

"I Will Always be an American Living in Mexico":

Women of the Mormon Colonies

by

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## ABSTRACT

The "Mormon Colonies" in Chihuahua, northern Mexico, boast a sizable population of women originally from the United States who have migrated to these small Mexican towns. This ethnographic study of the immigrant women in the area focuses on questions of citizenship and belonging, and bolsters the scholarship on U.S. American migrants in Mexico. Using data from 15 unstructured interviews, the women's experiences of migration provide a portrait of U.S. American migrants in a Mexican religious community. Analysis of this data using grounded theory has revealed that these U.S. American women have created a third social space for themselves, to a large degree retaining their original culture, language, and political loyalty. Their stories contribute to the literature on transnational migration, providing an account of the way migrants of privilege interact with their society of settlement.

## DEDICATION

To Grandma Mere, whose life inspired this research.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

When I was 18, I migrated from Mexico to the United States. I came from the small community of Colonia Juárez, Chihuahua in northern Mexico, which six years later was briefly elevated to the public consciousness in the United States due to 2012 presidential candidate Mitt Romney's family ties to the community. My migration was in some aspects unusual: I spoke perfect English, I was already a U.S. citizen, and my physical appearance allowed me to blend right in with all the other fair-skinned, green-eyed girls in Utah. To call myself a Mexican immigrant hardly seemed right. Given the differences between my migration experience and other immigrants' stories of difficult crossings into the United States, racial discrimination in this country and trials of learning a new language, I felt guilty about allowing people to assume I had suffered during my migration process in ways that I had not.

By the time I finished college four years later and moved to Arizona— a state where anti-immigrant politics in recent years have, nationally, been some of the most uncompromising— I had long since stopped referring to myself as an immigrant. My experience seemed to have very few commonalities with that of other Mexican immigrants I came in contact with, and I understood that I am privileged in terms of race and class. Furthermore, even before I could have articulated the thought, I felt that the social and cultural capital I carry in relation to many other Mexican immigrants prevented me from legitimately claiming a place among them. Still, when it came to choosing a research focus, I was pulled to the topic of migration over and over again. In thinking about the way my personal migration story tied into existing research on migrant



communities, I realized there was one community that was not only worth studying, but also had not been previously studied. In life's cyclical fashion, I would be returning to Chihuahua.

Known as “the Mormon Colonies,” Colonia Juárez and Colonia Dublan were founded in 1885 when pioneers of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church, more commonly referred to as Mormon Church) fled the United States due to the antipathy generated by their practice of polygamy (outlawed in the U.S. in 1882) (Romney, 1938). These early Mormon settlers established eight communities in the states of Chihuahua and Sonora, Mexico. In his book about the history of the Mormon Colonies in Mexico, Thomas C. Romney (1938) writes that despite local leaders' initial suspicion caused by this influx of American<sup>1</sup> settlers, Mexico's then-president, Porfirio Diaz, informed the Mormons that not only were they “welcome as colonists in Mexico, but that the Government was anxious to have them help in the development of the country” (Romney, 1938, p. 59). Pablo Yankelevich (2012), who wrote about immigration and the promotion of mestizaje in Mexico around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, might attribute this to the legislation developed in Mexico in the 1880s and 1890s to promote both public and private colonization projects in rural areas. Certainly, the response of the Mexican government seems to suggest that the policy was indeed to make every effort to attract

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<sup>1</sup> Using the term “American” to refer exclusively to people from the United States, though a common practice, is admittedly problematic, since technically all of the inhabitants of North, Central and South America are Americans. The members of the Mormon Colonies who are U.S. citizens are described by other members of the community as “*Americanos*” or (less tactfully) “*gringos*.” They refer to themselves as “Americans” or “English-speaking.” In the absence of a preferable alternative, and given the fact that people born and raised in the United States are widely referred to as “Americans,” I will use the term that way throughout this thesis.

“honorable and hardworking foreigners and procure their establishment and settlement” in Mexico (Boletín del Ministerio de Fomento de la Republica Mexicana 1, 1878, as cited in [and translated by] Yankelevich, 2012, p. 408).

Although the practice of plural marriage was prohibited in 1900 by the LDS Church, these American migrants remained in Mexico. However, through family relationships and continual transmigration, they retained extremely close ties to the United States. Currently, the LDS Anglo-Saxon population in Colonia Juárez and Colonia Dublan numbers 400 people (B. Jones, personal communication, August 11, 2013). The local LDS Church-owned junior high- and high school, the Academia Juárez, serves 480 students, 73% of them Mormon (Alvarez, 2012), 7% of whom have Anglo surnames (B. Jones, personal communication, August 11, 2013). These numbers are understood by current residents of the Colonies to reflect a dwindling of the U.S. American population in the area over the past hundred years, although there is no formal research that would provide statistics to support this claim. Therefore, although the population of people in the area who are Mormon has increased since these towns were first settled, the number of residents originally from the United States has declined.

Visitors to the area note the historical Victorian homes and comfortable ranch houses along tree-lined streets, often commenting that they look transplanted straight from Utah. Both Colonia Juárez and Colonia Dublan are known for their peach and apple orchards, chili farms and cattle ranches, and some of these green fields and orchards sprawl along the edges of the towns. Residents of the Colonies typically work as farmers, ranchers and/or in the local schools. Social life in the Colonies revolves around the LDS

Church, as members meet once a week for services and often several times throughout the week for church meetings, activities and events at the local Church-owned schools.

Thomas Romney (1938) points out that even in the early days of settlement when most of the colonists lived in penury, young people migrated to the United States to attend colleges and universities. Romney writes,

After graduation from college they usually find employment far more profitable in the United States than could be obtained in Mexico. . . these young people almost invariably find their mates while at college and. . . assume the responsibilities of the married state. Instead of returning to the Colonies in Mexico, where there is little inducement for ambitious young people to settle, they establish homes in the United States. (1938, p. 302)

Though these words were penned in 1938, they are just as applicable today. I can attest to this, for it was my experience as well. However, there has always been a small percentage of people (usually men) who, following their marriages, migrate back to Colonia Juárez or Colonia Dublan along with their American spouses. The job prospects in the area are predominantly tied to land ownership (i.e. farming, ranching) and traditionally male-dominated. Because of this, there is little opportunity for women who have left the Colonies and married someone who is not from the area to move back. For men, returning to Colonia Dublan or Colonia Juárez with a spouse is much more common, and many of my friends' mothers growing up were American immigrants to Mexico.

It is this population of American immigrant women in Mexico that I chose to study. In some ways, their migration story mirrors mine in that (unlike many immigrants) their circumstances allowed them to immediately assume a privileged position in their

adopted country. The revolving migration that occurs in the Mormon Colonies, wherein young men leave for the United States and come back with their new brides in tow, has resulted in an understudied community of people who live with one foot on each side of the border. Their practice of mixing American and Mexican culture means that they enjoy a home in both (and, sometimes, in neither). One of the purposes of studying these communities is to determine to what degree they have assimilated to their society of settlement, or whether they remain an isolated community similar to other American immigrant communities in Mexico (explored in “Culture and Assimilation for Transnational Migrants,” below). This phenomenon has not been studied and holds possible contributions to the scholarship on American immigrants in Mexico, which in general is extremely scarce. More broadly, I aim to discover where this community fits in relationship to the worldwide trends of migration and transnationalism.

In the following section, I review literature relevant to transnationalism, citizenship, culture and assimilation in migrant communities, as well as existing work on American migration to Mexico. In doing so I will set the context for the way migration has influenced American women’s culture and identity formation in Colonia Dublan and Colonia Juárez, Chihuahua.

### **Transnationalism and Citizenship**

The migration patterns I will be referring to in this section are those of immigrants who have access to dual citizenship and post-nationalist identities. Because not all human beings have the same opportunities to be embraced as “legal” migrants by their country of settlement, the migratory patterns described here are not universal among immigrants.

However, they are generalizable among U.S. American immigrants to Mexico, and therefore pertinent to the communities I studied.

In the literature on international migration, using the concept of transnationalism to explain the way international migrants sustain intensive economic, social and cultural bonds with their families and countries of origin has become very common (van Bochove & Rusinovic, 2008). Smith and Guarnizo (1998), who wrote extensively on the notion of transnationalism, write that it represents phenomena that, although not exactly new, reached historic intensity at a global scale towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Transnational connections simultaneously affect more than one nation and are often generated by human migration (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998). In attempting to define what, exactly, transnational migration is, Glick Schiller and Fouron (1999) write that it is “a pattern of migration in which persons, although they move across international borders, settle, and establish relationships in a new state, maintain ongoing social connections with the polity from which they originated” (p. 344). Therefore, in transnational migration, people live their lives across international borders (Glick Schiller & Fouron, 1999). Recognizing that we are living in a world where migrants are crossing back and forth across borders but maintaining multiple relationships (familial, economic and religious) that span borders, Linda Bash and her colleagues coined the term “transmigrant” to differentiate between this type of migrant and one who completely abandons old patterns of life to adopt a new culture and language (Basch et al., 1994, as cited in Croucher, 2009). The term never really caught on, perhaps because most scholars now recognize that the *majority* of contemporary migrants maintain sociocultural,

political and economic ties to their home country after they migrate, while at the same time becoming part of the countries where they settle (Croucher, 2009; Levitt, 2011).

Although the bulk of literature on immigrant transnationalism has been applied to migrants who leave a less developed country for one that is more so (Portes, 1996; Roberts, Frank & Lozano-Asencio, 1999; Smith & Guarnizo, 1998), U.S. migration to Mexico has many of the same characteristics, despite the migration flow being from a more-developed nation to a developing one. For example, like other transnational communities, migrants who leave the U.S. create and sustain multi-stranded social relations in both their societies of origin and of settlement (Portes, 1996). Similar to other transnational groups, the extent and diversity of U.S. migrants' transnational ties are possible because of readily available high-tech means of communication (such as the Internet, email, satellite television and Vonage telephones) (van Bochove & Rusinovic, 2008). Therefore, an analysis of an American southward migration should be one of immigrant transnationalism, with one important distinction: it must also be through the lens of migrants of privilege (Couchner, 2009).

The fact that many immigrants are no longer exclusively members of only one nation-state has prompted reconsideration of what citizenship entails. Citizenship is commonly thought of as membership in only one national community. However, the growing trend for sending states to incorporate their "nationals" abroad by recognizing dual citizenship means that many migrants obtain citizenship in their country of immigration as well as remain a citizen of their country of origin (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998; van Bochove & Rusinovic, 2008). Furthermore, some would argue that the activities and sense of belonging that were previously tied to citizenship are no longer

limited by national borders (van Bochove & Rusinovic, 2008). This type of membership in a global society characterized by transnational politics could also be described as cosmopolitan, or postnational, citizenship (Dahlin & Hironaka, 2008). Norris (2000) defines cosmopolitan citizens as those who, rather than identifying predominantly with a single state, identify with a continent or the world as a whole (as cited in Dahlin & Hironaka, 2008). Postnational citizenship is defined by Soysal (1994) as characterized by unfixed boundaries, rather than being tied to a single national community. Claiming dual or postnational citizenship reflects the desire of individuals to have their legal status reflect all the political cultures to which they feel they belong (Hayden, 2005, as cited in Dahlin & Hironaka, 2008).

In a study examining the values and meanings migrants assign to national citizenship and their citizenship practices, Leitner and Ehrkamp (2005) found that many transnational migrants challenge conceptions of bounded national citizenship, as they recognize their multiple identifications and want to participate in multiple polities. With this expanded notion of citizenship, transnational migrants become bi-national subjects who enjoy not only the benefits of citizenship, but also the costs of citizenship in two nation-states. Smith and Guarnizo (1998) write that because of this, they may be either doubly empowered or doubly subordinated, depending on historical and local circumstances. For American migrants in Mexico, their circumstance is largely one of bi-national empowerment (Coucher, 2009).

### **Culture and Assimilation for Transnational Migrants**

Levitt (2011) contends that in addition to citizenship, it is an important analytical move to include culture as a more central piece of migration debates. She points out that

it is necessary to study migration as a cultural act: since migrants' identities and actions are full of cultural meaning, the practice of migration is inherently cultural. When seen as a dimension of all social relations and forms, culture can be understood as a process, in which cultural circulation (the relationship between migrating people and migrating cultural products) determines the way ideas and practices change over the course of a migrant's travel (Levitt, 2011). The implication for a community that includes many migrants is that the host community is constantly adopting new cultural practices. In the case of an American migrant community in Mexico, it is therefore possible for the members to behave almost as though they were in the United States.

In her study of American immigrant communities in Ajijic and San Miguel, Croucher (2011) finds that culture is one factor that pulls Americans to Mexico and pushes them from the United States. Her respondents cited among their reasons for moving to Mexico the fact that society moved at a more leisurely pace, that Mexicans had more favorable attitudes toward seniors and, for women, that the country was a more pleasant place to be female (Croucher, 2011) (although perhaps this only applies if one is a white foreigner of privilege). Still, although her subjects frequently cited culture as being one of the attractions of living in Mexico, they didn't often assimilate, and in fact reported that they interact very little with the Mexican locals beyond being served by them (Croucher, 2011).

Similarly, Romney writes that in the Mormon Colonies, the original colonists were "exclusive and seclusive, having few if any contacts with their [Mexican] neighbors" (1938, p. 147). He attributes this to the genetic and cultural differences between the two groups, describing Mexicans as "temperamental and given to intense



emotionalism” while Americans were “less emotional” and “strongly inclined toward the practical” (Cottan Romney, 1938, p. 146). Whether or not this commentary based on stereotypes is accurate, Romney’s point that the original U.S. colonists and the Mexican community did not associate has held repercussions for the area to this day (as I will discuss further in the findings portion of this study).

Given that many Americans remarked that they are drawn to Mexico because of the culture, it is worth studying the extent to which these migrants assimilate to the culture they report being so fond of. Classical assimilation theory assumes that immigrants relinquish their culture of origin in favor of acculturating to the country of residence (Gordon, 1964). However, Antonsich (2012) traces the theoretical development of the notion of assimilation and discusses the way it fell out of favor starting in the 1960s, replaced starting in the 1970s and until the 1990s in favor of multiculturalism. Currently, the “new assimilation theory” holds that acculturation is a bi-dimensional process, in which individuals can maintain their culture even as they acculturate to new societies (Huijnk, Verkuyten & Coenders, 2012). Therefore, current conceptions of assimilation theory hold that sameness (assimilation) and difference (multiculturalism/transnationalism) can coexist (Antonsich, 2012).

This notion of assimilation occurring simultaneously to transnationalism can explain why, in the case of the communities Croucher studied (Ajijic and San Miguel de Allende), she describes the immigrants as living in an “environmental bubble” that impedes assimilation and draws more immigrants who can rely on “the close-knit nature of the foreign community and the easy access to familiar cultural comforts” (2011, p. 64). Along the same lines, Cohen (1977) writes that it is common to observe immigrant

groups in which the residents create their own “enclaves” that shelter them from the host society. Because of this, although the American migrants in Coucher’s (2011) study settled in a foreign land, their lives remain much the same: they watch American television, celebrate American holidays, speak English and participate in U.S. politics. Many of these things also occur in Colonia Juárez and Colonia Dublan, and one of the purposes of studying these communities was to discover whether they live in an “environmental bubble” to the same degree as other American immigrant communities in Mexico, given the lengthy amount of time that has passed since the original settlers migrated there.

### **American Migrants in Mexico: Reversing the Focus**

Though immigration policies in the United States have long been wrought with tension and discord, in the past few years the divergences have been amplified. Harsh legislative policies designed to curtail the number of Mexican migrants entering the United States (notably Arizona’s SB1070 bill and Alabama’s HB56 bill, both targeting undocumented migrants), and the erection of a 700-mile-long border fence between the two countries have fed (rather than appeased) the anti-immigration cry “immigrants take our jobs and lower our wages!” In the midst of this heated rhetoric, few have stopped to examine the smaller (though still significant) wave of migrants heading the other way: south.

Migration literature in general has focused on migration from less developed places to more developed ones, and the standard model for explaining this experience has been previously studied (Topmiller, Conway, Gerber, 2011). However, the case of U.S. citizens migrating to less developed countries, particularly Mexico, has yet to capture the

attention of migration scholars (Croucher, 2009; Topmiller et al., 2011). In trying to research this trend I became aware of the dearth of research and scholarship on American migration to Mexico.<sup>2</sup> I couldn't help but make comparisons between the work available on American migration to Mexico, and Mexican migration to the United States (the latter of which has certainly received its share of attention). In this section I will reverse the focus of most available Mexican-American migration literature, and in some instances make comparisons between the two migration flows.

According to Croucher (2009), among the possible explanations for a lack of scholarship on U.S. (im)migrants to Mexico, and perhaps the most obvious, is that the wave of Americans migrating to Mexico is smaller than that of Mexicans migrating to the United States. However, while the available data on U.S. citizens living abroad are “meager and incomplete,” according to the Migration Policy Institute in Washington, D.C., we do know that of the estimated 4 to 6 million Americans living outside the United States, the largest proportion, estimated at over 1 million, reside in Mexico (Croucher, 2009). Indeed, the United States' southern neighbor is the country with the most U.S. expatriates in the world, and not since the conclusion of the American Civil War (when thousands of Southerners migrated even further south) have so many Americans moved to Mexico (Nevaer, 2003). U.S. immigrants in Mexico make up the largest proportion of the country's foreign-born population at 76 percent (Censo de Población y Vivienda Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 2010). This parallels the fact that

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<sup>2</sup> Because I highlight U.S. scholarship in this paper, it might seem obvious that the research I found deals overwhelmingly with migration to the U.S., not U.S. migration outward. However, my searches in Mexican databases revealed the same trend, and indeed available literature from both countries and in both languages (English and Spanish) primarily focuses on Mexican migration to the United States.

Mexican immigrants in the United States also comprise the largest group of foreign-born in the country at 30 percent (Grieco, 2003). What this means is that the relative size and impact of both groups is similar, although the rhetoric surrounding each is not.

A second potential explanation for the lack of scholarship and interest in this north-to-south migration is this one, also posited by Croucher (2009):

‘Immigrants,’ in the minds of U.S. politicians, academics, media, and public at large, are not ‘white.’ They are not U.S. citizens. They do not leave wealthy and powerful countries, completely voluntarily, to live in poorer and less powerful ones; and ‘immigrants’ do not typically arrive in the new land possessing greater economic, political, and cultural power than the majority of their hosts. (p. 7)

In other words, the term “immigrant” for many U.S. citizens, both in the U.S. and in Mexico, conjures an experience very different than the one most Americans living in Mexico are having. For these immigrants who have “greater economic, political, and cultural power” than their surrounding society (and than most other immigrants), to be labeled that way seems a contradiction, much like claiming the label for myself didn’t seem right when I first moved to the United States.

The refusal to identify as “immigrants” by U.S. migrants to Mexico may be traced to one of the guiding assumptions in the literature of transnationalism: power imbalances and inequality between immigrants and the members of their host society (Croucher, 2007). Though most American immigrants do indeed experience power imbalances and inequality, it is in the opposite direction, meaning that they as immigrants are typically more privileged than the members of their receiving state. For this reason, the experience of American migration to Mexico is commonly much easier than that of their counterparts

in the U.S. Yankelevich (2012) attributes this to the rhetoric and practices that the revolutionary government used to foster immigration to Mexico to “improve” the people biologically. Until the mid-1930s, an atmosphere of “mestizophilia” and a desire to “civilize” Mexico’s indigenous population and foster ethnic fusion led the government to promote a “colonization-immigration formula” (Yankelevich, 2012), which meant that American and other foreign settlers were welcomed with open arms. This practice undoubtedly shaped current perceptions of the migration of Americans to Mexico.

Croucher (2007) writes that the presence of Americans living in Mexico poses a terminological dilemma: are they immigrants, expatriates or a diaspora? I experienced the same quandary in trying to research this thesis, because searching the terms “immigration” “Mexico” and “United States” (in any order) invariably led to literature discussing Mexican migrants in the U.S. I had moderate success in finding information about American citizens living in Mexico by replacing the term “immigrant” with the term “expatriate.” Erik Cohen, who wrote comprehensively on the topic of expatriates, offers a basic definition of the word: “the citizens of one country living in a given locality of another country” (1977, p. 24). Beyond this simple definition, he emphasizes transiency and privilege as being the characteristics that separate expatriates from immigrants, writing that this “inverted minority” has status within the host society and “[is] surely the best-cared for, pampered and well-heeled group of migrants there ever was” (Cohen, 1977, p. 56).

It is perhaps not surprising therefore, that in response to the question “What are you?” many members of the American community in San Miguel de Allende stated simply “I am just an American living in Mexico” (Croucher, 2007, p. 18). Rather than try

to negotiate any of the terms that could be used to describe them— “immigrants,” “expatriates,” a “diaspora,” “legal or illegal aliens,” “colonists,” etc.— American immigrants prefer to avoid these subjective identifiers. A recent example of this stood out to me when 2012 U.S. presidential candidate Mitt Romney displayed a similar reluctance to use the word “immigrant” when describing his connections to Mexico: “My dad was born in Mexico and I’m proud of my heritage, but he was born of U.S. citizens who were living in Mexico at the time” (Bingham, 2012, para. 8). Because Romney’s “U.S. citizens living in Mexico” family extended back three generations (meaning that his great-grandfather migrated to Mexico, but his grandfather and father were born there), I was intrigued that, after all that time, apparently the Romneys still considered themselves neither Mexicans nor immigrants, simply American citizens living in a place besides the U.S. I wondered if this was still the case for people of U.S. upbringing who now live in Colonia Juárez and Colonia Dublan, or whether they are more willing to identify as either Mexicans or immigrants instead of holding on to the diasporic identity “Americans not in the U.S.”

Questions of immigrant identity and belonging in the Mormon Colonies are longstanding, because they have been marked by transnational migration since their inception. A study of the American immigrants in these communities holds possible contributions to the scholarship on migration, assimilation and transnationalism. Because the majority of immigrants in Colonia Dublan and Colonia Juárez are women who have married men born there, I focused my research on women of U.S. citizenship and/or upbringing. Throughout my conversations with them, we explored the way culture, citizenship and belonging are influenced by the circumstances of their migration.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHODOLOGY

Placing research emphasis on understanding the “depth of meaning” (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008) in the experiences of the women in Colonia Juárez and Colonia Dublan led me to explore their life histories and everyday behavior through an ethnographic approach. I chose to conduct unstructured interviews to study how these immigrant women construct their social reality as they “create meaningful categories for themselves and others” (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008, p.16). In individual unstructured interviews participants can describe their experiences fully and without interruption which can result in richer and more abundant data (Valentine, 1993). It is also easier to maintain a conversational style while simultaneously steering the interview to obtain the kind of data the researcher is looking for (Valentine 1993). Finally, individual interviews can provide a series of broad themes to help highlight topics and issues that interest the researcher, while at the same time leaving room for narrative answers and probing questions (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

In thinking about the best way to undertake this research project, I considered doing both individual interviews and a focus group, since each method has its advantages and disadvantages. A focus group is a very efficient use of time, as more people can be interviewed at once (Valentine, 1993), which was appealing when considering the eight-hour drive from these communities to my home in Phoenix. In a focus group, the researcher also acts more as a moderator than an interviewer, which lessens the degree to which she will influence the data (Qu and Dumay, 2011). My influence was a concern for me given my personal relationship with some of the women I chose to interview and my

status as a historical member of the community; however, such “insider” status is also recognized to reassure participants and facilitate the sharing of different sorts of information than would be disclosed with more distanced interviewers. By using a focus group in such small communities I also risked silencing some of the voices in a group and increasing the likelihood of participants voicing accepted community norms. Ultimately, the small size of each community and the private information that might be disclosed meant that the benefits of unstructured, individual interviews outweighed the use of a focus group.

### **Participants**

Participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling within the Colonia Juárez and Colonia Dublan communities. Each participant received an email describing the study and eligibility for participation (Appendix A). Since I chose to study English language communities in the area and their association with the construction of identities, this email was written in English. I was interested in speaking specifically with people for whom (American) English is the primary language and who identify as citizens of the United States (whether or not they also identify as citizens of an additional country). Because I lived in Colonia Juárez until I moved to the United States seven years ago, I first contacted 14 women from that community that I knew had migrated from the United States or Canada to Mexico. I also wanted to include women who lived in Colonia Dublan; however, I was not as familiar with the Colonia Dublan community (a fact made even more pronounced by my seven-year absence from the area). In light of this, I asked the original 14 women I contacted if they would identify their fellow countrywomen (in both communities, but especially Colonia Dublan) for inclusion in this study. After



receiving several referrals, I contacted a second group of 14 women, most of who belonged to the Colonia Dublan American/English-speaking community. Due to unfavorable interview conditions (namely, one participant's husband was present at the time of the interview, causing concern that the participant could not speak candidly about her experience in Mexico), one interview was eliminated from the sample. In total, interviews with 15 participants were utilized in the final analysis. A total of 15 interviews seemed to be appropriate for this exploratory study because of the small size of these communities and the thematic saturation that was achieved towards the last few participant interviews.

Of the 28 women first contacted for participation, the final interviewees included seven women from the first wave of emails and nine women from the second wave. They ranged in age from 22 to 79 years, all were white, and all but one identified as not being Hispanic or Latino. One woman identified as white and Hispanic because her father was Hispanic, but is not a fluent Spanish speaker and identifies culturally as American, not Mexican. Two of the participants were Canadian citizens in addition to being U.S. citizens, but because of the length of time they had lived in the U.S. and the fact that they identified culturally with other Americans, they were included in this study and are referred to as "American" throughout this analysis. To qualify for participation, individuals had to be of U.S. citizenship and/or upbringing. They also had to have lived in Mexico for at least one year and have long-term plans to stay. Although nearly all of the women had moved to Mexico with the intent to stay, two had previously had to leave due to economic hardship. After a period of living in the United States for many years, these two women moved back to Mexico relatively recently, for the second time. The

length of time participants had lived in Mexico ranged from 4-58 years. The mean length of time participants had lived there was 17 years.

### **Procedure**

Individual unstructured narrative interviews were conducted with 16 participants. Eleven interviews were conducted in the homes of participants while five interviews were conducted at the Academia Juárez (the local high school) or at my family's home in Colonia Juárez. The option to interview at either of these alternative locations was provided in case women with many children and/or younger children preferred to be interviewed somewhere besides their own home. Both at the Academia Juárez and at my family's house, interviews took place in a quiet room where only the interviewee and I could hear the conversation, ensuring privacy and confidentiality. All participants agreed to be interviewed for a study on women's decisions and experiences of moving to another country, and in particular the move from the United States to Mexico. Participants received a thorough explanation of the purpose and methods of the study before the interview process began, and each participant received a consent form stating that her agreement to being interviewed would serve as informed consent to participate in the study (Appendix B). In accordance with IRB protocol, participants were allowed to discontinue participation at any time. Oral consent was again obtained prior to beginning the recording of each interview.

Upon disclosure of the research purposes and a description of what sort of things might be discussed, participants were asked to describe their upbringing and decision to move to Mexico. This served to establish rapport, particularly since for the majority of participants a description of the process of moving to Mexico was intertwined with the

story of their courtship with, and marriage to, their husbands. Since interviews primarily took place in the homes of participants, the relaxed setting combined with this type of storytelling ensured the comfort of participants, which was a priority given the personal nature of the subject matter. After their initial free-form story, I presented some additional questions that invited narratives on the process of moving to Mexico, the challenges and advantages of living there, dominance of the Spanish language, the integration of themselves and their children into Mexican society, and feelings of citizenship and belonging. All narratives were prompted by questions that allowed for participant-guided conversation and ease of disclosure. Although some interviews were emotional in nature, none of the participants chose to withdraw from participation. The resulting narratives ranged from approximately 30 minutes to 75 minutes in length.

Anonymity of the participants was ensured through the assignment of a participant identification number, in chronological order, that was used to identify participants throughout the analysis stage of this study (i.e. P1, P2, P3, etc.). Each participant identification number was then changed to a pseudonym for use in this analysis. Each interview recording was transcribed by listening to short segments of the recording, pausing the recording, then typing the segment into a word document. During transcription, care was taken to include not only verbal utterances, but also nonverbal communication such as laughing or crying. This served to capture the atmosphere of the interview and account for the emotional tone of each participant, thus ensuring the accuracy of the interview transcriptions. In interview transcription, I used hyphens to signify brief pauses in speech, particularly to signify an interruption in speech (whether by me as the interviewer or by the participant herself, as she moved to a different line of

thought). The interview transcriptions yielded 167 pages of single-spaced text utilized during the data-analysis stage of this study. All details that could identify specific individuals and threaten confidentiality were removed from the transcripts and excluded from the data analysis.

### **Analytical Process**

The data analysis for this study was guided by grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which is the process of drawing conclusions or deriving theory by analyzing the patterns, recurrent categories, and themes found in the data. The constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used to identify emergent themes in the data. First, I read each printed transcript and used open coding to identify important or telling segments of the text, labeling them in the margins. I then applied a name (or a code) to each of these segments. The second step of the analytical process was to create categories, grouping the codes and patterns that I had identified previously into higher categories, or themes. Because I approached the analysis procedure without a predefined set of coding categories, my goal in this phase was to gain insight and understanding, immersing myself in the text and allowing themes and concepts to rise from the data itself (emergent themes), as recommended by Hesse-Biber & Leavy (2006). The final stage of data analysis included refining each theme and determining which text segments best exemplified the themes for inclusion in the final write-up. In the analysis below, I have included the participant pseudonym as well as the line numbers of the original interview after each interview excerpt (i.e. “Anne, 309-314”).

## CHAPTER 3

### ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Of the fifteen women I interviewed, only two moved to Mexico independently while single (one met and married her husband after moving, the other is still single). Of the remaining women, eight knew before getting married that they would be moving to Mexico. One woman knew prior to marrying her husband that it was a “strong possibility” that they would eventually move to Mexico, and the rest had no idea such a move was in their future. It’s fair to say all of the ladies I interviewed, besides the two women who were single when they migrated, moved there because their husbands grew up in the area. However, the women’s reasons for moving were varied, and in some cases the push to move came from them, not their husbands.

The women who knew beforehand that they would be moving to Mexico did so soon or immediately after they were married. These migrations were husband-led, with the women in a supportive role. Elizabeth told me that her husband “made it very clear that when we got married we were moving to Mexico eventually” (Elizabeth, 21-22), and in several cases the women were informed by their now-husbands that these men did not even want to date women who weren’t willing to return to live in the Mormon Colonies. Because these eight women (and most of the others I interviewed) are married to either farmers or ranchers, the opportunity these occupations provide for a man to be self-employed (“run his own life” as one person put it) and work outside creates what one woman described as a “man’s haven” in the Mormon Colonies.

Having grown up in this environment, the men these women married were anxious to return to it, and Iris explained, “You know, and it’s hard, when they want to

come back and work, when a man settles down and gets married, and they're ready to do kind of their life's work kind of a thing, you know, he wanted to come" (Iris, 47-49).

Along the same lines, Lily told me, ". . .but I think it's just that little saying we always say that you can take the boy out of the Colonies, but not the Colony out of the boy. So I think really that's ultimately what brought us back" (Lily, 28-31). For a variety of reasons, these women were supportive of the idea of moving, even though migration to Mexico wouldn't have necessarily been their first choice had they married someone else. One woman commented that she had heard about the Mormon Colonies before meeting her husband and found them "intriguing," while another remarked that she visited before getting married and loved the family-oriented nature of the community. Elizabeth summed up the attitude of this group of women by saying, "I was excited about moving here because [my husband] loved it so much and was so positive and excited about coming that it made me excited and want to come (Elizabeth, 377-378).

Some of the women, however, reported that the idea to move to Mexico had not been presented to them until after they were already married. Heather remarked,

I mean, I guess he had warned his past girlfriends, 'Look, if you date me, there's a possibility you'll end up marrying me and moving to Mexico.' But he never presented that to me! Not at all! It wasn't until, in fact, after we were married that the idea came to be [ . . . ] And all of a sudden, this offer to go to Mexico came up. So yeah, it wasn't in the plans for sure. (Heather, 143-150)

Among this second group of women, not all were as willing to move as those that knew prior to getting married that they would be doing so. For them, moving "wasn't in the

plans” before getting married and wasn’t discussed for a period of time after getting married. As Kathy described,

And I was willing to come down and visit a few times, his parents would be like, ‘Come down for Christmas,’ ‘Oh, sure, we’ll come.’ But I never wanted to move down here. He had mentioned that he might take over the family farm, but I just was like, ‘Mmm... no, I’ll go visit, but I’m not going to move down here. I don’t think it’s my thing.’ (Kathy, 53-57)

While Kathy expressed reluctance to move because it “wasn’t her thing,” Courtney commented that she had been disinclined to move away from the United States because she didn’t know if her children would have all of the advantages (as far as extracurricular activities) that she had enjoyed growing up. For the women in this group, the idea to move to Mexico was introduced gradually after they were married, and the move itself happened as economic opportunities to do so presented themselves.

Though some of these women expressed having been initially reticent to move, they made sure to add that they have grown to love the area and are happy to be there. In fact, only one woman of the 15 that I interviewed expressed sadness and frustration at being “forced” to live in Mexico, saying,

[My husband] doesn’t. . . he chooses to do this. This is not my choice [laughs].  
This is not my choice. We, I feel like we gave up an awful lot to move back here, and that probably is a real hard, tender spot for me. Because like I said, it wasn’t my choice to do this at all. (Monica, 239-242)

This statement, though the only one of its kind, saddened my feminist heart. I was also vaguely unsatisfied with some women’s assertions that a married woman has the ability

(and the duty) to make herself satisfied wherever her husband's happiness lies. For example, Francis told me,

I think that a woman who is very loyal and who loves her husband a lot, can make herself very happy wherever the husband happens to be. And I think that that is her obligation, to make a happy home and to make things smooth, and to not be criticizing and complaining all the time. I don't think there's a place in a marriage for that kind of thing. Amen. (Francis, 285-289)

Although her closing "amen" was meant in jest, it underscores the religious elements that have informed her position. In 1995, the LDS Church issued a document entitled "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," in which the Church makes clear its position on marriage and the responsibilities of husbands and wives. In this document, considered "scripturelike in its power" (Packer, 2008), the Church declares,

By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners. ("The Family: A Proclamation to the World," 1995)

Although this statement is not necessarily prescriptive, it espouses conservative Euro-American gender roles and is widely interpreted by Church members to mean that, where possible, stay-at-home motherhood is encouraged. Therefore, in both of the communities that I studied, men are commonly the primary (if not the only) breadwinners. For all but two of the women I spoke with, the move to Mexico was



caused in large part because a career opportunity arose for their husbands. Betty commented,

To me, the number one good thing that I love about living here is being where my husband is happy. I think that a man has to love what they're doing in order to be happy. And I think a woman is blessed with— we're more emotional and sentimental, or at least I am. If I know that my family's happy, I'm happy. Regardless of how old my washing machine is, or you know whatever, I'm happy.

(Betty, 613-618)

Being a “good” wife in this very conservative environment includes “mak[ing] herself very happy wherever the husband happens to be.” Despite my initial inclination (as a Mormon feminist) to disagree, I was mollified by research that shows that relationships between spouses, family members and close friends are “more likely to be characterized by the giving of benefits in response to the perceived need of the individual with no expectation of repayment” (Houlihan, Jackson & Rogers, 1990, p. 90). Furthermore, happy marriages have been found to be characterized by a lack of “equity of exchange” in serviceable acts between spouses (Houlihan et al., 1990). In other words, these women's willingness to meet their husband's need to find a fulfilling career path by migrating may contribute to the success of their marriage, even though the action is not reciprocal.

With that said, I fully expected that all of the women I interviewed would be living in Colonia Juárez or Colonia Dublan only because they had married someone from the area. However, I was surprised to discover that some women had been the driving force for the move. Of course, for the two women that were single when they moved to

Mexico, this goes without saying (although one of these two women did not plan on staying, but ultimately did so because she married someone from the Colonies). These women migrated because of favorable career prospects in one case and a love interest in the other. However, in addition to these two women, a small but distinct group of already-married women remarked that the idea and desire to move had been theirs, not their husband's. As Diane put it, “. . .the reason we moved here wasn't because I was dragged down here like many wives are, because their husbands meet them there [in the U.S.] and then they come back to farm” (Diane, 77-79). Unsurprisingly, this independent decision-making process led to feelings of empowerment and contentment, Anna observing,

[This] is what I chose, and I think when you make the choice yourself you tend to make the best out of whatever you're given. And rather than feeling like 'this happened to me' like, 'this is my choice, this is what I wanted.' (Anna, 272-274)

For this small group of women (three in total), the desire to migrate to Mexico stemmed universally from the fact that this was the community where they wanted to raise their children. Diane commented, “we just basically moved here because we felt like we wanted to raise our kids in this environment” (Diane, 85-87). Similarly, Anna remarked, “[W]e're raising a family together and that's what I really wanted, so [. . .] I thought I got a good deal” (Anna, 287-288). Migrating to Mexico was seen as an acceptable trade-off to being able to raise children in a community that is very family-centered for 14 of the 15 women that I interviewed (one migrated as a single woman, with grown children).

With this background in mind, there were three overarching themes that appeared after coding all the interview data. I have labeled them “Justifying Moving to Mexico,”

“Juntos Pero No Revueltos,”<sup>3</sup> and “Third Space in the Mormon Colonies.” Each of these themes has two subthemes that further explore the ideas contained in interview data. Under “Justifying Moving to Mexico,” I discuss *family-oriented reasons for living in Mexico* as well as *cultural and financial reasons for living in Mexico*. In the “Juntos Pero No Revueltos” section, I review the way interview participants perceive the *language barrier as a divisive element* and *socioeconomic status as a divisive element*. Finally, in “Third Space in the Mormon Colonies,” I explore *citizenship in the third space* and *teaching patriotism and citizenship as a mother*.

### **Justifying Living in Mexico**

According to Shirk (2011), Mexico’s domestic security began to decline in the mid 1990s, thanks to a severe economic crisis that led to increases in robbery and crime. The country was further buffeted in later years by a wave of drug-related violence that can be traced to government crackdowns on the drug industry, growing consumption of illicit substances (in both the U.S. and Mexico), generational shifts within *narco* hierarchy, US-based arms trafficking and institutional corruption on both sides of the border (Patterson, 2009). Shirk claims that the number of drug-related homicides increased more than sixfold after 2005, and in total the Mexican government estimates that from January 2007 to late 2010, more than thirty-two thousand of the approximately forty-five thousand homicides in the country were drug related (Shirk, 2011).

Despite the fact that both Colonia Juárez and Colonia Dublan are small, rural farming communities, they too were affected by the wave of violence that shook the country during these years. This was due in part to their proximity to Ciudad Juárez,

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<sup>3</sup> Translated as “together, but not mixed.”

which Shirk describes as “among the deadliest places in the world” thanks to its status as a major trafficking city. Indeed, many of the women I spoke to explained the changes that had taken place in the community due to security concerns. One described the way a counterkidnapping specialist had been brought in to the community to educate people on the best ways to keep themselves safe; another recalled the terror of laying on the floor one night while hearing gunshots right across the street from her house. A third woman talked about the way her kids now have to be driven everywhere rather than riding their bikes or walking, admitting that she is wary of allowing them to visit new friends’ homes and concluding simply, “There’s been an innocence that’s lost” (Iris, 334).

Given these security concerns in recent years, some of the American women I interviewed have become accustomed to justifying their choice to remain in Mexico to friends and family in the U.S. Kathy noted,

It wasn’t— it was scary, but. . . and it was hard to explain to family when they were terrified, they didn’t know, and that’s how I felt like the other people that would leave, they were terrified like our families who didn’t understand what was going on, why we would stay. But if everyone leaves the situation, what do you leave behind? Some people have to be here to. . . not keep it standing, but just kind of keep it stable. (Kathy, 635-639)

However, although increased in recent years, the need to defend the decision to live in Mexico existed long before the area experienced the security concerns previously discussed. Several of the American women I spoke to reported having been met with skepticism and concern by their parents, family members and friends both before and after their migration to Mexico, regardless of the country’s circumstances. Although

violence has since abated in these small communities, even ordinary events require that these women continually justify their choice to stay there, as exemplified by this story Anna told me about a recent trip to the grocery store:

I was going to the grocery store and a guy— you know how they are down here, a guy came out in the road and was juggling the fire sticks. And I put a picture on Instagram saying that I was on my way to the grocery store and got a show. And seriously, all my friends were like, ‘Oh my gosh, where do you live, get out of there!’ And I thought it was awesome, I was like ‘Are you kidding me?’ They’re all scared for me and I thought it was awesome. (Anna, 411-417)

The contradiction between what her (American) friends thought (“get out of there!”) and what Anna thought (“it was awesome”) highlights Anna’s need to defend her circumstances. Along the same lines, Gretel described her adopted hometown and life there this way: “It’s a happy place to be, and it’s kind of an adventure” (Gretel, 210-211). This feeling of living “kind of an adventure” creates a difference in perception between the women that live in the Mormon Colonies and their friends and family across the border that must be managed on an ongoing basis.

Perhaps due to long practice in emphasizing the positives of their lives in Mexico, most of the women spoke extensively about the benefits of living where they do. This process of justification overwhelmingly focused on the area’s positive child-rearing environment. For some, the biggest advantages were the opportunity for their children to grow up in an LDS-dominant community, while others highlighted the benefits of their kids being bilingual. Similarly to U.S. migrants to San Miguel de Allende in Coucher’s (2007) study, a smaller number of women referenced economic factors and discussed the

financial advantages they enjoyed that wouldn't be available for them on the other side of the border.

**Family-oriented reasons for living in Mexico.** For the majority of the women I interviewed, the possibility of raising their children in these very small communities was the biggest factor in their decision to migrate. Though they had no firsthand experience of living in the Mormon Colonies themselves, several participants indicated that their spouse's childhood provided a model for the way they wanted to raise their own children. One person remarked,

[. . .] [my husband] grew up in a very idyllic sort of childhood growing up, so I think, and I think it's that case for a lot of people from the Colonies, to know they have such a dreamy childhood that they think 'If I can recreate that for my own children that would be a great thing.' (Lily, 35-38)

Knowing that their primary goal was to find a good place to raise a family, creating an "idyllic sort of childhood" for their kids was an enticing idea. A few of the women commented that from their first visit to these communities they noticed that the kids seemed happy and well adjusted. This was what convinced them the move would be a good idea, despite initial opposition in some cases, as for Kathy who said:

And so that was when it really changed, is having a child, and my harsh attitude about 'I'll never move there, I'll just go visit' really changed into 'You know, maybe this is a good place to raise my kids. Maybe it is something that we'd be better off with.' (Kathy, 84-87)

Given that most things in these communities revolve around the spiritual principals of the LDS Church, it was not surprising for me to hear that many women

believe this small, rural area of Mexico shields their children from experiences that can be morally detrimental. Kathy related the story of her kids being fascinated by elevators until they were around 10 years old, saying,

Not normal for kids their age, they don't think that's pretty cool. So like my niece who lives out there, she's a year older than [my oldest], her maturity level is years above. But the things that she's been exposed to and knows scare me, because I don't think— at that age you should still have some innocence. (Kathy, 647-650)

Iris concurred with this assessment, saying, “I think that even though Mexico's behind in a lot of things, they're also behind in, as far as in our high school, they're behind in teenage pregnancy and the drug abuse and things like that” (Iris, 594-596). The school this woman is referring to is the Academia Juárez, an LDS Church-owned school in which only 14% of students are not practicing LDS members (B. Jones, personal communication, August 11, 2013). Given this statistic, for the most part the Mormon children of the Colonies are surrounded by peers who share their beliefs and value system, which (I can say from personal experience) does make it easier to live in accordance to Church principles.

The women I spoke to focused not only on the things that do not happen thanks to the Church's influence, but also the things that do contribute to the spiritual and moral development of their kids. For example, Courtney said that a great advantage to living where she does is “That you know that your children are learning gospel principles that are eternal, and in an eternal aspect I can't think of a better place to raise my children.” (Courtney, 184-186). Likewise, for Jessica moving to Mexico was seen as synonymous with providing her children with a strong foundation in the LDS Church:

We thought this was a wonderful place to raise children and we knew we'd never make any money because [my husband is] a schoolteacher and you don't make money here, but we felt that wasn't the most important thing. We wanted to raise our children here and have them have such a good base in the Gospel as he had had. (Jessica, 68-71)

Making sure their children have “a good base in the Gospel” and “learn gospel principles” is seen as easier in this area. Certainly, Colonias Juárez and Dublan are well known for producing leaders in the Mormon Church. Several former residents have become LDS General Authorities, and many others have become bishops,<sup>4</sup> stake presidents<sup>5</sup> and mission presidents.

According to Hatch (1972), this stems from a 1925 ban by the Mexican government on ministers and missionaries of all religions. The LDS Church has always placed heavy emphasis on missionary work, and was anxious to resume its efforts as soon as possible. However, once the ban was lifted, for many years the only missionaries that could proselyte were Mexican nationals. Because many of the residents of the Mormon Colonies were technically Mexican nationals, but also retained close ties to LDS Church leadership in Utah, Hatch (1975) writes that the Mormon Colonies provided most of the leadership and the missionaries for all of Mexico during this time. Due to the growth of the LDS Church in Mexico in the years since, this is no longer the case. However, many Church leaders do still have roots in the Colonies, and all of the LDS boys that graduate

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<sup>4</sup> Spiritual leader of a ward (congregation).

<sup>5</sup> An LDS stake is equivalent to a Catholic diocese and encompasses several wards.



from the Academia Juárez are expected to serve two-year missions for the Church (slightly shorter missions are encouraged, though not expected, for girls as well).

Besides the spiritual aspect of growing up in the Colonies, the mothers I interviewed also felt that giving their children the opportunity to be bilingual was priceless. This was a huge motivating factor and was mentioned by many of the women as a big advantage to living where they live. One woman gushed that her “heart just literally flows with love and warmth” when she hears her children speaking Spanish. Another, reflecting back on her child-rearing years, commented,

[...] I thought the fact that [my kids] were becoming bilingual was very, very valuable. And it wasn't just like taking a Spanish class here and there; it was, you know, they were going to school part-time in Spanish and part-time in English, even in those days. So I thought it was very valuable to have that. (Francis, 145-148)

While many of the women recognized the value of their children being fluent Spanish speakers, the emphasis on creating a bilingual environment for children is not universal, as illustrated by this woman's comment:

I think there are a lot benefits to being here, I think that it's a good place to raise a family, in the regard of culture, like what I just told you, bilingual, bicultural kids. I think that's huge! You know when I see families who don't really take advantage of that, I think that's just sad. (Lily, 141-144)

This comment may refer to the fact that many of the women who recognize the value of their children being bilingual reported that they do not speak Spanish themselves, regardless of how long they have lived in Mexico. The degree to which different

American immigrant women focus on learning Spanish and passing those skills to their children differs significantly, as is discussed further in subsequent sections. Still, in regards to language and culture, one participant described a sentiment that most of the American women I interviewed share, saying, “The kids that come from here have something that most people don’t. And it’s because of the culture they grew up in. I think it’s neat” (Gretel, 213-215).

**Cultural and financial reasons for living in Mexico.** In her work on American migrants to Mexico that live in San Miguel Allende, Coucher (2007) explains that culture is a draw for Americans, particularly those who have “grown disenchanted” with the pace or quality of life in the United States. Similarly, the women I interviewed talked extensively about their love for their community, as well as their appreciation of Mexican culture, with quotes like “I love the kiss on the cheek when you see people,” or “I loved the friendliness of the Mexican people.” In general, the women I interviewed perceived Mexican people as being warmer, kinder and much more polite than Americans.

However, equally important to many women was the opportunity to live among a large American population (even in Mexico). Iris commented,

And I think that’s what really draws people here, are the people. I don’t think that we would live here unless there was a large group of English-speaking people here, number one, [my husband’s] family (probably number one), the community, and then the Church is so strong here. (Iris, 541-545)

Heather echoed this same sentiment, remarking that her favorite thing about living in the Mormon Colonies is the tight-knit community and “that there are a lot of Americans here that can relate to your situation, so you don’t feel alone” (Heather, 388-389). Again, I

turn to Coucher's (2007) work because she points out that although many Americans appreciate Mexico's welcoming cultural attitudes, migration to the south is heavily influenced by established social networks. Similar to the way immigrants to the United States typically settle in cities where large numbers of their compatriots already reside, American migrants to Mexico are attracted to the communities that already host other American citizens. For the women that have moved to Colonia Juárez or Colonia Dublan, having "a large group of English-speaking people" who can "relate to [their] situation" is important. Ultimately, the somewhat clannish nature of these communities is both a factor, and a result, of separation between its American and Mexican members (as explored in the "Juntos Pero No Revueltos" section).

Additionally, several women pointed out that some aspects of the unified atmosphere of these communities aren't necessarily specific to American or Mexican culture, but rather seem to be a factor of rural religious life and a small population size. There were so many quotes about this subject that it was hard to choose only a few to include in this write-up. Overall, women commented on the friendliness of people in the area. One woman pointed out that the thing that struck her when visiting for the first time is that everyone waves at each other, a custom that was hard for her to get used to after she left an urban environment. Gretel discussed the supportive atmosphere of the Colonies, saying,

[. . .] the best thing about living here, is that when something goes wrong and you need people to support you, whether it be a sick child or a family member who died or something like that, everybody's up in your face and everybody knows what's going on, and you have a lot of support and a lot of love. It's just a really

loving place to be. It's a very loving and a very. . . forgiving, I think that people are very forgiving here. It's hard to hold a grudge I think, when you have to see people so often. So that's what's neat about living here. (Gretel, 332-339)

Naomi also discussed the way there is "always time for a friend," making a comparison to the fast-paced life she observed her relatives living in the United States:

The people here seem more open than in the States. People in the States are generally closed and 'This is my life, I've gotta go here, gotta do that,' and are just kind of too busy. Even, I see it in my sisters' lives and what they're doing—not that they're not nice, but they're just busy. Like, overly so. And I wouldn't say that we're not busy here, but there's always time for a friend. There's always time to stop and help somebody on the street. I don't know, it's just a little different. (Naomi, 467-472)

In these small towns, women who have been transplanted far from friends and family quickly become an integral part of their new communities.

Besides a cultural pull for U.S. migrants in Mexico, Coucher (2007) writes that the Americans she studied in San Miguel de Allende overwhelmingly identify economic factors as the reason they chose to migrate. She writes about their houses ("magnificent colonial structures" purchased for "bargain prices"), the maids, cooks and gardeners they employ, and the way U.S. pensions amount to double a middle-class family's income in Mexico (p. 24-25). Among the women I interviewed, the financial advantages of living in Mexico did not come up as much as the benefits for their families and cultural draws, but some women did touch on their relative economic privilege. These women discussed the

way their financial advantage allows them to live more comfortably in Mexico than in the United States. Olivia declared,

I can't afford to live by myself in the United States on 9 dollars an hour. Ok?  
Can't. I can live comfortable down here on 9 dollars an hour. Ok? And still be able to drive and get my truck permit<sup>6</sup> and go to the States every two months and get my groceries, or get somebody in Colonia to buy my groceries and give 'em money cause they're going up to the groceries. You know. Um, I couldn't live the way I live right now in the States. (Olivia, 290-296)

Iris concurred, saying,

I think there's a lot of benefits that we take advantage of, living here. And I guess that's what I'm trying to explain, labor's cheaper here, we wouldn't have this size of a house in the States, it would have cost us, you know, who knows what. You know, but here we can afford having a bigger house, having a yard man and a maid, I feel like that's a big blessing. I mean, I do, I feel like it's been a blessing. (Iris, 606-616)

These comments suggest that, similar to the U.S. migrants Coucher studied, American migrant women are motivated to stay in Mexico (and justify this choice to others) by the material comforts their economic privilege provides.

### **Juntos Pero No Revueltos**

“And I think that's kind of an interesting issue for all of us here in the Colonies, you know, is how we fit, and where we fit exactly.” -Lily, 193-195

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<sup>6</sup> In order to drive an American car, as many American immigrants do, a car pass that enables them to keep the car in the country legally must be renewed every six months at the border. This will be further discussed under “Third Space in the Mormon Colonies.”

In trying to think of a descriptive title for this section, I immediately thought of the saying “*Juntos, pero no revueltos.*”<sup>7</sup> I tried to find its equivalent in English, but stopped after reading this sentence among my interview data: “But what I see in my kids that’s so cool and I love it, is that there isn’t a language for them. [. . .] It’s the ever flowing from one to the other” (Lily, 119-121). An integral part of growing up in Colonia Juárez or Colonia Dublan is the melding of two languages and two cultures, particularly among those of us who were born and raised there. However, one thing that was interesting about returning as an adult (and as a researcher) to a place I had last lived in as a teenager was the forced acknowledgement of tensions I had either never noticed or forgotten. Evidently, this melding of cultures is not exactly as smooth as I remembered it being.

Coucher (2009) writes that in this globalized era where “goods, services, people and ideas” move frequently and farther, the question “Who am I, and where do I fit?” is intensified (p. 138). She writes that migrant identity depends on context; for American migrants in Mexico (at least in the communities both she and I studied), that context is one of relative privilege. Many of the women I interviewed, both in Colonia Juárez and Colonia Dublan, brought up what they described as a “separation,” a “tension,” or a “divide” between the people of different cultures in the area. The women that have lived in Mexico the longest reported that this separation has lessened considerably over the years, with Francis saying,

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<sup>7</sup> The literal translation of this phrase is “together, but not mixed.”

It's changed a lot from when I first came down here. The two, the Spanish and the American cultures have more or less merged now, but in those days they were pretty separate, actually.

V: How come?

Francis: I don't know, that's just the way it was. (Francis, 114-119)

Elizabeth, another long-time resident, agreed that this sense of a divide between cultures used to be much more pronounced, commenting, "I know when [my husband] was raised here, at the beginning of when I was first here, you could be friends but you didn't really associate. It was a culture thing I think" (Elizabeth, 273-275). Both of these women noticed a progression toward what they described as a "merging" of cultures in the many years they have been members of the community (though it is possible this is rather a result of greater familiarity across the cultural groups).

Years ago, sociologist Robert Park theorized that the progression of immigrant assimilation would be thus: after an initial stage of *contact*, immigrants would experience *competition and conflict* within their host community, then *accommodation*, and finally *assimilation* (as cited in Coucher, 2009). This theoretical approach has since been replaced by the idea of transnational migrants, who are able to participate across borders, although their ability to do so varies by class and race (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). Middle-class and professional migrants, by virtue of their socioeconomic status, can therefore "selectively assimilate" elements of both their society of origin and the society in which they settle (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007, p. 139). This "selective assimilation" process is evident in the varying degrees to which the women I interviewed speak Spanish and associate socially with their Mexican neighbors. Though some commented

that now “the two cultures have more or less merged,” most of the women I interviewed felt that a separation is still very much present.

In some instances, participants described a sense of social separation specifically between the English-speaking LDS Church congregations and those that are Spanish-speaking. In both Colonia Juárez and Colonia Dublan, the English-speaking congregation is called the First Ward, and the Spanish-speaking, the Second Ward. These wards were numbered in order of appearance, as the original colonists were English-speakers from the United States. In both communities, the two different language wards meet in the same building and have activities together. Still, as this comment will show, there’s a nagging split:

Heather: There’s a divide. Even though you’re friends, there’s still that little divide.

V: Do you see it as a bad thing, or a normal thing?

Heather: Well, it’s something you accept, of course, living here, you just come to accept. But at first it was kind of strange to me, because I went to a baby shower, and I’m friends with several women in town from the Second Ward or whatever, but everyone was split. Like all the Second-Warders were on one side of the room, all the First-Warders were on the other side of the room. And I noticed that immediately and I made a comment to somebody, and they said, ‘Oh, it’s always like that. That’s just how it always is.’ And it is kind of sad that there’s not more intermingling, but I think it’s just a comfort thing.

V: People not willing to step outside their—



Heather: Yeah, yeah. Past the initial *saludar*,<sup>8</sup> I think, then they go back to their safe zones. (Heather, 423-434)

The addition of the words “or whatever,” after “women in town from the Second Ward” is telling. Because Heather would have been well acquainted with all the women from the First Ward, “or whatever” serves as a catch-all phrase to include all of the Mexican women at this gathering, some of whom might not have been in the Second Ward or even LDS at all. Despite Heather’s assertion that she (and others) “come to accept” this societal split, it still creates an unnatural social setting. Many of the women reported that these cultural or linguistic divisions are common in the Colonies, whether at school basketball games, church activities or, as in the above example, parties and other social gatherings.

Interestingly, it is not only the (predominantly female) American immigrant adults who experience this type of social clustering. Their kids experience the same “othering,” despite the fact that they’ve lived in Mexico their whole lives and in many instances were born there. Lily told me this story about when her son was younger:

When [my son] was in fourth grade he came home and he was like, ‘My friends said they can’t play with me any more,’ and I said, ‘Oh yeah, why is that?’ And he said, ‘Because I’m not like them.’ And I said, ‘Really, and how are you not like them?’ And he said, ‘I don’t know, they’re the ones that told me I’m not like them.’ [laughs] And I said, ‘But why do they feel that you’re not like them?’ And he said, ‘Well, it’s because they said my skin isn’t brown like theirs.’ And I said,

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<sup>8</sup> The term *saludar* refers to the Mexican way of greeting people with a kiss on the cheek (though most often it’s rather a touching of cheeks while air kissing).

‘You know what, son, you are exactly like them, they are just exactly like you, you are the same. You know, there’s no difference, there’s no difference.’ He said, you know, ‘That’s what I told them.’ By fourth grade, what was really interesting to me, and it wasn’t him that saw a difference, it was his classmates that saw the difference. And I think that’s kind of an interesting issue for all of us here in the Colonies, you know, is how we fit, and where we fit exactly. (Lily, 184-195)

Villareal (2010) writes that no skin-color-based racial categories are recognized in Mexico’s population census and, although Mexicans do make color comparisons in everyday life, there is “extreme ambiguity in skin color classification” (p. 653). In addition, in the border state of Chihuahua, many people besides American immigrants have white skin and European features. It’s possible that Lily’s son didn’t look so different from his little classmates, some of whom were probably nearly as “white” as he was. I would argue that “brown skin” encompassed a fourth-grader’s ability to identify broader linguistic and cultural differences, and that it points to a socioeconomic differentiation, more so than a distinction based on race.

These ambiguities of identity and belonging are neither new nor unique to the Mormon Colonies, but the additional components of race, class and migration in this small community make them particularly complex. In Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) seminal work on Borderland theory (with a capital “B,” to differentiate the mental, spiritual and emotional components from the geographical one), she argues that Borderlands are socially created as a consequence of the inability of certain groups to deal with difference. As a result, they construct Borders to establish binary categories of humans,

with the goal of generating hierarchies and keeping certain people at a distance. Anzaldúa writes,

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A Borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residual of an unnatural boundary. (1987, p. 7)

The “emotional residual” of the Borderlands created in the Colonies between American immigrants and their families, and Mexican members of the community, produces complicated dynamics of difference that must be managed in a small-town environment of intimacy.

Though many women identified an underlying strain (albeit dull) between the two cultural groups in the area, it isn't something that's routinely discussed. As Betty put it, “I don't think that people want to talk about it; I think that we want to be above it, or not a part of it, but it's definitely there” (Betty, 263-265). Still, most of the participants were quick to clarify that the reason for these divisions has nothing to do with racism. When I asked them what they thought was the cause, they cited the language barrier as the primary cause, followed by socioeconomic and cultural differences. Being “uncomfortable because of the language barriers” (Elizabeth, 291) prompts most women to stay within the comfort zones of their family and (English-speaking) friends.

Attributing a certain separation to being unable to fully communicate, Jessica described,

[. . .] but I just think it's the language. I don't think it has anything to do with racism or anything like that. I just think that you feel uncomfortable when you can't communicate. I feel uncomfortable; I can't speak for other people, I don't

know what other people have told you, but I just think the language is difficult.  
(Jessica, 244-248).

Monica explained that her associations are based primarily on the people she sees most often. These towns are very small, but her social circle is still limited to people who speak her primary language:

There is separation, and here's what I'm thinking. You know, I've looked at that separation before and I've kind of wondered about it, but. . . I would say that the majority of my really good friends are English speaking. They're in our ward, they're the ones I associate with. So when we go out publicly, if I see one of them, that's who I'm drawn to. It's not any decision that I'm 'Oh, well, she's a Mexican lady and she's an American lady,' it's not like that. It's just, 'Oh, there's [Stephanie], I'm going to go say hi to [Stephanie],' or 'I'd better go say hi to [Angela] or she's going to be mad.' [laughs] You know? And so you're kind of drawn together because that's who you're familiar with, more familiar with.

(Monica, 303-311)

Monica (like other people in these communities) is “drawn to” her fellow Americans, their shared cultural background underpinning the social network they form based on language. Along the same lines, Lily commented that “that’s really the radius of the Colony social life is what’s going to happen at church, pretty much, and your family” (Lily, 107-108), making it difficult for some to not only learn the language but also branch out of their familiar social group. This is understandable, particularly for the very large families in which many of the members of the family live near each other. That was the case for Iris, who mentioned:

And I don't know if it's a little different for our family because there's so many of us, so I've got five sisters-in-law here, you know. So we do tend to stick to ourselves a little bit, you know. But, and I don't want to seem like we don't need anyone else, either, but we're just all kind of close. (Iris, 415-418)

For the women that do live near family, this focus on their own kin (sometimes to the exclusion of others) is unsurprising: studies of gendered network structures have found that women have greater proportions of kin in their networks, interact more frequently with kin, and keep in contact with more diverse kinds of kin than men (Moore, 1990, as cited in Avenarius, 2009). More broadly, observations about the continued embeddedness of immigrants in their ethnic social networks are longstanding, as in the work of Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993). Still, given the many years some women have lived in Mexico, I was surprised at the extent to which they still identified language barriers as an obstacle to their assimilation to Mexican society. While this claim is in part true, it is also a way of "glossing over" other fundamental differences, such as race and nationality, which contribute to a separation between different members of the community. However, although I don't agree that language barriers carry as much weight as was ascribed to them in my conversations with these women, they (along with socioeconomic factors) certainly do contribute to the social divide.

**Language barrier as a divisive element.** Stevens (1999) argues that proficiency in a second language in adults is strongly related to age at immigration, with possibilities of fluency in a second language being very great for young learners but decreasing in early childhood, adolescence and especially adulthood. Additionally, she writes that learning a second language at any age requires "exposure to the language, motivation,

and opportunities to practice receptive and active skills” (1999, p. 574). In other words, language learning requires communicative and social interaction, both of which might be limited by the sense of separation American women in the Colonies feel from their Spanish-speaking neighbors.

This might explain why, among the fifteen women that I interviewed, only one considered herself fluent in Spanish. Of the other fourteen women, eight said they did not speak Spanish, and the remaining six replied that they didn’t speak well but could “get by.” Among the women that I interviewed who speak poor or limited Spanish (some amusingly described their level of fluency as “kitchen Spanish” or “baby Spanish”), common consensus is that there isn’t a need to do so, given that most people in the area speak English. These women expressed that they lacked the patience and motivation to learn Spanish. Anna commented,

And you know, to default, like, everyone around here is pretty fluent in both, and so that’s kind of been bad for me because it hasn’t made me have to learn, because if anybody sees me struggling they’ll jump in and take over for me. So like the things that I have to do without English like going to the grocery store, things like that, dry cleaners. . . I can do, because I’ve had to. But anything where someone speaks English I can’t do because someone always jumps in and. . . yeah.

V: Saves you.

Anna: Saves me, yeah. (Anna, 91-99)

Thanks to the region’s proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border (a short 3 ½ hour drive away) and the bilingual elementary and secondary schools, many native Spanish-

speakers who live in the communities' neighboring city, Casas Grandes, also have a firm grasp of English. Women who haven't learned Spanish rely on others' knowledge of English to help them perform tasks such as shopping, because "you can go to most any store and find somebody that speaks English" (Monica, 172-173). Some women saw this as a hindrance to their own learning opportunities, as Olivia expressed:

And I don't have to [speak Spanish]. When I go to Casas, everywhere I go, I try to speak my stupid baby Spanish and get the stuff, and they start speaking to me in English!

V: Oh, really?

Olivia: Most, everywhere I go. And it's like, how do I learn Spanish when you guys want to practice your English every time I come in the store! So it's like, I've been here four and a half years and I don't speak Spanish. You know, I go to church in English and I do speak to people in English, and I speak to these people in English and Spanish both, and give 'em hand signals for whatever I want, and stuff, so it's really crazy. (Olivia, 350-358)

Most women were of the opinion that, as Olivia communicated, there are really no opportunities for English-speaking migrant women to be immersed in Spanish; the people in their social circle basically include the people they attend church with (in English) and the people in their families, who also speak English. In addition, even strangers "start speaking to [them] in English," whether to save American women the trouble of figuring out the words (as Anna noted) or to practice their own English (as per Olivia). Finally, some women identified having bilingual children as an easy way out to learning to speak Spanish, like Courtney who remarked,

And then of course when the kids came, you know the kids were able to translate so I was very lazy that way. But I can honestly say that it's very difficult for me to understand the language, to understand the sounds. (Courtney, 70-79)

Due to all of these factors, English-speaking migrants don't perceive themselves as having the need to be fluent in Spanish, although some asserted that they would "love to be fluent in Spanish" and that if they had to "practice it every day or had to use it every day [they] would probably learn it" (Elizabeth, 295-296). Unfortunately, this lack of language ability promotes divisions in the community, as discussed in the previous section.

It was clear to me while interviewing that a lack of Spanish fluency, for whatever reason, is extremely frustrating to some of these women (though not all). In the cases where women did report that they speak fluent or "passable" Spanish, many talked about how they were "desperate to learn" because of the feelings of powerlessness and frustration they had when they couldn't understand what people were saying. Naomi commented that she "hated that feeling of not knowing what people were trying to communicate to [her], and [she] hated that feeling of feeling stupid," (Naomi, 329-331), reporting that those feelings of powerlessness and inadequacy were what drew her to better her language skills. Jessica recounted how she had previously had the opposite experience, as she watched immigrant populations in her home country struggle to communicate. She expressed frustration with their unwillingness or inability to learn the host country language and saw that it was a mirror to her present situation:

But yeah, I guess [the other women are] not that interested. I really was; I really had a desire to learn Spanish and I'm not saying I've done great, don't get me



wrong. But in Canada, when I was in nurse's training, we had a huge, really big community of Ukranian people in Edmunton and I was trying to take care of those people in the hospital and these little ladies had never learned to speak English because they lived in their own Ukranian community, and it frustrated me to death. So when I came to Mexico I thought to myself, 'You better get with it and learn Spanish so you're not like one of those little Ukranian ladies.' So I really had a desire, I really felt the obligation seriously. (Jessica, 289-296)

It was evident that this woman, having had the experience of being a part of both the linguistic majority and minority populations, understood the implications of social isolation caused by not having a common language.

Stevens (1999) argues that second-language fluency among adults occurs (in part) as a result of considering language acquisition as a social process. Therefore, it seems that although the women I interviewed cited the language barrier as the *cause* of social separation between American migrant women and their Mexican neighbors, this barrier is also the *result* of this divide. This cyclical process results in women who don't associate with Spanish-speakers because they can't speak Spanish, which then results in an inability to ever learn Spanish. The language barrier will only be overcome when American women are willing to make Spanish learning a social process, taking every opportunity to speak Spanish despite a low initial level of mastery.

**Socioeconomic status as a divisive element.** In addition to linguistic differences, many of the women I interviewed highlighted the socioeconomic differences in the area as a big obstacle to fully connecting with their neighbors. The level of poverty in Mexico

is much greater than what most (if not all) of the women I interviewed had experienced before moving. Diane voiced,

There's always that class of people anywhere you go in the United States that are the laborers, you know like the janitors or the fast-food people. And it's usually people of another race, like in the South it's the African American people, in El Paso [Texas] it's the Hispanic people. And here there's that definite distinction, except that the working class is much, much poorer. Much, much poorer. (Diane, 690-695)

Because of the great socioeconomic differences in the area, Diane also commented that “the money has a lot to do with it, maybe not so much racism but the haves and the have-nots” (Diane, 378-379). Betty agreed, saying,

I think that for a lot of time the American culture, the English culture, the Americans— I don't even know what to call them—

V: Yeah, I don't either.

Betty: —they were a little more affluent. Most of the Spanish-speaking worked for them, and so they felt like we were- what's the word I'm looking for, when you're holding someone down . . .

V: Oppressing?

Betty: Yes. I think they feel like we were intentionally repressing them. (Betty, 285-293)

Coucher (2009) writes that American migrants in Mexico enjoy a position of relative privilege, and this privilege shapes the identities they construct for themselves and others, as well as the stories they tell about their lives. Indeed, nearly all of the

women are much better off economically than the communities that surround them, and particularly than their employees. If identity narratives of Americans in Mexico draw on economic justifications, it should come as no surprise that a couple of the participants identified what they described as feelings of superiority among the English-speaking community due to higher socioeconomic status. They both commented that they noticed this in other people, but first noticed it in their own families in one of their children. For example, Betty observed,

I feel that the Americans that live here kind of have a warped sense of reality. I feel that they have a feeling of entitlement to them. And I don't know why that is, but I just kind of feel like— and me included, it's a problem— I noticed it first with my family. You know raising my kids, you kind of notice that your kids have a little attitude or something, and you try to help them with that attitude and then you realize that it's kind of a little bit broader circle. And then you start looking and you kind of notice the same patterns— to me, I did— with all the Americans. I feel like they feel that rules maybe don't always apply to them, you know, they're the exception to the rule. I feel like there's a sense of entitlement, I don't know how else to say it. Do you think it is superior? I try really hard not to let my kids think that they're superior. But I did notice with my older kids, [son's name] especially (don't use that part, he'll know it's me) [laughs] he kind of had this superior attitude, entitled. He felt entitled. You know, and he felt like if there was a rule, he was the exception to it. (Betty, 454-466)

For Betty, her son's feelings of "entitlement" were indicative of the same attitude within the wider community of American adults and kids he (and she) associated with.

Diane had a very similar story to the one Betty shared, and commented that her response to her son was, “Ok, I’ve got to do a little better at making sure that you are a little bit more humble” (Diane, 733-734). In fact, both women were quick to clarify that when they noticed this in their own homes, they immediately tried to teach their children that having more money than others doesn’t make you a better person. Still, it is seen as a relatively common phenomenon in the community. Diane continued,

I guess I see it more in the younger people, the teenagers who have yardmen doing the work and maids doing the work inside and they get to— and this could be very judgmental and I don’t know what goes on in their homes, but they just kind of run around and don’t really have too many responsibilities, and get into trouble. (Diane, 374-378)

Living in households where their parents had the financial ability to employ people, thus freeing their kids from chores, contributes (in Diane’s opinion) to a sense of superiority caused by not having many responsibilities. This contrasts with two fundamental values that underpin life in the Colonies: hard work and moral rectitude. She later observed, “So I think that if you have someone cleaning up after you, you know, different race, different language, just sends the wrong message” (Diane, 738), linking this type of domestic employer-employee structure to feelings of cultural separation and perhaps tension between different racial and cultural groups. Anticipating this, I collected data on whether the women that I interviewed employed maids. I’ll admit that I was expecting the answer to be “yes” for nearly everyone, but was surprised at the number of women that had strong feelings against having a maid work in their house and at the reasons they cited for feeling this way.

*Maids as indicators of a type of lifestyle.* One of the most interesting comments regarding having or not having a maid illustrated the complicated politics of domestic labor in a racially and socioeconomically diverse community. A woman told this story of the way American migrants must learn to navigate the experience of having a maid (which for all of the woman I interviewed was unique to living in Mexico):

Well, this friend that lives in El Paso, at the very beginning of our friendship she made a comment, we were out to lunch one time and we were talking about maids. And she said, 'I won't even hire a maid that has worked in an American home.' And I just went, 'Why?' and she said 'Well because they're lazy,' and she said, [. . .] 'You guys treat them like they're people.' And we thought she was teasing, and she kind of was, but she was trying to— we coddle them, because we're so afraid that they're going to think that we're prejudiced or something that we kind of walk on eggshells, we're so afraid of what people are going to think of us. Especially when it's a racial and a religious boundary. And the affluent Spanish-speaking, they don't have that problem. (Betty, 299-310)

The fact is, the women had strong opinions on either side of the maid issue. For some, having a maid was presented to them before they moved to Mexico as one of "the benefits of living [there]" (Elizabeth, 177). Contrastingly, some women pointed out the way they felt uncomfortable paying someone a (modest) salary to do what they could reasonably do for themselves, like Olivia who bluntly remarked,

I can't see paying somebody 8 dollars a day to work at my house all day long. That irks the crap out of me. It kills me that these people can't even afford to have a car to get their groceries. (Olivia, 246-249)

Those that were in favor of having a maid became vaguely defensive, insisting that they “provided a job opportunity for someone who wanted to work” (Courtney, 105). Many also insisted that the maid was “like a second mom” or “like an aunt” to their children. Gretel related the story of how, when her maid was gone for a week to visit family, Gretel’s daughter ran in every day at lunch asking if their maid was back yet. On the day she returned, Gretel related, her daughter “went running back into the laundry room and you could, they just, they hugged and she cried and ‘I missed you’ [. . .] it’s like she’s an aunt I think, that kind of relationship” (Gretel, 188-191). Iris likewise observed,

[. . .] I mean she’s just like their second mom. I mean she’s been with me since [my oldest daughter] was two. And they, they don’t— I wouldn’t say they respect her like a member of the family, but I think they consider her that as well. She’s just a little nicer, she’s not as strict, you know what I mean. (Iris, 475-489)

Finally, Elizabeth commented that the maid was “like a friend.” The addition of the word “like” is significant in all of these statements (i.e. “like an aunt,” “like a second mom” and “like a friend”), for in creating this simile the women I spoke to falsely compared two unlike relationships.

Patricia Hill Collins (2001) analyzed white American women’s narratives about their black maids as “one of the family.” In her exploration, Hill Collins argues that this type of positioning of the maid as a “beloved yet second-class family member” masks the power differentials between both women (2001, p. 4). She further opines that when children (like the ones described above) encounter members of different racial and ethnic groups most frequently in subordinate roles they “learn the meaning of a racialized social

class hierarchy in gender-specific ways from within the safety purchased by their propertied families” (Hill Collins, 2001, p. 14-15). Indeed, some of the Colony women who don’t have maids are skeptical of the “just like family” claim:

Yeah, they say they’re part of the family, and I just. . . you know, the treatment that they get sometimes. . . Like someone was telling me the other day, ‘Oh, I had to yell at my maid for the first time, I just couldn’t believe how stupid she was to do this.’ And I’m like, wow. To cross that boundary with someone, even an employee, to me it was surprising. (Kathy, 340-344)

In this context, Hill Collins’ claims about the way more powerful groups use statements like “she’s my friend” and “we love her” to minimize the importance of social inequalities seem applicable in this community as well.

However, in fairness there is one important difference. Hill Collins writes that in the United States, residential housing and neighborhoods that are racially segregated ensure that maids’ families and the white employers’ families will never move next door to each other (2001, p.16). This not necessarily the case in rural Mexico; in the small communities of Colonia Juárez and Colonia Dublan, maids might live just a couple of blocks from their employees. Race-, ethnic- and class-segregated space is not such a common occurrence, primarily because the towns are so small it is difficult not to be just about everyone’s neighbor. Perhaps this helps alleviate the extreme power differentials that fostered Hill Collins’ analysis of black maids in the United States. The women I interviewed said things like “When [my maid] goes through hard times it’s hard on us, and you know, when I go through something hard she sympathizes” (Iris, 179-181) and related stories of delivering food to their maids’ families in times of tragedy, or regularly

“giving her everything we can,” from food to clothing. Still, the tensions of employing someone of a different race at minimum wage are present. This is just one more way in which American female migrants to Mexico must learn to work within their position of relative privilege.

### **Third Space in the Mormon Colonies**

One windy day last March, I sat in a beige overstuffed living room chair, waiting for my interviewee to compose herself. The topic at hand hadn't been particularly delicate, and she seemed surprised by her emotions as she narrated the story of having gone to “Stadium of Fire,” a Fourth of July celebration at Brigham Young University, when her oldest daughter was a toddler. Growing teary, she related,

Betty: Well, we went, and it's in the BYU stadium, and they always begin the same way, with the fire jets flying over [starts to cry]. And it just really hit me. And everybody stood, and they sang the national anthem. And when those fighter jets flew over. . . it was a sense of loss for me. You know, it was, it's who I am. Regardless of where you live, your heritage is your heritage.

V: Did it make you sad because you thought your kids wouldn't feel that same way about it or because you were here [in Mexico]?

Betty: Oh. . . I think I just missed it. I think that I was finally old enough to appreciate all the rights and privileges that I had as an American. I think is what it is. (Betty, 147-155)

Like Betty, many of the people I interviewed expressed strong feelings of patriotism and loyalty to the United States, regardless of how long they had lived in Mexico. National identity can be construed in many ways, but one common definition focuses on love for



and pride in one's country, its symbols, accomplishments and values (Citrin, Johnston & Wright, 2012). Certainly, several of the women brought up that having lived through World War II, or having family members who are or were WWII or Korean War veterans, meant that they had been raised to be "extremely patriotic." The pride these women feel in claiming U.S. national identity was clear. Whether or not they feel the same enthusiasm for claiming their adopted country of Mexico was much less evident—in some cases, not evident at all. Legally migrating to Mexico is not widely prioritized, and U.S. cultural and linguistic practices are continued with few efforts at acculturation (at least in their homes).

Many of the women I spoke with described how much they miss their home country, and the holidays and traditions they were raised with. One participant told me she has at times felt so homesick that she's "gone outside and stared north and cried." She was not the only woman to comment on the longing she sometimes feels for "home." In her work on the concept of "home," Kinefuchi (2010) writes that despite (or perhaps because of) increased border crossings and transnational migration, "home" is key to identity formation. She argues that while home may be physically or territorially marked, its more symbolic significances (emotional, relational, cultural and political) constitute its salience. Therefore, she claims, "In the context of migration, a strong sense of belonging to a specific place comes with the need to reinvent cultural traditions and to adhere to cultural ideas, practices, and values" (Kinefuchi, 2010, p. 231). This is evident in Colonia Dublan and Colonia Juárez where, as previously discussed, American immigrant women replicate their language and culture to such a degree that it creates tension between them and their Mexican neighbors.

In an analysis of nationalism in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, David Gutiérrez builds on Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) notion of the Borderlands. He uses the concept of *third space* to explain the way ethnic Mexicans within the United States create a unique "interstice between the dominant national and cultural systems of both the United States and Mexico" (Gutiérrez, 1999, p. 488). Gutiérrez claims that ethnic Mexicans are forced to develop mechanisms of adaptation by drawing on sources of collective identity and solidarity, and that these "defensive strategies of adaptation" create a "third" social space between two dominant systems. He writes that in the "relatively safe havens" of their third space, ethnic Mexicans can "communicate in Spanish, continue to practice most of their family customs, maintain their religious practices and rituals, teach their children, and otherwise symbolically express themselves by enjoying distinctive cuisines, styles of music, and forms of entertainment" (Gutiérrez, 1999, p. 488-489). This description struck me due to its resemblance to what I had observed in the communities and homes of the American women I spoke to in Mexico.

Much in the way Gutiérrez describes, Americans in Mexico have also carved out what might be described as a third space, although Coucher (2009) writes that in their case the social space they have reserved for themselves is one of empowerment, not marginalization as in Gutiérrez's analysis. Still, similar practices as those described by Gutiérrez take place in the households of the American women I interviewed, where conversations in English are heard over the strains of American country music, and religious quotes from LDS church leaders are prominently displayed on the walls. Common perception among the women I interviewed is that the Mormon Colonies are a quaint amalgamation of the United States and Mexico. For example, one woman's

answer to the question “How do your kids identify?” was, “I think they identify ‘Colonia Juárez.’ Because you know what, we’re not really Mexico and we’re not really America, it’s a mix, it’s a funny mix” (Naomi, 148-150).

The fostering of a third space has created a “neither here nor there” attitude that almost certainly contributes to the feeling of separation from the Mexican community discussed in the previous section, but the difference from the surrounding Mexican towns and cities is seen in a positive light by these American immigrant women. One commented that it’s “definitely like a little Utah in Mexico” and “feels like you’re in America for sure,” continuing, “so people from Casas Grandes I think look at this place different from other parts of Mexico. And it definitely feels different to me, too. I mean not better, or anything, but just way different” (Diane, 222-225). Heather told me about the first time she visited Colonia Juárez, right after she began dating her now-husband. She said,

And we pulled into the Colonies, and I remember thinking, ‘Oh.’ You know, it was like a breath of fresh air. It was not the Mexico we had just driven through, for sure. It was like a whole other little world. And it reminded me a great deal of Midway, Utah, where I was living in high school. And so I instantly felt at ease coming here. (Heather, 119-123)

These women recognized the forging of a distinct culture and national identity in these communities, one that draws heavily from practices learned in the United States, but by very virtue of occurring in Mexico becomes unlike what occurs in either country.

Such a social space allows for a comfortable uncertainty about where “home” really is, given the differences between these women’s physical home and the cultural and political home they retain. Iris commented,

Well, since we live here, you know, I don’t want [my kids] to forget my heritage, where I’m from, because I love Mexico, but United States is my home. I mean, my home is here, I guess I . . . I guess I feel like we have the best of both worlds. And I’m sure you’ve heard that a lot in your, you know, because I can still go to the States, you know, but I have the tranquility of living in here and raising our kids here. But . . . I just still, I’m patriotic towards the United States. Especially Texas. [laughs] [. . .] But I do want [my kids] to understand, you know, what it means to be from the United States as well. You know, I don’t know, I just, I guess I’m proud of that, and so I want them to realize that too. (Iris, 143-154)

A key element in this statement is the way Iris strives to incorporate her kids into the same third space she inhabits, passing on her culture, nationality and language. If, as Kinefuchi (2010) claims, transnational migration makes “home” an even more significant part of identity formation, I wondered what the effects of growing up in this ambiguous third space are for the children of American immigrant women in Mexico.

This thought brought to mind a distinct memory I have of a woman (who was raised in Colonia Juárez, but whose mother is an American immigrant) telling my dad she was excited to go to the United States and do the things she couldn’t do in Mexico “since we live in a foreign country.” His amused answer to her has stuck in my memory all these years: “We don’t *live* in a foreign country! We *visit* a foreign country!” My dad’s friend

had been influenced to such a degree by her American mother that, despite having lived in Mexico her whole life, she still thought of it as “a foreign country.”

In the following paragraphs, I will explore the way being/staying American, in terms of citizenship and political loyalty, intersects with inhabiting a third space; indeed, it is what makes the third space possible and “real.” I will also discuss the way these women attempt to pass on a social space that is neither the United States nor Mexico to their children, and whether or not these kids feel similarly comfortable with an ambiguous sense of “home.”

**Citizenship in the third space.** Though the women I interviewed have lived in Mexico for varying amounts of time, even the “newest” immigrant reported that she has lived in the country for four years already. Still, only about half of the women told me that they have legally migrated to Mexico or are in the process of doing so. What I am considering “legal migration” for the purposes of this paper is the possession of either an FM3 or FM2 form. There are essentially three types of visas: FM3, FM2 and FMM. An FM3 is a five-year resident permit, which must be renewed annually. After five years, possessors of the FM3 have the possibility of converting to Mexican citizenship (Zukowski, 2006). An FM2 is very similar to a green card for immigrants in the United States, and allows Americans to live and work permanently in Mexico (Zukowski, 2006). The women who had neither of these visas own an FMM (*Forma Migratoria Multiple*, which I refer to throughout this paper as a tourist visa), which must be renewed every 180 days— a process some have repeated for years with plans to continue doing so indefinitely. According to Mexican immigration law, American tourists who visit Mexico

must have a valid U.S. passport and an FMM, which is officially issued by the Secretariat of the Interior (*Secretaria de Gobernacion*) (Vargas, 2008).

Mexican law also stipulates that people under a tourist visa are only authorized to stay for six months with no renewals, although “rare extensions may be obtained in cases involving serious illness or force majeure” (Vargas, 2008, p. 869). However, it is easy to get a new tourist visa for the next six months by leaving the country, even for an hour. Thanks to these communities’ nearness to the U.S.-Mexico border, this is a convenient way for many people to stay in the country for years by repeating this process twice a year. When I asked Iris if she had ever had any trouble getting many consecutive tourist visas year after year, she replied, “They don’t ever really ask, so I just kind of— if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it!” (Iris, 238-239).

Iris also brought up an important point, saying “Mexico does make it a little easier for an American to live here, or at least to come here” (Iris, 256-259). Coucher (2009) writes that the reception American migrants receive in Mexico is largely welcoming. She contrasts that with the neglect and even hostility that greet Mexican immigrants in the United States, thanks to the nativism and xenophobia that have escalated in this country in recent years. In her study, Coucher (2009) cites several scholars to show the way most literature on transnationalism portrays migrants as moving from poorer countries to richer ones, from less powerful to more powerful states, and from a place of dominance in society to a place of marginalization relative to the “natives” in their new host society. She argues that this power imbalance—in reverse—can help explain the tolerant reception of American immigrants by the Mexican government and Mexican society: Americans who migrate to Mexico automatically assume an empowered position,

wherein everything from everyday interactions to bureaucratic processes becomes smoother and “easier.”

Still, I was curious as to why the women I interviewed didn’t just choose to migrate legally, particularly the longstanding members of the community, when nearly everyone said she was in Mexico to stay. A common answer was that the paperwork is “tricky,” confusing and time consuming. In truth, the rights and obligations of immigrants to Mexico are scattered among numerous legislative enactments, including Mexico’s Constitution, federal and state codes, and special decrees (Vargas, 2008). This makes the process of migration difficult to understand and can indeed result in years of paperwork.

In his overview of the rights and obligations of Americans in Mexico under Mexican law, Jorge A. Vargas (2008) writes that Mexico’s immigration law policies are based on two fundamental premises. First, Mexican immigration law is designed not to welcome immigrants, but rather to restrict their entry into the country since they have historically not been needed to populate the nation (as in the United States and Canada). Second, the notion that Mexico’s federal executive possesses “absolute and complete power in the area of immigration” is strongly adhered to. This means that the rights of foreigners to remain in the country depend solely on the discretion of federal authorities (p. 263-264). Both of these factors make it more convenient for many American migrant women to just keep their U.S. citizenship and get a new tourist visa periodically (a quick

and relatively painless process), particularly for those that drive an American car and have to renew the car pass every six months anyway.<sup>9</sup>

Although the women I interviewed voiced qualms with the immigration process and the time commitment it would necessitate, most told me that the main reason for remaining on a tourist visa indeterminately was the aversion to anything that could jeopardize their American citizenship. Olivia commented,

As far as I know, I'm here to stay. But I will always be an American living in Mexico, ok. Um, people are asking me to get my papers and stuff like that, but I'm fine living here on a visitor thing. [. . .] No, I'd never not be American. And I don't want to give up my voting rights, I don't want to do all that, I don't want to get my papers down here and do all that, ok? (Olivia, 264-279)

Rhetorically, Olivia's minimization of her tourist visa (as well as the whole process of legal migration) when she talks about her "visitor thing" speaks to her privileged position in the community. As discussed above, this supports Coucher's (2009) claim that the power imbalance of American migrants in Mexico shapes the stories they tell about their lives. Another woman concurred with the assertion that she would never endanger her U.S. citizenship, saying,

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<sup>9</sup> Many of the people who live in the communities where I did this research drive cars purchased in the United States. Financing is less common in Mexico than in the U.S., so some people prefer to buy a car across the border and import it, which is easy given the region's proximity to Texas and New Mexico. A good used car can be purchased in the U.S. and imported to Mexico for less than the cost of buying a new car in Mexico, and used cars in the States are generally newer and in better condition than used cars in Mexico. The import permit for these cars must be renewed every six months, so those who must renew import permits for their American cars and tourist visas for themselves tend to do both at the same time.



I've just never had a problem; we've always had an American car so I've always had a tourist pass. I don't know, I guess I just don't ever want to jeopardize anything that has to do with my American citizenship, I wouldn't ever want to toy with that, I guess. (Iris, 219-222)

Both of these statements highlight the way that commonly accepted practices (though not necessarily Mexican law) make it very easy for Americans to live in Mexico without committing totally to migrating. Their legal status as American "tourists" in Mexico also facilitates (and contributes to) the creation of the third space they inhabit.

In general, there seemed to be some confusion as to what the laws are in terms of claiming citizenship in multiple states. Diane said that she had no plans to pursue Mexican citizenship because "[she doesn't] know if you can have dual citizenship anymore" and she "definitely want[s] to keep [her] U.S. citizenship" (Diane, 426-430). Heather, who is currently a citizen of both Canada and the United States, wondered if she would be permitted to be a citizen of all three countries, and said it would be "heartbreaking" to have to renounce her Canadian citizenship, which she would have to do if it came down to a choice between the three.

Indeed, since 1795 the United States has required immigrants to pledge to set aside any previous loyalties when they naturalize, so it's understandable that emigrant citizens believe that they are expected to have complete loyalty to the U.S. However, Jones-Correa (2001) writes that both U.S. and international law have evolved to a more lenient and ambiguous stance with regard to dual nationality. Although the U.S. discourages dual citizenship, in practice it is tolerated through a "don't ask, don't tell" policy (Jones-Correa, 2001). The hesitation by these women to sever ties with their

country of origin might also be explained by the strong bond they retain to their home country thanks to the nearness of the border, which allows for frequent trips and, in the case of some families, allows them to keep houses and businesses in the U.S. Faist (2000) writes that the more transnational ties immigrants retain, the more reluctance they have to adapt to the immigration country and the stronger the incentive to form a transnational community. Indeed, for the women in Colonia Juárez and Colonia Dublan, the choice not to pursue Mexican citizenship has resulted in a sense of ambivalence towards their adopted home.

For those women who do have an FM3 or are working towards their FM2, the process has, in fact, proved to be lengthy and confusing. Betty exclaimed, “I’ve been working on my immigration papers for twelve years. Twelve years!” (Betty, 409). Kathy addressed the lack of a definite timeline for the process as well as the ambiguity of what the end result would be, relating:

I’m working on my FM3. I’m in year three of it.

V: How many years does it take?

Kathy: Five. But the thing is, we started this process and then every year when I go back to renew, because you have to go to Janos<sup>10</sup> to renew it, they’ll say, ‘Umm. . . yeah, it’s only two years now,’ and then we’ll go back, ‘No, it’s five years,’ ‘No, no you can’t get a *credencial*<sup>11</sup> when it’s all over,’ so they don’t, I don’t know. I don’t really know what I’m actually going to end up with by the

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<sup>10</sup> Janos is a small city about 40 minutes away from Colonia Dublan and about an hour away from Colonia Juárez.

<sup>11</sup> A *credencial de elector* is a Mexican voter registration card, often used to provide proof of citizenship.

end of this, I just know it's expensive. But at first I used to think, 'Oh well, if they want to deport me go ahead. See ya.' Just out of, not out of hate of anything, but just if you're going to make this such a frustrating process then see ya, I don't want to deal with it. But now it's, you know I wouldn't want something to happen that my kids and my husband, any of us would be separated for any reason. And just. . . [my husband], and I should say myself as well, are firm believers in trying to do it as honestly as you can, knowing that there are times you have to trick the system or cheat the system, but to try and be legal in most ways. So that's what we're trying to do, we're trying to be legal. (Kathy, 282-296)

Striking in this last commentary is the nonchalant assertion that government bureaucracy must be "cheated" or "tricked," and the implication that Mexican authorities are not to be trusted. This theme was repeated in discussions with other interviewees as well. A different woman told me, "Knowing that there's so much corruption [in Mexico], that's hard to me. It's hard for me" (Betty, 600-601). Still a third asserted,

It was always very challenging to cross the border in those days [when I first moved to Mexico], it was terrifying.

V: Why?

Francis: Because in those days they used to check everything that you had, and I had not learned how to use the bribe system yet. And so crossing the border was frightening, they could be mean to you.

V: Do you mean crossing from—

Francis: From the United States into Mexico. (Francis, 161-176)

All of these comments suggest that what some perceive as rampant corruption in Mexico may be an incentive to remain unequivocally American by pursuing only a tourist visa under American citizenship, thus distancing themselves from a dishonest system.

This distrust of Mexican authorities has also become disillusionment with the Mexican political system in general. Vargas points out that the extent of knowledge most Americans have about Mexican law can be reduced to three generalizations, the last of which is that “the administration of justice in Mexico has been slow, and some judges and authorities are perceived as corrupt or dishonest” (2008, p. 243). Indeed, whether by hearsay or by experience, corruption in Mexico was identified as an impediment not only for legally migrating but also for exercising civic duty. Gretel resignedly remarked,

And I wish that I, I wish that I had more interest [in Mexican politics], but I almost feel like everyone pays each other off here anyway, what’s the point?  
[laughs]

V: Oh, that’s so sad. So you feel like it’s kind of a lost cause here, whereas in the United States you can actually maybe effect some sort of change, indirectly maybe?

Gretel: [sighs] I guess, I guess I do feel like that, and it’s kind of hard for me to admit that about Mexico because I love it here too, but I just kind of feel like Mexico is Mexico, and they’re still going to have their drug problems— I mean, America does too, but. . . the government’s still going to have to work with the drug dealers and there’s no way around it, from what I can see. (Gretel, 401-410)

The escalation of drug violence in the area, discussed previously, probably greatly exacerbated the perception of rampant corruption Mexican authorities seem to be known for anyway.

Yang writes that dual nationality might confuse immigrants, leading to lower rates of civic participation in all spheres (1994, as cited in Jones-Correa, 2001). Whether or not this is true for the American women I interviewed, I can't say; but certainly very few of the women indicated that they vote in Mexico. Several said that they do vote in the United States (though at least one sheepishly admitted that it's been a while, and many only vote during presidential election years). For the women who haven't migrated and are still on a tourist visa, a lack of political awareness in their adopted country is to be expected, as they aren't allowed to vote in Mexico. The other women told me that not knowing the language and not feeling like Mexican politics affect them are their main reasons for having little interest in civic participation in Mexico. One woman said that due to the fact that some of her kids already live in the United States and the rest soon will, coupled with the fact that she and her husband do not have a farm or a business in Mexico, makes her "feel like American politics affects [her] way more than politics do [in Mexico]" (Diane, 435). Another (whose family business is in the U.S.) concurred, saying:

I don't know, economically we don't make pesos, we don't make money here. So economically it doesn't affect me, whatever goes on here. My rights and freedoms are pretty much the same, so I mean unless it's something that affects me personally— that sounds very shallow, doesn't it? [laughs] But unless it's

something that affects me personally, I'm not really that interested.

(Iris, 283-287)

Again, these women's circumstances place them in a political third space, living in a country in which they have neither the rights nor (in most cases) the interest to participate civically. At the same time, American immigrants' transnational ties provide the incentive to form a third space community with their compatriots.

The comments above regarding what some people perceive as widespread corruption in Mexico may discourage them from pursuing Mexican citizenship, thus creating distance between themselves and what they see as a dishonest system. Indeed, mistrust of Mexican authorities' honesty is contrasted in Kathy's statement, several paragraphs up, with the way she is "trying to be legal" and thus, honest. For the women that had or were working on attaining FM3's or FM2's, "living honestly" was their main motivator. Gretel commented,

No, I've got my immigration card thing. I think most of us have done that by now.

It seemed like when Arizona was passing their— what was that bill they were passing?

V: 1070?

Gretel: I think so, where if they pulled people over they could ask them to prove their, show their papers. Anyway, when they were doing that, they got real worried that they would seek retribution on the Americans living in Mexico and start doing that to us, so we got counsel from our bishop to get that done so that it wouldn't be an issue for us, and I think most of us have done it. So we're legals now. (Gretel, 260-268)

Gretel's belief that "most of" her compatriots have legally migrated might not be the case. As I indicated above, only about half of the women I interviewed have done so.

Given the region's proximity to Arizona and the participants' knowledge of current events and politics in the U.S., I wondered if the people who are living in the country without having the proper immigration papers for their circumstances see any parallel between their situation to that of undocumented migrants in the United States.

Gretel replied when asked,

I did until I got my paperwork [FM3] done. I did, I thought it's kind of a contradiction, except that I'm not living off of the government here. I don't depend on the Mexican government to provide a life for me, where most of the illegals out there depend one way or another on the government to help them in some way. And I guess that's the difference. But it's still the illegal— living illegally in the country is still the same. So, yeah. (Gretel, 272-277)

While Gretel recognizes the way her legal documentation made her "illegal," she justifies her situation by claiming she does not depend on the Mexican government for anything. As she still drives on public roads, I would disagree; however, she wasn't the only woman to voice this justification. Iris said,

I do [think about my legal status], actually, although I don't get nearly any of the benefits that [undocumented migrants] get in the States. I can't work legally here. Well, they can't really either, but they do. You know, I don't feel like the Mexican government has done one iota, helped me at all. So as far as like, as far as like being a wet-back, yes, I feel like I am. [laughs] I'm just kidding! Edit that out! No, it doesn't bother me. I'm here legally on a tourist pass. (Iris, 223-230)

The most interesting part of her statement to me is the way she construes being on a “six-month” tourist pass for years (residing in the country as a immigrant) as “legal.” The notion that Iris (and others on a technically overstayed tourist visa) is legal and law-abiding is again an indicator of a privileged position in the country. Like Olivia, who referred to her FMM as her “visitor thing” earlier in the chapter, this statement speaks to their empowered position and ability to use social dominance in a way that is most convenient for them.

The remarks that undocumented migrants in the U.S. are “supported” by the government may stem from Stephen Camarota’s (2004) report, in which he used Census Bureau data to conclude that even when taking into consideration all direct and indirect taxes paid, “illegal households created a net fiscal deficit at the federal level of more than \$10 billion in 2002” in the United States (p. 5). However, Camarota’s study has been said to fail to distinguish between the “fiscal” and “economic” impact of immigration (Parker, 2006), and his claims about the economic impact of immigrants in the U.S. are disputed. Furthermore, the belief among American immigrants in Mexico that “illegal immigrants” in the U.S. “live off” the government seems to serve primarily to construct difference between themselves and other immigrants (see “American Migrants in Mexico: Reversing the Focus” section), and not necessarily to be supported by hard numbers and statistics.

Having a social space that is neither the United States nor Mexico, but rather incorporates aspects of both, allows women who have migrated to Mexico to live in a comfortable third space. However, I wondered what the effect of this space is on their children. Do they feel similarly comfortable with this ambiguous sense of “home?”



Furthermore, is teaching their children to live in the third space something that the American women I spoke with choose to do, consciously and purposefully?

**Teaching patriotism and citizenship as a mother.** In conversation with one of the women I interviewed, I inquired,

Did you ever, as you've been raising them here, do you think your kids would say they're Mexican? Or that they're American?

Naomi: They're confused! [laughs]

Given that most of the women I interviewed reported feeling much more attached to the United States than to Mexico (regardless of the length of time they had lived in Mexico), I made it a point to ask if they observed the same claims of U.S. citizenship and loyalty in their children. The answers were varied. For many of the kids that grow up in the area, citizenship and belonging is an issue that must be grappled with on a near-daily basis, and certainly every time they cross the border. One woman recalled the story of when her teenaged son was crossing the border into Mexico after a trip to the U.S. The border agents, who knew this family, pulled her son in for a playful "interrogation." She related,

[They] asked him, you know, 'Are you American or are you Mexican?' And he said, 'Well, I'm both' or whatever. 'Well, where were you born?' 'In Mexico.' 'But you say you're an American?' You know, so it was just kind of teasing him but it was, he was kind of stressing, 'Ok, I say I'm American but I was born in Mexico, how does that work, Mom?' But they have both, they have both papers. (Naomi, 141-150)

The existence of a third space could in theory be repeated from generation to generation in these communities, for it was clear that some women very deliberately and

conscientiously teach their children American heritage and patriotism. One pointed to a picture of the U.S. Founding Fathers gathered around the Constitution that is hung in her living room during our interview, telling me that she “talks about it all the time” with her kids. Other women rely mostly on frequent visits to the U.S. (and Canada) to get their kids “acquainted with their roots” and learn that part of their family history.

However, the loyalty of the children didn’t necessarily correspond to the efforts of their mother to teach allegiance to the U.S. For example, although one woman identified as being extremely patriotic to her home country, she shared this story about her oldest son, telling me his “loyalties lie with Mexico, very definitely”:

I remember that one time I was having a little celebration for the Fourth of July, and [my son] said to me, ‘Well, how come we don’t celebrate the 16th of September?’<sup>12</sup> and I was ashamed. And you know, that kind of brought me up short, and after that I tried to be respectful of the holidays here, and find out a little bit more about them, too. (Francis, 189-193)

By celebrating only the U.S.A.’s independence day, this woman was seen by her son as privileging one country over the other. For the children of immigrant mothers in Mexico, a hybrid identity seems to be much more common than for their mothers, who more often choose to retain their “American-ness” even if it is within a context of third space. Contrastingly, their children more frequently assume a hybrid identity that involves “ongoing intertextual performances in which persons continually select and discard identity” (Young, 2009, p. 41). Therefore, like the young boy in the story above, they can

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<sup>12</sup> Mexican independence day

choose to perform one identity in a particular setting, the other identity in a different setting, or both simultaneously.

Interestingly (at least based on the reports of the mothers I spoke with), it seems that boys are more prone to assume a hybrid identity in these families than girls are, particularly as they get older. Many of the women reported that while their boys “see themselves as Mexican,” or both Mexican and American, their daughters were more likely to see themselves as American. My personal experience growing up in these communities was that most (if not all) of the daughters of American women in the area move to the United States after high school and very rarely come back. Certainly this could be attributed to a lack of job opportunities other than farming and ranching (generally seen as male occupations) in the area, and not necessarily to patriotism and loyalty. Still, after yet another woman told me she could “almost guarantee that [her] boys would see themselves as Mexican” but not necessarily her daughters, I asked her what contributed to this difference between boys and girls in the same families. She responded,

I think that maybe [the girls] identify with their moms, and because the boys are out working on the land that they’re probably going to end up working, that they just kind of follow that tradition. I think it has to do with the land.

V: Hmm, that’s interesting.

Betty: That’s just my opinion. But I think that my boys have always, every summer they’ve worked on the farm, their dad has told them, this is yours to come help, the next generation, you want the next generation to carry on. Survival

of their heritage, and I think they identify with the land, and it's in this country and they're a part of it. (Betty, 169-176)

Betty's opinion is that their tie to the land, gained by working it alongside their fathers, allows "Colony boys" to nurture a hybrid identity that enables them to perform both their Mexican identity and their American identity. Girls, however, do not experience this connection to Mexican land (and I would say, also are not so exposed to Mexican society outside of a limited circle of friends from school). Thus their mothers, both intentionally and unintentionally, can more easily reposition girls' cultural identity to mirror the mothers' own.

Many of the mothers I interviewed emphasized the importance of teaching their kids that they are American citizens, one telling me, "Because I'm always, 'We're American, we're American,' you know, pounding" (Iris, 131). However, all of the women reported not being "bothered at all" and "not having an issue" when their kids claim Mexico over the United States, or claim both simultaneously. However, one woman told me,

I really do worry that [my kids] won't learn American culture and history the way I want them to, because that's a big part of me, I've always loved American history, I've always been real into politics in the United States, the Constitution, and I love it. (Gretel, 229-232)

Another commented,

But what kind of always made me feel bad is that [my kids] don't understand my growing up. You know, they didn't understand exactly where I came from because it's different from here. (Naomi, 160-162)

In her (auto)ethnography of Korean American mother-daughter relationships, Young (2009) writes that there is a tension between cultural assimilation and cultural preservation in the children of migrants. She describes the way that, because she has been socialized into being an American, her mother cannot fully relate to her. The same sentiment is expressed in these women's statements that their kids won't learn about things that are meaningful to them or "won't understand [their] growing up."

Despite these challenges, for the women I interviewed, it's important to teach their children about what it is to be an American citizen. This is true for reasons both practical and sentimental, as identified by Naomi who said,

I have [taught my children to be American], and I have for a couple of reasons. Partially so they understand who I am and where they come from, you know, their ancestry so when they read family history they know what they're talking about and looking at where these people, where their point of view comes from. And I also have because I know that as the economy is getting worse here, they're probably going to end up out there and I want them to be familiar with that as much as they possibly can. They'll be going to school out there, they need to know— I don't want them to feel inadequate or nervous about being out there in that culture. (Naomi, 173-180)

A big part of the teachings these women do in the home is meant to pull their children into the American category to supplement the ways they are pushed into being *Mexicanos* outside the home. By doing this, American women in Mexico invite their children into the same third space they inhabit, but also give them the tools to create a hybrid identity and enable them to choose which half of it they perform.

## CHAPTER 4

### DISCUSSION

The decision to migrate to a new country, for whatever reason, holds implications far beyond a change of address. Coucher, one of my primary sources for this study, posits that the situation of American immigrants to Mexico is “similar to but better than” that of most immigrants to the United States, particularly immigrants from Mexico (2009, p. 178). Overall, I would say that assessment holds true for the American immigrants I spoke with as well. However, the women who invited me into their homes help give a more nuanced understanding of what it means to be a migrant of privilege in a religious community, and in so doing add a dimension to the complicated issue of migration. The following paragraphs summarize the insights gained from their experiences.

Being a member of the LDS Church is an underlying factor to every decision the members of the Mormon Colonies make. For many women (and men), the Church’s focus on families, morals and faith makes living in Colonia Juárez or Colonia Dublan appealing because of the family-friendly environment they afford. In this religious environment, where traditional Euro-American gender roles are the ideal, the ability for families to live well on one income as women stay home with their kids is viewed as a blessing. Therefore, in this context the family is perceived to be best off by basing the decision of where to live on the career path of the husband, and (for land-owning families) farming and ranching opportunities entice many ‘Colony boys’ back to their hometown with their loyal American wives along for the adventure. However, for American immigrant women, transitioning their cultural practices and adapting to a foreign country produces complexities and contradictions in terms of belonging and

identity.

Like other migrants, Americans in Mexico practice transnationalism: they live in one country while continuing to practice the customs, speak the language, and celebrate the holidays of another. They find comfort in social networks that are mainly composed of other immigrants from the United States, and they remain resolutely American in terms of political loyalty and citizenship. Additionally, for the majority of them, their status as ‘migrants of privilege’ makes it easier than it is for most immigrants to cross borders, practice their culture, and speak their native language (at home and in public) without the fear of inviting resentment or punishment. However, the women of the Mormon Colonies have also successfully created a third space for themselves, wherein the aspects of their American heritage can mingle with Mexican surroundings to create something that is different from both original cultures.

Still, the complexities of the historical narrative that justifies the presence of U.S. American immigrants “settling” this small corner of Mexico are difficult to ignore. Because I live at a time and in a place where the actions of immigrants— both “legal” and (especially) undocumented— are constantly under scrutiny, it is interesting to think about whether or not the original immigrants had the right to colonize in the first place. In fact, given that their migration was motivated by escaping the U.S. legal system rather than conquest, whether or not they “colonized” in the usual sense of the word is, in itself, ambiguous. In any case, the establishment process of the original settlers of the Colonies (aided and encouraged by the Mexican government at the time) has affected the way residents interact to this day. For example, school leaders at the Academia Juárez have recently committed to admitting a very low percentage of non-LDS students, decreasing

the percentage of “non-members” from 28% to 14% in the last three years (B. Jones, personal communication, August 11, 2013). Because the school is widely recognized as the best in the area, some non-LDS families have been attending the Academia for generations. Now, however, they find that their children are denied admission. Although evidently this was a practical decision, driven by the fact that the school is subsidized by LDS tithing money, it has been framed by some disgruntled families as a racially motivated and divisive move.

This example illustrates the contradictions of a community that prides itself on being tight-knit, but which harbors the underlying remnants of historical separation. At the beginning of this text, I wondered whether these American immigrants in Mexico are reluctant to label themselves as “immigrants,” “expatriates,” or a “diaspora.” I found that the answer to this question is mostly “yes” among American immigrants in Colonias Juárez and Dublan, but also discovered that the more central issue is *why* this is so. The reality is that navigating identity as an American in the Mormon Colonies is complicated, laborious and often sensitive. It means admitting privilege while simultaneously trying to blend in, two contradictory activities that do not lend themselves well to each other. The fragmented nature of these communities bubbles to the surface on occasion, both on a community-wide level (as in the situation I just described), and on an individual level in the private reflections of the American immigrants that live there. Yet just when I become convinced that these divisions are deep and permanent, I remember one of the most insightful comments in my conversations with the women who participated in this study. In one of my final interviews, Naomi poignantly reflected:



I told my kids today, ‘I forget sometimes that I’m a whole different nationality.’ I forget! You know I get down there [to work] and we’re laughing and talking and working and. . . I forget that I’m different, I guess. And sometimes I’m walking to my truck and I’m thinking. . . am I? I don’t know. (Naomi, 235-238)

For Naomi, and for many residents of the Mormon Colonies, discovering her place in the community is an ongoing process. Perhaps this is a universal experience for migrants: to negotiate cultural variances on a daily basis, but to ultimately conclude that people around the world are more alike than they are different.

### **Limitations**

The information gleaned from this research study is an important starting point for further analysis of American migrants in Mexico. However, it may be limited by the small sample size of interviewees. Additionally, this sample was almost entirely composed of white Americans (with only one Hispanic American, and no other American women from different ethnic backgrounds). In order to make the findings generalizable, a broader and more representative sample is needed. Therefore, the data collected is useful for discovering a range of attitudes, and may be used in the future to inform a larger study that could discover the proportion of American migrants who hold such attitudes. Further research on American migrants in Mexico, both men and women, is necessary to add to the body of scholarship on this topic.

### **Implications and Areas for Future Research**

Growing up, I often heard visitors to Colonia Juárez comment that it is a “special place,” and my experience there as a researcher has allowed me to explore what makes the area unlike others. The unique intersection of LDS culture, American culture,

Mexican culture and small town life creates a social setting in which the members are constantly interlinked, and in many ways incorporates the best aspects of all of these different cultural practices. Previous to commencing this research, I assumed that the failure to assimilate (by relinquishing American cultural practices and learning to speak fluent Spanish) was a fault on the part of American migrant women in the Colonies. However, it is precisely because of the limited way in which some women assimilate that strong American lifestyles and practices have survived throughout the area's 128-year history. Without them, the unique environment that results from the intermingling of two different national cultures and an overarching religious culture would have been lost long ago, as this "little Utah in Mexico" blended into the local culture.

This realization offers support for current assimilation theory that values not only sameness through assimilation, but also difference through transnationalism. For Mexico, and other nations facing increased transnational migration, the social intermingling in immigrant communities inspires questions for future research. For example, in the case of the Mormon Colonies, it would have been fascinating to gather the perspective of the Mexican maids, gardeners, farmworkers and ranchers that work for the American women/families I interviewed. How do they perceive the steady stream of American immigrant women? What is the cultural impact on Mexico in general, and this area of Mexico in particular, of the increased migration flow from the United States? The overall impact of American migrants on Mexican towns must be more systematically explored.

## CHAPTER 5

### EPILOGUE

I began this study because of my own experience as a migrant, but also because of the way political debates in Arizona have framed the issue of migration during my time here. The paradox between migrants I know who have sacrificed time, money, possessions and safety, only to experience horrific abuses in crossing the border from Mexico to the United States, and the experience of people from my hometown who have no trouble fluidly moving across borders in the opposite direction, is always in the back of my mind. Additionally, the relatively warm reception American migrants receive in Mexico stands in stark contrast to the often hateful rhetoric in Arizona surrounding Mexican immigrants to the U.S. The reason for these divergences was something I felt needed to be explored.

However, it would be too simplistic to portray the women I interviewed as universally privileged. Although most are financially much better off than their neighbors, there are some who have experienced economic difficulties that indeed have caused them to have to move back to the United States for a time. Though their money buys a much better lifestyle in Mexico than in the U.S., circumstances are by no means luxurious for most of the wives of farmers, ranchers or schoolteachers. Beyond economic struggles, many (probably all) have experienced the isolation of moving somewhere where they don't know a soul, unable to communicate at all at first (and in some instances, unable to communicate effectively for years) with anyone outside of a limited community of English-speakers. While it is true that the women of the Mormon Colonies

don't share a lot of the experiences of other transnational migrants, the variances in people's migration experiences intrigue me much less than the similarities.

My purpose in studying American migrants in Mexico was primarily meant to add to the existing scholarship on this population. Nevertheless, I was also motivated by the recognition (even before beginning interviews) that there was great value in reversing the focus of Mexican-American migration. It was Ralph Waldo Emerson who said, "That which we call sin in others is experiment for us." For those who have never had the experience of being immigrants, perhaps it is easy to vilify the choices and motivations of the immigrants they see around them (and not give much thought to their own actions in a similar circumstance). Therefore, in producing this literature, I hope to highlight one important message: Americans can be immigrants too. I am motivated by the faith that in realizing this, the topic of migration in the United States can be approached in a more compassionate and humane way.

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APPENDIX A  
EMAIL RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Greetings,

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Lindsey Meân in the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to explore women's decisions and experiences in moving to another country, and in particular, moving from the United States to Mexico.

I am recruiting individuals with this experience to participate in a one-on-one interview, which will take approximately 45-90 minutes. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at (801) 376- 7431.

Best,

Vanessa Nielsen  
Graduate Student, Communication Studies.

APPENDIX B

INFORMATION LETTER/CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION

Hello,

I am a graduate student in the M.A. in Communication Studies program at Arizona State University (ASU) under the direction of Dr. Lindsey Meân. I am conducting research to explore women's decisions and experiences of moving to another country, and in particular, the move from the United States to Mexico.

I am recruiting individuals with this experience to participate in a one-to-one interview, at a location of your choice, which will last between 45-90 minutes. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop the interview at any time. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study, there will be no penalty.

I would like to audiotape this interview so I can transcribe it for accuracy. The interview will not be recorded without your permission. Please tell me if you do not want the interview to be taped; you can also change your mind after the interview starts, just let me know. Your participation in this study will be kept confidential and all identifying information will be removed during transcription. Your name will not be used. Transcripts will be stored in a password secure file on a secure server at ASU and audiotapes will be stored in a secure location accessible only to the two researchers,

Your responses to the interview will be used to develop greater insight into how people adapt and transform following a move to another country. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation. Your responses will remain confidential. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used. Your agreement to being interviewed will be taken as your informed consent to participate in this study.

If you are interested in participating in the study please feel free to contact me to make an appointment to meet, or leave information (email and telephone number) with me to be contacted. You can contact me at: [vanessa.nielsen@asu.edu](mailto:vanessa.nielsen@asu.edu) or 801.376.7431.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact one of the researchers listed below. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788. Please let me know if you wish to be part of the study.

Sincerely,

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