicans on both sides of the border that “*en el norte, la mujer manda*” [in the north, the woman is in charge], particularly if the woman has papers.⁷³ Women who work in the U.S. experience the independence that comes from earning a wage and making friends in the workplace. They may learn to drive, or at least they will be able to figure out public transportation, and they can leave the house without permission. They can buy gifts for their families back home with money they have earned. According to the men in Hirsch’s study, women have more power in the U.S. because “*el mando*, the power to give orders, is an economically earned right,”⁷⁴ and in the U.S., Mexican women are in a better position to earn it. This concerns Luis because he believes in the traditional male-headed household and is wary of what he refers to as “American liberalism.” He has worked hard so that his wife would not have to work.⁷⁵ Her obligations are to the house and children. Margarita agrees:

A husband has obligations to buy you clothing, give you a house, give you food and give all this to the children and give you money. These are the simple obligations. A woman has the obligation to attend to her children, attend to her husband, attend to her house, care for the money that he gives us and also take advantage of the few cents that he gives us, once in a while, to give him a gift.

Yet, when Margarita thought she was pregnant with a third child, her husband told her that he would bring her north where she could seek better health care. She soon discovered, however,

⁷² Jennifer Hirsch, “En el Norte la Mujer Manda: Gender, Generation, and Geography in a Mexican Transnational Community,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 42, No. 9 (1999): 1332–49; Hirsch, *A Courtship After Marriage*.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Hirsch, *A Courtship After Marriage*.

⁷⁵ Luis is a serious, responsible young man who has been affected by his childhood and migration experience. Beginning in 2000 when Luis migrated to York Springs for two years, he augmented the money that Blanca was sending home. He sent money to his mother and younger siblings in Peribán de Ramos (interviews with Luis A.E.; Maria Elena E.V.). Silvia said that both Blanca and Luis have always asked if she, her siblings, or mother needed money and were always willing to send money.

that she was not pregnant and he then revoked his offer to bring her. Unless it was absolutely necessary, Luis did not want to risk the dangers and the expenses of the trip.

“I want to go north too.”

—MARTA OLIVIA AND JOAQUIN

Marta Olivia is a twenty-seven-year-old woman.⁷⁶ She lives in Peribán with two children, ages five and three, while her husband, Joaquin works at the “egg factory” in York Springs. Joaquin five migrated to York Springs in 2000. Over a period of two and a half years, Marta has received only one photo of him and she wonders what he looks like now. The couple’s goal was to buy a house with the money Joaquin earned in the U.S., but the remittances were not as high as she had hoped, and she five herself struggling to make ends meet. She says that her husband makes very little in the U.S., only enough for himself to survive, and she and the children continue to live with her parents in a small house not far from the plaza. They cook on an open five in the main room.

For her, the economic benefits do not outweigh the absence of her husband. Although her husband has been gone for over two and a half years, the family has reaped few material benefits. Marta says, “*él quería hacer una casa aquí, y no, no se puede, gana muy muy poco*” [he wanted to build a house here, but no, it’s impossible, he earns very, very little]. She expresses sadness and desperation. She wants him to return, even if she has to work more. “I also wanted to be able to work, to do something, I don’t know, to be able to help him economically so he wouldn’t have to be so far away for so long, so far away from us, from here. I feel impotent not being able to participate too.” When asked whether she wanted to go to the U.S. Marta replies, “*Yo si quisiera, pero él no quiere, dice que es muy peligroso. . . y es mucho dinero también*” [Yes, I wanted to, but he doesn’t want [me to], he says it’s very dangerous . . . and a lot of money too]. Marta prefers to go to the U.S. to be with her husband, but says that her husband is opposed to her going because of the

⁷⁶ Marta is the younger sister of Rumaldo, Sr. and Maria Guadalupe. She is the aunt of Cruz, Juan, Javier, and Rumaldo, Jr.

dangers in crossing the border illegally and the cost of the trip. The language she uses is blunt: her husband said no and she will not have the support to cross. She tells us:

I want to go north to Pennsylvania too and be with him but Joaquin says it's too dangerous to cross, especially with the children. But here, the children grow up without a father. My little one [Juan, the three-year-old] hasn't seen his father since he was one—he doesn't know him, doesn't know what it's like to be hugged by him. Next year, I want to go with him to Pennsylvania. I haven't seen him for two years and haven't had a picture of him for one year (November 2003).⁷⁷

She also adds at the end of our conversation, highlighting the unintended consequences of fieldwork, “Now that I've met you [meaning the whole group of us], I am going to insist that I go to Pennsylvania next time.”

When we returned to Pennsylvania in late November 2003, we were able to visit many of the relatives of people whom we had interviewed in Peribán, including Joaquin. We shared with him and the others, the photos and video-taped messages from their families back home and then took some photos to send back down to Peribán. When it came time to take Joaquin's photo, he took off his hat, fluffed up his hair and gave a big smile. He was eager to send the photo down to his wife and children, even though he will be making the three day trek back home this year for Christmas. When I asked if he would be back, he shrugged his shoulders and said, “*Quién sabe?*” [Who knows?]

Back in Peribán, Marta tends to their children and the housework during the day, and at night, works in the family-owned *abarrotes* shop [grocery store]. Her mother helps her care for the children, and sometimes even helps out financially. She describes how her daughter's classmates teased her at school, saying she did not have a father: “My daughter suffered a lot the two years she was in kindergarten; she suffered a lot because her classmates said she didn't have a father.”⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Marta, interview by Susan Rose, November 2003, Peribán.

⁷⁸ Ibid.; Marta, interview by Hailie Furrow, November 2003, Peribán. Marta, however, was the only woman who mentioned this, although many other children had fathers who were absent due to migration.



Carmen and daughter. Photo courtesy of the authors.

Christmas 2004

Joaquin has returned to Peribán, and the whole family is living together with Marta's mother and father. In June 2004, when I next visit them, Marta, Joaquin, and the children all seem really happy. Marta talks about how good it is to have Joaquin home—and they both laugh. All four of them sit close together, smiling. Their little boy was much more outgoing, smiling and looking everyone in the eye. Joaquin was working, making windows.

When I asked them about their plans, Joaquin again shrugged his shoulders and smiled, "*Quién sabe?*" [Who knows?]. But this time, Marta seems much more certain that if Joaquin leaves for the north again, she and the children will go with him. She has said as much directly to him and talked openly about some of the jealousy she felt while he was away. As other researchers have found, "migrants are often more free from the vigilant observation of kin and community that characterize small-town Mexico."⁷⁹ Mexican migrant respondents in Vidaro's study noted that "they were married there [in Mexico], single here [in the U.S.]. Men have

⁷⁹Frank and Wildsmith, "Grass Widows."

more opportunities here. In Mexico . . . they live in the same city or town, everyone knows them . . . Here's it's easier for them, because where is their wife? Who is going to tell her?"⁸⁰ But rumors travel the circuits as well, and "this time," Marta says, "we will stay together as a family."

"I don't want to be stuck here with the children."

—CARMEN AND LEONARDO

Carmen is a mother of five children. She is married to Leonardo who worked for five years in California and seven years in Pennsylvania. Carmen spent a number of years with him in the States both working and having children, but they are both now back in Peribán where Leonardo runs a shop. *Tienda Nancy*, named after their daughter, sells almost everything from soda to bread to car oil to Pampers (one Pamper at a time if need be for two pesos a piece) and cigarettes (individually or as a pack). Two of their children were born in California and Nancy, their five-year-old daughter, in York Springs where they were farm workers. Leonardo recalls: "There was a lady there, in Pennsylvania, who was very nice to us. She saw the baby and gave us a blanket and pillow. Otherwise, we had nothing."⁸¹

In Peribán their house, which consists of a kitchen and two adjoining bedrooms, has no windows and only dirt floor. The children play in the mud in a small area on one side of the house. It is empty except for a tire swing attached to a little tree. The family has been back in Peribán now for three to four years, but Leonardo wants to go back north to earn more money. He wanted to go last fall but did not, and is now planning on trying to go back north this year. He wants Carmen and the children to stay in Peribán. But when we talk to Carmen alone, she wants to go north as well: "There I can work and earn money—and get out of the house. Here I am stuck at home, with the children all

⁸⁰ Quoted in Claire Isabel Vidaro, "Sexually Transmitted Diseases and Married Hispanic Immigrants in North Carolina," (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1997), 48.

⁸¹ Leonardo García, former migrant worker in California and Pennsylvania, shop owner in Peribán. Multiple conversations with Kjell Enge and Susan Rose, October–November 2003, Peribán de Ramos.

day long, and cooking and cleaning. I can't get out. I'd rather be up north where I can work and be out of the house."⁸²

Carmen feels overwhelmed by the children and the housework. She invites us in to talk and to play with the children, welcoming the company and the opportunity to talk about being more independent in the north where she was able to work. Even though the work there was hard, she had other women to talk with and greater freedom. According to Hirsch and Gutmann, few women continue working when they return to Mexico. They may open up a little shop to add to their families' earnings, but other than that their options are few.⁸³

When I talk with Carmen in June 2004, however, she says she does not want to go north to work, that she wants to stay in Peribán with the children. "Five children is too many to travel with." Leonardo is planning on going north again but is still not sure exactly when. When asked whether he preferred working in California or Pennsylvania, Leonardo responded:

I liked it better in California. There were more Mexicans and lots of people to talk with and things to do. I could go fishing and catch trout for my family to eat. But it's better for me to be in Pennsylvania—in Adams County—we're more isolated and there's not much to do, so the money doesn't slip out of the pocket. It's better that I work in Pennsylvania and save my money to take home.⁸⁴

"I have suffered."⁸⁵

—MARÍA GUADALUPE AND GUSTAVO

María Guadalupe is Marta's forty-eight-year-old sister. While they share the same parents, they are separated in age by twenty-one years and represent two different birth

⁸² Carmen García, former migrant worker in California and Pennsylvania, now a housewife in Peribán. Interview with Susan Rose, October 20, 2003, Peribán; Follow-up interview with Hailie Furrow, November 10, 2003, Peribán; Conversation with Rose, June 4, 2004.

⁸³ Hirsch, 137; See also Mathew Gutmann, *The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 221, 243.

⁸⁴ Leonardo García, 2003.

⁸⁵ Multiple interviews and informal conversations with the Arroyo and Esquivel families, both in Peribán and Pennsylvania, by Marcelo Borges, Hailie Furrow, Sarah Hiller, and Susan Rose. These included formal and informal, individual and family, interviews with various family members at their homes and ranch.

cohorts and two different sets of expectations. While Marta wants to go north to be with her husband, and is frustrated that she has not been allowed to, María Guadalupe never had such dreams or desires. She just wanted her husband to return home safely.

María Guadalupe has lived in Peribán her whole life. As a child she made tortillas and helped take care of her brothers and sisters. Today she is a mother of eight children who takes great pride in her home and family. Migration has played a major role in María Guadalupe's immediate family life. As mentioned above, her husband, Gustavo, first traveled north in the early 1970s when the couple was beginning their family. They were both fifteen and she had not yet moved out of her parental home. He crossed the border with his best friend, Rinaldo, to do seasonal farm work in California. When discussing her husband's first trip northward, she describes her feelings, "Then I cried, I cried for a while, for a while I prayed to God, and for a while I said, it's better that he comes back, I prefer at least that he's here, this way I don't suffer as much; but later, I said, I want to have my [own] house, I want to live separately [from my family]."⁸⁶

With tears in her eyes, María Guadalupe talks about the sacrifices she had to make. "I suffered a lot," she says—a familiar refrain, especially among women of this generation. Suffering is a discourse most commonly associated with women, where it is seen as a means by which one reaches full womanhood.⁸⁷ *Ser mujer es sufrir* [to be a woman is to suffer]. Suffering "confers virtue, and through this, respect."⁸⁸ As Melhuus suggests, "Suffering in the form of family martyrdom is not primarily about a person, [rather] it expresses something about social relations and . . . gender relations."⁸⁹ While there was

⁸⁶ María Guadalupe Esquivel Morales, conversation with Susan Rose, October 29, 2003; Interview with Hailie Furrow, November 2003; Conversation with Rose, June 5, 2004.

⁸⁷ Marit Melhuus, "Power, Value, and the Ambiguous Meanings of Gender," in Marit Melhus and Kristine Stolen, eds., *Machos, Mistresses, and Madonnas: Contesting the Power of Latin American Gender Imagery* (London: Verso, 1996), 230–59.

⁸⁸ Victoria Malkin, "'We Go to Get Ahead': Gender and Status in Two Mexican Migrant Communities," *Latin American Perspectives* 31, No. 5, Issue 138 (September 2004): 75–99.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

power and virtue gained in women's suffering, they did not have the power to make decisions about their own migration—about whether they would stay or go. This is something that is changing slowly for the women of the younger generation. What María Guadalupe and Gustavo did share was a dream that his trips north would allow the family to accomplish their goal of buying a house and establishing themselves as economically independent from their parents. This was a hope that was modestly realized. The money that Gustavo earned during his first trip north was invested in a small *lotecito*, or farm lot. After thirty years, the avocado trees they planted have matured and become productive. Money from three subsequent trips north went toward the foundation and construction of their home and its improvements. The ability to buy the lot, hard work, and the ash from the volcanic eruption of Parícutín that fertilized the soil has enabled them to move a little beyond subsistence-level farming—but this has only happened within the last two to three years.

Now many years after her husband last went north to work and finally returned to Peribán, María Guadalupe can still vividly describe the loneliness she felt without Gustavo, and the sadness the children endured in the absence of their father. She recalls one day in particular:

One day I was ironing and I had the laundry basket nearby to make the work go faster. My son opened the basket and almost broke it. He said, "inside here it smells like Dad, like his shirts; it smells like Dad." And he laughed and jumped up and almost broke the basket again. I couldn't reprimand him because he had said it smelled like Dad, and there he was, smelling the shirts.

Today, this son is living in York Springs, Pennsylvania, and sending money back. María Guadalupe says, "Because my children now go north to work, my husband no longer needs to." Two of her sons, José and Rigoberto, along with their wives (also from Peribán) and two children, are now living in York Springs. Another son, his wife, and youngest child just recently crossed over to work in California. Their two older children, ages five and seven, are living with cousins in Peribán until the parents can come and get them. Isidro, María Guadalupe's five-year-old son, just completed one year of secondary school and now works as a full-time mechanic, and another daughter lives

at home. María Guadalupe misses her children but is happy and proud that the family is well established. In her interview, María Guadalupe often referred to the mutual love between her, her children, and grandchildren. Despite the suffering she has experienced in her life, her goals were to have a happy and healthy family, and she feels she has succeeded:

They [referring to her children and grandchildren] bring me gifts, they mail me things, every once in a while, the other one visits me too, they spend time here for a while, we chat, we eat, and they leave, and I tell them, this makes me happy, that they are together; they live well, they live very well.

The women each told us, “my husband did not invite me to go.” Even Carmen, who had traveled and worked with her husband in the U.S. for seven years, said that now with all the children, Leonardo did not want her to go. While she pressured him for awhile, he has told her that he will be traveling alone and she is resigned to that. At one time or another, Alfreda, Margarita, Marta, and María Guadalupe—like hundreds of other women in Peribán—experienced a period of life in the absence of husbands who have gone to *el norte* to work. The women had little choice but to stay home while their husbands migrated. Most of them had to continue living with their parents or return to their parental homes. While they were under increased supervision by male relatives and parents, the women did talk about the ways in which they came to exercise some authority while their spouses were absent.⁹⁰ By virtue of being left behind, many women were forced to become the major decision-makers in the family. This served to challenge the tradition of *machismo*, where men perceive themselves to be the heads of household and to hold the power. Many of the women had to take on a job, at least part-time, and some had to assume the role of breadwinner. Husbands returning to these newly empowered women were often forced to reconcile their traditional

⁹⁰ See also Luin Goldring, “Gendered Memory: Constructions of Rurality Among Mexican Transnational Migrants,” in E. Melanie DuPuis and Peter Vendergeest, eds., *Creating the Countryside: The Politics of Rural and Environmental Discourse* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 303–32; Victoria Malkin, “Gender, Status, and Modernity in a Transnational Migrant Circuit (Papers from the Transnationalism Conference, 1998, <http://les.man.ac.uk/SA/Transnationalism/malkin.htm> (accessed May 29, 2006)). Hondagneu-Sotelo, “Overcoming Patriarchal Constraints.”

ideas of family and gender with the new realities their absence had helped create.⁹¹ What the women stressed in their interviews, however, was how lonely they had felt and how much they had suffered. The primary motivation for young women going north was to maintain family stability and escape being left behind.

Margarita, María Guadalupe, Marta, Alfreda, and Carmen all remarked that their husbands first migrated in response to the economic pressures of supporting a growing family. Women of both generations referred several times to the ownership of a house by a couple as a rite of passage and a symbol of economic independence from parents. Although Margarita's sentiments may be more explicitly related to the material benefits of her husband's travel northward, both she and María Guadalupe spoke about the sacrifices they made as a result of their husbands' migration. They must live without their husbands for a while in order to gain materially, or live without those material gains forever. Marta's situation is different—for her, the minimal economic benefits did not outweigh the loneliness.

While Mexican women have traditionally stayed behind, more and more are now going north—both to reunite with their families and also to look for work.⁹² This represents change both among women in Mexico, and in the opportunity structures in the U.S. where the numbers of working women are increasing. More jobs have opened up for Mexican women both in factories and as domestics.⁹³ As migrants to the U.S., many Mexican women have experienced greater autonomy and freedom from patriarchal, familial restrictions, though economics and race are of equal or greater concern than gender. Men's attitudes too may be changing as conditions change. Mexican migration scholars observe that: "Although men are at first reluctant to expose their wives and children to the hazards and hardships of migration, the life of a solitary migrant worker

⁹¹ Angélica Navarro Ochoa, "Migración y transformaciones de vida en Santiago Tangamandapio, Michoacán," *Tzintzun* 33 (January-July 2001): 35–66.

⁹² Enrico Marcelli and Wayne Cornelius, "The Changing Profile of Mexican Migrants to the U.S.," *Latin American Research Review* 36, No. 4 (2001): 105–31.

⁹³ Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild, eds., *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Metropolitan Books, 2003).

eventually becomes difficult to sustain. As the costs and risks drop with the expansion of the networks, men increasingly bring their wives and children into the migratory process and the demographic base of migration broadens.⁹⁴ Marta's, Margarita's, and Carmen's respective husbands cited the dangers and the costs of crossing when they told their wives they could not go. But Rigoberto and José went back to Peribán to look for wives who would be willing to come with them to the north.

Widowed and abandoned women are increasingly likely to consider going north as well, especially if they have relatives, and hence resources, in the north. Hours are spent talking about how they might accomplish this, where they might go, how they might get there. For example, Cristina's husband left for the States six years ago, leaving her with their three children. They have never heard from him, though they believe he is somewhere in Pennsylvania. As the children are getting older—they range in age from ten to sixteen—she is trying to find a way to cross over. She and her friend, Maria Carmen, joke about how they might meet an "American man."

Maria Carmen's husband died two years ago. She supports herself and her ten-year-old son by selling juice in the central market. She wants to join her older brother in California so that her son can get a better education. Many in her family, including her mother, father, and several brothers have a long history of moving back and forth between the U.S. and Mexico. Three of her brothers and one of her sisters currently live in the U.S.; the other eight live in Peribán. Her brother Gabriel, who has worked for the better part of eighteen years in the U.S., is now building a house next to their mother's house. After Maria Carmen's father was beaten to death in Washington in the 1970s, her mother returned to Peribán. Esperanza recalls her earlier crossings when "the water was up over my neck." "Now," she laughs, "I'm too old now to go. I can't run so fast anymore. That's for the young ones." Maria Carmen, however, wants to go legally. She has checked out how much it costs to get visas for her and her son: approximately \$150 for each to apply with no guarantee that they would get the visas. Nonetheless,

⁹⁴ Durand and Massey, "Mexican Migration to the U.S.," 20–31.

she dreams of setting up a small juice stand in *el norte* and is trying to save up enough money for the applications.

Conclusion

Migration from Mexico to the U.S. is one of the largest sustained flows of immigrants anywhere in the world. Since 1970, at least 6.8 million Mexican immigrants have entered the U.S., both with and without documents. Through oral history interviewing, we were able to learn more about some of the causes, costs, and consequences of migration for those who traverse the border and come to live in two communities. Their stories are filled with hope and despair; longing and suffering; risks, gambles, losses, and gains. For all, it has taken courage and hard work just to negotiate the crossings and provide the basics for daily living for themselves and their families.

In the process of conducting a series of oral history interviews, we learned a great deal about migrant labor and ethnic diversity in Adams County, and the transformation of York Springs, a community undergoing great change. We also gained a much greater understanding of the sacrifices made by men, women, and children on both sides of the border—and the love that often sustains them. While some families are fragmented, even destroyed by the crossings, others are stretched and some strengthened. In some cases, people leave and are never heard of again; others stay in close communication, especially now with more accessible telephone and e-mail; and many provide a critical source of economic support. From this perspective, individual remittances, even those that are spent on consumption: food, health care, and the construction of houses, including putting in windows or cement floors, help increase the quality of life and the standard of living. In this sense, going north to work and bringing back money is both rational and productive in many, though not in all, cases.

As transnational spaces open up and people, goods, and culture circulate among them, more rather than less interaction and change can be expected at the macro (global/structural), meso (societal/institutional) and micro (interpersonal/individual) levels. The research on Mexican migration has revealed the importance and fruitfulness of triangulating data—using

quantitative data, ethnographic fieldwork, and oral history interviewing to analyze the complex dynamics of economic exchange and people's priorities, motivations, and actions. In order to humanize the process, we need to keep in mind the human face of migration and also see beyond the individual to the global, national, and transnational forces that shape people's livelihoods, practices, and possibilities.

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