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The Immigration Story of Maria Guadalupe Reyna

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THE IMMIGRATION STORY OF MARIA GUADALUPE REYNA

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Abstract

The objective in this capstone project is to present the immigration story of Maria Guadalupe Reyna and use her personal experience in Mexico to draw attention to the circumstances that occur throughout the lives of immigrants. For much of society, there is only a surface level of understanding of why a person, a family, or families would risk everything including their lives for an opportunity to reach the United States. Though each story is unique, there are countless decisions and challenges that become all too familiar throughout the stories of immigrants. These shared experiences create a bond for those who have endured a similar set of circumstances. The truth is that the struggle for an immigrant does not end once they have crossed the border; this struggle is simply replaced by another set of conditions. There is always another hurdle, and they present themselves in every aspect of society; language, employment, education, and healthcare, just to name a few. For many of us, it is hard to recognize what these obstacles might look like because we have the privilege of never having to experience them. The absence of this perception is often what leads to a lack of empathy or negative attitudes about our country's most recent immigrants. If communities within the United States are to become more compassionate then, it is necessary to learn the stories behind the journey of an immigrant.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my mentor, Dr. Xóchitl Chávez, my family, and friends for their help and support throughout this project. I would also like to directly thank my Grandmother, Maria Guadalupe Reyna for sharing her memories, although painful at times, and for allowing me to tell her story in this project. Had it not been for her bravery many years ago the lives of my family members and my own would likely have been very different.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	4-5
METHODS.....	5-6
REGION.....	6-9
LABOR.....	9-13
GRANDMA'S STORY.....	14-24
CONCLUSION.....	24-26
REFERENCES.....	27-29

Introduction

This capstone project explores themes centered around migration such as- the roles of women, unfair employment opportunities, sacrifice, and strength many migrants experience in their immigration to the United States. There is a misunderstanding that is often present in the conversation about immigrants. For many, the process of immigrating to another country starts the minute you decide to leave your home and does not end with crossing a border geopolitical border. On the contrary, numerous events occur before one begins the lifelong path of the immigrant experience and continues even during the settlement process of the new country. To further illustrate the conditions that cause one to immigrate, I will use both scholarly materials and the first-hand experience of Maria Guadalupe Reyna from Mexico for this thesis. Maria Reyna is one of the many migrants holding a powerful story that depicts the struggles of an immigrant and a woman. Maria was born on December 6, 1954, in El Puerto del Coco Guerrero, a small rural region of Mexico. At 11 years old, Maria's parents would send her to Mexico City, where she began to work as a domestic laborer for a number of families she did not know. One of the reasons this story is so influential to me is because Maria Reyna is my maternal grandmother. Her story is part of the reason why my family and I are able to live with opportunities and privileges she did not have growing up. Listening to her story gives me the ability to realize the importance of hearing one's story firsthand. Without having the understanding or background, it can be difficult to comprehend why a person might immigrate and develop a perspective that is free of misconceptions.

The challenges that Maria Reyna and migrant women encounter as immigrants from Latin American countries will be presented in this project. Maria's story exemplifies

demographic elements, settings, specific regions, work labor, and gender roles. All of these elements are major influences on women's experiences as they migrate to the United States.

For as long as I can remember, immigration has always been a prominent issue in the news and on an international and local level. I cannot remember a time when the issue of immigration has not been in the news. What strikes me the most is that many of the same narratives continue to dominate the conversations about newcomers to the United States. The focus remains on crime, the cost of resources, and the impact on state systems. Conversations based on empathy always seem to be overpowered by the usual rhetoric.

Methods

For this ethnographic study, I interviewed my maternal grandmother, Maria Guadalupe Reyna. I chose to share elements of her story because they emphasize that immigration is not as simple as crossing a border. Migrating to another country is a process that can take years to achieve. I am choosing to tell my grandmother's story because it is a constant reminder of wanting more out of life. Contrarily her story argues against the misconceptions that surround immigration issues. What I value most about her story is that it gives people the ability to contemplate real hardships, sacrifices, and the audacity to dream for a better tomorrow. As a child, I remember listening to bits and pieces of her remarkable life in El Puerto del Coco Guerrero, Mexico. Learning more about her and her story, I realized many would not have an opportunity to hear a story like hers. For some -like my grandmother- the immigration process begins as a child, an adult, or even as a new parent. I am discovering that migrant stories continue long after one has successfully migrated to the United States. I believe these stories are essential so that conversations about immigration do not miss the context of why people would

risk everything. We must talk about immigration as a humanitarian issue first. To do so, we need to understand the complexities and backgrounds of immigration stories that can potentially change how people view immigrants and discuss immigration.

To begin this project, I worked with UC Riverside's IRB team for guidance to ensure the interviews were conducted ethically and appropriately for the use of the project. Upon their approval, I worked with Dr. Xóchitl Chávez to formulate a set of questions for my interview. The questions I used focused on the interviewee's life in Mexico. I also asked the interviewee to expand on the reasons for leaving to a large urban area such as Mexico City. I asked these questions to highlight some of the many factors that take place before a person decides to migrate to the United States. This project contains portions directly from Maria's interview and combines scholarly articles and books from accredited authors such as Denise Segura, Patricia Zavella, and Cerola Suarez-Orozco. I decided to use both interviews and literature reviews to allow readers to connect to Maria's story on a personal level and then have the academic literature provide the research to support the events in her story.

Region

Latin America is home to 33 different countries, all with their own respective historical

Figure 1.
Regions of Guerrero (Schmal, 2019)



background and culture. For this project, the focus will be on the country of Mexico. I will focus on the state of Guerrero and the capital city, Mexico City, which are the two areas that serve as the primary locations for Maria's immigration story.

What is essential to acknowledge, is that Guerrero and Mexico City are vastly different from one another. Guerrero is located in the southern coastal region of Mexico. It is bordered by the states of Oaxaca, Michoacan, and Puebla. The foundations of states follow a similar makeup to the way in which the United States organizes states. The construction of each state possesses many different municipalities, with Guerrero itself containing 81 municipalities. Professors of science and medicine Cahua-Pablo et al. (2017) best explain in their research report the categorization of each municipality (Figure 1.) falls into one of the seven regions: Acapulco, Centro, Costa China, Costa Grande, Montaña, Norte, and Tierra Caliente. The region Costa Grande is the territory that includes the area known as El Coco. In order to understand the uniqueness of Maria's hometown, El Coco, it is imperative to showcase the mountainous region of Costa Grande.

This mountainous region is recognized for its vast amount of agriculture and forestry. In an interview with M. Guadalupe-Reyna (Personal communication, May 18, 2021), she describes El Coco -her hometown- as a place full of beauty. El Coco neighbored a flowing river that was the life source of an impressive assortment of fruits (Figure 2.). One particular detail about this region that remains true, is that the towns in these cities tend to be small and likewise hold a smaller population. As a result, there is

Figure 2.
Rural Region of Guerrero (Anderson, 2015)



Figure 3.
Mexico City in 1952 (Sanchez, 2017b)



less development, and due to limited employment opportunities, it can be challenging to find a consistent income. Given the large amount of vegetation that grows in this region, much of the economy comes from agriculture. The agriculture industry happens to be the largest job sector, and apart from agribusiness, there are very few jobs available. Unfortunately, those living in municipalities, such as El Coco- have limited resources related to other socio-economies resources such as business, education, and healthcare. Such limitations also continue to marginalize communities and contribute to the cycles of poverty that continue to impact rural and indigenous peoples. As a result, these socio-economic differences also feed into the development of biased perceptions about native peoples. Perceived biases towards minorities are especially true in large urban areas where migrants are often looked down upon by those with lighter completions or native inhabitants of urban areas such as Mexico City.

Unlike El Coco's rural lifestyle, Mexico City is primarily an urban community. It is a city full of history, a multitude of communities, industries, and opportunities that are not available in other regions of Mexico. (Figure 3.) Professor of Geography Carlos Mautner (2023) explains unlike in some places where only 200-500 people resided, Mexico City had a population size ranging between 3.1 million to 5.5 million between the 1950-1960s. The shift in population size is part of what contributes to the main differences between rural and urban regions of Mexico.

The large population size of Mexico City permits its community to access resources that contribute to future success. Some of these resources include possibilities related to public education systems, healthcare facilities, and steady employment opportunities (Figure 4.). In addition to its population size, Mexico City is able to have additional resources due

Figure 4.
Towering billboards advertise the latest films in 1945
(Sanchez, 2017a)



to its location. Mexico City is in a valley, and though mountains surround it, it does not have the same agricultural capacity as other regions. While Mexico City may be more advanced and industrialized, the capital city thrives on the importing of goods and services from all the neighboring areas in Mexico. As a result, there is a higher cost of living in regard to how one supports the expense of urban life. Given that many of these households had the means to live in Mexico City, many also sought for workers to help in their homes. The story of Maria Guadalupe Reyna begins as one of the workers within these homes.

Labor

The reality of underdeveloped communities in rural Mexico is that opportunities and resources are very limited. As a result, many families face the challenges of navigating financial struggles and the demands placed on families as times change. Economist at the World Bank, Dorte Verner (2015), reports as of the early 2000s, more than 25% of Mexicans lived in rural areas of the country. Though this percentage has dropped 34% from previous decades, many of these regions still encounter hardships with poverty. A reporter from the Borgen Project, Melissa Quist (2019) states that as of 2016, about 43.6% of the population lived below the poverty line. A significant reason rural communities face extreme poverty is due to land in these areas being given the classification of agricultural farmland. With this being the primary source of employment, it is challenging to make sufficient wages to maintain a sustainable living environment for themselves or their families. Additionally, due to the vast amount of agriculture Mexico produces, it becomes a challenge to sell products at a profitable price. With so many vendors competing with one another, there is always someone who may be willing to sell their product for a lower price.

To change this standard, introducing new forms of employment or sources of income is essential to make ends meet. However, creating new employment that brings a sufficient amount of profit for families continues to encounter challenges. As a result, many families within these regions commonly ask for financial help from their children. Many have found employment in local areas, while others have their children move to urban areas of the country where there are better employment opportunities. Mexico City is one of the most significant areas known for hiring children in the workplace. According to reports from Quist (2019), employers in Mexico hire about 3.6 million children between the ages of 5-17.

A child may leave home for several reasons to provide for their families. The most common cause is poverty. According to Quist (2019), a large number of individuals have to face the dilemma of poverty which comprises approximately 40% of Mexico's population. Consequently, families must face the uncertainty of not knowing how they will provide for their loved ones. Financial stresses are not unknown to most children living in these situations. As people grow to realize, children are vigilant of the world around them even from a young age. Some children volunteer to take part in their family matters; others, however, are not given the option. Children who are not given an option, oftentimes are simply following the direction of their parents to work in a new environment to provide aid for their families.

Working as a child is done primarily out of necessity in Mexico due to the feeling of there being no other option for their financial situation. For most children in the United States, the reality of working as a child is not necessarily common. However, this practice was an everyday occurrence for children living in rural Mexico. In the interview with Maria Reyna, she reflects on her own experience stating, "Everyone in the town did that with their children [sent them to work] so we thought it was something normal" (M. Guadalupe-Reyna, personal communication,

May 18, 2021). Sending children to work was as common as a child attending school, and for many, beginning work took the place of their education. Given how pivotal it is to find employment in Mexico, the value of hard work is an asset given deep respect by much of the population living in these rural areas. For some, hard work is a value so significant that education can become second place to advancing in a workforce setting, especially if money is scarce. For many communities, their parent's experiences and beliefs are passed down from generation to generation. Dr. Patricia Murrieta of the University of Guadalajara (2016), reports that if parents began working at a young age they would likely have their children do the same. Moreover, it is also difficult to see the importance of education when there are many entry-level employment opportunities that have little or no educational background requirements. In fact, the term overeducation, coined by economists Micheal Quinn and Stephen Rubb (2006), has become widely used in describing the job economy in rural areas. In developing countries, Quinn and Rubb (2006) report overeducation as a negative in the workplace by causing issues with productivity and mobility. Education in some of these regions is also not accessible or complimentary. In order to have an education, one may need to pay for their children's schooling. The bottom line is that if families struggle financially with basic needs, then the natural result will be the inability to prioritize education

Ultimately the final decision to send children to work is left to parents. While it may be a last resort, if families find themselves in desperate situations, asking their children for help is irrefutable. While there may be an abundance of work opportunities, they come at a cost that, in many cases, leads to generational financial setbacks. Profitable employment opportunities are not likely to be found in rural areas of Mexico. If one wishes to find work they can maintain a living from, one would need to search for work in places such as Mexico City. Employment in urban

communities, while they provide individuals with some financial stability, can also leave individuals far from their families, communities, and the comfort of the place they call home.

Working in Mexico City as an adult is certainly no easy task, but working here as a child can be one of the most difficult, underpaid, and undervalued experiences. Most children sent to work in Mexico City come from agriculture-based regions and from small communities with a quiet lifestyle. As opposed to a city filled with a skyline of buildings, an abundance of people, languages, and customs they do not find familiar. Work situations varied for children. Most work children found was often domestic: working as a chef, a maid, or a nanny. However, other jobs such as factory work and varying industries also existed for the fortunate who found this line of work. The reality is that good jobs are in high demand, and not everyone arriving in Mexico City had the opportunity to obtain one of these positions. As a result, many turned to other forms of making money and finding themselves in underworld illegal activity to make ends meet. Despite how unfair some employers may be, it is known throughout Mexico City that part of the reason Mexico City is able to thrive is because of migrants.

For places like metropolitan areas, such as Mexico City, almost everyone has their own migration story. In fact, the news of people leaving their homes for better opportunities, only to find hardship and struggle, caught the attention of entire generations. The public, artists, musicians, and bands worldwide who are familiar with these truths began to bring to light the harsh realities of living in poverty and some of the most difficult circumstances faced by recent immigrants to Mexico City. One of the most recognized Mexican Rock bands of this time, El Tri became an advocate in many ways for these migrants. The band originated in Mexico City, and due to their place of origin, much of their music spoke of the members of Mexico City. Prior to 1971, the band conducted music in both Spanish and English. However, after a performance at

the Festival of Avandaro, El Tri made a transition to solely recording their music in Spanish. The reason is members of El Tri, specifically the lead member Alex Lora, felt much of the meaning behind their songs was lost in English translation. The song which captures the life of Maria Reyna and so many from Mexico City is El Tri's 1992 production "*Chilango Incomprendido*". *Chilango Incomprendido* roughly translates to the misunderstood native or resident of Mexico City. El Tri's song illustrates the journey of individuals leaving their homes for D.F. -another name for Mexico City- and addresses the hardship these individuals face. In one verse, for example, El Tri's (1992) lyrics state, "*Chilango, chilango incomprendido/ Chilango, defequense por necesidad*". The message of this verse is a declaration that these individuals have no other choice. They face hardship and discrimination because it is their only valid option. In another verse, El Tri uses the phrase "*mil usos*", which translates to "thousands of uses." The lyrics from El Tri's song capture the essence of the trying conditions migrants face when they come to Mexico City. As the song continues it even describes the despair of having no other options and turning to crime. The lyrics state, "*Hasta de narco y atracador*", meaning resorting to drug dealing and theft. For many migrants, the idea of finding a better life proves to be a continuous struggle leaving many with the push and pull of desperation.

One of the lyrics that stood out to me most from El Tri's (1992) song *Chilango Incomprendido* was "*Chilango, defequense por necesidad*". "*Defeño*" is a word meaning, of or related to, Mexico City. In this lyric, El Tri describes the immigrant as being stripped of the opportunity of having a choice. This necessity to live is what leads families and children to endure the harsh reality of migration that is connected with discrimination, ridicule, and despair. Maria Reyna is one of these individuals who was stripped of her right to choose. As will be seen in the next section of Maria Reyna's interview, there are several instances where she makes

sacrifices that rob her of the security of her family. Nevertheless, making these difficult decisions is necessary for the purpose of survival and reunification.

Grandma's story

In an interview with Maria Reyna, I asked her to share her experience of leaving home for Mexico City to support her family. The following sections include translated transcripts of how Maria Reyna described the shift from her childhood to a life working as a maid in Mexico City. From our conversations, it was quickly apparent how her life's story corresponds to the literature from pioneering anthropologists that conducted research on women and immigration, Denise Segura, Patricia Zavella, Julie Goodson Lawes, and many others on the immigrant experience.

“At 11 years old I was sent to work in the city with my sisters [her sister Ines and Isabel]. It was challenging because we had always been together, and now we were going to be separated. We each lived in different houses with different families, and it wasn't easy to see each other because we lived in different districts of the city. So we needed to take a bus and have a meeting point if we wanted to see one another. We also couldn't call each other. Even if the families had a phone, we were not allowed to make phone calls. Because of our schedules, we were only able to see one another every eight days and just for a short while. As for the work, it varied and depended on what the family employer needed. In my first home, I worked as a babysitter. In another house, I was a maid, then a cook, and that's just how it was. You always need to adapt to the work.

The workers were given a room in the house separate from the tenants. However, we were only allowed certain privileges. For instance, we couldn't shower with hot water since we did not have a boiler. We also were not allowed to eat the food we served the families. Sometimes they would let us have leftovers for dinner. However, a bowl of soup and a piece of *bolillo* (*bread*) was our traditional meal.

Some days were good days but others were not. Prior to arriving, the City [Mexico City] to me was a huge place far from home and filled with people. I had never traveled before so I would tell myself that this was my vacation away from home. In some ways, it also felt like a right of passage. Everyone in the town sent their kids away to work, so to us, it was normal. I wasn't surprised when our parents told us we would be leaving, we knew it was going to happen. But it was sad how we were treated and how we lived for that matter. We worked, but we worked for our family. Any wages that we were given, we were not allowed to

spend. Our dad would come every so often to collect the money from each of us, but it was all very fast. We didn't get to see him very long.

I do have some good memories from my time there, specifically certain people. I worked for one couple, both of whom were doctors, and they took very good care of me. They would conduct checkups and run health tests to make sure that I was okay. I was just always afraid, and I would cry a lot. I would get a lot of headaches and a lot of panic attacks, which I now think was anxiety.

The darkness was something I was terrified of, especially when I was alone in a closed dark room. I was always afraid, especially of people. Though some families were kind to me, there were others who were not. Men were coarse. When you're a young employee, they think they have the right to yell at you, curse at you, or even grope you. That was our life for six years."(M. Guadalupe-Reyna, personal communication, May 18, 2021)

There are many stories like Maria Reyna's that offer examples of the sacrifices children have to make for the well-being of their families. Children like Maria have to sacrifice not just their childhood but sometimes their safety as well. The responsibility of children helping their families can place them in vulnerable positions to employers or others that may not have good intentions. In many cases, Maria as well as others, were not given an opportunity to speak up for themselves. Any objections to their employers would likely be met with consequences for themselves and their families. Child workers were seen as expendable if they did not comply with their employers, leaving them to work in silence.

My grandmother's experience is one that is shared by many and it is certainly not the only story that describes what it was like for women migrating from rural Mexico. What I have found is that many of these accounts are often very personal and can be painful to revisit. Nina Lakhani (2015) a reporter from the Guardian newspaper, published an article on the stories of many women who left their homes in search of work in Mexico City. One of the women she writes about in her article is Carolina Hernandez -based on Lakhani's (2015) report- Hernandez was 16 years old when she left her home and family in Veracruz to find work in Mexico City. In an attempt to find an environment away from her abusive uncle, she left home in search of work

as a maid. However, she, unfortunately, found that life in Mexico City would not provide her with the safety and security she had hoped for. Lakhani (2015) reports that Hernandez was mocked by her employers and strangers for speaking her native Omotí language, and because of her background, people within Mexico City saw her as an easy target to take advantage of. Employers would accuse Hernandez of stealing or would simply refuse to pay. For Hernandez, her life outside of work came with another set of struggles.

Similarly, Hernandez's Life at home was, in many ways, very frightening. As many women in this environment experienced, there was always something to be fearful of. Lakhani (2015) states the risk of facing sexual and physical abuse was unfortunately always a threat: either by employers, tenants, family members, or someone in the general city. Unfortunately for women like Maria (my grandmother) and Carolina Hernandez, working in domestic environments had many risks but it was also difficult to leave. Many felt that despite the danger and vulnerability, leaving will have ultimately detrimental effects on their families. In addition, there was always a fear of finding work outside of their positions since many of these women had very little to no education. Working at a young age and being obligated to stay in an environment where one is continuously in service of others can create doubts about what other opportunities might look like. In many ways, this lifestyle prevents girls from finding their voice and independence from a young age.

Searching for one's voice is not simple for individuals who have always been responsible for and reliant on others from such an early age. Many young girls endure a life that has always been in service of others or under the supervision of someone else. On the other hand, many young men that migrate to Mexico City do not face struggles with self-identification. Men are expected to find work and are encouraged to explore their work interests. Although they face

unique challenges, young men could live in Mexico City under a different set of rules. Women, however, were often linked to their families with expectations of remaining obedient to their family's authority. Making choices that go against family norms is a challenge that often comes with repercussions of their own.

Life-changing decisions can be frightening, but they are essential for the betterment of one's future. In Maria's story, she states that at the age of 17, she made the decision to stop working as a maid. Maria would need to have a plan in order for her father to accept the decision. She no longer wanted to work as a maid, nor did she want to work in a family setting. Her desire to work independently was a challenge, given how discrimination in the workplace against women was heavily prevalent. Professor of sociology at the University of California Santa Barbara, Denise Segura (1984) illustrates in an article that employers regularly overlook women for work positions due to the expectation that one day they may become pregnant and need to leave their employment. Employers would often refuse to train women, leaving them exposed to injury or failure. However, Maria was hopeful, despite the odds, her plan was to leave her position as a maid and find a job in the factories nearby. Once Maria returned home she sat with both her father -Vicente- and her Tio Julian to tell them of her plan to work in a factory. While listening to the conversation, Maria's sister Ana expressed interest in joining Maria in transitioning to a new workplace. Ana was also working in Mexico City as a maid, but like Maria, she was looking for a better opportunity. Tio Julián told Maria he could help her and Ana find employment in Mexico City and stay at his house so long as they helped pay rent. The newfound freedom Maira would gain proved to be life-changing. Instead of having to ask permission for every aspect of her life, Maria would be able to enjoy her time freely after work. Maria returned to Mexico City with Tio Julián and Ana to begin working. As promised, Maria

and Ana found work at a local sewing factory in Mexico City. Adapting to work as a seamstress was easy for Maria; after all, she had previous experience sewing while working as a maid. Maria's new employment offered her opportunities she previously did not have. She was able to be near her sister and meet other women who would soon become her friends. Most importantly, she had a start and end time in her work day. Amid the excitement of Maia's new life, she would later meet the man she would one day marry.

My grandfather, Donaciano Reyna, was an employee at the factory. Despite working on separate floors, both he and Maria caught each other's attention. Everything started with a few glances between breaks or when they both happened to be on the same floor. One day Maria's friend Lucha caught onto Maria and Donaciano's interest in each other. In an attempt to help Maria, Lucha told Donaciano to ask her out before any of the other co-workers made the first move. Lucha's statement gave Donaciano the push he needed to ask Maria out on a first date. However, his attempt did not go so well. For Maria, the day started with the typical excitement of a first date. What would she wear, how would the conversation go, and what would they watch? They were supposed to meet at the movie theater; however, her excitement came to an end when she realized how long she had been waiting for Donaciano. As usual, the work in a big city factory never ceased, and Donaciano was not able to make it in time for the encounter. Despite her sister's advice, Maria and Donaciano stayed in contact at work and maintained a good relationship. As time passed, they continued their conversations and also found time to meet outside of work at an ice cream shop near their factory.

As luck would have it, the factory planned a trip for their employees to go to La Quebrada, a beach in Acapulco. Donaciano saw the factory's trip as an opportunity. Maria described that he sat with her on the way to La Quebrada, conversing the entire way. They both

continued in each other's company throughout the day and at the beach. There, Donaciano again apologized for the failed attempt on their first date and officially asked Maria to be his girlfriend. According to my grandmother, she did not let him off the hook so easily but she could not hide the fact that she also wanted to be his girlfriend. Maria accepted Donaciano's request and they returned back to Mexico City as a new couple.

After three years of being in a relationship, Maria and Donaciano were married. They settled in Mexico City and began their new family soon after their wedding. They both settled into their new lives together and continued their jobs at the factory. My grandparents lived with other family members who also left home to find work in Mexico City. It was not easy, but they were making things work until the day Donaciano came home from work infuriated. He had enough at work with his boss. The working conditions were never great and employers would regularly mistreat their employees. Donaciano made the decision to leave but also to leave for the United States in search of better employment opportunities. According to Maria, there was not much of a discussion and Donaciano believed leaving was necessary for his family. All she could do was accept his decision despite knowing that she would not be making the journey with her husband. They had two children -their firstborn, Norma, was two years old- and Victor, their youngest, was only six months. Donaciano promised Maria he would come back for them or earn enough money to bring them to the United States. Donaciano's promise, as well as intended, did not go as planned.

A few months after Donaciano left for the United States, he settled in Riverside, California. Maria returned with Norma and Victor to her parent's home in El Coco, Guerrero as she could not afford to stay in Mexico City. She also did not have enough money for her and her children to join Donaciano in the United States. After returning home, Maria's father advised her

to make a decision. She must choose between staying in Mexico, hoping for Donaciano to return, or following her husband to the United States. Joining her husband, however, would mean she would need to leave her toddler and infant in her parents' care.

After six months apart, Maria knew she would be able to take care of her children despite their separation. In fact, according to the book, *Women and Migration in the US-Mexico Borderlands: A Reader* by Denise Segura and Patricia Zavella (2007), accredited professors of Sociology and Latin American and Latino studies, many women whose husbands migrate to the United States elect to “leave unattended marriages”. However, because she wanted to see her family reunited one day, she boldly decided to follow him to the United States without her children. Doctor of Human Development and Education Carola Suárez-Orozco et al. (2002) assert that due to the risks of immigrating, some families felt it was safer to leave their children behind in Mexico and return for them once their living situation was secure. While the thought of leaving her children brought her physical pain, she believed the security of her family and their future rested in joining Donaciano.

Maria, Donaciano, and her father began to devise a plan for her to cross the border to the United States. Maria sold her jewelry to gather the money needed to hire a “coyote.” Everything happened very quickly; and before she knew it, it was time to hug Norma and Victor goodbye. The journey to the United States was no simple task. Even with precautions, there were significant risks with every step she took to get closer to her final destination. She traveled multiple ways and remembers thinking about the stories she heard of migrants experiencing robberies, reported to immigration authorities, or experiencing acts of violence. Maria was fortunate that the person responsible for smuggling her across the border helped her and several others safely. The person who helped Maria cross to the United States instructed Maria to meet

in Tijuana where she and others would cross to the United States. She was shuttled into a van with dark curtains and told to remain silent for the duration of the drive. Maria remembers it was pitch black, and no one dared to speak as they traveled. She remembers praying to join Donaciano soon and for her children's well-being. Within a few hours, she had crossed the border and was in route to Riverside, California. Donaciano was waiting for her and she was overjoyed to reunite with Donaciano. Nevertheless, from the moment she set foot in the United States, Maria was determined to send for her children, Norma and Victor. In my interview with Maria, she states that when she arrived in the United States, Donaciano told her she was not going to work. Not working was simply unacceptable for Maria, and she remembers telling him, "I am going to work. I came to work to bring my children here. We are not going to leave, we are here and we are going to get our kids here. I am not going to accept being far from them"(M. Guadalupe-Reyna, personal communication, May 18, 2021).

Donaciano did not like her response and again told her she would not work. She simply responded with, "I am going to work -and three days later I found work." (M. Guadalupe-Reyna, personal communication, May 18, 2021). Saying no to her husband was not easy for her or women in Maria's situation. She again found herself in a vulnerable position in a new place and disconnected from her family's support. Doctor of Anthropology at the State University of New York, Julie Goodson Lawes (1993) illustrates in her study that women would often compromise and conform to their new situations. Often they became the caretakers and managed the home while the male figures in the household went out to work. For many migrant wives, the imbalance of power was a constant struggle.

Being a migrant woman, a wife, and a mother comes with challenges that are unknown to men who migrate to the United States. In Maria's story, Donaciano was the first to leave their

family in search of work. Soon after, she left her children in an attempt to protect and keep her family together. However, she would have to confront a new set of responsibilities in the United States. Many migrant couples face changes in their marriage dynamics when they arrive in the United States, especially those who were separated from their husbands for some time.

According to studies, from Goodson-Lawes, (1993) when husbands left their wives to find work in the United States, it was difficult to restore the same dynamics previously established once both partners were reunited. Goodson-Lawes (1993) narrates the dynamic switch as women become “less willing to subordinate themselves, within or outside the house”(p. 290). Some might feel women were acting insubordinately, but in actuality, they were acknowledging, perhaps for the first time, that they were capable of more than what their family dynamic allowed. New independence became a source of empowerment, however, many spouses viewed it as a constraint to their marriage.

Having different expectations within a marriage is challenging and magnifies feelings of insecurity in a new environment. Goodson-Lawes (1993) states that couples tend to feel alone in their partnership. Given that men were generally the ones who immigrated first, women were almost always the ones that felt this dynamic. In addition, during the time spent apart, husbands often developed a comfortable social network. For women who arrived after their husbands, the same established connections were absent, contributing to feelings of isolation. Although some women felt this way, others were driven by more personal motives-their children.

While some families were only apart for months, others were separated for years. Graduate of New York University School of Law, Andrea Smith et al. (2004) article illustrates how distance within these relationships, especially among children at a young age, can form a divide and psychological struggles between parents and children. As mentioned in Maria’s story,

when she left for the United States she left her children, Norma and Victor, behind in Mexico. Based on the interview with Maria, she would not be reunited with Norma and Victor until five months after her departure. During this time, Maria recounts that reuniting with her children would not only be difficult but dangerous. In order for Norma and Victor to arrive in the United States, Maria needed to entrust her children to strangers, a coyote, and other immigrants they did not know.

Fortunately, Norma and Victor arrived safely; however, the struggle for Maria and her family did not end there. When asked about how it felt to reunite with her children Maria recalls,

“When they arrived [Norma and Victor] it was very hard for me because Victor did not like us. He did not like me. Victor was only six months old when I left so he never had the time to get to know me. Instead, he would cry a lot and look for my mom, his grandma. Victor also did not like the food here. Most foods from here, especially milk, would hurt his stomach. Norma, on the other hand, did know me. When she got here she ran to hug me and remembered me. She knew who I was, she knew I was her mom. (M. Guadalupe-Reyna, personal communication, May 18, 2021).

As can be imagined, reunification is not an easy process for children or parents. Luckily for Maria’s family, she was able to reestablish her relationship with her children and make up for the lost time between them. Unfortunately, due to age, length of time apart, and resulting trauma, some families are not as fortunate.

One of the first major challenges of being an immigrant is crossing the border safely. The next is living in the United States as an undocumented immigrant. Immigrants are aware there are an insurmountable number of injustices that can occur due to their status. Immigrants often take the blame for taking jobs that some feel are rightfully jobs for citizens. However, in reality, the jobs accepted by most immigrants are often unsought service jobs. Companies are aware that migrants have no choice, and will endure poor working conditions with little argument due to life circumstances. According to a study conducted by -reporters of the U.S. Department of Justice-

Office of Justice Programs- Mary Bauer and Monica Ramirez (2010), if the United States were to deport all immigrants, then there would be a significant shortfall of about \$2.6 trillion in U.S. Economics. Nevertheless, even with this knowledge, when the topic of immigration arises, much hostility comes into the conversation.

Though migrants are part of what makes the luxuries within the United States possible, migrants continuously experience judgment in place of compassion. Maria Reyna's story is one of thousands. There is an abundance of inspiring and courageous immigrant stories that can change how people view immigration. Unfortunately, many stories will go untold. As is described in the song by musician Manu Chao (1998), "*Clandestino*" the lives and the stories of these migrants are clandestine and live in secret. His lyrics explain that his life is "like a ghost in the city, my life is prohibited, say the authorities." "*Me dicen el clandestino/Por no llevar papel*"(Chao, 1998) translated, they call me a *clandestino* / for not having papers. Manu Chao's song is an illustration of the life society has created for immigrants.

CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, in today's society, there are a number of misconceptions when it comes to immigration matters. Immigrants are often judged or blamed for circumstances over which they have no control: political climates, economies, armed conflict, poverty, or trauma. In this project, some of the main themes seen throughout this paper intertwine with migration, the roles of women, unfair employment opportunities, sacrifice, and strength. Although expressions of these themes may be told through a different lens they are found within every migration story.

Secondly, there needs to be a shared understanding by policymakers when discussing immigration. There are many people in positions of power that have a very narrow understanding of immigration and the influences that drive these issues. It is important to recognize factors that

include poverty, the lack of a job marker, and living in constant violence are all contributors to why a person may decide to migrate. What happens across borders impacts migration and we have to understand our role in those events.

As stated throughout this paper, the experience shared by migrants to the United States is complex. Maria Reyna and those who contribute to developing an understanding of the immigrant experience are Latina Anthropologist scholars such as; Denise Segura and Patricia Zavella, reporter Nina Lakhani, and musicians like Manu Chao and El Tri, all emphasize that there is a driving force leading individuals to migrate prior to beginning their journey. These voices need to be shared and brought to the forefront of conversations in our homes, in our communities, and in all public forums.

I used my grandmother's story to provide a personal account of what an immigration story looks like. It is my belief these stories need to be shared so that we can connect to the reasons why one would risk the security of their community and family. It takes courage to leave your life behind for the prospect of education, stable employment opportunities, or even the ability to allow children to simply be children. The aspiration of finding a better life is not an easy path, but for many, it is worth the risk. Maria's life is a primary example of just how rigorous the journey can be. In several moments throughout her story, we see that she faced challenges that are still relevant today. To most people, these stories are unimaginable unless they are told by those who experience them. Overcoming the challenges of leaving home at 11 years old, saying goodbye to her children, and rediscovering her strength as a woman are histories that need to be earned from and celebrated.

Immigration in the United States and the conversations that surround this topic have been ongoing since the creation of geopolitical borders in the 1800s. Regrettably, much of the

narrative often dominating the news cycles does not focus on immigration as a humanitarian issue. That needs to change, and I hope to contribute by highlighting the reasons that lead to migration and the positive impact newcomers have in this county. When I think of my grandmother's story, it reminds me of all the possibilities that exist when you develop a desire to learn, to work hard, and to become resilient. If this were not the case for my grandmother, stories such as mine would not be possible. I am an extension of her story and my hope is to add to her success.

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