

**INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES ON THE  
SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER:  
A CASE STUDY OF A MEXICAN RURAL TOWN**

A Thesis

by

MARIA ISABEL AYALA GARCIA

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

August 2003

Major Subject: Sociology

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**ABSTRACT**

International Migration and Its Consequences on the Social Construction of Gender: A  
Case Study of a Mexican Rural Town. (August 2003)

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This thesis is the result of ethnographic research conducted in a sending community in the state of Hidalgo, Mexico. This study calls into question the stereotypical view of Mexican women as passive and traditional. There are several conclusions reached during this study. First, the results reject Menjivar's (1999) and Levitt's (1998) arguments. In the community studied, an unfulfilled economic or emotional absence encourages women to challenge the system of practice of Nurangi (participation in the labor force) even in the absence of a migration experience. Second, the analysis shows that contrary to our hypothesis, the physical absence of the male is not a trigger mechanism for women's participation in the labor force. Third, women from both migrant and non-migrant related groups have increased their human capital. However, migrant and non-migrant related women who participated in market activities not only expanded their human capital but also gained an economic and emotional benefit. Finally, the interviews have also shown that contrary to some literature that views Mexican women as passive and subordinate agents, the women in the Nurangi community are active agents, and what is sometimes perceived as a static gender division of labor is rather a fluid.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Human migration is an event that has taken place since the beginning of times. However, in the last century, scholars have come to pay particular attention to the issue of international migration due to its social, political, and economic implications worldwide. Various scholars (Massey and Espana 1987; Piore 1979; Portes 1978) have sought to explain international migration. In the Mexican context, they view the existence and the reproduction of the “migrant syndrome” as the product of people’s necessity for finding better economic opportunities to the ones they have in their sending communities (Goldring 1992; Alarcon 1988; Reichert 1982). As such, international migration “can be understood as a family strategy [mostly a male one] for economic reproduction” (Alarcon 1988:345).

When examining the Mexican case, the United States is most typically the target country for Mexicans participating in international migration. It has been suggested that the volume of Mexican immigration to the United States represents the largest flow of humans across national borders in the world (Phillips and Massey 2000). The Instituto Nacional de Geografia e Historia reports that according to the 2000 Mexican Census, there were nearly 5.8 million people 4,230,817 men and 1,537,442 women that migrated to the United States between 1995 and 1997. However, for the majority of Mexicans, their intention to migrate is not a permanent one .

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This thesis follows the style and format of the *American Sociological Review*.



In recent decades, with technological advancements in transportation and communication, international migration to the United States has not become a permanent movement for many Mexican citizens. Contrary to common assumptions, today, many people engage in transnational migration (here on referred as “migration”) through the development of transnational communities. Transnational communities emerge from the constant movement of migrants (in many cases males) between the communities of destination (United States) and origin (Mexico) as a way to provide for their families while they are not able to do it in their communities of origin (Levitt 1998). According to the Instituto Nacional de Geografia e Historia, between 1992 and 1997, approximately two million Mexicans who had migrated in the past returned to Mexico. This continuous movement of migrants has important implications because it produces a variety of changes for both the sending and the receiving community.

For the most part, when researchers have examined transnational migration and its impact on communities, the focus has been on how receiving communities are affected. However, the changes that occur in the homefront are often overlooked or completely ignored. This neglect is unfortunate in gaining a broad theoretical overview of the effects of migration, when researchers do focus their lens on the impact of migration on home communities, the emphasis tends to be almost exclusively on economic factors. For example, Massey and his colleagues (1987:216) state that the dollars sent by the migrant to the sending community (remittance) and the change in the family structure resulting from the male householder’s absence “affect the patterns of socioeconomic organization.” Fortunately, since the 1980’s immigration research has

broadened, and feminist scholars have come to pay special attention to the effects that international migration and remittances have on the normative structure (ideas, values, and beliefs that guide social life) in the sending community, especially as defined within the family, and the impact that this has for the gender division of labor.

In this thesis, I will focus on the impact that the international migration of married males and their remittances have on the sending community, especially as it relates to the normative structure. In many communities, the normative structure involves norms and beliefs regarding sex role expectations. Gender roles are the “expected attitudes and behaviors, which a society associates with each sex” (Lindsey 1997:3). In Mexico, the traditional family unit is comprised of a husband, a wife, and children, and the gender and power relations within it define the “normative and practical demarcation of male and female roles and statuses” not only within the family unit but also in the community (Kanaiaupuni 2000:1317). In this normative structure, the men are supposed to economically provide for the family while women are the ones that transform money into service by their labor (Mines 1981; Trigueros 1992). Because of this strict division of labor, women face certain control and surveillance on the part of family members and the community as a whole, which prevents them from overtly challenging the normative structure. This control is enforced by patriarchy, which places a higher status on men’s human, cultural, and social capital compared to that given to women’s (Trigueros 1992). However, Pierce (1995:26) mentions “history, ... demonstrates that [a] conception of a gender division of labor is far from static or natural, but is fluid, changing, and socially malleable” and Mexico is not an exception.

Today, the reality in Mexico is that an increasing number of women are joining the labor force. When trying to explain the reason for the rise in women's labor force participation, the literature sees migration as a strong force inducing Mexican women to challenge and redefine the traditional gender based division of labor. In particular, there are two views that see migration as a trigger mechanism for this redefinition. On the one hand, part of the literature sees women's migration as the basis for redefining the normative structure. In Menjivar's (1999) study of Guatemalan and Salvadoran immigrant women in the United States, she argues that immigration affects gender relations as women enter the labor force. For Menjivar (1999), employment gives immigrant women exposure to more egalitarian relationships perceived as the American model, and, thus, encourages them to redefine their gender relations (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1999). In this case, "the material conditions in [women's] lives undermine what otherwise would be ideal—the upholding of patriarchal family roles" (Menjivar 1999:622).

On the other hand, there is another body of literature that sees the changes in the normative structure as the result of social remittances. Peggy Levitt (1998:927) defines social remittances as "the ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital that flow from receiving to sending country communities." Levitt (1998) notes that while migrants are in the United States they come in contact with the host community. Depending on the degree of immersion in the United States culture, the migrant may come to adopt the ideas, values and beliefs, which are subsequently transmitted to his/her sending community and promote changes (Levitt 1998). In some cases, existing ideas and

practices may go unchallenged (Levitt 1998:930). In others, new elements are crafted into existing ones. In still others, a redefinition of the normative structure may occur, “where new [gender] social relations and cultural patterns are created by the intermingling of migrant and receiving-country forms” (Levitt 1998: 930). However, both Menjivar’s (1999) and Levitt’s (1998) perspectives tend to lead to the treatment of Mexican women with no migration experience as passive agents in redefining the normative structure and, thus, in challenging the gender division of labor. Hondagneu-Sotelo (1999:573) asserts, “We cannot expect gender relations to remain static, even in the absence of transnational migration. Local and national processes intersect with transnational influences” and “the social structures and constructed identities central to the gender order are... also subject to contestation.” Arrom (1985) mentions that even when on the surface it may seem that in Mexico men and women hold the same gender ideology, women define the “normative code very differently” (Findlay 1992:88). For example, Hirsch (1999) states that younger generation women have come to define spousal relations as based on respect (*respeto*) and trust (*confianza*). Furthermore, even when Findlay (1992:88) mentions that “women agreed with men that wives should obey their husband’s, [the women agreed that] in exchange, husbands owed their spouses financial support and restraint of their physical violence” (Arrom 1985). Therefore, when men stray from this normative structure, women redefine it. Men can disrupt the normative structure in two ways—through an economic or an affective absence.

As mentioned earlier, one of the primary reasons for migration is an economic one. The male in the family tends to migrate when there are limited job opportunities to

support his family in the local community. For the most part, during the time the male is abroad, he sends money (remittances) to his family left behind. By sending remittances, the migrant male fulfills the normative structure associated with sustaining his family. However, if the remittance is not sufficient to support the family, the woman may come to challenge the normative structure and begin participating in the labor force.

Moreover, there is another reason for why women may come to redefine the normative structure—an affective absence. In the established normative structure, besides the men participating in the labor force, they are expected to hold an affective role in relation to their wives and families. Hirsch (1999) observes that younger women see a marital relation as one that should be based on trust (*confianza*). Trust implies a relation between equals. Rather than the male spouse having a higher status, he is now seen as a “companion” (Hirsch 1999). In this type of relationship, the normative structure is disrupted when the husband/partner engages in alcoholism, physical violence towards the wife, or extramarital affairs, thus breaking the trust that exists between the spouses. When this happens, women feel free to challenge the normative structure since it is the men that broke it. Accordingly, the breakage of the normative structure by the men through an economic or affective way allows women to exercise their agency overtly and, thus, challenge the normative structure of the sending community (Argent 1999; Menjivar 1999). Furthermore, Levitt (1998:934) argues that these revised concepts will expose “non-migrants to a more ample range of possible self-concepts from which to choose.” Additionally, Levitt (1998) believes that the change in the normative structure will have an impact on the sending communities’ systems of practice.

In this study, the normative structure represents the norms and beliefs regarding gender roles that rule the social life of the members of the community. Once this structure changes, the system of practice is expected to change as well. Levitt (1998:934) defines systems of practice as “the actions shaped by normative structures. For individuals, these include household labor, religious practices, and patterns of civil and political participation.” Therefore, it is assumed that if a husband/partner male that migrates (which is a change in the organizational structure) and does not send enough remittances to provide for his family, the woman may feel the traditional normative structure is broken and, thus, may feel freer to challenge the status quo as it involves the division of labor. This redefinition on the part of Mexican women may be seen in their participation in the labor force. In this sense, women’s agency is seen as a personal quality and not as the result of migration and cultural transmission.

Furthermore, besides examining the Mexican women challenge and redefinition of the traditional gender norms, this study will also show how the changes in the normative structure and the systems of practice that may occur lead to a broadened human and social capital among women that may come to be valued and respected by the larger community. This expansion of capital is the product of the new division of labor that arises because of women’s challenge to patriarchal norms and may be the direct result of their joining the labor force.

Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to use qualitative data obtained in a community in Nurangi in the State of Hidalgo in Mexico (here on referred as Nurangi) to determine and analyze the impact that the international migration of married males and

their remittances have in this sending community. Specifically, I am interested in showing how Mexican women can come to challenge and redefine the normative structure and the systems of practice as it pertains to the gender division of labor. Furthermore, I will examine how women's participation in the labor force results in the expansion of their human and social capital and the impact that this has on their status in the community.

This thesis consists of five chapters. This chapter has provided an overview of the research that will be undertaken in this study. Chapter II will examine the literature related to international migration and the creation of transnational communities. It will also explore some of the current perspectives that attribute Mexican women's participation in the labor force to migration and discuss their shortcomings. Next, a demographic, social, and economic description of the community in which the data is collected will be presented. Chapter III will present the methods employed in the data collection for this research. Chapter IV will provide a discussion of the findings from the data analysis. Finally, Chapter V will present an overview of the major findings and a discussion of the implications of the results.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this chapter, I will examine the current literature that relates to this thesis. I will begin by exploring the literature on international migration. I will discuss some of the migration patterns and the remittances that result from the migration of the male. Then, I will review the concept of “family” as an important institution in Mexico. I will discuss the composition of the family and its implications for the division of labor that exists within its boundaries. I will pay particular attention to the acceptable gender roles and women’s participation in the labor force. Next, I will go over some social and demographic characteristics of the site from where the data for this ethnographic study were collected. Finally, I will bring together the literature to introduce the main idea behind this thesis: international migration as a trigger mechanism for structural and cultural transformations in the sending community. Furthermore, I will examine the effect that the international migration of the male has for the human and social capital of the women in the sending community.

### **INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION**

Mexican migration to the United States is the largest international flow of humans in the world (Phillips and Massey 2000). In this thesis, a migrant is defined as a person who engages in international migration. According to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), between 1961 and 1998, Mexico sent nearly 4.7 million migrants to the United States. However, this number is actually an underestimation since



it is based on individuals who migrated to the United States on a legal basis. Thus, people who took other routes (e.g., undocumented migration, visa overstays, etc.) to come to this country are not included. Alarcon (1988) refers to the Mexican migration process as “nortenzacion,” or the process through which some Mexican communities, especially rural ones, have produced a self-sustaining and expanding pool of migrant workers. This process of nortenzacion supposes not only a supply of Mexican migrant workers but also a demand in the North American labor market. Unfortunately, Mexican migrants typically find employment in low-wage, dead-end, and dangerous jobs (Alarcon 1988). If migrants face such poor working conditions, why is it that Mexicans continue to migrate in such large numbers to the United States?

## **MIGRATION PATTERNS**

International migration is a process that has particularly target males. According to Delauney (1995) and Donato (1994), international migration is a male dominated activity. In Chavinda, the town where Alarcon (1988) conducted his study, there is a migrant tradition that goes back three generations.

Even when the volume of women’s migration to the United States has risen since the end of the 1980’s, most Mexican women do not engage in international migration (Cornelius 1990; Donato 1994). There are several reasons for why women do not migrate. First, women typically do not migrate due to the double standard of family life for men and women. In Mexico, as in many parts of the world, having a family becomes a cause for migration for men but an obstacle for women (Kanaiaupuni 2000). For

example, the role of mother limits the acceptability of the migration of the women who have children. Second, since women's income is considered supplementary to that of men, economic forces typically do not propel women to migrate in search of employment. Third, women do not migrate as often as men because it is cheaper to raise a family in Mexico than in the United States, especially in light of the low income of Mexican Migrants in the United States. Finally, the presence of the wife in the sending community allows the husband to maintain his social standing in the sending community (Kanaiaupuni 2000). As such, the circular migration of males between Mexico and the United States would not be possible if women did not assume non-market and market (labor force) responsibilities in the sending community (Kanaiaupuni 2000). In sum, these reasons together account for the general absence of migration among women and the temporary and circular nature of this movement.

The literature shows that even when there is a common assumption that Mexican migrants come to the United States to permanently establish in the country, this is not always the case. Alarcon (1988) asserts that Mexican international migration tends to be temporary. The legal problems and the discrimination that migrants face while in the United States influence the temporary nature of their stay as they typically engage in constant back-and-forth movements between Mexico and the United States. Such geographic mobility leads to the creation of transnational communities and familial survival strategies (Alarcon 1988). However, besides political and social problems in the receiving country, there are other factors that influence migration patterns.

A variety of personal and structural factors (gender; age, social, human, and cultural capital, and the local opportunities and economic conditions) also influence whether or not people migrate (Kanaiaupuni 2000). At the micro level, social networks affect the decision of young adults to migrate. Finally, the economic condition in the sending community represents perhaps the most important push factor associated with migration.

Various scholars (Massey and Espana 1987; Piore 1979; Portes 1978) have sought to explain international migration. For the most part, in the Mexican context, the existence and the reproduction of the “migrant syndrome” is the product of people’s dream of finding better economic opportunities compared to the ones they have in their sending communities (Goldring 1992; Alarcon 1988; Reichert 1982). Hence, international migration “can be understood as a family strategy [mostly a male one] for economic reproduction” (Alarcon 1988:345). Therefore, in many cases, remittances become a tool for survival in the sending communities.

## **REMITTANCES**

Remittances from the United States have become an important source of income for Mexican rural families (Mines 1981). Adams (1996:150) defines remittances as “the money and/or goods sent home by migrant workers” which can have a significant effect on the income distribution and asset accumulation in rural areas. Migrant remittances are very important for the development process of the sending community at the micro and the macro level.

At the micro level, Montes (1987) notes that for families, remittances provide money to cover basic necessities and, thus, improve their living conditions (see Menjivar 1998). One of the first things in which a migrant family invests remittances is in the acquisition of a house (Basok 2000). For the most part, migrant families are more likely than non-migrant families to build or acquire better quality houses made of brick or adobe, as well as to attain other durable goods, thus enhancing their status in the sending community (Massey et al 1987). In addition to houses and durable goods, some people acquire land. In many cases, the land becomes a source of food, income, and security for the family. Some people also invest in non-tangible goods such as education since it increases the children's chances for socioeconomic mobility (Basok 2000).

However, according to the literature, for the most part, remittances are not used in productive investment. One of the reasons that discourage people from investing in a business is the insecurity that small businesses face and the absence of people to manage such ventures (Basok 2000). While women in the sending community are a source of labor for such businesses, patriarchal restrictions have traditionally prevented migrants from viewing to see them as a possible source of labor. This is unfortunate because such investments would yield future income. Overall, most studies concentrating on the effect of remittances in the sending community focus on their micro level.

Many studies have neglected the impact that remittances have had at the macro level especially for developing sending communities. However, Menjivar (1998:98) mentions that "these transfers of money [remittances] supply foreign exchange to capital-poor countries, a source of liquidity to governments deficient of cash, a mitigant

of balance-of payment problems, and a mean of providing hard currency.” Furthermore, Massey et al (1987) mention that the advantages that remittances have for the sending communities, especially small ones, even when overlooked are very important.

For example, home-construction has become not only a way to spend remittance money but also a very important factor in local economies, as construction becomes an important source of employment. Remittances are also very helpful in improving the town with small projects such as remodeling plazas and roads (Massey et al 1987:230).

Furthermore, in addition to economic profits, remittances bring social benefits to the sending community.

Remittances promote reciprocal networks among members of the community.

Mines’ (1981) points out the practice of the lending of houses in Zacatecas as an illustration of the development of such networks. In rural Zacatecas, if a person builds a house for his own use and later on does not occupy it, the person lends it to someone who needs it (Mines 1981). However, migration and remittances do not produce only benefits. Indeed, some studies point out the negative impact that remittances have for the people in the sending community (for a varying view, see Cornelius, 1978).

Even when remittances increase families’ resources, social stratification in the sending communities has also tightened. Mines (1981:113) mentions that “the remittances from the U.S. have created and reinforced the class differentiation that has occurred in the village community.” Mines (1981) states that in the sending community, the lower classes predominate, something that makes the purpose and result of migration different for each group. For one group, migration has become the means towards upward social mobility-- for the lower class it is a tool for survival. In many towns, price

inflation is so high that the only people that are able to acquire land are those that have a migrant member. This event has led to the perpetuation of unequal property distribution and has affected social relationships (Massey et al 1987).

Furthermore, international migration and its remittances have had an effect not only in the social stratification of the community but also in the type of relations among the members that reinforce this differentiation. Reichert (1982) observes that the return of migrants to Guadalupe, the site of his study, was in the form of vacation with migrants lavishly spending their experiences as a way to demonstrate their prosperity. The exorbitant spending patterns of migrants led to social separations as many non-migrant families could not afford to participate in many activities that required the spending of money. In addition, relations between the women in this sending community started to change. Reichert (1982) mentions that the women with non-migrant members felt inferior to those with migrants in their families.

As was the case with men, friendships between women in Guadalupe were expressed through the exchange of goods and services. Prior to heavy migration to the United States, such exchanges normally involved the giving of food and various hand-made items (Reichert 1982:418).

However, with changes in the standard of living that migration brought, women were more likely to give as presents store-bought food and clothes. In many cases, the migrant-related women acted superior and no longer wanted to maintain friendships with women whose husbands did not migrate (Reichert 1982). As shown in Reichert's (1982) study, international migration has an impact on the sending community not only at an economic level but also at a social one. In some instances, the effects of people's migration and its byproduct are positive; in others, they are negative. However, the

degree to which migration and remittances have positive or negative effects on social relations depends on the amount and frequency of remittances.

Unfortunately, very little is known about remittance patterns at the individual and household level (Menjivar 1998). Since the decision and amount remitted are affected by several factors, the issue is complex. Alarcon (1988) mentions some of the factors that influence the amount remitted and their timing. One factor that influences whether a migrant remits and the amount of the remittances is his/her motivation to migrate. Menjivar (1998) points out that if a person migrates for economic or political reasons, it is more likely that he/she will send remittances back to the sending community. However, it is also possible that a person that migrates looking for better opportunities will face his/her migrant life alone (with no help from others). In such cases, people have more problems sending money back home.

Family obligations in the sending community increase the likelihood of remittances (Menjivar 1998). The reason for this pattern is the mutual expectations and obligations. For example, if the migrant's children continue to live in the sending community, the migrant will be more likely to send money (Menjivar 1998). Family obligations can be measured by the household composition in the United States and in the sending community (Menjivar 1998). For example, the smaller the household composition in the United States compared to that in Mexico, the higher the probability a migrant will remit. Besides family obligations, political factors can also affect remittance patterns.

In community migratory networks, a division occurs in the young adult period of the male migrant's life cycle into an "unfortunate" group and a "fortunate" group. On the one hand, the "unfortunate" group is made of people who fail to attain a legal status in the United States and, thus, is forced to return to the sending community after some years (Mines 1981). On the other hand, the "fortunate" group is made of people who attain a legal status in the United States and are able to work with no problems. In such case, many of these people begin a career in the country. Menjivar (1998:103) notes that,

Changes to a more permanent immigration status, plans for citizenships, and home ownership are indicators of investments and attachments that immigrants make in the new country and may increase the likelihood of remaining in the new country and may interfere with obligations to relatives back home (Menjivar 1998:103).

Furthermore, the remittance dollars and the absence of productive members in the household can affect the patterns of socioeconomic organization in the sending community (Tienda and Booth 1991; Massey et al 1987). Therefore, before we look at the family and the gender division of labor of the people in the sending community, it is necessary to first describe some of the demographic and economic characteristics of the site where the data for this thesis were gathered: the municipality of Cardonal.

## **MUNICIPALITY OF CARDONAL**

For this thesis, Hidalgo, a central state in Mexico was selected to gathered data. In this section, I will provide an overview of some of the demographic and economic characteristics of the region. I will particularly focus on a community of the municipality of Cardonal, which I refer to as "Nurangi" in this thesis. Nurangi, the Otomi word for



“household,” seems appropriate given that we are interested in observing the division of labor that exists among couples and that the region is primarily inhabited by the Otomi indigenous group. Finally, I will examine the labor force participation of the women in the municipality and the type of work and wage level characteristic of the region. Unfortunately, however, because the community being studied is too small (250 inhabitants) it is difficult to find information about it. Therefore, the majority of the demographic and economic characteristics will come from the municipality where the community is located.

In the last decades, the state of Hidalgo and particularly Nurangi have become important suppliers of migrants to the United States. According to the 2000 Mexican Census, the state of Hidalgo had a total population of 2, 235,591 in 2000 with rural residents (50.4%) slightly outnumbering urban residents (49.6%). At this time, the population density was 108 inhabitants per kilometer. In 2000, Hidalgo had close to two million people five years or older from which 17% speaks an indigenous language.

The municipality of Cardonal is located in the central part of the state of Hidalgo. According to the 2000 Mexican Census, the municipality of Cardonal has a total population of 16,943. The indigenous population accounted for about four fifths of the 16,943 inhabitants in the Cardonal municipality, the site of my research.

Most of the municipality’s indigenous population is Otomi. The word “Otomi” is an Aztec word that derives from the word *otocac* which means ‘walk’ and *mitl* which means ‘arrow’ to imply that the Nhanhus were simple “bow-and-arrow bird hunters (Dow 1998). Indeed, the Otomi group prefers to be called “Nhanhus.” In 1993,

according to the National Indigenous Institute (INI), about 37 percent of Hidalgo's total population spoke the Otomi language.

#### *LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION*

In 2000, the Mexican Census shows that the municipality of Cardonal in Hidalgo had 5,457 males 12 years and older, with 51% being economically active<sup>1</sup> and employed. By way of contrast, the municipality had 6,251 females 12 years and older, with 17.4% economically active and employed. These figures show that relatively few women are part of the economically active population.

#### *TYPE OF WORK AND WAGE LEVELS*

In 2000, 40 percent of Cardonal's workforce was employed in agriculture, farming, and fishing and 18% worked in construction. At the same time, in 1990, 36.4 percent of the employed population earned less than a minimum salary and an additional 29.7 percent earned between one and two times the minimum salary. In 1990, between January 1<sup>st</sup> and November 15<sup>th</sup>, a minimum salary represented 8.405 pesos or about 8 U.S. dollars (Comision Nacional de los Salarios Minimos 2000). These earnings patterns illustrate the high degree of economic marginality in the municipality.

According to the Instituto Nacional de Geografia e Historia's Conteo de Poblacion y Vivienda (2002), the Cardonal municipality in the State of Hidalgo had

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<sup>1</sup> Economically active population: People 12 years old and older that worked or helped someone to work at least for an hour during the week of reference (between march 5 – 11<sup>th</sup>, 1990); it also includes the people that did not work but that did have a job and those that actively looked for a job in the reference period (Instituto Nacional de Geografia e Historia 2002).

3,658 occupied households and the community where the study was conducted had 53. The households in the municipality of Cardonal contained an average of 4.9 occupants. According to the 2000 Mexican Censo de Poblacion y Vivienda, the majority of the Cardonal municipality's houses had dust floors (54%) with 44 percent having cement floors in 2000. In addition, 55 percent of the houses had brick, rock or cement walls, while 38 percent of the houses had asbestos or metallic ceilings. Overall, we may say that the economic traits of the municipality of Cardonal described here represent a traditional community characterized by economic marginality. Next, I will discuss some of the cultural characteristics of not only the municipality of Cardonal but also Mexico in general.

## **THE FAMILY**

In Mexico, the traditional family unit is comprised of a husband, a wife, and children. The gender and power relations that define the “normative and practical demarcation of male and female roles and statuses” do so not only within the family unit but also in the community (Kanaiaupuni 2000:1317). However, the concept of a gender division of labor is fluid and ever changing (Phillips 2001; Pierce 1995). Women's resistance is not only shown in protests but also in their self-constructions (Phillips 2001). Lavrin (1987) mentions that the acceptance of the idea of women as passive agents disregards the contemplation of women as agents of social transformation (see also Findlay 1992). Arrom (1985) focuses on Mexican women's historical agency. She

asserts that even when on the surface it may seem that men and women have held the same gender ideology, women have defined the “normative code very differently.”

The fluidity of women’s construction of the gender ideology is recognized in Hirsch’s (1999) study. She observes that based on generational status, there has been a change in spousal relations by women that has gone from a relationship based on respect (*respeto*) to one based on trust (*confianza*). For the older generations, the marital relationship was synonymous with respect. Men and women had different obligations in marriage based on traditional notions of the social order. Alonso (1995:33) points out that:

The man, whose sexual endowments are principally valor and strength, should give and will give to the woman protection, nourishment, and direction, treating her always as the most delicate, sensitive, and fine part of himself and with the magnanimity and generous benevolence that the strong owes to the weak, especially when this weak one gives herself to him and, when she has been confided to him by society. The woman, whose principal endowments and abnegation, beauty, compassion, perspicacity, and tenderness, should give and will give to the husband obedience, pleasure, assistance, comfort, and counsel, treating him always with the veneration that is owed to the person who supports us and defends us, and with the delicacy of she who does not wish to exasperate the brusque and irritable part of herself.

We need to remember that respect implies hierarchy. As Alonso (1995:33) illustrates, “protection and obedience do not have the same social and cultural value,” just as women and men have different statuses. In an analysis of Silvia Arrom’s (1985) *The Women of Mexico City*, Findlay (1992) observes that although Arrom recognizes gender power relations in Mexico, she fails to recognize that it is people’s concept of the social order rather than a material interest that continues to subordinate women, which “prevented them from equalizing married’s men and women’s legal and economic status

(Findlay 1992:82). Given that the husband is viewed as the representative of the family in the eyes of the state, he becomes the head within the family “refin[ing] and rationaliz[ing] the gender asymmetry ordained by nature” (Alonso 1995:32). In this case, men, having been brought up with a sense of superiority over women, believing that they “own” their wives and, thus, feeling free to control them. Trigueros (1992) mentions that these forms of control include verbal as well as physical control. However, even when women are expected to obey their husbands, as sociologists, we should not diminish their agency in the construction of or challenge to the normative code. With time, women began redefining spousal relations to ones based on trust (*confianza*.)

Younger generation women have now come to have a different view of marital relations. Hirsch (1999) mentions that younger generation women see a marital relation as one that should be based on trust (*confianza*). Findlay (1992:88) notes that,

In Arrom’s study, women agreed with men that wives should obey their husband’s, but instead that, in exchange, husbands owed their spouses financial support and restraint of their physical violence. Men, on the other hand, asserted their right to unlimited control over their wives’ bodies and lives.

Trust implies a relation between equals meaning that decisions are made together. Rather than the male spouse having a higher status, he is expected to be a companion and share the reproduction tasks (Hirsch 1999). It is because of this redefinition of spousal relations on the part of women that a relation based on trust has led to the “erosion of the gendered boundaries of space between the house and the street” (Hirsch 1999:1337). In addition, this redefinition of spousal relations has allowed the slipping of gendered task boundaries.

Still, women and men have a division of labor. For the most part, men continue to hold market roles (labor force participation) while women hold non-market roles. Furthermore, even when today, younger generation women expect respect in a marital relationship, not all of them obtain it (Hirsch 1999). I have previously mentioned how the exercise of control on the part of men and the community has a tremendous impact on whether or not women are able to exercise their agency and how their social, cultural, or human capital is also important for the development of not only gender relations but the development of the community as a whole.

In many cases, the household structure influences the degree to which this control is exercised. Kanaiaupuni (2000:1317) defines a household as “a group that ensures its maintenance and reproduction by generation and disposing of a collective income base...it has a limited set of resources (e.g., land, capital, and labor) and a set of needs and consumption desires.” For the most part, there are two types of households: extended and nuclear. In the extended household unit, the older head of the household makes the important decisions in the house while the sons’ and daughters’ in laws have little voice (Trigueros 1992). In other cases, even when the couple does not live in the same house as the parents, they still live in the same property as a small part of the land is given to children when they get married. Trigueros (1992) observes that in many cases, the son builds his house in the parent’s land in which case even when they maintain certain independence, when the man migrates to the United States, the wife and children are left under the supervision or care of the husband’s father. In any case, Kanaiaupuni (2000) suggests that in Mexico, the typical nuclear extended household is

the “primary source for economic, emotional, and social security,” and it is the gender and power relations that exist within the family that define the actions, roles, and statuses that men and women hold in the community.

## **GENDER ROLES**

Every community has a set of gender roles that rule their daily lives. Gender roles are the “expected attitudes and behaviors, which a society associates with each sex” (Lindsey 1997:3). Phillips (2001:94) observes that when we talk about the gender division of labor we are talking about an “asymmetric, hierarchical and exploitative relationship and not a simple division of tasks between equal partners.” For the most part, women and men learn from the time of childhood socialization the proper roles to perform (Kanaiaupuni 2000). Phillips (2001:94) mentions that,

The meanings of gender become tied to many kinds of cultural representations, and these in turn establish terms by which relations between women and men are organized and understood” (Scott 1988,3). Such distinctions are said to be inevitably expressed, at least in hierarchical societies, as dominant-subordinate dualities that “make sense” to Western researchers – public vs. private, culture versus nature, men versus women, and so on. In taking a critical perspective, it therefore, becomes important to expose such divisions not only as power relationships, constructed as such “for particular purposes in particular contexts” (Scott 1988, 44), but also as the framework within which women (and men) conceptualize reality, as what informs and constrains their construction of “realistic” alternatives.

In his study of rural Zacatecas, Mines (1981) found that men and women performed traditional sex role activities. Overall, men worked as laborers, aiding bricklayers, fixing fences and tending other people’s animals. In some cases, even when

the husband would “help” in the house, it would most likely be in confined activities that other people could not see (Hubbell 1993). The reality for the women is much different.

Christenson (1989:265) points out, “the domestic, the private, and the familiar have been traditionally considered feminine spaces.” Tienda and Booth (1991) states that patriarchy is very significant when looking at why gender separation and the inequality that occurs because of it, persists in the process of social change. Although the meaning of motherhood is constantly changing, responsibility over children is exclusively assigned to women (Guandelman et al 2001). For the most part, traditional female activities involve going for water, threshing and grinding corn, preparing handmade tortillas and other food, cleaning the house, taking care of the children, taking the food to the men working the land, and washing clothes among other things (Trigueros 1992). In some cases, women’s activities also involve remunerated activities such as preparing tortillas for the neighbors, washing other people’s cloths, and selling fruits and vegetables in the town. However, Mines (1981) mentions that overall, women contribute almost no cash income to the household. Even when women’s activities are very important for the reproduction of the group, these activities are assigned lower statuses than those performed by men (Trigueros 1992). Many women may wish to break the acceptable social order by performing activities not associated with their gender. Unfortunately, for many women the social control or surveillance exercised by their male partner or the community as a whole is so strong that they are not able to exercise their full agency and perform market roles. It is true that in many places the majority of women tend to work at home. Guandelman et al. (2001:1806) notes “a patriarchal



ideology that frowns upon working outside the familial sphere reinforces female subordination to men and dedication to domestic affairs.” However, in some places, these patterns are changing. In some cases, tired of holding a low status, many women join the labor force.

### **WOMEN AND THE LABOR FORCE**

There have been changes in Mexico regarding female employment. Kanaiaupuni (2000) observes that at one point, women had to ask for permission to work outside the house. However, this is changing and more women are joining the labor force. While new reality continues to assign domestic roles to women, it also allows for the expansion of their roles to include market activities to support their children economically (Guandelman et al 2001). According to the Consejo Nacional de Poblacion (1995), employment rates among women have been on the rise. In her 1969/70 and 1988/89 fieldwork work in Uruapan, Michoacan, Hubbell (1993) saw an increasing number of middle-class women entering the labor force due to the economic hardships that the country was going through. In many cases, women did not take part in any money-producing activity outside the house without their husband’s knowledge (Hubbell 1993). Yet, many women do take part in such activities at home without their husbands’ knowledge. Such activities complicate the measurement of women’s labor force especially since it involves factors at the individual and the household levels (Hubbell 1993).

*INDIVIDUAL LEVEL*

At the individual level, Lustig (1978) observes that one of the factors that influences women's labor force participation is age. Lustig (1978) points out that between the 1960-1970 period, the majority of women that worked outside the house for money did so between the ages of 15 and 30, peaking at ages between 20 and 24. However, for the most part, as soon as women got married, they left the labor force (Lustig 1978). This pattern continues to be seen today. The second factor that influences women's labor force participation is education. Women with higher levels of education are more likely to work outside the home compared to their counterparts that have a lower level of education. Third, the type of job that women hold is also important with respect to women's labor force participation. In her study, Christenson (1989) used logistic regression to explore factors associated with female labor force participation among groups with distinct socioeconomic contexts and different individual and familial characteristics. Christenson (1989) observes that the wage-earning agricultural and non-agricultural sectors (e.g., household work) have traditionally offered an important space for the incorporation and permanency of women in the labor market since women generally perform the work role alongside domestic and the family roles. MirafTAB (1994:2) mentions,

Home-based work may also be seen as bringing the domestic and public spheres together. According to this view, home work brings women greater possibilities of income generation and wealth by changing the home from its previous status as a site of economic confinement.

Thus, MirafTAB (1994) argues that bringing together the home and the place of work could allow for the breakage of the two different spheres (public and private)

between the sexes. As such, it is in the urban central states of Mexico, where there are more wage-earning activities, where relatively more women tend to be part of the labor force (Christenson 1989). Besides the individual level factors influencing women's participation in the labor force, there are factors that are important at the family level.

### *HOUSEHOLD LEVEL*

As mentioned previously, it is within the household that there is a demarcation of people's roles and this division is also shown in the public sphere. Therefore, at the household level a factor influencing women's participation in the labor force is marriage. Christenson (1989) mentions that married women have a lower level of labor force participation than non-married women. In many cases, men do not allow women to work outside the house because of jealousy, pride, etc., which implies a power differential between men and women within the household. The family's economy should be another factor taken into consideration when examining women's participation in the labor force.

Contrary to many studies, Lustig (1978) disagrees with the view that economic necessity ("necessity effect") explains variations in women's participation in the labor force. Lustig (1978) suggests that the "necessity effect," does not hold true. Lustig (1978) argues that labor force participation for women may be more expensive than it would be if they continue to produce goods for family use. Accordingly, if women from low economic sectors work outside the house, they will be more likely to work by

themselves in small enterprises rather than in non-privately owned enterprises selling their labor.

Chant (1991), however, disagrees with Lustig's argument. Chant (1991) points out that there are also many instances where family needs push women into labor force participation. In many cases, the inability of the man to provide financial support for the family due to ill health or irresponsibility may push the woman to look for a job outside the home (Chant 1991). Miraftab (1994:2) mentions, "one of the survival strategies of the urban Mexican poor is the use of the home for production activities. In this situation, the family is turned into a unit of production as well as consumption, and the home becomes a site for both production and reproduction." Therefore, the integration of informal production into the homes of low income families may alter the established patterns of social/spatial interaction (Miraftab 1994). However, Chant (1991) argues that one of the major forces pushing women to work outside the house is the change in the household structure rather than the economy itself.

Household structure can further positively or negatively influence the labor force participation of married women. For the most part, women's labor force participation is lower in nuclear than in non-nuclear households (Chant 1991; Christenson 1989). Chant (1991) points out that it is the nuclear household structure that is most supportive of dominant gender ideologies, which affect the division of labor, the status of women, and men's control over women's labor power. Chant (1991) points out that this occurs because first, women are not able to delegate household responsibilities as in extended household structures and also because the male, as the household sole provider, has more

power. Chant (1991) mentions that in many Mexican cities, the sex of the household head in low-income families is critical in determining women's propensity to work outside the home.

On the other hand, the incorporation of kin (extended households) especially of women allows for the restructuring of the internal division of labor by delegating women responsibilities or by women's themselves becoming the head of their immediate households (Wong and Levine 1992). Chant (1991) is careful to note that it is difficult to pinpoint at the causes and consequences of women's labor force participation. For example, in many instances, it is because a woman starts working in the labor force that there is an extension of kin which most of the time involves the addition of females into the household (Chant 1991). For example, without exception, in Chant's study (1991:154), women who did not work outside the home,

attributed their non-participation to various aspects of household form and organization, particularly to the fact that through extension or stage in the lifecycle there were other earning members in the home (thereby reducing their need to go to work), or because they had no assistance in domestic labor and child-care.

Furthermore, even when it has been noted that women with more children have a lower level of labor force participation, Christenson (1989) argues that studies have not completely come to agreement on this issue, proposing that perhaps, it is the differential characteristics among women that may explain their differences of participation in the labor force. However, Chant (1991) suggests that, regardless of the temporal order, entrance into the labor force or extension of kin, this tends to be mutually reinforcing.

Finally, an important aspect at the household level related to the likelihood of a woman working outside of the home is socialization. Cerruti (2000) argues that if a girl's mother has been involved in market roles, it is more likely that the girl will do so as well. However, this participation tends to be for the most part in the informal sector and for intermittent periods.

In the previous sections I have examined some of the economic, demographic, and cultural characteristics of Mexico. I have gone over some of the labor force patterns of women and how the household plays an important role in the gender division of labor. Furthermore, I have discussed how the literature shows that a change in the structure and headship of the household, and an unfulfilled division of labor may have an impact on how this division of labor is reconstructed and reconceptualized by women. Therefore next, I will go over some of the transformations in the normative structure of the community that may take place with the physical, economic, and emotional absence of the husband/partner.

## **INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AS A TRIGGER MECHANISM FOR STRUCTURAL AND CULTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS**

There are many transformations that take place in the sending community from which migration originates. The most obvious transformation is a demographic one. Due to migration, a very high proportion of the young and middle age men are absent, with children, women and the elderly accounting for a major share of the population (Mines 1981). However, as Peggy Levitt (1998) asserts, there are other important structural and

social transformations involving alterations in the normative structure, social capital, and systems of practices of the sending community.

### *NORMATIVE STRUCTURE*

A perusal of the literature reveals that few studies have examined the impact of migration on structural and social patterns in sending communities in Mexico. Moreover, ever fewer deal with changes that women experience in the community of origin. For example, research carried out in the 1980's (e.g., Mines 1981) focused on changes in men's roles while ignoring women's roles. Accordingly, studies that have neglected women have viewed them as passive. Yet, this view is problematic because the international migration of males may allow women to challenge the normative structure. In particular, Peggy Levitt (1998) asserts that migration alters the normative structure of the sending community and, thus, impacts many of the gender norms that constrain women. Normative structures are the ideas, values, and beliefs that guide social life.

These types of structures include:

Norms for the interpersonal behavior, notions of intra-family responsibility, standards of age and gender appropriateness, principles of neighborliness and community participation, and aspirations for social mobility. They also include expectations about organizational performance such as how much the church, state, or the courts should function. Norms about the role of clergy, judges, and politics are also exchanged (Levitt 1998:933).

According to Goldring (1992), migration leads to the fragmentation of social spaces. For the most part, women are assigned the familial space and non-market activities while men are assigned the external space and market activities (labor force participation). Thus, in the case of migrants, the absence of the male may produce a

change in the structure of the family, which may allow women to challenge the normative structure. For example, in his study of rural Zacatecas, Mines (1981) found that once the husband or male head of household migrates, some women take on market responsibilities often associated with males. In such instances, as women assume market roles, a new social condition emerges. However, Cardenas (1983) mentions that the redefinition of the normative structure and the gender norms within it may not be completely different (see also Alarcon 1988). Even when it may seem that the woman has a position of power, she may continue to be subordinate and under the watch of other people because of the “double morality.” This double morality makes the absence of the husband not only an opportunity to challenge the normative structure, but also makes the woman socially vulnerable since she may invite suspicion and criticism from family members and the larger community (Alarcon 1988). Nevertheless, if a change in the normative structure does occur, Levitt (1998) argues that there will also be a change in the systems of practice of the people.

#### *SYSTEMS OF PRACTICE*

Levitt (1998:934) defines systems of practice as “the actions shaped by normative structures. For individuals, these include household labor, religious practices, and patterns of civil and political participation.” In this case, since gender norms are part of the normative structure, the actual roles that women and men perform will be the systems of practices.



The literature shows that women's roles expand in the sending community with the migration of the male. For the migrants, the family has a fundamental value not only because it is "the center of the biological reproduction but also because it is a secure center in which investments take place" (Alarcon 1988:346). Trigueros (1992) observed in her study that the migration of husbands and male partners resulted in the family becoming a matriarchal one. Alarcon (1988:346) notes that a matriarchal family is one in which "the women that takes on the total responsibility of the economic administration of the house and the care and education of the children." Since migration has a negative effect on the number of children in a given family, it is more likely that women with migrant partners will be able to expand their non-market roles to market ones (labor force participation) meaning that they will need to acquire human capital (Alarcon 1988).

Human capital is the resources that people invest in that make them more productive and from which they benefit economically (Phillips and Massey 2000; Becker 1964). In many cases, migrant related women get involved in the labor force through such activities as making tortillas to sell, washing other people's clothes, selling prepared foods, and working as a domestic servant, while their migrant husbands send back remittances. Goldring (1992) notes how some of the women in Las Animas use personal earnings generated from embroidering to help their families survive by buying beans when a money order was delayed or when the migrant had just left. In most of these cases, women became the sole educators and caretakers of their children. However, the new roles that many women may adopt due to changes in the family structure and the

community may not endure. Indeed, the acquisition of human capital and the legitimization of the new gendered norms in the normative structure will depend on the social capital possessed.

### *SOCIAL CAPITAL*

Social capital is not only a tool to acquire human capital but also one that may come to promote civic engagement (Coleman 1988,1990, Putnam 1995). Social capital represents the social relations that exist among family or community members. According to Putnam (1995), social capital facilitates coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. Thus, a very important component of social capital is “generalized reciprocity” (Putnam 1995:172).

Reciprocity refers to “a continuing relationship of exchange that is at any given time unrequited or imbalanced, but that involves mutual expectations that a benefit granted now should be repaid in the future” (Putnam 1993:172). The concept of “generalized reciprocity” is based on the “assurance community members have that their altruistic actions will be rewarded at some point ensures their willingness to contribute to others’ welfare” (Wall 1998:311). Thus, Putnam (1993) sees generalized reciprocity as a basic ingredient of cooperation, and a factor that can lead to improved productivity and civic engagement. Brehm (1997) mentions that for Putnam (1993), civic engagement is at the very core of his idea of social capital. In the case of Mexican women, accordingly, strong networks among women in the sending community will allow them to acquire human capital and later on come to legitimize the new normative structure creating and

facilitating cooperation and coordination (Brehm 1997). Furthermore, Coleman (1988) mentions that all of the factors involved in social capital have two key elements that tie them together, one being social structures and the other being that they facilitate social action by actors within these structures.

Bourdieu takes Coleman's argument a step further. According to Wall (1998), Bourdieu (1986,1990,1993) sees social capital as the tool to maintain or change a person's position in a hierarchical structure. For Bourdieu, a person's position is based on their "social, economic, and cultural capital" (Wall 1998:306). In this sense, "people struggle to maintain or improve their social positions within various areas of institutionalized activities, which he refers to as (fields)" (Wall 1998:307). Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:97) define a field as a "network, or configuration, of objective relations between positions." The efficacy to which social capital will be able to maintain or change the position of a person will "depend on membership in a social group whose members or representatives establish group boundaries through the exchange of things and symbols" (Wall 1998:306). However, Wall (1998) mentions that many sociologists influenced by Bourdieu raise the question on whether social capital or the level of trust existing in a community may exclude some people from resources. Therefore, it is possible that just as the migrant related women may come to form a strong set of networks and thus acquire human capital, conflict may arise between migrant and non-migrant women. However, if the conflict is overcome, the social cohesion that exists among women in the sending community may become the tool for the legitimization of the new normative structure. In any case, the international migration of the man may

become a trigger mechanism for structural and social changes in the sending Mexican community.

As has been shown, the international migration process is very complex. For the most part, Mexicans migrate to the United States wishing to improve the economic conditions of their families in the sending community. Since the Mexican normative structure is one in which there is a gender social hierarchy in which men occupy a privileged position, women continue to hold non-market roles. However, international migration may allow changes in the normative structure particularly in those related to the gender division of labor and, thus, in the systems of practice and social capital of women in the sending community. These changes, in turn, may allow for a redefinition of the gender norms allowing women to hold not only non-market roles but also market ones, specifically their participation in the labor force. Therefore, in this thesis, I draw from different topics to examine the effects of international migration on the social construction of gender of women in a rural Mexican sending community, specifically their definition of the normative structure, the systems of practice, and the impact that this redefinition has on women's social capital.

Therefore, drawing from different bodies of literature, the present study asks whether the normative structure of a Mexican rural community (Nurangi in the State of Hidalgo) is affected by migration. In particular, the following sets of questions are examined.

- **Does the men's migration allow women in the sending community to take an active role in redefining the normative structure?**
- **Are the systems of practice of the sending community affected by the women's redefinition of the normative structure?**

- **How is the human capital of women affected by their redefinition of the normative structure?**
- **How is the social capital of women affected by their redefinition of the normative structure?**

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **METHODOLOGY**

The research questions proposed in the previous chapter will be addressed through data collected in an ethnographic study. This thesis is the product of ethnographic work in a community of Nurangi within the municipality of Cardonal in the summer of 2001. The municipality of Cardonal is located in the state of Hidalgo in central Mexico. Given my own experience as a Mexican migrant to the United States, I became interested in the study of international migration. Having done my undergraduate at the University of Texas-PanAmerican in Edinburg, Texas, I came into contact with many Mexican migrants of all generations who came to the United States searching for better opportunities than the ones they had in their Mexican communities of origin. It is through my own migration that I was able to experience many of the social, cultural, political, and economic problems that migrants face in their search for a better life. It is because I was able to see life on the American side of the border that I became interested in the life of the people, particularly the families that stayed behind in Mexico.

As a migrant, I was able to understand many of the problems migrants face, such as missing one's family, culture, country, the food one grew up enjoying, missing all that in many cases is taken for granted. It is because I understood how the life of a person changes with migration, that I began to be interested on how the life of those that do not migrate change with the migration of a friend or a relative. I became interested in how the life of families in the sending community is affected by the migration of the male,

who in most cases is the head of the household, and how this structural change may lead to cultural as well as to further structural changes, as has occurred in the community of Nurangi in the municipality of Cardonal.

As I was undertaking my first year of M.S. coursework and seeking a thesis topic, I came across a great opportunity. When young, my father made some trips to a small community in Hidalgo. He describes Nurangi at the time as a community in which men and women woke up with the singing of the rooster and went to sleep when the sun went down. In this community, women wore the typical dress of the area, and the houses were mostly made of adobe. People's mode of transportation consisted of walking and riding their bikes or horses. The popular drink of the area was tepache, a preHispanic drink. Ten years later, my father had the opportunity to go back to the community that he knew in the past and encountered a significantly different reality. Women and men continue to wake up with the rooster, but now they go to sleep at the end of the last "telenovela" (Mexican soap opera.) Women wear colorful clothes and jeans, and the houses are made of brick and cement. There are still many people who walk or ride their bikes or horses, but in many houses one sees a variety of trucks with license plates from such U.S. states as Louisiana, Texas, California, and Georgia, just to name a few. In addition, beer has replaced tepache as the social drink. While the town has changed, many of these changes are not due simply to the transformation that occurs with time. Rather, many of the transformations are, according to the town's people, the product of the migration of many members of the municipality's population and the product of their work – remittances– on the other side of the border.

Sociologists (Massey et al 1987; Mines 1981) have described the roles that men's migration and their remittances have played in the transformation of Mexican communities, such as in Nurangi. However, much of the focus of extant studies has been on housing and economic changes. Given this gap in the literature, I became interested in looking at the changes that occur at the micro level in terms of social organization (normative structure.) Specifically, I became interested in the impact of the international migration of married/cohabitating males on their wives/partners, and the impact that the demographic changes and remittances have on the gender division of labor of the people that stay behind.

## **METHODOLOGY DEVELOPMENT**

Previous research in this area of study has been based on quantitative analysis that examines the impact of international migration on the sending community. However, quantitative methods have shortcomings in that they predispose researchers to enter the field with pre-established categories. The qualitative method, on the other hand, permits an inductive method of study that recognizes all types of information as important without its filtration due to pre-established categories. Thus, this study uses a grounded theory methodology to conduct the analysis. In particular, this approach is used to obtain answers to the broad questions posed at the end of the previous chapter. The approach is also used to identify patterns from observations and open-ended interviews.



Because of the ethnographic and qualitative nature of my research, the study consisted of participant observation and individual person-to-person interviews with volunteer Mexican women with migrating and non-migrating husbands/partners. The qualitative part of the study is based on in-depth analysis at the household level. As Chant (1991:228) argues, this level of analysis helps us improve “the analysis of women’s work which has tended in the past to rely on stereotypical conceptualizations of patriarchy.”

First, in this thesis, I included some demographic questions in Spanish derived from the Ethnosurvey 99 of the Mexican Migrant Project (See MMP Website). These questions tap the following issues.

- Information about family members and all the persons living in the household (Table A).
- Information on each person living in the household with migrant experience in the United States (Table D).
- Information on the formation and history of businesses, firms, or other activities that require an investment from the household head or his/her spouse (Table E).
- Labor history of the household head since he/she began to work (Table Fa).
- Labor history of the household head’s spouse since he/she began to work (Table Fb).
- Information on current residence and history of other properties owned by the household head and his/her spouse (Table I).
- Household amenities (Table J1).

- Vehicles currently owned (Table J2).
- History of the household head's ownership and rental of sharecrop agricultural land (Table O).

Second, the survey includes questions about the responsibilities within the marriage of migrant men and their wives/partners before and during migration as perceived by the latter. As mentioned previously, many migrants are not able to send enough remittances to their families (economic absence) or they come to have another family in the receiving country (affective absence). The questionnaire includes questions about sex roles and attitudes at two different stages to assess the extent to which economic and affective absence leads to a redefinition of the normative structure on the part of the women.

Third, the survey also includes questions about the human and social capital of the women to evaluate the extent to which women have expanded the possession of these forms of capital, and the consequences that these changes bring to the lives of women in particular and the community in general.

Finally, field notes were developed through the collection of data to allow for the recognition of factors not previously considered and which might uncover important issues. The complete questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

Even when I recognized that in many cases having predefined categories and definitions predisposes the researcher in his studies, for the purposes of this thesis, it was necessary to operationalize some of the variables here explored. The variables used in this research along with their conceptualization are listed below.

- Gender division of labor: expected division of labor between men and women based on the attitudes and behaviors, which the people of the Mexican municipality of Cardonal, Hidalgo associate with each sex.
- Labor Force Participation: the performance of economic activities also referred as market roles.
- Non-Labor Force Participation: the performance of non-economic activities also referred as non-market roles.
- Household: “groups of people who share a common residence and common budgeting and consumption activities” (Chant 1991:231).
- Household structure: the composition of the members living in the same household unit (nuclear/extended).
- Household head: decision-making person in the family, whether a male or a female from a nuclear or extended family.
- Extended household: household composed of nuclear members and other relatives or a head of household with other non-nuclear relatives.
- Nuclear household: household composed of a head of household and his/her spouse/partner, a head of household and his/her partner with non-married children (12 years of age and under), or a head of household with non-married children. Within this household type there can be domestic workers. Non-married children include children that are single, divorced, widowed, or separated that live with their parents as well as children that are married but do not live with their spouses/partners.

## **SAMPLE AND INTERVIEW PROCESS**

Having an interest on the effect that the migration of the male has for the gender division of labor of married/cohabitating women in a sending community, I contacted two sisters (nuns) in Nurangi from which my population is drawn. Cardonal is a community where the traditional normative structure is maintained. For the most part, men participate in the labor force and women do not. However, the lack of economic and affective resources on the part of male migrants towards their families allows women to overtly redefine the normative structure. Because of the structural changes, due to international migration, that are taking place in the community, Nurangi is an excellent place to examine how and to what extent changes in the gender division of labor affect the normative structure in the community. The sisters did not only provide me with housing, but also served as my entrée into the community.

My target population consisted of two groups of women —those whose husbands/partners currently migrate and those whose husbands/partners have never migrated. The reason for stratifying the sample along the migration status of husbands/partners was to control for the possibility that many of the changes in the normative structure of the community and the division of labor may be the product of factors affecting the overall community as oppose to only migrant families. The quotes provided in this thesis come from personal interviews, with the names of respondents being changed to protect their identity.

The first day I arrived in Nurangi, the sisters invited me to one of their daily visits to some of the nearby communities. It is necessary to explain that Nurangi is

comprised of many small communities. These communities are separated from each other in distances ranging from one mile to twenty miles. While cement roads connect many of the communities, access to some is only available through dirt roads. Because the majority of the population of Nurangi does not own automobiles, local residents mostly rely on people who own vehicles including strangers along the road to get to other communities in the municipality.

I accompanied the sisters on my visits to the towns surrounding Nurangi. These visits allowed me to better understand the social life in the area. However, my interviewees were conducted in a small community, one that did not exist ten years ago. The small group of houses was considered to be part of the bigger town next to it. However, with money from remittances, the town's people were able to build a small chapel and a cemetery, which resulted in the decision to become their own community. The people of the town know each other very well, with most being relatives.

During my first day in Nurangi, I accompanied one of the sisters to talk to a woman (Constanza) who worked at a small convenient store. This woman was in charge of the store because her father and brother had migrated to the United States. Because of their migration, Constanza became the head of the household. Once we got to the store, the sister explained to Constanza the nature of my visit. I introduced myself. I started by saying that my name is Isabel Ayala and that I was from Mexico City. I told Constanza that I was a graduate student at Texas A&M University. I mentioned that I was a migrant myself and that in my studies I had come into contact with many migrants in the United States. However, I became interested in the effect that international migration had for

women who stayed in Mexico. Therefore, I wanted to interview women who had both an international and a non-international migrant husband/partner. At the beginning, Constanza's reaction to my presence was one of mistrust. She was very reserved and hesitated before she agreed to be interviewed. However, it seems that the fact that one of the sisters went with me to see her eased her mistrust. I also think that me sharing my personal history as a Mexican migrant also helped break the initial barrier.

After I had interviewed Constanza the very first day, I asked her if she knew of other women who would be interested in talking to me about their experiences. After thinking about it, she mentioned a couple of persons that possibly could collaborate with me. Constanza became a very important contact. Once I gained her trust, she directed me to other people that agreed to be interviewed. One of the things I found is that people in this small community were reluctant to talk to strangers. However, once I knocked on their doors and told them who had directed me to them (usually a family member or friend), the women were more likely to accept to talk to me. In many cases, the interviewee would accompany me to introduce me to my next informant, which helped tremendously in gaining the confidence and trust of my respondents.

As such, I used the snowball sampling technique to identify the participants in my study. When I first planned my research, I expected that each woman would give me at least five names of other women who would be potential respondents. However, I quickly realized that I had overestimated my initial expectation. Every time I asked an interviewee for a next contact, they would only give me one name. This along with the small size of the specific community prevented me from obtaining a large number of

potential respondents that could help provide at least a hint of randomness. Yet, in the end, snowball sampling came to be convenient for my research in ways that I did not expect. In my thesis proposal, I was interested in the social capital expansion of women whose husbands/partners migrate and that of women whose husbands/partners do not migrate. Snowball sampling allowed me to identify the interconnected networks of the women in the community. This approach allowed me to see, directly as well as indirectly, the web of existing relationships among women in the community.

My final sample consisted of ten women who had a husband/partner who is an international migrant and eight women whose husband/partner was not a migrant. Two women refused to be interviewed. The interviews lasted between one and two hours. The interviews were audio taped when consent was given (Appendix C). The interviews took place usually in the interviewees' home or backyard. In most of the cases (except one) the interviewee and me were the only people present at the time of the interview. The interviewees did not receive any compensation, and they were allowed to withdraw their participation from the study at any time. The names of the respondents were changed to provide confidentiality and the interviews and other notes are being kept in the secured file of the principal investigator for three years.

There are a few problems that I encountered in conducting my research. One of the problems I encountered with every participant, including my key informant, dealt with the signing of the consent forms. There are two main problems I encountered when I asked the women to sign the forms. The first one dealt with the fact that I was a stranger wanting them to sign a paper. They never had the experience of being

interviewed by a researcher. Most of the women, although not all, that agreed to talk to me did not see me as a sociologist, but rather as a person to whom they could relay many issues they had been holding back since they did not feel comfortable doing so with the other women in the community. In the next chapter, to clarify this point I will touch upon how the social control in the community prevented women from sharing their experiences and problems with their peers.

The second problem I encountered while conducting the interviews involved the illiteracy of the respondents. Many of the women I interviewed did not know how to read or write. It is important to mention that the racial composition of the community I interviewed is Otomi or Nhanhu, which is a racial minority in Mexico. The Otomis speak Nhanhu, which is a dialect. Furthermore, this is a very poor rural community in which 53% of the population of Nurangi 15 years of age and older is illiterate (INEGI 2000). The illiteracy of many women created problems with the signing of the consent form. Therefore, I asked them to ask a family member who was literate to read the letter to them so they knew what they were signing. There were a couple of women who told me they trusted me to sign whatever I gave them. However, I was very uncomfortable by this, since in the future a person may take advantage of them.

## **PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION**

In addition to conducting face-to-face interviews, I also engaged in participant observation as part of my study. For the first part, I stayed in Nurangi in the summer of 2001. While living in the community, I was invited to participate in a variety of social



activities such as visiting the town, attending a ceremony of the blessing of a house, attending the weekly market, and attending a town's annual celebration. In addition, I participated in countless conversations.

On one occasion, I was invited to the celebration of the blessing of a house. I was able to see first-hand what Massey et al (1987) and Mines (1981) describe in their work. It was very impressive to see a wood and aluminum small one-room house next to one made of brick and cement. It was a big celebration for the owners. The family consisted of two daughters and two sons that were migrants. The house became the product of the sons' migration. The whole town was invited and people dressed up for the occasion. The ceremony concluded with a full meal consisting of *mole*, rice, and apple soda, which the family provided.

On a Monday, one of the sisters invited me to go to a town called Ixmiquilpan. Ixmiquilpan is the Tlatelolco<sup>2</sup> of our time for the people in Nurangi. Every Wednesday, people from around the area travel to this community for the weekly market. The town is filled with people that go there to sell their products. In the plaza, one is able to find fruit, vegetables, furniture, wood, clothes, and animals, just to name a few items. In many cases, people conduct transactions through the exchange of articles rather than currency.

Another of my participation activities dealt with a town's celebration. Most rural communities give their community a name based on a particular saint. Every year, when

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<sup>2</sup> Tlatelolco: One of the most important markets in old Mexico that served as a space for material and social exchange and that at times used to gather in one day up to 40,000 people in commercial activities (Enciclopedia de Mexico 2000).

the day of the particular saint occurs, the town conducts a big celebration involving a procession, a mass, food, music, dances, and games. The celebration attracts local residents, those from neighboring communities, as well as migrants. For many migrants, the town's celebration is the only time of year that they return to see their relatives. All the people in the community collaborate to make this celebration the year's party.

Finally, I constantly engaged in very interesting conversations with the sisters and some of the workers in the house. At the beginning, given that I was not familiar with the area, I saw things in ways that did not make much sense. However, as days passed, I was able to begin to give meaning to women's actions and words. I began to understand that I had arrived in Nurangi with preconceived ideas about rural life and relations based on my urban middle-class background. However, the recognition and acceptance by many members of the community apart from the sisters encouraged me to remain as objective as I could.

The qualitative methodology adopted in this thesis provided several advantages. First, being a Mexican woman, whose first language is Spanish, and who has lived the experience of being a migrant, the women I talked to felt comfortable expressing their feelings and ideas. My background and the same language interaction resulted in improved interviewer-interviewee communication. Second, during most of the interviews conducted, I performed interactive interviewing. Ellis et al. (1997:121) describe interactive interviewing as an "interpretative practice for getting in-depth and intimate understanding of people's experiences with emotionally charged and sensitive topics, such as childbirth, illness, loss, and eating disorders." For these authors,

interactive interviewing involves both the respondent and the interviewer sharing their social and personal experiences and telling their stories in “the context of developing a relationship” (Ellis 1997:121). In interactive interviewing, the interview process, the stories shared, and the understandings that arise during the interaction are all-important. The interviewer-interviewee relationship is not as hierarchical or guided by a strict set of rules as it is the case with more traditional interview methods. Ellis et al. (1997:123) assert that interactive interviewing is “a method supported by interpretive scholars, in particular, feminists who argue against the mythical value-free scientific inquiry and call for researchers to acknowledge their interests and sympathies.” Based on this interview approach, I was able to attain a level of collaboration and reflection that I sought but did not expect to achieve. By drawing on interactive interviewing, I was able to get an in-depth and intimate understanding of the women’s experiences and opinions, many of these involving sensitive areas associated with problems that they experienced in the course of their lives as wives/partners of migrants. Finally, the qualitative methods used provided me with hypothetical categories and non-anticipated issues that enriched the study such as the importance of emotional expectations on the part of the women that will be explained in the analysis reported in Chapter IV.

However, I need to acknowledge some shortcomings that I experienced conducting the research. In this thesis, I found myself not only questioning and studying academic and field facts and events, but also in a search to gain the trust of my respondents and the “true” answers to my research questions. As mentioned previously, I believe that for this study, I was able to gain the participant’s trust based on the

interactive interviewing method. However, I need to acknowledge that I came to the field with a background that may have influenced the participants in ways of which I am not aware of or recognize. For example, although I am a Mexican migrant woman, I am a graduate student and this status may have intimidated some of the women specially those that are illiterate. Accordingly, it is possible that some women may have talked to me about their lives in a way in which they expected me to want to hear. Furthermore, I realized that since I relied on snowball sampling, some of the women may have felt threatened to explain exactly how they felt because of the fear that I may share their personal information with other people in the community. Nevertheless, my experience during the interviews shows that with time and interactive interviewing the women's fear was overcome. Moreover, the snowball sampling approach places limitations on the generalizability of my study. In addition, I think that another shortcoming of my research is the small number of interviews that I was able to conduct and the relatively short amount of time I spent in Nurangi. I think that these shortcomings limited the amount of information obtained and also the depth of the analysis that I was able to perform. Finally, because of convenience, I chose Nurangi to conduct my investigation. However, in future research, I would be interested in conducting my study in a community that represents one of the most important migrant sending communities. I recognize that these are shortcomings in my project. However, I believe that the validity and reliability of my project are not downplayed by the recognition of these shortcomings. On the other hand, I believe that awareness of the restrictions of this research allows readers to better evaluate my findings and place them in a proper context.

## **HYPOTHESIS**

As I shift attention to the next chapter reporting the results of my study, I reiterate below the following general hypotheses guiding my analysis.

- A Mexican woman from Nurangi who has a husband/partner who migrates and receives an insufficient amount of remittances to support the family is more likely to engage in market activities compared to a woman who has a husband/partner who migrates and receives sufficient remittances.
- A Mexican woman from Nurangi who has a non-migrant husband/partner that does not provide enough money to support the family is more likely to engage in market activities compared to a woman who has a non-migrant husband/partner who provides enough money to support the family.
- A woman who suffers from a husband's/partner's affective absence is more likely to engage in market activities.
- A woman who participates in market activities will acquire human capital.
- A woman that participates in market activities will create networks with other women who participate in market activities that will assist her in acquiring human capital.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **ANALYSIS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In the last decades, Nurangi has produced many migrants most of whom are males. But besides demographic changes, the international migration of males and the remittances they send have triggered important structural and social transformations that originate among women in the sending community. In this chapter, I will provide an overview of some alterations in the normative structure, system of practice, and the expansion of social capital that have taken place in Nurangi. I will compare and contrast the responses of women whose husbands/partners do not migrate (control group) with those who do. I will first provide a general overview of the families, household characteristics, and economic capital of the respondents. Second, I will examine changes in the gender division of labor that have occurred due to the physical, economic, and emotional absence of male heads of the household from the perspective of women from both sample groups. Third, I will discuss how these absences influence women's participation in the labor force. Fourth, I will examine how the human capital of the wives/partners is affected. Fifth, I will compare and contrast the perceptions of women of both groups (non-migrant and migrant) about each other to understand women's interaction in the community. Finally, I will return to my research question of whether the international migration of the male and the amount of remittances he sends affect the normative structure of the sending community, in particular the gender division of labor.

## **GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE SAMPLE GROUPS**

As mentioned in the earlier chapter, the data for this thesis come from two samples. The first sample group is made up of ten women whose husbands/partners participate in international migration. The second sample group consists of eight women whose husbands/partners do not migrate. By using some questions from the Mexican Migration Project (2000), I compared the two sample groups on household structure; housing characteristics; and appliances, automobile and land ownership. The following paragraphs show the results of this comparison.

First, we see that the average household composition of the women interviewed (migrant and non-migrant related) was that of a nuclear family. However, migrant women were part of smaller households (two to six people) compared to non-migrant women (four to eight people). Because of the characteristics of the household composition of the sample groups, it was not possible to examine theories that focus on household type (nuclear and extended) as a factor influencing women's participation in the labor force. I will discuss the gender division of labor married couples in the next section

In terms of home ownership, the responses show that everyone interviewed owned the land and the house built on it. All of the respondents mentioned that the land where the house was built on was acquired through inheritance. In the past, federal land was allotted to members of the community by giving a fraction of the land to each family. Through time, the land has been divided among the offspring. All of the respondents said that the land was a live inheritance (before death) that the

husband's/partner's family gave to him. This type of partition promotes families living close to each other and exemplifies the high value that the Otomi community places on the family.

A similarity between the two groups was also found in car ownership. The same number of households own cars in both groups (three). However, the cars for the migrant related sample group were bought with remittances.

Besides similarities in home and car ownership, members of both groups face the same infrastructure problems in their houses. Even when almost all respondents have electricity, the women from both sample groups mentioned a scarcity of running water (5 non-migrant related and 5 migrant related), and the rest of the respondents did not have running water at all. The state has been trying to improve such conditions by building a thicker tube that provides families with water. However, the shortage is not due to its transportation but rather the scarcity of the vital product due to a lack of rain and the high temperatures. Another problem that the community faces is the lack of drainage. Indeed, none of the houses in the community have drainage.

Yet, even when in terms of home ownership and infrastructure both groups face the same living conditions, when we look at quality of housing and economic capital, the migrant related group is better off. While some of the non-migrant houses are made of sheet and brick, their ceilings are often of sheet and their floor of ground dust. However, for the migrant related group, the majority of the houses are not only made of cement but so are their floors and ceilings. This difference in the quality of housing of both groups is explained by the remittances received by the migrant related respondents. In many cases,



besides helping in the improvement of the quality of the houses, remittances are also used to add more rooms to the structure. Furthermore, the economic capital of the migrant related group is better as shown by the appliances that families own. During the interview, migrant related women listed more owned appliances than the control group.

This section attempted to provide the reader with a general overview of the characteristics of the sample groups. Through this exploration, we found that even when both groups have similar household structures (nuclear) and infrastructure, and home and car ownership, the migrant related group is better off in quality of housing and economic capital possessed. The following sections will look at some of the social characteristics of the community and the effect that the international migration of the male and his remittances have had on the community.

### **WOMEN'S REDEFINITION OF NURANGI'S SYSTEM OF PRACTICE**

An examination of the literature discloses that few studies have examined the impact of migration on structural and social patterns in sending communities in Mexico. Even fewer studies have focused on the changes that women experience in the community of origin when their husbands/partners migrate. Furthermore, the literature that focuses on Mexican women has often portrayed them as passive agents in the definition of the community's normative structure. However, as this analysis will show, rather than being passive, Mexican women are active agents in the definition of their lives. Indeed, when the opportunity arises, they become critical actors in challenging the system of practice of the community, which can later on have an effect on its normative

structure. Still, since this normative structure is based on acceptable norms or codes of behavior, it is first necessary to look at some of the activities that break from a traditional division of labor.

The systems of practice are actions or activities shaped by a normative structure. Therefore, to evaluate whether the migration of the male becomes a trigger mechanism for the challenge of the acceptable norms in the sending community by women, it is necessary to look at the system of practice, as it becomes a practical way to measure changes in the normative structure. To conduct this analysis, I will begin by comparing and contrasting the past and present activities that women and men perform as perceived by women whose husbands/partners do not migrate and women whose husbands/partners migrate.

#### TRADITIONAL SYSTEM OF PRACTICE

In this study, I was first interested in the type of activities women were involved in before marriage. A pattern that arose was that most of the respondents from both sample groups participated in the labor force before marriage. However, as soon as they got married, their responsibilities changed and became limited to household chores and motherhood. For example, a woman said,

*Before I got married, I used to work cleaning a house in Mexico for eight years, from when I was eight to sixteen. I earned sixty pesos a week. When I got married, I was in charge of cleaning the house, making tortillas, bringing wood, bringing water, I would carry the buckets of water on my head. Bring corn to make tortillas... (Maria del Carmen Perez, non-migrant, age unknown.).*

Another respondent commented,

*Before I married, I used to work at a hotel in Ixmiquilpan. I started working since I was eleven.... Then, when I got married, I just dedicated to the home... I watch my children... I send my older daughter to school. My daughter is in 1<sup>st</sup> grade. My husband told me that I should work at home... to take care of the girl... and that way when he comes I am at home... (Juanita Sanchez, non-migrant 37).*

The fact that women leave the labor force once they get married may be explained by the normative structure that rules Nurangi. In most cases, this type of division of labor takes place in patriarchal societies. Women are able to participate in the labor market at a young age prior to marriage. However, once marriage occurs, the division of labor of the couple is well defined. When asked about their daily activities, all women said they were in charge of washing, cleaning, cooking, and childcare as the following quotes exemplify,

*Wash, feed my husband, have the house clean (Josefina Sanchez, non-migrant 24).*

*Mainly to work on the house, wash... feed my husband... cook... the house, weave, embroidery... (Carla Garza, non-migrant, age unknown).*

*Make meals... take care of a little orchard, I wash, iron, prepare the meals... I would wake up at 6 a.m. and then go to bed at 9 p.m. (Myriam Morales, non-migrant 33).*

*I was in charge of cooking, to make tortillas.... Clean... do household chores... my husband and I lived together (cohabitated) for two years, and then we came here (Cruz Martinez, non-migrant 29).*

*I was in charge of taking care of my husband... take care of myself while pregnant (Yolanda Castano, non-migrant 22).*

In addition, just as with the women whose husbands/partners did not migrate (control group), the women whose husbands/partners migrated said that before the men

started migrating, the women performed non-market activities. A woman said, “I did not work. I had to take care of the house...” (Sandra Castaneda, migrant mid 20’s to 30’s).

Another woman mentioned,

*When he used to work at the welding workshop I took care of the household, of the children, of taking care of the house... (Brenda Molina, migrant 42).*

With these quotes, it is apparent that marriage is associated with the restriction of women’s “space” to the private, meaning the household. Patriarchy is likely responsible for the limitation of women’s space and activities. In patriarchal communities, women are subject to the same division of labor, a division that is based on biology to assign social activities, in this case, non-market activities, to women. In many cases, since women typically perform non-market activities that do not produce money, the community and men assign a low value to such activities. I believe that it is because of this division of spaces (public and private) between men and women and its perpetuation that gender inequality exists and social change is prevented.

However, to follow this line of thought is to come to devalue women’s work at home as well. Researchers who view women working at home as powerless beings perpetuate the view of Mexican women as passive agents. To understand this point, it is necessary to look at the responses that women gave when asked about their husbands’/partners’ responsibilities when they were at home. A respondent said,

*[He was in charge of] bringing the food, bringing the money, and giving me money for whatever was needed (Josefina Sanchez, non-migrant 24).*

Another woman mentioned,

*His obligations are to go to work and bring me the groceries, because I do not even go out for the groceries to Ixmiquilpan... since he works in Ixmiquilpan, he brings me the groceries. He walks to Nurangi, and then, takes the bus from Nurangi to Ixmiquilpan. He leaves the house at 7, 7:30 a.m. and then comes back at 8 or 8:30 p.m. He works from Monday through Friday, sometimes he does not work one or two days, it depends on whether or not there is a job available (Juanita Sanchez, non-migrant 37).*

Yet another woman notes that,

*He used to work in whatever was available, assisting the bricklayer or the mechanic... he does whatever is available... (Angelina Garcia, non-migrant 58).*

Women whose husbands/partners migrated gave similar responses to women in the control group. A woman said,

*Before migrating my husband used to build paintbrushes... but the price went down, and his work was no longer profitable. So that is why he left (Myriam Morales, migrant 50's).*

Another woman commented,

*He used to work at the mechanic workshop... and I took care of the household... (Sandra Castaneda, migrant mid 20's to 30's).*

These responses show how both groups of women recognize that their husbands' responsibilities are market activities (labor force participation) with men being responsible for bringing money to the household. While this recognition may seem consistent with the idea of patriarchy, in the case of the women in Nurangi, we see that it is not the case. Even when it is true that there is a division of labor on the basis of sex, women's responses reject the idea of them being passive, submissive, and oppressed. They reject this passivity by recognizing that their husbands also bear certain responsibilities. Indeed, women see men as having the obligation to economically provide for the family while they [women] come to transform that money into service

through their labor. Having that view shows agency rather than passivity. The women interviewed show an economic expectation from men just as they recognize a service expectation from them. Therefore, women's actions challenge traditional research views that portray Mexican women as passive.

So far we have not been able to recognize any differences between the two sample groups of women. We have seen how many of the women participated in the labor force prior to marriage. We have also seen how with marriage, women come to perform non-market activities while men perform market activities by participating in the labor force. However, in the interviews, differences among the women emerged.

#### CHALLENGE TO THE TRADITIONAL SYSTEM OF PRACTICE

Throughout the interviews, I was able to recognize how with time, women of both samples began to follow a different path. Furthermore, there was a difference of experiences among the non-migrant related sample that split the group in two. I will begin by focusing first on the non-migrant related group and their differences and then go to the migrant group.

First, the responses of the majority of the control group show that even through several years of marriage, their obligations in the family continued to be the same as when they got married. The majority of these women said that their main activities included household chores and childbearing as the following quotes exemplify.

*I am in charge of the house. I have always been in charge of the house, of cleaning, washing, and well, sometimes I also help to carve the "lechuguin," which is a type of cactus. When I was little, I used to do it. This is the work that there is here (Teresa Lopez, non-migrant 45).*

Another woman commented,

*No, on the contrary, the work has been bigger... I need to prepare the meals for my husband, to take care of the children, clean them, wash them... when one is single what does one do? Nothing! But when one gets married once receives a large responsibility and one has to work more (Teresa Lopez, non-migrant 45).*

Yet another woman said,

*Well, now we have some animals... some little goats so I take care of them. I also prepare the meals and continue to iron (Myriam Morales, non-migrant 33).*

The men, on the other hand, continue to hold the breadwinning responsibility, which comes with marriage and is part of the system of practice of Nurangi. A respondent said,

*... (silence) well, I do think that there have been some changes; he [husband] has worked more for his children. When it was only the two of us there was not too much... but with children it changes. So now, as a couple, we both do our job... work... it only gets more difficult when one acquires an obligation (Teresa Lopez, non-migrant 45).*

However, even though for this group the system of practice or the acceptable division of labor has remained the same through the years, the responses of other women in the control group show a challenge to the traditional division of labor through the performance of market activities.

The responses of four women in the control group show a challenge to the view of women as passive beings in this sending community. Indeed, these women resemble the case of most women who have a spouse/partner who is a migrant in that both of these groups challenge the normative structure by adopting a different system of practice. Trigueros' (1992) insights shed light on women's redefinition of their marital relationship. In Nurangi, I observed how contrary to common assumptions, women

define their marital relationship as a relationship that is based on trust, which Trigeros (1992) points out is based on respect. Since trust implies a relation between equals, women see their husbands/partners as companions. In this type of relationship, women expect to be treated with respect. Because of this expectation, the women, as active agents in the definition of their world, expect not only a physical companion, but also an economic and emotional companion. When any of these three expectations (physical, economical, or emotional companionship) is not present, the women come to redefine the system of practice as shown by their participation in the labor force.

#### WOMEN'S LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION

The system of practice of Nurangi is one in which the majority of married women perform non-market roles (household chores) and men hold market roles (labor force participation). This division of labor is maintained by the mutual expectation and fulfillment of those expectations by each partner. However, when the male husband/partner fails to fulfill the wife's/partner's expectations (i.e., physical, economic, and emotional presence), the woman feels free to challenge the traditional system. The following section will examine how each of the three expectations, especially an unfulfilled economic and emotional presence, may lead to women's participation in the labor force.



*Physical Absence of the Husband/Partner*

In Nurangi, the system of practice assigns women the familial space and non-market activities, while the external space and its market activities (labor force participation) are given to men. Thus, the international migration of the male, beyond affecting the structure of the family, may positively or negatively influence the labor force participation of married women.

In this community, married males are expected to economically provide for their families. However, Nurangi is a community that has a very high unemployment rate. Therefore, when men are unable to provide economically for their family in the community of origin, many of them opt to migrate to the United States. The following quotes exemplify how the economic necessity is a very important factor in the decision of males to migrate. For example, a woman said,

*He used to work in Mexico. The rent was too high, and the children are growing up. This house was made when he was single. Then we got together, I also worked, and I worked in Mexico. We helped each other out by working.... We had our first baby in Mexico (City); the second one was harder so, he stayed in Mexico working... I did not want him to leave... I told him that I was not asking him to leave, but we had to think of the children; they are growing up (Mariana Romo, migrant, age unknown).*

Another woman also said,

*Every time that my husband can migrate he does... and it also depends on how the situation is at the time... Maybe if he stays here we have money to eat... but that is it... we may not have money to dress, so that is why he goes... he has been migrating for the last two years. The first time he went, he came back after a year, and the second time he came after six months... I do not know where he goes because he change [residences], and I only find out where he is when he calls me (Sandra Castaneda, migrant mid 20's to 30's).*

For the most part, the migrants find about the job through other people in the town (friends or relatives). A woman commented,

*Somebody told him that there is work over there... (Edith Palacios, migrant, age unknown).*

Another woman said,

*First some people started going and then, they came told other people and so on... (Brenda Molina, migrant 42).*

However, the migrants always suffer the risk of having nobody to look after them when they try to cross the border.

*How many people go? A group of people, five or six go to the same place... but they know who is going to receive them, to support them on the other side... (Brenda Molina, migrant 42).*

The wives know about the United States from what their husbands tell them. Some of the problems men face and relay to their wives/partners include language barriers, missing the family and the culture, lack of freedom, and the racism they experience. A respondent, for example, said that her husband has problems finding a job because he does not speak English.

*My husband says that it is very difficult to be there.... If you do not have somebody that supports you, it is very difficult to find a job, because you do not speak English... they have no car... (Brenda Molina, migrant 42).*

Another woman commented that a big problem for her husband is missing the family and the Mexican culture.

*At the beginning, he did not get accustomed... one time he started crying saying that he missed me... he could not find a way to come back... I think that somebody advised him... he told me that he had to work hard while he was there... When he left, I felt that I had lost him forever... He is a good man...some other people say that their husband will come just to get drunk... they do not like it when they come back... but that is not my case... (Mariana Romo, migrant, age unknown).*

Another woman commented,

*[She almost said nothing to me] he does not tell me about his work... he mostly calls to see how I am doing, how are the children and that is it... sometimes the call is too short so we do not have enough time... (Sandra Castaneda, migrant mid 20's to 30's).*

Another issue that has come in the conversations is a feeling of lack of freedom. Many migrants do not feel free due to the illegal status they have in the United States.

*From over there... well... there are some things that people like, but there are others that we do not... for example here we are free... over there we are not... maybe here we do not have anything to eat... but over there we are not free... maybe here we just eat a tortilla with salt... that is it... but here, there are no problems... (Daniela Capetillo, migrant, age unknown).*

Finally, in some of the conversations, some of the women commented that their husbands face racism as the following quote exemplifies,

*Over there sometimes you go out and there are many racists that do not want to see you... I do not know... there are some that are nice, others are bad... maybe it is because we are Mexicans... and they are Americans... sometimes even the ones that are Chicanos are bad with us... sometimes they treat us different... it varies... there are some that are from here... but wish to stay there.... If we go it is because we need to... if there were jobs here why would we leave? If there were jobs... who would think of leaving? Sometimes they would want to go back. But then you think, go back to two rooms where we are crowded? So they stay longer... to continue building... but yes, it was difficult (Daniela Capetillo, migrant, age unknown).*

All of these experiences are encountered for a short period of time since all of the migrants engage in transnational migration. They work for months or years at a time and then most return to their community of origin. While in the United States, most migrants work in construction and agriculture. When asked about their husbands'/partners' job in the United States, some of the women said,

*Tomato, potato, chili, pumpkin... Sometimes he comes. There is nothing to do here... sometimes they come every one or two years... sometimes they stay for a month or two and then they go back. (Daniela Capetillo, migrant, age unknown).*

*The first time he left it was in March 2000. He has not come back yet; he is working in construction... in Atlanta (Mariana Romo, migrant, age unknown).*

*I live here by myself... my son is not here now... It has been three months since he migrated... it is the first time... He is going to Florida to work in the land... (Edith Palacios, migrant, age unknown).*

*My two children study in Mexico (City)... When he goes to the United States, he goes to Atlanta.... He has been a migrant for six years... When he is over there he stays over there for a year and a half... then he comes back and stays for a year or two years... When he is over there he works in construction (Brenda Molina, migrant 42).*

Thus, in the case of migrant related women, the physical absence of the male may produce a change in the structure of the family, which may allow women to challenge the normative structure. Chant (1991) and Christenson (1989) have argued that women's participation in the labor force is lower in nuclear than in non-nuclear households. However, all of the women that participated in the study were part of nuclear households. Therefore, it is not possible to test Chant's (1991) argument that women's responsibilities can be expanded to market activities in the presence of extended kin in the household. Yet, based on the responses obtained from the migrant related sample, women's participation in the labor force did not depend solely on household structure, but rather on the amount of remittances sent (economic presence). The economic absence will be discussed shortly.

However, following Chant's argument, we would infer that for the control group, the physical presence of the male supports dominant gender ideologies (patriarchal) and, thus, prevents women from challenging the system of practice. Nevertheless, as

mentioned previously and as it will be shown below, there are four women in the control group who performed market activities despite the physical presence of their husbands/partners. Therefore, in the end, the data show that the physical absence of the male is not the trigger mechanism for women's participation in the labor force even though it affects other factors that will be discussed later.

### *Economic Absence of the Husband/Partner*

During my participant observation in Nurangi, I was able to understand more about marriage for the Otomi community. Marriage itself was not seen as a burden for men or women. Instead, the people of Nurangi were socialized from children to value family. Furthermore, many of the comments of the respondents show that they value and expect a relationship of respect and love. While they came to accept the division of labor in the normative structure, they had the agency to speak up when the men did not fulfill their expectations.

A very important expectation in this division of labor was that of having the husband/partner provide economically for the family. A woman would remain in the private space (household), performing non-market activities, as long as the male fulfilled his role as the economic provider. During the interviews, I recognized similar patterns among four women from the control group and all the women whose husband/partner migrate. Women from both groups came to challenge the system of practice as exemplified by the activities they performed when they felt that their husbands/partners did not provide economically for their families. Yet, the economic absence of the male

was not as important as their emotional absence in the case of non-migrant related women as will be discussed later. However, the economic absence of the male was influential in the case of migrant related women since in most cases, remittances are the only source of income of these families.

A very important result of males' migration is remittances. When men send remittances, their wives/partners go to a furniture store (Electra) or a bank (Bancomer) to receive them. One woman illustrates this situation,

*Through Electra... it depends... it is depending on the season... if he is working he can send me money and if he is not, well... he cannot because over there right now there are problems too...it is mostly due to the migra, they have to take care of themselves... especially in the land (campo) that is where the migra is... even if they have money or not, have a job or not... (Sandra Castaneda, migrant mid 20's to 30's).*

Remittances for Nurangi have become an important source of income for many families and also for the development of the sending community. Unfortunately, the timing and amount of remittances is very unstable because of the unsteady and temporal nature of jobs in the U.S. along with political factors. A woman commented,

*They send the money every time they get some money together... sometimes they do not find a job there either... they have to pay rent, everything, pay everything... over there the rent is too expensive... they earn better, but they also pay a lot for a lot of things... the cost is very high... is like if we were here and we rented... we would not have any money... none... over there at least, even with the rent they are able to get together a little bit of money...(Daniela Capetillo, migrant, age unknown).*

Most of the migration in Nurangi originates from the desire to expand an existing house or to acquire it. The houses of the sending community are often made of one or

two small rooms. I asked one woman if they own the house prior to her husband's/partner's migration. She responded that,

*Well... before they started migrating we had two rooms... but once they left we began building more... without the money from over there we could not have done it... here... you only get money to eat... not even to dress... you do not have enough money to do that... (Daniela Capetillo, migrant, age unknown).*

And often, the house has problems of infrastructure,

*This is house of Habita (mortgage)... I have the land and then I have a mortgage to pay for the house... and I continue to pay for that...there is no water... it gets here every third day... if you get it, if not then you stay without water... (Edith Palacios, migrant, age unknown).*

In Nurangi, home construction has become an important source of labor for many resident males. In addition, in some cases, remittances are used for the acquisition of land (Basok 2000). However, Nurangi has suffered from a dry season for years. A woman explains,

We used to have some land... but it does not give anything because there is no water... right now there are no rains so you cannot get money from it...nothing grows... we would sew beans and corn but nothing grows up right now... it takes years for it to grow.... Four years ago we did get a little bit of it because we sent money to rent a tractor and then when the harvest was done we came back to get it ourselves because to pay somebody else to do it is too expensive... *(Daniela Capetillo, migrant, age unknown).*

Another woman said,

*Three years ago my husband sew something but since it has not rained, he does not do it anymore* (Myriam Morales, non-migrant 50's).

One more commented,

*Here we have land but we cannot cultivate because there is no rain...* (Brenda Molina, migrant 42).

In some cases, beyond shelter and land, some people have used remittances to acquire a car.

*The car we bought with the money that we saved... we did it because sometimes it is very necessary to have a car. We could have never gotten a car if it was not because of the money from over there... here... how could we have done that?* (Daniela Capetillo, migrant, age unknown).

Another woman mentioned,

*All of these things are thanks to migration! We have three cars... all of them financed by migration... It is through migration that my children have been able to study...* (Brenda Molina, migrant 42).

However, during my stay in the community, I saw that most cars are parked and are seldom driven. This is explained by the demographics of Nurangi, which is mostly composed of children, the elderly, and the women, with the majority of women not knowing how to drive.

Nevertheless, for the majority of families, remittances become the only source of income to satisfy basic necessities. Unfortunately, many migrants have problems sending money back home, with women living with the uncertainty of whether any money will arrive at all. A respondent commented,



*No, he does no longer send me money... a lot of women have started working... However, there are still many people that see wrong a woman that works... especially the ones that have a man that supports the family ... but more and more that is changing because life is getting very difficult... (Myriam Morales, non-migrant 50's).*

Extant research has often overlooked the challenges that women face due to limited or absent remittances. The economic absence poses stress and problems for the family in the sending community. Therefore, women whose husbands/partners do not fulfill their economic responsibility to the family typically become labor force participants. In this case, the “necessity effect,” which Lustig (1978) rejects, holds true. As Chant (1991) recognizes, family needs push women into the labor force. A respondent commented,

*Well... he does not send me money anymore (laughs) he does not send me anything because now because he has other women he does not send me money anymore... He says that he has to go because he has to work but he leaves and he does not send any money.... That is the way it is ... I have to start to work because there is no money... (Myriam Morales, non-migrant 50's).*

Another woman said,

*When my husband just left I did not work... I kept taking care of my home... but since there is no enough money I have to start working too (Myriam Morales, migrant 50's).*

Other women also responded,

*My husband taught me how to make them [brushes]. One day he bought a brush, and then he broke it up to see how he would make one... and that is how he learned to make them, and that is how he taught me how to make them too (Myriam Morales, non-migrant 50's).*

*I am in charge of the convenience store... he left, and when they came back, they brought money to build the store... so when they left I became in charge of it... (Daniela Capetillo, migrant, age unknown).*

In the interviews, both samples of women began participating in the labor force when the men did not fulfill “their end of the bargain” in a normative structure that assigns them market roles. As a family survival strategy, women use their home for production activities. Thus, besides holding non-market roles, women adopt and participate in market activities, specifically in the informal market. However, the economic absence of the male is not the only unfulfilled expectation that encourages women to redefine the system of practice.

*Emotional Absence of the Husband/Partner*

In the majority of the cases involving the women in the control group and in some cases involving migrant related women, an emotional absence was more harmful and became a more important trigger mechanism for their participation in market activities. Women from both sample groups felt that their husbands/partners failed them when they cheated on them, hit them, or became drunks. When these types of events occurred, the women felt emotionally abandoned and came to question the normative structure of the community. A woman said,

*...Well... here many things have occurred so I say it is not the same from the time when one gets together... he changed a lot... he looked for another women...it is no longer the same I think... (Angelina Garcia, non-migrant 58).*

Another woman commented,

*Sometimes they have changed... Sometimes he brings the money and sometimes he does not. He does not help me in the house; I am the only one that takes care of the household. When he works far away, and leaves at 7, I have to wake up at 6:30 to prepare him breakfast and lunch. Sometimes I go to sleep at 1a.m. because I have to work with my daughter in her homework... until she finishes we go to sleep. I like my daughter to do good homework...I want her to be responsible. My husband gets home, he eats and goes to sleep, the same as my other children, but my daughter and I stay until she finishes her homework. As a mom, one has to be responsible.... See that she carries out with her homework (Juanita Sanchez, non-migrant 37).*

Furthermore, sometimes the women who suffer an emotional absence on the part of the male can see the potential for an economic absence later on.

In these cases, either an economical or an emotional absence on the part of husbands/partners makes women of both sample groups challengers to the system of practice. The women came to redefine the gender division of labor into a division that strays from patriarchal schemes. In this case, women come to adopt a new system of practice. Women come to change the patterns of participation in the household and sometimes in the community as well. We see that what is sometimes perceived as a static gender division of labor by many scholars, is rather fluid, changing, and flexible. Women come to protest and resist in active ways, and they do so by performing activities (e.g., market activities) that were traditionally considered male activities.

Nevertheless, besides adopting market activities, most of the women continue to hold non-market activities. Most of the women that began participating in the labor force did so in the informal market, which allowed them to continue taking care of their children. This situation supports Miraftab's (1994) argument that home-based work allows for the fusion of the private and the public space by bringing the opportunity for

income generation into the household. Furthermore, the fusion of private and public space may lead to a change in the gender division of labor.

Overall, this section has shown the impact that the physical, economic, and emotional absence of the male as perceived by women have in their predisposition to challenge the system of practice of the community through their participation in the labor force. Next, I will look at how this participation in the labor force may or may not lead to a matriarchal system.

#### WOMEN'S AUTONOMY: A BYPRODUCT OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOR FORCE

We have seen that women from both sample groups come to participate in the labor force. Trigueros (1992) has suggested that sometimes women's participation in the labor force transforms a patriarchal system into a one that gives women autonomy. In a female autonomous system, women become the decision makers of the household in terms of the economic administration and the care and education of the children. The interviews conducted show that even when there is a general similarity in the trigger mechanism for women to adopt market roles (economic and emotional absence of the male), the byproduct of this participation is different between the two sample groups and it may be due to the physical absence or presence of the husband/partner.

On the one hand, all of the non-migrant related women who came to perform market activities did not become the decision makers of the household. The women in the control group reported that their labor force participation did not provide them with

enough money to become the sole economic providers. Their income, even when valuable, became only supplementary to the males' income. In this case, separation or divorce was not considered a rational decision, and, thus, all of the women in the control group continued to live with their husbands/partners. The physical presence of the male, then, may not encourage women to look for market activities that allow them to become sole providers. Because of this, non-migrant households may not become female autonomous.

On the other hand, there is a distinct pattern among the women whose husbands/partners migrate. The responses reveal that in most cases, even when the primary reason why women enrolled in market activities was an economic absence, the physical absence of the male has an effect on the type of job they seek. The physical absence of the male and, in many cases the economic absence, drives women to look for jobs that generate an income that serves as the primary rather than supplementary form, to cover basic necessities. By becoming sole providers due to the economic and physical absence of the male, women become the decision makers and economic administrators of the household. Therefore, in this case, women become not only the principal decision makers through their production of income and household administration, but they also continue to be the educators and caretakers of the children.

In fact, women's redefinition of the system of practice increases their responsibilities and makes them subject to what Arlie Hochschild (1989) describes as the "second shift." In the traditional normative structure and system of practice, only women work in non-market activities. However, when they see an emotional and economic

expectation unfulfilled, they come to redefine the system and get involved in market activities. In cases where the women do not have any help from family or friends in taking care of the household or the children, women are responsible for both market and non-market activities which increases their physical labor. However, even with the increased workload, the majority of women in the labor force mentioned that the emotional satisfaction they gain from work far out-weights the physical stress posed by their two shifts. This will be something that will be discussed later.

Furthermore, in addition to analyzing not only the triggering mechanisms that lead women in the sending community to adopt market roles and some of the structural and social results of this adoption, it is necessary to look at the husbands'/partners' perceptions on the women's participation in the labor force.

#### HUSBANDS'/PARTNERS' PERCEPTIONS ON WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOR FORCE

Since a gender based division of labor has been the norm in Nurangi, I became interested in knowing how the husbands/partners felt about women's participation in the labor force. Given that men and women are assigned roles on the basis of their gender, I expected that women's labor force participation would make the men in the community feel threatened in terms of their masculinity. Unfortunately, I obtained information regarding men's views only from the perspective of their wives/partners. A woman's comments exemplifies her perception,

*I had never gone out before, to sell, but we had so many things to sell that he forced me to do it. Before, [Constanza's] store was our house. I used to take care of the convenience store. When my husband had an operation, I had to go out and work. That is when I got lucky because I began to have some clients in Ixmiquilpan. However, 15 days ago I did not go out to sell, we had an argument, he does not value me. That week we talked. I do not want shouts and cursing... Panchito, my little boy is not doing well in school... the teacher has told me that. So he comes and tells me that we are going to do better, that we are not going to fight anymore... (Josefina Sanchez, non-migrant 24).*

Yet another woman commented,

*He did not say anything before. He used to study... I would come back and he was already a sleep... we had very little communication... He was feeling bad... he said he felt like a slave... Once he told me that he would pay for the divorce.... (Yolanda Castano, non-migrant 22).*

A woman said,

*Many of them tell me that I am a fool, that the sun is too bad, they tell me that if they were me, they would be at home, that he is supposed to teach himself to bring the money. But now, he does not want me to stay at home. Now, when I get all nice and pretty to go out they say that I am earning a lot of money, that I am fat. There was a time when I used to sell by myself, and he hit me, my brother had to intervene. I had to ask for permission, he had to watch me; he questioned me a lot... if I talked to one of the men in the market... I do not want to sell anymore, I get tired and he threatens me saying that I will not go out of the house again. What I sell, I give to him for him to buy merchandise. However, I do not give him all... If I sell 300 pesos (30 dollars), I only give him 200, I keep some for me too. He gambles, drinks a lot, lately he has not done that much, but before, I was very foolish because I would give him all the money. There are sometimes when I do not eat right, well, I do not buy jeans, I am the "jodida" [fucked up] because he leaves with his friends. My family bring me things, he takes advantage of this... that family members from here or on the other side send me things. Some of my brothers send me 300 pesos or 500. I do not buy clothes because I have to buy food. He says bad words to me, what is the purpose of going out to work? A year ago we bought the little car. I have told him that the children are growing up. We should have built the restroom and another room for the girl. He says that I am not married to a rich guy. Many times he has told me to leave the house (Josefina Sanchez, non-migrant 24).*

However, interestingly enough, the majority of the women said that their partners, especially in the case of migrant men, came to support/accept the fact that they were working. One woman whose husband/partner is a migrant indicates that:

*No... what is he going to say? He knows that it is very difficult... even for him not having a job sometimes... over there he pays rent... over there he pays a lot, he pays everything, the water... (Myriam Morales, migrant 50's).*

Another one commented,

*It is something normal for us all... since they leave we also need to work hard to pull it through to work and to not to get behind... (Brenda Molina, migrant 42).*

The responses show that even when women's participation in the labor force comes to challenge the system of practice of the community, most of the male partners see the greater economic benefit that such participation brings. For example, in the case of migrant related women, when the husbands/partners come back from the U.S., most do so for a short period of time. Hence, the migrant related women indicated that even when the husbands were in the sending community, they [women] continued to participate in the labor force. A respondent commented,

*... it depends whether he is in good health or not... sometimes when he comes back healthy yes, he helps... but if he comes back sick, then I am the one that continues working... (Myriam Morales, migrant 50's).*

There was only one exception to this and it came from a migrant related woman who said,

*When he gets back he goes back to work in the welding workshop... because if we start eating up the savings money then we end up being the same... (Brenda Molina, migrant 42).*

This exception may be explained by the stable jobs that the husband has in both the United States and in Mexico, which provide the family a stable income all year long. In



any case, the emotional absence of the male tends to have a stronger impact for the control group women than for the migrant related group.

Beyond “*machista*” feelings (men’s superiority), it appears that the women’s definition of a marriage bond, as one of partnership, is shared by many of the men. However, it is important to note that this assessment needs to be viewed with caution because my study is cross-sectional and, thus, represents a mere snapshot of the community. It would be interesting to collect data over time to identify the temporal nature of men’s reactions as well as to assess how these may be affected by the characteristics of men and women. In addition, it would be fruitful to collect information directly from the men.

Furthermore, showing that even with the returning or vacationing migrant men the women continue their participation in the labor force builds up the case for not only a change in the system of practice of the community but also its normative structure. Since the normative structure is the ideas, values, and beliefs that guide social life, women’s participation in market activities, even with the presence of the male, may show a transformation of patriarchal ideas to more egalitarian ones. Thus, if the rest of the community further adopts this transformation of ideas, we could be talking not only of a change in the system of practice but also a change in the normative structure of Nurangi.

## PERSONAL PERCEPTIONS OF NON-MIGRANT RELATED AND MIGRANT RELATED WOMEN ABOUT THEIR LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION

Thus far, we have looked at the impact that the physical, economic, or emotional absence has on women's participation in the labor force. Subsequently, I examined women's perceptions on the challenge they had made to the established system of practice. For the women in the control group, the main characteristic was empowerment meaning that the women who participated in the labor force felt that they were doing something positive.

For the migrant related women, however, their labor force participation brought them mix feelings. On the one hand, they felt empowered due to their income earnings. On the other hand, they also had negative feelings associated with insecurities with decision-making and childcare, as well as criticism from the community.

### *Decision Making Insecurities*

Many of the migrant related women reported that the economic and emotional absence of the male led them to participate in the labor force. However, the physical absence of the male promoted in them a feeling of insecurity about the decisions they made. Many of the women were worried that the decisions they were making were not correct. A respondent said,

*In Mexico my husband earned 600 pesos a week... the money came every 8 days. I bought corn...but now... he does not send money... I buy little food... I do not earn a lot in the stationary store... it is not like the convenience store [refers to Constanza's store]. I take from the money he sends me to survive.... It depends on the luck you have that day... He has barely been there for a year... he does not earn well... he is not a man with addictions, I do not complain, I give God thanks he sends me 2,000 or 3,000 pesos every 15 days...so I invest... I do not buy expensive dresses, the money I use it for food... sometimes I worry that I am not spending the money well... I feel fear that one day, when he comes back he will tell me 'what did you do with the money?' Since I was a little girl I have earned money... I do not want to wait for the money to get here... (Mariana Romo, migrant, age unknown).*

In this quote, the woman reveals a sense of insecurity. Such a feeling may be the product of years in which the household's decision were delegated to the male. In this case, the physical absence of the male forces the woman left behind to not only adopt practical market activities but also to become the decision maker. In the long run, the adoption of such roles may lead to a transformation in the household type, e.g., a matriarchal household.

### *Childcare Insecurities*

Besides decision-making insecurities, women expressed insecurities related to childcare. In particular, migrant related women indicated that their labor force participation forced them to leave the children alone and to neglect them to a certain degree. One woman said,

*I feel sad... bored... tired of the same routine... Fortunately, I have food... I do things just to do them, sometimes I become desperate, there are problems in the town... he is not here, and I have to go, so I have to leave my children... I do not take care of them, as I should (Mariana Romo, migrant, age unknown).*

Another women commented,

*The problem is that when one leaves the house you also neglect your children... it is a carelessness, sometimes I work a little bit but mostly not... because I neglect my children. The thing is that sometimes one, as a woman, is responsible for the children, as if you start working it is very difficult because you cannot miss work when they get sick and if you do you get fired so it is hard (Sandra Castaneda, migrant mid 20's to 30's).*

Yet another woman said,

*... well... sometimes, I am unable to take care of the children, as it should be.... Sometimes, I do not pay them enough attention... I get too tired. And then, the homework... (Yolanda Castano, non-migrant 22).*

The fact that many of the migrant related women felt they were neglecting their children because of their labor force participation poses a very strong emotional stress for them. As mentioned previously, the Otomi community, where the study was conducted, places a high value on family. Many of the women began participating in the labor force because of an unfulfilled physical, economic, or emotional expectation on their husbands/partners. However, because of the male's unfulfilled expectation, many of them felt that by enrolling in market activities, they too fail to fulfill their own expectations: motherhood and childbearing. These feelings of neglect may be further exacerbated by the sentiment of the community.

#### *Criticism by the Community*

In addition to doubts about their decision making and the stress associated with neglecting their children due to work outside the home, migrant related women were fearful of the feelings that the community had towards them. As mentioned before, this community was characterized by a normative structure in which women worked in non-

market activities and men in market ones. The women who continued to participate in non-market activities (household chores) never mentioned the fear of being criticized by the community. However, women who participated in the labor force were worried that the community frowned on their work outside of the home. This fear of the community is also shown in their interaction with other woman. The migrant related women mentioned that they did not go out with people on a social level because gossip could arise. The fear of being looked down by the community became a form of social control, and this system of control maintained the normative structure and the system of practice of Nurangi. However, what it is interesting is that even with the community's control, women's agency is shown when they see a marital expectation unfulfilled.

At the beginning of this section, I mentioned that the system of practice is made of actions or activities shaped by a normative structure. The responses show that there are events that lead women from both sample groups to redefine the systems of practice by adopting market activities alongside non-market activities. For the control group, an emotional absence on the part of the male, which could lead to an economic absence, became the most important trigger mechanism for them to participate in the labor force. For the migrant related group, however, an economic and an emotional absence led them to participate in market activities. Even when the physical absence of the male did not influence migrant related women to enroll in the labor force, it did lead many of them to have feelings of insecurity. In any case, whether women adopted market roles due to an economic or emotional absence on the part of the male or not, we see that the women in Nurangi of both sample groups are not passive agents. In some cases, their challenge to

the system of practice led them to steady incomes; in others, it became only a supplementary aid. However, regardless of the reason (economic or emotional absence) for their participation in the labor force or the study group to which they belonged (non-migrant related or migrant related), women's responses show that they are active and exercise their agency when they perceive it is needed. Below, I will examine how the human capital that women possess affects their participation in the traditional system of practice of the community or in the new market activities they adopt.

### **HUMAN CAPITAL EXPANSION**

Whether they are non-migrant or migrant related women or whether they continue to perform non-market roles or have also adopted market roles, the women have certain forms of human capital that aid them in the performance of the activity they do. According to Phillips and Massey (2000) and Becker (1964), human capital is the resources that people invest in that make them more productive and from which they benefit economically. In the interviews, it was found that non-migrant related women who continue to hold non-market roles and those that perform market activities have different perceptions about their own human capital.

On the one hand, we have the non-migrant related women who continue to perform non-market activities. In the interviews, the women who continue to work in the household did not see an increase in their human capital through the years. In fact, most of them said that their roles continued to be the same. A woman said,

*Well yes... here what things can I learn? I have not learned anything (Juanita Sanchez, non-migrant 37).*

However, some said they did not know how to cook, and, in fact, it was their husband who taught them.

*Like what? Well yes. For example, when I got here I did not know anything, but my husband told me, he taught me, how to do things, how to work and other things (Teresa Lopez, non-migrant 45).*

We see that the women in the control group have not acquired or expanded their resources to demonstrate an economic benefit. The majority of the women in the control group continue to perform activities associated with the community's system of practice. However, even when their activities do not show an economic benefit, their responses show that, in fact, many of them feel that that they have become more productive, especially as it refers to cooking. One women reported,

*To prepare the meals... to make tortillas... Sometimes I also help out clean the school... help out with the breakfast (Myriam Morales, non-migrant 33).*

Another respondent mentioned,

*... I learned how to cook... before, my husband used to be the one that cooked... (Cruz Martinez, non-migrant 29).*

Another woman talked about a school related issue,

*...I have learned some things like for example when they have the bell at school, I need to go down because I get some food for my children like four tomatoes, four green beans that is all through elementary school (Carla Garza, non-migrant).*

*...I learned how to cook... before, my husband used to be the person that cooked... (Cruz Martinez, non-migrant 29).*

*Yes... I like to defend myself... I always said to myself that I would never allow anybody to manipulate me (“mangonearme”) right? So, that is why I always... well maybe yes, at the beginning I did not know how to defend myself but now... more or less... I am not the same... (Angelina Garcia, non-migrant 58).*

These quotes show that even when the majority of these women do not benefit economically from learning how to cook for their families, they still feel more productive. The women mentioned they felt good about knowing how to cook and this feeling may be related to their motherhood role. Knowing how to cook is something that allows them to fulfill their non-market roles in the household and, thus, brings them pride. Furthermore, they may be complying with “their end of the bargain” in the gender division of labor that has been part of the normative structure of the community. Therefore, even when their expansion of human capital in terms of knowing how to cook may not bring them a monetary exchange, the emotional satisfaction they feel may still be a type of resource or reward.

On the other hand, there are respondents who because of the affective or the economic absence of the male decided to take on market roles. When asked about whether they had seen an increase in their human capital, most of them responded positively. A respondent said,

*Yes, I have learned a lot of new things... maybe in the past I did not learn anything new because there was somebody that took care of me... for example my dad... but now... I have learned a lot... for example I have learned to fix problems... to solve them... I did not know how I would do it. But by myself... for example now... with the town’s issues... that one has to go to the faenas [community improvement events], I am not in charge... but since there is nobody here I have to do it... (Daniela Capetillo, migrant, age unknown).*



Another woman commented,

*The first time it took three months before he would send me anything, that is why I had to start working in the highway [helping build it]... I would go to Ixmiquilpan... I also helped one of the teachers by cleaning her house. After three months of my husband being away, my son got very sick. He was hospitalized for a week; thus, I did not go back to work... Working took my time... and I was away from my children... that is the reason for why I decided to stop working. The money and other things go back and forward... sometimes you have them and sometimes, you do not... One day I decided I wanted to start a business... that is why I started the little stationary store [“papeleria”]. Sometimes I do not have any money, today... and tomorrow I have 10 or 20 pesos... sometimes I get discouragement, desperate... I did not reach a high level of education, that is why at the beginning some of the problems I encountered were pretty much that of calculating things... That is why I talked to my brother-in-law, he helped me out. When you work hard on something you can finally do it. Well yes... when my husband left I was worried; I did not know how I was going to survive... One day, I saw some ladies working in the highway, and I learned to do that... and then here with the store... (Mariana Romo, migrant, age unknown).*

A woman mentioned,

*Well yes... I have learned how to do brushes... (Myriam Morales, non-migrant 50's).*

*At the workshop, they capacitate you first and then, you start working... mostly jeans... it is like a “maquiladora”... there are about 98 people working in the workshop... but I only worked there for some months... (Sandra Castaneda, migrant mid 20's to 30's).*

*Yes... how can I tell you... sometimes... sometimes you have to think by yourself... when your husband is not here you have to think by yourself... as a woman, one has to work as if one was a man... for example when your husband is not here the town obligates you to work as if you were your husband... you have to... as a woman, when your husband is here you feel protected... but when he is not here you have to make it on your own... you have to survive and become strong... when the husband is not here there are many things that people say or do... when the woman is alone there are some times that due to envy or something else one comes to be damaged being your husband on the other side one comes to learn to be strong against other people... you dedicate yourself to the house, to children, to school... (Sandra Castaneda, migrant mid 20's to 30's).*

Another woman notes that,

*Yes... because we do heavier work than the one that he used to do... for example move rocks... take sand... that is men's jobs that we need to do now... in the community there is no people... all the men leave so women have to do it. (Brenda Molina, migrant 42).*

Taking into account that there are not enough jobs available to provide for the population in Nurangi, the few jobs that are available are often given to men who may have the human and physical capital to perform them. Some of the migrant related women found themselves competing for jobs that men held. Therefore, they had to find creative ways to use their human capital or to expand it to become economic providers for their families. For example, in the interviews, three women whose husbands/partners did not migrate reported that their husbands/partners cheated on them. As a result, one of the respondents decided to start a tortilla store. This is what she commented,

*Well... I have worked in my house and in the tortilla... I no longer watch TV because I have to work... I have to clean, wash... And take care of the business [tortilla]. Sometimes I watch it at night but that is it. I work all day (Angelina Garcia, non-migrant 58).*

Another woman said,

*I used to work cleaning rich [people's] houses, and then I was in charge of my whole house. In the afternoon I used to study elementary school... Life makes you value the things that one has. I am a person that does not like to depend on the husband and having children at home is even harder... Later on, I started working as a cashier in a restaurant... Every person that I met... every person liked me... I left the job not because I was fired... I would like to work but where do I leave the children... but I am still being offered jobs. For example the delegate has offered me a job as a cashier for the water payments (Yolanda Castano, non-migrant 22).*

One more woman commented the following,

*I am in charge of the house, but I also make labels, inscriptions... with oil paints... I never took courses, I also do some things like frayings ["deshilados"], which are manual decorations, and since I was little... and now I sell some of the things. But it does not sell very well because people do not have enough money (Yolanda Castano, non-migrant 22).*

In any case, the previous quotes show how most of the women that participated in the labor force came to either accommodate or expand their human capital to receive not only an economic but also an emotional benefit through their personal satisfaction.

#### WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR HUMAN CAPITAL

The women interviewed have different types of human capital and, thus, derive distinct outcomes from them. The women in the control group who continued to be enrolled in non-market activities mentioned they had increased their human capital by learning how to cook. The other half of the control group and all of the migrant related women came to use the human capital they possessed in creative ways or expanded it to participate in a very competitive labor market to provide for their families. Next, I will discuss women's thoughts about the type of human capital they possess.

The women in the control group who perform non-market activities do not have either positive or negative feelings about the human capital they possess. The women in this group commented that learning how to cook had expanded their human capital. In the interviews, when the women commented they learned how to cook, most of them said it with pride. However, when I asked them how they felt about those changes, none of the women mentioned any positive feelings about it. In fact, they had nothing to say.

Even when they mentioned they learned how to cook, all of them said they did not feel anything positive about such change.

I was also interested in knowing how the women who participated in market activities felt about the changes and their increase in human capital. Here, for the most part, the women felt very positive toward this expansion. One such women commented,

*... before I would feel weird waiting, now, I have money, and if I want to buy something, I just buy it. Sometimes, I need money for the school celebrations so I buy it. I have some savings from my selling in the market, and that money I use it for the house and the children (Josefina Sanchez, non-migrant 24).*

Another woman said,

*... Well, I feel better because before I did not know how to do anything; I knew nothing. Now, I know how to work [in the house]. One feels nice when one learns to do something... (Teresa Lopez, non-migrant 45).*

Another respondent commented,

*Good, before, I felt like I was locked in, I did not go out for anything. Now, I go out on Mondays. At least every Monday for six months. The little girl has to heat the food until I get here at 6 p.m. and I feed them. At 7:30 a.m. I leave them at school, and then I go to Ixmiquilpan (Josefina Sanchez, non-migrant 24).*

In this section, we looked at how women from both sample groups use their human capital to perform their daily activities. The responses of the women in the control group who continue to participate in non-market activities show that even when they expanded their human capital in ways that did not benefit them economically (learning how to cook), all of them felt a sense of productiveness. On the other hand, the women in the control group who began participating in the labor force said that they did not only expand their human capital, but also saw an economic benefit and felt a sense of productiveness that they had not experienced. This same situation is seen in the migrant

sample with all but one of the women. The emotional and economic absence of the husband/partner added to a physical absence of the male and led them to not only become more productive, but also to draw a larger economic benefit from their human capital compared to the control group. Therefore, we may say that participation in the labor force among women brings them a feeling of productiveness in addition to an economic benefit that often boosts their self-pride. In the following section, I will look at how women's participation in the labor force has affected the interaction among women in the community.

## **SOCIAL CAPITAL**

Even when the women interviewed had different life experiences due to the migration status of their husbands/partners, there is still a sense of community among all women in Nurangi. This sense of community or civic engagement is promoted by the social capital that exists among the women in the community. Social capital represents the social relations that exist among family or community members. The interviews revealed that the non-migrant related women's opinions were divided in two groups.

On the one hand, there was the group of women who did not interact with migrant women. To illustrate, one woman reported that

*Almost none... most of the time I am alone... I work in my house and I am alone... sometimes I go and talk to my aunt but that is it... (Cruz Martinez, non-migrant 29).*

Another woman said,

*... Not really, I do not talk to people that much, I pretty much stay with my children... sometimes when I have to pick them up I say hello to this or that person... but that is all...Here everybody has to say hello to everybody you see in the road... you ask each other how is it going... everybody does that (Angelina Garcia, non-migrant 58).*

However, the majority of non-migrant women indicated that they did not only know women whose husbands /partners migrated but, in fact, interacted with them. One of the respondents said,

*Yes, there are many. Almost everybody leaves. There are almost no people. Everybody goes to the other side and suffer (Maria del Carmen Perez, non-migrant, age unknown).*

Another respondent said,

*Yes... Maricruz... she has problems... she has problems because her husband is over there... he does not send enough money... supposedly he left to earn money to build a house, but they have a lot of material and they have not been able to build anything because sometimes he does not send enough money for the food and the building of the house and, thus, food comes first... she is desperate... she does not know whether to get divorce or not.... (Yolanda Castano, non-migrant 22).*

Furthermore, many of them said that women whose husbands migrate are different from those whose husbands do not.

*Yes... there are people... it is different... being here... (husband) things are different... but as long as he is not here the woman has to look for something to eat ... like I told you if I do not have enough money, I have to find the way to eat... (Myriam Morales, migrant 50's).*

However, even when women from both groups may know each other, sometimes the actual interaction does not go beyond a greeting in the street. A pattern found among all migrant related women is that they do not like to go out with other women. The migrant related women expressed great concern about the gossip that arose due to the

absence of their husbands/partners. In response to my question on whether she goes out with other women, one woman said,

*No... For me it is very restricted... sometimes people think that because your husband is on the other side you have a lot of money... that is a lie... if your husband works it is o.k., but if he does not then there is no money, and not because my husband is on the other side that means that I am covered with money, that is a lie... the children come first... and sometimes when I am talking with other women sometimes they tell me that such person said this, that another person said that ... and there are gossips... sometimes when the husband is here you do not feel bad, you do not care... because you can talk to him but when he is not here he can hear some things... that can affect your marriage... Thus, I do not go out... one as wife, as a mother... you have the fear that he gets there (United States)... that it goes well... it hurts... it is sad... when they tell you that they go to the other side and then you find out that he is dead... it is so cruel... because of negligence... because of ranchers that kill Mexicans... it is the law of life... it is luck... In Nurangi there are people that do not know whether their family is alive or not... they do not know anything... There are problems over there of racism... I think that U.S. does not have poverty... maybe a little bit, but I think that Mexico has poverty... more poverty... I hope that one day Mexicans and Americans will be friends... it is mostly due because of governments... in Mexico there are a lot of problems with corruption... nothing will change unless corruption stops... [She talks about Blacks and Guatemalans.] (Sandra Castaneda, migrant mid 20's to 30's).*

In this case, we may need a deeper revision of the implication that the physical absence of the male has for women in the sending community. In the previous section on the labor force participation of the women, the women's responses did not show any great impact that the physical absence of the male has for them. In fact, the emotional and economic absence of the husband/partner became the trigger mechanism for women to begin participating in the labor force. However, in this section, we can see how the physical absence of the male does impact the type of relations that migrant related women may have in the community. Many of the women mentioned they feared that their interaction with other people (mostly men) may be perceived as licentiousness and

that it would influence their husband's opinion of them (wives). However, it is interesting to see that the majority of non-migrant women, no matter whether they participated in the labor force or not, understood the situation of the migrant related women that participated in market activities. A respondent commented,

*They have to work hard for their children. Things are not the same. They get money from the other side. They build their homes, and their children study* (Maria del Carmen Perez, non-migrant, age unknown).

Another said,

*Yes... the ones that have their husbands somewhere else... they have to respond with donations, with faena... to respond just like the men do. Unless the man does not allow her and he pays somebody else to do her job in the faena while he is not here. It has changed because now they work... for example some of them have started working in the building of the road, the highway... some have also started working in dressmaking* (Carla Garza, non-migrant).

A point that has to be made is that even when many of the women that continue to perform the non-market activities understand and value women's participation in the labor force to economically provide for their families, the new division of labor has to become legitimized.

Indeed, the acquisition of human capital and the legitimization of the new gender norms in the normative structure will depend on the social capital possessed. In many cases, it is through the interaction of the community as a whole that the challenge to the community's system of practice and normative structure may come to be legitimized not only by the women but also by the men. This type of acceptance may originate by the interaction that exists among all people in the community through community events called *faenas*.



FAENAS: ONE PATH FOR THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE NEW SYSTEM OF PRACTICE AND THE ADOPTION OF A NEW NORMATIVE STRUCTURE IN NURANGI

*Faenas* are community based events that bring the members of the community together once or twice a month to do some type of labor that improves the community. A delegate, who is chosen annually, heads the *faena*. One respondent describes the selection of delegates. “Every man in the town has a chance to be a delegate... so for example three years ago my husband was the delegado... now there is a guy from down there. Men from 18 to 60 years old participate in the *faena*” (Juanita Sanchez, non-migrant 37). According to Mariana Romo (migrant, age unknown), the delegate is in charge of all matters, the subdelegate is the assistant to the president, the secretary writes all events and agreements, the treasurer manages the money, and the director (“*regidor*”) is in charged of letting people know that there is a *faena*. I found out through my interviews that a woman has never been a delegate.

The delegate is chosen through a vote. The person chosen to be delegate has to accept the position no matter whether he/she wants it or not (Juanita Sanchez, non-migrant 37). It is an obligation that every man has at some point in time. The people in the town organize through meetings that take place every month or every two weeks. During the meeting, the people of the community decide what the community needs next. A respondent mentioned an example of a *faena* activity,

*Faena is, for example, now that they will open the road here on the back and they need somebody to move the land...the cemetery down there... it was the sole product of faena ... it is every eight days... when we need to bring water is every eight day... The water committee organizes it; the delegate "delegado" was in charge of organizing the creation of the cemetery (Juanita Sanchez, non-migrant 37).*

Another woman commented,

*Yes... one goes to the faena... one goes to the faena of the school or the town... to pick up stones... it depends... sometimes you have to be there or day long... in my house we spoke Nhanhu and Spanish, my children know how to speak Nhanhu and Spanish... (Edith Palacios, migrant, age unknown).*

One more woman said,

*I do the housework... I also do the community work... the work of the faenas... for example... now we just finished doing the cemetery... so we built a fence... it lasted for six months... the delegate chooses and organizes what type of work we need to do in the community... all of the people have to work... both men and women... and the people that cannot go to work have to pay a fee... of 100 pesos.... The delegate has assistants... and that person communicates to the people that there is work from 8 to 1 p.m. goes to eat and then from 2 to 6 p.m.... only on Saturday or Sundays.... We have also built the delegation... sometimes we have to clean the community. For the chapel... it is something that has been done for years and every year a new delegate is chosen... (Brenda Molina, migrant 42).*

A respondent said that if people do not participate when the work of the *faena* is done, they have to pay 50 pesos (five dollars) for half a day and 100 pesos (10 dollars) for the whole day. In addition, for every unattended meeting people have to pay 35 pesos (3.5 dollars). Every family has to send a representative to the *faena*. One woman commented,

*What I think of this? Well, on the one hand [it] is good because one learns to do it, on the other is bad because it is hard work... One person per family has to do it... After the faena is over all the people of the community get together and turn in the tools used, and there is a big book where there is a control of all the people that live in the community and one has to sign it ... there are people 18 years old that need to start working... so ending the faena, each person has to write their signature to record that he/she was present... (Brenda Molina, migrant 42).*

The majority of the time, it is the male head of the household who represents his family. However, depending on the type of activity, women and children have to help too. Yet, the situation is changing due to migration.

The absence of the male has obligated many of the women who stay behind to take the male's place. For some women, the types of activities involved pose a great physical stress. However, sometimes the insufficient income makes women have to overcome the physical stress and participate in the *faena* as this woman commented,

*The faenas only happen during the weekends. If it is something urgent then people have to work during the week too. For the most part, the faenas take place during the weekend, on Sundays. Supposedly it is mostly the men who go (Mariana Romo, migrant, age unknown).*

However, Mariana Romo (migrant, age unknown) mentions that since her husband is not present, and she does not want to pay the fees, she goes to the *faenas* and works. She says that she prefers to buy 50 pesos of meat for her children rather than pay the fee for not showing up.

In this community, we see that the *faena* becomes an event in which people (men and women, migrant or non-migrant related) not only interact, but also cooperate for a communal benefit. Every family becomes a source of labor. Thus, men and, in their absence, women are expected to provide the same amount of labor for the good of the

community. Putnam (1993) sees generalized reciprocity as a basic ingredient of cooperation, and a factor that can lead to improved productivity and civic engagement. In this case, the *faena* may allow not only for the community's well being, but also for a healthy interaction among its members. Coleman (1988) mentions that all of the factors involved in social capital have two key elements that tie people together—the first being social structures and the second being that they facilitate social action by actors within these structures. Furthermore, Bourdieu (1986,1990,1993) sees social capital as the tool to maintain or change a person's position in a hierarchical structure. For Bourdieu, a person's position is based on their “social, economic, and cultural capital” (Wall 1998:306). Therefore, women's participation in market activities and *faenas* (traditionally male activities) may become the path for the acceptance and in many cases the legitimization of the challenge that women's actions pose to the system of practice and the normative structure of the community. In the case of Mexican women, strong networks among women in the sending community may allow them to not only acquire human capital, but may also be the path to legitimize the new normative structure as exemplified by this final quote.

*Yes... we interact with other women who have husbands that migrate... Well, sometimes we help each other... when one stays alone and a problem comes it is more difficult than for a man, so yes, many times the community helps out... sometimes even the community gets together and collects some money to help the person that has the problem...it is on the other side where people come closer... maybe it is because they are away from their families but in the other side they come closer together... (Brenda Molina, migrant 42).*

In this section, I examined the type of interaction that exists among women in the community. On the one hand, the majority of women in the control group said that they

not only knew women whose husbands/partners migrated, but they also interacted with them. However, the responses of migrant related women show that the physical absence of the male promotes in them a feeling of uneasiness in terms of interaction with other women. This feeling originates with the fact that gossip may arise about their social engagements which can affect either their relationship with their husbands or their status in the community. Nevertheless, even when it was hypothesized that there would be two separate networks between women of both sample groups due to the migration or non-migration of their husbands/partners, this was not the case. A factor that may explain a sense of community in the majority of the interactions is *faenas*. *Faenas*, as communal-based events, bring people together for the good of the community. Furthermore, this interaction may allow for the acceptance of many women's challenge to the system of practice in Nurangi and may lead to the challenge and change of the normative structure.

## **FINAL REMARKS**

In this chapter, I have shown that the process described by Alarcon as "*Nortenzacion*" exists in Nurangi, where this study was conducted. Beyond the demographic changes that have occurred throughout the duration of this process, the community has also seen structural and social transformations. Specifically, I have gone over the changes that have taken place in the system of practice as well as the human and social capital of the community. First, I provided a general overview of the respondent's household characteristics. Subsequently, I examined some of the changes in the gender division of labor of the community due to the perceived physical, economic, and

emotional absence of the men as reported by women. Next, I went over human and social capital factors than had been altered by women's challenge to the system of practice. In the next chapter, I will provide an overview of the results. The concluding chapter will also answer the research question that has driven this research: Is the normative structure of a sending community affected by the international migration of the male and his remittances?

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSION**

For many years, people from urban and rural Mexico have engaged in international migration. Most international migrants have often been pushed by the economic necessity of their families due to high unemployment and poverty rates in their communities of origin. Still, contrary to common assumptions, this migration tend to be temporary rather than permanent leading to the creation of transnational communities. Unfortunately, since the majority of the studies conducted to study this global and circular movement have often focused on the receiving community, the study of Mexico as a sending community has been neglected.

The importance of transnational communities should not be downplayed. Besides demographic and economic changes, sending communities have shown changes at the micro level. This research is based on the idea that the male's absence affected the patterns of socioeconomic organization. I hypothesized that the international migration of the male and the remittances he sent would affect the normative structure of the community, and, in particular, it would lead to changes in the system of practice.

In this thesis, I have criticized studies that see Mexican women's participation in the labor force as the result of a migration experience or social remittances. In particular, I discussed two views that see migration as a trigger mechanism for the challenge of the system of practice and normative structure of Nurangi that are based on a gender division of labor. On the one hand, Menjivar's (1999) study of Guatemalan and

Salvadoran immigrant women in the United States suggests that immigration affects gender relations as women enter the labor force. For Menjivar (1999), employment gives immigrant women exposure to more egalitarian relationships perceived as the American model, and, thus, encourages them to redefine their gender relations (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1999). On the other hand, Levitt (1998) sees women's participation in the labor force as the result of social remittances. Levitt argues that while migrants are in the United States, they come in contact with the host community. Depending on the degree of immersion in the U.S. culture, the migrant may come to adopt the ideas, values and beliefs, which are subsequently transmitted to his/her sending community (Levitt 1998). However, both Menjivar's (1999) and Levitt's (1998) arguments implicitly promote the view of Mexican women with no migration experience as passive, a view that may perpetuate gender inequality.

Therefore, the purpose of this thesis was to determine and analyze the impact that the international migration of married/cohabitating males and their remittances have in a sending community (Nurangi). Specifically, I was interested in showing how Mexican women may challenge and redefine the normative structure and the system of practice as it pertains to the gender division of labor. Furthermore, I examined how women's participation in the labor force affects their human and social capital and the impact that this has on their status in the community. Therefore, based on ethnographic research, I have tested my initial hypotheses and came to the following conclusions.

In the community of Nurangi, many of the women in both sample groups participated in the labor force before marriage. However, once they got married, they



were assigned the private space and performed non-market activities. Males, on the other hand, performed market activities to provide economically for their families. Yet, even when this division of labor may be perceived as unequal, women in the community comply with it as long as their marriage expectations are fulfilled.

The analysis shows that women in Nurangi expect an economic and emotional presence from their male partners/husbands. On the one hand, women in both groups expect their husband/partner to provide economically for the needs of the family. On the other hand, women also expect a relationship based on respect, trust, and love in their marriage. If the male does not provide economically for his family, or the male emotionally or physically abuses the wife, the woman challenges the system of practice of Nurangi. The primary challenge to the system of practice of Nurangi consists of women participating in the labor force. However, even when both sample groups demonstrated that both an economic and an emotional presence are necessary to fulfill their expectations, there was a difference in the importance that each absence posed for each sample group. For the control group (non-migrant related women), the emotional absence posed not only a greater stress on the women, but also became a more important trigger mechanism in their participation in market activities. For the migrant related group, the economic absence was most important, even when the emotional absence continued to play a critical role. As such, the results reject Menjivar (1999) and Levitt's (1998) argument described above. Second, the analysis shows that contrary to my hypothesis, the physical absence of the male is not a trigger mechanism for women's participation in the labor force. However, even when the physical absence of the male

was not a trigger mechanism for women's participation in the labor force, it does allow for a transformation of the household.

The physical absence of the male allows for the transformation of the migrant household into a matriarchal household. When the male does not provide economically for the family, the woman participates in the labor force. The unstable timing and amount of remittances poses a challenge for the women in the sending community. Such challenge is resolved by participating in a labor market that permits them to use their human capital or expand it in ways that allows them to earn enough money to survive. However, contrary to the women in the control group who engaged in market activities, the income that the majority of the migrant related women earn becomes the primary income that sustains the family in the sending community. Therefore, the woman becomes not only the caretaker of the children and the household administrator but also the economic administrator.

The interviews have also shown that contrary to some literature that views Mexican women as passive and subordinate agents, the women in Nurangi are active agents. On the one hand, there are non-migrant women who continue to perform non-market activities, but show their agency by defining their marital relationship as one that should be based on respect and trust. On the other hand, there are women from both sample groups that have challenged the normative structure by adopting a system of practice that differs from the traditional one. In any case, whether they are non-migrant or migrant related women or whether they continue to perform non-market roles or have

also adopted market ones, the women of Nurangi show they not only possess agency but also human capital that has aided them in the performance of their daily activities.

In terms of human capital, both groups of women have resources that have allowed them to be productive in non-economic or economic terms. On the one hand, women in the control group who continue to participate solely in household chores and childcare (non-market activities) express a sense of productivity by learning how to cook even when no income was generated from it. On the other hand, women in the control group and the migrant related group that participate in the labor force mentioned that they had expanded their human capital. For some, learning how to take care for a business led to this expansion. In such cases, women who participated in the labor force did not only express a sense of productivity, but they also saw economic benefits from the expansion or creative use of their human capital.

Furthermore, the analysis has shown that women from both sample groups continue to interact with each other through *faenas* even when both groups have different perceptions than the ones expected. On the one hand, the physical absence of the male leads to women's feelings of insecurity especially in the type of perceptions that the community and the migrant husbands may have of them if they engage in social events at a friendship level. On the other hand, the responses of the majority of women in the control group who engaged in non-market activities show that women's redefinition of the system of practice is not perceived negatively. In fact, the responses presented express how women understand that women's market activities originate from unfulfilled expectations, especially the need to provide for their families. However,

beyond positive or negative perceptions about each group, it was found that there exists a sense of community due to the interaction that takes place in *faenas*. *Faenas*, as communal based events, bring people together for the good of the community. Furthermore, this interaction may allow for the acceptance of many women's challenge to the system of practice in Nurangi and, thus, the community may be in the process of changing the normative structure. In the following section, I will discuss some of the shortcomings of this thesis.

### **SHORTCOMINGS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Even when the data from this study were been collected using scientific methodological techniques, the analysis presented here has to be subject to criticism for some of the shortcomings that I have identified and that deal with the population, the sample, and the cross-sectional nature of the study. First, the population was chosen because of convenience factors. Having few resources, the convenience of room and board offered by some contacts in Nurangi encouraged me to choose this particular location. Even though this community has gone through a process of *Nortenzacion*, I acknowledge that there are other states and communities in Mexico that produce a greater number of international migrants. Future studies should look at communities with larger numbers of people that engage in international migration and compare these results with the ones found in this thesis. Second, the snowball sampling approached employed in my study prevents me from generalizing these results to other Otomi communities. The initial intention was to have some type of randomness in the sample

by choosing the second name offered when new contact names were given. However, the small population of Nurangi is reflected by the respondents' leads, which typically offered at the most, one or two names. For the future, it is suggested that researchers use the initial method proposed or a random sample. Third, I had problems answering my research question on whether the international migration of the male and the amount of his remittances allow for the redefinition of the normative structure of the community. The problem originates from the fact that this study was cross-sectional and, thus, provides only a snapshot of the community. Because of this timing limitation, it was impossible to recognize the causality of events. The responses show that women from both sample groups redefine the system of practice of the community when they see an unfulfilled emotional or economic expectation on the part of the their husbands/partners. However, I am uncertain whether this type of behavior was promoted by the physical absence of the male and then adopted by the rest of the women in the community, or whether the behavior originates from women's expectations in general. Therefore, this study should serve as a stepping-stone for future studies, which may use a longitudinal method that will allow them to come to better understand the causality of events. Finally, future research should look at the impact that women's challenge to the division of labor has for the stability of the family. In this research, I was limited in the responses obtained since I was only able to interview the women. It would be interesting to assess directly men's opinions of women's challenge and redefinition of the system of practice and the impact that this has for the family.

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

Furthermore, this study has several implications. First, my study helps advance academic literature focusing on sending communities and women's participation in the labor force. My literature review revealed a lack of studies on sending communities in Mexico. The majority of the research that examines international migration has often focused on the receiving community and has, thus, ignored a fundamental part of this global process. A greater emphasis on sending communities will help broaden our understanding of international migration by more closely identifying the impact that such movement have on the families and communities left behind. It is through a deeper knowledge of the communities of origin of the migrants, that effective policy can be created to target social, cultural, and economic concerns.

Second, beyond implications at an academic level, we see that Mexican women's role is very important for the process of rural development. This research shows how community members (women) that are often portrayed as passive challenged the normative structure of a community. In this study, the structural and the cultural transformations that took place in Nurangi were the result of women's redefinitions, expectations, and agency. This event is of particular importance in transnational sending communities in which most of the population left behind is made of women and children. As we have seen, in the case of Nurangi, women become agents of change even when they had to overcome many obstacles due to their decision to depart from traditional schemes. These problems are associated with major childcare needs and the social control that the community poses. Thus, in Mexico, the government should make

efforts to create a system of childcare facilities to provide for the rural population. While such assistance is seen in some urban centers, childcare needs among rural families are often ignored due to cultural ideas that continue to see childcare as women's responsibility. Breaking away from traditional ideas that limits women's space to the private is necessary for the development of women in the public space, and, as shown in this thesis, it is crucial in the development of rural transnational communities.

Third, the role of education should be acknowledged as an important tool for the transformation of traditional ideas that have limited women's activities and value. Through education, people are exposed to different ideas and develop a critical mind. It is through a critical mind that people question their reality, thus bringing change to existing social practices and norms. In the interviews, I mentioned how many women were concerned for their children's education, especially for their daughters. This concern may originate from women's recognition that an expanding human capital allows for better opportunities as they have seen in their own lives. Therefore, women encourage their children to further their education so they will not go through the same problems they faced. In addition, since knowledge is power, many women understand that the knowledge their daughters obtained may allow them to speak up when their expectations are not being met.

Fourth, the role of education and the critical mind and human capital it develops may, in turn, possibly have long-term implications for women's independence and, more broadly, family stability. In the interviews, we saw that for the non-migrant related women divorce was not a rational choice due to the lack of economic opportunities in

the community. However, with changes in the normative structure of the community and the strengthening role of education that leads to women's human capital expansion, women are empowered not only at an emotional level but also a practical one. Younger generation women may no longer be restricted in their opportunities because they may possess the tools to compete side by side with men. Because of this, it is possible that divorce rates may increase just as women's income.

Finally, it is interesting to see the powerful effect that community action can have for the community and for its members. On the one hand, women's responses made clear that the perception of the community on particular issues continues to be an important source of social control for members of the community, especially women, thus promoting the maintenance of traditional forms of culture and social structure. On the other hand, this thesis also shows how community based events do not only benefit the community in economic and development issues, but also in social interactions among groups with different ideas. It is through this interaction that not only people's challenge to the status quo is possible, but also that, in the end, its redefinition is achievable.



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**APPENDIX A**

**QUESTIONNAIRE FOR WOMEN WHO HAVE BECOME HEAD OF  
HOUSEHOLD BECAUSE HUSBAND MIGRATES**

1. What does your husband/partner tell you about the United States?
2. Before your husband/partner began migrating, what were his responsibilities?
3. When your husband/partner used to live in Mexico what were your responsibilities?
4. How often does your husband/partner come back?
5. How long does he stay?
6. Now that your husband/partner is migrating, what are his duties when he comes back?
7. Now that your husband/partner is migrating, what are your responsibilities?
8. Do you know other women whose husbands/partners are migrating?
9. Have you learned any new task(s) since your husband/partner began migrating?
10. How do you feel about these changes of roles?
11. Are there any consequences that you have seen from this change?
12. What does your husband/partner think about these new roles?
13. Has your status in your family or community improved because of this change of roles?
14. What do your children think of this?
15. Do you know other women whose husbands/partners are migrating?
16. Do you interact with them? If so, when?



**QUESTIONNAIRE FOR WOMEN WHO'S HUSBAND IS A NON-MIGRANT  
HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD**

1. When you got married/free union, what were your responsibilities?
2. When you got married/free union, what were your husband/partner's responsibilities?
3. What are your responsibilities in the family now?
4. What are your husband's/partner's responsibilities in the family now?
5. Have you learned any new task since you got married/free union? From whom?
6. If so, how do you feel with these changes of roles?
7. Are there any consequences that you have seen from this change?
8. What does your husband/partner think about these new roles?
9. Has your status in your family or community improved because of this change of roles?
10. What do your children think of this?
11. Do you know women whose husbands/partners are migrating?
12. Have the women whose husbands/partners are migrating changed in any way? And if so, in what way?
13. What do you think of these changes?

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