

# **OVERCOMING PATRIARCHAL CONSTRAINTS: The Reconstruction of Gender Relations Among Mexican Immigrant Women and Men**

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*This article examines how gender shapes the migration and settlement experiences of Mexican immigrant women and men. The article compares the experiences of families in which the husbands departed prior to 1965 to those in which the husbands departed after 1965 and argues that the lengthy spousal separations altered (albeit differentially for each group) patterns of patriarchal authority and the traditional gendered household division of labor. This induced a trend toward more egalitarian conjugal relations upon settlement in the United States. Examining the changing contexts of migration illuminates the fluid character of patriarchy's control in Mexican immigrant families.*

**P**atriarchy is a fluid and shifting set of social relations in which men oppress women, in which different men exercise varying degrees of power and control, and in which women resist in diverse ways (Collins 1990; hooks 1984; Kandiyoti 1988; Baca Zinn et al. 1986). Given these variations, patriarchy is perhaps best understood contextually. This article examines family stage migration from Mexico to the United States, whereby husbands precede the migra-

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tion of their wives and children, and it highlights how patriarchal gender relations organize migration and how the migration process reconstructs patriarchy.

In family stage migration, patriarchal gender relations are embedded in normative practices and expectations that allow men and deny women the authority and the resources necessary to migrate independently. Men are expected to serve as good financial providers for their families, which they attempt to do through labor migration; patriarchal authority allows them to act autonomously in planning and carrying out migration. Married women must accept their husbands' migration decisions, remain chaste, and stay behind to care for the children and the daily operation of the domestic sphere. These normative patterns of behavior, however, are renegotiated when the departure of one family member, the husband, prompts rearrangements in conjugal social power and the gender division of labor in the household.

The process of family stage migration diminishes patriarchy, but it does not do so uniformly. In this case study, the time period of male migration and settlement distinguishes between two groups. Men who departed prior to 1965 were more likely to live initially in predominantly male communities, to endure a longer period of time in the United States without their wives and families, and eventually to obtain legal status, unlike a later cohort of undocumented immigrant men;<sup>1</sup> this differentially modified the obstacles their wives would face in migration. Women and men do not enter the migration process equally, but given the diverse historical and social contexts in which migration occurs, women in the same culture and in similar circumstances may encounter different types of patriarchal obstacles and, hence, improvise different responses to migration. Distinct migration trajectories culminate in the creation of different types of gender relations once the families settle in the United States. Patriarchy is neither a monolithic nor a static construct, even within a group sharing similar class and racial-ethnic characteristics.

Gender relations in ethnic families are typically explained as culturally determined, as derivative from either "traditional" or "modern" values. Revisionist scholarship on Latino families challenges this acculturation perspective by considering the effects of structural economic, political, and social factors in shaping relative resources (Pessar 1984; Baca Zinn 1980, 1990). This article continues in that tradition, but with a slightly different twist. The alterations in patriarchal behavior are attributable neither to the adoption of feminist ideology or of "modern" values, as the acculturation model posits, nor to women's enhanced financial contributions to the family economy, but to arrangements induced by the migration process itself.

While the causes of this U.S.-bound Mexican immigration can be identified in macro-level structural rearrangements in Mexico and the United

States (Massey et al. 1987), the manner in which people respond to these macrostructural transformations is shaped by gender. Since gender is relational, the analysis considers both women's and men's experiences during the spousal separations. What women do during the spousal separations ultimately affects their husbands and vice versa.

### HOUSEHOLDS AND MIGRATION WITHOUT GENDER?

When I began my research, I entered the field with a set of guiding assumptions derived from the migration literature promoting the analytic primacy of the household (Dinerman 1978; Pessar 1982; Selby and Murphy 1982; Wood 1982). Several key assumptions, fundamentally economic ones, typify this approach, and in order to understand my alternative conceptual framework proposed for the study of migration, it is useful to review these tenets. First, the household is defined as a contained *unit* composed of kin-related persons who share a set amount of land, labor, capital, and social resources, such as immigrant network ties. Migration is perceived as a responsive *adaptation*, one pursued when the household's consumption needs outstrip locally available resources. Finally, the model assumes the operation of householdwide calculation — that family members together devise household *strategies* that guide migration.

While the household model acknowledges that migrants live their lives enmeshed in social relationships — an improvement over both the asocial perspective of neoclassical economics and the overly deterministic macrostructural model frequently used in migration studies — Tilly and Scott's (1987) remarks that household strategies are often shaped by processes of “contention, bargaining, negotiation and domination” (p. 9) provide a feminist point of departure. Writings by Rouse (1989) on migration and Wolfe (1990) on the topic of young women's factory employment, as well as feminist scholarship on families (Baca Zinn 1990; Hartmann 1981; Komarovskiy 1988; Thorne 1982), also illuminate flaws embedded in the household model.<sup>2</sup>

Family and household members do not necessarily act as a unit. Divergent and conflicting interests over migration may coexist within the household unit, although these differences might be masked by family members' attempts to forge an appearance of family unity (Rouse 1989). The major point, however, is that family interests and individual interests — especially women's and men's — do not always mesh. This observation suggests that the study of women's and men's migration might be better understood within a paradigm that acknowledges the power relations operating within the family

or household unit. Patriarchal authority and constraints, as well as contention and resistance to patriarchy, shape family migration decisions.

Focusing on patriarchal constraints and negotiations improves upon the conception of migration derived from a monolithic household model. This alternative approach not only captures the divergent strategies employed by women and men within any given household or family but highlights as well the diverse strategies and resources employed by women in similar, but different, contexts. While an older cohort of women whose husbands had migrated achieved migration by persuading their husbands, a more recent group of women in similar circumstances were more likely to rely on subversion of patriarchal authority. The household model captures only unitary household strategies and implicitly assigns women heterogeneous (e.g., dependent, passive) roles in migration. Finally, while the household model sees migration as an adaptive measure in which families or households secure resources, the focus on patriarchal constraints examines the search for resources as they occur in the dynamic arena of family politics.

An exclusive focus on the household risks ignoring the significance of broader kin and non-kin networks. Immigrants are experts at developing social networks that reduce migration's financial and social costs and risks by providing the new migrant with valuable information, job contacts, and other resources. Recent studies of Mexican immigration highlight the importance of these social infrastructures in facilitating, channeling, and maintaining migration flows (Massey et al. 1987; Mines 1981; Portes and Bach 1985). While men have been identified as the "pioneers" of these networks (Mines 1981), research has not explored women's place in these social relations. Operating under the implicit assumption of the household model—that all resources, including social ones, are shared equally among household and family members, studies imply that married women automatically benefit from their husbands' social resources and expertise (Kossoudji and Ranney 1984; Massey et al. 1987; Mines 1981).<sup>3</sup> The analysis developed in this article underscores the manner in which gendered immigrant networks facilitate or limit migration opportunities for Mexican women and men. Men and women in the same family may use different network resources, sometimes at cross purposes. These networks are significant for both migration processes and settlement outcomes.

### SETTLEMENT AND EMERGENT GENDER RELATIONS

A second area of inquiry concerns the type of gender relations immigrant newcomer families establish in the United States. The stereotypical view

maintains that Mexican immigrant families are characterized by extreme machismo. This image consists of a caricaturelike portrait of excessively tyrannical men and submissive women. It is based not only on the notion that immigrants preserve intact cultural traditions but also on the belief that machismo is "traditional" among Mexican families. Research, however, does not support the claim that all contemporary Mexican and Chicano families are characterized by a uniformly extreme type of patriarchy (Baca Zinn 1980; Cromwell and Ruiz 1979; Guendelman and Perez-Itriaga 1987; Kelly and Garcia 1990; Segura 1988; Ybarra 1982, 1988; Zavella 1987), although patriarchal ideologies and divisions of labor certainly endure (Baca Zinn 1980; Peña 1991, Zavella 1987).

Conversely, there is an emerging view that sees Mexican immigrant families becoming less patriarchal because of American cultural influences. This view, I believe, is correct in its assessment of the general trend toward more egalitarian gender relations among Mexican immigrants but incorrect in its explication of why this arises. According to the acculturation perspective, changes in conjugal roles in ethnic families derive from the influence of modern cultural values, not structural arrangements. Research, however, shows that Latino families may adopt increasingly egalitarian gender behavior while still retaining elements of traditional culture (Baca Zinn 1980). The Mexican immigrants who participated in this case study not only identified as *Mexicanos*, but moreover, they lived extremely segregated, encapsulated lives, characterized by limited contact with Anglos, so the changes do not appear to be due to any "Americanization" or "modernizing" acculturation process.

A more satisfactory analysis of this issue departs from a model based on relative control over resources and contributions to the family economy (Blood and Wolfe 1960; Blumberg 1984, 1991; Blumstein and Schwartz 1983). Research by feminist scholars in various racial-ethnic communities suggests that the increase in immigrant women's economic contributions to the family economy, concomitant with immigrant men's declining economic resources, accounts for the diminution of male dominance in the family (Kibria 1990; Lamphere 1987; Pessar 1984, 1986).

Although gender relations in Mexican immigrant families become less patriarchal, they do so in a heterogeneous fashion. The forces responsible for these transformations go beyond resource equations and are very different from those posited by the acculturation model. The analysis developed in this article focuses on a dimension that is generally overlooked—behavioral changes initiated by the migration process itself. I argue that the partial dismantling of patriarchy arises from new patterns of behavior induced

by the arrangements of family stage migration. In light of this analysis, migration becomes a gendering process. These changes do not occur uniformly, and the analysis contrasts two groups that are distinguished by the historical period of migration and by length of spousal separation due to migration. Once families were reunited, these spousal separations and the context in which they occur were fundamental in shaping new gender relations.

The study of migration offers an ideal opportunity to examine how dramatic structural transformations and migration processes reshape gender relations. Recent studies of migration suggest both the malleability and the tenacity of patriarchal power in immigrant families of various ethnic and national origins (Glenn 1986; Kibria 1990; Pessar 1986). Studies of patriarchal power in nonimmigrant families might be enhanced by an examination of the various historical conditions and social contexts in which gender is reconstructed in immigrant families.

Insights drawn from the early stages of field research and from the feminist literature led me to focus on two dimensions of patriarchal gender relations that shape migration: the changing balance of power and authority in the family and access to community social networks. After a description of the research, the discussion focuses on the place of gender in organizing family stage migration and follows through with an analysis of how this particular social route of migration induces transformations in gender relations.

## DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH

This article is based on a case study encompassing 44 adult women and men in 26 families. I began research in a San Francisco Bay-area community in November 1986, just as the Immigration Reform and Control Act passed,<sup>4</sup> and I engaged in 18 months of continuous, intensive social interaction using participant observation and in-depth interviews. Whenever possible, I interviewed husbands and wives separately; interviews were tape-recorded and fully transcribed with nearly all 44 individuals. All interviews and interactions occurred in Spanish; the quotes appearing in this article are verbatim translations selected from the transcripts.

### Sample

Conventional random sampling techniques are not feasible when researching an undocumented immigrant population in the United States

(Cornelius 1982), so I chose a nonrandom snowball sample. I met some of the respondents during the period spanning 1979 to 1982, when I had worked in the community. It was, however, primarily my participation in various community organizations during the field research for this project and extensive personal reciprocity that enabled me to elicit study participants. These involvements allowed me to maintain relationship continuity with respondents. Since I was primarily interested in undocumented settlement, I chose subjects who had resided in the United States for a minimum of three years.<sup>5</sup> Twenty-two of the 26 families were undocumented when I met them, although many of them became candidates for amnesty-legalization.

The 10 couples discussed in this article were mostly middle-aged when I interviewed them. Women's ages ranged from 30 to 73, the men's from 33 to 73.<sup>6</sup> With the exception of one couple, they all had children. Respondents' level of education ranged from no schooling to secondary school, preparing two men for work as rural schoolteachers and another for a job as a bookkeeper in Mexico. Prior to their husbands' migration to the United States, most of the women had not worked outside the home.

The five families in which the men began undocumented migration prior to 1965, when the *bracero* program was still in effect, came from peasant backgrounds in rural Mexico. The five families in which migration occurred after 1965 included families who had last lived in both urban and rural areas of Mexico, although most of those who had lived in Mexican cities had been urban-rural migrants or came from families who migrated to the city. Spousal separations because of migration lasted an average of nearly nine years for the pre-65 group and two or three years for the post-65 group.

In spite of the undocumented legal status that many of the subjects maintained for years, they had stabilized their residency and, to some extent, their employment in California. The men generally worked as janitors, gardeners, or restaurant employees, and the women as domestic workers. These occupations do not necessarily represent nationwide trends in Mexican immigrant employment but reflect the structure of employment opportunities for Latino immigrants in this particular metropolitan area.

A small sample and qualitative methods were chosen for this study in order to develop an explanation of processes as they occur at the microstructural level. The analysis offered in this article is concerned with explaining how family stage migration arises in the context of domestic patriarchy and how it elicits diverse outcomes in gender relations, rather than with predicting future patterns of migration or generalizing the findings to all Mexican undocumented immigrants.



## FAMILY STAGE MIGRATION

Direct labor recruitment of Mexican men by U.S. employers, dating back to the nineteenth century, and the *bracero* program, a temporary contract labor program established by the United States and Mexico between 1942 and 1964, institutionalized family stage migration. Although these programs provide historical precedent, the interviews and the discussions that I conducted with husbands and wives reveal the significance of patriarchal gender relations and ideologies in shaping family stage migration.

In all of the families in which men preceded their wives, patriarchal forms of authority prevailed, so that migration decisions did not arise as part of a unified family or household strategy. Generally, husbands unilaterally decided to migrate with only token, superficial regard for their wives' concerns and opinions. Women were not active decision-making participants. When I asked the men about their initial departure and their wives' responses, they were generally reluctant to present information that implied family conflict over migration. While some men admitted that their wives reacted unenthusiastically, they claimed that their wives agreed or, at worst, were resigned to this situation because of economic need. Typical of their responses was one man's comment: "How could she disagree? My brother was here [in the United States], and things were going well for him."

When I asked the women to recall these scenarios, many of them reported having been vehemently opposed to their husbands' migration. The principal reason was fear of their husbands' desertion, of becoming a *mujer abandonada* (an abandoned woman). One woman, speaking of her home town in Mexico, estimated that "out of ten men who come here [United States], six return home. The others who come here just marry another woman and stay here, forgetting their wives and children in Mexico." Women feared that their husbands' migration would signal not a search for a better means of supporting the family but escape from supporting the family. Their husbands' migration promised an uncertain future for them and for the children who would remain behind; therefore, women tended to respond negatively to their husbands' departure.

Even so, few women were in a position to voice this opposition. Some of them were young — teen brides when their husbands began their long migration careers. In retrospect, these women recognized that they were not accustomed to disagreeing with or even questioning their husbands' judgment. Dolores Avila, who was initially left behind with an infant and who gave birth to a second child while her husband was in the United States, recalled: "I had to believe that he knew what was best for us, that he knew how to advance our situation." Other women expressed their opposition in



silence, through prayer. Several women reported that they implored God to have the border patrol capture their husbands and send them back home. While their prayers were sometimes answered, the men stayed home only momentarily before departing once again. Other women initially supported their husbands' decision to migrate in the hope that U.S. remittances and savings would alleviate economic needs; as time passed, these women became opposed to their husbands' lengthy sojourns.

The husbands' departures initiated lengthy spousal separations, ranging from 1 year to 16 years.<sup>7</sup> The 10 couples discussed in this article were separated an average of nearly 6 years. During these periods, the men usually returned to Mexico for visits. In many of the families, spousal separations induced significant transformations in conjugal relations. The following discussion examines the dynamics through which this occurred.

### **The Women Who Stay Behind: New Rewards and New Burdens**

Remittances sent by migrant husbands arrived sporadically and in smaller amounts than anticipated. While store credit and loans from kin provided emergency relief, these sources could not be relied upon indefinitely. In response to extreme financial urgencies and in spite of structural limitations on employment, women devised income-earning activities compatible with their child-rearing responsibilities. The most common solution was informal-sector employment, usually vending or the provision of personal services, such as washing and ironing, which they performed in their homes. These women, especially those with young children, worked intensively. Often, it was precisely these conditions that prompted women to migrate. A study of women who fit the pattern of family stage migration found that all 14 women in the sample reported pursuing migration to end the burden of being the sole head of household (Curry-Rodriguez 1988, 51).

Although these expanded activities and responsibilities were onerous, the women discovered unanticipated rewards during these spousal separations. Women provided a substantial portion of family resources, and they became more competent at performing multiple roles, as they honed new skills, such as budgeting or public negotiation. A cluster of studies conducted in Mexico and among Mexican immigrant women in the United States suggests that these conditions foster women's autonomy, esteem, and role expansion (Ahern, Bryan, and Baca 1985; Baca and Bryan 1985; Curry-Rodriguez 1988; González de la Rocha 1989; Mummert 1988). As Teresa Ibarra, a woman whose husband migrated to California while she remained behind in a small town in Michoacan caring for five children, explained:

When he came here [to the United States], everything changed. It was different. It was me who took the responsibility for putting food on the table, for keeping the children clothed, for tending the animals. I did all of these things alone, and in this way, I discovered my capacities. And do you know, these accomplishments gave me satisfaction.

Earning and administering an autonomous income did not automatically translate into greater power for women. These women administered budgets with negligible disposable income, an experience characterized more by the burden of stretching scarce resources than by holding the reigns of economic power (Benería and Roldán 1987, 120). Paradoxically, the men migrated north for economic reasons, to fulfill breadwinner responsibilities, and to save money to purchase a house, buy land, or pay debts. Yet in the United States the men encountered—especially in this particular metropolitan area of California—an extremely high cost of living and low wages, which their “illegal” status only exacerbated. This situation hindered the accumulation of savings and remittances, and over time, the women resented their husbands’ shunning of familial responsibilities, especially with so few economic resources returning in the form of remittances.

## REMITTANCES

I don’t know whether they earned a little or nothing, but that was what they sent.

As the quote above suggests, the small amount of money that husbands sent home, and women’s ignorance about where the entirety of men’s U.S. income was spent, fueled women’s discontent. Several women strongly suspected that their husbands squandered the money frivolously on other women and in bars. The husbands’ migration aggravated a situation in which women performed a disproportionate share of household reproduction tasks and men controlled the greatest share of income. Although men migrated in order to support their families better, they were less accountable to their families while in the United States than if they had not gone north and less accountable than the women who stayed behind.

Men’s absences from the home enhanced their ability to withhold from their wives information on the exact amount of their earnings, a practice not uncommon among poor, working-class families in Mexico (Benería and Roldán 1987). This meant that the men could spend a greater share of their earnings on personal pleasures, if they were so inclined. In informal conversations, many women and men, respondents as well as other immigrants in

the community, insinuated that many men prefer the life of an independent migrant, free of the constraints and daily responsibilities imposed by a wife and children. Without admitting these motives as his own, Luis Bonilla, a husband and father who remained apart from his wife and six children for two years, explained why he believes men wish to defer their families' migration to the United States:

For many husbands it's just not convenient for their wives to come here. Sometime they don't want their families to come here because they feel more liberated alone here. When a man is by himself, he can go anywhere he pleases, do anything he chooses. He can spend money as he wants. Instead of sending them \$400, he can send them \$300 and spend the other \$100 on what he wants. He's much freer when the family is in Mexico.

Women resented both the extra burdens imposed on them by men's absence from family obligations and the small amount of remittances. As one woman remarked, "The entire burden falls on one, and that isn't fair." For women such as Isabel Barrios, whose husband's first departure in 1950 initiated a 14-year separation before she and their seven children joined him, this anger became an impetus for migration:

He would leave and come back, and sometimes he would leave for three years, four years. Every time that he returned home to visit I became pregnant, and I had children, and more children, as they say, "fatherless children." The check that they [migrant husbands] send, that's very different than being a father. Because as the priest at San Cristobal Church says, they are fathers only by check. They are fathers who in reality have not helped raise the children until they [children] arrive here, something for which I fought hard. Because in reality, I didn't want them to be raised only by myself. I had to work to earn money, and I had to raise the children alone. It was exhausting.

Women's desire to migrate rarely coincided with their migrant husbands' wishes. The majority of sojourning husbands remained opposed to their wives' desire to migrate; during their brief visits home or in letters sent from the United States, the men discouraged their wives from migrating. The men told their wives that landlords in the United States would not rent to large families, that the jobs in the United States were too hard, and that adolescent children would be corrupted by drugs, gangs, and other bad influences. Migrant husbands who had not obtained legal status told their wives that crossing the border surreptitiously was too dangerous for women.

Most of the men remained steadfastly opposed to their wives' and families' migrating. Conjugal struggles, some lasting several years, ensued. How, then, did the women successfully challenge their husbands' authority to achieve family reunification and migration? The men who began their

migrant careers prior to 1965 faced a set of circumstances very different from those faced by men who began migrating after 1965. Consequently, the wives of husbands who went north prior to 1965 faced patriarchal constraints different from those faced by the wives of a later cohort of migrant husbands, and the following section contrasts the experiences of these groups.

### PERSUADING PATRIARCHY

Because of changing U.S. immigration legislation, many of the pre-1965 cohort of migrant men had obtained legal status by the 1970s. In order to do likewise, the women needed their husbands' cooperation and formal assistance. To legally migrate, then, the women needed first to persuade their husbands into helping them. Women accomplished this by using family—in-laws, kin, and especially teenage sons and daughters—to help convince the men. Raymundo Carbajal, for example, for years had resisted the migration of his wife and six children, but he finally conceded when their eldest daughter joined forces with her mother. The daughter pointed out that she and her older siblings were approaching 21, and after that age, they would not be eligible to obtain legal status through their father. In the Avila family, in which the children were still young, in-laws helped Dolores convince her husband Marcelino to reunite the family by telling him that the children needed to grow up with their father present. In families with sons, this was perceived as imperative; Arturo Barrios, the father of seven boys, conceded to his family's migration, and years later acknowledged that "boys need their fathers." Family members and kin pressured husbands into assisting with family migration; the wives and teenage children often agreed in advance that their employment earnings would contribute to family income in the United States.

The long separations fostered by the men's solo sojourns diminished the hegemony of the husbands' authority and increased women's autonomy and influence in the family. This enabled the women to develop their own migrant agendas. The women who endured these long spousal separations seemed to develop the greatest sense of autonomy and social power; they used this in advancing their goal of migration. Sidra Galvan, now 73, recalled how she had stubbornly persisted in convincing her husband over the years:

A lot of time had passed, and he always gave excuses. But after he came back that time [after deportation], I saw no good reason why I should not go too. He always said it was too dangerous for women to cross, but his boss was going to fix his papers, so now he had not one pretext.

These women pursued their personal goal of migration by persuading and urging their husbands to help them go north.

The wives of men who began their migrant careers before 1965 relied on a more limited range of resources than did the wives of the later post-1965 cohort. Specifically, the absence of a significant representation of Mexican immigrant women in the United States denied them access to assistance from other immigrant women, leaving them more or less dependent on male kin, especially spouses. It is also important to note that because the men could easily obtain legal status, their wives expected to obtain U.S. legal status through their husbands. These women were placed in a position of persuading or negotiating with their husbands in order to achieve migration. Until the mid-1970s, women gained leverage in these spousal negotiations with their husbands through the support of family members in Mexico and reliance on resources such as their jobs, their expected U.S. earnings, and in one case, even literacy skills.

### **SUBVERTING PATRIARCHY THROUGH WOMEN'S NETWORKS**

For a more recent cohort of undocumented immigrant men, those who began their migrant sojourns after 1965, obtaining legal status easily was no longer a viable option. Consequently, their wives were not dependent on obtaining legal status through their husbands. This effectively removed the women's need to gain their husbands' approval for migration.

By the 1970s and 1980s, women who wanted to migrate to the United States after their husbands and against their husbands' wishes were more likely to rely on the direct assistance of other migrant women to subvert or challenge their husbands' opposition to migration. Women's migrant networks work much the same as the men's migrant networks, with one exception: They provide prospective migrant women assistance in persuading their husbands to allow them to go north or in achieving migration without the husbands' knowledge. Immigrant women already in the United States assisted their sisters, mothers, and friends in this manner, helping them to write letters to their husbands or helping them to formulate convincing arguments about their earning potential in the United States. Teresa Ibarra, for example, recalled that she initially migrated with the help of a friend who had U.S. migration experience:

Well, I came with this friend, because for years I had suffered from that illness in the eyes [migraine headaches]. So my friend had gone back there [Mexico].

She would say to me, "They'll cure you in the United States, they'll cure you over there," and in that way, she encouraged me to go. And she told me to write to him so I could go. She stayed in Mexico for three months, and during those three months I kept writing him, to see if I could go, until he finally gave in.

When husbands resisted, women's networks made material forms of assistance available to circumvent men's power. Women lent each other money to cover travel costs and "coyote" or smuggler fees, sometimes unbeknownst to the men. In some cases, separate income funds covered spouses' migration costs; sometimes husbands, much to their chagrin, did not learn of their wives' and children's migration until after the fact.<sup>8</sup>

A case in point is the Bonilla family. In 1974 Tola Bonilla, an illiterate woman, managed with the help of a friend, to write letters to her husband in California, asking that he either return home or bring her and the children to the United States. Luis Bonilla ignored his wife's pleas, so Tola secretly borrowed money from her mother and sister, both of whom worked in California, and after Luis had unexpectedly arrived home for a brief visit due to an expulsion by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), she used these funds to go north. She accompanied him when he departed, yet separate income funds covered their migration costs. Tola was pregnant at the time, and at her insistence, they took the eldest son and youngest daughter. Once in the United States, she saved part of her earnings and borrowed money from a friend to bring the remaining four children. She did this secretly: "Luis didn't know they were coming. He became very angry when they called from Tijuana, but by then it was too late. They were practically here." Tola Bonilla's migration and accomplishment in bringing her children north against her husband's will depended on the encouragement and financial assistance that she received from her mother and sister, her teen daughter's support and willingness to stay behind and care for the younger children, and help from her new friend in California.

The experiences of these migrant women suggest that when women are not accorded legitimate or institutional power, they may resort to subversion of legitimate authority. Two conditions are necessary for women to challenge their husband's authority. One is a sense of social power and autonomy, derived from the processes induced by the lengthy spousal separations. Studies conducted in Mexico by Ahern et al. (1985) and González de la Rocha (1989) demonstrate that as women assume expanded roles and tasks while their husbands are in the United States, they develop an enhanced sense of empowerment and decision-making capacities. As Curry-Rodriguez (1988, 52) notes, this ability to act independently appears to be the "by-product" of migration. Without this transformative process, set in motion by the hus-

bands' migration, it is unlikely that women would have developed and actively pursued their own migration intentions.

The other important factor, one that appears to have become increasingly important since the 1970s, is access to women's network resources. Migration, as noted earlier, depends on social resources, and these were less available to women in the 1950s and 1960s when as one woman recalled, "it wasn't customary for women to cross [the border] without papers." By the 1970s women were "illegally" migrating and joining undocumented migrant husbands, and they no longer relied exclusively on their husbands' formal cooperation and assistance, as did the wives of the *bracero*-era men who had obtained legal status. In this sense, the husbands' illegal status helped to further erode their patriarchal authority in the family. Since more women had migrated and settled in immigrant communities in California by the 1970s, there was a greater pool of social resources available to women than during the 1950s and 1960s.

Two women in families in which the husbands departed after 1965 reported that they migrated because their husbands coerced them. In these two instances, the husbands were absent for a relatively short period of time, and the women lived with their family of origin. In these circumstances, the women were neither burdened with intensive work nor allowed to develop a requisite sense of autonomy. On the surface, the experiences of these women would seem to support the view of women as passive migrants, as participating household strategists, but this view masks the power relations involved in these decision-making processes. In these families, men continued to exercise patriarchal authority in family migration matters, and the women, however unwillingly, submitted.

### CONJUGAL RELATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES: MEN'S EXPERIENCES AND DIMINISHING PATRIARCHY

The migration process discussed above affected relations between wives and husbands once families were reunited in the United States. Two indicators of patriarchy are considered here: the household division of labor and patterns of decision making and authority. In those families in which the husbands first migrated prior to 1965, an unorthodox, more egalitarian gender division of labor emerged when the families were reunited. In order to understand why this happened, we must examine the men's experiences during the spousal separations.



Many of these long-term sojourning migrant husbands lived in what we might call "bachelor communities." These consisted of all-male residences, usually small apartments, shared by a number of migrant men. As few as 2 or 3 men, and sometimes as many as 15 or 20, shared a residence. In this context, men learned to do household chores that traditionally in U.S. or Mexican culture, men are not supposed to do. Men learned to cook, clean, iron, and shop for groceries. Most of them also held restaurant jobs, where they worked bussing tables, washing dishes, preparing food, and in one case, cooking; these work experiences also widened their repertoire of domestic kitchen skills.

Symbolically, tortillas perhaps best represent Mexican food, and their preparation is traditionally women's work. Yet in these bachelor residential quarters, many of the men in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s learned to make tortillas. As one man related: "There were no tortillas for sale then [1950s] as there are now. So I learned to make tortillas and to cook food too."

Most striking was how proud some of these men were about their newly acquired repertoire of domestic skills. Marcelino Avila, who first came north in 1957, four years before his wife and two children, recalled:

Back in Mexico, I didn't know how to prepare food, iron a shirt or wash my clothes. I only knew how to work, how to harvest. But when I found myself with certain urgencies here, I learned how to cook, iron my clothes and everything. I learned how to do everything that a woman can do to keep a man comfortable. And the custom stayed with me. . . I now know how to prepare American food and Mexican food, while back in my country I didn't know to cook at all. Necessity forced me to do things which I had previously ignored.

Once reunited with their spouses in the United States, the domestic skills that men were forced to learn in their wives' absence often continued to be exercised. Based on what I observed during my visits to their homes, what these couples told me, and in some cases, on what I heard from neighbors, these families appear to maintain a more nontraditional division of household labor than other Mexican immigrant families that I visited. Men did part of the cooking and housework, they unself-consciously assumed the role of host in offering me food and beverages, and in some cases, men continue to make tortillas on weekends and special occasions. These changes are modest if we judge them by ideal standards of feminist egalitarianism, but they are significant if we compare them to normative patriarchal practices.

On Sunday afternoon, while I interviewed Rebecca Carbajal, she and I sat at the large dining table while her husband Raymundo made soup and flour

tortillas from scratch. When the soup and tortillas were prepared, he joined us, and commenting on his activities, he said, without a touch of sarcasm, "This is exactly how we are, this is how we live, just as you see us." He even boasted that he was a more talented cook than his wife. Manuel Galvan, at age 73, rose to squeeze fresh orange juice for him and his wife before taking his morning walk to a nearby donut shop, where he met with a small group of men for coffee and gossip. The women also held higher expectations for their husbands' activities in the domestic sphere. Isabel Barrios, for example, complained that by comparison with her grown sons, her husband was deficient, as he had never changed dirty diapers, neither in the United States nor in Mexico. Dolores Avila testified that her husband had changed babies' diapers after the family migrated, and in the current Avila household, it is Marcelino who takes primary responsibility for household chores, such as washing and ironing clothes, vacuuming, and cooking.

In those families in which husbands began their migrant sojourn prior to 1965, these new arrangements arose as a result of the long spousal separations and the small, isolated settlement communities characterized by the relative scarcity of women who would typically perform domestic household chores. Meanwhile, the wives had grown more independent and assertive during the long spousal separations. They were no longer accustomed or always willing to act subserviently before their husbands.

In families in which the men began their migrant sojourns after 1965, daily housework arrangements were not radically transformed once the families were reconstituted in the United States. In these families, the men did not perform a significant amount of housework. Although most of the wives held jobs outside the home, the men still expected their wives to wait on them and to take primary responsibility for cooking and cleaning. Most of the women did so.

The Bonilla family arrangements illustrate this pattern. When Tola Bonilla returned home in the late afternoon from cleaning other people's houses, she set about cleaning her own home, laundering, and cooking. On two occasions when I was invited for dinner, Tola cooked and served the meals but did not eat, and she sat down with a glass of juice only after she had served us, claiming that eating heavy food at night made her ill. I felt awkward discussing community organizational tactics with Luis while Tola assumed a subordinate position on the sidelines. Although the Bonillas advocated, in my eyes, a progressive social agenda, their household division of labor remained conservative and patriarchal. Although both Luis and Tola adopted the rhetoric of gender equality — part of the curriculum they learned in church-sponsored weekend marriage encounters — in practice, their daily activities

did not challenge women's subordination. Similar inequities were apparent in the Ibarra, Macias, Gandara, and Duarte families—all of whom had migrated since the mid-1960s.

The continuation of a traditional gender division of labor among this group is, I believe, rooted in the conditions of migration. The post-1965 migrant men migrated a fewer number of times and for shorter periods before their families joined them. In the United States, the post-1965 migrant men countered and lived in a flourishing Mexican immigrant community that included both men and women, as well as entire families. They were more likely to live with kin or, in some instances, in amorous relationships with other women than in an all-male dwelling. Despite the absence of their wives, the post-1965 group of migrant men were not impelled to learn traditional "women's work," because they lived in residences where other women—kin, wives of the men who invited them to stay, or in some cases, "girlfriends"—performed these tasks. Traditional expectations that delegate domestic tasks to women were often reinforced by kinship obligations.

When husbands and wives were reunited, an orthodox gender division of household labor was generally reinstated. Yet traditional forms of patriarchy were not reconstituted in precisely the same form as they had existed prior to migration. Women did not relinquish the decision-making power and authority that they had established during their husbands' sojourns. Women often participated fully in major family decisions regarding the disciplining and rearing of teenage children, whether or not to take in boarders, and how to spend hard-earned savings. Blanca Macias, for example, meticulously cared for her home and family, but when her husbands' brothers arrived to stay for an indefinite period of time, taxing her already-significant cooking and cleaning responsibilities, she balked and ultimately convinced her husband to tell his brothers that they could no longer stay. In addition to working as a domestic, Teresa Ibarra cleaned, cooked, and laundered in her own household of 13 people, which included 3 boarders living in the garage, yet she successfully resisted her husband's attempts to remove their juvenile delinquent son permanently from the home.

## CONCLUSION

Patriarchal gender relations organize family stage migration, and migration reorganizes gender relations. Men's authority within families and men's access to migrant network resources favor husbands' initial departure. Yet their departure rearranges gender relations in the family; as women assume

new tasks and responsibilities, they learn to act more assertively and autonomously. This new sense of social power and later, for another cohort of migrant wives, additional access to women's network resources enable the wives to migrate.

The unitary household model cannot explain these changes, because it does not recognize power relations between women and men sharing the same household. Women praying for the border patrol to capture their husbands and families in which spouses rely on different network resources and on separate income funds to cover their migration costs call into question assumptions about "household migration strategies" and the universality of shared household resources. While some women are coerced into migration by their husbands, this process is characterized more by contention than by household harmony.

Once the families are reunited in the United States, migration and resettlement processes elicit transformations in patriarchal gender relations. During the spousal separations, women often learn to act independently, and men, in some cases, learn to cook and wash dishes. In other instances, they learn to concede to their wives' challenges to their authority. These behaviors are not readily discarded when the spouses are reunited. Not only is migration shaped by gender relations, but perhaps more important, the migration process experienced by those who pursue family stage migration forges new gender relations. In this sense, migration is both gendered and gendering.

The partial dismantling of patriarchy requires women's and men's participation, as the experiences that men undergo in migration and resettlement are just as significant in eliciting change as are the women's experiences. Yet even as elements of patriarchal behavior erode, patriarchal beliefs often persist. Baca Zinn (1980, 52) found a similar lag in patriarchal values and ideology among Chicano couples who had shed patriarchal behaviors. Once again this reminds us that the character of gender relations does not necessarily derive from cultural values and beliefs, as the acculturation model posits.

What are the implications for this new sector of U.S. society? While it is too hasty to proclaim that gender egalitarianism prevails in interpersonal relations among Mexican undocumented immigrants, there is a significant trend in that direction. This egalitarianism is indicated by the emergence of a more egalitarian household division of labor and by shared decision-making power. Women still have less power than men, but they generally enjoy more than they previously did in Mexico. The stereotypical image of machismo in Mexican immigrant families is contradicted by the daily practices of families discussed in this article. With the diminution of patriarchal gender

relations, women gain power and autonomy, and men lose some of their authority and privilege. These gains and losses are reflected in the women's near-unanimous preference for permanent settlement in the United States and in men's desire for return migration — a finding that echoes Pessar's (1986) data on Dominicans in New York City. Men's desire to return to Mexico is also rooted in their loss of public status once in the United States, where their class position, racial-ethnic category, and often legal status further erode their ability to exert patriarchal privileges. Patriarchal authority is not entirely undermined, but the legitimacy of men's unchallenged domination in the family diminishes through processes induced by family stage migration.

### NOTES

1. The differences in these migration trajectories are related to the establishment since the late 1960s of permanent immigrant settlement communities in the United States, a phenomenon shaped in part by the legacy of the *bracero* program, the maturation of immigrant social networks, passage of the 1965 Amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act (Pub. Law 414), and the diversification of labor demand for Mexican immigrants in the United States.

2. For a thorough critique of the assumptions embedded in the household model and for an empirical investigation of intrahousehold relations, see Wolf (1990).

3. Kossoudji and Ranney (1984, 1141) do acknowledge that since the 1970s, young single Mexican women have developed new immigrant networks.

4. The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), enacted in November 1986, included major provisions in the areas of employment and legalization for undocumented immigrants in the United States.

5. Other studies (Chavez, Flores, and Lopez-Garza 1989; Massey et al. 1987) also use the three-year residency criterion as an indicator of long-term Mexican immigrant settlement.

6. The case study also included families who migrated together as a unit, as well as unmarried women and men, most of whom later formed some type of family in the United States.

7. Occasionally, spousal separations were more lengthy. In one family, not included in the analysis here, spousal separation numbered 31 years. That husband was eventually joined by some of the adolescent and young adult children; although his wife had migrated and temporarily resided in the United States, she had returned to live in Mexico.

8. In Curry-Rodriguez's (1988) study, separate income funds were more common than not in sustaining family stage migration. In that study, 11 of the 14 women reported that they, without assistance from their husbands, made their own travel arrangements and raised the money to cover migration documents (p. 52).

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