

Women on the Border:
Gender, Migration, and the Making of “Reynosa, Veracruz,” Mexico

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XXVII ILASSA Student Conference
Research Paper
The University of Texas at Austin
01 February 2007

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Introduction

During my stay in the Mexican border town of Reynosa, Tamaulipas last summer, I fell into conversation with a native Reynosense about the phenomenon of Veracruzano migration to the border. “Yes, there are Veracruzanos here,” she said, “too many of them. This city is Reynosa, *Veracruz*, in reality.” I soon discovered that these remarks echoed the sentiments of other Reynosenses who described the recent influx of Veracruzanos into their community as an unwelcome “invasion.” In this paper I look at what Veracruzana immigrant women themselves have had to say about this issue, focusing on their personal experiences of relocation and adaptation to a new socio-cultural environment.

My summer 2006 research project explored questions of gender, social networks and workforce participation among Veracruzana maquiladora workers in Reynosa. In order to develop a fuller understanding of both the immigrant sending and receiving communities, I adopted a multi-local ethnographic approach, spending five weeks at the Mexico-U.S. border and one month in the coastal town of Tuxpan, Veracruz. I conducted fourteen in-depth interviews with Veracruzana factory workers in Reynosa and carried out several informal interviews with women in Veracruz. Visiting Tuxpan, as well as the nearby municipality of Poza Rica, allowed me to develop a clearer understanding of what *home* meant to the Veracruzanos who migrated to Reynosa, and what exactly it was they left behind.

Despite the significant rise in Veracruzano migration to Reynosa in recent decades, this phenomenon has been given very little attention within the Mexican and North American academic communities. As Reynosa continues to experience rapid population growth, due in large part to the city’s booming maquiladora sector, it is important that scholars develop a better understanding of the experiences of newly-arrived Veracruzano/a immigrants at the border. Furthermore, as there exists very little scholarship that focuses on the voices and life experiences of maquiladora workers in Reynosa, my research takes an important step toward filling that void.¹ Rather than

concentrating solely on women's roles as maquiladora workers, however, this paper takes a more holistic approach by providing intimate portrayals of Veracruzana immigrants' lives beyond the factory floor and assembly line. While the personal stories and opinions of this specific cohort of factory workers cannot be said to represent Veracruzana immigrant women as a whole, they do provide valuable insight into more general phenomena, such as the ways in which internal Mexican migrants cope with the challenges that they face in new geographic and socio-cultural settings.²

Using Veracruzana women's oral histories as primary source material, this paper seeks to address the following questions: What is the role of social networks in facilitating migration and adaptation to life at the Mexico-U.S. border? How do Veracruzana women participating in the industrial workforce shoulder the double burden of factory work and domestic responsibilities? And finally, in what ways are gendered divisions of labor both reinforced and renegotiated in Reynosa? Throughout this paper I argue for the importance of family and community social networks in providing a crucial buffer against the economic hardship and discrimination faced by Veracruzanas/os in Reynosa. In addition, I suggest that the Mexico-U.S. border represents a space where traditional gender role expectations are constantly being questioned, challenged and redefined. Whereas in Veracruz women and men generally tend to occupy distinct spheres of daily life – as unpaid domestic homemakers and wage laborers, respectively – my findings indicate that once in Reynosa, immigrants of both sexes often find themselves engaged in work activities within both the private and public domains.

Despite significant gains obtained by some women in the household and the workplace, however, I recognize that gender-based discrimination and violence are grave problems that continue to plague the border region (Wright 2006). Nevertheless, as labor activist/journalist David Bacon correctly points out, “murders and the devaluation of workers' lives by the [Mexican] government and the [maquiladora] plant operators haven't weakened efforts to achieve better conditions, either in the factories or in the communities” along the Mexico-U.S. border (Bacon 2004, 314). To further illustrate this point, I briefly describe how labor organizers and cross-border activists affiliated with the women-led grassroots organization, the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (Border Committee of Women Workers or CFO), are struggling to promote and defend workers'

and women's rights in Mexico's maquiladora industry, where federal labor laws are minimally enforced, if not ignored completely.

Based upon my interview data, research findings and analysis of secondary source materials drawn from the fields of anthropology, history and feminist geography, this paper sheds light on Veracruzana women's understandings of gender, migration and their dynamic roles as mothers, full-time wage earners and heads of household. Furthermore, it explores the ways in which women's traditional responsibilities have undergone significant transformations as a result of migration and their incorporation into Reynosa's maquiladora workforce. In sum, this case study offers a unique window onto the lives of Veracruzana immigrant women by illustrating how in spite of – and in response to – overt hostility directed towards them by native Reynosenses, they have forged a shared sense of regional identity and urban belonging in the burgeoning border town that has become popularly known as “Reynosa, Veracruz.”

Context of the Research

In the following section I describe the context in which my research project emerged. First, I trace the steps that I took in developing the investigation and provide a brief summary of my research design and methodology. Next, I offer an overview of the socio-demographic profile of Reynosa, Tamaulipas, and a contemporary sketch of the city's maquiladora industry. Finally, I close this section with a cursory look at recent Veracruzano migratory trends and the socio-demographic impacts that this immigration stream has had on the city of Reynosa.

Preliminary Visits to the Borderlands

Since October 2005 I have been actively involved in Austin Tan Cerca de la Frontera (Austin So Close to the Border or ATCF), a local nonprofit organization affiliated with the American Friends Service Committee that organizes quarterly solidarity delegations to Mexican border towns. Over the course of three days, groups of five to twelve delegates from the United States learn firsthand about the realities of corporate-led globalization along the border and have the opportunity to speak with

maquiladora workers and labor organizers in their homes and communities (AFSC 2005). I have served as a Spanish-English translator on numerous ATCF delegations.

Members of Austin Tan Cerca's sister organization, the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (Border Committee of Women Workers or CFO) receive the delegates upon their arrival to the border and lead tours through popular *colonias* (neighborhoods) and on the outskirts of the cities' industrial parks. The CFO is a women-led grassroots organization that operates in five cities along the Mexico-U.S. border, namely, Ciudad Juárez, Ciudad Acuña, Piedras Negras, Nuevo Laredo and Reynosa. The organization's headquarters is located in Piedras Negras, Coahuila and is under the direction of coordinator Julia Quiñonez, herself a former maquiladora employee. Since 1986, CFO staff and organizers have been working to empower and educate maquiladora workers about their rights under Mexican labor law, promote independent unionization, and develop strategies to solve problems or disputes within the factories. The organization's overriding goal is "to improve working conditions and the quality of life for workers in the maquiladoras, especially for women and their families" (CFO 2005).

My particular interest in Reynosa's Veracruzano community developed over the course of several visits to Mexican border towns during the 2005-2006 academic year. On my first delegation, our group traveled to the cities of Piedras Negras and Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, where we met a number of women hailing from the state of Veracruz who had migrated north in search of employment in the maquiladora industry. When I inquired into the nature of this migratory trend, I was intrigued to learn that the majority of Veracruzano immigrants resided farther southeast in the border town of Reynosa. I was told that the presence of the maquiladoras and Reynosa's geographic location – virtually a straight shot north from Veracruz – make it a particularly attractive destination for this immigrant community.

Research Project Design

After establishing relationships with labor organizers and activists on both sides of the border, I was invited to attend the annual CFO-ATCF *Encuentro*, or encounter, in November 2005. It was here that I first spoke with Julia Quiñonez about the possibility of volunteering in the CFO's Reynosa office during the summer of 2006. After discussing

the proposal with her fellow staff members, Julia accepted my offer and together we began outlining a plan. I visited Reynosa in March 2006 in order to establish contact with my host, define my volunteer responsibilities and familiarize myself with the city.

In order to better facilitate my adaptation to everyday life in Reynosa, the CFO generously made arrangements for me to stay with one of their own *promotoras* (labor organizers) and her teenage daughter in a colonia forty-five minutes by bus outside of Reynosa's city center. I had met both mother and daughter the year before at the Encuentro in Piedras Negras. Herself a Veracruzana and a former maquiladora worker, my host, Angélica Morales,³ shared her living quarters, kitchen and personal stories with me over the course of five sweltering summer weeks at the border. This homestay experience gave me an intimate look at my host's home life, work responsibilities and the significant effects that migration had on her family.

Methodology

In terms of my research methodology, I adopted two interrelated approaches: in-depth, semi-structured oral history interviews and participant observation. Soon after my arrival, Angélica introduced me to a number of her female friends and acquaintances who also hailed from the state of Veracruz and were currently or previously employed in Reynosa's maquiladora industry. I carried out a total of fourteen interviews with seven women, ages 32 to 50, as well as one interview with the 55 year-old husband of one of my informants. Our conversations centered around the following themes: women's biographical backgrounds and personal migration histories; social networks and female migration; how women living at the border manage to simultaneously balance work outside of the home with domestic responsibilities; women's opinions on maquiladora factory work; their overall experiences living in Reynosa; and the phenomenon of return migration.

One of my goals in conducting qualitative ethnographic research was to respond to and challenge the depersonalizing effects of corporate globalization. In our contemporary age of mass-production, U.S. consumers are often unaware of how many human hands participated in the creation of their foreign-made goods, be they automobiles, athletic apparel, or kitchen appliances. Following in the footsteps of

pioneering anthropologists such as Norma Iglesias Prieto and María Patricia Fernández-Kelly, who authored two of the first ethnographies on women maquiladora workers in Mexico,⁴ my project aims to foreground voices and perspectives that all too often go unheard by First World consumers.

Apart from formal investigation methods, I spent a good deal of time socializing with the women who participated in my study. Through informal visits, outings and casual conversations, I was able to develop rapport and a sense of *confianza*, or trust, with these women. I was frequently invited into their homes to chat, share meals, celebrate birthdays and look at family photos. I was also invited on several weekend shopping excursions *en el otro lado*, on the “other side,” in McAllen, Texas, with women who had obtained their U.S. tourist visas. In the section that follows I provide a discussion of some of the important historical, geographic and socio-demographic characteristics of my research site.

La Frontera: Laboratory of the Future

A site characterized by free trade privileges and tax exemptions – not to mention extreme poverty and environmental degradation – the Mexico-U.S. border has transformed into a paradise for transnational corporations. Indeed, Mexico’s northern frontier represents one of the world’s first laboratories for free trade (CFO 2005). Low labor costs, lax environmental regulations and poor enforcement of labor laws have lured corporate giants to open export-processing factories all along the nearly 2,000 mile-long border. As of September 2006, 2,084 such establishments were in operation in Mexico’s six northern border states (INEGI 2006).

The term *maquiladora* refers to industrial plants where the final stages of manufacturing, assembling, or packaging of previously designed foreign materials take place. These factories, which are predominantly foreign-owned, usually by U.S. companies, import equipment and materials on a duty-free and tariff-free basis. The finished products, which range from garments to automotive parts and electronics, are returned to the original market without paying export fees (Maquiladora Solidarity Network 2005). Anthropologist Liliana Goldín explains that countries such as Mexico, El Salvador and Guatemala “offer investors tariff free zones with an abundant labor

force willing to work for extremely low wages and often in conditions that would be unacceptable or illegal for the workers of developed countries” (Goldín 2001, 32). For many peasants and working-class Mexicans in the country’s rural interior, however, the “low wages” offered in places like Reynosa, Tamaulipas are appreciably higher than those found in their home communities.

Tamaulipas

The northeastern state of Tamaulipas is located on the Gulf Coast and borders Texas to the north, Veracruz and San Luis Potosí to the south, and Nuevo León to the west. Three prominent sister city pairs are located along the state’s northern border; these include, from west to east, Nuevo Laredo/Laredo, Reynosa/McAllen, and Matamoros/Brownsville. Due in large part to the presence of a thriving maquiladora industry, Tamaulipas boasts the nation’s fifth-largest out-of-state immigrant population after Baja California, the Federal District, the state of Mexico and Nuevo León (INEGI 2006).

Reynosa: The China of the Borderlands

Official demographic statistics from 2005 show that in Tamaulipas, the municipality of Reynosa had the largest population with 526,888 residents, followed by Matamoros (462,157) and Nuevo Laredo (355,827) (INEGI 2005). While Reynosa has a diverse economic base, including oil, natural gas resources, agriculture and tourism, its strongest industrial sector is without question the maquiladora industry (Reynosa Municipal Development Plan 2005).

As of August 2006, Reynosa had 135 active maquiladora factories – a significant 40 percent of all factories in the state of Tamaulipas – employing 98,702 workers. It merits noting that Reynosa has the third-highest number of active maquiladoras in all of Mexico after Tijuana, Baja California (575) and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua (282) (INEGI 2006). Noting the steady rise in the number of employees in Reynosa’s factories during the first quarter of 2005, the CFO dubbed Reynosa “*una especie de China en la frontera*,” a sort of China of the borderlands, attracting new hires at record speed (CFO 2005). The rising number of maquiladoras and industrial parks in recent years has made

the area an increasingly popular destination for migrants from Mexico's rural interior, especially those hailing from the state of Veracruz.

Migration from Veracruz

...the Veracruzano expansion is a phenomenon that extends to other border states and is growing increasingly intense. This migratory phenomenon has brought as a consequence the demand for new and improved urban spaces, infrastructure, equipment, dwellings, etc. for these new inhabitants, but at the same time, it has meant an enrichment and fusion of customs that combine with local traditions and enrich the cultural melting pot that characterizes border cities.⁵

– Francisco Javier García Cabeza de Vaca, Municipal President of Reynosa
Reynosa Municipal Development Plan 2005-2007

The above quote is illustrative of the significant impact that Veracruzano migration has had on the municipality of Reynosa over the past three decades. In the words of sociologist-historian Cirila Quintero of El Colegio de la Frontera Norte in Matamoros, Reynosa's demographic profile "*ha veracruzizado*," has become "Veracruzitized," in recent years.⁶

According to Mexico's National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics (INEGI), Veracruzanos comprise the largest immigrant population in the municipality of Reynosa, numbering 62,195 residents, followed by natives of Nuevo León (22,181) and San Luis Potosí (17,873). Table 1 lists the immigrant populations of the six most prominent sending states to Reynosa over the past four decades and provides an illustration of how rapidly immigration from Veracruz eclipsed immigration from Nuevo León in the ten years between 1990 and 2000. In the coming semester I plan to investigate in further detail the reasons behind this dramatic shift in Veracruzano migratory trends.

Over the course of my stay at the border, many of the women I interviewed would playfully refer to the city as "Reynosa, *Veracruz*, Mexico," some (over)estimating that Veracruzanos comprised a whopping 80 percent of the total population. According to my informants, Reynosa's Veracruzano community is so large that the city transforms into a virtual ghost town at Christmastime, when out-of-state residents travel back home to visit their families. After the holiday season, Veracruzanos returning to Reynosa frequently bring along family members or friends who want to try their hand at earning a more lucrative income at the border. It became clear to me that social networks developed

between friends, relatives and community members play a vital role in creating self-perpetuating migratory circuits between the host and home communities.

“When One Leaves, Twenty Return”: A Look at Veracruzano Social Networks

A number of contemporary scholars have laid the theoretical groundwork for understanding the importance of social networks and the family unit within Mexican immigrant communities (Ruiz 1987, Sánchez 1993, Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, Massey 1999). In his seminal work on Mexican migration and identity formation in Los Angeles, historian George Sánchez argues that the *barrio*, or local neighborhood, provided a cherished and coveted refuge for Mexican immigrants in twentieth-century California. Long subject to residential segregation, it was in this social space that newcomers “could adapt to American society while still retaining in their lives much of the flavor of Mexico” (Sánchez 1993, 150). Moreover, in the face of intense racial discrimination and economic hardship, Mexican-origin inhabitants of Los Angeles found solace and support in their immediate or extended family networks.

During my interview with Esthér Núñez, a 32 year-old married mother of two, she offered a subtle, yet provocative glimpse of the dynamics of discrimination that exist within Mexico’s own borders. Hailing from a small *rancho* in Vicente Guerrero, Papantla, Veracruz, Esthér spoke about the experience of returning to her community of origin during the winter holiday, when the maquiladoras close their gates and Veracruzanos head south to be with their families.

Back home, they say: “How have things gone for you?” Actually, they don’t even ask you anymore; you’re wearing decent clothes, you bring back things that you’ve bought, you bring money. Everyone sees the changes that you’ve made for yourself since you left, and you return home better-off. Then they, too, become inspired and set out [for Reynosa]. Amongst ourselves, we all help each other out. This is how we Veracruzanos are; that’s why they [Reynosenses] don’t love us. One person goes home and then five more come back. It’s really our doing, since we are the ones encouraging them to come here.⁷

Esthér’s remarks illustrate how, in her experience, the Veracruzano community has served as a shield against the palpable hostility directed towards her by native Reynosenses.

Carolina Jiménez, 50, a native of Poza Rica, Veracruz, also underscored the role of social networks in facilitating migration to the border. Her sentences were punctuated by gentle laughter as she spoke:

As they say nowadays: “When one leaves, twenty return.” When one person goes home, they bring back their cousin, their relative, their sibling, and then this one brings others, and so on and so forth. Then they say over the radio broadcasts: “When one leaves, twenty return.”⁸

The difference between Esthér’s statement (“One person goes home and then five more come back,”) and the discourse permeating the airwaves (“When one leaves, twenty return,”) is quite revealing of the different ways in which people perceive and describe Veracruzano migration to Reynosa. Despite these differing interpretations, it is clear that Veracruzanos are actively recruiting their friends, relatives and community members to try their hand at earning a living *en la frontera*.

Forging Friendships on the Factory Floor

In her work on Mexican cannery workers in southern California, Vicki Ruiz describes how social networks extended well beyond the *barrio* and into the realm of waged factory work. Mexican women operatives in California’s food processing industry, she explains, “not only assisted their relatives and friends in obtaining employment but also initiated neophytes into the rigors of cannery routines” (Ruiz 1987, 33). Similarly, all of the women in my study learned of Reynosa’s maquiladora industry by word-of-mouth; relatives, friends or acquaintances had shared personal stories, hearsay and gossip of steady employment and higher wages *en el norte*, thus inspiring these women to embark on their own journeys to Mexico’s northern frontier.

A 34 year-old single mother of two pre-teen boys, both of whom live with relatives back home in Veracruz, Gabriela Prieto spoke highly of her experience working in Reynosa’s assembly plants. Since migrating from the community of Gutiérrez Zamora ten years ago, she has held the same job in the very same factory, where she works assembling switches and control panels for automobiles. “It’s a pleasant environment,” she explained,

because we're all women; there are very few men that work there. And the majority of the women come from the state of Veracruz. They're not from precisely the same place as me, but from various different parts. So, there is always some topic to chat about. Over ten years, you get to know each other's problems and worries.⁹

Gabriela's statement is illustrative of the ways in which Veracruzana immigrants have forged a sense of community and camaraderie not only within their neighborhoods, but also on the shop floor. Furthermore, Gabriela's words shed light on the gendered divisions of labor that continue to persist inside the maquiladoras.

Gendered Divisions of Labor: Reinforced and Renegotiated at the Border

The Reynosa City Council website offers a telling description of the municipality's two most lucrative industrial sectors: "One can observe the difference between the oil and maquiladora industries. While the first generates service goods and employment to the population with high salaries and benefits for its employees, the second only employs in its majority female manual labor."¹⁰ A brief historical examination of the political-economic relationships between the United States and Mexico is crucial in understanding the context in which the maquiladora industry emerged in the mid-20th century, and how it came to be depicted as a stereotypically feminine industrial sector.

Labor at the Border: Past and Present

A precursor to the contemporary border export-manufacturing industry was the Mexican Farm Labor Program, popularly known as the Bracero Program.¹¹ As an emergency measure intended to remedy the labor shortages created by World War II, the United States signed the Bracero Treaty in 1942, which allowed for the temporary legal migration of Mexican agricultural laborers to the American Southwest. Over a twenty-two year period, the Bracero Program brought nearly half a million Mexican workers to the United States to assist in railroad construction and to cultivate and harvest staple crops (Gutiérrez 1999).

The Johnson administration's unilateral decision to terminate the Bracero Program in 1964 left nearly two hundred thousand *braceros* idle and unemployed while migration to the border continued unabated (Fernandez-Kelly 1983). The following year,

under President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, the Mexican government launched the Border Industrialization Program, designed to encourage industrialization in the northern regions of Mexico and to increase occupational opportunities for the vast population of unemployed seasonal migrant laborers in the area. The BIP was a novel national strategy which offered incentives to foreign-owned corporations willing to locate manufacturing plants across the Mexico-U.S. divide. Historian David Gutiérrez notes that the “expansion of industrial production in the Mexican border states...combined with the ever-present lure of possible work in the United States, has drawn millions of people into an expanding *zona fronteriza* (frontier zone) straddling the international border” (Gutiérrez 1999, 505). While the Mexican *bracero* workforce was comprised almost exclusively of male contract workers, the advent of the maquiladora industry spurred a dramatic shift in the gender demographics along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Feminization of the Workforce

After the termination of the Bracero Program, rather than hiring the thousands of unemployed men returning from the United States, the maquiladoras recruited a new labor force: Mexican women, the majority of whom were young, single, and childless, with only basic levels of education (Iglesias Prieto 1997, Fernández-Kelly 1983). Some plant managers have claimed that women are naturally suited to performing tedious tasks and repetitive assembly line work – especially in the textile and electronics industries – due to their “nimble fingers” and inherent “docility” (Elson and Pearson 1981). Others contend that, owing to their lack of prior work experience, women are more vulnerable and exploitable than their male counterparts, and are therefore selectively recruited by corporate employers. Feminist geographers Mona Domosh and Joni Seager argue that women have come to represent a “disposable” labor force, since, according to patriarchal ideology, “a job is not supposed to be a permanent feature of women’s lives...Cheap, flexible, and replaceable, women have become the ideal labor pool in the new global economy” (Domosh and Seager 2001, 50).

The Maquiladora Industry Today: Gender Disparities

At first glance, contemporary statistics seem to suggest that such gendered workplace disparities are a thing of the past. For example, INEGI data show that as of September 2006, men comprised a little over half (51.8 percent) of Mexico's total maquiladora workforce along the border. However, a closer examination reveals that gender inequality is indeed still pervasive in the industry.

In the maquiladoras along Mexico's northern frontier, women continue to outnumber men as factory operatives, 390,732 (53.5 percent) to 340,140 (46.5 percent). Even more striking are the data illustrating the disproportionate number of men occupying technical and administrative positions within the maquiladoras (see Tables 2.1 and 2.2). Moreover, despite their majority status as manual laborers, women workers are paid on average 474 pesos (roughly \$44 USD) less per month than their male counterparts for engaging in the same work (INEGI 2006). Tables 3.1 and 3.2 provide a look at factory operatives' monthly salaries by gender, side by side with the substantially higher monthly salaries of technical and administrative personnel. One notes that Tamaulipas statistics are remarkably in keeping with general border averages.

As Domosh and Seager rightly argue, it is clear that a "gendered division of labor is deeply embedded in the global economy. Indeed, it's hard to explain how the global economy functions without paying attention to the gendered division of labor that sustains the new world order" (Domosh and Seager 2001, 49). In the next section I illustrate how, for some Veracruzano immigrants living at the Mexico-U.S. border, the traditional, clear-cut division of labor between men and women has begun to break down, particularly in the domain of the household.

Women at Work: Shifting Gender Relations in Reynosa, Tamaulipas

Many of us women are humiliated by our husbands, for the very reason that the man is the one who works. Men hit their wives, they abuse them. Women feel insecure, they put up with everything. They don't know how they're going to bear their lives because they have to deal with their husbands. Sometimes women have to tolerate abuse because they aren't educated, or they're afraid to face life on their own. They have to put up with a lot of things because they don't have a job. They don't have the means to defend themselves.¹²

– Carolina Jiménez, 50 years-old, native of Poza Rica, VZ

Numerous scholars have explored the various ways in which migration and female workforce participation have contributed to the transformation of traditional gender roles and relationships between men and women (Hirsch 1999, Pessar 1995, Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, Pedraza 1991). During my stay in Reynosa, I had an opportunity to witness some of these changing gender dynamics within a number of Veracruzano households. As my research project unfolded, it became clear that *la frontera* represented a space in which certain gendered divisions of labor could be renegotiated, if not dissolved completely.

“Machistas” and “Conformistas”: Gender Relations in Veracruz

When asked to compare everyday life in Veracruz to life in Reynosa, one of the most frequent topics that women brought up was that of gender roles. As we sat together at her kitchen table one hot summer evening, Esth er N n ez, then nine-months pregnant with her second child, reflected on women’s lives and traditional responsibilities in her *rancho* in Papantla. “Back home,” she told me,

the wife has to devote herself to feeding her husband; the husband’s job is just to bring home money. The man is never going to help out with the woman’s chores. The mother is the one who suffers; she washes clothes, irons, cooks, and does everything necessary to take care of the baby.¹³

These sentiments were echoed by a number of other Veracruzana women in Reynosa. Nancy Hern andez, a 38 year-old single mother, lamented the fact that her father never made an effort to teach her about agriculture back home in Tres Valles, Veracruz, as he did not consider it to be “women’s work.” Nancy suggested that perhaps she never would have left the ranch if her father had shared his knowledge of farming with her. “My *pap * always said, ‘The woman in the house, the man in the field.’ He always divided it up that way,” she recalled. “He never said, ‘Okay, we all live together here, so we’re going to work the land as a team.’ No. He always says that a woman is a woman, and a man is a man. My *pap * is really *machista*.”¹⁴

Beatriz Santos, 36, adds yet another unique perspective to the issue of gendered divisions of labor in Mexico. Born into a poor family, she left her birthplace of Mequetla, Veracruz at age sixteen to seek work in Reynosa’s maquiladora industry. “I always

wanted to own a house,” she confessed, as we sat in her immaculate, sparsely decorated living room, “because back home I used to wander from one place to another, sometimes even sleeping beneath a tree. If we had a house, it was made of sticks, or sometimes not even sticks – just a little hut made from palm leaves.”¹⁵ She went on to describe how heavy rains and tropical hurricanes would destroy her family’s makeshift homes, forcing them to construct shelter all over again from scratch. Twenty years after arriving in Reynosa, in the company of a curious North American graduate student, Beatriz reflected upon the ways in which women’s lives changed upon migrating to the border.

Immigrating to Reynosa has its advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is that here people can earn money; here a *señora* can start to work. She’s no longer dependent like a woman who lives in the ranch. Back home women are dependent on men to provide for them. The question is *how* the man will manage to provide – he may work as a day laborer from sun up to sun down, but he has to bring home beans, a bit of chile or tortillas to give to the children. And the women, that’s how they are, conformists; at least the few who are left, because now what the majority of the women are doing is emigrating. Now the ranch is emptying out because people are leaving for *el otro lado* or they’re coming here [to Reynosa].¹⁶

Striking a Balance: Renegotiating Gender Roles in Reynosa

Whereas in Veracruz women and men generally occupy distinct, gender-specific domains of work – in the household and in the waged workforce, respectively – my findings reveal that such stark divisions of labor tend to break down when couples relocate to Reynosa. Carolina Jiménez, whose quote opens this section of the paper, experienced a sort of gender role reversal after migrating to Reynosa from Poza Rica, Veracruz. After her husband Guillermo underwent spinal surgery several years ago, the operation caused permanent damage to one of his legs, abruptly ending his working career at the age of forty-five. As a consequence, Carolina explained,

I work and my husband is the one who stays at home. As he says, “Now I’m the wife here. Now I understand what it’s like to run a household.” He also understands that sometimes men don’t see all the work that women do. They arrive home and shout, “What’s all this?” and abuse the wife. A man doesn’t see all the work that his wife did. And now my husband understands because he’s living it. Now he is the one in charge of preparing meals. He even washes dishes; he does it all. He isn’t ashamed to do anything. He likes to cook, he likes to mop; so, this is how we divide up the chores. I work and he’s here in the house. He takes care of everything. This is how we help each other out.¹⁷

Esther Núñez also expressed satisfaction with her husband Ramiro's contribution to domestic chores. Esther, a former maquiladora worker, currently works as a nurse while her husband, also from Papantla, earns a living as a self-employed plumber. According to Esther, getting used to being a mother in Reynosa was not particularly difficult,

because my husband helps me a lot. My husband shares all the chores. If I prepare a meal, he washes the dishes. If I wash the clothes, he mops, he sweeps. One thing for another. And if he's tired, well, I'll take care of it, but even so, he never leaves me with all the work. I've been lucky in the sense that he has always helped me out, but from what I've seen in other couples, the men never help. The truth is that they're few and far between, the ones that will help you.¹⁸

A native of the coastal city of Tuxpan, Veracruz, Maribel Cruz, 35, also divides up household and childcare responsibilities with her Honduran-born husband, Alejandro, whom she met two years ago in Reynosa. "Back home, a woman has no options," Maribel explained during our interview in her small bedroom. Baby clothing and colorful toys cluttered the bed where we sat. "The only choice she has is to take care of her children. There you don't have the freedom to say, 'I want to work,' because you don't have access to the same opportunities that you have here [in Reynosa]." Asked how she managed to balance a full-time factory job with her domestic responsibilities, Maribel responded:

I organize myself. I take my younger son [8 months] to the daycare center. There they take care of him for me from the time that I begin my workday until I leave. My daughter [12 years-old] is already grown. My husband takes her to school and from there she comes home on the bus. Besides this, I work things out with my husband. I do some things and he does others so that I can make my life a little less tiring, because, well, I have to work. But I do have his support.¹⁹

While women living on the border have made significant inroads in areas that were once restricted to men, such as the waged labor force and community organizations, they are still subject to gender inequality and sexual harassment in the workplace, spousal violence, kidnapping and femicide.²⁰ As my investigation progressed, I came to realize that Veracruzana women carried a double burden of being both female and "foreign" in the eyes of native Reynosenses. Contrary to official discourse that celebrates cultural

diversity in Reynosa, my findings indicate that problems of discrimination and xenophobia are indeed rampant in this border city.

¿Invasores o Invitados? Reynosenses' Responses to Veracruzano Migration

My eyes were opened to the issue of discrimination on two separate occasions early on in my fieldwork. One instance, ironically, involved a visit to the Reynosa-based *Centro de estudios fronterizos y de promoción de los derechos humanos* (Center for Border Studies and Promotion of Human Rights or CEFPRODHAC), where I had planned to browse the organization's library for texts on Veracruzano migration to the border. Disappointingly, my research visit ended after a mere fifteen minutes, as staff members guided me to a single tome, a local history of Reynosa published in 1986.²¹ When I inquired about the lack of academic research being done on internal migration in Mexico, a CEFPRODHAC investigator explained to me that researchers have not studied this phenomenon in detail chiefly because Mexicans have the liberty to travel anywhere they want to within the Republic. Attempting to justify the dearth of scholarship on this topic, she went on to explain that in Reynosa, Veracruzano immigrants are not looked down upon or mistreated as are undocumented immigrants that cross the border into the United States.²² My research findings, however, indicate otherwise. As the following anecdote illustrates, the border town is hardly the all-embracing "cultural melting pot" that Reynosa's municipal government describes it as being.

Reynosa, Veracruz, U.S.A.

One of the most edifying exchanges that I witnessed during my stay in Reynosa took place within thirty minutes of my arrival in La Joya, the colonia that would become my home for the next five weeks. The day of my arrival, my host, Angélica Morales, had accepted an invitation from her friend and fellow CFO volunteer, Sara Puentes, to have an early-evening dinner together at her house. It was here that I was first made aware of the controversy surrounding Veracruzano migration to Reynosa.

Over a savory meal of homemade *mole* and *frijoles charros*, I casually asked Sara whether she preferred corn or flour tortillas, black beans or pintos. Obviously, I did not realize that I was directing this question to a native Reynosense. Sara stated proudly and

emphatically that flour tortillas and pinto beans – two essential staples of northern Mexican cuisine – were by far the best option. Angélica and I exchanged furtive smiles, as I knew from a previous conversation that my host's preferences were just the opposite, having been raised on *frijoles negros* and *tortillas de maíz* back home in Veracruz. Regional differences such as these, I soon realized, often exacerbate the intercultural tensions that can be ever-present along Mexico's northern frontier.

At one point during our meal, Sara's 17 year-old son, Alex, made a sarcastic quip that his mother did not appreciate, especially in the presence of guests. "You would think he's a Veracruzano," she remarked, visibly embarrassed by her son's adolescent behavior, "but he's not." I was not sure what to make of this comment, so I asked Sara what she had meant. In Reynosa, she explained, to call someone a Veracruzano is considered a pejorative remark or an insult.²³ Angélica visibly winced and set down her silverware.

Thus began a very dynamic – and for me, revealing – discussion between the two friends. Angélica was quick to defend her fellow Veracruzanos; she explained to me that these particular immigrants were highly sought after to fill labor-intensive jobs in Reynosa because of their reputation as hard workers. Sara, on the offensive, quickly countered that Veracruzanos weren't particularly hard workers; they were simply the only people willing to accept a meager wage of 400 to 500 pesos (roughly \$37 to \$46 USD) per week to perform laborious, menial work that natives of Reynosa refused to do. Angélica concurred momentarily: for many people who migrate north from poor *ranchos* in Veracruz, she explained, the "low wages" at the border are much higher than those offered back home. "For Veracruzanos," Angélica attested, "it is a fortune."²⁴

A comment that then struck me as particularly intriguing came from Sara. "For us," she said bluntly, "the United States is in the United States. For Veracruzanos, the United States is here in Reynosa."²⁵ As my research project unfolded, I came to understand the logic behind Sara's words, and began to notice some of the striking parallels that exist between Veracruzano migration to the border and Mexican (or Latin American) migration to the United States. To my interviewees, the border represented a land of opportunity where they had come to realize their dreams and to seek a certain degree of independence as wage earners and homeowners. Furthermore, as the following

section demonstrates, these women unanimously agreed that they were in Reynosa to stay. Through our interviews and informal conversations, it became clear that reestablishing roots in Veracruz was neither a desirable nor feasible option for these women.

“¿A qué me voy?” Women’s Reflections on Return Migration

When asked to describe life in Veracruz, my interviewees frequently waxed nostalgic, describing the picturesque landscapes, family members, fresh produce, regional cuisine and local traditions that they had left behind. At the same time that they expressed a longing to reunite with relatives and friends back home, each and every one of these women identified job scarcity as the primary factor hindering their return. “If I go back home,” Angélica asked me as we sat together at her kitchen table one afternoon, “¿a qué me voy? (What am I returning to?)”

More of the same? No. Depending on my family? No. I wanted to get ahead. I wanted to acquire things for myself, not to have others provide them for me... Yes, I would like to be with my family, but I think I’ve already grown accustomed to being here. My daughter has also gotten used to it. I don’t think that we would return because, well, if I had really considered returning, I would never have committed to obtaining a house and establishing myself here in Reynosa.²⁶

Similar feelings were echoed by Carolina Jiménez. Before coming to Reynosa, Carolina earned 200 pesos (approximately \$18 USD) per week working in a cafeteria in the archeological zone and tourist attraction of El Tajín in Papantla, Veracruz. When asked if she would ever like to return to live in her community of origin, she responded:

Well, partly yes and partly no. Sometimes I feel the desire to return, but at other times I don’t. Here [in Reynosa] a person has their work. Going back home would be starting from zero. There a person has nothing, not even a foundation, nothing to return to. Here you sometimes have problems and everything, but at least you have a foundation. I’m going to work today; I know that every week I will have money. However, if I go back home, I’m going to arrive without a clue, searching – that is, assuming that I can even find work.²⁷

Beatriz Santos also expressed satisfaction with having gotten ahead in life since moving north. At one point in our two-hour long interview, she shared with me a poignant story from her youth that illustrated her dreams for the future, many of which she had realized during her twenty years in Reynosa. Back home, she recounted,

I would always sit and watch the stars with my little sister. I used to say to her, “*Chica*, you’ll see – one day I’m going to go far away. Who knows where, but I’m going to work. And we’re going to have a house. *I* am going to have a house, just wait. I’m going to build a house for *mama*, or maybe it will be my own, but we’re never going to wander around anymore. We’re going to have someplace to stay.”²⁸

I inquired as to whether Beatriz would ever consider returning home to Mequetla for good. “I would, but only if I had a million pesos,” she replied, straight-faced – eliciting peals of laughter from her partner, Julieta, who accompanied us during the interview – “to establish a business or to be able to purchase a parcel of land.” Beatriz continued, describing how she felt especially torn,

because my *mamá* is back home. My intention was to live there during her final years; my *mamita* is old now. I left home when I was twelve years-old. I left all things maternal. I grew up alone in life without my *mamita*, without having her around to love and protect me [*apapacharme*]. I grew up and then, straight to work. Now I think to myself, *Dios mío*, I’ve always been far away from my *mamá*. My *mamá* cries...But she doesn’t like it here [in Reynosa]. I do, but she doesn’t.²⁹

After she was fired from her job in the maquiladora DELPHI in 2005, Beatriz started her own *abarrotes* (neighborhood grocery) store with her partner, Julieta, who is studying cosmetology in hopes of one day owning her own beauty salon. They, like other women I spoke with, feel that they have invested a great deal in their new surroundings and have progressed economically since migrating to the border. For Beatriz, returning to Mequetla would mean abandoning their newly established business, an option that she is not willing to consider at present.

Despite strong feelings of ambivalence and nostalgia, all of my interviewees agreed that returning home would mean sacrificing their financial security and/or newfound independence. These women expressed a sense of pride and satisfaction in having obtained homes of their own³⁰ and having secured steady employment in Reynosa. In closing, I cite a quote from Maribel Cruz. As our final interview drew to a close, I asked her the following question: “*If you could give advice to women in your home community who were contemplating migrating to Reynosa, what would you say to them?*” Maribel responded: “That they give it everything they’ve got.”

That it’s difficult, because you arrive in an unfamiliar place. When you have goals in life, when your ideals are clear, you can achieve anything. Give it all the effort in the world,

because this is the principal means of moving ahead – having the necessary strength to excel. And despite the fact that sometimes there are stormy days, the calm will always arrive. Don't lose hope.³¹

Conclusion

In this paper I presented an analysis of my fieldwork data gathered over the course of five weeks during the summer of 2005 in Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico. I began by exploring the role of social networks in facilitating Veracruzano migration to the Mexico-U.S. border. Using women's oral testimonies as primary source material, I illustrated how Veracruzanos/as who have already journeyed north share success stories, advice, and material goods with their friends, relatives and community members back home, frequently inspiring them to try their hands at earning a living at the border.

Furthermore, I have shown how migration and women's incorporation into the waged labor force have contributed to the transformation of gendered divisions of labor between Veracruzano immigrant men and women in Reynosa. While women's "double shift" as factory workers and homemakers has in many cases been partially alleviated by their husbands' sharing of household chores, gender parity is still far from being a reality along the Mexico-U.S. border. Women continue to suffer violence both in the public and private spheres; men occupy the vast majority of technical, administrative and supervisory positions within the maquiladoras; and female factory employees still earn less than their male counterparts for the same work performed. Moreover, Veracruzana women must bear the brunt of social hostility and discrimination from native Reynosenses.

Nevertheless, closely-knit social networks both in the *colonias* and within the maquiladora factories have helped Veracruzanas to adapt to everyday life in Reynosa and to forge a strong sense of community and belonging in what was once a foreign, urban landscape. My findings indicate that this particular generation of Veracruzana immigrants is intent on settling permanently in their new homes. Indeed, it is in "Reynosa, Veracruz, (U.S.A.)," a border town with a variety of symbolic names, that Veracruzanas are realizing their own unique versions of the American Dream.

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Tables

Table 1: Migration from other states in Mexico to the municipality of Reynosa

YEAR	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
REYNOSA	62,356	54,976	39,626	93,404	162,146
	%	%	%	%	%
Coahuila	13	9	7	8	5
Guanajuato	11	7	7	7	4
Nuevo León	36	29	25	24	14
San Luis Potosí	8	10	10	14	11
Veracruz	2	6	10	15	38
Zacatecas	6	4	3	4	2
Other	30	39	41	32	28
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Plan Municipal de Desarrollo 2005-2007. 2005: 18. Reynosa, Tamaulipas City Council. Internet. Available from http://www.reynosa.gob.mx/plan_municipal/plandedesarrollo.pdf; accessed November 10, 2006.

Table 2.1: Composition of Maquiladora Personnel by Job Category and Sex: Border State Totals (As of September 2006)

Category of worker	Total	Men	% Male	Women	% Female
Total maquiladora personnel	934,514	483,866	51.8 %	450,648	48.2%
Manual laborers	730,872	340,140	46.5%	390,732	53.5%
Production Technicians	127,518	94,325	74.0%	33,193	26.0%
Administrative Employees	76,124	49,401	64.9%	26,723	35.1%

Source: INEGI. 2006. Estadística de la Industria Maquiladora de Exportación. Internet. Available from <http://www.cfomaquiladoras.org/dataprincipaljunio06.htm>; accessed November 10, 2006.

Table 2.2: Composition of Maquiladora Personnel by Job Category and Sex: Tamaulipas Totals (As of September 2006)

Category of worker	Total	Men	% Male	Women	% Female
Total maquiladora personnel	187,969	97,193	51.7%	90,776	48.3%
Manual laborers	149,958	69,664	46.5%	80,294	53.5%
Production technicians	22,099	17,095	77.4%	5,004	22.6%
Administrative employees	15,912	10,434	65.6%	5,478	34.4%

Source: INEGI. 2006. Estadística de la Industria Maquiladora de Exportación. Internet. Available from <http://www.cfomaquiladoras.org/dataprincipaljunio06.htm>; accessed November 10, 2006.

Table 3.1: Average Monthly Salary in Mexican Pesos of Maquiladora Workers by Job Category and Sex: Border State Totals (As of September 2006)

Category of worker	Average monthly salary	Men	Women
Manual Laborers	\$3,140.00	\$3,393.00	\$2,919.00
Production Technicians	\$7,986.00	—	—
Administrative Employees	\$16,093.00	—	—

Source: INEGI. 2006. Estadística de la Industria Maquiladora de Exportación. Internet. Available from <http://www.cfomaquiladoras.org/dataprincipaljunio06.htm>; accessed November 10, 2006.

Table 3.2: Average Monthly Salary in Mexican Pesos of Maquiladora Workers by Job Category and Sex: Tamaulipas Totals (As of September 2006)

Category of worker	Average monthly salary	Men	Women
Manual Laborers	\$ 3,127.00	\$ 3,377.00	\$ 2,909.00
Production Technicians	\$ 9,988.00	—	—
Administrative Employees	\$ 14,170.00	—	—

Source: INEGI. 2006. Estadística de la Industria Maquiladora de Exportación. Internet. Available from <http://www.cfomaquiladoras.org/dataprincipaljunio06.htm>; accessed November 10, 2006.

Notes

¹ The bulk of ethnographic studies on export-processing zones and maquiladora workers' life histories have tended to focus on Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua (Fernández-Kelly 1983, Peña 1997, Salzinger 2003, Wright 2006) Tijuana, Baja California (Iglesias Prieto 1985), and Nogales, Sonora (Cravey 1998).

² While the immigrant adaptation process is a popular theme in immigration studies, scant attention has been paid to internal Mexican migration. For scholarship that focuses on the adaptation experiences of Mexican immigrants in the United States, see Sánchez 1993, Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, Hirsch 1999, Massey 2002, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 2003.

³ In this paper the names of my interviewees have been substituted with pseudonyms in order to ensure their privacy.

⁴ See Norma Iglesias Prieto, *Beautiful Flowers of the Maquiladora: Life Histories of Women Workers in Tijuana*, translated by Michael Stone, Gabrielle Winkler (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997 [1985]) and María Patricia Fernández-Kelly, *For We Are Sold, I and My People* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1983).

⁵ All Spanish-English translations are my own unless otherwise noted. The original Spanish text reads: "...la expansión veracruzana es un fenómeno que se extiende a otros estados fronterizos y cada vez es más intenso. Este fenómeno migratorio ha traído como consecuencia la demanda de nuevos y mejores espacios urbanizados, infraestructura, equipamiento, vivienda, etc., para estos nuevos habitantes, pero al mismo tiempo ha significado un enriquecimiento y fusión de costumbres que se combinan con las locales y que enriquecen el crisol cultural que caracteriza a las ciudades fronterizas."

⁶ Cirila Quintero, interview by the author, Matamoros, Tamaulipas, Mexico, 20 June, 2006.

⁷ Esthér Núñez, interview by the author, Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico, 28 June 2006. "Y allá, no, '¿Cómo te ha ido?' Ya ni te preguntan, vas más o menos de estilo, llevas cosas, llevas dinero. Y pues, ellos te ven el cambio que hiciste desde que estabas allá, al cambio donde estás ahorita y regresas ya mejor. Entonces, ellos se animan, se vienen para acá. Entre nosotros mismos nos ayudamos. Y así somos todos, todos los veracruzanos. Por eso no nos quieren. Porque nada más se va uno para allá, y ya se vienen cinco para acá. Porque realmente, pues, es por nosotros, porque nosotros los animamos a que se vengan para acá."

⁸ Carolina Jiménez, interview by the author, Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico, 04 June 2006. "Ahora así como dicen, 'Se va uno y regresan veinte.' Porque ya va uno y se trae al primo, se trae al pariente, se trae al hermano, y ya éste se trae a otros y así. Luego dicen en las difusoras: 'Se va uno y regresan veinte.'"

⁹ Gabriela Prieto, interview by the author, Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico, 03 June, 2006. "Es un ambiente agradable porque somos puras mujeres; son pocos los hombres que trabajan allí. Y la mayoría de las mujeres, todas vienen del estado de Veracruz. No precisamente de donde yo soy, de varias partes de por allá. Entonces, siempre hay un tema que platicar. En esos diez años, conoces los problemas y las preocupaciones."

¹⁰ "Se puede apreciar la diferencia entre la industria petrolera y la maquiladora. Mientras que la primera genera bienes de servicio y de empleo a la población con salarios altos y prestaciones a sus empleados; la segunda sólo ocupa en su mayoría la mano de obra femenina."

¹¹ For an excellent historical overview of the Bracero Program, see "Braceros, 'Wetbacks,' and the National Boundaries of Class," Chapter 4 of Mae Ngai's book, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.

¹² "Hay muchas las mujeres que somos humilladas por el marido, por lo mismo de que el hombre es el que trabaja. Las golpean, las maltratan. Ellas se sienten inseguras, aguantan todo."

No saben cómo van a sobrellevar su vida por aguantar el marido. Tienen que aguantarlo a veces por lo mismo de que no están preparadas, o tienen miedo a enfrentarse a la vida. Y pues, tienen que aguantar muchas cosas por lo mismo de que no tienen un trabajo. No tienen base para defenderse.”

¹³ Esthér Núñez, interview by the author, Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico, 28 June 2006. “Allá la mujer se tiene que dedicar a darle de comer al esposo; el esposo nada más se dedica a traer dinero. El hombre nunca te va a ayudar a los quehaceres de la mujer. La mamá es la que sufre, lava, plancha, cocina, y todo lo que hay que hacer para el bebé.”

¹⁴ Nancy Hernández, interview by the author, Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico, 09 June 2006. “Mi papá siempre dijo que la mujer en la casa, el hombre en el campo. Él siempre lo dividió así. Nunca dijo, ‘Bueno, aquí vivimos todos juntos, vamos a trabajar la tierra de equipo.’ No. Siempre dice que la mujer es la mujer, el hombre es el hombre. Bien machista mi papá.”

¹⁵ Beatriz Santos, interview by the author, Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico, 05 June 2006. “Siempre quería tener una casa, por lo mismo de que allá andaba de un lugar a otro, durmiendo a veces hasta debajo de un árbol. Si ya teníamos una casita, era una casa de palitos, o a veces ni palos tenía. No más tenía la pura chozita, era un chozo de esos de palma.”

¹⁶ “Emigrarse para Reynosa tiene sus ventajas y desventajas. La ventaja es de que aquí puede ganar la gente; la señora ya puede trabajar. No está atendida a como vive uno allá en el rancho. Porque allá las mujeres están atendidas a que el hombre les da. O sea, el hombre, a ver *de dónde*, pues, aunque sea de jornalero de sol a sol, pero llevan para hacer frijoles o un pedazo de chile, unas tortillas para dar a los chamacos. Y las mujeres, así son, conformistas, las que quedan ya pocas, porque ya ahorita ya, casi la mayoría lo que hace es emigrar. Allí ahorita ya casi pues está quedando vacío porque la gente está saliendo para el otro lado o para acá.”

¹⁷ Carolina Jiménez, interview by the author, Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico, 04 June 2006. “Yo me dedico a trabajar y mi esposo es él que está aquí. Como dice él, ‘Ahora yo soy la mujer aquí. Ahora sí ya comprendo,’ dice, ‘lo que es atender un hogar.’ Y lo mismo comprende que a veces los hombres no ven el trabajo de la mujer. Llegan a la casa y ‘¿Qué es esto?’ y a maltratar a la mujer. No ve el hombre el trabajo que uno hizo. Y ahora lo comprende porque ya lo está viviendo. Ahora él es el que se encarga a hacer de comer. Incluso él hasta lava, todo. Él no se afrenta a hacer nada. A él le gusta cocinar, a él le gusta trapear. Así nos repartimos los deberes. Yo trabajo y él está aquí en la casa. Se hace cargo de todo. Así nos ayudamos mutuamente.”

¹⁸ “Yo, más que nada, para mí no fue mucho porque mi pareja me ayuda mucho. Mi pareja comparte todas las cosas. Si yo hago de comer, él lava trastes. Si yo lavo ropa, él trapea, él barra. Una cosa y otra. Y si él está cansado, pues lo hago yo, verdad. Aún así, no me deja trabajo completo. Él me ayuda mucho. Yo he tenido esa suerte de que él siempre me ha ayudado, pero para otras personas, en lo que yo he visto, nunca ayudan. Son contaditos, los que te ayudan, la verdad.”

¹⁹ Maribel Cruz, interview by the author, Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico, 03 June 2006. “Allá la mujer no opciones. No tiene otra más que cuidar a sus hijos. No tienes libertad de decir, ‘Quiero trabajar,’ porque no tienes las mismas facilidades que aquí.” “Yo me organizo. El niño más pequeño lo llevo a la guardería. Allí me lo cuidan desde que empieza mi jornada de trabajo hasta que salga. La niña ya está grande, la niña se la lleva mi esposo a la escuela, de allá se viene en autobús. Aparte me organizo con mi esposo, porque yo hago unas cosas y él hace otras, para que yo pueda hacerme un poco menos pesada la vida, porque pues, yo tengo que trabajar. Pero cuento con el apoyo de él.”

²⁰ For a more comprehensive discussion of femicide, social justice movements and human rights advocacy groups along the Mexico-U.S. border, see Mark Ensalaco, 2006, “Murder in Ciudad Juárez”; Amnesty International USA, “Justice for the Women of Juárez and Chihuahua,” <<http://www.amnestyusa.org/women/juarez/>>.

²¹ Margulis, Mario and Rodolfo Tuirán. 1986. *Desarrollo y población en la frontera norte: El caso de Reynosa*. Mexico City: El Colegio de México.

²² Florencia, interview by the author, June 13, 2006.

²³ While a detailed analysis of the nativist/racist sentiments that exist in Reynosa is beyond the scope of this paper, I felt it important to include the above conversation in order to illustrate some of the tensions that have emerged as a result of Veracruzanos' migration to the border.

²⁴ Ángela Morales, personal communication with the author, May 27, 2006.

²⁵ Sara Puentes, personal communication with the author, May 27, 2006.

²⁶ "Si me voy para allá, ¿a qué me voy? ¿A lo mismo? No. ¿Estar dependiendo de mi familia? No. Yo quería progresar, yo quería tener mis cosas por mí misma, no que otros me las facilitaran... Sí me gustaría estar con mi familia, pero, yo pienso que ya me acostumbré a estar aquí. Ya mi hija también ya se acostumbró. No creo yo que nos regresaríamos porque aparte, pues, si yo hubiera tenido pensado regresar, no me hubiera echado el compromiso de sacar una casa y de establecerme aquí en Reynosa."

²⁷ "Pues, en parte sí, en parte no. A veces siento ganas de volver, pero a veces no. Que aquí ya uno tiene su trabajo. Irse para allá sería empezar de ceros. No tiene uno nada, ni una base, nada para volver. A veces aquí uno tiene problemas y todo, pero pues, aquí tiene uno una base. Voy a trabajar hoy, sé que cada semana voy a tener dinero. En cambio, me voy para allá, voy a llegar a ciegas, a buscar; si es que encuentro trabajo."

²⁸ "Yo siempre veía a las estrellas y me sentaba con mi hermanilla. Le decía yo, 'Chica,' digo, 'Vas a ver que un día me voy a ir lejos. A ver dónde, pero voy a trabajar. Y vamos a tener una casa. Yo voy a tener una casa, vas a ver, que le voy a hacer una casa a mi mamá, o yo la voy a tener, pero ya no vamos a andar nunca p'acá y p'allá. Ya vamos a tener donde quedarnos.'"

²⁹ "Yo, sí. Pero solamente que contara con un millón de pesos para poner un negocio o para poder comprar un terreno... Porque allá está mi mamá. Eso es lo que era mi intención. Ir a vivir allá en los últimos años porque mi mamita ya está viejita. Yo me salí desde que tenía casi 12 años, ya dejé lo maternal. O sea, yo ya crecí solita en la vida ya sin mamita, sin que me estuviera a mí apapachando. Yo crecí, y luego, para adelante. Ahorita yo digo, '*Dios mío*, yo siempre que he sido lejos de mi mamá.' Mi mamá llora... Aquí a ella no le gusta; a mí sí, pero a ella no."

³⁰ All of the women I interviewed were living in residences subsidized by the government program, INFONAVIT (Instituto del Fondo Nacional de la Vivienda para los Trabajadores), the Institute for the National Fund for Worker Housing. More information on this program can be found on the INFONAVIT website: <http://www.infonavit.gob.mx/>.

³¹ "Que le echen ganas. Que es difícil porque te llegas a un lugar desconocido. Cuando uno tiene metas en la vida, tienes tus ideales bien claros, lo puedes lograr todo. Echarle todas las ganas en el mundo porque esa es la base principal para salir adelante – tener la fuerza necesaria para sobresalir. Y que a pesar de que a veces hay días de tormenta, siempre viene la calma. No desesperes."