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Balancing Life: Women, Family, and Work in California Agribusiness

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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by

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Capitalist agriculture, not family farming has dominated the California agricultural economy throughout its history and unlike the rest of the nation has relied upon the interchangeability of numerous migrant and immigrant groups whose employment opportunities were limited. An examination of the history of California agribusiness highlights four periods in which the labor force is mainly single/unattached males, or family units. This dissertation examines the social and economic consequences of the changing use of labor in California agribusiness and the impact of these changes on women farm workers and their families.

Mexican-origin and Dust Bowl families are the only two family groups who have labored in California agribusiness during the twentieth century. The historical importance of women farm workers has been neglected in the literature of California agriculture, as well as the importance of family and household strategies in the initial incorporation of women into agricultural wage work. I document the contributions of Mexican-origin farm working women within the context of their historical experiences,

along with the strategies that they and their families utilized, making the family viable as an important labor unit despite the disruptions and complexities of a pattern of changing labor in California agribusiness. I focus on the role of women in California agribusiness and their importance in the settlement process, family maintenance, and community development. Women enter wage labor out of extreme needs of the family and at times as heads of households, and their income is essential to the survival of the family. Their entry into wage work adds substantially to their workload as they continue their domestic role in addition to their role as wage worker. They and their families acquire substantial benefits from the women's involvement in community building and networking with institutions that are available to them, particularly if they acquire English as a second language.

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

It was a warm day in April when I first met Ramona Garcia[1] whose name I was given by a contact at the Coachella Valley Historical Society. Ramona lives with her husband, their youngest daughter, and her daughter's six month old son in a small house on the same property where she helps her brother care for their ailing mother. The property is situated on a small parcel of land in Thermal, a small town located 25 miles southeast of Palm Springs and approximately 9.5 miles north of the Salton Sea in the Coachella Valley.

Looking younger than her 61 years, Ramona offered me a glass of cold water while her daughter went to find pictures that they wanted to show me before I began to record Ramona's life story. Nervously, but with great pride, Ramona brought out pictures of her mother and father, her husband, their old union cards, and various family photos. She began her story tentatively, but as she went on, she became more and more comfortable, and by the end, she thanked me for allowing her to talk about her life. Her gratitude touched me deeply because without her story, and others like hers, this dissertation would not be possible.

Ramona Garcia arrived in the United States in 1957 at the age of 12 from Encarnación, Jalisco, Mexico. Her father tilled the land for a rancher in Texas since 1942

[1]All names are pseudonyms unless otherwise stated.

and, after many years working for the rancher, the rancher helped arrange legal status for her entire family. Ramona remembers many good times while her father worked for the rancher in Mexico; she was allowed to help the rancher take care of the animals, and feed the chickens, cows, and goats. Her brother used to milk the cows and in return, the rancher gave her brother toys and fresh meat to eat.

In Texas, her father earned 50 cents an hour driving a tractor while Ramona, her mother, and her brothers earned 32 cents an hour picking cotton. After the family had lived in Texas for nearly two years, a friend invited Ramona's father to California where the pay was better. The family moved to Mecca, California in August of 1959, where her father already had secured a job, with a substantial increase in pay, driving a tractor. Beginning a new life in the United States was a difficult experience that forced Ramona to grow in ways she never thought possible as she dealt with drastic changes that began with language. There were no bilingual classes as there had been in Texas and therefore, reading and writing in English and continued to be a challenge.

The family rented a small house in the town of Mecca and Ramona began classes at the local school where Cecelia Foulkes, whose family was a local Mecca Anglo pioneer family, was one of her teachers. Because her father had no formal schooling, he did not believe that she and her brothers needed any further formal educations and felt it best that she and her brothers leave the school system after sixth grade. Her brothers disregarded their father's wishes and continued in school for a time, however, after sixth grade, Ramona stayed at home to help her mother with housework and to work in the fields.

Ramona's household duties included cleaning and cooking, and making fresh tortillas each day with her and her mother's routine varying little; they arose each morning at 3:00 A.M. to prepare breakfast for the family, as well as lunches that would be taken to the fields, and then they would go to the fields, come back home, cook, clean, wash, and prepare to start all over the next day.

Ramona's mother picked vegetables, such as corn, lettuce, beans, onions, carrots, cucumbers, beets, and radishes, as well as fruit during her time as a farm laborer; she is now in her late eighties. She worked until the age of sixty-eight when the work became too difficult for her, in part a result of too many accidents and falls on the job. Ramona, her mother, and brothers used to work as a team and were driven to work by her eldest brother as he was the only one who knew how to drive besides her father. Following in the footsteps of his father, her eldest brother worked for thirteen years as a tractor driver, and would drop them off in the fields and then he continued on to his work.

Ramona recalls that restrooms were very far from where they worked and workers were restricted as to how many breaks they were allowed to take. Fresh water was not provided for the workers and each had to furnish their own water, and everything was done at a quick pace in order to accomplish the required work within the required time. There were times when she and her brothers were not paid as they forgot to ask for the name of the company that they were working for at the time, resulting in being left in the field after everyone else had finished. Things changed in 1965 and 1966 when the *Bracero* program came to an end and the union came to Coachella Valley; water would

have to be cold and there had to be at least two portable restrooms, one for men and the other for women. Ramona recollects that when the union began recruiting workers in the Coachella Valley, her mother, being unknowledgeable about the union, followed the advice of their *mayordomo* (crew leader), to ignore union representatives. In order to bypass union representative, the *mayordomo* would have them begin work in the fields around 3:00 a.m. and thereby finish picking the crops before union representatives arrived between 9:00 – 10:00 in the morning. One morning, her family found themselves without a job because the company that they had been working for signed with the union and because the company workers had not paid union dues, she, her mother and brothers could no longer work for the company. Ramona, her mother and brothers felt betrayed by their *mayordomo*, but it wasn't long after the incident that her family joined the union and they found a job with another company with union benefits.

Ramona's husband, Carlos, came to the United States during the *bracero* years in 1958 at the age of twenty-one. Originally from Francisco y Madero Torreon, Coahuila, Mexico, he became a U.S. resident with the help of Ramona's mother who hired a lawyer to help him with his papers. Ramona received her citizenship at the age of forty-two and her newly-found confidence from becoming a citizen enabled her to find a job as a housekeeper at a religious nursing home care facility in the City of Palm Desert in the Coachella Valley. There, she was instrumental in the hiring of her friends and relatives when the company needed more housekeepers in the nursing home. As a housekeeper, Ramona cleaned windows, doors and corridors daily, as well as daily cleaning and

sanitizing of showers and bathtubs. She dusted baseboards, window sills, ledges, and lamps, emptied waste baskets and scrubbed or vacuumed floors, and changed and washed bed sheets, pillow cases and towels. At times, she was even called upon to assist a nurse with a patient. Ramona's efficiency at her job was recognized and she was put in charge of scheduling the entire housekeeping staff.

During her vacation periods, Ramona would work privately for families with ill patients throughout the Coachella Valley where, as a private caregiver, she received more than double the salary than at the nursing home ($4.25/hour vs. $9.25/hr). When she was offered a permanent position in Palm Desert with one of the families and a salary of $10.00/hour, she readily accepted and because of her working experience in the nursing home and as a private caregiver, she learned the skills to take care of her terminally ill mother. In contrast to her work in the fields, her housekeeping work provided her and her family with a steady income and employment that could be relied upon. Ramona's U.S. citizenship, along with her steady wages, ensured that neither she nor her daughter had to work in the agricultural fields.

The life story of Ramona Garcia typifies the life stories that I was privileged to record of Spanish-speaking women who have worked or are working in farm work in the Coachella Valley. There are many variations in their life stories – different origins, different ways of entering the United States, and various ways of entering or exiting agricultural work. However, particular aspects of their lives bring them together. All of them came to the United States as members of families/households. Their husbands,

fathers, or grandfathers initially came from Mexico to the United States for work out of absolute necessity and the presence of women working in the fields was a strategy just as was the migration of their menfolk. Their histories speak to the lives of women immigrants and migrants whose work, both outside and inside the home, helped make it possible for their families to meet the challenge of life in California farm work, particularly in the unforgiving desert communities in the Coachella Valley. In addition, their stories fill in the historical record as to their presence and importance in California Agribusiness.

My study focuses on the role of women in farm work, as well as their importance in settlement, family maintenance and community development in California farm working communities. My study also highlights the work and roles that Spanish-speaking women have been engaged during the twentieth century within the context of California agribusiness. Cycles of changing labor in California agribusiness (i.e., unattached male, migrant farm workers vs. family labor) play an important part in farm working women's lives and the manner in which they and their families develop strategies to weather the complexities and disruptions in their lives by national, state, and local influences. Women of farm working families, both in California and in Mexico, have been and continue to be irreplaceable, adding to the success of the Spanish-speaking families and their labor in the development of California agribusiness, and ought to be addressed and given their due credit.

1.1 – FARM LABOR IN CALIFORNIA AGRIBUSINESS

Agribusiness, not family farming has dominated the California agricultural economy throughout its history and unlike the rest of the nation has relied upon the changing use of an exploitable labor force. An examination of the history of California agribusiness highlights four periods in which the labor force is mainly *solo* (individual or unattached) males, or family units. Unattached males may encompass both unmarried men and married men without their families. During the decade of the 1850s, Native Americans and disenchanted gold miners initially filled the need for agricultural labor and later, during the *Bracero* Programs, Mexicans comprised the majority of workers. The Chinese, Japanese, Punjabi, Mexican and Filipino laborers were overwhelmingly single males (Daniel 1981:24; Fuller 1940; Chan 1986; Matsumoto 1993; Leonard 1992). Three times the United States government approved wartime emergency recruitment of Mexican single males, during WWI with the Immigration Act of 1917, a farm labor agreement between the United States and Mexico during WWII that began in 1942, and during the Korean War in 1951.

Chinese Farm Laborers

The first ethnic group hired on a grand scale in California agribusiness was the Chinese immigrant farm laborer and they were considered an "efficient migratory work force" managed by Chinese tenants, labor contractors, and merchants who played a

similar role as the Chinese *compradors* in China (McWilliams 1939:71; Chan 1986:341). China was recognized as a most favored nation, making the male peasant workers opportune recruits because of the 1868 Burlingame-Seward Treaty (Palerm 2014:63). Known as "*mai-pan*" by their fellow Chinese, *compradors* made it convenient for the white landowners to negotiate contracts, after which everything was handled by the Chinese *comprador* in an orderly fashion. White landowners paid the contractor/*comprador* the negotiated amount, leaving them with no responsibility for providing any type of housing for the men and they seldom had any dealings with the farm workers themselves. The method of contract labor has lasted to the present time and is characteristic of California migratory labor history (Fisher 1953:2-24; Chan 1986:350).

Chinese farm workers lived in a virtual male environment and seldom became part of the social world of rural California despite the fact that they were an essential element in agricultural production. They provided their own living arrangements and came together in groups of 40-100 workers. Because the Chinese maintained their own living arrangements, growers gained an additional benefit of not having to pay for room and board for the workers, and along with low wages, it was a win/win situations for growers.

Even though many of the Chinese men were married, very few brought their wives with them to California (Chan 1986:386-87). Chinese women remained in China, according to Chinese custom in order to accommodate their mothers-in-laws and to preserve the family line. However, the fact was also that poor Chinese men could not afford to bring their wives with them. Anti-Chinese activities erupted during periods of

economic downturns in California during 1876-79, 1886, and 1893-94, resulting in the Chinese being blamed for what all workers were experiencing (Chan 1986:370; Palerm 2014:64). While Chinese farm workers initially filled the need for laborers, they were the first ethnic group to be excluded from immigration on the basis of race with the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 that essentially put an end to Chinese migration and the ability to send for wives (Chan 1986:3). With their importance in agriculture dramatically reduced, they were replaced by Japanese laborers. As well as introducing a new ethnic group into the agricultural labor force at the turn of the twentieth century, California agribusiness turned towards industrialization through sugar beets, citrus and cotton, leading to "the construction of the first factories in the field" in California (Palerm 2014:65).

Japanese Farm Laborers

Like their Chinese counterparts, Japanese farm laborers were individual male workers who were considered ideal for farm work. Growers liked the fact that Japanese laborers followed "the first requisite of seasonal laborers…they did not colonize; they moved throughout the state at their own expense working as migratory laborers, and one grower suggested that "White laborers with families…would be liabilities" (McWilliams 1939:107; Matsumoto 1993:22). The contract labor system "became a weapon of considerable force" for Japanese farm laborers (Fisher 1953:25). They enhanced their bargaining power through well organized "associations" that served initially as

contracting agencies (Daniel 1981:74). Early on, the Japanese underbid competitive labor for jobs and were soon in great demand as farm laborers (Fisher 1953:28; Matsumoto 1993:22). In addition, the Japanese bosses withheld labor at during harvest as a method to raise prices or piece rates (Palerm 2014:67). As contract laborers, the Japanese gained a strong foothold as tenants and from 1900 on, they grew rice in Northern California, citrus in Southern California, and carved a niche in intensive cultivation specializing in crops such as strawberries (Leonard 1992:21). The Japanese excelled so well in agribusiness that the same xenophobic anti-immigrant sentiment that eliminated the Chinese from farm work swelled again, coming to a crescendo with the 1906 "Gentlemen's Agreement" that prohibited further Japanese immigration. There was, however, a loophole that permitted families to join resident Japanese men (Matusmoto 1993:22). Female Japanese immigrants entered California mainly between the years 1908-1924 and while the 1906 Agreement effectively reduced immigration from Japan, Japanese immigrants continued to enter the U.S. mainland from Canada, Mexico, and Hawaii, until the Immigration Act of 1924 excluded immigration of all Japanese.

Filipino Farm Laborers

Koreans and South East Asians also arrived in California during the first and second decades of the twentieth century and worked throughout the State as "laborers, lessors, and owners" (Leonard 1992:21-32). Most Filipinos entering California during the period

1920 through 1930 found employment in agriculture and as a group, and were mainly young, individual males (Palerm 2014: 69). They organized themselves very much like the Japanese under a contract system in which the men worked in "gangs" for a labor contractor, who recruited, boarded, and disciplined the men and to whom the workers paid for their room and board in "camps' (McWilliams 1939:107). It was this "guild character" that distinguished the Japanese and Filipino contract system from the Chinese and Mexican, a system that resembled union labor with a potential for organization and collective action. Filipino laborers were subjected to great indignities, receiving the lowest paying jobs, housed in deplorable conditions, doing mainly "stoop labor" particularly in asparagus and melon harvesting (Palerm 2014:69)

Punjabi Farm Laborers

Men who migrated from the central Punjab in India beginning in 1906, were known collectively as "Hindus," although few were actually Hindus (Palerm 2015:69; Leonard 1992:32). In reality, 85-90 percent were Sikhs and about 10 percent were Muslim. Punjabi men began entering the United States in the first decade of the twentieth century when Canada began tightening its admission requirements. Unlike Chinese and Japanese laborers, Punjabi immigrants came to the United States on their own and not through contract-labor recruitment. They migrated to the Imperial Valley, the San Joaquin Valley, and the Sacramento Valley because of the geographically similarity of these areas

to the Punjab. During their initial years in California, Punjabi men migrated around the State in small groups, working in agriculture, on the railroads, and in lumbering. Increasing Punjabi immigration led to prejudice that made it more and more difficult for them to gain admittance to the United States, however, like the Japanese, they developed strategies to circumvent legal difficulties. Some found that being admitted first to the Philippines (a U.S. possession at the time) allowed them to enter the United States legally. However, in 1913, a federal decision ruled that Punjabis entering the Philippines for the purpose of legally entering the United States could be detained and deported. Additional restrictive measures ended the legal immigration of Punjabis by 1914 and by 1917, the Immigration Act of 1917, effectively slowed immigration through its "barred Asiatic zone" and its "literacy provisions" (Leonard 1992:32) and opened the door for Mexican labor recruitment.

Mexican Farm Laborers

The extremely restrictive Immigration Act of 1917 led industrial growers to pressure Congress to exempt Mexican immigrants from certain requirements in the legislation under a temporary worker program that would accommodate the need for sufficient labor to harvest crops. As a result, migrating Mexican laborers entering the United States for temporary work in agricultures, and later for non-farm jobs, were exempt from the head tax, contract labor, and literacy clauses of the immigration act (Kiser and Kiser 1979:10).

This exemption enacted the first *bracero* program which successfully recruited large numbers of Mexican farm workers in response to perceived war-related shortages; the program lasted until 1922, just three years after the close of World War I.

Unemployment following the Mexican Revolution, and the continuing tradition of northern migration from Mexico, as well as their geographical proximity, put Mexican farm workers in line to fill the grower's need for labor. On the one hand, Mexican laborers were similar to their Chinese and Japanese counterparts in that they were mostly individual/unattached males. On the other hand, unlike their predecessors, they tended to return to their homeland thus relieving California "from the burden of sustaining an idle labor force between crops" (Palerm and Urquiola 1992:320). California growers consistently and deliberately overestimated the numbers of farm workers needed in fear that they would not have sufficient workers to harvest the crops and to ensure lower wages. And while there were more farm workers in California in 1918 and 1919, growers convinced Congress to extend the wartime waver of Mexican immigration restriction. The policies that were implemented were aimed directly at encouraging temporary workers, not permanent immigrants (Alarcon 1994:5; Guerin-Gonzales 1996:44). As would be expected, the oversupply of farm workers resulted in lower wages as workers underbid each other for jobs. The void that was left by Asian and Southeast Asian immigrant labor was filled by Mexican farm laborers until the Great Depression, at which time approximately 400,000-500,000 Mexicans were deported to Mexico (including U.S. citizens) or they returned voluntarily (Palerm 2014:77; Palerm

and Urquiola 1992:320; Monto 1994:55). The deportation of Mexican workers marked the first time in the history of international migration between the United States and other countries that government supported and sponsored expulsion of immigrants was instituted. Along with the mass repatriation of Mexican-born laborers, the Depression years of the late 1920s to the beginning of the war boom economy of 1939, there was active recruitment of bankrupt Dust Bowl families from Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri, and Texas to fill the needs for workers.

White Migrant Dust Bowl Farm Laborers

During the decade of the Depression from 1930 to 1940, thousands of white migrants from the dust bowl (Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas, and Missouri) entered California to work in agriculture. This work force consisted of American families and in them, unlike in previous migrants who worked in agriculture, the American public saw themselves: "a symbol of Depression-era failure, later an affirmation of success and deliverance" (Gregory 1989:xiv). Dust Bowl migrants followed "a fully developed migration system," following relatives who had already settled in California and, after a while, the face of California's agricultural labor force overwhelmingly changed from foreign dark skinned workers (as well as dark skinned Mexican-American workers) to American Anglo workers (Gregory 1989:27). While in the Imperial Valley and some of the coastal basins the number of Mexican and Asian laborers in agriculture remained about the same, the

interior valleys were now dominated by Dust Bowl farm worker families and other whites. The labor force would remain this way until the 1950s when Mexican farm workers re-entered agriculture on a large scale and Dust Bowl families ceased to be the dominant component of the agricultural work force because of World War II and their entry into military and higher paying defense jobs (Kiser and Kiser 1979:67; Gregory 1989:61-62).

Mexican Farm Laborers (cont.)

When growers complained that their workers (Dust Bowl laborers) were being lost to the military and higher defense jobs during World War II, the 1942 *Bracero* Program was established as an emergency program to again "satisfy perceived labor shortages in agriculture" because of the war (Kiser and Kiser 1979:67; Garcia y Griego 1996:45). Under the program, over 4.5 million Mexican Nationals were recruited for jobs mainly in agriculture in the United States. This program allowed for both married and unmarried Mexican men because of the desperate need for labor in the United States. Therefore, the care of children and the homefront in Mexico was relegated to wives, mothers, and sisters. The Program provided a temporary worker arrangement for agriculture that effectively minimized the grower's direct investment in labor recruitment, incentives, and control, and provided an unprecedentedly inexpensive, malleable, and diligent labor supply (Wells 1996:57). When families were left behind in Mexico, workers could live and eat more cheaply and were able to send remittances to their families in Mexico

(Garcia 1992:5). In Mexico, where family members grew subsistence and cash crops, raised cattle, and sold crafts, remittances were utilized wisely. When entire families live in California, on the other hand, household spending increases since subsistence activities that were depended upon by the family in Mexico are no longer possible.

Agribusiness justified the use of Mexican farm labor during WWI and now again during WWII and implied that there would surely be shortages of farm labor during WWII as there was in WWI. As with the Chinese, Japanese, Punjabi, Korean, and Filipino farm laborers, one of the advantages of using individual/unattached males was that housing was a much easier situation to deal with rather than those who had family members with them; for example low quality housing where many men were able to live together discouraged family labor versus housing with electricity, running water and cooking areas that encouraged family labor.

The overall effect of the policy allowed for the jobs of local, settled Latino agricultural workers to be taken away and given to *braceros* (Gonzales, Jr. 1985:17). The program was extended after the war, finally legalized through Public Law 78, lasting until the United States revoked it in 1964. Even though the *Bracero* Program was initiated as a temporary solution to the idea that there was a lack of agricultural workers, many *braceros* obtained visas, became permanent workers, and sent for family members and friends. In 1947, Walter Goldschmidt suggested that families of "agricultural workers are becoming a physical part of the total community" and that the ambitions of the agricultural worker lies in that direction (1947:68-70). Indeed, the Mexican immigrant

population increased and settled in *colonias* throughout California, "adjacent to an agricultural town or city" living apart from the larger community and discouraged from incorporation (McWilliams 1968:217; Palerm 2014:74).

During the Post-*Bracero* period between 1965 and the early 1980s, the stability of Mexican farm work families did prevail and many Mexican *braceros* and ex-*braceros* obtained visas, became permanent workers and sent for family members upon the conclusion of the program (Kiser and Kiser 1979:67; Garcia 1992:50). The result was increased settlement and ever increasing numbers of women, especially among immigrants, who sought work in the fields and packing sheds. During the mid-1980s, however, in an effort to cut costs, agribusiness substituted company crews with migratory crews who were hired by labor contractors (Garcia 1992:x). Thus it became more difficult for resident farm worker families to find employment, and when they did, wages were lower and there were no benefit. And as increased mechanizations tends to favor male labor, the demand for female labor in packing houses decreased.

As of 1983, approximately 90% of the agricultural labor force was either Mexican or of Mexican descent (Palerm 1991:14) After the passage of the 1986 Immigration and Reform and Control Act (IRCA), Mexican farm laborers again sought to bring their "spouses, children, and parent to the United States by using family unification program – or as new undocumented immigrants" (Palerm 1997:23). As farm worker families settled in rural communities throughout California's lush agricultural valleys, greater numbers of women, especially among immigrants, sought part-time employment in agricultural work.

In the late 1980, women farm workers constituted anywhere between 23-30% of the agricultural labor force (Vaupel 1988:10; Palerm 1991:14; Mines 1997:6). Women and children from Mexico and Latin America were the new migrants to the United States (Kearney and Nagengast 1989:18).

In reality, the notion of the male farm worker in California Agribusiness is a myth, as women have always worked in the fields. Prior to the turn of the nineteenth century, California-born Mexican women (Native Californians of Spanish-Mexican-Indian descent, *Hispanos, Californios*) were forced into wage labor as a result of the devastating loss of land that *Californios* experienced during the 1860s and 1870s that precipitated drastic social economic, and political changes in their lives, along with the development of the agricultural industry (Palerm 2014:61). Women's role as wage worker in the 1880s not only altered "traditional patterns of employment and familial work responsibility," but also forced women to adjust to their new roles as wives, mothers, wage workers, and sometimes as head-of-household (Zinn 1987:158; Camarillo 1984:28-29). Their entry into the labor market coincided with the systematic exclusion of the Chinese from wage work that left a void in the labor pool, and while California-born Mexican males were still able to work in the few remaining cattle industry occupations, participation in wage labor often began with women, usually as family labor (Ruiz 1982:56; Camarillo 1984:28-29; Camarillo 1996:83).

As large-scale fruit and vegetable industries overshadowed the wheat industry in the late nineteenth century, the food processing industry likewise found a profitable niche.

Plants were built throughout the state to fill the need of a developing agribusiness (Palerm 2014:61; Ruiz 1987:22; Ruiz 1982:61). At the outset of food preservation in California in the 1850s, the women who worked in food processing, hand-packed produce in family-owned sheds and sold the preserved produce door to door. The sugar beet industry grew in importance with beet operations and hired California-born Mexican, Italian, and Portuguese women (Zavella 1982:93; Ruiz 1982:56; Ruiz 1987:25). And, Korean women also worked as farm workers during the early twentieth century (Guerin-Gonzales 1996:21). How do we know this? Because of the work of the social scientists who began to focus on the invisibility of women in the early literature on California agribusiness. What they found is that women entered the agricultural labor force as members of families, and that up until recently the attention was focused on male workers while relegating the work of women as secondary and of little importance.

1.2 – WOMEN AND FAMILIES IN CALIFORNIA AGRIBUSINESS

There has been little focus on families or women as members of families in the classic writings on California agribusiness. Carey McWilliams makes only brief references to families or women in his social history of California agriculture, *Factories in the Fields* (1939). An anomaly occurred during the World Wars when women worked in the agricultural labor force as members of the Women's Land Army (see Kipp 1960), however, the practice of enlisting women for labor in the fields was discontinued when they began to demand safeguards. In passing references to families, McWilliams

(1939:224) writes that over 2000 men, women and children were forcibly evicted from a worker's camp in the Imperial Valley in 1934 by burning the shacks that they lived in, and an infant died as a result of tear-gas bombing. In 1935, in a survey of 745 families, almost 90 percent were employed exclusively in agriculture and had no other source of compensation (McWilliams1939:246). The average yearly employment for these families was found to be approximately 31 weeks per year.

In his 1940 dissertation, *The Supply of Agricultural Labor as a Factor in the Evolutions of Farm Organization in California*, Varden Fuller (1940:19814) writes that one proposal to furnish workers to replace the Chinese was to import Italian families. It was thought that because "Italians were too poor to become operators, they would remain as laborers." During the 1888 growing season, a time of labor shortage because of Chinese exclusion, expansion in fruit production, and industrial prosperity, farmers advertised for help to fill the void and families came from three hundred miles away in their wagons for jobs to harvest fruit (Fuller 1940:19817). As a result of labor shortages in 1888, the State Board of Trade worked out a deal with Southern Pacific Railroad to transport boys and girls for agricultural employment at half the price (Fuller 1940:19816).

In reference to the 1913 Wheatland Riot, Fuller writes of inadequate housing and sanitation for 2,800 laborers and their families on a large ranch where there was work for only 1,500 laborers; the combinations of "misery and employer deception…was sufficient enough to bring on the riot" (Fuller 1940:19840). In Chino and Anaheim in

1897, where "white labor" continued to be employed exclusively for several years, women performed much of the insider work in canneries and packinghouses (Fuller 1940:19830). Men and women laborers were not separated, which according to Fuller, made it impossible to determine the proportion of different labor groups in fruit work. Local women and children were employed in place of "Orientals… [and were found]…generally more satisfactory by growers during the 1910 fruit harvest in Santa Clara Valley (Fuller 1940:19842).

In *As You Sow: Three Studies in the Social Consequences of Agribusiness*, Walter Goldschmidt (1947) discusses the agricultural industry of Wasco and emphasizes the consequences of the tendency to specialize in one or two cash crops on the social and physical landscape (Goldschmidt 1947:28). One evidence of this is the disappearance of the barnyard and the fact that the garden is now considered a luxury because it is thought to be cheaper to purchase products at the market and use land for cash crops. Goldschmidt connects the disappearance of the barnyard and the elimination of the barnyard chores that was usually performed by the housewife and concludes that, along with labor saving electrical devices, the old saying "a woman's work is never done" no longer applies. The farmwife is said to be emancipated from the drudgery of barnyard chores and housework and is therefore free for social activities, just as is the town housewife. Goldschmidt concludes that this circumstance has tended to result "in the breakdown of the traditional barrier between country and town people" (Goldschmidt 1947:28).

Goldschmidt also writes of the "outsider wife" and categorizes her as someone who did not grow up in Wasco and arrived to work as an agricultural laborer. Outsiders are distinguished by ethnic origin: white, black, and Mexican laborers. "Outsider wives" are described as individuals who remain outside the social walls of the community,…are not accepted into community life, and are not considered in community affairs" (Goldschmidt 1947:59). The outsider wife works either in the fields or in the potato sheds with her husband, working the same hours that he works (Goldschmidt1947:91-92). The farm laborer's wife desires social advancement "in that she wants to have a place of … [their]…own in town even though the accommodations would not be as nice as their present conditions (Goldschmidt 1947:159). Goldschmidt considers the family to be one of the "smaller units" of a different order in social groups, the other is "the clique" (Goldschmidt 1947:75). The family is described as "consisting of a married couple and its dependents, usually children – little need be said" (Ibid.). More effort is put into describing "cliques." Most social scientists now think that the family unit is much more complex than Goldschmidt indicated and is, indeed, in need of further study.

Lloyd H. Fisher writes in his book, *The Harvest Labor Market in California* (1953), that a substantial portion of the agricultural labor force is family labor with wives and children supplementing the earning of the primary wage earner by working in the fields with him (Fisher 1953:17). As wages and incomes rise, family labor is withdrawn from the market and if wages rise high enough, family labor ought to be completely withdrawn, thus diminishing the total amount of labor offered in response to higher

wages. He further argues that "higher wages… [would not result in an increase]…in the labor supply. If wages are abnormally low, workers withdraw to other sectors or refuse work for relief, and those available would work at a reduced efficiency. As wages rise, the full supply of agricultural laborers become available and higher wages lead to a reduction in supply as the laborers work fewer house each week. As a result, the aged, the young, and women are able to withdraw from the fields because of higher wages for able-bodied males. Fisher also writes that California agriculture is able to "provide productive employment for men, women, and children, for the experienced, and inexperienced, for alcoholic derelicts from the 'slave' markets, and for the skilled Filipino, at a labor unit of output which does not vary widely" (Fisher 1953:8).

Ernesto Galarza writes in his dedication to his book, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story* (1964) "To the men, women, and children in the fields, and to their friend Gardner Jackson." While like the other scholars mentioned, Galarza pays little attention to the families who work in the fields, what he does say emphasizes the preference for males during the era of the *Bracero* Program. Galarza describes how a migrant family of eleven members spent a night in a San Jose cemetery as they moved from their jobs picking prunes…there was no housing for them. Farmers had supplanted family housing by constructing barracks for the *braceros,* thus discouraging residence of domestic workers, further weakening community ties and enhancing isolation. More recently, Robert Alvarez, Jr. (1987:165-70) addresses the notion of the breakdown of community ties of migrants and emphasizes that relationships change as circumstances

change and that migration can function "to increase solidarity and family relations," countering the argument of Galarza.

The *Bracero* Program effectively deterred stable crews and cohesive union and underscored the notion that "efficiency lay in…[the direction of]…the man of the barracks…and not in that of the man of the family" (Galarza 1964:258-259). It is not until the Great Depression that we actually "see" families in agribusiness, and for the most part, it is because these workers are White and Americans and seen worldwide in photographic essays by photojournalist Dorothea Lange who worked with Associate Professor of Economics, Paul Taylor of the University of California, Berkeley.

1.3 – WOMEN IN CALIFORNIA AGRIBUSINESS

It is within the context of family labor that women were initially integrated into agricultural wage work in the twentieth century and therefore, an examination of the incorporation of family labor is essential. Depression Era families, who migrated mainly from Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and Missouri, and Spanish-speaking families from Mexico, are the two ethnic family groups that have labored in California agribusiness during the twentieth century. The women of these two groups, in particular, emerged as a demographic cross-section whose contributions have made the family competitive in agricultural work. This study focuses on the women of one of these groups, Spanish-speaking families from Mexico, to highlight their role in historical context. To accomplish this, I examine the ethnic, class, and gender roles of Spanish-speaking farm

working families and the particular cultural strategies that made family labor a major agricultural contention. This analysis, from a socio-cultural and ethnohistorical perspective, beginning in the early twentieth century through the present time, looks at how the position of Spanish-speaking women in their families and their wage work, has been maintained, shifted or changed in relation to the dynamics of California agribusiness.

Prior to 1964, and with the exception of the Women's Land Army during the World Wars (see for example: Kipp 1960), scholarly attention given to women farm workers in California has been lacking and most studies do not address their historical importance. Indeed, intellectual shifts in the 1960s were central to scholarly, political, and social movements that led to a growing interest in the position of women in human societies (Boserup 1970; Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974; Reiter 1975). As more women entered academia in the 1960s and 1970s, interest in women farm workers increased and feminist scholars began to fill in the pieces that previously had been lacking. As a result, our knowledge of women farm workers in California has greatly expanded because of the work of scholars, including anthropologist Patricia Zavella (1982, 1987) historian Vicki Ruiz (1982, 1987, 1998), both who have both written in depth of California cannery workers, historian Devra Weber (1986, 1994), who has written about the cotton industry, and more recently, the work of anthropologist Teresa Figueroa Sanchez, (2013, 2015) who has written about women sharecroppers in the strawberry industry. Despite this progress, there is much work left to be done.

A state survey, perhaps the first to specifically document women agricultural workers in California, indicates that in 1964, women comprised approximately 10% of all farm workers, both foreign and domestic, at the peak of harvest season (California Department of Industrial Relations 1964:9). The majority of the women (45%) were employed in grapes, while 13% were employed in vegetables (including tomatoes), and 11% in cotton (Ibid.). This survey of earnings and hours of women agricultural workers was carried out at the request of the Industrial Welfare Commission and deals with 1,333 growers and farm labor contractors. The survey queried 9,117 women farm workers in ten California counties, including women working in on-the-farm packing sheds and found a steady increase in the number of women farm workers between the years 1960 and 1963: 1960 – 7.8%; 1961 – 8.0%; 1962 – 8.9%; and 1963 – 9.2%.

A 1988 report demonstrates that women comprised approximately 28% of the farm labor force during the early 1980s (Vaupel 1988:19). This percentage, however, dropped to 25% in the late 1980s and by the mid 1990s, women made up 20% of the farm labor force (Mines, Gabbard, and Steirman 1997:6; Rosenberg, Steirman, Gabbard and Mines 1998:6). The closing of packing shed activities that began in the 1950s and the replacement with field packing made a huge impact on the types of jobs available for women farm workers. Women farm workers particularly tended to work fewer hours than their male counterparts and generally performed the least skilled positions, mainly in grapes, vegetables, and tree fruit: overwhelmingly, women are employed in weeding, thinning, hoeing, and some harvesting, i.e., short-lived and irregular positions that leads

to fewer hours (Barton 1978:1). What these figures indicate is that women's level of involvement in agricultural work varies over time and I suggest that women's participation in wage work is shaped by household strategies and impacts that need to be better understood.

Women farm workers display the same diversity as the population at large - they are married and single, young and old, heads of household and more, and yet, little is known about their historical participation in California agribusiness besides a few published works during the last fifty years. In the literature, women's presence in agricultural wage work is far more noticeable now than at any other time. Yet, what we know about women's contribution to California agribusiness basically comes from 10 sources: a combination of surveys that profile women farmworkers (California Department of Industrial Relations 1964; Barton 1978), a needs assessment of women farm workers (Lopez-Treviño 1989), a study that examines women farm workers and resistance in the workplace and in the family (Barton-Cayton 1988), the nature of labor discrimination, opportunities and barriers, as well as their social and cultural consequences (Bays, 1988; Vaupel 1988; Vaupel 1992), in-depth histories of women in the canning industry (Ruiz 1982, 1987, 1988; Zavella 1982; 1994) and women and families in the cotton industry (Weber 1986, 1994). Even though these studies and survey reports give us a better understanding of women's participation in agricultural wage labor during the late 1970s through the 1990s, all but three neglect the history of women in California agribusiness and do not explain the reasons why or how families, and therefore women, became

available for wage work (Wolf 1982:379; Heyman 1991:51). Neither do they connect the milestones of women's lives "within a particular context of class, gender and family relations" (Roldán 1987:101-102).

Barton-Cayton (1988:56) emphasizes the lack of information regarding women farmworkers and concludes that this is "an indication of how women are subsumed in and hidden by family." While her observation is valid, her conclusion is similar to combining all farm workers into the category of "cheap" labor or describing the entire farm labor force as "a unit that does not vary widely" (Fisher 1953:18). This misses an extremely important point regarding the protean nature of capital and the manner in which it overlooks the variety of ways that capital mobilizes social labor and thus neglects how members of "particular working classes show wide variation…differ in origin, in point of entry into the labor force, in composition, and in the ways they relate to other groups and social categories" (Wolf 1982:154-58). Oversimplifying women's participation in agribusiness in this way distorts the descriptive accuracy of the reality of farm work (Fernandez-Kelley 1983a:192). In addition, oversimplification fails to recognize the importance of household strategies regarding women's labor force participation (notable exception, Garcia 1992) and how, joined with wide-ranging political, economic, and ideological forces, the full meaning of women's participation in the labor force comes to light, and clearly, history is foundational to that understanding.

1.4 -- METHODOLOGY

To bring women of farm working families to the forefront, I isolate and describe the historical points at which they enter the wage labor force. To accomplish this, I base my study on the methods and approach of ethnohistory in combination with oral and life histories. My work is based generally in the Coachella Valley in Riverside County, and specifically in the farm worker community of Mecca. Mecca was chosen as a field site because Mexican-origin family farm laborers presently represent the majority of its populations and women have been involved in agricultural wage labor there for decades. But, more importantly, my advisor, Professor Juan-Vicente Palerm, was interested in desert agriculture and, as one of his last students at the University of California, Riverside; I developed my project as a result of many hours of his theoretical and fieldwork training, and his guidance.

Building on preliminary field visits between 1997 and 1999 made with two of my colleagues in the Anthropology Department at the University of California at Riverside, Travis DuBry and Manolo González-Estay, I began long-term field residence in the Coachella Valley in July of 2003. With the help of another colleague, Konane Martinez, I was able to rent a room in Coachella in the house of the sister of one of Konane's friends. The lack of housing is a major problem in Mecca and I had been unable to find a place to rent until Konane introduced me to her friend, Rosalinda Rodriguez, and who in turn introduced me to her sister, Xochitl Garcia. For the majority of the two and one half years working in Coachella Valley, I resided much of the time with Xochitl in the City of

Coachella approximately nine miles north of Mecca. During the final months of my fieldwork, however, I resided in Mecca with a Catholic nun, Sister Esperanza Jasso, in her trailer across the street from Mecca Elementary School.

Fundamental to this dissertation are the concepts of gender, class, and ethnicity. As an organizing principle, gender refers to the way in which women and men are perceived, evaluated and expected to behave (Sanday and Goodenough 1990:5). In addition, following Adelaida Del Castillo (1996:217), "…gender…is approached as a negotiated relation to be contested and questioned, never to be taken for granted as a rigid social role," therefore, "gendered relations" are viewed as "culturally sensitive strategies" that are responsive to changing conditions and purposes. Using the concept of gender to examine household and wage work relations will give insight into changing gender roles in working-class farm worker households. Class may be seen as determining "the kinds of economic and political options available to men and women" (Fernández-Kelly 1983a:14). Ethnicity, defined "in terms of frequent patterns of association and identification with common origins," (Lamphere, Zavella, and Gonzales, with Evans 1993:7) is joined with class and gender in order to highlight diverse experiences of working-class farm worker families. All three concepts will enable a deeper examination of the umbrella term "cheap" labor under which women and farm working families have been placed in the past. In addition, I look to theories of the family wage economy, the household division of labor, and theories of family migration strategies to better understand women's entry into wage labor.

Using an ethnohistorical approach, I combine oral and life histories with archival research in order to construct a more thorough history of the Spanish-speaking population in the Coachella Valley. Russell J. Barber and Frances J. Berdan (1998:9-11) define ethnohistory as:

> an interdisciplinary field that studies past human behavior and is characterized by a primary reliance on documents, the use of imputed from other data sources when available, a methodology that incorporates historiography and cultural relativism, and a focus on cultural interaction.

Because ethnohistory is historiographic, the critical use of documents is an absolute necessity, especially in relation to their probably validity and accuracy (Ibid.). Rather than preserving "fictions that deny the facts of ongoing relationships and involvements" (Wolf 1982:18), ethnohistory calls attention to "dynamic interrelationships between people of different cultures" (Barber and Berdan 1998:303). The use of history provides the methodological focus that allows me to consider the data on change and facilitates the linking of the past to the present (Kaplan and Manners 1986:75; Brettell 1998:531; Barber and Berdan 1998:304).

Ethnohistory relies on both primary and secondary sources and both are important to the researcher. Primary documents are sources written or composed by people present at the particular time and place under discussion, while secondary documents are records written by people pulling together or commenting on original data – a migrant farm worker in California writing home to her/his family in Mexico about his/her work in agriculture is an example of primary data. On the other hand, an academic that utilizes

the letter as a resource to discuss the state of farm work in California is a secondary source (Barber and Berdan 1998:30-32). According to Barber and Berdan, however, the difference between primary and secondary resource is "analytic, not inherent" and the decision as to whether or not a source is primary or secondary ought not be dogmatic, rather a resource ought to be "used with caution and recognize its limitations" (Ibid.). Primary sources are important for their promise to furnish factual, albeit incomplete and selective data on the past, whereas secondary resources basically provide interpretations. It is important, therefore, to search out primary data for facts; oral histories and interviews are included in primary sources.

Oral history or a "verbatim record" is a primary source that represents "firsthand testimony regarding events and processes (Starr 1996:40; Barber and Berdan 1998:248). While ethnohistorians disagree as to the historical value of oral accounts, they agree that oral histories are enormously valuable even though they are limited by the fact that the witness must be living, that the information has been degraded through many repeatings, and that memories may be faulty (Barber and Berdan 1998:248). According to Paul Thompson (1998:2-6) the "challenge of oral history lies partly in relation to… [the]…essential social purpose of history" and helps to present a more realistic reconstruction of the past, while providing a challenge to the historical account of the status quo and therefore has "radical implication for the social message of history as a whole.

Archival research, along with oral and life histories, are critical to completing the reconstruction of California's agricultural history. These methods also assisted in fleshing out the role of women in agricultural work within their changing social, cultural, economic, and arenas. In-depth historical research clarifies the relationship between the actual and the ideal, and the idealization of the past (Brettell 1998). Historical research is fundamental to taking the dissertation from one that merely collects reminiscences to one that validates, contextualizes, and organizes the personal information of oral histories to be useful as a research source (Sommer and Quinlin 2002).

With reference to my definition of terms, I use "Mexican" to discuss individuals and families born in Mexico, and "Mexican-American" to discuss those individuals with a Mexican heritage who are born and raised in the United States. During my fieldwork in the Coachella Valley, I infrequently heard adult children of farm workers use the term "Chincano/a," and generally this group was connected to the United Farm Workers or had a college/university degree and had returned to the Valley as a way to reconnect with their roots as well as to give back to their communities in a professional context. On the other hand, other adult offspring of farm workers rejected "Chicano/a," "Hispanic," and Latino/a," embracing instead "Mexicano/a" as a source of identity and a reflection of their deep pride in their Mexican descent.

When discussing U.S. migrants during the Depression coming mainly from four southern plains states, Missouri, Texas, Arkansas, and Oklahoma, I use "Depression Era migrant families," Depression Era families," or Dust Bowl Families" to indicate a time

period that includes White, as well as African-American Depression Era migrant families. Depression Era migrants have also been called "Oakies," "Arkies," and more respectfully, "Southwesterners" (Gregory 1989:xiv). However, all of these terms have their problems, either having a negative connotation as do "Okie" and "Arkie," or a confusing connotation, as does "Southwesterner." My use of the above terms enables me to more accurately portray each particular group.

1.5 -- FIELDWORK

Upon entry into the field, I became reacquainted with Sister Esperanza Jasso, a Religious Nun of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, who I initially met during my earlier visits in 1997. I offered my services to her as I felt that by volunteering some of my time, local women would get to know me in the setting of the elementary school. Anthropologists have a long history of giving back to the area in which they are working and I felt the necessity of following that legacy. In the beginning, many residents thought I was someone from the border patrol while others thought I was a government agent. However, in my role as a volunteer in Sister Esperanza's program, "The Empowerment of Migrant Women" at the school's Parent Center, distrust of me dissipated over time…or so I wanted to believe.

For two and one half years, I collaborated with Sister Esperanza in many projects, including English as a Second Language for women of farm working families. As women heard about the program, more would come to class, and through these women, I

established rapport and was able to interview and take oral histories. These women, in turn, introduced me to other women in the community. The young woman who allowed me to live with her during much of my fieldwork, Xochitl Garcia, introduced me to women living in and outside of Mecca who work/worked in agricultural fields around Mecca. In addition, the historical societies in Indio and Palm Springs referred me to women who agreed to talk to me. In all, I have oral histories from women living in Mecca, Thermal, North Shore, Indio, and Coachella.

The use of snowball sampling, often employed for the purpose of identifying hidden populations, was useful in both instances (Trotter and Schensul 1998). Mecca includes a high number of undocumented farm workers, and snowball sampling is sensitive to this situation. Snowball sampling operated through rapport that I developed with individuals and who, in turn, introduced me to a larger, more expansive sample of women of farm working families. I scheduled oral histories with sensitivity to the work schedules of the participants. I have gathered oral and life/work histories from women and members of their families and focused particularly on older and retired women farm workers, and successive generations of women in families for the purpose of gathering information about the earlier part of the twentieth century.

I participated in numerous community, school, and local activities, such as union marches, events at the new Mecca Family and Farmworker Service Center, school district meetings, school plays and graduations, *fiestas*, baptisms, *Quinceañeras* and other birthday and holiday celebrations. My husband, Charles Burney, joined me in many of

these activities of the community and his participation helped with the rapport that I developed. One particular *Purépecha* woman, who has been to our house in Wildomar, calls him "papa Charlie" because he is the same age as her father in Michoacán, Mexico.

Archival work was undertaken at the Coachella Valley Historical Society, the Palm Springs Historical Society, and the Indio branch of the Riverside Public Library, the Coachella Valley School District, as well as the A.K. Smiley Public Library in Riverside County that houses Coachella Valley collections not held in Indio. Resources included newspapers, periodicals, and local, state, and federal government documents and census materials. As I had found early on in my fieldwork preparation, there was little information to be found regarding Mexican women in particular or women in general in the early to mid twentieth century resources.

My study of Mexican and Mexican-American farm working families add, both theoretically and empirically, to rural and agricultural studies in California, and to the history of the role of women farm workers and their families under the economic conditions of advanced capitalism (Brettell 1998). This study addresses the historical importance of women in agricultural wage labor within the industrial context of California agribusiness (Pesquera 1985; Lamphere, Zavella, Gonzales, and Evans 1993), and it follows the creation and re-creation of Mexican and Mexican-American working class groups (Heyman 1991). The findings will be important for comparison with other parts of California and will contribute data on Mexican and Mexican-American farm worker households. This project speaks to issues specific to women farm workers as well

as to women's issues in general, such as women's roles in society and the politics of gender. The focus on women's work, both outside and inside the home, offers a basis for historical and comparative understanding of women's role in California agribusiness and will permit policymaking to better represent the reality farm workers in rural California.

1.6 – DISSERTATION OVERVIEW

In Chapter 1, I have provided a brief overview of the direction of this manuscript, the integration of women into California Agribusiness in the twentieth century through an examination of family labor. While only two ethnic groups have labored as family labor in California Agribusiness, Depression Era families mainly from Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and Missouri, and Spanish speaking families from Mexico, I focus on Spanish speaking families from Mexico to highlight their importance in California agribusiness.

In Chapter 2, I provide a review of the theoretical literature concerning women and families in farm labor, the family wage economy, household division of labor, and family migration strategies, all working together to bring a fuller understanding to women's entry into wage labor. I identify and describe the historical points at which women of twentieth century farm working families enter into the wage labor force, reasons for their entry, and the effects of their wage labor on farm worker households. Significant alternative areas of employment, such as canneries, packing sheds, and domestic wage work along with the conditions that have caused these sectors to wax or wane over time are also considered. I investigate the economic and demographic factors that influenced

women's entry into wage work and why they turned to or left it. In addition, I discuss gender roles in rural California in general, and farm worker families in particular and I construct a chronology that discusses how and why women's roles change during the twentieth century in rural California. I examine how domestic, wage earning, and community and maintenance roles complement or conflict with one another, as well as look at the interconnection of these roles within family and work. I also consider the class and ethnic dimensions of farm work, and have attempted to present a deeper understanding of women's roles in agricultural wage work and explain why this is important for public and social theory.

In Chapter 3, I introduce a general socio-cultural and physical geography of the Coachella Valley. I follow the population influx in the Coachella Valley generally, focusing on families, and I use census data in Mecca from the turn of the century to the 1930s particularly since the number of farm workers that I interviewed worked in the Mecca area but may live in other areas of the Coachella Valley. What this data illustrates is that Mexican immigrants, both male and female, have been in the Coachella Valley and Mecca since the late nineteenth/early twentieth and yet little is known of their lives except for the census study of my advisor, Professor Juan-Vicente Palerm and my colleague, Travis DuBry, as well as Travis' dissertation (DuBry 2004) and his book "Immigrants, Settlers, and Laborers: The Socioeconomic Transformation of a Farming Community" (2007).

In Chapter 4, I introduce two families of women who come together within the work environment of California farm work. I focus on three generations of two families in order to view women's wage labor and household labor in historical perspective. In this way, I examine the stage at which women enter wage work, as well as the conditions, both social and economic, that propel them into wage labor. In addition, I trace how the position and workload of women changes over generations, whether in the United States or Mexico, as well as changes in family dynamics.

In Chapter 5, I focus on women's role in the building and maintenance of community life. Because I volunteered at the elementary school in Mecca, I met most of the women in my study initially through the English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Mecca Elementary School, church, and the Mecca Family and Farm Workers Service Center are at the heart of the community and it is through these institutions that I examine community life and women's role in its building and maintenance. I also emphasize women's agency in these communities as a way in which their involvement helps them cope with their circumstances, an aspect that differs from previous generations.

A summary of my work and my findings are found in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 2:

Agribusiness in California

Even though family labor has been part of the California agricultural landscape since before the twentieth century, the prevailing view of labor in California agriculture is that it is composed mainly of unattached male migrant farm workers (McWilliams 1939; Fuller 1940; Galarza 1964). California agriculture has relied upon the labor of both unaccompanied migrant male laborers, and that of migrating and settled family labor at various historical points (Taylor and Vassey 1936; Fisher 1953; Gregory 1989; Palerm 1991, 1994, 1995, 1999, 2002, 2014; Palerm and Urquiola 1992; Garcia 1992; Krissman 1995; Wells 1996, Haley 1997; Figueroa Sanchez 2002; DuBry 2004). While a review of California agricultural history documents the use of Spanish-speaking family labor beginning in the first decade of the twentieth century, considering the length of time that families have been incorporated into California agribusiness, it is curious that Lloyd Fisher (1953) and Ernesto Galarza (1964) are the only theorists who considered the participation of family labor.

Writing at a time when a substantial part of the agricultural labor force was composed of family labor, but publishing his findings during the *bracero* period, Lloyd Fisher (1953) argued that family labor significantly supplemented the earnings of the primary wage earner. He argued further that the part of the labor force that consisted of wives, mothers, school-aged children and the elderly is largely involuntary and only necessary

because of the low level of family earnings. Fisher concluded that when wages rose to the point that families are able to exist on the income of the head of household, family labor is withdrawn, thus diminishing the labor pool.

Ernesto Galarza published his work on the *bracero* years in California agribusiness in 1964, just as the program came to an end. While the *bracero* program began as a government recruiting system during the Second World War, it ended up providing labor during the period 1942 through 1960 and became what Galarza called "the black market for Mexicans" (Galarza 1964:255). Mexican recruitment filled the need for the chronic shortage of labor, and as a supplemental labor force, they were considered to be more productive, dependable, and they "accepted the hard stoop labor that…no domestic laborer" would accept (Ibid.229). Galarza pointed out, however, that each successive group of farm laborers is considered to be more productive than their predecessors:

> The Japanese were hailed as better workmen than the Chinese. The Filipinos were received as a notable improvement on the Japanese. The Mexican migrants of the 1920s were rated higher than the Filipinos. The southern whites of the dust bowl migration topped the Mexicans, and finally the *bracero* proved superior to them all. He could, according to employers, produce as much as two or three domestics together. (Galarza 1964:235)

Growers thought of the *bracero* as the perfect farm laborer who would willingly spend most of his time under supervision. And because the *bracero* was conceptualized as the ideal, efficient, managed man, the Mexican family man was not recognized to conform to this profile. Indeed, the viewpoint of some growers at that time maintain that family men

tended to strengthen common interests with other workers, promoted organization, and advanced ways to protect workers interests, all of which pointed him towards citizenship.[1]

Taken together, the theories of Galarza and Fisher reveal a labor pattern in California agribusiness that oscillates between unaccompanied male farm workers and family labor. While both theories reflect the immediate social and policy realities of farm labor (e.g. the benefits favoring individual male laborers versus family farm labor), they neglect to consider the larger social, cultural, economic, and policy arenas that surround farm work, for instance, *braceros* were mainly family men and the women in their families who were left behind in Mexico were essential workers on their farms and to the family economy in Mexico. Indeed, my study illustrates the importance of Mexican and Mexican-American women in the history of California agriculture and their families. Women's role and position in farm working families is in constant flux depending on whether or not they remain in Mexico or migrate with family members to California. Whether working for wages or not, their labor is California agriculture has been devalued and given little credit in the literature. However, their paid and unpaid work is absolutely essential, even though it has been basically invisible until the 1970s.

[1] Between 1956 and 1959, alternatives to the *bracero* program were attempted. First, the Japanese were brought in and then in 1956, Hawaiian laborers were experimented with, but the experiment failed within one month when the workers declared a work stoppage objecting to low wages, contract changes and the withholding of worker's documents. Filipino workers were approved to fill in when there were labor shortages and owners also considered the hiring of "illegal Mexican farm workers" (Galarza 1964:249). Owners finally looked to the domestic farm labor force as an alternative to *braceros;* domestic workers were disqualified because they tend to be a stable labor force.

Agricultural intensification in California accounts for both the large number of farm workers and the "long list of immigrant nationalities which have played so large a role in the agriculture of the State" (Taylor and Vassey 1936:289; Palerm 2014:61). During the history of California agribusiness, there are periods in which the labor force is mainly young, unattached males (hired without family members) or mainly family labor (consisting of many member of a family, including women and children). American Indians, out of work goldminers in the early decades of the 1900s are then followed by Chinese, Japanese, Punjabi, and Filipino laborers, all of whom were overwhelmingly unaccompanied men. And as I pointed out in Chapter 1, unaccompanied Mexican males were selected during the first *bracero* program of 1917-1922 during World War1, and later, during the Great Depression beginning in the late 1920s, bankrupt Dust Bowl farm families mainly from Oklahoma, Texas, Missouri, and Arkansas were actively recruited and pushed Mexican farm laborers from the fields. Unattached Mexican male farm labor was again selected during the second *Bracero* Program that was enforced between the years 1941-1964 because of the perceived agricultural shortage during World War II. But after the termination of the *Bracero* Program in 1964, Mexican farm working families reunited and settled with growing numbers of women, especially among immigrants, seeking part time work in the fields and packing sheds. In 1986, the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act again encouraged the reunification and settlement of Mexican families in agricultural communities and once again, increasing numbers of women found work in California agribusiness.

It is evident that capitalism allows great flexibility and variety in the number of ways in which growers handle labor. At times, growers strive for stability and demand a highly skilled worker with formal or on-the-job training (e.g., domestic stable labor/family labor) while at other times, there are sectors that de-emphasize skill and training and draw upon an unstable labor force (e.g., unaccompanied males, *braceros* and undocumented workers). In California agribusiness, the result has been a segmented or differentiated labor market (Meillassoux 1981; Wolf 1982; Segura 1986; Kearney and Nagengast 1989). The work of Claude Meillassoux (1981) is useful to understand the distinguishing manner in which labor is exploited in California agribusiness.

In his discussion of the articulation of the "self-sustaining agricultural community" with capitalism formulated from his fieldwork in Africa, Meillassoux (1981:120-123) argued that capitalism maintains sufficient labor reserves through a system of a "*double labour market* on the one hand, and the rotation of the rural labour force on the other," both of which are achieved "through periodic discharge back to the domestic sector, and the racist ideology necessary to support these policies." Through the double labor market, workers are divided into two labor groups: those workers who are integrated and reproduced completely within the capitalist sector (stabilized), and those workers who migrate and are only partly reproduced within the capitalist sector (unstable). In addition, the "double labour market" reveals itself through two forms of discrimination: 1) direct and indirect wages, and 2) the implementation of an unstable labor policy in which wages are so low as to discourage integrated workers who could not survive on such incomes.

The cultivation of racist and xenophobic intolerance is a fundamental strategy within the host population that keeps workers in a constant state of apprehension, as well as pitting new immigrants against settled immigrants. The double labor market also works to diffuse labor militancy, and "capitalist efficiency" is improved through "different wage, employment, and working condition control levels" that each labor market division is subject to (de la Torre 1982:56).

Direct and indirect wages, as well as instability, lead to the rotation of the migrant labor force because the worker, left without a job or social security, is left with little alternative but to return to his/her home of origin. Workers are required to carry residence or work permits that, in turn, expose them to various forms of intimidation. Instability, a result of the "double labour market" has within it the flexibility to 1) reduce the number of immigrant workers by banning or restricting immigration or refusing to renew contracts when the economic circumstances are positive, and 2) lifting restrictive immigration policies and controls when economic times improve.

Whereas, Meillassoux is valuable in revealing the integration of family labor into California agribusiness, however, it is still necessary to understand women's entry into wage labor and to that end I will examine theories of household/family wage economy, theories of household division of labor, and family migration theories. In this way, the participation of women in California farm work is better understood, particularly combined with their roles as members of families and neighborhoods within the context of larger socioeconomic considerations, and help to explain the "relationship between

men's and women's participation in labor,"…[international migration,]…informal economic activities, and family organization" (Fernández-Kelly 1983a:177).

2.0 – THEORIES OF FAMILY/HOUSEHOLD WAGE ECONOMY

Social scientists have long looked to the family as a means to measure the effects of industrialization and since the family is the institution which mediates between institutions and individuals and is the center for decision making regarding the actions of its members, it is necessary that women's paid and unpaid work be incorporated into an examination of the family (Tilly and Scott 1979:7-8). In their groundbreaking examination of the effects of industrialization on the French and English family economy during the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries, Louise Tilly and Joan Scott (1978) found that households could no longer depend solely on family labor, but required the wages of multiple family members to survive. Along with industrialization, wage labor increased, the household mode of production declined, and the demands of wage labor greatly impacted women's domestic activities. Married women often resolved this conflict by not turning to wage work unless it was absolutely necessary, or they found work in the least industrialized sectors where the separation between home and workplace was minimized, conflicted least with their domestic responsibilities, and where they could continue to control how and when they worked (Tilly and Scott 1978:124-131).

For the most part, wage contributions from married women were expected only if there was insufficient income from other household working members. That being said, even as late as the twentieth century, bourgeoning industrial employment available for women, along with insufficient wages from the major wage earner, remained the primary reasons for women to enter the wage economy (Tilly and Scott 1978:123-131). Part of the strategy of households to bring in wages included the hiring out of daughters into domestic service through their parents; household strategies put an emphasis on the hiring out of daughters into wage work whose departure not only relieved the burden of her support from the family, but also helped to support the family. The wages of daughters were paid to their parents and therefore augmented the family budget and emphasized the primary importance of the family unit.

Vicki Ruiz (1987:14-15) demonstrated that the wage employment of female members of Mexican families in U.S. food canneries mirrored that of English and French families studied by Tilly and Scott (1978). Most wage workers in canneries were young single daughters, living at home and putting all or part of their pay checks into the family income. Daughters often entered wage work and were only followed by their mothers if the additional income was deemed necessary for the household. Ruiz estimated that between 1930 and 1950, "approximately 70% of Mexican women canning and packing workers were single and the remaining 30% married, divorced, or widowed" (1987:15). Married women often defended their need to work as being temporary, during times of additional medical bills or other added expenses, but invariably, they continued their

waged work even after the expense was dealt with. The seasonal nature of employment such as agricultural work and food processing, reinforced "the notion of women's employment in the labor force as temporary or supplemental" (Ibid.).

In her study of maquiladoras and the changing household composition and income distribution of wage workers, Maria Patricia Fernández-Kelly (1983a) concluded that the size and age distribution of households, along with the weak employment status of male household members, were the main factors that explained the entrance of women into wage labor. Fernández-Kelly found that employment in the maquiladora industry appeared to be related to the "proliferation of female-headed households" and that women worked in maquiladoras as part of a household wage economy (1983b:55). Most young women belonged to households in which mothers were fully involved in household activities and child care; mothers managed the household income and were given the daughters' wage contributions. The incorporation of women with dire economic needs demonstrated "the use of the most vulnerable sector of the population to achieve greater productivity and larger profits" (1983b:219). It is the intersection of labor market conditions and familial needs that propelled women into *maquiladora* wage labor: large numbers of young women have turned to *maquiladora* factories in order to contribute to familial needs resulting in women becoming the main provider of stable and regular income for their families, not supplementary wage earners. The male head of household is often unemployed or underemployed and unable to support the family and

daughters combine their income with that of other working household members, and thus, allowed household expenses to be met.[2]

Victor Garcia (1992) documented household strategies that families draw upon to "meet their basic maintenance need" during the economic crisis in Mexico in the 1980s. Workers utilized unemployment and disability benefits that they paid into while employed, however, very few sought public assistance, such as AFDC, food stamps, or Med-Cal because of the "welfare" stigma attached to those public assisted programs. It was often the households with young children that turned to public assistance when their unemployment benefits ran out. Households also devised various income generating activities, such as employment in the informal and formal labor markets to generate year-round income. Households took in boarders during the harvest period, participated in "home assembly work, the sale of goods, vegetable gardening, and the collecting of bottles and aluminum cans" (Garcia 1992:259). Some women and teenagers provided childcare in addition to selling table cloths and embroidered goods. Income generating activities, however, varied from household to household depending on the "size and composition of the group and the resources at its disposal" (Ibid.). Households also practiced consumption strategies to keep expenses down: essentials are kept to a

[2] Sixty-two percent of the women that Paul Taylor (1980:103-104) interviewed in his study during the 1920s, gave poverty or economic necessity as reasons for their entry into wage labor. Most middle-aged and older women in his sample joined the labor force out of the weak employment status of their husbands. and the women's wages enabled the family to get by. Josiah Heyman (1991:178-84) found that women in working class families of Agua Prieta in Northeastern Sonora, Mexico worked in maquiladoras as part of the household economy. His findings support those of Fernandez-Kelly who concluded that female wage workers intensified their labor because they, more than other household members, were more strongly subject to obligations to contribute to the family wage economy.

minimum with the priorities being rent or mortgage payments and utility expenses. Food and medical expenses were kept as low as possible and few farm workers sought formal medical attention because of the high costs involved. Clothing, footwear, or furniture are purchased in second-hand stores and kin networks are called upon during difficult times – and even in this respect, there is variation.

The importance of women's labor in Mexican farm immigrant families/households cannot be underestimated and goes beyond the farming industry into cutting-edge industries such as electronics. Christian Zlolniski (2006:141), for example, examined the lives and work of Mexican families in the Silicon Valley of California and found that "despite women's subordinate position in immigrant families…, working mothers played a crucial role in maintaining the integrity of their families." And, despite women's household responsibilities, they were also active participants in formal and informal income-generating activities, as well active in numerous social networks with friends, family, and members of the "larger, local community," all of which are important to the stability of their families. Zlolniski's examples fit well with my data collected during my study in the Coachella Valley.

2.1 – THEORIES OF HOUSEHOLD DIVISION OF LABOR

A.V. Chayanov (1966:49) presented one analytical model that allows for the examination of the workings of the household economy and to critically look at change and strategies of adaptation. He described the internal workings of the family household

production unit within a capitalist economy and argued that the behavior of family farms differed from capitalist economic behavior, and that through particular "subjective evaluation" and decision making, and the "self-exploitation" of the family labor, the consumption needs of the family are met (Ibid.81). The "economic activity and the quantity of labor used on the peasant farms are determined…by family size and the equilibrium achieved between its demand satisfaction and the drudgery of labor" (Ibid.195). If agricultural production deteriorated, the family's equilibrium also deteriorated; however, unutilized family labor met agricultural shortfalls through income generating crafts and trades and thereby restored family equilibrium.

Though there has been much criticism of Chayanov's theory, Carmen Diana Deere (1990:297) holds that while his theory of demographic differentiation does not take into account the fact that "household labor and its composition by age and sex over the family life cycle are not strictly autonomous or independent variables," his emphasis on the life cycle of the family helps to understand the economic activity of the household and the manner in which it changes and varies in composition.

Deere (1990:16-17) argued that the ability to labor must be reproduced on a daily basis through household activities such as cooking and cleaning in order that necessary and surplus labor may be performed. Likewise, over time, a class process is reproduced through biological reproduction and the next generation of workers is socialized through such institutions as the family and schools. Deere presents a number of economic, political, and cultural practices that influenced whether or not the household was the

principal site of labor reproduction and to what extent. Income pooling and shared consumption was said to be one of the economic practices, political practices included the state's ability to legislate contractual relations between individuals (such as marriage, divorce, and property ownership), and cultural practices included the rules and strategies that govern marriage and kinship and how individual and collective rights were structured and ordered by gender and age. Deere argued that the economic, political, and cultural practices were deeply interrelated, uphold the nature of households as the site of reproduction of labor power, and combined are referred to as household relations.

Florence Babb (1989:154) studied market women and their families in Huaraz, Peru and the various sources of livelihood they used to survive on a day to day basis. Babb's work accentuates that of Fernández-Kelly and addresses the importance of investigating women's work "within the broader framework of their lives in and out of the home" (1989:53). Babb concluded, as did Fernandez-Kelly, that women entered the market because their work was necessary for the survival of their families. The importance of women's work to the family was explained against the instability and low rate of pay of wage employment. Many families found it necessary to engage in "subsistence farming and household labor, petty commodity production and commerce, and the capitalist mode of production" (1989:155-56). Babb contended that it is out of economic need that diversification was followed, and thus provided sufficient livelihood for families. Family diversification was not only viewed as a strategy for coping with poverty and spreading

the risk of failure, but was also seen as a response to economic underdevelopment in Andean, Peru.

Polly Hill (1982:1, 49) compared family strategies of dry grain farming households in Northern Nigeria and South India in order to test her hypothesis that "a dry grain mode of production was a recent phenomenon that emerged where dry grain cropping was dominant. Arguing against Chayanov's homogeneity model, Hill examined the diverse approaches to dry grain farming among eight localities in the two regions where this particular mode of production was found. Hill examined in great detail the economic activities that dry grain farming households engaged and the importance of relations between fathers and sons with regard to property and inheritance. She also discussed the participation of women in wage work, but she did not address the circumstances that propelled females into the wage labor market. According to Hill, any member of the household in South India over the age of twelve may be called upon to work, with the exception of children attending school. As participants in agricultural work, females contributed nearly as much as male members and often handled farming operations, however, they never plowed, drove carts, or undertook such operations as well-irrigation that involved handing cattle (1982:61, 112-113). In paddy cultivation, female members were relegated to the most labor-intensive work, such as transplanting, weeding, and harvesting. In the wage labor market as day laborers, females earned two-thirds or three quarters of the wages paid to males, nonetheless, women operated as traders of various types of food independently of their husbands and their trading activities were highly

valued by their husbands. Hill indicated that the division of labor in agriculture does not overlap into the domestic arena, and gave no explanation as to how female members of the household negotiated between their domestic responsibilities and their participation in the wage economy.

According to Adela de la Torre (1993), Mexican women migrating to the United States provide needed family income and actively participated in important household decisions. She argued, however, that gender roles in the household are altered very little by women's agricultural employment and, in fact, only served to increase women's overall workload since household work remains women's responsibility. This falls in line with Lamphere, et al (1993), in that women in agriculture, who earn less income than men and therefore not considered "main-stay" providers, were responsible for home and family concerns.

Sylvia Guendelman and Auristela Perez-Itriago (1987) found that women's wage work had a considerable impact on the marital relations of couples who migrated from Mexico. Women experienced significant role shifts moving from one society to another. As members of couples working outside the home, they established cooperative roles that tended to bridge traditional gender distance with joint decision-making activities that served to balance family power relationships. Returning home to Mexico, on the other hand, produced a marked role shift from cooperative to parallel roles in which decision making activities became highly demarcated.

Adding to the importance of women, children, and teenage and young women's unwaged work, Teresa Figueroa Sanchez (2015, 2012) examined the gendered aspects of male-headed and non-traditional female-headed in strawberry sharecropping in California agribusiness and found important difference between the two. Figueroa Sanchez focuses on the "the fundamental reorganization of patriarchal relations in immigrant households as well as the complexity of gendered relations (2012:10). She found that male-headed sharecroppers "reproduced a system of male privilege" and paid sons market rate wages while only doling out pocket money to wives and daughters (2015:935). On the other hand, Female-headed sharecroppers were more egalitarian in allotting earnings to sons and daughters. In fact, female-headed sharecroppers insisted that adult workers contribute to household expenses.

In Mexican and Mexican-American farm working families alike, there are a wide variety of patterns in the household division of labor ranging from "role-segregation" to "egalitarian or joint-role" and variations in between the two polar opposites (Bays 1988:45). Rural Mexican-American farm working families consistently exhibited an egalitarian power structure with the hallmark of both rural and urban Mexican-American families being one of "innovation and change" (Hawkes and Taylor 1975:809; Wells 1981:105). Louise Lamphere, Patricia Zavella, Felipe Gonzales, and Peter B. Evans (1993:217) found that a significant factor in the household division of labor in Mexican-American and Anglo women who were employed in the apparel and electronics industries was the importance of working wives' income contribution to the household.

In households where women earned considerably less than their husbands, they tended to carry out much of the household work and child care themselves. Whereas in households in which women were "main-stay providers," especially in Mexican households, the division of household work was more egalitarian with some men tending to provide more household support than their wives.

2.2 – FAMILY MIGRATION STRATEGIES

Scholars of migration have put forth several theories regarding women's incorporation into the migration stream and ultimate entry into wage labor. According to Guendelman and Perez-Itriago (1987:249-258), women's incorporation into migration appeared to follow a similar pattern of European guest worker programs by which male workers are invited to enter the labor force, which in turn, induced other family members to migrate and enter wage labor – 24% of the women found employment as agricultural workers, while 11% found work in the service sector.

Katherine Donato (1993:767-68) suggested that family unification is only part of the explanation for the increased presence of women migrating to the United States. Donato found that land ownership in Mexico tied women to their homes while it freed men to seek work in the United States. On the other hand, productive resources such as business ownership strengthened men's attachment to their homes and thus, increased the probability of women's migration.

Donato's findings complement those of Ester Boserup (1970:76-80) who examined labor recruitment policies of European type plantations in Asia and parts of Africa. Boserup found that policies in Asian and African cash crops established during colonial times but still owned and run by Europeans, differ widely: "in some cases only men were employed, in other cases the whole family" (Ibid.). According to Boserup, family employment policies included the labor of women and children with that of the male workers. These plantations "welcomed women joining their husbands; the women made a home, helped to stabilize workers, helped to feed the families by cultivating a small plot of land and were available to help in light seasonal agricultural work such as harvesting and weeding as wage-earning workers" (Ibid.).

Yet in Africa, the most widespread pattern of employment on plantations is that of mostly young, unmarried/unattached men. The recruitment policy of only hiring men often ensured that families did not follow the man to his new residence but stayed behind in the village (Boserup 1970:76-80). In other cases, the low wages paid to the men and the deplorable housing was enough to deter women from accompanying men. Boserup found as well that in regions of Africa where women contributed little to the production of cash crops but were responsible for practically all of the family food production without the help of men, plantation labor consisted of men who are able to leave their dependents at home to be cared and supported by "able-bodied women" (Ibid.). In Asia, on the other hand, where agricultural systems relied on the presence of men, the assumption was that men were unable to be recruited because women cannot be left

behind to support themselves and their dependents. This invariably led to the employment of family units where women had an important role in the production of cash crops as members of families.

Boserup argued that the contrast in the use of female labor was connected to "considerations of cost in the plantation sector…[in that]…the division of labour between the sexes depends upon what factor makes labour costs for the export sector the lowest feasible in the given local circumstances" (1970:76-80). In either case, "ways of holding down labour costs in the export sector are at the expense of the women" (Ibid.). In the case of Asian plantations, women were involved in full-time wage work as well as in their primary role in the household as wife and mother; in the case of Africa, women retained their primary domestic role but increased their workload because the men of the village are away working on plantations or in mines. Boserup maintained that "only in quite a superficial sense can it be said that this export effort is based solely upon male labour" (Ibid.)[3].

Palerm and Urquiola's study (1993) of the interdependent relationship between Mexican farm labor and California agricultural production supports the work of Boserup. Their study found that land ownership, the demographic make-up of families, and the

[3]Boserup's research on "casual labour," indicates that many women who engage in casual agricultural labor also accept other types of manual, unskilled employment available in the rural areas they reside in, and that women are preferred over men in these jobs because they are "willing to accept lower wages and more often accept unauthorized deductions, false accounts and delayed payments" (Boserup 1970:76-80). As to the gradual disappearance of women used for hand operations in agriculture because of the use of mechanization of some aspects of agriculture, Boserup predicts that the demand for women should, in fact, increase rather than decrease. Her research shows that "mechanized agriculture often seems to raise the demand for female labour…[and that]…if there is to be a decline in female agricultural labour it will more likely be due to a change in labour supply" (Ibid.).

constraints of family demands often determined whether or not males took part in the *Bracero* Program. Men with young families participated only if the care of their farms could be handed over to their wives and children. In other instances, larger, mature families were able to put several young men into wage labor while the household head remained at home to handle the responsibilities of the farm and family with the aid of his wife and remaining family members.

Piya Chatterjee (2001) illustrated the method in which planters worked with colonial administrators during the mid to late nineteenth century to guarantee a continuous flow of workers in her study of a tea plantation in India. Family labor was encouraged to migrate in the belief that the presence of women and children had a stabilizing effect on male recruits and kept them from returning to their homelands (Ibid:80). The "ideology of family settlement" was not limited to the stabilizing effect on male workers, but was necessary for the reproduction of the labor force (Ibid.81-82).

According to Chatterjee (2001), by the turn of the twentieth century, women emerged dominant in "the outer margins of plantation labor…'where in certain processes such as plucking, women are handier than men'" (Ibid.2). Thought to be "more 'dexterous…and keener eyed'" than other women, young female tea pickers were thought to have an inherent ability to pick tea leaves; more than that, plantation owners preferred the labor of "virgins" and they defined the highest quality of tea (Chatterjee 2001:26-27). Postcolonial managers connected the plucking of tea leaves to an inherited craft that can be passed from mother to daughter, the worth of which was "enhanced by a feminized

tradition" (Ibid.196). Looking past the apparent attempt at romanticization lays the reality of tea harvesting: the women who "pluck" the tea leaves are highly supervised. Much like agribusiness in California, tea cultivation requires a steady supply of workers, especially "during periods of peak harvest" (Ibid.73).

2.3 – FAMILY LABOR, GENDER, CLASS, AND ETHNICITY IN CALIFORNIA AGRIBUSINESS

In this section, I discuss the entry of women into California agricultural labor within the context of historical periods. My use of "historical periods" to examine women's historical points of entry into wage labor is based both on information that became apparent from the literature and my choice to give structure to my presentation. Each historical period is identified by particular events that shaped the decision-making strategies and relationships in twentieth-century California farm working households.

Of the succession of ethnic group who have labored in California agribusiness, only Spanish-speaking families and Depression Era migrant families have worked as family units. Women of 20th century California farm working families entered California wage labor at four different points: 1) **1900-1929** as members of farm working families and during the "great migration" responding to Mexican unrest as a result of the Revolution. Once in California, growers found Mexican families to be the best tool against labor organization of "lone" or *solo* male agricultural workers; 2) **1930 -1941** as members of Depression Era farm working families and again, in the early 1940s when Depression Era

women of farm working households, along with women across the country, responded to American war propaganda encouraging women to enter a national labor force that was losing its working men to war. In addition, the repatriation of Mexican and Mexican-American farm working families, along with California's expanding agricultural industry opened the door for work opportunities for Depression Era farm working families; 3) **1942 – 1970** as members of Mexican and Mexican-American farm working households and families of former *braceros;* under the family reunification provisions of the 1965 Immigration Act, many women entered wage work; and 4) **1971 to present** as members of Mexican and Mexican-American farm working families reuniting as a result of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act and its provisions.

1900–1928: Mexican Immigrant and Migrant Families

The period between 1900 and 1928 encompasses the great migration from Mexico to the United States in response to the expansion of the *hacienda* system, inflation, and the repressive government of Porfirio Diaz in Mexico. There were plentiful employment opportunities for unskilled labor in a "rapidly industrializing United States," particularly after the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution (Hoffman 1976:7). Jobs flourished not only in agriculture, but in the railroad industry, mining and urban construction, service and manufacturing industries. The main impetus for Mexican immigration, however, was

agricultural expansion in the Southwestern United States.[4] The common characteristic in all of these industries was the seasonal nature of the work with labor needs dramatically increasing from low to high peaks and continually repeating the cycle and Mexico, a source of labor for employers, could provide the needed workers.[5]

The railroad industry facilitated a crucial connection between the isolated Southwest, which in turn, made possible the development of agriculture and the construction of irrigation projects (Reisler 1973:8). Railroad labor camps eventually became the *colonias* that the Southwest is familiar with today:

> Wherever a railroad labor camp was established, a Mexican *colonia e*xists today. …In the sparsely settled semi-arid Southwest, the construction of the rail lines was well in advance of actual settlement. Elsewhere in the West and Middle West, settlers had promoted railroads; but here railroads promoted settlement.
>
> (McWilliams 1968:169)

Railroad companies wanted the stabilizing effect of families on Mexican workers and encouraged the migration of families and yet, often had a difficult time keeping labor because of the tremendous opportunities in an industrializing America and Southwest that

[4] Mexican labor was thought to be a perfect answer to the "social cost of the harvest labor supply" in that Mexican workers create no social cost to the community – unlike Chinese and Japanese workers, Mexican workers returned to their home state in Mexico at the conclusion of the harvest season (de la Torre (1982:19). The cost of maintaining the labor force (i.e., health, education, and housing) was transferred to Mexico.

[5] During this period, several ethnic groups of "bachelor laborers" worked in California's agricultural fields and canneries, as well as a variety of other industries (Matsumoto 1993:21). The migratory life of Japanese, Filipino, Korean, Mexican, and Punjabi immigrants who initially entered agricultural work as young, individual males reduced the possibility of settlement and involvement in community life. If housing was provided at all, it was in the form of temporary housing, such as labor camps, squatter camps, or auto camps (Fisher 1953:71).

was changing rapidly.[6] As railroad workers left for work in other industries, additional Mexican labor was recruited (Elac 1961:6; McWilliams 1969:168; Hoffman 1976:7).

Family labor was recruited by Southern California citrus growers to control labor agitation during the first decade of the twentieth century. Before family labor was integrated into California agribusiness on a large scale, however, the organization and resulting strikes of agricultural labor during this first decade left the industry vulnerable and led to efforts of some growers to move towards the stabilization of their workforce (Mines and Anzaldúa 1982:20-21). Lone male agricultural workers, including Spanish-speaking workers, organized and participated in strikes to improve their working conditions at Fresno in 1901 and 1902, in the San Francisco Bay area in 1902, and in Redlands in 1903 (Gómez-Quiñones 1973:24; Mines and Kearney 1982:i; Kearney and Nagengast 1989:16). As a result of strikes, some California growers, particularly in the citrus industry, initiated a "dual strategy" to control labor: the elimination of Chinese and Japanese labor contractors and the stabilization of their labor force (Mines and Anzaldúa 1982:21). Growers made a gradual shift from lone male agricultural workers, housed in low-quality bunkhouses, to Mexican family labor. By the late 1920s, family housing in the citrus industry became a common pattern:

> The racialized and gendered transformation of the citrus workforce from singles males to family labor during the World War I period cannot be solely explained to the goodwill efforts of the company management or Progressivism, but also by their economic motivation

[6] As of 1909, Spanish-speaking representation among railroad workers was somewhere between 17-58% of the entire railroad maintenance labor force. Of this percentage, 98% were from Mexico, 71.5% had been in the United States less than five years, and wives accompanied over half (Reisler 1973:6; Garcia 1980:121).

> to recruit and maintain a more permanent labor force, as well as to ensure a new generation of workers. (Alamillo 2000:158)

Some employers favored the recruitment of family labor because they considered them "cheaper, stable and loyal," and a single wage, based on the piece-rate system, was paid to the male head of household (Alamillo 2000:102).

The foundations of extensive social networks that that began prior to 1900 by Mexican workers eventually provided direct connections to someone with migrant experience in the United States from various Mexican sending communities particularly from the Mexican Central Plateau States of Jalisco, Guanajuato, Aguascalientes, and Zacatecas, and from Michoacán (Elac 1961:11; Massey et al 1990:148). Potential immigrants accessed extended social networks for support and the eventual migration to the United States and were essential in the strengthening of Mexican culture (Sanchez 1984:251). A few Mexican entrepreneurs were able to open businesses, become cultural brokers between the Anglo community and Mexican immigrants, and played key roles in the formation of community.

Women's informal networks that were developed in Mexico served the immigrants well and proved to be invaluable in the settlement process. Most Mexican women, whose families first entered citrus work, were not engaged in wage work, but their role within the household was considered "crucial to the family subsistence and survival" (Alamillo 2000:94-103). During the second decade of the twentieth century, women

raised children and handled the major domestic responsibilities of family members, as well as boarders, while men continued their role as family providers.

While there were few Mexican women of farm working households engaged in wage work in 1910 Corona, one survey presents census data of the "Occupational Distribution of Mexican Females" in the City of Corona in 1910 and 1920 and out of the three women who worked for wages in 1910, two worked in the packinghouse while one worked as a housekeeper (Alamillo 2000:111). Women considered cannery work a step up from field work and, in fact, rated it as the preferred work of a three tiered hierarchy of agricultural work: at the bottom was farm field work, packing houses or packing sheds were second, and cannery work was the work most favored (Zavella 1987:96, Ruiz 1982:56-61).[7] It was common to see women and their daughters working side by side with other family members, and women often chose to remain in the canning industry because of the industry provided benefits and the relatively high wages when compared to other "unskilled" jobs (Zavella 1982:126).[8] In 1920, fifteen of the thirty-four Mexican women who worked for wages worked in packinghouses, twelve worked in canneries, two

[7] Spanish-speaking women often found work in packinghouses or fruit and vegetable processing companies, two of the major employers of immigrant women (Zavella 1987; Ruiz 1987). From their inception, canneries and packinghouses divided its work along gender lines; during the 1880s and again at the turn of the century, mechanization was "introduced to 'deskill' the craft labor of men and control the work process of unskilled workers" (Zavella 1987:31-34). With mechanization came a job hierarchy for men through which men received apprenticeships or promotions. Women, on the other hand, had virtually no opportunity for advancement except for an occasional promotion to crew leader.

[8] In 1911, most Mexican food processors worked in Southern California since nearly half of the state's Spanish-speaking population resided in Los Angeles and San Bernardino counties. By 1928, Spanish-speaking workers were employed throughout the State of California and Mexican women, who made up the majority of its labor force, were "clustered" within the lower level job positions, working either as cutters or canners – none held supervisory positions (Ruiz 1982:56-61).

worked as laundresses, one worked in a hospital, one as a seamstress, two worked as general farm laborers, and one worked in a restaurant (Alamillo 2000:111).

The burden of compensating for the inadequate wages paid to male agricultural workers often fell upon women who remained in the home and who, shouldering the care of children and domestic responsibilities, and utilized alternative strategies of cooperation and negotiation to meet the family's subsistence needs. In addition, Spanish-speaking women during the 1920s had to accommodate progressivists who were intent on integrating Mexicans into American society. Americanization programs were initiated throughout local school districts by sending teachers to Mexican households with the express intention of instructing the immigrant women in the art of "middle class and nuclear family standards of domestic living" (Alamillo 2000:168). Efforts to "domesticate" the Mexican family meant that men were expected to accept their role as husband and family provider, while women were instructed in their proper role as wife, mother, and protector of American family standards. Little value was give to Mexican culture, which was seen as a barrier to thorough assimilation into American life. It was believed that if women accepted American values, her family would follow her lead (Sanchez 1984:254).

At the same time that progressivists were attempting to instruct Mexican women into a "cult of domesticity," they also perceived Mexican women as perfect candidates for meeting the labor needs of gender segregated occupations, such as domestic and service work, and as laundresses and seamstresses. Americanization advocates ignored their

conflicting message of the importance of family and household care, and by blurring the boundaries of the public and private responsibilities of Mexican women, attempted to prepare Mexican women for their entry into the wage labor market at the same time they managed a home instilled with the "Protestant work ethic" (Sanchez 1984:255).

By the mid 1920s, Mexican labor was highly concentrated in large-scale intensive agriculture, with most workers, 70-80 percent, employed as casual, "unskilled," rather than permanent laborers (Fearis 1971:74; Daniel 1981:67). Many Mexican families worked in the cotton industry because of its stability and, at times, wages were higher than other unskilled or semi-skilled positions with entire crews often consisting of family members who pooled their resources:

> For Mexicans who saw their families as a buffer against the disruptions of migration and work, the ability to work and travel together was often preferable to other forms of work in which they were more isolated. Migrating together reinforced the sense of the family as an economic and social unit (Weber 1986:107-08).

Women worked alongside their families out of absolute economic need. During circumstances in which male heads of household lost their jobs or were unable to find work, women were forced to enter wage work and take on the role of wage earner in addition to their domestic responsibilities. Mothers cared for young children and handled household responsibilities, while at the same time, reinforcing family unity. In some areas, such as the Imperial Valley, Mexican children were bussed to Mexican schools even though they lived in white school districts. School boards failed to enforce

compulsory attendance regulations because school officials believed that Mexican children belonged in the fields, not in the classroom (Reisler 1973:240). While parents desired the best for their children, various institutions appeared to be at odds with the hopes of parents.

Strategies of citrus growers to stabilize their workforce in the 1920s worked for a while but did not completely eliminate worker organization. According to Galarza (1977:29), domestic workers "represented the tendency to bring social form and structure to the formlessness of the labor pool." And while increased residency created "a structural basis for the development of unions," the lack of a strong base limited the success of unions (Weber 1986:302). The success of the citrus industry in the establishment of a stable work force, however, was followed by a series of seven strikes between 1930 and 1939. Even though strikes were costly to growers, they were broken with imported workers, strikers were evicted from company-owned housing, and growers refused to recognize worker's organizations. Strikes actually strengthened growers' resolve to control their labor supply and therefore, "while employers paid for increased labor market stability with greater militancy, they suffered no long-term losses as a result" (Ibid.).

1929-1941: Depression Era Migrant Families and Repatriation

The Great Depression dominated the years between 1929 and the entry of the United States into World War II in 1941. The entry of Depression Era migrant families into

California agriculture led to the repatriation of Mexican and Mexican-American workers and provided an overflow of workers for growers that worked to keep wages down and workers impoverished (Gregory 1989:52). These newcomers from Texas, Missouri, Arkansas and Oklahoma came to California to settle and to find a better life than they had left behind and many immediately began to put down roots. Most families entered farm work with its accompanying low wages and as they made their way into agricultural regions such as the San Joaquin Valley. Growers preferred Depression Era family labor as they thought them to be "cheaper and more reliable than single men," and they particularly favored those workers who were not entitled to relief and were desperate for work (Sherman 1970:85; Weber 1986:288-94). Even though growers considered Mexican workers to be more productive and dependable than Depression Era families, they initially liked the fact that the newcomers were not organized and would not participate in strike breaking activities. It was only a matter of time before Depression Era families joined labor organizations such as UCAPAWA (United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America) and pushed for better working conditions.

Mexican immigrant workers became the main work force in California agribusiness during the 1920s. Growers had been so effective in keeping wages down that most members of farm worker families were put into the work force; in addition, many supplemented their family's income by competing for jobs in sectors of the economy other than farm work (Guerin-Gonzales 1985:102). Competition for jobs during the

Depression created resentment toward Mexican immigrant workers by native white workers. Just as with the Chinese and Japanese before them, Mexicans were quickly made into scapegoats and objects of protest that nativists pushed to have expelled from the United States.

California repatriation efforts were organized in 1931 after legal and illegal "deportation and fear" tactics failed to intimidate Mexican immigrants in Los Angeles County into leaving (Guerin-Gonzales 1985:120-21, 140-41). Most repatriates in California were from the Southern California agricultural counties of Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Riverside, and San Diego, and county officials concentrated on the return of Mexican families who they believed were draining valuable county resources at a time when it could least be afforded. The destinations of most repatriates were states in the north-central region of Mexico: Durango, Jalisco, Michoacán, and Zacatecas. Overall, Mexican farm workers in California, while reduced in absolute numbers, were still significantly present in the agricultural work force throughout the 1930s (Stein 1973:37). Repatriation efforts, however, had the effect of limiting any sense of security that Mexican farm workers had in the agricultural industry. Even though 79,000 Mexicans returned to Mexico in 1929 and another 70,000 returned in 1930, statistics gathered from the Mexican Migration Service indicate that 124,000 returned in 1931; of the 1931 number, 75,849 were men while 49,142 were women with over 40% being under the age of twelve years of age (Guerin-Gonzales 1985:107).

Not everyone was pleased with repatriation efforts. Most California growers were against repatriation and the manager of the Agricultural Department of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, George C. Clements, argued that the local Mexican population should not be jeopardized (Guerin-Gonzales 1985:143-48). There were fears that unless the deportation of Mexicans was stopped, the agricultural industry would be put at great risk even though Depression Era workers filled the workforce… excess workers who could be used to keep wages low was what would be lacking. Opposition to repatriation was reversed in 1933, however, when Mexican workers struck for higher wages in El Monte, and while it was "not the first to take place in 1933…it was the first to receive public attention and it became one of the biggest strikes that year" (Lopez 1970:102-02).[9]

Fearing the spread of labor agitation, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce promoted it, while at the same time attempted "not to jeopardize their labor supply permanently;" this illustrates that growers in California agribusiness feared the lack of a cheap, docile labor force (Guerin-Gonzales 1985:152). The 1935 National Labor Relations Act and its amendments, which regulated the interaction procedures between labor and management, reinforced the exclusion of agricultural labor and kept in place a "major factor in frustrating the organization of farm workers" – the absence of a legal

[9] Mainly, the 1933 El Monte strikers were Mexican Nationals and first- and second-generation Mexican-American family labor groups paid by piece-rate, as well as backers of the Cannery and Agricultural Workers' Industrial Union (C&AWIU), a Communist organization and branch of the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL). The berry pickers were striking out of desperation and extremely low wages and felt that they had little to lose – "over half were U.S. citizens and the balance had been in this country ten years or more…[and]…had passed the stage of being 'grateful' for wages that were better than they had been in Mexico" (Lopez 1979:111).

framework for settling disputes and lending legitimacy to labor movements (Scheuring and Rochin 1983:249).

Mexican repatriation affected both Mexicans and Mexican-Americans on both sides of the border. Many repatriates faced difficulties adjusting to a different reality in Mexico; the economy was worse than in the United States and those who attempted to return to the U.S. found more stringently enforced immigration laws (Guerin-Gonzales 1985:155). Women and children found life in Mexico even more difficult to adjust to than men. The relative freedom women experienced in the U.S. was diminished considerably upon their arrival in Mexico and they were faced with family expectations of spending most of their time working in the home. Children, many of whom were born in the United States, were forced to leave friends, and some were unable to speak or read Spanish, compounding difficulties attending classes in Mexican schools.

In the United States, those who remained faced economic and social conditions that were extremely uncertain; many could not find work and were often threatened with violence and intimidation (Guerin-Gonzales 1985:155-176). Mexican workers who lived in southwestern cities and moved to rural areas in search of work in farm labor outnumbered Mexican workers who moved to the cities from farms to find work. In addition to racism, intimidation, and threats of violence, Mexican workers were paid one sixth of the national average of $1,784, with average annual income being $289 (Guerin-Gonzales 1985:167). And while prices for California crops began to rise in 1933, the year was also distinguished by the lowest wages for farm workers. These deplorable

conditions ultimately led to more strikes than in any other time in the history of California agribusiness.

Depression Era agricultural families encountered similar conditions and discriminations as Spanish-speaking agricultural families, however, in their case their plight came to the attention of the general public and the government through the work of writers, journalists, photographers, and researchers. Class, gender, and ethnic differentiation played a major part in their illustration of an enduring ethnic and class marker of the kind of farm laborer that Californians, in particular, and U.S. citizens, in general, are willing to accept.

1942-1970: Braceros and Family Reunification

As the United States entered World War II, agricultural growers complained that their workers were being lost to higher paying defense jobs as well as the military (Kiser and Kiser 1979:67). Rising agricultural wages forced growers to compete for labor:

> …many of the informal wage agreements negotiated among farmers broke down, resulting in what was termed 'labor piracy,' the act of stealing another grower's workers from him. Fisher wrote: 'Whether a shortage of agricultural labor had developed by 1943 depends upon the definition given to the term 'shortage'…but the labor market had clearly begun to change from a buyer's to a seller's market.
>
> (García y Griego 1981:16-17)

The agricultural labor market in the early 1940s was extremely tight and the grower's solution was a substantial importation of contract workers (García y Griego 1981:17). Indeed, the *Bracero* Program signified "a return to a pattern of seasonal farm labor migration that had been established over several decades, after being interrupted by the distressed economic conditions in American agriculture during most of the thirties" (Elac 1961:17).

The *Bracero* Program, inaugurated in 1942 with an expected termination date of 1946, was in response to World War II agricultural shortages by the United States, as well as part of Mexico's contribution to the war effort. The program selected individual, adult Mexican migrant male laborers to work temporarily in the United States in both agricultural and non-agricultural employment. By 1946, there was a surplus of workers available for agricultural work that included undocumented "wetbacks," *braceros*, and domestic workers, but growers, preferring the wartime *Bracero* program, lobbied to keep it going, and because of their influential connections with Congress, growers gathered the support to keep the program in place until its demise in 1964 (Samora and Simon 1993:140; Samora 1971:44-47). The program continued its operation well past its proposed termination date under Public Law 78 that was passed in 1951 because of events in Korea (Elac 1961:23; García y Griego 1981:21). Operated "partly as a tool to use against domestic workers" and for the recruitment and distribution of labor" this process of "managed migration," was sustained virtually without interruption from 1942 to 1964 (Galarza 1964:15, 43).

To say that during the *Bracero* period only Mexican men worked in California agribusiness would be incorrect for the picture is much more complex than that. Between 1960 and 1963, 7.8 and 9.2 percent respectively of the labor force was female (California State Department of Industrial Relations 1964). Women were predominantly (62%) located in three geographic agricultural areas: Tulare, Fresno, and Riverside counties and 69% of women worked in three crops – the majority in grapes, followed by vegetables, and finally, cotton. Field employment included: "picking, bunching, thinning, planting, pruning, weeding, hoeing, topping, vine tying, and field grading and packing" (Ibid.).

More women were paid hourly wages than by piece-rate, but among those who were paid piece-rate, many were assisted by their children or other family members with the earning combined into one. Some growers had shifted from piece-rate to hourly, payments to encourage "quality picking on a continual basis" (California State Department of Industrial Relations 1964:11). With piece-rate picking, there was much "haste and waste" and since hourly payments went into effect, there wasn't a single reject from the cannery…" (Ibid.). Whether or not a worker was paid by the hour or by piece-rate was almost equally divided among growers and reflected the difference in crops and women's employment activities (ex: cotton choppers usually hired crews through farm workers and were hired directly by growers in all but three crops: cotton, vegetable, and cherries. Fewer women worked for labor contractors; however, there were some areas in which labor contractors provided up to 75 percent of the women agricultural workers.

Canneries were an important part of agribusiness until the 1950s when they began to decline (Zavella 1991:320). As the *Bracero* Program strengthened, the lettuce industry was the first to adapt itself to a new cooling industry in the early 1950s that shifted packing shed activities to the field (Thomas 1985:86-87). The move into the fields at once "integrated the harvest and simultaneously made the labor force overwhelmingly alien" (Ibid.). Field-packing allowed one group of workers to both harvest and pack, leading to the gradual displacement of mostly women packing house/packing shed workers (García 1992:143). By the time packing sheds closed their doors in the Guadalupe in the 1980s over 400 women had lost jobs. These numbers also correspond with increasing numbers of women in the fields and other sectors, both in formal economies such as janitorial work (Zlolniski 2006), factory work, and informal economies such as street vending.

The overall effects of the *Bracero* program were the displacement of local domestic agricultural workers by *braceros* and the deterrence of stable crews and cohesive unions (Kiser 1973:276).[10] The true importance of the *braceros* was their role "to fill the peak demand for labor, which lasted only a short period in any single crop" (Runsten and LeVeen 1981:37). Local Mexican-American agricultural workers suffered greatly from

[10] Under the program, married and unmarried braceros were allowed to enter the United States for wage work as long as family members were left at home in Mexico. The care of children and the homefront in Mexico was therefore relegated to wives, mothers, and sisters. Because families were left in Mexico, workers could live and eat more cheaply in the U.S. and were better able to send remittances to their families (Garcia 1992:5). During the 1940s and 1950s, most Mexican men worked as contract *bracero* laborers, however, as workers found ways to cross the border without papers, most entered without documents to work (Mines and Kearney 1982:5).

high rates of unemployment and were unable to improve their working conditions through organizing since *braceros* were there to take the jobs of strikers in the fields, packing houses, and canneries (Gonzales, Jr. 1985:17).

Many Depression Era male workers who remained in agribusiness during the program, began a process of moving into better paying, more stable positions while lone male *bracero* contract workers displaced domestic Mexican and Mexican-American agricultural workers in the fields and packing sheds. Mexican farm working families were used as a supplemental labor force, and faced unemployment and extremely uncertain, difficult times. Male *braceros* were contracted to replace "thousands of domestic workers seeking higher wages in wartime industries throughout the Southwest – sufficient also to displace them permanently when the pressure of the war would disappear" (Galarza 1977:31-5).

High unemployment during the 1960s, urbanization, unprecedented mechanization that displaced rural workers and priorities of the Kennedy administration weakened the case for foreign workers (Kiser 1973:273-76).[11] The termination of the program in 1964, however, led to a new period of increased settlement of Mexican farm worker families and even greater diversity in the farm worker population overall, as well as increasing numbers of women entering farm labor.

[11] Evidence that *braceros* had been underpaid and abused, along with the awareness that they had excluded domestic workers from agricultural employment, a broad coalition of reform-mined groups, such as the AFL-CIO, churches, and respected U.S. publications, branded together against any further extensions of the program (Palerm 1993:329). The Kennedy administration saw the termination of Public Law 78 as part of its anti-poverty steps "designed to increase job opportunities for the group which has suffered most from competition with the imported workers: Mexican-Americans" (Kiser 1973:274).

The enactment of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments precipitated a period of widespread family unification. The termination of the *Bracero* program and the conversion to domestic labor in agribusiness led to important benefits for American farm workers: unemployment dropped, wages increased, and working and living conditions improved (Kiser 1973:346-47); Kearney and Nagengast 1989:22). Prior to its termination, only a small number of *braceros* brought their wives and families into California to settle, however, family reunification became a widespread practice after 1965 when many former *braceros* obtained visas, became permanent workers, and sent for family members (Kiser and Kiser 1978:67; Garcia 1992:50). During the late 1960s, a new pattern of settlement emerged among Mexican immigrant farm workers in which many young immigrants also brought their wives and families or started families once they were settled (Mines and Martin 1986:2).

Settlement, distinguished by family unification or formation, combined with access to full-time, year-round employment, generally begins as male migrants reunite their families when they have found secure employment and/or housing (Massey, Alarcón, Durand, and González 1990:180; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994:17, 25; Alarcón 1995:28; Haley 1997:68). While many Mexican *colonias* were swallowed up by urban sprawl after World War II, Mexican agricultural communities such as Brawley and El Central in the Imperial Valley and Mecca in the Coachella Valley, established in the 1920s as agricultural workers were able to work eight to ten months of the year, did not experience such urban growth.

Shaped by variables that affect the character of rural and urban families in different ways, "rurality does not have a single, unidirectional impact" on Mexican families (Wells 1981:103-05). Extended families serve as an instrument of job recruitment and support: "Rural settlers typically come as families, settle near relatives, and, depending on the constraints of distance write letters, visit, and exchange favors with relatives in the migrant stream or in nearby cities…" (Ibid.103). Extended families assist members in coping with difficult situations and tend to augment the "emotional security and well-being" of members, and operate to continually vitalize and transform rural families; they persist primarily out of "reciprocal concern, identification, and support" (Ibid.; Alvarez, Jr. 1987:104).

1971 to Present: California Agricultural Relations Act, IRCA and its Aftermath

Women have played a central role in the development of immigrant communities as "dense ties emerged only with the migration of entire families" (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994:57, 174). Important in the actual decision to settle, women, more than men, indicate their desire to remain in the United States because of the opportunities available for themselves and their children. Women's informal networks play an important part in Mexican communities, and women have been influential in organization building in their communities (Hatch 1979:61; Weber 1994:66; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994:174; Haley 1997:157; Alamillo 2000:248). Because Mexican immigrant women generally migrate with families, they generally have family or kin networks of female relatives from their

place of origin that they may rely on (Weber 1994:66). Women also develop social and work networks out of common concerns that "actively cultivate and nurture relationships" (Zavella 1987:110; Ruiz 1987:31; Salamon 1992:180).

The expansion of high-value fruit and vegetable crops not only led to greater employment opportunities for farm workers, but also to the settlement and stabilization of the labor force (Palerm 1991:42; Palerm 1999:57). Farm worker settlement has also been encouraged by: 1) the eligibility of farm workers since 1977 for state unemployment benefits that helps to lessen the insecurity and hardship of seasonal unemployment; 2) the placement of multiple workers in the labor market that allows for farm workers to pool their wages and make up for low wages and seasonal unemployment; and 3) the SAW (Special Agricultural Worker) program of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act. At least 89% of farm labor is performed by workers who labor year-round and "who string together a series of short-term jobs – mostly in agriculture, but also in other industries," a number that puts to rest the notion of the "seasonal worker" (Villarejo, Don and Dave Runsten 1993:22).

During the late 1960s to early 1970s, agricultural working conditions improved and growers were able to attract and legalize qualified *braceros* and their relatives, and with experience, many farm workers became experts in their line of work. Unlike the stabilization efforts during the 1920s that led to failed labor militancy, efforts in the late 1960s led to a coalescence of successful "unified group action" by Mexican-American agricultural families (Kearney and Nagengast 1989:22; Scheuring and Rochin 1983:249).

Agricultural labor union pressure was successful in forcing hearings on agricultural labor problems and despite grower oppositions, passage of the California Agricultural Relations Act in 1975 created an Agricultural Labor Board that would facilitate the "orderly settlement of disputes" and "supervise and certify farm worker elections" (Scheuring and Rochin 1983:249).

The introduction of mechanization to tomato harvesting resulted in increased hiring of women by growers who believed that women were "'more suited' to machine work than men" (Barton-Cayton 1988:22). This corresponds to the perception of growers of tea plantations in India that women tea pickers were more dexterous and were thus selected as most suitable for plucking tea leaves (Chatterjee 2001). And yet, if this argument was a valid one, it would seem that most surgeons would be women, and at the very least, illustrates a fallacious argument.

Domestic farm workers, who were displaced by mechanization through the elimination of the more highly skilled job positions, were hired to harvest crops that were not easily mechanized. The labor-intensive nature of high-value specialty crops in California stimulated seasonal transmigrational flow from Mexico to answer the demand for cost-efficient manual labor. Because manual labor, not mechanization, is needed for high-value specialty crops, California agriculture began a process of "Mexicanization" or, the use of Mexican seasonal migrant labor instead of mechanization, along with a "social transformation and restructuring of the rural environment" (Palerm 1991:42; 1999:49).

But not all domestic workers wished to re-enter or remain in an industry defined by low-status, low paying jobs thus forcing growers to look for additional sources of labor (Thomas 1985:73).[12] As more families legalized their status and settled throughout rural California, Mexican workers, including women, responded to rural and urban wage opportunities and solidified social networks (Alarcón 1995:13).

Between 1964 and 1978, migration was increasingly comprised of women and children who migrated as immediate family members of *braceros* who had become permanent residents. During the 1970s, most women employed in agricultural work were Mexican or Mexican-American (Barton 1978:5-8). A study of women farm workers conducted by Amy Barton (1978) indicated that women's ages ranged from 21 to over 56 years of age, however, most were between 21 and 29, followed by those women between 40 and 49; most were between the ages of 30 and 39, with women aged 50 and over being the fewest employed in agriculture. One third of the total population sample were heads of household and, according to the study, "women engaged in agricultural farmwork are working for basic support…[and]…are not engaged in part-time occupations to provide 'extras'…they are not simply a surplus labor pool, but are a significant and integrated part of the labor force". Even though many women are found to be heads of household in the labor force, women's income is "two-thirds less than those of male farmworkers." According to Barton, women are confined to the lowest

[12] Growers turned to hiring border crossers (commuters and green card workers, "wetbacks," experienced Mexican documented immigrants, and "H-2 workers" (Kiser 1973:301; Portes and Bach 1985:81). Undocumented immigrants, however, were the largest group who entered southwestern agriculture at the end of the *bracero* period (Thomas 1985:74).

paid, low-status positions (in order of frequency), such as "weeding, thinning, and hoeing, with some harvesting." Women reported that family responsibilities and child care are obstacles in finding work.

The expansion of labor-intensive crops during the early 1970s ended a downward trend in California agribusiness of seasonal farm employment, and with the reintensification of California agriculture during the late 1970s and early 1980s, farm employment far reached "unprecedented proportions" at the same time that wages began a downward slide (Palerm 1999:50; Villarejo and Runsten 1993:24). Gains made during the 1960s and early 1970s eroded during the mid to late 1970s, and along with the economic crisis in Mexico during the 1970s and 1980s, served to shift the demographic composition of Mexican immigrants to the United States: it was more settled, Mexican family oriented, less dependent on following the crops, and had more women farmworkers (Mines 1985:68-70; Kearney and Nagengast 1989:22; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994:31). In the 1980s, a shift from mainly individual male migrants to "a more socially, heterogeneous, year-round, de facto permanent Mexican immigrant population in the United States…accelerated (Cornelius 1992:171-73). Entire family units, more family reunification, and more single women migrated than in the 1970s: wives, single women and children, and children are the new migrants from Mexico and Latin American (Kearney and Nagengast 1989:18; Cornelius 1992). The Mexican economic crisis in the 1980s resulted in the tendency for more wives, children, and single women to find work as the income of male heads of household were insufficient to meet family needs. With

declining wages and deteriorating working conditions, U.S. employers took advantage of "the large surplus associated with the enormous immigration flux" (Villarejo and Runsten 1992:24).

Coinciding with the Mexican economic crisis, the United States was also going through its own recession during the 1980s. Large growers throughout California kept their labor costs down by substituting ground packing with field apparatus packing, as well as requiring that workers from harvesting companies or labor contractors be comprised of Mexican workers who lived along the U.S.-Mexican border and the interior of Mexico (Garcia 1992:322-30). The result was the displacement of stable, resident farm workers in favor of Mexican migrant laborers and resident farmworkers were basically limited to work such as "irrigating, thinning and weeding, and seedling transplants" (Ibid.).

The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) opened the door for agricultural workers to legalize their residence and, combined with agricultural reintensification, young Mexican immigrants began to settle and raise their families in rural communities in greater numbers throughout California (Garcia 1992; Haley 1997; Palerm 1999; DuBry and Palerm 2001). However, the consequences of IRCA go beyond family reunification and settlement. Mexican workers are not only migrating from traditional sending communities, such as Michoacán, Jalisco, Guanajuato, and Zacatecas, but undocumented indigenous Mexican workers have joined other undocumented migrants in the California agricultural flow to compete for work and are welcomed into

the “double labour” market of California agriculture. And, whereas, Goldschmidt (1949:15) stated that “no group…has remained in farm labor in California for more than a single generation,” Mexican and Mexican-American laborers have proven his pronouncement to be untrue.

2.4 - SUMMARY

Most of what we now know about women in agricultural work comes from several studies, one conducted in the late 1970s, and the rest in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Only the studies of Ruiz, Zavella, Weber, and Figueroa Sanchez, however, begin to address women’s historical place in California agriculture. To understand women’s position and why they remain in low-status, low-paying agricultural jobs, there must be an understanding of the historical circumstances underlying their entry into wage labor. Historically, Fisher’s argument that farm working women leave agricultural labor when the income of the household head is sufficient to support the family has been untested in the past and my research indicates that there are a multitude of reasons why farm working women leave farm labor, only one among them being sufficient monetary support of the household head.

The lack of knowledge about the various roles of women in California agribusiness translates into a lack of understanding about the needs of women farm workers that, in turn, influences farm worker policy unrealistically and impacts the lives of women and their ability to provide a decent living for their families. The invariable upset in the lives

of Spanish-speaking farm workers because of the insecurity of farm work and its pattern of changing labor, adds to the already tenuous lives of women farm workers. Because women farm workers and their children are the most vulnerable of the farm worker population, it is imperative that policy makers know and understand the concerns and problems of women in farm working households. The focus on women's work, both inside and outside the household, offers a basis for a historical and comparative understanding of women's role in California agribusiness and the possibility of affecting policy in order that it reflect the present reality of rural California.

Chapter Three:

WE WERE HERE TOO[1]

During an initial trip to the Coachella Valley, I asked a Mecca grower: "How long has family labor been involved in agriculture in this are?" The grower answered: "Family labor has always worked in agriculture here." Indeed, census data, local written and oral histories testify to and support the grower's answer. From the time that one of the first Anglo families moved to Walters (now Mecca) in August 1901, Mexican laborers working for the railroad and in agriculture were also there with their families (Bisbee Papers, Coachella Valley Historical Society). The main purpose of this chapter is to present a cultural and physical geography of the Coachella Valley in general and of Mecca in particular. In additions, I present the ethnohistory of Mexican-origin immigrants to the Coachella Valley in general, and to the town of Mecca in particular, to illuminate settlement building patterns and activity.

3.1 -- Coachella Valley Geography

There is a beauty and solitude that surrounds the desert that is hard to put into words. From the time of my first field trips to Coachella Valley in 2000, I was awed by craggy mountains presenting shades of coral, purple, and amber, appearing devoid of vegetation. On closer inspection, the mountains, surrounded by desert and miles of seemingly out of

[1] The title of Chapter 1 reflects the title of a Palm Springs Historical Society publication, "We Were Here Too" that presents the life stories of the original 16 Mexican families in the Palm Springs area during the 1920s and who have remained in the desert.

place quilt-like agricultural patches, are sparsely covered with thriving vegetation that blends into the mountainsides. My initial conceptualization of the Coachella Valley changed a great deal during my fieldwork: oppressive heat, violent winds and blowing sands leaving visibility at near zero, and occasional heavy downpours, while they did not distract from the beauty that had originally inspired me, added a missing dimension of reality to my romantic vision of the Valley desert.

The Coachella Valley was shaped over millions of years by the San Andreas Fault Line located near the base of the eastern mountains and by several fault lines at the base of its western mountains (Laflin 1998:9). Today, thermal wells, pumice and obsidian outcroppings confirm the Valley's seismic activity of the past and present. Coachella Valley oases are remnants of forests of palms that once surrounded Lake Cahuilla where Native American Cahuilla harvested palm berries. The *Washingtonia filifera* fan palm, the only native palm in the United States now, grows in the valley's earthquake fault lines where water has come to the surface (Laflin 1998:19). Above the Hills near Thousand Palms and Indio, oyster and mollusk shells can still be found (Pawley n.d).

Extending for nearly fifty miles through central Riverside County in Southern California, Coachella Valley is bordered at the upper most northern and the northeast segments by an extension of the San Bernardino Mountains, bordered on the northwest by the San Jacinto and Santa Rosa Mountains, and terminates at the Salton Sea southwest of the Imperial Valley (Friedman, D.G. 1959:1-5; Nuttonson, M.Y. 1962:20; Wilke, Philip J. and Lawton, Harry W. 1975:9-11; Weeks, Lowell O. and Nordland, Olaf J. 1984:2). Separated by the Salton Sea, both the Coachella and Imperial Valleys make up

a sizeable portion of the Colorado Desert and even though both are part of a desert, the two Valleys have been distinguished as important agricultural centers since the early twentieth century. The fairly flat terrain of the Coachella Valley slants towards its center and elevations range from approximately 1,100 feet above sea level at the entrance in the northwest to roughly 245 feet below sea level at the Salton Sea with most agricultural development at about 250 feet above sea level.

The climate in the Coachella Valley is distinguished by long, exceedingly hot summers with sporadic high temperatures throughout the entire year – a 90° temperature can be expected during each month of the year. While mild temperatures are prevalent during the winter, frosts and snow are extremely rare, however, when frosts do occur, it is usually from the first of December through the middle of February. Relative humidity is generally very low during most of the year except between July and September when high humidity and temperatures are frequent along with monsoonal rains. Irrigation is necessary all year around because of the high evaporation rate. Average rainfall in the Coachella Valley floor is about 3-4 inches while in the nearby mountains about 15 inches may be expected (MacDougal 1915:233; Proctor 1968:10; California Department of Finance 1995). Precipitation varies yearly ranging from no rain at all, as in 1896/97, to over 17 inches recorded in 1927. When it does rain in the Valley, the danger of flash flooding is very high due to its intensity. Nevertheless, rain and flooding are generally localized occurring in small areas with the rest of the valley little or no precipitation. Water for irrigation is dependent on the rainfall and melting snows of the northwestern

mountain tops, and since 1949, through the All-American and Coachella Canals, water rerouted from the Colorado River at Imperial Dam, and pumped from a rich aquifer.

Figure 1 --- Maps of California and the Coachella Valley

3.2 – Early Inhabitants: Native American Cahuilla

The Native American Cahuilla have long lived in the desert, hills, and mountains of Southern California, including the Coachella Valley, hunting deer, sheep, rabbit, and other small game, and gathering mesquite beans, piñon nuts and acorns (Wilke, Philip J. and Lawton, Harry W. 1975:10-12, 25). Evidence of prehistoric camels and other fossilized remains have been found in the Mud Hills of Indio and Mecca, indicating that the area was once grassland capable of supporting such life (Nordland 1978:110; Laflin 1998:26). Philip Wilke and Harry Lawton (1975:9-43) summarized the historic aspects of oral traditions of the Cahuilla Indians and the early written records of the cultural geography of the Coachella Valley and found a tradition of habitation and cultural continuity of prehistoric lake dwellers to the historic Cahuilla Indians spanning at least 400 years. But, as the lake dried up and food resources became insufficient, the Cahuilla moved into the mountainous area of the Valley where vegetation was more productive. Reoccupation of the Valley floor would only become possible again in the Salton Basin when mesquite became established once more.

A diary account by José María Estudillo of an 1823-24 expedition provides the first written description of Cahuilla agriculture and their digging of wells (Wilke and Lawton Ibid.; Pawley n.d.:15). The wells were as deep as twenty feet and steps were dug into the side down to the water level and according to one source (Pawley n.d.:15), Cahuilla women dug the wells by hand. Accounts from the 1850s indicate that the Cahuilla had already experienced substantial acculturative change; however, considering the fact that the Cahuilla had most likely encountered Anza in the Santa Rosa Mountains in the 1774

and, that since 1774, had traveled west of the mountains for employment and had come into contact with Mission San Gabriel and *Californios* using Native American trails to reach the Salton Basin in order to extract salt in 1843, this would not be surprising. The Cahuilla also traded salt from the southern portion of the Salton Basin with Native American groups from Arizona and New Mexico by way of the Cocomaricopa Trail through the Coachella Valley that was hundreds of years old (Wilke and Lawton 1975:22; Nordland 1978:110).

Population estimates of indigenous Cahuilla in the year 1770 range from 3,600 to as many as 10,000 individuals (Bean 1978:583-84). In the early 1860s, an L.A. County Census indicates that there were approximately 3,238 Cahuilla although a smallpox epidemic brought the population down to 1,181 in 1865. The U.S. Government subdivided Cahuilla land holdings into one mile, non-contiguous, square sections in order to encourage the building of a rail line and to prevent the consolidation of power or independence based landholdings. In 1877, reservation boundaries were established with the Cahuilla overseen by the U.S. government after 1881 and up until the 1930s. These changes altered the Cahuilla lifeways considerably, particularly in the repression of their cultural institutions i.e., religious and political. Despite these tremendous difficulties, the Cahuilla maintained a successful economic strategy until their lands were divided into small parcels that made their previous agricultural success very difficult. Today, the Native American Cahuilla are important players in the Coachella Valley economy through the operation of various businesses such as casino and hotel operations and banking. Travis DuBry (2004:46) documents the present day influence of the

"seven distinct tribes of two affiliations in the valley: the Agua Caliente Band, Cahuilla Band, and Torres-Martinez Band of Cahuilla Indians; and the Augustine Band, Cabazon Band, Morongo Band, and Twenty-Nine Palms Band of Mission Indians ."

Railroad, Water, and Workers in the Coachella Valley

3.3 -- The Southern Pacific Railroad

Before the railroad was built through the Coachella Valley, Native American Cahuilla were the only inhabitants in the Valley, but the U.S. government and Anglo capitalists envisioned a transformation of the desert Valley floor. A contract between the government and the railroad began the transformation process by bringing "depots, sidings, crews, housing for section crews, but more importantly, it brought well diggers to find water" (Nordland 1977:56). The Southern Pacific Railroad played an important role in the development of Coachella Valley for seventy-five years: Indio became a major terminal due to its advantage of being situated midpoint between Los Angeles and Yuma. Railcars carried early Valley produce to market, as well as human capital to the Valley in the form of Mexican workers to labor on the railroad (accompanied at times by their families) and during WWII, the railroad moved troops and material from the Valley to Yuma. Even though the trucking industry with their use of superhighways and extremely efficient refrigeration began taking over shipment of the Valley's produce before World War II through the 1950s, the railroad remained the primary means of transportation of table grapes to U.S. and Canadian markets.

William Bradshaw began a trek across a trail well used by Native Americans in the Coachella Valley looking for the shortest trade route from Los Angeles to La Paz, Arizona. Bradshaw encountered a Cahuilla Chief, "Old Cabezon," and a Native American Cocomaricopa mail runner from Arizona who was visiting the Chief's Cabezon encampment near the present town of Mecca. The two Native Americans shared their knowledge of an ancient trade route that went through the Colorado Desert, along with sources of water along the route. Bradshaw and his party crossed the desert and made their way to Providence Point on the Colorado River in Arizona. The trail from San Gorgonio Pass to Providence Point became known as the Bradshaw Trail and ultimately became a supply route from Los Angeles to La Paz on the Colorado River near Blythe (Mecca and the Surrounding area: Coachella Valley Historical Society n.d.:1). At the future site of Mecca, a small adobe stage coach station was built for the stage coaches and heavy supply wagons that passed along the route until the Southern Pacific Railroad was constructed.

The Southern Pacific Railroad was established in 1865, became interested in the government's proposed rail system, and construction actually began in 1874 at Los Angeles and East Texas – it was planned that the two portions of railroad were to meet at some point along the way. The first trains began running from Indio in May of 1876 with exchanges of passengers and mail between the Arizona/California Stage Coach Line and the railroad. Over the next months, the rail line was extended to Woodspur (present day Coachella), Thermal, and Walters (present day Mecca) and the use of the Bradshaw Trail for hauling freight gave way to rail service once the railroad completed its line to Yuma.

The linkage of the Sunset Route from New Orleans to Los Angeles was completed in 1883 when the last spike was driven in Texas and the complete trip between L.A. and New Orleans could be made in less than forty fours (Pawley n.d.:38). The building and maintenance of rail tracks through the desert valley was not unproblematic:

> Frequent cloudbursts washed out the newly graded route. Culverts and rip-rap of rocks were necessary to protect the grade from the floods of the canyons. A new hazard confronted the crews – 'blow sand.' In the center of the sandy area it was necessary to build a siding known as 'Saliva.' It was also necessary to maintain a section crew to shovel out sand which covered the tracks and filled the switches. Sharp particles would cut off telegraph poles very quickly.
>
> (Laflin 1998:35)

With the completion of the rail line and the passage of the Desert Entry At in 1885 by Congress that allowed the Federal Land Management Office to open non-railroad and non-reservation land up to homesteaders, the only thing needed for the Valley to experience real population growth was sufficient water.

3.4 -- Blue Gold in Mecca at 1500 feet

The problem of sufficient drinking water for track maintenance crews continued to plague the railroad. The Rose Well Drilling Company was contracted to drill wells at Indio, Woodspur (Coachella), Thermal and Walters (Mecca) and while the artesian wells produced exceptional drinking water at these locations, the supply, and especially urgent

Figure 2 – Early Well Drilling

Courtesy of the Coachella Valley Historical Society

for the steam engines used by the railroad, continued to be less than satisfactory. Prior to 1894, Walters was the center of activity and known for its artesian wells and as the place where prospectors and miners could purchase provisions for mining.

The railroad contracted with the Rose Well Drilling Company in 1894 to drill another well in Walters and this time, using a hydraulic rotary rig, and an artesian gusher was struck – the "blue gold at 1500 feet," changed the history of the Valley (Brown 1985:136;

Pawley n.d.:40). The strong force of the artesian flow allowed the filling of ten tank cars at once. Between the 119 miles from Indio to Yuma, there were now two adequate water sources: at Yuma, a 52,000 gallon tank filled by water from the Colorado River, and at Walters, another 52,000 gallon tank was filled by an artesian well (Signor 1990:16-17). The discovery of an artesian water source in Walters underscored the fact that there was untapped underground water, but as early Anglo pioneers drilled wells from Indio to Mecca, the artesian affect gradually subsided and after the 1930s, gasoline and electric pumps were used to pump water for domestic and agricultural use (Nordland 1977:60).

In 1901, Mecca was a typical railroad town consisting of the railroad station, staffed by a station agent. A telegraph office that also housed a Wells Fargo office and was staffed twenty-four hours a day by two telegraph operators and a Wells Fargo agent (Bisbee papers n.d.). As well as handling telegrams, it was also the responsibility of the telegraph operator to fill empty rail cars and manage train orders (Laflin 1998:38). The telegraph operator and his wife had a small grocery and supply store behind the station that had been built with railroad ties and they furnished supplies "to the miners in the mountains to the east, the Mexicans who worked on the railroad, as well as the Indians from the Martinez and Torres reservations to the west" (Bisbee papers n.d.:1).

As news of the well spread, the valley faced a land boom and Walters (Mecca) became known for its abundance of water and for its production of cantaloupe – the transformation of the desert was on the verge of becoming a reality (Periscope 1984:20-23). The Valley and Walters (Mecca) was being settled as fast as wells could be drilled and with an abundant supply of water, agriculture was well under way. Farming began in

the Walters area before 1898 with the growing of melons, tomatoes and other truck crops long before table grapes, dates and citrus became the most lucrative crops (Laflin 1998:61). About 25 acres of cantaloupe from Walters sold for $5.00 a crate

Figure 3 – Loading Produce Directly to Rail Cars in 1908

Courtesy of the Coachella Valley Historical Society

in 1898 and in 1899, 225 acres were planted and sold for the same price in Los Angeles. Good production and a high rate of return encouraged the expansion of acreage for the production of cantaloupe in 1900 to around 1800 acres but a destructive heat wave with

temperatures reaching 135 degrees and spoiled the entire crop on their way to market – many of the farmers were ruined financially. It didn't take long, however, for land cultivation to catch up to the pre-heat wave production. Unfortunately, the artesian affect of wells weakened as more land came under cultivation (Nordland 1977:149). By 1903, many wells were already beginning to dry up in the Thermal area, but wells in Mecca remained strong (Bisbee Papers n/d).

A Snapshot of Mecca, California, through the Census Records, 1910 – 1930

3.5 -- 1910 Census: It would seem that Mecca was a completely Anglo town during its early years, however, a thorough examination of the Federal Censuses of 1910, 1920, and 1930, gives a different picture. Mecca was mentioned for the first time in the 1910 Federal Thermal Census and listed as "Mecca Village, Mecca Road. In 1910, 124 individuals were living in Mecca and along Mecca Road – 45 females and 79 males, all English-speaking Anglos. Three individuals were not from the United States, but had immigrated from Sweden, Scotland, and Canada. The population was housed in a total of 40 dwellings: twenty-two homes and 18 farms. The entire workforce was male except for one female who was sixteen years of age from Colorado, and who worked as a servant for the hotel. I break down the age spread of the 1910 Mecca population in Table 1.

TABLE 1 – Mecca Population according to Age in 1910

	Under age 5	**14**	**11% of population**
	5-17	**25**	**20% of population**
	18-20	**8**	**7% of population**
	21-24	**15**	**12% of population**
	25-44	**42**	**34% of population**
	45-54	**11**	**9% of population**
	55-59	**3**	**2% of population**
	60-64	**2**	**2% of population**
	65-74	**4**	**3% of population**
	75-84		
	85+		
124	**100%**		

1910 Federal Census

3.6 -- 1920 Census: A cursory look of the 1920 census gives the impression the Mecca area continues to be an Anglo village/town. However, there are references to Mexican workers in Anglo pioneer papers housed at the Coachella Valley Historical Society. Within two years of the 1910 census, there is mention of Mexican families working in beds of Bermuda onions, clipping the tops and roots and packing them in wire-bound crates (Early Farming circa 1912, Coachella Valley Historical Society n.d.).

My interviews indicate that Mexican railroad workers sometimes traveled the railroad with their families and that families were housed in railroad section housing throughout the Coachella Valley. The adult children of one Protestant pioneer family talked to me at a family gathering to which I was invited. The patriarch was originally from Piedras Negras, Zacatecas, Mexico, (possibly Coahuila, not Zacatecas, though migration from Zacatecas to the United States ran through Piedras Negras at the Texas border at Eagle

Pass), and worked for the railroad for forty-four years; the matriarch was originally from Torreon, Mexico. The patriarch had been coming to the United States since 1909 and in 1923, he brought his wife and first born son to the United States and towards the end of the 1920s, they moved to Thermal with their four children. Together, they had a total of fourteen children, six males and eight females, one child died shortly after birth and all but one were born in the United States.

The early days of Mecca were described to me as surrounded by mesquite trees, arrow weed and sage. There were no paved roads from Mecca all the way to Indio. In Mecca, the family lived in railroad section house #50 that consisted of a large room with 3 smaller rooms on each side separated by a hallway. They had a coal burning stove inside the section house provided for by Southern Pacific, and a kerosene ice box; they kept water in a pan on top of the stove to keep gases from the coal and kerosene down. Their mother tended to their goats, cows, and other animals and was known to have enough food to feed anyone who was hungry. Electricity came to the area in 1948, and by the 1950s they had a gas butane stove in the section house. In the 1940s-1950s, the only form of entertainment for children was the Saturday movies, hosted by a man named Ted Gordon. *Flash Gordon* movies were fondly remembered and the older members of the family believe that the newest school in present day Mecca, Saul Martinez Middle School, ought to have been named after Ted Gordon because of all that he did for the kids of Mecca.

The railroad "crew" was called "the gang" and was made up of 60-80 men. Most of the Mexican workers on the railroad were Catholic, however, the minority Protestant

families felt discriminated by the Catholic majority. Even though there was a small church for Protestants and one for Catholics across from Mecca School, the family drove their Dodge into Indio for religious services. To this day, they continue to be members of the congregation in Indio despite the fact that there is now an Apostolic Church in Mecca. The family is into their fourth generation of American citizens – this year, one of the great-granddaughters of the family was awarded the prestigious "Gates Scholarship" which funds her entire university training – room, board, everything. Her mother is single, very active in the Mecca community, works for the school district and is considered the new Mecca historian since the death of Cecelia Foulkes.

The population of Mecca was first counted in the 1920 Mecca Federal Census. The number of individuals counted was 583, 353 of which were male and 230 females. According to the census, there were four categories designated under "race:" White, Indian, Japanese, and Filipino. Mexican Nationals and their children born in the United States are incorporated into the "White" category and thus described, the population falls into the census "racial" categories illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2 – Racial Categories in the 1920 Mecca Federal Census

White:	**443**	**76%**
Indian:	**114**	**20%**
Japanese:	**25**	**4%**
Filipino	**1**	**<1%**
	583	**100%**

1920 Federal Census

The impression that there were no Mexicans in Mecca at the time of the 1920 census would appear to be correct, however, following the categorization of the census schedule of 1920, I added birth place as an indicator in order to get a finer distinction. In this case, I found seven categories: White, Indian, Japanese, Japanese-American, Mexican, Mexican-American, and Filipino. The breakdown is shown in Table 3.

Table 3 – Birth Place Category in 1920 Mecca Federal Census

White:	**279**	**48%**
Indian:	**114**	**20%**
Japanese:	**19**	**4% (% of Japanese and Japanese-**
Japanese-American	**6**	**American combined)**
Mexican	**144**	**28% (% of Mexican and Mexican-**
Mexican-American	**20**	**American combined)**
Filipino	**1**	**<1%**
	583	**100%**

1920 Federal Census

I found that nearly one third of the Mecca population was of Mexican origin in 1920. I have broken the Mexican population in the Federal Census down further. There were 32 families with a combined total of 135 individuals and an additional 28 individual males living in the Mecca area in 1920 making a total of 163 Mexican and Mexican-Americans; there were 103 males and 61 females. Table 4 presents the age-spread of the Mexican/Mexican-American population:

Table 4 – Age Spread of Mexican/Mexican-American Population in 1920 Census		
Under 5	**26**	**16%**
5-17	**41**	**25%**
18-20	**7**	**4%**
21-24	**13**	**8%**
25-44	**59**	**36%**
45-54	**11**	**7%**
55-59	**2**	**1%**
60-64	**1**	**1%**
65-74	**2**	**1%**
75-84	**1**	**1%**
85+		
	163	**100%**

1920 Federal Census

By revising the way in which the population is counted, one can easily see that twenty-eight percent of the population in 1920 is Mexican and Mexican-American, a fact that cannot be seen with a brief inspection of the numbers. I also found that all of those in the labor force either worked for the railroad or were in farm work; one Mexican male was a farm foreman. The census indicates that there are five cases where the wife and/or children worked in addition to the husband/head of family – all of them for the railroad. Six children were noted to be railroad laborers – four boys (ages 12, 11, 10 and 8) and two girls (ages 4 and 1); three children, two of the boys (ages 12 and 8) and the 4 year old girl were members of one family. This begs the question, was this a mistake by the census taker, or, what type of work is a four-year old girl and a one-year old girl capable of doing on the railroad? All of the Mexican/Mexican-American population lived around the Mecca railroad section or on the farms they worked for: Mecca Station

of the Southern Pacific Railroad, North West of Mecca Township; Township 7S 8E NW of Mecca; Unincorporated area – ten miles East of Section 15; Salton Station of Southern Pacific Railroad; and the Oasis District.

3.7 -- 1930 Census: The 1930 Federal Mecca Census shows of total population of 1,398 individuals, 552 females and 846 males. If one looks at the categories designated by the census taker, the population results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5 – 1930 Mecca Population

Chinese	**1**	**<1%**
White	**710**	**51%**
Mexican	**503**	**36%**
Filipino	**2**	**<1%**
American Indian	**137**	**9%**
Japanese	**45**	**3%**
	1398	**100%**

1930 Federal Census

As in the 1920 census, I used the categories designated by the census taker but again added birth place as an indicator. Instead of the six categories utilized by the census taker, I organized the population into ten categories shown in Table 6, with the Age Spread of the population presented in Table 6 with the age spread of the population shown in Table 7.

Table 6 – Birth Place of 1930 Mecca Population

White	**707**	**51%**
Mexican	**275**	**20%**
Mexican-American	**226**	**16%**
Chinese	**1**	**<1%**
Filipino	**2**	**<1%**
American Indian	**137**	**10%**
Japanese	**15**	**1%**
Japanese-American	**30**	**2%**
Columbian	**1**	**<1%**
Spanish	**4**	**<1%**
	1398	**100.00%**

1930 Federal Census

Table 7 – Age Spread of the Mecca Population in 1930

Under 5	**155**	**11.1%**
5-17	**372**	**26.6%**
18-20	**78**	**5.6%**
21-24	**97**	**6.9%**
25-44	**433**	**31.1%**
45-54	**133**	**9.5%**
55-64	**69**	**4.9%**
65-74	**37**	**2.6%**
75-84	**12**	**.9%**
85+	**9**	**.6%**
Unknown Age	**3**	**.2%**
	1398	**100.0%**

1930 Federal Census

The Mecca population in in 1930 was very young with eighty-two percent under the age of 45, 52% under the age of 25, and 38% is under the age of 17.

The 1930 census also captures the types of property owned with seventy-three farms owned (one is owned by an Anglo-American woman who is a widow), 26 farms are rentals, 16 non-farm rental units were owned and 13 non-farm rental units were rented. There are a total of 99 farms and 29 rental units; one of the owned non-farm units was a hotel. All of the owned properties were owned by Anglo-Americans, while 6 Native Americans owned 6 truck farms.

One interesting difference between the 1920 federal census and the 1930 federal census is the question of whether or not one owns a "radio set." It would appear that owning a radio was considered a luxury item and I found that 41 individuals owned radios: 39 Anglo-Americans and 3 Mexican-origin males owned radios (one Mexican alfalfa farmer, one Mexican cotton farmer, and one Mexican fruit farm laborer).

When the Mexican-origin population is considered according to birth place (the age spread is presented in Table 8), there are 93 families with a combined total of 437 individuals, and an additional 64 *solos* or individual/unattached males living in the Mecca area. The total number of Mexican-origin individuals in the Mecca area during the 1930 census was 501 with a total of 297 males (233 as members of families) and 204 females (as members of families). One Mexican woman was married to an Italian man who was the foreman of a fruit farm, one Mexican woman was married to a Spanish fruit farm

laborer, and one Mexican woman was married to an Anglo-American truck farmer.

Table 8 –Age Spread of the Mexica-Origin Population in 1930

Under 5	**76**	**15%**
5-17	**142**	**28%**
18-20	**32**	**6%**
21-24	**36**	**7%**
25-44	**166**	**33%**
45-54	**34**	**7%**
55-59	**5**	**<1%**
60-64	**4**	**<1%**
65-74	**5**	**<1%**
75-85	**1**	**<1%**
85+	**0**	**0**
	501	**100%**

1930 Federal Census

The Mexican and Mexican-American population represented 36% of the entire Mecca population in 1930, up 8% since 1920. There was slightly more diversity in occupations since 1920 – the majority of Mexican-origin males continued to work for the railroad as section laborers and, in farm labor as fruit farm laborers and truck farm laborers. However, one 65 year-old male was an alfalfa farmer (he arrived in the U.S. in 1915), one 35 year-old cotton farmer (came to the U.S. in 1903), two males were truck farmers (aged 20 and 24), one 36 year-old male was the high school janitor, one 29 year-old male was the cook for a railroad bridge gang, one male worked as a laborer for the U.S. government, and a 20 year-old male worked as a laborer at the Salt Works. There were five Mexican-origin women working for wages: one, a 40 year-old woman was a housekeeper for a farmer, a 16 year-old woman was a truck farm laborer (along with her

father), a 35 year-old woman worked as a truck farm laborer, and a 43 year-old woman and her 17 year-old daughter worked as truck farm laborers.

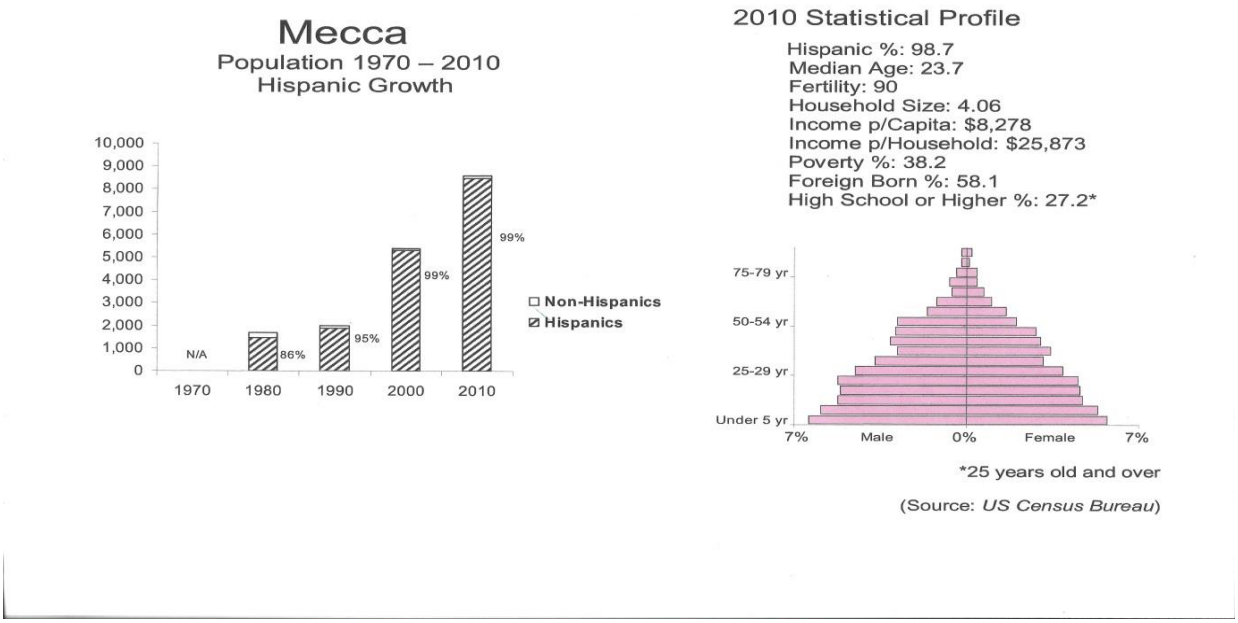
The majority of the Mexican-origin population lived in the Oasis farming district on fruit farms near Mecca on Highway 64; two Mexican truck farm farmers also lived near Mecca on Highway 64, there were two Mexican origin renters on or near Pierce Avenue, farm workers were living on farms near or on Pierce Avenue and Avenues 62 and 64, and on farms along Highway 99, railroad workers and their families were living at the Southern Pacific Railroad at Mecca on Avenue 74. A total of 453 Mexican-origin individuals lived on farms at or near Mecca, while 48 individuals did not live on farms. In the 1930 census, it is of interest to note that by just tabulating by birth place, we find that sixteen percent of the so-called Mexican population was actually American citizens, a more diverse population than was indicated by the census taker.

As we approach more recent census material, we find that the Hispanic population in Mecca and agriculture continued to grow. By the 1950s, agriculture in the Coachella Valley and Mecca "had come of age" with fields fruits and vegetables and profits that appealed to large corporations that made their home alongside the remaining small farms (Du Bry 2004:116). The availability of an abundant water supply through the Coachella Branch of the All-American Canal in 1942 precipitated the growth of large-scale agriculture in the Coachella Valley. Travis DuBry (2007:70; 2004:92) pointed out that in 1938, there was over 14,000 acres in production, and by 1950, the amount of acreage in production more than doubled. With more crops to harvest, more labor was needed. *Braceros* worked in Coachella Valley while the *Bracero* Program was in effect and

afterwards, many former *Braceros* brought their families and settled in Mecca and the surrounding area. Mecca began as an Anglo town, but was beginning to change rapidly now as industrial agriculture gained an even larger foothold through the 1970s.

From the years 1980 through 2010, there was an increase in the Hispanic population from 88% in 1980, 95% in 1990, and 99% in both the 2000 and 2010 Census and corresponded to agricultural intensification in Coachella Valley and throughout California (Palerm 1997; DuBry and Palerm 2001). Indeed, we find that mechanization in the 1960s and the cancellation of the 1964 Bracero Program were two things that were supposed to reduce the need for hired farm workers, and actually did for a while,

Table 9 – Hispanic Growth in Mecca from 1970 through 2010



Courtesy of J.V Palerm

but did not keep the numbers down for long. The numbers began to increase during the 1970s and 1980s with the expectations are that there will be an increasing need for farm workers in the coming years (Palerm 1997:11). Table 9 illustrates the Hispanic population growth in Mecca from 1970 through the 2010 Federal Census and clearly shows an increasing Hispanic population and a decreasing Anglo population that is the opposite from the town's beginning and what Travis DuBry (2004) calls "The New Pioneers of Mecca."

3.8 -- Spanish-Speaking Workers: Future Prominent Valley Citizens

As I have shown earlier in this chapter, the 1910 Federal Census presented a completely Anglo population of 124 individuals. Within 10 years, the census (as I break it down according to birth place), the population of Spanish-speakers was actually at 28% and the number increased further in the following ten years in the 1920 Census to 36%. According to the graph above (Table 9), from 1980 through 2010, the Spanish-speaking population increased to 99% of the entire population of Mecca.

I worked with the raw census data for the 1910, 1920, and 1930 numbers earlier in this chapter; with data after 1930, I used Census Summary data. The 1990 Mecca Census counted 1966 persons, with 1126 males and 840 females. Of this number, 1299 were counted as White, 63 persons as Filipino, 1 Pacific Islander, and 603 persons were of "Other Race." Things were much more complicated than these initial numbers. The data breaks the population down further as 83 persons "Not Hispanic," 1803 Mexican persons, 7 individuals from Honduras, 21 persons from El Salvador, and 53 "Other Hispanic"

individuals. Out of the so called "White" population, 1883 persons were of Hispanic origin, while 83 people are not Hispanic; these two numbers add up to Mecca population number of 1966 persons. Of the 83 persons who were not Hispanic, 64 were Asian or Pacific Islander and through these numbers, it would seem that there were 19 Anglos living in Mecca at the time of the 1990 Federal Census, a complete turnaround from its Anglo beginnings, and corresponding to the Table 9 as to the increasing growth of the Hispanic population in Mecca.

The 1990 Census showed a total number of 665 persons over the age of 16 in the workforce, and of that number 497, or approximately 75%, worked in the "Farming, forestry, and fishing occupations." These numbers, however, were further complicated by the number of hours that the census takers utilized; there were no absolute numbers, only "Usually worked" particular hours ranging from "35 or more hours a week" to '1 to 14 hours a week." The census enumerators appeared certain that there were 147 males and 235 females who were not employed during the census period in Mecca.

What became clear to me as I focused on archival and census data was that very little has been recorded about the Mexican workers in Mecca and the Coachella Valley. There were only small references to Mexican workers on the railroad and in agriculture, but from more recent life histories taken from the descendants of Mexican immigrant families by the Coachella Valley Historical Society and the Palm Springs Historical Society, a more complete picture of the Valley's population during its Euro-American settlement beginning in the late 1800s. The following life stories add context to the Mecca census data in that many of the experiences are, most likely, similar in nature with

Mexican pioneer families across the Valley and dovetail the lives of Mexican Mecca pioneers of the same time period. These life stories also illustrate settlement patterns and community building by bringing together multiple generations beginning in a specific time and space (Alvarez, Jr. 1987:164).

Many members of the families who immigrated from Mexico to the Coachella Valley during the late 1800s and early 1900s worked on ranches, the railroad, and helped build the agricultural empire that is today's Coachella Valley. Many of the descendants of the families that came to the Valley in search of better lives and work are yesterday's Spanish-speaking pioneers and today's prominent Valley citizens. In January of 2002, the Coachella Valley Historical Society presented a *Jamaica* celebration; this was an exhibit in honor of the Mexican pioneers of the Coachella Valley entitled "*Nuestra Familias*." The *Jamaica*, traditionally, is a Mexican get-together that brings together an entire neighborhood for food and entertainment. In this instance, the neighborhood was the entire Coachella Valley and the descendants of the Mexican pioneers were invited to record family histories and loan photos and artifacts for the occasion (Cooke 2001). Lalo Guerrero considered "the Father of Chicano Music" was the featured performer (Litz 2002). While most of the exhibit was not able to be found, Connie Cowin of the Coachella Valley Historical Society, allowed me to have access to the records that were archived and the following histories are five of the 50 families[2] that were highlighted as part of the *Jamaica* in 2002. I would like to be able to find those missing parts of the

[2] These are the actual names of these Mexican pioneers in this chapter.

exhibit and further research the archives for additional historical contributions of Mexican-origin pioneers.

George Gonzalez, Jr.

George Gonzalez, Jr. became one of the most successful ranchers in the Coachella Valley and he began his assent to prominence as a general laborer for the Southern Pacific Railroad beginning in 1905 (George Gonzalez, Coachella Valley Historical Society papers 2002). George was born in Meoqui, Chihuahua, Mexico on April 23, 1885. George's parents died when he was only eleven and he was raised to adulthood by a friend of the family and at the age of twenty he left Mexico to find work in California and arrived in Coachella Valley just as the Colorado River had flooded the Salton Basin. He was hired by the railroad for 50 cents a day to help move the tracks to higher ground while he lived in a railroad labor camp in Mecca. After hearing of construction work in an area near Los Angeles, he quit his job with the railroad and moved from the Coachella Valley to work on the construction of the Rose Bowl in Pasadena. In 1910, before moving to Pasadena to continue to work, he returned to his home village in Mexico to marry a young woman from his village. He and his wife had three daughters together while living in Pasadena.

In 1915, with hopes of purchasing land for farming, George moved his family to the Coachella Valley where he worked for a rancher near Thermal. The rancher's wife, a schoolteacher, taught him English while he was under the employment of her husband; learning English helped George pave the way to recognize business opportunities open to

him. George and his wife saved as much of his salary as they could and eventually were able to buy land and begin farming on their own. With the success of their farming operation, George returned to his village Mexico and encouraged other Meoqui families to move to the Coachella Valley and participate in the opportunities that were available. In papers housed at the Coachella Valley Historical Society (George Gonzalez 2002), the importance of George Gonzalez, and in the migration of others from his village, is revealed in the following statement: "the backbone of the good Mexican families which migrated to this valley in the early 1920s resulted from Georges' persuasion…from the little village of Meoqui."

George had purchased over two hundred and fifty acres of land by the 1930s and built an adobe ranch house on 90 acres near Monroe and Miles, located in present day Indio. He also owned an additional 90 acres near the present site of Jackson and Highway 111 – the Riverside County Fair and National Date Festival Grounds are now located on part of this property. On the corner of Requa and Towne Avenue, an area known as Mexican Town, George built a grocery store, a pool hall, and a barbershop mainly to help the people living in the area and just as was George's adobe home. Both of these last two properties are located in present day Indio. George died tragically in 1936 in an accident with a truck in Covina as he was preparing for a trip to Mexico, leaving a legacy of family and friends in the Coachella Valley.

Natividad Gomez

Natividad Gomez came to the Coachella Valley through the encouragement of George Gonzalez in 1918. He left his family in Meoqui, Chihuahua, Mexico, at the age of 43, and he found work at one of George's ranches in Thermal and in 1920, Natividad brought his family to the Valley. Several years later, the Gomez family moved to Wilmington, California where Natividad worked at the Consolidated Lumber yard until 1932 when the family returned to Thermal.

Little more is said about Natividad Gomez and the family history was filled out by his daughter, Celia, the last remaining member of the original Gomez family. Celia Gomez was born in Thermal shortly after the family arrived. She graduated from Thermal School in 1935 and attended Coachella Valley High School for her freshman year only, having to leave school for work. Celia married Joe Munoz at Our Lady of Soledad Church in Coachella in 1937 and had one daughter, Elvira. In the early years of their marriage, Joe worked in agriculture and later at the Coachella Valley Water District where he worked until he retired after 25 years. Celia and Joe celebrated their 64th wedding anniversary in December of 2001.

Philip Nava

Philip Nava was born in 1882 in Jerez, Zacatecas, Mexico. Philip came to the United States through El Paso, Texas, at the age of fourteen and traveled throughout Texas and New Mexico as a crew member on the railroad. In 1904, Philip arrived in Mecca with his

wife, Cruz, and continued working on rail sections throughout the Valley. The Navas had five children together.

Philip began working for local ranchers in 1910 at the age of twenty-eight and within five years, he was able to support his family as a self-employed rancher. He returned briefly to the railroad in 1918 during an economic downturn. From 1920 to 1935, Philip was again a self-employed rancher who turned to photography to supplement his income when farming was difficult. Philip would drive throughout the valley, generally on Sundays, and take pictures of families in their Sunday best, returning on the following Sunday to try to sell the photos. After 1935 and until 1942, Philip managed several Palm Springs ranches, and worked as a gardener until 1954; at the age of seventy-two, he was forced to retire because of illness and he died at the age of 84.

Jacob Dominguez

Jacob Dominguez arrived in the Coachella Valley in the 1920s from Santa Rosalia, Baja California, Mexico at the approximate age of 12 with his family. His family settled in Thermal and all of them, both parents and all five children, worked in the fields or doing any work that was available. Jacob married Margarita Lerma, whose family immigrated from Santiago de los Caballeros, Sinaloa, Mexico also during the 1920s. Her family settled in the Thermal area where there was plenty of opportunity for work in farm labor and domestic work. Margarita worked as a housekeeper and babysitter for a local grower while Jacob went into farming, but when the market crashed, most farmers, including Jacob, were forced out of business. He opened a restaurant on Highway 111

across from Roosevelt School called "Frances' Café" that earned a reputation for great food. The couple had four children together.

Adolph Avila

According to the daughter of Adolph Avila, Patricia Avila Salazar, the Avila family came to the Coachella Valley in 1906 from Rancho Las Palomas, Jalisco, Mexico, when her grandfather was five years old. They settled in Thermal when "there were only single men, Indian girls and rattlesnakes in the Coachella Valley" (Coachella Valley Historical Society 2002). Patricia's great-grandfather, Pedro Avila and his son, John, worked as sharecroppers and harvested mesquite trees at different ranches in the area and were paid seventy-five cents for a nine hour work day. Patricia's father, Adolph, attended John Kelly School in Thermal up to the seventh grade when he had to quit school and go to work in the fields. During repatriation when many Mexicans were returned to Mexico, the Avila family was allowed to stay in Thermal because of money owed to them; the loan was eventually paid off with a cow given to her grandfather instead of the money owed. Patricia's father, Adolph, and her mother, Elena Soto, were married in 1952 in Coachella and have been married for fifty years as of 2002. She and her five siblings grew up on Calle Avila in Coachella and they always thought that the street was named after their grandfather, John, until they found out that the street was actually named for Mexican President Avila Camacho.

3.9 -- The Original Mexican Families in the Palm Springs Area

The first life history of George Gonzalez is one of only a few histories of Spanish-speaking immigrants housed at the Coachella Valley Historical Society in Indio. It mirrors the migration process set forward by Robert R. Alvarez, Jr. in his book "*Familia*: Migration and Adaptation in Baja and Alta California, 1800-1975" (1987). It is a "pull yourself up from the bootstraps" story that symbolizes the American ideal for many immigrants who came to the United States for a better life. In George's case, we have a man who was orphaned at the early age of eleven, took off on his own to California at the age of twenty despite the fact that he could not speak English, working his way up from railroad hand to pillar of society with large landholdings. He is remembered for his kindness and ability to share his wealth and knowledge with other immigrants from Mexico. George Gonzalez began an immigration network, along with community building and adaptation in the Coachella Valley that encompasses several generations of Spanish-speaking pioneers. Similarly, George's life history, the life histories of Natividad Gomez, Philip Nava, Jacob Dominguez, and Adolph Avila do not tell of initial difficulties of living in a foreign culture/society or the hardships that they had to overcome to achieve the "American Dream." Nor do any of the life histories detail much of the women in the families. There are, however, a few life histories of early Spanish-speaking immigrants to the Coachella Valley that do tell a more complete story.

We Were Here Too

The story of the original sixteen Spanish-speaking families to the Palm Springs area in the 1920s is told by their descendants in a publication by the Palm Springs Historical Society in 2005 entitled "*We Were Here Too!*" It is the story of their initial home, "the square-mile downtown enclave Section 14, with its mix of Mexican… [Native-American, and African-American}…families and the especially deep bond between the Mexicans and the Cahuilla" (Smith 2005:B-6). The publication melds the stories of the sixteen families within the historical context of the time and allows one to fill in some of the blanks of the Gonzalez life story.

The original sixteen Spanish-speaking families arrived in the Coachella Valley desert during the 1920s looking for jobs in agriculture, the railroad, and construction. They came at different times from different places in Mexico: the States of Sonora, Chihuahua, Aguascalientes, Jalisco, Michoacán, and Torreon. Some of the families lived in tents near Whitewater and marveled at herds of wild horses and burros wandering across the desert, eating the fallen fruit of fig and other fruit trees located at the base of the mountains. Others set up tents near what is now the O'Donnell Golf Course. But it didn't matter where they initially began their lives in Coachella Valley, life was extremely difficult and many hurdles had to be overcome, and like the Gonzalez life story, began immigration networks, community building and settlement in the Coachella Valley.

Those members of the families who died early on could not be buried in the Welwood Murray Cemetery where most people were buried but, instead, had to be buried in the

Native American Cemetery, the Jane Augustine Cemetery. Construction workers and domestic workers had no legal remedy for being underpaid or not paid at all for work they had completed. And, the "Americanization" program that was taught to their children in school was insulting to some of the families. In later years, the Mexicans, African-Americans, and Native Americans were allowed in the theaters, but only in the balcony section.

The Americanization program, as well as the rules and regulations associated with the Mexican, Native American, and African-American children at the Frances Stevens Elementary Schoolhouse emphasized a sense of being unwelcome. The Americanization Room was basically a one room schoolhouse that was separate from the main elementary school. The children were not allowed entrance to the school at the main gate, but had to use a side gate on the school grounds. The children were also separated from Anglo children during lunch and play periods and since school administrators did not believe the children had proper hygiene, their children's hair was inspected for lice and they had to brush their teeth each day before classes began. Upon completion of third grade, the children from the Americanization Room were integrated into the main elementary school and at that point, the children were part of all of the school activities. Segregation, however, continued outside of school hours and Anglo children did not mix with the Mexican, Native American, or African American children.

3.10 -- Mexican Families and the Cahuilla: The Beginning of Community

Unlike the Anglo community, the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Native Americans, most of whom were also Spanish-speakers, welcomed the Mexican families and leased them a portion of Native American land in order that the families would have a permanent place to live (Palm Springs Historical Society 2005). Many of the men of the families were hired to construct rock and adobe walls that still exist in the Palm Springs area, as well as the houses for the Mexican families in Section 14. Work began on "Section 14 in the early 1930s with the families helping each other in the construction of homes, and in essence, the beginning of their community. As more families moved into Section 14, new and vibrant stories of Mexico were passed on to neighbors and the sense of community thrived.

The Mexican families remember the Cahuilla with affection. One Cahuilla woman who lived in a crude house with a dirt floor sold tortillas and tamales to the families in order to support her family. She was known throughout the community for her wonderful tortillas and is remembered by her long skirts and a *reboso,* or shawl, covering her hair even during the hottest summer months. And with affection, they remember the beautiful Native American songs that would rise from the round structure that was covered with palm fronds where the Cahuilla held their religious ceremonies. After the ceremony, the Cahuilla would make their way around the Mexican community, eating tacos, beans, and tortillas at different Mexican family homes. Mutual respect between the Cahuilla and Mexican families provided a sense of belonging for the Mexican families

and one that they had not received from the Anglo community; socializing between the two groups contributed to a strengthening of their bond.

La Colonia Mexicana

In the early days of settlement in Section 14, not all of the families knew each other, but whether they were related, neighbors, or co-workers, they understood the difficult times they had embarked upon in the unforgiving desert of the Coachella Valley. This fact brought about the necessity of helping one another and they created a life insurance/burial organization called the *Aliancia* that assisted families in emergency situations, helped with life and death benefits, and assisted with numerous other needs. Families supported fund raising dinners and other events, such as folkloric dances, musical performances, and bake sales in order to benefit the organization and the community. Both the men and women of the community put their efforts into the *Aliancia.*

After a time, out of a fading *Aliancia* was born *La Colonia Mexicana*. While the need for assistance gradually declined, the need for social connections increased and *La Colonia* became an essential part of the village. Members of *La Colonia Mexicana* were involved in church fiestas and other social events and provided booths for food, entertainment, and Mexican knick-knacks. Women dressed in the attire of their Mexican villages that symbolized their pride in their past. And each year at a *Colonia Fiesta,* the young women of the village would vie for the honor of becoming *La Colonia Mexicana Reina* (queen). The queen was chosen by the number of tickets that the young women

sold – whoever sold the most tickets was selected queen. Money raised from the sale of tickets funded the building of floats and numerous other community projects and, of course, the queen and her court had the privilege of riding on *La Colonia Mexicana* float.

La Colonia Mexicana was not just about raising money for social events, but also emphasized the raising of children to respect their backgrounds and families, and participating in the needs of the community. This was most evident during World War II when the *El Mirador* Hotel was converted to housing for injured soldiers. It was evident to *La Colonia* women that twenty-four Spanish-speaking soldiers were not being visited by hospital volunteers and they decided to set up teams from the organization to visit the Spanish-speaking patients. *La Colonia* teams held dinners in the cafeteria, along with music and folkloric dancing and paid homage to the soldier's sacrifices and let the soldiers know that their heroic efforts were recognized and honored.

The Catholic Church

A mission church, originally built for the Agua Caliente Native Americans, became the place for Catholic religious services for the families. The spiritual life and strength of these early pioneers came from this church – it was the site for baptisms, weddings, first communions, confirmations, and funerals – the focus of all their spiritual events. The women sewed colorful altar linens to match the various church occasions and the men maintained the grounds of the church. On Saturday mornings, the nuns from Coachella came to section 14 to teach catechism.

When the neighborhood eventually pulled together to build a new church, women did the fundraising while the men constructed the church itself. The new church was called "Our Lady of Guadalupe," and an annual fund raising fiesta was held beginning in the 1930s, that commemorated the patron saint of the Mexican people by a portrayal of the appearance of the Virgin Mary to the Mexican peasant, Juan Diego. Families throughout Coachella Valley came to participate in the games, food, music and dancing at the annual event through the 1950s.

What these stories illustrate is the building of social networks and process of immigration (Alvarez, 1987:163) and taken all together, the history of the families who settled near Palm Springs gives additional insight into the settlement of Mexican families in the Coachella Valley. Their hardships, adjustment, and sense of determination can be inferred upon the family histories from the Coachella Valley Historical Society as it must have been as difficult for those families as it was for the Section 14 families. Life was difficult in the Mecca area and a sense of personal and family determination comes through and what makes these histories all the more remarkable is the fact that they have played out in a geographical area of extremes – extreme temperature, extreme winds, and extreme living conditions. And yet, these pioneer immigrant Mexican families in the Coachella Valley are like any other immigrant group who come to the United States looking for a better life — their stories have only begun to come to light to show that they were here too.

The next chapter will focus on the lives of Mexican women, their work both inside and outside the home, and their contributions to the settlement and community building

processes in the Coachella Valley. The lives of Spanish-speaking women will add further context to the early growth of Coachella Valley and illustrate their integral part that they have played in balancing family and life in the desert.

Chapter 4:

The Lives and Work of Women Farmworkers

In this chapter, I present the lives and work of four generations of women threaded together within the work environment of California agribusiness along with their homeland in Mexico. I begin by exploring the lives and work of three unrelated women that illustrate the changing role of Spanish-speaking women. I continue by examining three generations of Spanish-speaking women in two farm working families, and together with the three unrelated Spanish-speaking women, demonstrate a pattern of life and work that is inextricably bound by the idiosyncrasies of farm labor in California. I ask the questions: What is the class position of origin[1] of Spanish-speaking women of farm working households and their level of education? At which stage of their lives do women enter wage work and what are the economic conditions that precipitate their entry into wage labor? How does capitalism affect the lives of women in farm working households? How does the position of women in farm working households of different generations fare over time? Do we find differences in the workload of women of different generations?

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[1]I use "class of origin" following that of Martha Roldán (1987) setting the "…older childhood phase (between eleven to twelve years old) as the crucial period of origin. The importance of this stage lies in the fact that at this time the 'educational future'… [of the women in this study have been decided]. If the young woman has already begun formal education, during this period it is decided whether she will complete elementary school, begin her paid occupational trajectory (if she has not begun already) or devote her time to household chores making it easier for other family members to work outside the home."

Whether staying behind and maintaining the homefront in Mexico, or creating and maintaining community relations and working to keep the family together in California, Spanish-speaking women in farm working households have often found themselves dealing with circumstances that they never before encountered but, nonetheless, work together with household members to employ strategies that best fit their circumstances. However, we ought not ignore insidious day-to-day pressures endured by farm working families just because Spanish-speaking farm working household reveal "strong family and kinship networks" (Zinn 1983). "Adaptations" of Spanish-speaking families to social and economic constraints in Mexico or California may be considered "family strategies" (Zinn 1987:168).

Little attention is given to work added to women's daily life during long months when family members have migrated for work in California. In their home village, women create a system of help through networks of family and friends that alleviate some of the burden upon them and, unlike in California, they are connected by their country of origin, its spoken language, culture, and societal norms. In the Coachella Valley, on the other hand, many women in farm working families speak little or no English, and are confronted with cultural and societal norms far different than their own that make their daily lives even more difficult.

We have lost the chance to record the every-day lives and work of Spanish-speaking women of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries whose families labored in California agribusiness. We are, nonetheless, afforded insight through Latin American

and Chicana feminist scholars (Wilson 1982; Zavella 1982; Guendelman and Perez-Itriago 1987; Vaupel 1992; de la Torre 1993 and others) who had the foresight to recognize changes in the position of women within the context of changes in industrial agriculture. The women in this study arrived in the United States or California during the period between 1965 to present, however, all have relatives, generally a father or grandfather, who worked in California agribusiness beginning in the early twentieth century, and have had the experiences of their relatives passed on to them through oral tradition. Each woman is placed within one of the four periods that I discussed in Chapter 2, the point at which they or members of their families entered wage labor in California, those periods are: 1) 1900-1929, 2) 1930-1941, 3) 1941-1970, and 4) 1971-present.

3.1 -- THREE WOMEN

Magdalena

"I have never worked. I've born nine children.
I have raised them and taken care of my husband."
Magdalena, age 90

Ninety-year old Magdalena[2], a frail, petite woman, reminisced about the days of the hacienda in Guanajuato, Mexico where her parents worked for the owner. Magdalena was born during the time of the hacienda in Mexico between the years 1900-1929 into indebted peonage through her father. She has never had any formal schooling and most

[2] All names in this chapter are pseudonyms.

of Magdalena's life has revolved around day-to-day living, cooking, cleaning, and raising children. She thought it amusing that I was interested in her life and work since it was her life has been a life of "just women's work."

Magdalena's mother inculcated traditional household duties to Magdalena, as her mother was responsible not only for the care of her own family, but also the care of the *patrón's* family. Regardless of the fact that her mother worked for the *patrón*, the work that her mother performed was considered "women's work." For the most part, Magdalena recalls her life as always being a homemaker, taking care of her family and animals in her village in Guanajuato, Mexico and then in Indio, California.

Magdalena married into the peasant class through her husband who benefited from land reform. She has always cooked, cleaned, washed and ironed clothes, and fed the cows, pigs, chickens, and horses, just as her mother did for the owners of the hacienda. Magdalena told me that taking care of nine children is not an easy job when you have to do everything by hand. During her child-rearing years, Magdalena had no electricity, no stove, not even a washer or dryer. Everything had to be cooked fresh over an open fire because there was no way to refrigerate food and she spent every day, from morning to night, preparing for the next day – seemingly endless chores. For example, the corn that she would grind in a stone *metate* to make *masa*, flour, for the tortillas had to first be cooked in water and then be cooked in the *comal*, a flat pan, over the fire; the process would take a good three to four hours to complete. The water that she needed everyday had to be pulled up from the well with a rope and wheel and then dumped into buckets

before she could wash clothes on a cement stone or in a round wooden container called an *artesa*.

Magdalena's husband, Miguel, grew up in her village and yet, he is a U.S. citizen born in Kansas in 1918 while his father worked on the railroad in the United States. It was easy to find a job in the United States in 1918 – all you had to do was show up at the border and ask for a job and someone would give you a ride to the place where you were needed. His parents returned to their village in Mexico when Miguel was eight years old and put him to work taking care of their cattle and during that time friend taught Miguel to read and write while they managed the cattle together.

Miguel received a plot of land after land reform, and he planted and grew beans, corn, and pumpkins; when he didn't have enough money, he would pick strawberries, asparagus, or corn for other ranchers. Sometimes even then, he didn't have sufficient money to support his family and he began crossing the border illegally during the 1940s, or so he thought. During the periods when Miguel crossed the border to follow the crops in the United States, he would be gone for months at a time. Magdalena was left behind to care for their children and their home site and, even though she was constantly nagged by strong fears that her husband would not return home for one reason or another, she managed both her domestic work and child-rearing responsibilities, in addition to work normally performed by her husband.

It wasn't until many years after her husband had been crossing the border that he found out he was actually a U.S. citizen. A friend told him that since he was born in the

U.S., he had all of the rights of a citizen of the United States and he didn't have to cross the border illegally. With the help of his aunt, Miguel was able to get his baptismal certificate at the church where his parents had him baptized in the United States, and then he filed for legal status. When his citizenship status was cleared up in 1979, he brought Magdalena to the Coachella Valley, leaving their grown children in their village in Mexico. At first, they lived in One Hundred Palms in a trailer park and then moved to the labor camp in Indio, a low income apartment complex rented only to people who work in the fields, and they have resided there to the present time.

When Magdalena and Miguel first moved to the Coachella Valley, she attempted to work in grapes, but the desert sun was just too much for her. So, she stayed home in their bungalow apartment doing what she knew best: cooking, washing and cleaning, and taking care of her husband, and others who would stay with them until they got on their feet. Her housework, however, was easier in Indio than in Mexico because, she had a stove, a washer, and an electric iron. Magdalena never really thought of doing anything else since domestic work is what she was taught to do and it's what she knew how to do. Through the years living in Indio, Magdalena has dreamed of returning to her "*pueblito*" in Mexico, but her husband insists on staying in California because he is a U.S citizen. They used to visit their village often; however, this has become much harder as they have gotten older.

Magdalena and Miguel believe they did a good job raising their children, giving them a better future by making them legal in the United States, and also by teaching them how

to work hard in the fields. Their children were not formally educated, but they didn't have a choice since schooling beyond third grade wasn't available in their village. When you are hungry, you can't think and working in the fields is the only option when you come from an agricultural background and it's what you are taught to do to survive.

Miguel did not initially support his children coming to the United States as he believed that they would be lured into bad city habits such as drinking and drug use, join gangs, or just become homeless. But with the passage of Immigration Reform and Control Act in 1987, he believed it was the right time to bring his offspring to the United States. Miguel believes that by living in this country, the third generation is getting a better quality of life, a choice to have an education and the right tools for success.

Griselda

My grandmother was a homemaker and did the heavy work at home like washing, cooking, making everything fresh because there were no refrigerators or stoves, or electricity. My mother was also a homemaker, but she also helped my father prepare the land to plant the corn, and weed the land after the corn was growing. I went through ten years of school and before I was married, I used to sew in a factory to help my parents, and I also sewed at home for my family and friends. My husband has always worked in agriculture and when we moved to California, both my husband and I worked the grapes. Now I am a homemaker and I also baby-sit for my grandchildren. My duties at home are to clean and cook, but I don't see it as work, especially when I compare it to what my mother and grandmother went through. *Griselda, age 59*

Fifty-nine year old Griselda grew up in a peasant household in a small village in Guanajuato, Mexico, attended ten years of formal schooling, and helped both her mother with domestic work and her father with farm duties; she was born during the period the period 1942-1970. She remembers that when she was seven years old, her father used to take her to plant corn and take care of the two big oxen that he used to work their land. During the 1960s, her father migrated as a *bracero*, leaving his family for months at a time in the capable hands of his wife. As a way to compensate for her father's absence while working in California, Griselda acquired a job in a factory as a seamstress. With ten years of schooling and her sewing expertise, opportunities opened for Griselda within the wage labor force that was of benefit to her family's survival during the periods of her father's sojourns into California agribusiness.

Griselda's maternal grandparents, likewise, worked their own fields in Irapuato, Guanajuato, Mexico. Griselda smiled broadly as she told me about her mother's father and his travels to California. She so enjoyed hearing about his odyssey of crossing the border and the people he would meet; they would offer their homes to him and give him work until he had sufficient money to move on to the next town. Griselda's grandmother, born in 1924, was a homemaker and, in addition to her homemaking responsibilities, worked the fields with Griselda's grandfather, taking over his duties while he worked in California.

Griselda married her husband in 1964 and continued to work in the factory while her husband worked in agriculture planting strawberries, and once in a while, he worked in

construction doing small jobs. She left wage work to raise her two children and didn't return to wage work until they immigrated to California. Griselda and her husband decided to immigrate to California in 1988 during the economic crisis years in Mexico (see Palerm 1993:341-347). Leaving their grown children behind, Griselda brought with her the memories of her grandfather and father working in California for better lives for their families.

After Griselda and her husband settled themselves in the Coachella Valley, they arranged papers for their son, 22, and their daughter, 18. With the family back together, Griselda could breathe easier, however, she and her children joined her husband in agricultural fields in Coachella Valley out of economic necessity. Both of her children attended school in Guanajuato; her son has a degree in Agricultural Engineering and now works as a custodian at a school in Mecca; her daughter finished high school in Guanajuato and presently works for a company that provides care for the elderly in Coachella Valley. Her husband continues to work in citrus, picking lemons and other types of citrus and even though he only works half days, his job is secure. Both she and her husband have worked for years in grapes, but now, with the security of her husband's job in citrus, she was able to quit her job in agriculture and focus on their grandchildren and a new home.

Griselda and her husband recently purchased a parcel of land with a mobile home at North Shore at the southern tip of the Coachella Valley and the northern edge of the Salton Sea. She loves the fact that they have so much space, space that was lacking their

apartment in Mecca. Griselda, only recently becoming a "homemaker," has a life unlike her mother and grandmother. She has worked most of her life for wages and the hardest work has been working in the fields. Griselda believes that no matter where agricultural work is done, whether in Mexico or the Coachella Valley, it is a hard life; the pay is low and this makes life difficult because there is always worry about money. Her mother had to deal with her father's lengthy sojourns to California for agricultural work and Griselda, in turn, was called upon to handle all of the household and agricultural duties. She helped her mother in the home and, in addition, brought in wages to compensate for the lack of income during her father's absences. And yet, she feels that the work done by her grandmother and mother was more arduous than her wage and household work combined.

Ivonne

> *"I know by experience that women work harder than men because I have to be a homemaker, a field worker, and also a mother. I have to get up early to cook lunch for myself and my husband, prepare meals for my children as well as food to take with them to day-care, come back home from work and cook and take care of the children, do the washing and cleaning. On the other hand, the man goes to work and comes back home, takes a shower and goes to sleep. If I'm lucky, my husband might help me with something, but not all of the time. Maybe my vacation will start when I don't have a job."* *Ivonne, age 34*

Thirty-four year old Ivonne describes her attempt to balance home and wage work in a farm worker community in Coachella Valley. Born during the period 1971-present,

in a small village in Guanajuato, Mexico in 1972, she has lived in Mecca since 1992. Ivonne has worked in the fields since 1992 picking grapes and doing other jobs to prepare the vines, but when her job with the grower is complete, she collects unemployment during the rest of the year. Usually, her job is from December to the month of June, however, during the months that she is not employed, Ivonne also sells Avon out of her apartment and will do massage therapy for farm workers upon request. Ivonne is determined to manage her duties as wife and mother along with her job in the fields because her income is a necessary component of the family budget. In addition to her income for part of the year, Ivonne goes early Friday mornings to Catholic Charities in Mecca to collect a box of provisions that supplements the family food provisions.

Her husband used to work at the L.A. airport in a position recommended by a friend, but after September 11th, he and many others were let go and she and her husband decided to move the family to Coachella Valley where her parents have worked and lived for many years. At first, the family migrated for agricultural work throughout California; they have worked in Bakersfield, Los Angeles, San Juan Capistrano, and Indio, and sometimes they migrated through Texas for work. Now, her husband prepares houses for sale in the Coachella Valley construction sector.

Ivonne has been involved in unpaid domestic work since she was very young and entered into wage work in Coachella Valley when her husband lost his job in Los Angeles. Ivonne's father, a butcher working for a *carnicería* in Michoacán, Mexico, emphasized education for his sons but not his daughters and therefore, Ivonne has had no

formal education, but nevertheless, she found it easy to find a job picking grapes in Mecca.

Ivonne's father began migrating to the Coachella Valley to pick grapes, cucumbers and green beans in 1970. Her mother remained in Michoacán to manage their ten children, seven girls and three boys, and to keep things together while he was gone. Ivonne and her siblings stayed with her grandparents because their mother had to work a variety of jobs for the survival of the family that included taking in laundry, selling fruit in the streets during the day, and in the evening, selling dinners. Her mother now lives in the Coachella Valley with Ivonne's father, and works in the fields with him.

Ivonne's maternal grandparents have never come to the U.S. and have always worked their own land in Michoacán growing corn and cucumbers. Because of her grandparent's large family, ten children (six boys and four girls), her grandmother was "mostly a homemaker, always busy cooking, washing, and cleaning for everyone."

Ivonne and her husband were married in Guanajuato, Mexico in 1990 and since their undocumented migration to California in 1992, their family has grown. They have four children, all under the age of eight and Ivonne is constantly on the move from 4:30 in the morning until the time she finally gets to bed, hopefully, by 10:00 in the evening, just "to start over again the next day." She seldom gets a break because there is no help in Mecca for women with small children – there is no help with babysitting unless you have family members or a friend willing to assist.

Despite the fact that Ivonne has had no formal schooling and is unable to read or write, during periods when she is free from working in the fields, she makes time to learn English because she knows that it would improve her chances of finding a better job. A Catholic nun at the elementary school gives English lessons and allows the students to bring their children to class and, therefore, Ivonne is able to take advantage of an unusual opportunity to learn English. As her English becomes more proficient, she intends to take citizenship classes.

With all of the new immigration changes, border issues, and immigration officials coming into her community, Ivonne wants to ensure that her family is safe and secure; the changes in immigration policies has blanketed the community in an aura of fear. And, even though she and her husband are residents and their four children are all American citizens, she worries about the anti-Mexican sentiments so prevalent today. It's an additional stress on a woman and her husband who are doing all they can to make ends meet to provide a better life for their children. What she and her husband want most for their children is to attend school, get a good education, and some day, a good job.

The Three Women

One grandmother yearns for her "pueblito, another woman feels a sense of accomplishment, and a young mother feels the stress of being spread too thin, finding little assistance in her areas of need. Three examples of unrelated women, born at

varying historical points, illustrate the changing roles and positions of Spanish-speaking women in California farm working households.

Magdalena was born during the hacienda period of Mexico and represents the period between 1900-1929. She had no formal schooling, but was taught by her indentured mother the duties required by the owner of the hacienda for whom her parents worked. But when she married, she moved into the peasant class with land that she and her husband called their own. And when he husband found out that he was actually a United States citizen, they moved to the Coachella Valley and eventually made plans to bring their entire family into the United States. Magdalena entered wage work for only a short time, the heat of Coachella Valley being more than she could endure, and remained in her tiny home in a labor camp caring for her family and others who would stay with her and her husband. This is not uncommon considering that Magdalena was more valuable to her husband and others members of the household doing what she was most familiar in the home; this follows the research of Tilly and Scott (1979) who found that married women were most often the last to enter wage labor, and then only in cases of severe economic need. However, the fact that Magdalena attempted to work in the fields, illustrates that the family was, indeed, in dire straits and that negotiation among family members is a fluid process that depends upon a number of circumstances. In the case of Magdalena, there were younger household members who could manage field work while Magdalena managed the household.

Fifty-nine year old Griselda representing the period 1942-1976, was raised in a peasant household in Guanajuato, Mexico with 10 years of formal schooling. During her father's sojourns for agricultural work into California, she was required to help her mother with household and agricultural duties, and was required to take a position of responsibility from an early age. She and her husband immigrated to the Coachella Valley for a better life in 1988 during the economic crisis in Mexico. All of her children had good education in Guanajuato, Mexico, and have achieved positions in the Valley outside of agricultural work. Griselda is able to remember the arduous work that her mother and grandmother endured and believes that she has an advantage from their circumstances.

Yvonne's circumstance varies from Magdalena and Griselda's in several instances. Like Magdalena, she has received no formal schooling and that puts her at a disadvantage in Mecca; learning English will help in her desire to become a citizen. Like Griselda, Ivonne has worked in the fields of Coachella Valley in order to keep her family afloat, but unlike Griselda, Ivonne has an entrepreneurial spirit and has found ways in which to add income to her family.

The stories reveal class and gender dimensions and are viewed within "the context of their relationship within the family" as well as from the standpoint of "how the penetration of capitalism has affected rural women" (Wilson 1982:11). Left at their homes in Mexico, the women are required to take on the jobs/chores of their menfolk in addition to their "women's" work. The men leave empty holes in the lives of their

families while on their sojourns for work in the United States. The families maintain what is needed to keep themselves afloat, however, the impact on the women whose husband work in the United States can be overwhelming. Similarly, parents having to leave children in the hands of relatives while they make a home in the United States can be almost unbearable and yet, for a better life, so many sacrifices are endured.

The lives of Magdalena, Griselda, and Ivonne demonstrate changes in the position of women in Spanish-speaking women over three generations. Do these changes constitute a pattern in the position of Spanish-speaking women or will the changes prove to be an anomaly? In the following section, I present three generations of women in two Spanish-speaking families, *la familia* Talamantes and *la familia* Palomares. One woman, the maternal grandmother of *la familia* Talamantes, has never left her village in Mexico, but I was able to interview her on a trip Mexico to meet many member of the Talmantes family. The purpose of my trip to the small village in Mexico was to meet the family of a Coachella Valley family returning to their village for the Christmas holidays and to interview the patriarch and matriarch of the family.

3.2 -- TWO FAMILIES: GRANDMOTHERS, MOTHERS, DAUGHTERS, AND GRANDDAUGHTERS

La Familia Talemantes:

Maternal Grandmother/Mother, Angelica

"Life is much easier with the newer technology. In 1964, I was

> *still using an oil stove, but in 1969, my husband bought me a gas stove. Before electricity was brought into the village in 1970, each family had their own well and they brought up water in buckets. After 1970, the village put in a common well with electricity. I remember ironing my clothes on a disk from a tractor and we still use that disk for cooking tortillas outside.*
>
> *Angelica, age 82*

Indeed, while I visited the family, I saw firsthand how tortillas were cooked on the tractor disc…the most delicious tortillas I have ever eaten. Angelica was 82 years of age when I met her, born in 1926 during the period 1900-1929, and was an only child who grew up on a hacienda in Guanajuato, Mexico where her parents worked for the owners as *peones*. Her favorite memories of the hacienda are when she was eight years old, she playing with the owner's daughter, and surrounded by peacocks and swan. She smiles as she describes a pool of water filled with fish and turtles, the sweet smell of alfalfa that was planted all around the hacienda and, and riding in coaches pulled by beautiful horses when the family needed to go off the hacienda.

Angelica remembers *bandoleros* and rebels during the years of unrest, after the Revolution, who would steal everything they could from the houses that they came upon. When bandits approached the hacienda, the village men would put the women down the well to protect them from being abducted. Houses used to be made of adobe and the few remaining adobe houses in the village, while windows to the past, are merely everyday structures to the people of the village. People didn't have to worry about food spoilage because adobe houses remain cool in the summer and warm in the winter. Everything

used to be made out of clay, and Angelica remembers that her mother would put two pieces of wood together over the fire outside, like a cross, and put her large clay pot on top to make tamales.

The stone Catholic Church that stands at the entry into the village was built in 1899 as part of the hacienda. During the Lazaro Cardenas administration, the hacienda was repossessed from the owner and divided up among the workers and the poor. While most of the hacienda was destroyed, the church, parts of the hacienda wall and a few adobe houses still stand in commemoration to a different time. The ashes of the patrón are buried in the Catholic Church in the nearby city and even now, a village family may leave money to the Church and request that the ashes of their dead loved one be buried in the Church.

Angelica has been married twice. Her first husband died of tuberculosis after five years of marriage and they produced two sons together. After the death of her first husband, Angelica was single for five years. Her second husband is fifteen years her senior and has also lived in the village all of his life, was married prior to his marriage to Angelica, and owned a family *ejido* plot.

Many years ago, she and her second husband owned many head of cattle, but a severe drought killed off most of them, now they have about 30 head of cattle, pigs, goats, horses, chickens and roosters. The roosters are used for fighting, the milk from the cows and goats is sold, and the pigs are slaughtered for food. Their youngest son is a veterinarian and lives with them while handling the milking, artificial insemination, and

the veterinary care of the animals. People from all over their village hire their son for veterinary services as he prefers to offer his services by word of mouth and barter for payment instead of having his own business licensed by the government; the government charges extremely high taxes on veterinary businesses and so, his way works best for him and his parents.

Angelica has had a total of ten offspring between her two marriages, four daughters and six sons, and only one son died. Of the four daughters, three have immigrated to California; their eldest daughter lives with her family in Indio, the other two daughters have resided in Salinas for some time, one daughter for twenty-seven years and youngest daughter for twelve years. The daughters who live in Salinas work in agriculture, while the eldest daughter, who lives in Indio, was able to move out of agriculture because of her training as a seamstress. Angelica's father died the year that their eldest daughter married and her mother died when she was over one hundred years of age almost twenty years later. No one really knows how old either parent really was because the one son who knew their correct ages died and the information died with him. All of their sons have good jobs in a nearby Guanajuato city, own their own businesses, or help on *el ranchito.* Angelica's husband is extremely proud of the fact that he sent all but one of his sons to school in order that they could have a better life than did he and his wife. Their son who did not attend college decided that he wanted to help his father manage the ranch.

Daughter/Mother, Alessandra

> *"I never wanted to marry a man who migrated for work. I hated how the men of the village stared at the women who had been left behind to handle things while their husbands or boyfriends were gone, to see which women had been left like a rifle, cocked and ready to go. They [the husbands and boyfriends] didn't have to worry that their woman would stray if she was left behind pregnant. As a woman began to show her pregnancy more, she stayed at home more just so the village men would not stare at them and make ugly comments. I did marry a man who migrated for work after all but I always hated those ugly words of the village men."*
>
> *Alessandra, age 56*

Alessandra, age 56, was born during the period 1942-1970, and recalled women's embarrassment for being pregnant while their husbands migrated from her small village in Guanajuato, Mexico, for work. Her husband began crossing the border when their first child was just thirty days old. He worked as undocumented for six to eight months at a time and she was left in her village to care for her first child, in addition to her second child two years later, and her third not long after that. Even though she lived with her in-laws, she cared for the children, fed all of the animals, ("a few cows, pigs, and chickens"), and also had to help her mother-in-law with cooking, (freshly-made tortillas every day), cleaning, washing clothes, sewing, and so many other things, in addition to her own work for herself and her children.

Alessandra, looking younger than her 56 years, is named after the daughter of the owner of the hacienda where her grandmother and mother were raised. She describes the

intoxicating smell of green alfalfa fields that spread out beyond her father's house in the village. She would run through the fields and end up at a river that ran through the fields, lay flat on the ground and drink from it to quench her thirst. She and her brother used to help her father cultivate the land after she finished helping their mother with the everyday duties of washing clothes, cooking, making homemade tortillas, and then going to the fields to pick crops such as potatoes, corn, and beans. One of her many duties was helping in the preparation of the land for the next crop. She would mix dirt with the help of two horses pulling a metal pick that would mix and loosen the land. At home, she would then have to walk the horses in circles around the garbanzo bean plants to loosen the beans from the vines and then pick everything up and place them in sacks. And finally, the wheat grains had to be picked up with a special machine.

Alessandra was educated through third grade because that was the highest grade offered in her village at that time, but her speech indicates a much higher education. Being from the same village, her husband was also schooled through the third grade. During the rainy season, it was very difficult to get transportation to and from the village; therefore, teachers did community service and lived in the village while they were teaching.

As a young teenager, Alessandra was chosen to be the queen for the village festival and her mother made her a lovely white dress with a red cape and two princesses sat next to her on a carriage wearing pink dresses. A highlight of her life and an event that Alessandra recalls with great joy, they rode on top of a carriage pulled all around the

streets of the village by two huge bulls in the parade. Alessandra began dating her husband when she was seventeen, but she has actually known him all of her life. At one time, her father was married to her husband's aunt and when the aunt died, her father married her mother, Angelica. Despite the fact that she and her husband are not related, her sisters are her husbands' cousins.

After she and her husband married, they moved in with her in-laws and lived in one small room. She only had one bed, a small piece of furniture to put clothes in, and a crib in the room. After a while, her father-in-law built her a small kitchen outside the house so she could cook in her own kitchen. When their third child was two years old, her husband received an offer to move to another state in Mexico to work a piece of land. After working in a group of men, the land was going to be theirs. Her husband didn't like the long hours and he also had noticed that their children were beginning to lose their social skills; one of the things that he noticed was that his children would hide behind the house when visitors arrived without notice. One day, he returned to visit his mother in their village and never returned to the state where he had been working and instead, began crossing the border again. Alessandra and their children were unaware that he was no longer working in the other State until one day, Alessandra's brother-in-law showed up and told her that her husband had gone back to California and had sent him to pick up her and the children, take them back to the village and leave them with his parents. For seven years, she remained with her in-laws as her husband used to come and go to work in California. For a decade and a half after their marriage, her husband sent as much

money as he could to her, and in addition, he hired someone to build her a house in the village. Shortly after the birth of their youngest daughter and fourth child, Alessandra and her children moved into their new house, and to this day, when the family returns to the village, they stay in the house that her husband built for her.

In 1987, after the passage of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act and five years after the completion of their house, the family moved to California, thanks to her father-in-law. Since he had been born in the U.S., he was able to arrange papers for all of his sons and their families. Alessandra, her husband and their four children arrived in California on one day and on the following day, were working in the fields picking grapes in Mecca, and then raisins, lemons, oranges and grapefruit. The entire family migrated to Gilroy to pick cucumbers, green beans and tomatoes, and then returned to Bakersfield to pick grapes again. She remembers that in Gilroy, they stayed at the rancher's camp that had seven little wooden houses where families would stay during the picking season. Doing household chores was difficult because everything was done by hand, including cooking and washing clothes.

Alessandra describes California cucumbers as horrible, messy plants with yellow flowers that would stain clothing so badly that she had a hard time removing the spots from their clothing. Cucumbers are difficult to harvest because the plant is near the ground and it's hard on your back, bending or even going on your knees, you are twisting back and forth around the plant to find the vegetable underneath. In addition, the buckets filled with cucumbers are very heavy to carry and it's difficult to fill the huge boxes at

the end of the row. Working as a family, her father received one paycheck for all of them.

Alessandra worked in the fields from Monday through Saturday and only had Sunday off to do household work. But she is used to hard work – she has always worked, but it was unpaid work. Living at home with her parents in Mexico and even after her marriage, she helped her parents cut alfalfa, feed the cows, and her father would give her alfalfa for her own cows in return. Her own parents have never come to the United States and still live in the same village where they were born. At one time, one of Alessandra's sisters wanted to bring their mother to California, but her mother refused saying that she was too old, not used to traveling, and it was not something that she wanted to do in her lifetime.

Overall, Alessandra talks about work in the fields as being very hard because of all of the dust and chemicals that affect the workers. One time, she had to go to the emergency room because some chemical had gotten into her eyes that gave her red eye and horrible itching. She was given a shot to help her with the allergic reaction, but she thinks that women are more sensitive to the chemicals. Alessandra feels that there are just some jobs that women cannot do and one of them called *anillada* and men have to drag themselves under the vines of the grapes and make a ring around the vine trunk with a knife so the vine can get sugar.

Adjusting to California life at her in-law's tiny apartment at the labor camp in Indio was difficult for Alessandra because she had to leave her children in the apartment in

order to work for wages in the fields. Prior to immigrating to California, she had always been able to do her sewing work at home and take care of her children at the same time. Initially, everyone shared the same living space with her in-laws since all of her father-in-law's sons and families immigrated at the same time. There were 32 people sharing a two bedroom apartment with a small kitchen, small living-room, and one bathroom. But, that was one of the reasons that made her decide to work because she felt trapped in such a small living space and working outside the home was her way out. In 1994, she and her husband bought a lovely home in Indio where they live to this day. After they moved into their house, her family's quality of life improved immensely. For the first time, she had privacy and did not have to share her living space with in-laws.

Alessandra moved from the field and into a packing house packing dates. After her youngest child was born, two years after their arrival in California, she didn't work during the summer but, instead, found a job as a seamstress in a bridal shop; she had been recommended by a friend was hired on the spot. She worked at the bridal shop for three years until she found out that the owners had lied to her about paying her social security. She was then hired at a hotel as a housekeeper, and later on she was recommended by her eldest daughter to a friend of her daughter's who owned a bed and breakfast where she has been working for eight years. Now, she only does private housekeeping for a few houses. Alessandra has no health insurance, but her husband has insurance through his work at a golf course as a gardener. Through connections that Alessandra had made, her husband was able to get an interview and he was hired and no longer had to work in

fields. Both Alessandra and her husband feel blessed to be out of the field, but nonetheless, their hearts remain in a small village in Guanajuato and they often visit.

Alesandra and her youngest daughter studied hard together during 2007, and each passed their citizenship exams. Alesandra had to find time to study after her work day, but together, mother and daughter buoyed each other to success and are now U.S. citizens.

Granddaughter/Daughter, Adelaida

> *"I am proud of coming from a family of hard workers in the fields. Thanks to my grandpa that was born… [in the United States] …I now have a better life. Working in the fields makes you appreciate every-thing you have in life from friends, other people and things. It gives you a different perspective on life that you would not want to change from anything. And it encourages you to give your best every day to make this world a better one for you and your loved ones. The lessons of life, working hard and getting paid less encourages you to seek education and makes you hungry to progress in life and give your family another choice in life. Many families emigrate every day dreaming about a better life for their children. This was my parent's dream and it became true thanks to their hard job."* *Adelaida, age 33*

Thirty-three year old Adelaida, the middle sibling between two brothers and two sisters, was born during the period 1971-present and was twelve years old when her family immigrated to California in 1987 to a life completely different than where she was born and raised until the time of the family's immigration. As she describes the small village in Guanajuato where she was born, and spent her first twelve years, her face lights up. Green fields of alfalfa and corn behind her grandparent's house, a big garden that her

grandmother tended next to their house with big peach, fig, guava, nectarine, lemon and orange fruit trees, grandma's cows, horses, goats, pigs, rabbits, turkeys, chickens, cats and dogs, all made her life very good. At the time, however, she didn't appreciate everything she had – the appreciation of her background came at the price of very hard work.

Now the evenings spent with all of her cousins at her grandmother's house, playing, running, and hiding in the patio, are joyous memories that she treasures deeply. And despite the fact that she grew up in a small adobe house with only two bedrooms, a living room and a small kitchen with a small oven, without any fancy furniture, without a refrigerator or television, she loved her childhood. Most days were spent at school and after school, she helped her mother with household duties such as cleaning, washing, and babysitting her little sister, and then there was time to play with cousins and friends. At the time, she didn't miss anything that she didn't have because all she wanted was to play and have a good time. But, when she was twelve, her world changed when her parents decided that living in California was better for the family and a chance for a better future for all of them.

After making arrangements for green cards, the day came without warning when Adelaida had to leave the only world she knew; she didn't even get to walk in graduation from elementary school. Not knowing what was going to happen when she moved to a different country was a frightening experience and one that she will never forget. She and her family moved into her father's parent's apartment in Indio – in an old labor camp

in Indio – with only two bedrooms, one tiny living room, a small bathroom with a shower and a small kitchen. It wasn't only her family of seven people that moved into the apartment, but also twenty-five other relatives that immigrated at the same time. With all of her cousins, uncles and aunts, there were thirty-two people living in the same little apartment. Adelaida says, "we are talking about spending quality time with the family – a complete zoo trying to get ready every morning to go to school, eating meals and sleeping at night." When everyone was lying down at night to sleep, there was no room to walk around the apartment to use the restroom or even get a glass of water. But this only lasted until everyone earned enough money to get places of their own.

The language barrier was extremely difficult for Adelaida. She always took bilingual classes because she believed that she would eventually return to Mexico and she wouldn't need English any longer, so why bother to learn it. Instead, she worried about her parents working in the fields and being treated differently by others and her anger kept her from trusting and believing in others. Because there were few cars in her village and so many in her new country, she had constant fear that her parents would be hurt or killed in an auto accident. She did her best to help her parents to make things better and that's when she began to value her childhood and the kindness of her aunts and uncles when they would bring gifts back from California to her village.

Adelaida disliked moving from place to place to follow the grapes. They had to live with relatives again, share transportation, sleep on floors, and wash clothes by hand after working all day picking grapes…only the town changed and she had no choice in the

matter. Adelaida began working at the age of thirteen with a school permit issued during the summer months. Her father told her that he wanted her to have the experience of working in the fields so that she would see how hard it was and to instill in her how important it was to have an education.

She remembers going to Watsonville and the family living in a small camp outside the city. Each family lived in a small house that had two bedrooms, a small kitchen, and a small living room; the entire camp shared one bathroom that was outside and made of steel sheets divided in half, one side for the men and the other for the women. Each side had two showers without any walls to divide the showers from the toilet. In the back of the restrooms, there was a semi-sink that was mainly used for washing clothes by hand. The houses were made of wood with no insulation, heaters, air conditioning units or furniture and the families were given only two old mattresses, a small refrigerator and a stove.

Picking cucumbers was very hard, not only because of the hot sun, but because you had to do it on your knees and the wet leaves of the plants left your pants all wet. If you were picking cucumbers standing up, constantly bending over would kill you as the day wore on. The buckets were heavy and the rows of the field were so long to carry the heavy buckets to the end of the row to leave the cucumbers in the big wooden box that sometimes it seemed the day would never end. No water was offered to the workers and the restrooms in the field were in horrible condition. Adelaida followed the crops for two summers in a row, but after that, she cared for her younger sister and brother while her

parents, older brother and sister picked grapes in the fields. Cooking food and making sure her little brother and sister were well taken care of was not easy for Adelaida, but it was easier than working in the hot sun six days a week.

When Adelaida turned seventeen, she decided to look for a job training program that would give her skills to do office work. The following year she worked in a daycare center, and then she was offered a job at the college that she was attending after graduating from high school. Later, she worked for a hospital and now, she works for a hospice. She didn't learn English until she went to college because, after all, she believed she would be returning to Mexico. But, when she realized that the notion of returning to her village was just a dream, she knew she would have to learn the language of the country she was living in now in order to have a better quality of life.

Adelaida has, indeed, made good use of her adopted language. She nearly completed her nursing degree, but then decided that nursing wasn't what she wanted to do. She is quite the business woman and has been able to purchase a new car and pay it off, and while she was married, she and her husband bought a new home together. After her divorce, she retained title of the house and the fact that it has a good deal of equity because of the housing boom that has been going on for several years in Coachella Valley, adds to her success. To help make ends meet, Adelaida has rented bedrooms in her home to friends and/or relatives and has been able to furnish her home with new furniture, go in with neighbors to replace the wooden fence with a block wall fence that surrounds their properties, and hired help to build a covered patio behind her home. She

always has time to help family members, especially her father's parents who live in "the old camp." Because neither grandparent speaks English, she often translates at doctor's appointments or helps in any situation that calls for translation. A remarkable young woman, she has made the difficulties of immigration to a new country work for her.

La Familia Palomares:

Maternal Grandmother/Mother, Cierra

"I never knew my parents or my grandparents. My only uncle never told me what happened – all I know is that they died." *Cierra, age 76*

I sat down to interview the three generations of Palomares women in the dining-room of Catalina, the daughter of matriarch, Cierra. Cierra, a frail, seventy-six year old woman, asked her daughter and granddaughter to prepare some cookies and iced tea for all of us. The family had just purchased their favorite cookies in bulk at a favorite *panadería* in Santa Maria during a visit over the weekend. Cierra, wanted to be interviewed in her daughter's house because she was embarrassed to have me come to the labor camp in Indio. In her perception of class difference, she was embarrassed for me to see the conditions in which she lives and had no idea that I knew other people in the labor camp and had visited there many times. Similarly, when I visited the village of the Talemantes family in Mexico, their relatives were, at first, embarrassed that I was

allowed to see the conditions of their village and the way they live, but their immediate perception of class differentiation lessened the longer I was there…or at least, I wanted to believe it had lessened.

Cierra was born in 1932 in a small pueblo in Michoacán, Mexico during the period 1930-1941. She never knew her parents and knows nothing about them or her grandparents except that they died; she was raised by an older sister. She remembers that she never attended school because she had to take care of her brothers, and she went into waged work at the age of fifteen cleaning the house of a teacher in her town in order to help her sister. Cierra married her husband, Jaime, in 1957 at the age of twenty-five and have been married for fifty years. She tried to attend classes at school after marriage, but she found it very difficult for her to learn since she couldn't attend classes every day and by the time she would go back to class, she had already forgotten what she learned the last time she attended.

Cierra and her husband, who was born in 1927, have eight children together, five girls and three boys; the oldest offspring is sixty-six, while the youngest is forty-three. Three of their sons and three of their daughters attended nine years of formal schooling, while one daughter attended through eighth grade. Two daughters speak both English and Spanish and one of them went to college and received her nursing degree. Cierra's husband worked as a *bracero* in California and continued to work in California even after the program ended. Jaime's father also worked in California during the *bracero* years. In 1972, her husband arranged legal documents for Cierra and five of their children, but

she was forced to leave three of their children in Mexico. She brought the youngest children with her and left the three eldest children in Mexico until her husband could arrange to bring them to California. The rancher that her husband worked for gave her husband the letter to support legal papers for herself and five of the children and then eight years later, she was able arrange papers for her three oldest sons.

When Cierra first came to California, she and her family lived near the city of Davis where she worked the tomato machines. But it wasn't long before she and her husband decided to move to the Coachella Valley because she was afraid of the heavy rains and thunder in Davis. At first they lived in a trailer park named *La Ciudad Perdida* (the lost city) near Mecca and have moved to follow the crops in different cities such as Sacramento for the picking of tomatoes, Watsonville to pick apples, San Jose to pick pears, Gilroy to pick garlic and onions, Hollister to pick nectarines, peaches and plums, and all over the Coachella Valley where they picked lemons, grapefruit and grapes. They eventually moved to the labor camp in Indio where only farm laborers are allowed to live.

Cierra's working day began around 5:00 a.m., when she would get up and prepare her lunch (usually burritos) and get her two young daughters ready to go to work with her. Unfortunately, due to the lack of information about assistance with baby-sitting, she took her two young daughters to work with her. On her first break, she would go to the car to check on them to see if they were awake and give them breakfast and turn on the radio for them so they could hear the soaps or any other program on the radio between 7:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. At lunch time, she would check on them again and make sure they

were alright. When she picked pears and the weather was nicer, she made sure her daughters got some sunshine.

After coming back from work, she would pick things up around the apartment, and if they had furniture, she would make the bed. But sometimes, they wouldn't have any kind of furniture so she would fold up the cover that they used as a bed. Then she would cook something quick for dinner, wash dishes and prepare something for the next morning to eat. She would go grocery shopping a few times during the week because her check wasn't big enough to buy a lot of food at once. She would then fold the dirty clothes in bags so she could go to the laundromat and then, she would start all over again the next day.

Working from Monday through Saturday, Cierra would rest a little bit on Sunday and then go to the city to shop before coming back home to prepare food for the next morning. As her children got older, the entire family worked in the field as a group together packing grapes or picking lemons together. During all the years that she worked in the fields, there were always "legal" and "non-legal" people waiting to work for the rancher. For that reason, she always worked as a team with her family in order to get a decent income for her household. Despite the heat and cold, Cierra never really minded working in the fields because she loved being out-of-doors, she began her work early in the morning and finish early in the day, and could then go home, take care of her kids and spend more time with them. She is very proud that the Mexican people know how to

work hard to put fresh vegetables on the tables of millions of people since not everyone can be a receptionist, clerk, or somebody with a career.

Cierra had to stop working in the fields when she became disabled due to surgery on her knees. When working in citrus, she would put a lot of weight on her knees when she picked lemons and grapefruit and put them into big sacks. She began receiving social security checks at the age of sixty and despite the fact that she always worked more than forty hours per week; she was ineligible for insurance benefits because she was only a temporary worker.

Daughter/Mother, Catalina

> *"My husband told me that I didn't have to work after we got married, that I could be a homemaker and take care of our family. So, I did stay home for a while, but I got bored and went back to work…I don't work out of necessity, but now that my husband is disabled, my income does help because we like material things."* *Catalina, age 42*

Catalina, aged 42 at the time that I interviewed her, came to California with her mother, Cierra, in 1972 at the age of seven. Born during the period 1942-1970, Catalina remembers going to the fields with her mom during her early childhood and having fun playing with the vegetables. She went back and forth to Mexico with her family and liked living in both places. In California, Catalina and her family moved from place to place for work in cities such as Davis, Hollister, Watsonville, and Coachella Valley. She

remembers her father picking almonds, all kinds of vegetables and fruit and her mother was always working alongside him.

At the age of seventeen, Catalina married her husband and they have five children together; the entire family is bilingual, speaking both Spanish and English. Catalina attended classes through the eighth grade and her husband finished high school in Coachella. Her husband was born in the Coachella Valley as were their three daughters and he used to work for Pepsi-Cola, but injured his back on the job, and is now on permanent disability.

While working at a roofing and tile company, Catalina met her soon-to-be husband who was also working at the company. After they married, she worked in the fields picking grapes and bell peppers, and also worked as a housekeeper. She stopped working in 1987 to raise her children, and began working again in 2000. Now she works as a maid for two households: "One day of my regular work is as hard as the work my mom did in the fields." Catalina rises early at 6:00 a.m. and arrives at work by 7:00 a.m. She prepares breakfast for one of the families and sets the table, and then she picks up and washes the breakfast dishes, does the cleaning around the house, buys the groceries for the house and makes sure that everything is done before she finishes the day. When she finishes with her housekeeping position, she goes home and cooks and cleans again at her own house, but at least her family helps her with the home duties.

When Catalina and her husband married, he told her that she didn't have to work if she didn't want to because he had a good job and therefore she could afford to remain

home and raise her family; the idea of housework did not seem like real work to either Catalina or her husband. She did, in fact, stay home for some time, but because she was used to working hard, boredom got the best of her and she decided to go back to work in the fields. She also decided to go back to waged work again because she likes to have more material things for her family and she wanted to help her husband since he is unable to work any longer. Two of their daughters have finished high school, and one daughter has gone on to attend classes at College of the Desert in Palm Desert. Catalina took both of her oldest daughters to work in the field during their summer vacations from school so they would be able to appreciate the hard work and see how important it is to finish school. She didn't want her daughters to work full time in the fields because she knows fieldwork is hard, the pay is poor, and she wanted her daughters to have options that she never had. According to Catalina, there are advantages and disadvantages to working in the fields. If you work in the fields, you begin your day early and finish your day early, and if you know how to pick the type of fruit, you can make money, plus, you get paid weekly. One the other hand, if you work in a fast food restaurant, even though you get paid less, you are ensured to work your eight hours, you don't have to work in bad weather, and the job is not so backbreaking.

Catalina and her husband own a two-story home in a working-class area of Coachella with three bedrooms, three bathrooms, a living-room and kitchen. Because of the housing boom in the Coachella Valley during the nineties and early two thousand, most

new houses are large and priced to sell; many farm workers were able to purchase homes in the City of Coachella because of housing affordability.

Catalina's home has a welcoming appeal, with furniture that has been well kept, white tile flooring throughout the house, and colorful throw rugs are arranged in creative, comfortable settings; her husband meticulously keeps up the landscaping around their home since he is no longer working outside the home. Catalina says that she knows she could have had a better life than she has now, but she never liked school and decided not to take advantage of the programs and scholarships that were offered to her in order to secure a career. The irony now is that her daughter wants to attend college, but they don't qualify for financial aid because her income is in the "medium" range and they would have to pay for everything. It was worth it for Catalina's parents to bring them to the United States because they have had the chance to build a better life and even though she likes to visit their village in Michoacán, Mexico, she loves living in California. The difference is that you have more material things here than in Michoacán and that makes her life "easier and more pleasant."

Granddaughter/Daughter, Carolina

> *"I didn't mind sharing the same living space with aunts and uncles at my grandmother's bungalow at the labor camp. I had fun playing with my cousins and all of us attending Mass together in a tent at the labor camp. After Mass, it seemed like a party because there was lots and lots of great food. It seemed like there was more communication in our family back then that brought us all together every Sunday. I even loved going to school because it was right next to grandma's bungalow."* *Carolina, age 22*

Twenty-two year old, Carolina has great memories of the labor camp in Indio where her grandmother, Cierra, still lives. Carolina was born in Riverside during the period 1971-present, finished high school in Coachella, took classes for two years at the College of the Desert in Palm Desert, and speaks both Spanish and English. She works for a spa in a hotel and would like to continue school, however right now, she is taking a break from classes until after her baby is born. After the baby's birth, she is planning to go back to massage therapy school. The only place she has ever lived is in the Coachella Valley – in the cities of Indio, Coachella, and Palm Desert.

Carolina remembers the first time she went to work in the fields picking green beans in the Coachella Valley. It was very hard work and the cold weather and early hours made the work all the more difficult. When she was sixteen, she went to pick grapes in Mecca during her vacation from school in the humidity and hot temperatures that Mecca is known for – it was extremely hard work. She had to wear a long-sleeved shirt and covered her face with cloth for protection from the mosquitoes as she packed the grapes. She was terrified of the snakes and spiders that made their homes in the vines. Her experience in the fields has given her more respect for her grandmother and mom for giving her a better life and after she finished high school, she decided not to go back to the fields.

Carolina is married to a twenty-six year old man from Argentina who is working towards legal status and, like his wife, speaks both Spanish and English. He works for an electrical company that also has their employees paint houses, lay tile and other work

finishing new houses. They live in a two bedroom apartment with one small kitchen, a living room, and one bathroom; Carolina occasionally cleans the apartment and she is thankful that her husband helps her around the house. Carolina sometimes cooks, but often, the two of them eat at her mother's house with her family. Like her mother, Catalina, and her grandmother, Cierra, wanted for their daughters, Carolina wants a better future for her child and she does not want her child to work in the fields.

4.3 – SUMMARY

NINE WOMEN, THREE GENERATIONS, FOUR HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

The life histories presented in this chapter demonstrate changing roles of Spanish-speaking women in California and Mexico across four generations beginning in the early twentieth century. The women in this study have managed to balance life in diverse ways, and portray multiple realities that give insight into their lives of unpaid domestic and wage work. Through generational oral and life histories, we are better able to identify similarities and differences among different generations of Spanish-speaking women in farm working households.

The women I interviewed follow in the footsteps of many immigrant women from many different countries that come to the United States for a better life. Ideological and monetary aspects of women's work are in play and are portrayed in the words of Magdalena (born during the period 1900-1929), "I have never worked" at the beginning of this chapter, as well as in the words of Catalina (born during the period 1941-1970),

"My husband told me I didn't have to work after marriage" towards the end of the chapter. The idea of "women's work" being less valuable than other kinds of work threads its way throughout women's lives. Lourdes Benería (1985:120-121) discusses the paradoxical words "I don't work" or "my mother/wife doesn't work" that permeates the notion of "women's work." Work, in this instance means "participation in paid production, an income-earning activity" (Ibid.). Defined this way, work also has to do with the propensity to regard women's work both secondary and subordinate to men's regardless of the fact that a woman may be working more hours than anyone in her household, particularly if she is also engaged in wage work.

Benería (1985:133-140) maintains that there has been an undervaluation of women's work and that unpaid domestic work ought to receive the same attention of other types of "use-value production." The emphasis on the economic significance of women's unpaid domestic work, combined with wage work, brings to light the interconnectiveness of the "public" and "private" spheres, as well as the role of women "in the reproduction and daily maintenance of the labor force – a fundamental point being that household production lessens the cost of maintenance and production" (Ibid.).

> "A full understanding of these implications leads to the conclusion that whether we are dealing with agricultural production or domestic work, within a polygamous household or a nuclear family, use-value production generates 'social relations between people' and therefore forms part of 'the categories of economics.' Once this is understood, it is still possible to differentiate between activities that are directly related to capital accumulation and those that are not, or between that part of the labor force that produces exchange values and the part that is engaged in use-value production." Benería 1985:134

In Mexico, a woman's unpaid domestic work, as well as her ability to sustain the homefront, contributes to the freeing of household members to migrate for wage labor in California agribusiness. On the other hand, in California, a Spanish-speaking woman's participation in a family agricultural wage unit, while she works many additional hours performing unpaid domestic responsibilities and childrearing, make it possible for a farm working family to vie for work that is highly competitive and correlates well with the research of others (Ruiz 1987; Fernandez-Kelly 1983a and 1983b; Garcia 1992; Zlolniski 2004). My research finds that Spanish-speaking women enter the labor force for a variety of reasons and remain in the workforce as many of them are heads of households, something that Fisher (1953) did not take into consideration; I interviewed women in their 60s who continued to work in the fields of Coachella Valley despite the fact that their husbands and other members of the household are also working. Just as any family in the United States, it often takes multiple wage earners to keep things afloat.

Within the space of one generation, Spanish-speaking women emerged as pioneers in their own right by taking the reins of home and family during the long absences of husbands migrating for work, or migrating along with husbands or other family members to find work and a better life in the United States. Spanish-speaking women and their families adapted to difficult economic and political situations using a variety of strategies, among them being the national and international migration of family members or entire families and women turning to wage work in the formal and informal economic sectors. One thing is evident, family strategies continually evolve as circumstances

warrant it. My next chapter examines the role of women in community development and maintenance, highlighting the decisions made by Spanish-speaking women between family, community, and work in negotiating a better life for themselves and their families.

Chapter 5:

Women at the Well: Community Life in a Rural California Town

It was in the raw conditions of early California that women of different ethnicities and experiences gradually, and with little acknowledgement, contributed to the building of community life and relations throughout the State. The lives and contributions of women in California have been largely overlooked by writers who mainly focused on topics of the historical West such as exploration, mining, agriculture, and railroading (Schlissel, Ruiz, and Monk 1988:1). Indeed, while doing archival research for my dissertation, I was able to glean from records sufficient data to re-construct the history of the exploration of the Coachella Valley, the railroads, mining, agriculture, White and Japanese immigrant settlement of the Valley. However, I found scant reference regarding the settlement of the Valley by the Mexican population and what little information I did find concentrates mainly on the settlement contributions of Mexican males.

Mexican families arrived in the Coachella Valley from Mexico during the late 19th and early 20th centuries for men to work on the construction of the area's railroad and, with the discovery of artesian water sources, work in burgeoning agricultural sector. Only passing references in published and unpublished document are made to their arrival and it is only through the recent efforts of the Coachella Valley Historical Society and the Palm Springs Historical Society that we finally find documentation of the Mexican population

and their contribution to the settlement of the Valley. The lives and participation of Mexican women in the settlement of communities throughout the Coachella Valley remain, for the most part, invisible – these women are the women of farm working families who either labored in agribusiness or remained within the family domain to keep the family together, both in California and Mexico.

Today, in large and small communities throughout California, women's contributions to the building and maintenance of community life continues. This chapter focuses on a small farm worker community in Eastern Coachella Valley called Mecca and highlights how Spanish-speaking women of farm working families negotiate between family, work, and community roles. I illustrate the multitude of ways that women in this farm working community work to improve and create a better quality of life for their families and the community at large through family, social, and work networks. Through the lives of the women themselves, we view their journey from family to community through their strategies for community building and how they "link family concerns to a wider network of resources" (Pardo 1993:108).

5.0 – WOMEN AND COMMUNITY IN MECCA

Maria Luz Santiago – the Journey Begins at one Community School

Maria Luz proudly presented me with the CD that contained the genealogy of her and her husband's families. She and seven other women in the ESL (English as a Second Language) class were instructed by the school librarian/computer technician on how to

use the PowerPoint program and her CD was the result of three months of computer training. When I returned to Sister Esperanza Jasso's little trailer across the street from the school where I was living at the time, I placed the CD into my laptop and waited endless seconds for the program to come up and reveal the gem I had been waiting for. It's one thing to talk about families, but it's an entirely different thing to put faces on the names, and there in front of me were all of the people that Maria Luz had talked about over the years that I have known her. But, when I came upon Maria Luz' graduation picture with her parents when she became a nurse, and her wedding picture, I was overwhelmed. How beautiful she was in her nurse's uniform flanked by her beaming parents, and she was stunning in her white wedding dress (made by her mother), her head covered by an intricate lace veil, standing alongside her newly pronounced husband on the white steps of an absolutely magnificent cathedral…her life lay before her. The birth of four children and a hard life in the fields were yet to show, and on her young face there was only joy.

It was April and a comfortable 79 degrees and the sun shown down upon the surrounding mountains and painted them shades of coral. Only the lack of vegetation hinted at the hellish summer heat to come. This is the day that I first met Maria Luz Santiago in Sister Esperanza's classroom at the oldest school in the community. Sister had told me that I should expect a new student on this day and when Maria Luz hesitantly entered the classroom of the Parent Center. With her youngest son in tow clutching her hand, Maria Luz walked over to where Sister Esperanza was sitting and introduced

herself and her son, Tomás, and affirmed that she had come to enroll in ESL classes. Her son, holding tightly to one of her hands, hid his head within the folds of his mother's skirt while she comforted him with her other hand. I will never forget this meeting with Maria Luz and her shy son – it was the first among many classes where Maria Luz and I would exchange Spanish and English and which led to the forging of a bond that has connected her family with mine.

Maria Luz was born in Mexico DF to Otomí parents. Her parents married when her mother was seventeen years old and the union produced nine offspring – three girls and six boys. Maria Luz' father was an agricultural laborer for several years and then became a taxi driver while her mother remained in the home caring for their children and maintaining their home. When Maria Luz was twelve years old, her father left the family and her mother became the sole breadwinner for her nine children. Her mother had always sewn the family clothes and so she was able to turn to sewing for income and was eventually asked to work as a seamstress in a wedding shop to sew wedding dresses. Maria Luz and her brothers were deeply aware of their mother's hardship and did as much as they could to help her by selling covers for car dash boards that they made by hand.

Maria Luz's grandmother had thirteen children, but only four survived childbirth. Her grandmother died in childbirth leaving the four children to basically fend for themselves; Maria Luz' mother learned at an early age to care for family members and was always the first to offer help to anyone in need. Because they lived in an isolated rural area, there

were no hospitals or clinics nearby and the benefit of a doctor delivering or treating a pregnancy was not an option and the result was a high rate of infant death. When her grandmother was a young mother, there were only alternative medicines from natural herbs and many times, it just wasn't enough. The circumstances of her life were the driving force behind Maria Luz's desire to become a nurse.

Most of Maria Luz' brothers have earned degrees at the University in computer science and engineering while one of her sisters is a seamstress just like their mother. Both sets of grandparents, Maria Luz' and her husband's, worked in agriculture; her husband's grandparents farmed in his home community in Oaxaca and Maria Luz' in Mexico DF. Both owned land and grew vegetables and grains, beans, corn and green peppers. The two grandfathers also crossed the border to work and initiated a continuing pattern of migration to California.

Maria Luz and her husband have been married for almost twenty years. They have three children together and two children from her husband's previous relationship. When they decided to immigrate to the United States in the early 1990s for a better quality of life, her husband had already been working as a farm laborer in California agribusiness since the early 1980s in Mecca and the surrounding area. At first they followed the crops from Northern to Southern California and Mexicali: Indio, Mexicali, Sacramento and many other places throughout California. However, once a family of migrant workers, they are among the Mexican migrant workers who have left behind their "circular migration practices" to make a home for their family (Palerm 1999:56) – the decision to

remain in the small farm worker community in Eastern Coachella Valley in order that their children would be able grow up in one place. They made the decision to stay in the Coachella Valley and have resided there since 2002.

When I first met Maria Luz and her family, they rented a house just on the outskirts of the Mecca community. The house is reputed to once have been a haven for drug pushers, but she made the place her own. At the time of my first visit with Maria Luz at her house in 2004, I walked into an approximately 15' by 10' living room that was sparsely furnished with a large couch and love-seat, a small wooden table used for eating with three chairs situated around it, the smell of spices from a cooking meal filled the room from the kitchen. A wooden credenza-type set-up held a medium sized television set, radio, pictures, and various knick-knacks. The living room opens up into a fairly large rectangular shaped kitchen with an older refrigerator and stove and an ice chest on the floor to keep soft drinks ice cold. Another room extends from the living room that has a fireplace, is unfurnished and quite dark. An additional room extends off of this room and is separated by a wall that rises about four feet above the floor and inside the room was a mattress with clothes strewn all over. I noticed a young man sleeping on the mattress as Maria Luz led me through the room with the fireplace to one of the bedrooms where her youngest son, Tomás, was sleeping.

Tomás was sleeping in a crib and nearby was an unmade double bed. Beyond the bed and crib were two smaller beds and a doorway that led into a bathroom. All of the rooms in the house were fairly dark except for the kitchen that was well lit by the sun streaming

in through two large windows. Once beautiful marble flooring is throughout the house but many pieces are broken or just not there any longer and the walls of the house are a dingy yellowish-tan. It appears that the house was originally very beautiful but through years of non-repair, it is no longer the "dream" house it may have been at one time. Each time I have since visited Maria Luz and her family, the house reflects on-going economic changes in the household and the members whose lives depend upon the ups and downs of agribusiness. From the colorful table place settings that now are part of their routine for entertaining visitors, to the new DVD player in the living room; over the past two and a half years that I have known the family, there have been many noticeable changes.

Maria Luz' husband works in agribusiness as a foreman and his position is fairly secure – as secure as one can be in a business that wildly fluctuates. Maria Luz has worked at a date packing house in the area, but quit working at the packing house because of what she called "the indignities of the job." She gave as an example the better jobs and hours given to workers that the *mayordomas* gave to some workers while they gave the worst hours to those workers that they didn't like. She liked the date company very much, however, the working conditions put forward by the packing house boss made it intolerable for her. Maria Luz has also worked as a library clerk for the Apostolic Church in Mecca. When Maria Luz was working outside the home, her husband would help care for their children part of the time after his work hours while during the morning hours, when she was working, the children attended school. But, now that she is no longer working for wages, she maintains the house that twelve people live

in: Maria Luz and her husband, their six children (two are from her husband's first marriage), as well as five older relatives who work with her husband in the fields. Maria Luz does all of the cooking for the household but the children do the clean-up and the dishes, and the five relatives do their own laundry.

During the children's summer vacation, Maria Luz's husband takes his two oldest sons back to Oaxaca to see their mother and to visit his own family. Gifts from California are taken to relatives and gifts from Oaxaca are brought back to California for family and friends. During the time her husband is away, Maria Luz is entirely responsible for the well-being of their three children and will sometimes take the bus to visit her own family in Sacramento while her husband is in Mexico. She worries the entire time that her two step-sons will remain in Mexico and, from her point of view, lose the chance for a better life. But, so far, each summer they have returned with their father. Likewise, it is not easy for the mother of the Maria Luz's step-sons; she would like her sons to stay with her in Mexico, but also agrees with her ex-husband that they have a better life with him and his present wife in California. The situation is not only difficult for her, but also for her sons who, each summer, wrestle with the idea of remaining in Oaxaca where things are familiar. The complex choices that members of farm working families make to keep family relations vital and in tact are never easy ones, but decisions are made, nonetheless, to best fit the situation at hand.

On a morning in April, 2002, Maria Luz changed her home routine and drove to Mecca Elementary School where her children are enrolled, and began her journey from

household to community as she walked through the door of the Parent Center and introduced herself to Sister Esperanza and me. Along the way, she became part of numerous community networks that she, most likely, would not have become a part of had it not been for her decision to learn English. Many people that she has met through Sister's program have become important in her and her family's lives and they have mitigated some of the loneliness that she felt. But before I continue with Maria Luz and how she and others claimed their community, it is necessary that I explain the importance of Mecca Elementary School and its place in Mecca.

5.1 -- MECCA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: THE HEART OF THE COMMUNITY

Brian Haley (1997:236), in his discussion of the school system in the community of Shandon, California, has emphasized the nature of the school system as "the principle agent of inclusion, integration, acculturation, and accommodation…." Public education offers, through its curriculum, "instruction in a common history, language, geography, and symbols of national identity that inculcate a sense of shared community both locally and nationally" (Ibid.). As in Shandon and other communities throughout California, Mecca Elementary School advances the notion of a shared community by adhering to California State Content Standards. But more than that, the school has been the site for community meetings and celebrations, dances for students and adults, festivals, Quinceneras, bake sales, political rallies, after school and summer programs for the school kids, and more. The purpose of the coming together of the residents at the school

may have changed over the years since Mecca became a community, but since its inception, it has always been the heart of the community.

The Growth of Mecca School

Mecca school was built in 1902 and was initially a one-room school house, located at the corner of Highway 195 and Hammond Road (Foulkes 1985:27). One instructor was responsible for teaching all eight grades in the beginning. In 1909, the school was moved to its present site on Coahuilla Street and divided into two rooms, a woodshop was built that was eventually converted into a classroom in 1913, but it wasn't until 1940 that additional structures were erected: a three classroom structure replaced the older units and an administration building was constructed as well. The administration building was destroyed by fire in 1959 along with student and personnel files, and classroom records but was rebuilt the following year. In 1952, five classrooms and a kitchen were added along with three more classrooms in 1957. Since the 1980s and until 2006, the campus has consisted of fourteen buildings that housed thirty-one classrooms. A huge multipurpose room is used as the cafeteria and for community gatherings, and there is a well-stocked school library directly next to a small Riverside County Library. The Coachella Valley Recreation District oversees the swimming pool and basketball courts, in addition to a baseball field that is well used year-round by Mecca residents, particularly in the summer evenings when the heat of the sun somewhat softens.

During the summer of 2006, the school was given a major facelift. All of the classrooms were cleaned of asbestos and newly painted. The boys and girls bathrooms were modernized with new fixtures and tile, Sister Esperanza's Parent Center classroom was renovated and painted, and the rats that left their callings in the kitchen and in Sister Esperanza's classroom during night-time hours were finally eradicated. There was more to do, but as the summer of 2006 came to an end and the new school year was ready to begin, the remaining work, such as a new administration building, would wait until the summer of 2007. Meanwhile, the children, teachers, staff, and residents of Mecca have a school that they can be proud of, one that no longer appears as if it were part of a forgotten past.

Graduate Students in the Desert

The ESL program is taught by Sister Esperanza Jasso, a Catholic nun of the order of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, who I met shortly after I entered into long-term fieldwork in the Coachella Valley and who lives in the farm worker community of Mecca. She has been living in a small mobile home, at the former site of the community Catholic Church, across the street from the school for over ten years and she is a conduit between the people of the community and organizations within and outside of the community. I first met her when my colleague, Travis DuBry and I were working on the beginning stages of our dissertation fieldwork together. The two of us met Sister Esperanza through Kathryn Azevedo, then a social sciences graduate student from the University of California, Irvine, who at the time, was living in the community and doing her dissertation fieldwork

on issues of farm worker health. Both DuBry (2004) and Azevedo (2000) have since received their doctorates and both collaborated with Sister Esperanza on projects relating to improving the conditions of the community residents as part of giving back to the community that they were studying. DuBry's dissertation, "The New Pioneers of Mecca: Farm Laborers in the California Desert," and his book, "Immigrants, Settlers, and Laborers: The Socioeconomic Transformations of a Farming Community" are the definitive written sources on the community of Mecca. Patrick Linder, a University of California, Riverside graduate student in Anthropology, is presently doing his dissertation fieldwork in Mecca.

The community work that my colleagues and I were and are involved in is not unusual for anthropologists, for it is often the case that there is a strong desire to give something back to the community by attempting a more reciprocal relationship. Volunteering my time to the community to ensure a "give and take" relationship began at the school with Sister Esperanza who allowed me to collaborate with her in her program "Empowerment of Migrant Women through Education" at the school's Parent Center.

Parent Center at Mecca Elementary School

The Parent Center came about because of the need to bring Mecca parents into a relationship with the educational system. The parents were long concerned about the education that their children were receiving, however, their lack of knowledge "about the educational system…kept them away or absent from school life" (Sister Esperanza,

January 2005 field notes). Sponsored by the Coachella Valley Unified School District, several educators from Mecca School in 1997, including Sister Esperanza and the then principal of the school, attended a workshop in Sacramento at the invitation of the California Department of Education, called "Family-School-Community Partnership." Educators from all over the District attended as well and as a result of the workshop, Sister Esperanza, with the encouragement and support of the school principal, put the theories behind the workshop into action and began teaching English as a Second Language classes, as well as preparing some parents for citizenship.

Sister Esperanza told me that because of the workshop, the Parent Center functions as an "interactive skill-training program for parents to help them to become active partners in the education of their children" (Ibid.). The parent's involvement results in: a) their collaboration with teachers and participation and commitment to the school through the attendance of workshops provided by the District and, b) their children's improved performance in the classroom. The Parent Center is the place where the parents of the community may come and talk about problems that they are having with their children, their children's teachers, or just problems in general. They come for ESL, parenting skills, and any help that will positively affect their lives. Sister Esperanza's degree in child psychology is an asset and she is able to assess and diffuse problems and she often shares her insights with the school principal. However, after her tenure at the Parent Center for over ten years, Sister Esperanza is thinking seriously about relinquishing her volunteer position. The success of Sister's program propelled the District to create parent

centers at all of the District schools, but new personnel in the District do not know the history of her program and the reasons for its success, and are attempting a "one-size fit all" approach that strays from the parameters of Sister's approach and makes it a completely different program.

In order to promote the "one-size fit all" approach, the head of the District's Parent Resource Center asked that migrant and immigrant women from Sister's program and from Mecca School be chosen to have additional training with PEP (Parent Education Program) at the Parent Resource Center in Thermal. Maria Luz was included in the number of women who accepted the partnering with PEP along with the woman who heads the Parent Resource Center. The woman expected Mecca community women to put in the same hours as the District women who work for salary…these community women who are encumbered with extensive duties in their households, in addition to their classes at school, and volunteering additional hours that others are being paid for. It was particularly irksome to the Mecca women that the model for the program, Sister's Parent Center, was ignored and not given its due recognition.

At a School Board Meeting, the woman who heads the District Parent Resource Center spoke about all of the things she was planning to incorporate into school parent centers, never once mentioning that the whole program was based on Sister Esperanza's successful program in Mecca. Maria Luz, who had finally had enough and, speaking in half English and half Spanish, told the Board members about everything the Mecca Parent Center had accomplished, much to the dismay of the woman from the District

Parent Resource Center. When Maria Luz finished speaking, the entire board clapped! Word quickly got around about the "tiny, brown" woman who spoke up at the District meeting about the successes of Sister's community parent center.

Sister Esperanza was so very proud of Maria Luz and her extemporaneous presentation at the school board meeting, but she was also exhausted from the work of setting up her unique program, encouraging its growth over the years with the help of dear friends, only to see it misunderstood by outside forces in a fight for power in the District. The woman in the District Office wants a paid individual at the Mecca Parent Center, but how can anyone be paid a salary for what Sister has volunteered to do for over ten years – "the District could not afford it," as the Mecca principal pointed out. The woman at the District Parent Center does not understand the endless hours Sister Esperanza has volunteered to make her program a success, and she cannot relate to Sister's idea of the importance of mother's bringing their young children to class with them. To the District woman, there is only chaos and noise, whereas Sister saw opportunities for mothers to teach their children and to inculcate the importance of education. In fact, the school principal has recognized that the children of the women in Sister's ESL classes have become better behaved over time and better students, something that was not expected even by Sister Esperanza, the school principal or the student's teachers.

In his study "Parent Involvement and Remarkable Student Achievement: A Study of Mexican-Origin Families of Migrant High Achievers" (2000:155-158), Robert Treviño

found that the quality of school is not a factor in the academic achievement of Mexican-origin migrant students, nor is the size of the town or city, nor the town or city's ethnic composition. The only significant environmental factor is the ethnic composition of the school itself. His study indicates that migrant parents of high-achieving students tend to advocate for their children despite the school demographics. In addition, migrant parents were more likely to be involved in PTA meetings, parent-teacher consultations, and other school-based parent involvement activities if the school itself has a considerable Hispanic enrollment. I believe that Treviño's study has relevance to Mecca School, and the Mexican migrant mothers. The children of the Parent Center's ESL students, in each case, became student of the month or won other school awards, became better behaved in class, and developed an enthusiasm for school that, in some cases, was not there before.

In the end, it is the migrant women, their children, and Mecca School that will feel the loss of Sister Esperanza's mentorship. But she says she will continue to teach in her little trailer, just as she began, and open her home to migrant children whose parents must leave for work many hours before the opening of the school campus. Sister's residence is licensed as a school and she has kept the license current and will be able to give ESL classes to smaller numbers of women. She will go back to meeting women in the laundromat, in migrant housing units and continue as she began when she took the place of Sister Putnam, another Religious Nun of the Sacred Heart who initially set up the trailer that Sister Esperanza lives in. Through her programs, Sister Esperanza is leaving a

legacy of the importance of community to the migrant women who have benefited from her classes.

As to the future with Mecca community, Sister's plans for the summer of 2007 are "to overcome the language barrier between the Mecca and Purépecha communities." The Mexican Consulate has translated Purépecha into Spanish, and Sister intends to take it one step further and translate it into English for educational purposes, and of course, she has plans to mentor Guadalupe to be one of the teachers for the Purépecha community. The Consulate has promised to supply Sister with books for her program "Empowerment of Migrant Women." Sister has been recognized for her programs and while I was in Mecca, The Department of Public Health went through the State of California and made short films on the positive aspects of different communities. Representatives came to Mecca during the Spring of 2005 and talked with Sister about some of the things that might go into the film about education. They came into the Parent Center during our class and filmed the women with their children as the women practiced phonics with me and some of the women and children ended up in the film. They went to the school library and filmed the librarian as she read a book to the children, and finally, they went to the room of one of Sister's favorite teachers and filmed the children singing "*De Colores*," a song sung by Spanish-speaking farm workers throughout California. The film, "Mecca: the Heart and Soul of a Community (Coonradt, 2005)," is narrated by a Mecca resident who returned to the community to head the Mecca Family and Farmworker Service Center after receiving her university degree. Sister Esperanza, and

other community leaders, teachers, and residents give positive verbal snapshots of Mecca as the camera presents the town to the viewer. The film was presented on PBS in 2005 under the title "Mecca: the Legacy of Cesar Chavez"

Around the same time that the Department of Health was filming their project, the Press-Enterprise, Desert Edition, also took an interest in Sister's program and published an article "Word Power: Better English Helps Moms Help Their Families" (6/14/05 B-1). The article was also published in the Press-Enterprise's Spanish publication, *El D* and *La Diferencia del Desierto* as "*El Poder del la Palabra: Madres 7 el Bilinguismo*" (*Semana del* 24 *de Junio2005)* and both focus on the eight year old program "The Empowerment of Migrant Women Through Education."

"The Empowerment of Migrant Women" Program at Mecca School

The "Empowerment" program is geared towards migrant and immigrant women, with or without children, who work in the fields and packing sheds. This includes not only women from the community, but migrant women throughout the Coachella Valley. Women who join the program may also bring their children who are not in school while their mothers learn phonics, English conversation, computer skills, reading, grammar, and parenting skills. It is an ambitious program, but the results show in the confidence that the women develop, their involvement in community life, and their children's academic success. The program works by word of mouth and there are times when there are as few as two or three women or as many as nineteen or twenty. The structure of the

class is variable; some women come to every class punctually, while others will miss some classes and attend when they are able. In any event, there are no repercussions since Sister Esperanza's classes are not "one size fits all." More importantly, Sister understands the demands put upon farm working households and only wants the women to succeed; therefore, the classes fit the lifestyle of the women, not the other way around.

What makes the "Empowerment" program so unusual is that the women's children are welcome because of the belief that a mother learning is a powerful image and transcends her power to educate. During classes, mothers are gently assisted with teaching the children manners while the women are instructed in their subjects. By learning English the women are able to assist in their children's scholastic success. The children, seeing their mothers learning to better their lives, as well as their family's lives, develop pride in themselves and their mothers, and learn first hand the value of education. Young children are perceived as an asset in the classroom rather than a disturbance – it is a fundamentally different way of teaching and it takes great patience and understanding of the position of women of farm working households. Without access to childcare, women are unable to take advantage of the opportunities available to them. And without the programs, there are few ways that the women are going able to better their position in life for they lack the social capital and networks that are necessary.

Before Maria Luz began attending ESL classes, her husband allowed her to attend church but other than that, she remained, for the most part, in her home surroundings caring for her family and other household members and doing the myriad of household

chores that accompanies caring for twelve people. Since she began attending ESL classes, her husband allows her to go to church and ESL classes, and over the last two and a half years, Maria Luz has negotiated many changes in her and her husband's relationship and what she is "allowed" to do. Even though there have been changes, many things remain the same. She continues to have a fairly rigid schedule with regards to meals and anything that concerns her husband and children. If ESL classes went over their allotted time, Maria Luz had no problem excusing herself to go home and prepare the afternoon meal or to pick up her children from their classes. But the fact is, Maria Luz' journey from household to neighborhood institutions began in the heart of her community, the local elementary school.

It is sometimes very difficult for the women to make the decision to come to class and, once that decision is made, to be able to take the time to study. Most of the women work in the fields or packing houses and local casinos and must fit the classes and studying into an already full daily schedule…no easy feat! The class gives them space to grow intellectually and to form new and different friendships and alliances from those in family or church. The friendships often turn into deep bonds of trust that support the women in times of sadness or happiness. We only have to look at Maria Luz and another ESL student, Guadalupe Gonzalez, who was born in Ocumicho, Michoacán, Mexico and speaks Purépecha, Spanish, and is learning English.

In 2004, when Guadalupe shared the news that she was pregnant with her classmates, she was clearly overjoyed. It wasn't long, however, that she began to have problems with

the pregnancy and Maria Luz drove Guadalupe to the hospital twice. I rushed her to emergency the final time when she miscarried and after her miscarriage, all of the women in the ESL class took turns in watching over Guadalupe who was distraught over her loss. Maria Luz commented that the women had become very supportive of each other and each other's families and they have bonded in a way that was different what they could have imagined.

Martina Lopez

Those who manage to complete the program often have the chance to get out of agricultural work altogether, going on to paid jobs in the community or jobs outside of the community such as high schools, the school district, doctor's offices, and retail stores to name just a few. The point is, the training the women receive allows them to strengthen their ties to the community and outside the community, as well as their family and friendship ties. Martina Lopez is one of the women that I met and who benefited immensely from the contacts she made while learning English at the Parent Center. Martina and her husband are long time residents of Mecca and their son attended Mecca Elementary School. After their son graduated from Coachella Valley High School, he began attending the College of the Desert in Palm Desert and to offset tuition and books, he works part time at Target as he doesn't want his parents to have to worry about the cost of college; he understands well what his parents have sacrificed to give him a better life.

Martina Lopez was the first student that I worked with in the ESL class. She and her husband originally came to the Coachella Valley without papers prior to IRCA, and after IRCA, they both applied and received their green cards. They have been married for twenty-seven years and have one son. Martina's husband, Ricardo, is forty-four years old and would very much like a steady, full-time job because "picking" is seasonal work and his job as a custodian at the school is not full time and he called into work only when they need an extra hand. He wants a job where he works every day, not the seasonal work of agriculture and other part time jobs. Ricardo came erratically to ESL classes for a short period of time and then stopped attending altogether.

Martina has worked in the fields and packing houses around the Mecca area for years and has harvested oranges, lemons, melons, bell peppers, and worked in a several packing houses. Between Martina and her husband's combined incomes, they made a fairly decent living as farm workers. But, when Martina finished the ESL program, she went on to earn her GED and then went on to pass the U.S. citizenship exam. When Martina became a citizen, problems surfaced in the marriage. Her husband has yet to pass the citizenship test because part of the exam entails conversing with the tester in English and he has been unable to complete that portion of the exam. Martina's success in ESL classes and her citizenship exam has been a great source of discomfort for her husband.

Martina volunteered her time, and with her husband's assistance, coached the girl's soccer team at Mecca Elementary School to a first place win in the State championship soccer league. This success ultimately led to her employment at the local high school.

Martina's new job allowed her to purchase a red F150 Ford truck and she put ownership in her own name while her husband, who had gotten a job at a local golf course, is now back in agriculture working his old job because he didn't like the night shift at the golf course. Ricardo prefers the ability to spend time with his friends and share a few drinks in the evening. However, Martina's desire is to support her community in any way she is able and she, along with Maria Luz and other women from ESL have both become advocates for Mecca community and its institutions.

5.2 – Rural Women and *Poder Popular*

Some women from the program use their newly found confidence and English to help other farm worker families in the community in organizations like *Poder Popular*. *Poder Popular* is a grassroots organization that works towards social change and the development of community empowerment, health literacy and leadership development programs for agricultural workers by using popular education based on theories set forth by Paulo Freire (*Poder Popular* 2000). There is a recognition of the strength and attributes of agricultural laborers by the organization that puts at the base of its programs the use of popular education to build a strong foundation of leadership that will take Mecca and other targeted communities into an era of social change.

The project itself works under the umbrella by The Eastern Coachella Valley Social Change Collaborative (ECVSCC), a nonprofit, grassroots partnership of agencies, organizations, and individuals with the Desert Alliance for Community Empowerment

(DACE) as the grantee and fiscal sponsor. DACE is a collection of agencies, federal, state, county, and local that have come together to direct the growth in Eastern Coachella Valley (DuBry 2004:300). The fundamental goal of *Poder Popular* is to actively engage, mobilize, and empower agricultural laborers, working to improve the physical, social, and environmental hazards in their communities and ultimately create neighborhoods and communities that are more supportive and healthy. *Poder Popular* has organized classes on health, has alerted the community to changes in immigration laws, and has provided information to community residents regarding immigration rights.

The kick-off event of *Poder Popular* was on July 6, 2006 with a program called "*Iniciando la Jornada hacia Comunidades Saludables," Presentación del Programa y Nuestros Promotores Comunitarios* ("Initiating the Journey towards Community Health," Presentation of the Program and our Community Promoters), held at the Family and Farm Worker Service Center in Mecca. The promoter and community health organizer for Mecca, a woman who labored in the fields for over twenty years and sent her daughters to college on her farm working wages, made the introduction of various members of community services who, in turn, handed out flyers explaining what types of services were available. The organization provided dinner and raffled off prizes during the successful, well turned out event.

It is a fact that the same women of the community volunteer over and over again, and with a shortage of volunteer help, some have become disillusioned with the organization and overwhelmed with the amount of work involved in their volunteer work. Their daily

schedules are already filled to an uncomfortable level, making their community work an additional burden. Many of the women from the ESL class, including Maria Luz and Martina Lopez, have often volunteered their time to help *Poder Popular* present their community programs at the elementary school and at the Mecca Family and Farmworker Service Center because they feel that by volunteering their time to the community, their work results in the creation of the community of their dreams. As the women become more and more involved, the isolation that many once felt evaporates through new ties of community and friendship – but they have no qualms in drawing the line between volunteer time for the community and paid work or household work.

5.3 – MECCA FAMILY AND FARMWORKER SERVICE CENTER

In February of 2005, Riverside County sold millions of dollars of redevelopment bonds to pay for a complete renovation of Mecca (Henri Brickey March 3, 2005). Recognized as a redevelopment area since 1986, a stagnant real estate market inhibited support of a bond issue before 2005. But the real estate market that took off a few years ago like wildfire set into motion the reinvention of the small farm worker community. The Mecca Family and Farmworker Service Center is the beginning of the community's hope for the future. The seven million dollar Community Center located on Avenue 66 directly across the street from the modular building that previously housed the Center, officially opened with great fanfare. The Center is a vital part of the $30 million investment by the County of Riverside that will eventually transform Mecca as a focal

point of the entire eastern Coachella Valley (The Desert Sun 9/16/05). Thirty acres of unused farm land was purchased by the county redevelopment agency in 2003 that lies south of 66th Avenue and east of Highway 111. This area is planned to become Mecca's new town center and will house a senior center and a sports park with soccer and baseball field, as well as new single-family homes, gated communities and 54 apartments for low-income seniors. A $2.5 million, 11,000 square foot building across the street from the Farmworker Service Center will serve as a library and sheriff's station, and the County Library that is next to the Mecca School Library will move to its new location next to the sheriff's station.

The Center's Ground-Breaking

The Center broke ground on April 16, 2004 with a ground-breaking party in a celebration the included wonderful food, mariachi music, the presentation of County and local dignitaries and, of course, the actual ground breaking ceremony with pictures and balloons. The VIPs and public figures praised what would be a 22,000 square foot facility that would serve farm workers in the eastern Coachella Valley. It will house the *Clinica de Salud* that has been the only Health Clinic in Mecca for years and the Center will be the bridge the community and professional services, such as job training, parenting classes, bill and rent assistance, English language classes, and family counseling. The Department of Public Health will provide programs that in the past were provided in San Bernardino, and a public health nurse will be housed at the facility. In addition, child protective services will provide services such as family services.

As I walked around the huge tent that had been erected for the event, I noticed that while there had been a great deal of advertising for the event, there were only a few farm workers in attendance and they stayed together. I noticed several groups of farm workers standing outside the tent looking in, but none came inside; while they appeared to be dressed to attend the opening, they did not enter the tent and only came in when they were invited to come inside and eat. One father and his young daughter came into the tent but did not stay long and appeared very uncomfortable during the time he was inside and finally took his daughter by the hand and left….no one responsible for the event had come up to any of the farm workers to make them feel welcome. There was the expectation that many farm workers would come to the event when they left work in the fields, and care was taken to provide enough food to feed everyone that came. On the tables where the food had been placed, was a beautiful presentation of fruit, meats, breads, and agua frescas. But, as the dignitaries left, it was apparent that a great deal of food would remain untouched. Since the expectation was that many farm workers would attend the ground-breaking of what would be their Center, it would have been appropriate for the organizers to make sure the farm workers felt welcome. Unfortunately, this was not the case.

The Completed Center

The new Mecca Family and Farmworker Service Center opened September 16, 2005, and while the opening of the completed Center was delayed because of problems with the

Imperial Irrigation District and plumbing issues, since its opening, the Mecca Family and Farmworkers Service Center has, indeed, lived up to its name and promise. Under the capable hands of a young woman who was born in Indio to farm working parents who worked in the fields of Mecca to put her through college, the Center now provides indispensable services to the farm working residents of Mecca and the surrounding communities (Guzman January 2, 2006; December 26, 2006). At times, this remarkable young woman personally goes door-to-door to find out what the needs of the people are, while at other times she meets with groups, however, most of the time you find her hard at work in her office at the Center attending to her many duties and planning events that will benefit the community. In addition to her position at the Center, she chairs the Mecca Community Council and is one of the founding members of *Raices*, an activist group in the Eastern Coachella Valley. Her activities in the community are not only work-related, but also are personally and politically inspired: everything she does relates to bettering the lives of farm workers like her farm working parents.

Events at the Center

The Center sponsors many monthly events for the community and keeps residents informed of political issues that may affect their lives. One such event was the UFW march held on Sunday, March 26, 2006 protesting House Resolution 4437, which

Figure 4

Mecca Family and Farm Working Service Center (Photo by Author)

Representative Mary Bono, R-Palm Springs, co-sponsored and which would have made illegal U.S. entry a felony and would criminalize those who aided the undocumented. The young woman, who heads the Mecca Family and Farm Workers Service Center, along with the head of the Coachella United Farm Workers Branch in Coachella, organized the trip into Los Angeles and everyone met at the Center.

The group left the Center just after 10:30 in the morning in four buses full of Mecca farm workers and supporters. The farm workers filled two buses with 55 seats in each, the UFW members filled one bus, and the people recruited by the woman who runs the Mecca Family and Farm Workers Service Center filled one bus. Ralph's Grocery Supermarket Chain supplied well appreciated lunch boxes for everyone – a turkey sandwich (sliced turkey on white bread), an apple, apple juice, a small bag of cookies, and a packet of mayonnaise and mustard. When everyone had finished eating, we lined up and walked to the meeting place. From the numbers of buses at the site, there must have been hundreds of people, all of us wearing red t-shirts that had been passed out by the UFW, a sea of red marching down the street. The day was one of great excitement and pride, one in which Mecca farm workers left their geographical area of the Coachella Valley, some for the very first time. Through the efforts of a young Mexican-American woman and other community leaders, everyone came together as a community of workers, stepping out from their community where they felt safe into a safety net extended that into Los Angeles and joined thousands of people who supported them.

Other events that the Center sponsors included the Annual Farm Worker Appreciation Day. In 2005, to show appreciation to the farm workers of the community, a 50 pound box of food was provided to each family, along with clothes, toys, and one household item; access to pay phones and automatic teller machines were also provided as well as referrals to health care services. The Center also supports the celebration of "*Dia Del Niño*" (Day of the Child) that provides community children with activities, games and

prizes. As in so many of the events, representatives of organizations from outside the community, such as County representatives, State representatives, and service organizations provided packets of information for farm workers that continually reinforced knowledge of the types of services available to them. Each month, the Center publishes a sheet called "Happenings" that lists the programs, events, and organizations that will provide information and classes for "An Uplifted Community, that is Self-Sufficient, Strong, Educated, and Empowered" (May, 2005 Happenings). All of this is at the hands of the young woman in charge of the Mecca Family and Farmworkers Service Center, a young woman whose parents have worked in agricultural labor all their lives but refused to allow her to work in the fields and instead, guided her in the direction of education. She returned to the community of her youth after she received her university degree, using it to the betterment of the Mecca community.

5.4 – KABOOM AND THE NEW COMMUNITY PLAYGROUND

Community volunteers help organizers get the word out about the various events and many of the volunteers are women from the ESL classes. However, it's not only the women, but their husbands and children who also participate in helping with the events; community building becomes a family affair because of the influence of wives and mothers of farm working households. One remarkable event commemorating the commitment of Cesar Chavez to community building and service during his lifetime was held in March 2007 in celebration of his birthday.

In partnership with KaBoom, a national nonprofit organization and Home Depot, California First Lady Maria Shriver initiated the endeavor to build community playgrounds for California children. On March 30-31, volunteers across California built playgrounds in ten California communities, Mecca being one of them. The Coachella UFW leader, who now works for Riverside County Parks and Recreation, was the major force behind Mecca being chosen as one of the communities. Community leaders like the young woman who heads the Mecca Family and Farm Workers Service Center, Sister Esperanza, and others mobilized the community to action in preparation for the day of building the playground. Preparation began weeks in advance in order to adhere to KaBoom's required groundwork. Home Depot provided all of the materials for the playground and the community provided the volunteers, Sister Esperanza and the women from her program were charged with child care for all of the volunteer parents, while other community leaders made preparations for the availability of plenty of water, food, and t-shirts for the volunteers, and the Cesar Chavez foundation provided the money for food. Several days before the actual building was to begin, Home Depot delivered loads of concrete mix, sand, and the actual playground components, as well as all of the necessary tools.

On the morning of the day that the building of the playground began, volunteers were assigned into groups, A, B, C, etc. The group that one was assigned to determined what the volunteers would do. For instance, Groups A and B were to prepare the area where the playground was to be erected, Group C and D were to open boxes and begin

assembling the playground equipment, and so on. The whole process was exceedingly organized, as it would have to be in order to complete such a project in one day. Over 395 parents showed up to help construct the playground – all Mecca community residents. A KaBoom representative told me that there had never been such a turnout of community members in any of the other communities.

All of the children were taken to the school auditorium during the playground building, where each child was banded with their name around their wrist and then allowed to participate in activities, watch movies and enjoy snacks under the watchful gaze of Sister Esperanza, Maria Luz, and several other women from Sister's classes. KaBoom had provided the creative activity supplies to occupy the children, but it wasn't all play for the children. Maria Luz had them paint huge thank-you signs for the completion ceremony later in the afternoon; this activity brought in the participation of the children during this day where the main activity was for them. The women who organized the activities for the children were a constant blur all day, continually on the move helping children, cleaning up messes, serving food, sweeping the floor of fallen glitter and paper cuttings. And when word came that the playground was completed, the children lined up with their handmade signs and marched over to the Community Center where the playground is located.

The children were in absolute awe when they arrived at their new playground – colorful slides, climbing gyms, rock climbs, swings and more, anchored in a thick concrete with

Figure 5

Farm Worker Artwork at the Mecca Playground (photo by Author)

Figure 6

Commemoration Sign at the Playground in Mecca (Photo by Author)

the whole area covered in sand, ready for children to play once the concrete anchors were entirely dry. The volunteer farm workers were ecstatic that they were part of such an outstanding gift to their children. In addition to the playground, the volunteers painted a beautiful mural on the side of one of the buildings facing the playground that pictured Cesar Chavez and the fields around Mecca; the mural, in its entirety, represents the community, its past, present, and its future.

5.5 – *PRIMERO DIOS*

Within the daily language of many of the women of farm working households, there is an enduring commitment to their faith. And prior to classes in English, the strongest ties held by most of the women, besides those of the extended family, are religious ties that encompass a common belief system. Robert Ostergren (1981:237), in his study of the "Immigrant Church as a Symbol of Community and Place," writes that the church is the most important source of identity for a transplanted people and that one of the early activities of a community is the founding of churches. Indeed, in Mecca, there are two churches, one Catholic, the other Pentecostal; both religions have been part of the community for some time. Of course, before the churches were built – residents traveled to Coachella or Indio for their religious services. Today, the community remains mostly Catholic, and while there are other religions represented in Mecca, such as Mormonism and Jehovah Witness, most of the women that I interviewed or talked with who lived in the Mecca area belonged to one or the other church, Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic

Church or Mecca Apostolic Church. And, there is no lack of pride in their selected association to one or the other Church – these days, unlike the early years, rather than animosity, the members of the two churches respect the other's chosen belief. This was apparent to me in the jovial comments in class with one or another woman presenting the advantages of belonging to her particular church.

The dedication of each church to the farm workers of Mecca community is evident on a daily basis, just as it is evident with Mecca School and the Mecca Family and Farm Workers Service Center – each has a part in the social organization of Mecca. DuBry's (2000:242-243) description of Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church in Mecca illustrates a function of the church in terms of its role in maintaining culture, as well as a continuity with the past (Ostergren 1981:230):

> "It is very much a Mexican church. A wrought-iron arch soars over the entrance gate, displaying the name of the church in Spanish. At the foot entrance to the church grounds is a small shrine to *la Virgen* that always has lit candles and small notes containing prayers and tokens of faith. In the parking lot a large gazebo was built that resembles those found in public parks in Mexico, and a pathway of grass extends from it through the parking lot. Young trees have been planted along parking spaces, one day to shade the area from the heat. It is almost as if the church is recreating a space that resembles a *zócalo*, or or town center, a common feature in Mexican towns. The church construction itself resembles a flat-roofed rural mission from times past, and approaching it from the street conjures up the image of a church attached to a hacienda. The building is wide, with a succession of stained-glass windows rising up the walls toward the ceiling. Behind the alter is not the usual depiction of the crucified Jesus Christ, but of his mother, the Virgin Mary, *La Virgen de Guadalupe*." (DuBry 2000)

During the 2005 Cesar Chavez Day march in Mecca, a parishioner of Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church puts into full relief the importance of the Church to the Mecca farm working community into words through his poem "En El Pueblito de Mecca" (In the Little Town of Mecca):

En El Pueblito de Mecca

En el pueblito de Mecca
Hemos hecho un santuario
A nuestra virgen morena
Madre de los Mexicanos.

Entre todos cooperamos
Con un granito de arena
Para hacer este santuario
A Nuestra virgen morena.

También los que son de afuera
Nos dieron su donación
Eso se recuerda siempre
Y se lleva en el corazón.

Cuando sientas una pena
Cuando sientas un dolor
Ven aquí a la morena
Ella te dará su amor.

Cuando sientas la tristeza
Y no encuentres un Consuelo
Ven aquí a su santuario
A rezar con mucho anhelo.

Madre mía de Guadalupe
Dueña de mi Corazón
Gracias a Dios se realize
Lo que antes era ilusión.

Translation:

In the Little Town of Mecca

"In the little town of Mecca
We built a shrine
To our dark skinned Virgin
Mother of Mexican people.

We all cooperated
Each with a grain of sand
We made this shrine
To our dark skinned Virgin.

Those also from the outside
Gave us their donation
That we will remember always
In our hearts."

When you feel grief
When you feel pain
Come here to the dark skinned woman
She will give you her love

When you feel sadness
And you can't find comfort
Come here to her shrine
Praying with much longing.

My Mother of Guadalupe
Owner of my heart
Thanks to God you fulfill
What before was illusion.

This poem is in contrast to one that represents the community of the Anglo founders who were once the town's majority and illustrates how deeply the religious sentiments of the

"new pioneers of Mecca" are rooted (DuBry 2000). The contrasting poem, entitled "Our Mecca!" is without religious sentiments, but focuses on a geographical pride in the town:

"At last our desert star is born!
At last some one has blown our horn,
And now the world will hear about
Our goings in and goings out!
At last we have a chance to shout!
If anyone deserves this fuss,
We are convinced that it is us.

Too long has Mecca blushed unseen
With roofs of red and wall of green.
For we got virtues and conditions
That should release our inhibitions.
We got a sun so bright and bold
It rises copper, sets in gold.
A fishful sea, a fruited island,
Rocks like jewels, and rainbow sand.
We got frantic, romantic dates
That ride the sides in pursuit of mates.
Pastel mountains, and trees like lace,
And, oh brother, have we got space!

(written by Helen D. Bell and published in
Mecca: A California Desert History, by Cecelia Foulkes)

The poems illustrate the changing dynamics, culture, and belief systems of the Mecca community. The church changes to the needs of its congregation and the parishioners help push the change. A case in point is the increasing population of Purépecha in Mecca. Initially marginalized when the migrant workers first began working in the fields of Mecca, the community and the Catholic Church are now attempting to incorporate

their numbers. On the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, 2006, the Purépecha, proudly dressed in the beautifully embroidered clothing of their *pueblo*, marched to the church and presented gifts to the Virgin. There was an appreciation of the Purépecha presentation in the Catholic community that previously had been missing, illustrating a process of community building in which the interests of the Purépecha are recognized and their participation in the celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe is permitted (Arensberg and Kimball 1972:150)

The parishioners never fail to come to the aid of their church when it is need. When the roof of the twenty year old Catholic Church began to deteriorate, making it too dangerous to hold Mass inside the structure, the parish priest who was only appointed to the parish in 2006, moved all Masses outside in the parking lot where they would remain until the roof is repaired. And yet, attendance, rather than receding, went up. Parishioners who usually attended Mass once a month or so, came more often to support their church, and endured the variable temperatures of the Coachella Valley in the tents that set up in the parking lot (Olson December 23, 2006, B-1). Even former parishioners who had moved out of the parish retuned to show their support.

To raise money for the repair of the roof, the congregation held a fundraiser on the feast day of the Virgin of Guadalupe and raised over $30,000 mostly from the sale of homemade goods, an activity in which the women of the parish excel. Not only in this event, but in most events of the community, the women come together to plan and

prepare wonderful food and drink to sell – all kinds of tamales and tacos, *sopes* and *agua frescas*, and so much more.

Parishioners from other Catholic parishes like Sacred Heart Church in Palm Desert and St. Paul the Apostle Church in Chino Hills stepped forward to lend a hand. The Chino Hills parish donated over $52,000 for the repair work that was estimated to cost as much as $250,000. The Palm Desert Sacred Heart Parish raised money to rent a heated and air conditioned structure that will remain on the grounds even when the roof repair has been completed to handle the overflow of parishioners that was evident in the growing town even before the roof problems.

Likewise, the women parishioners of the Mecca Apostolic Church are active fund-raisers and can be depended upon to raise money for the functioning of their church. They are famous for their tamales and won first prize in the "Traditional nonprofit" category at the 2002 Tamale Festival in Indio held each year in December. Amid the enticing smells of an amazing array of handmade tamales, from chicken, pork, and beef, to ones made from chocolate, strawberries and dates, the churches' tamales were sold out on the first day and the women made a tidy sum for their church.

5.6 – SUMMARY

During my first trips to Mecca in the late 1990s, I found it difficult not to focus on the heat and dust that permeates the desert air, however, it wasn't long before I could look past my discomfort and instead recognize the community for more than excessive heat

and dust storms. The pride that Mecca residents maintain in their community is evident each morning throughout the town as they sweep clean the outside of their houses and apartments, picking up any trash that was deposited nearby over night. The strikingly clean houses and roadways in Mecca amazed me from the beginning of my fieldwork. But, most of all, through the lives of farm working women and their families, I began to see their hope for a better life and what they are willing to do to make sure that it happens. If given the smallest bit of encouragement, women in farm working households will step out and take advantage of opportunities available to them. They are used to working hard in their households and in their work environments and they put just as much energy into making sure that their community is one that they and their families can be proud of. Through their involvement in various community activities, they are introduced to local, state, and federal issues that may affect their lives and they share what they have learned with their families and friends.

Community work, however, is not performed at the expense of household duties. In fact, my findings correspond with Pardo (1993:130) who contends that, Mexican and Mexican-American women "recognized that maintaining household stability allowed them to do the work in the community" and was a way in which the women affirmed separate activity in the public domain. In Mecca, the school, the churches, and the Mecca Family and Farm Worker Resource Center are resources for the women through which they volunteer their efforts, and in return, they develop new social networks, become skilled in fundraising, their leadership abilities improve, and they learn negotiate with

local, religious and political, and state authority figures. The women view the fruit of their community work in their completed activities, in their home and family life, and their new relationships in the public sphere.

Through their first steps to learn English at the Parent Center, some of the women gained important skills and resolve to push themselves even further; several took their GED and citizenship exams, others found jobs outside the community of Mecca. Volunteering their unpaid labor for important events in the community gave the women a sense that the community was, indeed, theirs. They passed their mastery of computer skills onto their children in their homes, as well as negotiated with their church leaders, civic leaders, school representatives, and others to add their own voices to important decisions regarding their community, schools, and churches, all while managing their home and family responsibilities. Their actions prove that they have a stake in their community, one that they are willing to sacrifice precious time.

Chapter 6:

Conclusion

This study has examined the role of women farm workers in California, their role in community building and maintenance, as well as the impact of the cycles of changing labor on farm worker families, both in California and Mexico. As I began my study, I became aware that the most thorough studies of farm working women were mainly completed beginning in the 1970s when women social scientists were making an impact within the scholarly area of the effects of industrialization on families and the importance of women's paid and unpaid work (Boserup 1970; Tilly and Scott 1979). As I began to focus more deeply on women farm workers in California Agribusiness, I recognized that their historical importance needed to be addressed and decided to focus on life histories/oral histories in order to find a balance between what was in the historical record and the oral histories of farm working women, particularly in multi-generational households. These life/oral histories allowed me to see patterns in domestic and wage work of women over time and to see what propelled women into the labor force, as well as how work and family roles were negotiated. I also wanted to test Fisher's (1953) contention that women leave agricultural wage labor when the main provider earns enough to sufficiently support the family.

I began by looking at the pattern of changing labor in California Agribusiness in the early historical writings that focused mainly on the various ethnic groups in farm labor that described or inferred that that farm workers were merely "cheap labor" for California growers (ex.: McWilliams 1939; Fuller 1940; Goldschmidt 1947; Fisher 1953). These workers were perceived as faceless until another generation of scholars began to focus on the individual ethnic groups who labored in California fields (ex.: Gregory 1989; Leonard1992; Matsumoto 1993; Wells 1996). In addition, there are only slight references to women or families in these early writings on California Agribusiness. Many scholars since have examined the various ethnic groups of farm workers in California and have shown that to portray the various groups simply as "cheap labor" distorts the ways in which they differ. By adding context to the farm workers lives, scholars have shown that workers respond to many different economic, social, and familial constraints and are actively making choices that fit within the parameters of their lives.

Through an examination of the historical writing on California agriculture, I maintain that the hiring practices of California agribusiness clearly fit the theory of Claude Meillassoux (1981) and others regarding the segmented nature of agribusiness in California that I outlined in Chapter 2 (Wolf 1982; Segura 1986; Kearney and Nagengast 1989). A "segmented" or "double labor market" is used by agribusiness to keep labor costs and wages down by using one group to counter any militancy or organizing on the part of the other group, i.e. domestic labor versus unattached males. In this way, wages,

employment, and working conditions vary under each segment through the use of many forms of control that included intimidation, immigration restriction and contract negotiation. Very important was the cultivation of xenophobic bigotry that sowed dissension among new immigrants against settled immigrants and that also functioned to keep workers unnerved and unstable. Once any group of farm laborers began to make to make in-roads into California society in any capacity, or agitated for better working conditions, worried nativists were riled up under the impression that the particular group was taking California jobs, when in effect, Californians came to despise the type of farm work that the various ethnic groups were hired to do. Farm employers and recruiters exploited profits by specifically hiring workers with characteristics viewed adversely by native white Americans (Guerin-Gonzales 1985). The conditions under which farm workers often lived were deplorable and were highlighted and severely criticized by McWilliams (1939), Fuller (1940), and Goldschmidt (1947).

The idea of the unattached male farm worker is very deceiving and only in the loosest of terms is this worker "unattached." Indeed, families depend on the incomes of grandfathers, fathers, sons, uncles, and other extended members of families to keep afloat, and as often is the case, it takes more than one member to make ends meet. Housing, even if made available for the unattached male farm worker, was generally only fit for single males or males rooming together. From the life histories I recorded of the women in families who worked in agriculture throughout the state, housing even for them was not anything in which an American Anglo would live. All farm workers deserve

good wages and conditions in which to work as they are the backbone of our agricultural industry. And yet, the structure as put forward by Meillassoux and others continues to this day despite ongoing efforts to change it. How is it that then that farm working families deal with the disruptions and idiosyncrasies of a market dependent on the politics and economics of California agribusiness that oscillates between the hiring of unattached males and family labor? They do as any family would and adjust to changing circumstances in a myriad of different ways.

I have shown through census records and life histories that women have been an integral part of the growth of California agribusiness since the early twentieth century, whether tending the home place in Mexico or as part of family labor. But even before the twentieth century, Spanish speaking farm workers were integrated into California agriculture as *Californio* (or California-born Mexican) families lost land as a result of the annexation of California, the decline of the pastoral society, and litigation expenses over land titles (Cleland 1990:50; Almaguer 1994:66; Camarillo 1996:115). These extreme circumstances propelled *Californio* women into the wage labor market, working in packing sheds and into seasonal labor with their families, resulting in the alteration of traditional patterns of family and domestic responsibility. By the time Mexicans nationals entered California for wages, a well-embedded system of labor had structured the presence of Spanish-speakers in both the United States and Mexico societies (Zinn 1987:158; Massey, et al. 1990:44, 108). The Spanish-speaking laborer was incorporated

into the initial stages of the growth of California agribusiness and they remain there to this day.

The life histories that I recorded and presented in Chapter 4 span three generations in two families, and these women's voices, as well as many others, answer some of the questions I was asking earlier in this manuscript and they often coattail with many of what other scholars have written. Over the three generations that are presented in this study, the role of women in families changed considerably. In Mexico, one generation lived during the age of the hacienda, and then moved out of indebted peonage through marriage into a more diversified economy from an agrarian economy, while even at one point, attempting to work for wages in California agribusiness. Another generation of women entered the migrant labor stream and into seasonal wage labor in agriculture in California, with the third generation either choosing or refusing to work in agribusiness, some of whom went on to positions outside of agriculture altogether, while others went on to receive college degrees that allowed them to become part of the American middle-class, and mirrored the experiences of other immigrants to the United States. Generational oral/life histories of women farm workers to further add historical context to their role in the development of California agribusiness is an area of study that ought to be given further research.

Many women in this study negotiated changes in the family domestic sphere in California even if they did not work outside the home for wages. The position of the

woman at the time of immigration appeared to make a difference in the family. If she had gone through schooling in Mexico and received a degree, such as in nursing, her input was a necessary component of family decisions and carried considerable weight. Several women earned greater incomes than their spouses and in each case carried greater weight in decision making.

Spanish speaking omen on both sides of the border entered wage labor out of dire economic need, some were daughters, and others were mothers, grandmothers, and aunts. The migration of males that resulted from the revolution and industrialization were felt deeply within families and shifted the gender balance in households. Women in Mexico were and are left for months at a time, some not knowing whether or not a spouse or loved one will return. A documentary, "Letters from the Other Side" (Courtney 2006) details the hardships endured by women left behind when men migrate for work. Women tell of heartbreaking stories of the deaths of loved ones as a result of suffocation in the desert while being smuggled into the United States and women are filled with despair because their hope for a better future has been destroyed. These women dealt with the migration of their menfolk by managing both their spouses responsibilities on top of their own domestic responsibilities And yet, despite the disruptions to the family unit, family bonds and networks are strengthened and the family continued to be the main institution that facilitates and buffers the needs of the individual with the needs of work and society (Weber 1994:57-60).

As Mexican men traveled across the border to work on the railroad, agriculture and other burgeoning sectors during the early nineteenth century, women sometimes accompanied them, while at other times, they remained in Mexico taking over duties that had previously been tended to by male household members. Women were of vital importance, not only in their role in managing domestic responsibilities and childrearing, but their informal networks established in Mexico were essential in the settlement process in the United States. Extensive social networks established during migration paved the way for future migrants and immigrants. Because of extreme economic conditions during the early twentieth century in Mexico, and the abundant work that was available to them in the United States, menfolk left their families in the capable hands of their wives during their sojourns to work in the fields of California. Money sent back to families kept farms afloat, helped to build houses, and assisted in planning for retirement at a future date. Women maintained the home and family and often sold embroidered goods, took in laundry, and prepared and sold food for extra income.

Many of the women in the first settled families generation in the Coachella Valley continued to work in the fields of California agribusiness, but in some cases they pursued additional opportunities that opened up for them in other business sectors. The women who learned English and became United States citizens tended to have many more opportunities open up to them. Some women, on the other hand, purported to be content to remain in seasonal agribusiness as it fit their domestic and child care responsibilities much better than a regular part-time or full-time position. One *mayordoma* told me that

she did not believe that she was paid any less than a male doing the same work and combined salaries of her and her husband allowed them to purchase one of the new track homes built in Mecca.

In this study, most positions that women held in California agribusiness were, and remain, part-time, seasonal field work with the highest position being foreperson. During one summer of my fieldwork, a grower allowed me to join his workers in the field to pick grapes. The women were covered from head to toe to protect themselves from the searing heat, as well as from the wandering eyes of male farm workers. As I was shown how to carefully clip grouping of grapes, I saw, first-hand, some of the spiders and snakes that made their way through the vines. There were women of all ages working in the vines, with a few upwards of 65 years old. Many older women in my study though preferred to stay home with their grandchildren and had no qualms about leaving agricultural work to the next generation. Women worked in citrus and climbed ladders to reach the highest fruit that was hidden among thorny spikes on the trees. Packing house work was preferred by many women as it got them out of the hot sun, but a few of the women in my study found the practice of giving friends and relatives the best hours and positions, by some *mayordomas*, disagreeable and demeaning.

The importance of farm working women's agency in becoming involved with institutions and other members of their community cannot be underestimated; women who became engaged with the process of their children's education, found that their

children performed better in their classes with many of their high school graduates going on to the University. In fact, the first generation of American-born children in my study is now reaping the benefits of their parent's hard work and sacrifices and their parent's pride is obvious. Some University graduates have come back to Mecca and become involved in community institutions and have become leaders in Mecca and directing some of the future changes. Others have gone on to do University work in California at Davis, Irvine, and Riverside, fulfilling the promise of a better life in their families. This area of women farm workers and their involvement in community life is a fruitful and beneficial area of research, as would be the children of farm workers and with more data could be further developed.

The farm working women who live in Mecca and the surrounding area have become movers and shakers in their own community and work hard to make it a place where they and their families are able to live happily and safely. That is not to say that everything goes right all the time, but what they have shown me over the few years that I did my fieldwork, is that they refuse to see themselves as victims of their situations but instead, advocates for their children, their families, their institutions, and their town. Many of the women and their families in my study continue to do seasonal migration to harvest the crops throughout California, while others have discontinued the seasonal migration altogether and instead have focused on settling and promoting what it is they want their community to be for their children and their families.

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