



Perpetuating Split-household Families The Case of Mexican Sojourners in Mid-Michigan and their Transnational Fatherhood Practices

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ABSTRACT

New guest worker programs that promote temporary and documented immigration have been re-implemented by the United States. This is immigration policy that affects Mexican family organization within and across the border. Hence this paper examines first how Mexican male sojourners undertake their reproductive and productive work, by helping to sustain family life even though they are prevented from family reunification. Second, it explores how sojourners rearrange their parental responsibilities that have been disrupted by spatial-temporal family separation through transnational fatherhood.

Palabras clave: 1. international migration, 2. labor migration, 3. social policy, 4. transnational fatherhood, 5. family relations.

RESUMEN

Nuevos programas de trabajadores huéspedes que promueven la inmigración temporal y documentada han sido reimplementados por Estados Unidos. Ésta es una política de inmigración que afecta la organización familiar mexicana de la familia dentro y fuera de la frontera. Por lo tanto, este trabajo examina, primero, cómo los trabajadores huéspedes se hacen cargo de su trabajo tanto productivo como reproductivo ayudando a la manutención familiar a pesar de tener incertidumbre ante la reunificación de la familia. En segundo lugar, explora cómo los trabajadores huéspedes reordenan sus responsabilidades paternales obstaculizadas por una separación espacio-temporal de la familia en un contexto de paternidad transnacional.

Keywords: 1. migración internacional, 2. migración de trabajo, 3. política social, 4. paternidad transnacional, 5. relaciones de familia.

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Introduction

Historically, guest worker programs have been implemented as a result of economic booms, wartime labor shortages, and a high demand for unskilled labor by developed countries (Castles and Miller, 1998:68). Moreover, a guest worker program is crafted with a dual purpose: First, it aims to profit from the cheap labor derived from the macroeconomic gap between developing and developed countries. Second, it aims to create *restrictionist* immigration laws to prevent the integration of temporary migrants and their families into society, forestalling any intention to settle permanently (Glenn, 1999:80).

Indeed, both points underscore the materialistic and racist roots of guest worker programs: which is to explicitly preclude—by law—the integration of *racialized* groups from developing countries into U.S. society. Keeping families separated perhaps makes sense from an employer-economics perspective. The standard assumption is that because there is no direct familial responsibility, as family members are not physically present, workers are able to devote more time and energy to their work tasks. Since historically guest worker programs have been primarily encouraged in order to maintain circular temporary migration using restrictionist laws, a hidden *racist* discourse underlies this policy. These laws preclude migrants' permanent residence, restricting their families' biological and social reproduction to their countries of origin. However, in an increasingly globalized and transnational world, there does exist, from the perspective of the migrant himself, a very urgent and thus direct sense of responsibility and obligation to family (Glenn, 1999).

Considering that recent changes in immigration policy promote the fragmentation of the Mexican migrant family, this paper examines the social impact that the “Temporary Alien Labor to Meet Temporary Needs” (H-2s) program (Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services –BCIS–, 2003c) has on temporary migrants as members of a split-family organization. By using qualitative methodology that includes participant-observation and a set of unstandardized interviews (Berg, 2003), we aim to examine, first, how Mexican sojourners in mid-Michigan conduct all their transnational reproduction tasks that help sustain family life despite the fact that they are *quasilegally* prevented from family reunification. Second, we explore





how sojourners rearrange their parental responsibilities, which have been disrupted by spatial and temporal family separation, utilizing the framework of transnational fatherhood (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ávila, 2000:279).

In order to define “guest worker,” we depart from the social construction that “guest workers” are by legal definition temporary migrants (BCIS, 2003c). Drawing on Glenn’s (1999) definition of sojourners, for the purposes of this paper we shall identify Mexican temporary migrants as sojourners: “[Sojourners are]...prime-age workers from disadvantaged regions [that] are issued limited-duration permits to reside in regions needing low-wage workers (?) but are prevented from bringing relatives or settling permanently” (p. 80). The sojourning process reveals the social marginalization Mexicans experience as temporary migrant workers. Sojourners are seen and dealt with as a source of cheap labor with no opportunity to integrate themselves or their families into U.S. society (Glenn, 1999).

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of guest worker programs is to keep migration circular, thereby precluding sojourners’ permanent settlement in their host countries (Siu, 1952). However, previous research focusing on guest-worker programs such as the Chinese in the United States (Glenn, 1999), the Turkish in Germany (Castles and Kosack, 1973), and Mexicans in the United States (Galarza, 1965; Gamboa, 1990) has demonstrated that guest worker programs do not preclude permanent settlements or even prevent undocumented migration.

Guest-worker programs are often devised to restrain family unification and discourage permanent settlement, yet the Bracero Program, despite its intentions, stimulated both legal and undocumented migration and eventual permanent settlement (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1997). Nevertheless, policy makers still believe that promoting *quasilegal* migration and splitting families guarantees that migrant workers will maintain sojourner behavior and diffuse permanent settlement.

In our review of the literature, we adopt a historical perspective on the “guest worker” model to gauge the impact immigration policy has on Mexican sojourners’ family organization. We then tie this paper’s theoretical framework to Glenn’s (1999) Split-Household Family Model.





*A Brief Historical Background: U.S.-Mexican
Immigration Policy and its "Guest Worker" Programs*

In the nineteenth century, American colonization—primarily in the Southwest—stripped Mexicans of their landownership and placed them in a more disadvantaged position as labor workers (Baca Zinn, 1994; Griswold del Castillo and De León, 1997), thus creating race-based labor stratification. American industrial expansion, shortly thereafter, produced a historical demand for Mexican labor immigration at the turn of the twentieth century (Gamio, 1969:20; Santibáñez, 1930:30). This pattern continued as in the early 1940s new Mexican migratory streams, mostly males (both documented and undocumented), were fueled by immigration policies—*e.g.* the Bracero program (Bean and Stevens, 2003; Durand, Massey and Parrado, 1999; Gamboa, 1990).

As a result, the United States and Mexico officially began their first major temporary agricultural labor program in 1943, with the passage of the "Act of April 29, 1943" (BCIS, 2003a). Since this program was conceived to alleviate the agricultural labor shortage that existed during World War Two, it served as the basis for what would become the Mexican "Bracero Program" (BCIS, 2003a). The "Act of July 12, 1951" (BCIS, 2003b), then, provided the legal and operative framework for the Mexican Bracero Program.

The Bracero Program, in effect from 1942 to 1964, was the largest of the guest worker programs implemented by the United States. From 1942 to 1964, nearly 5 million temporary labor contracts were issued to Mexican citizens (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1997). The United States government sent labor recruiters and opened offices near the Mexican border. U.S. government agents were assigned to recruit temporary Mexican agricultural workers, provide transportation from the Mexican recruitment offices to U.S. reception centers, and assure reasonable working conditions and fair wages. After over 20 years and many changes in immigration policy, the Mexican Bracero Program ended on December 31, 1964 (BCIS, 2003b; Durand *et al.*, 1999; Gamboa, 1990), signaling a new era of Mexican immigration to the U.S.

The end of the Bracero era was followed by "a new era of massive legal and undocumented immigration characterized by greater representation of women and entire families, the establishment of permanent settlement communities in geographically dispersed areas, and more





diversified uses of labor” (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1997:118). This new era was codified by the 1965 Immigration Act.

Since 1965, when legislation did away with national origin quotas in favor of giving preference to labor certification and applicants with family already residing in the U.S., the United States has experienced what has commonly been referred to as the second wave of mass immigration. The more recent arrivals vary from the initial influx of immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century in that the majority do not come from Europe but from Latin America and Asia. These are areas that have experienced extensive U.S. military, economic, and social intervention since World War Two. Since Mexican social networks were already firmly established the Mexican immigrant population rose. Hondagneu-Sotelo has pointed out that an attempt to impose a quota in 1976 on Mexican admittances only served to encourage undocumented migration (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1997).

In 1986, Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act, putting in place employer sanctions against knowingly hiring undocumented workers. The Amnesty provision legalized the status of over three million undocumented migrants who could prove they had been living continuously in the United States since before 1982. Although over three million undocumented migrants were able to gain residence, many were not. Several Mexican immigrants were denied the opportunity for residence since they had missed the deadline.

Although patterns of migration between Mexico and the United States have changed since 1943, immigration policy-making, in terms of guest worker systems, has been re-visited once again. Immigration policy-makers have re-implemented a contemporary version of the early “Mexican Bracero” program: the H-2 program. The H-2 program however contains two variants: one for temporary agricultural workers (H-2A) and another for temporary skilled and unskilled workers (H-2B) (BCIS, 2003c).

Escobar-Latapí (1999) observed that in 1996 and 1997 the U.S. Congress discussed a number of proposals for a new agricultural labor program—H-2As (p. 168). As a result, the Temporary Alien Labor to Meet Temporary Needs (H-2s) ended up with a twofold purpose: (1) H-2As visas were targeted for agricultural work with no annual immigration caps, while (2) H-2B visas for service oriented low-wage jobs were mainly targeted for unskilled people, with an annual cap of 66,000 (BCIS, 2003c).





Because there is substantial previous scholarship covering that covers the agricultural-migrant-worker phenomenon (H2As), this paper focuses on low-wage, unskilled, and urban migrants (H2Bs). We examine sojourners' strategies to keep their split families close, especially through transnational fatherhood practices.

Transnational Fatherhood and the Split-Household Family Model

Immigration policy-makers have engaged in a discourse on family characterized by double standards. One side of the discourse is designed for middle-class America and another for migrants and their immigrant families. The former is exemplified by the tendency to encourage a predetermined, ideal type of family organization: the modern family—a breadwinner, a housewife, and two children with a stable postindustrial high wage job (Stacey, 1990). The latter model is applied to migrants and immigrant families regardless of social outcome, usually requiring a spatial/temporal disruption of the family, resulting in a split-household family model.

The split-household family structure has profound consequences for family relations (Glenn, 1999). Separating employment from home residence ensures more productive use of immigrant labor. However, even when sojourners work to support themselves and their families on a daily basis, the cost of reproducing new generations of workers relies on the political-socioeconomic context of their countries of origin. Although sojourners contribute financially to the well being of their families, Mexico must bear the responsibility of bringing up new generations of workers (Chávez, 1997:64; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1999:295). It is in these split-households that sojourners strategize methods of survival to maintain and rearrange their transnational paternal responsibilities.

Sojourners: A Marginal Social Location

While society universalizes male dominance, during their migration experience, sojourners face racial and class subordination (Galarza, 1965). In order to address this gap in the literature, we feel it is essential to analyze marginalized men from a feminist perspective. The inclusion of marginalized men the analytical characters within a feminist approach





(Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill, 2000; Kaufman, 1994), enables us to analyze Mexican sojourners' experiences in relation to their racialized, class-oriented, and gendered social locations.

Male Mexican sojourners are a racialized group that is poorly socially located—*i.e.* in a segmented labor market. Moreover, because of their powerless position, Mexican sojourners in the United States live a contradictory experience of power (Kaufman, 1994:157). This means that even though there is a general understanding of male dominance amongst Mexican men (Gutmann, 1996), their voices have been ignored and their labor exploited. Sojourners' marginal social location underlined by their racialized subordination shows how privileged groups are better positioned than they are. As a result, "guest worker" systems perpetuate the insertion of immigrants into low-wage and service-oriented job markets, preventing opportunities for social mobility in the U.S., while emphasizing the impact major socioeconomic structures have on their family organization (Glenn, 1999).

Data and Methodology

Data collected for this project were drawn from a non-representative population sample. We utilized non-probability techniques that included a combination of purposive and convenience samples. The population sample, gathered through the snowball technique, consisted of seven Mexican sojourners whose identity is protected by the use of pseudonyms: Miguel, Johnny, Brad, Lázaro, José, Paco, and Ernesto. The population sample had to meet two conditions. First, sojourners had to be married with a family member left back in Mexico. Second, the sojourner had to be a documented worker with an H-2B visa for the 2003 season. There were no age-specific criteria.

Because this paper seeks to produce an ethnographic case study, we used qualitative methodology that includes participant-observation and a set of unstandardized interviews (Berg, 2003). Although it is assumed that unstandardized interviews serve as supplements to field observations (Berg, 2003:80), in this case, unstandardized interviews functioned as the major source of data. Unstandardized interviews followed the *conversaciones*—conversations—model rather than just a standardized questionnaire. Our ability to obtain the sojourners' trust during our visits was facilitated



by holding our conversations in Spanish. We were able to observe sojourners' interaction, body language, lifestyle, and surroundings through field observations during our visits to the campsite. We then tape-recorded each of the seven conversations. Finally, we translated and transcribed the seven conversations we recorded.

Because we had promised confidentiality, we used fictitious names. Moreover, even though we collected the data in Isabella County, Michigan, we did not disclose the name and location of the city where these people resided. In addition, we changed the recruiting agency's name, and did not reveal the name of the company the sojourners worked for. However, we do disclose the cities or towns in Mexico where sojourners and their families have "permanent" residence. We believe this information to be important because it furthers research on current patterns of documented migration from specific areas in Mexico.

Data collection ran from early September to mid-November 2003. Visits to the sojourners' places of residence (Isabella County) were fairly frequent. Although the original objective was to interview sojourners on a weekly basis, interviews were sometimes conducted every other week.

The narrative of the manuscript draws from the "new ethnography" or polyphony authorial dominance model (Mc Dowell, 1996). By using the polyphony model we incorporate multiple voices, including the subject's voice and ours. We are not only passive narrators as we become an explicit character in the narrative. The inclusion of the authors' voices provides the opportunity to demonstrate research biases (McDowell, 1996:37).

Findings

Recruitment Process

The recruitment process was carried out through middlemen or intermediaries. Recruiters set up offices in various states of Mexico. We found, in this case, that although all sojourners were recruited in the state of Guanajuato, applicants came from different states, as far away as Tamaulipas and as near as Mexico City. During the conversations, sojourners informed us that ABC International S.de





R.L. de C.V.—their recruitment office—located in Guanajuato, was dedicated exclusively to recruiting workers. This company promised non-skilled jobs in Texas, Michigan, Mississippi, New York, Missouri, Louisiana, and Minnesota.

The application process is not free of charge. Once the application is approved, potential sojourners pay the recruitment agency \$155 up-front for administrative expenses, \$100 for miscellaneous expenses, and \$255 for the H-2B visa process, a total of \$510. However, sojourners are told that upon reaching the United States, they can make their money back. As a further incentive, they are promised a wage of \$8.50 per hour. Potential guest workers have to “invest” a significant amount of money in the application process. Two things are of note during the recruitment process: access to recruiters and money for paying the application fees.

Once access to the recruitment office is granted, potential candidates must undergo a criminal and immigration background check. Hiring is conditional on passing a qualifying test (which is not specified in the interviews). If these potential workers succeed in the application process, the middleman processes the H-2B visa and locates a job for the worker. In most cases, first-time applicants are not entitled to know their final destination until the whole process is completed. Repeat applicants are usually sent to the same place of work. Nevertheless, the following season, sojourners may end up in Texas, Mississippi, Michigan, Florida or any other state. The re-hiring process is contingent upon demonstrating a good work ethic, determined by the employer during the course of the contract.

Splitting Families

We were informed that access to the recruitment offices is relatively easy and complex at the same time. An intricate web of social networks shapes access to recruiters’ applications and interviews. Surprisingly all sojourners except Miguel held permanent jobs in Mexico. Having steady, permanent jobs implies that potential sojourners may have had the financial assets to pay for the application fees. For instance, there is the case of Brad. Brad used to work in a low-wage white-collar job at a hotel as a night auditor in his native town of Guanajuato:





Juan: Brad, tell me little bit more about how you got this job.

Brad: “I used to work in a hotel back in Guanajuato. During a conversation, a friend asked me if I would like to come to the US...legally. I said, are you kidding? Then, the friend said, ‘No, I can give you the address of the company that is recruiting.’ Well, in that case, I need to consult my wife.”

Juan: But you were working. Why did you come to the U.S.?

Brad: “It sounded very interesting, besides, in Mexico you make money by the day, over here in the U.S.—you make money by the hour. I went to the University of Guanajuato, and I studied architecture, but getting a job that matches your skills is very hard.”

Sojourners learned about potential employment from former coworkers, relatives, and friends. No sojourners had had any previous information about the H-2B program, and were informed about the program by friends and relatives. Also, none of the sojourners, aside from Miguel, had previously immigrated.

We found the main catalyst for switching permanent jobs in Mexico for temporary contracts in the U.S. to be socioeconomic. These people want to improve the quality of life of their families, especially their children. Having a steady job in Mexico does not guarantee better financial opportunities for their families. These sojourners envisaged socioeconomic advantages in the U.S. unavailable to them in Mexico. Moreover, these workers did not foresee the long-term consequences of being separated from their families. As a result, sojourners rearranged their parental responsibilities by using a transnational approach to fatherhood.

Transnational Fatherhood Practices: Keeping the Family Together

After settling in their places of work sojourners develop a double-pronged strategy in an effort to sustain and endure family relations. First, sojourners do more overtime more than the average U.S. worker because they want to accelerate their accumulation of capital while attempting to avoid the depressing nature of their solitary condition. Second, consistently working overtime translates into higher earnings—although not necessarily higher wages. Since these workers’ highest aspiration is to improve their families’ quality of life, sojourners are willing to work





as many hours as required in order to ensure better provisions for their families. Moreover, sojourners suggest that working harder and longer hours gives employers a better impression. Being a hard worker translates into relative job security. There is the implicit assurance that contracts are renewed for those who work harder than average. Paco exemplifies this behavioral pattern:

Juan: Tell me a little bit more about your financial situation.

Paco: “You know I make \$8.50 per hour; however, we always try to work overtime. Working overtime is where we make the real money. I don’t like to keep money with me. I keep what I need for food, no more. I send money to my family week-by-week through Western Union.

Juan: Does your wife works in Mexico?

Paco: “We have a business in Mexico. My wife, with the help of my children, sells tacos at weekends. We are hard workers. We save part of the money I send to Mexico. We do not pay rent since we own our house, but we are adding new rooms to the house, so we have to make extra money.”

Working harder and longer hours produces higher earnings, which are used to sustain and enhance a family’s quality of life. However, the spatial and temporal separation of the family produces noticeable feelings of loneliness and guilt. Although workers attempt to compensate for this separation by sometimes over-providing food, clothing, and school supplies amongst other things, sojourners rearrange their father-wife-children contact strategies to alleviate the emotional strain of being separated.

The exchange of letters and photos is common. But because the mail service operate at a much slower rate in Mexico than in the U.S., sojourners prefer rapid communication channels, *i.e.* telephone calls. Nonetheless, it is important to note that letters and photos offer a sense of greater emotional attachment to the family than do telephone calls. In every interview, workers showed us photos of their families as well as letters.

Telephone calls require special attention mainly because long distance phone calls are the sojourners’ primary means of communication with their families in Mexico. Sojourners are well aware that raising children is a parental responsibility. In the houses where sojourners live, the phone



line is restricted to local calls, yet it allows workers to maintain immediate communication with their families in Mexico since they can receive incoming calls. Having a phone line in the sojourners' house lets families left behind maintain a permanent, open channel of communication in case of an emergency or for dealing with the everyday burden of being a parent. In this way, workers exercise their fatherly right to raise, discipline, and educate children in a transnational context. For instance, Miguel says: "Juanito, we live a double life—including you—because we, over here in the U.S., have to live on a day-by-day basis while also having to worry about what's happening back at home. It isn't easy, it burns people out. Just look around, and you'll see how young people get older too fast. However, we need money, and them *Bolillos* (Anglos) need us".

Ongoing contact between workers in the U.S. and families in Mexico shapes children's social environment—*e.g.* discipline advice, school-related activities, etcetera. Some workers call once a week, others every day, and a few others call many times per day. Although workers save money by using calling cards, some of them may end up buying more than \$70 worth of calling cards per month. The average time a worker spends talking to his family by phone is 40 minutes. Yet, weekend conversations tend to be longer, often closer to two hours. Besides talking about parenting issues during phone conversations, workers discuss how to make better use of their remittances with their spouses. Major topics include home improvement, children's education, buying a house or building new rooms, and saving money for the an uncertain future.

Transnational Fatherhood Practices: Remittances

Since the Mexican family composition (sojourners) is not the norm, the split-household family model describes the standard family composition of sojourners better. Sojourners, just like other Mexican immigrant women working in the U.S. (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ávila, 2000), have made a major sacrifice by being away from their families. Remittances are a transnational fatherhood strategy for providing financial stability and compensating for the spatial-temporal separation. Accumulation of capital and the sensible use of remittances are major socioeconomic components of sojourner behavior. Remittances are the result of working long hours under severe weather conditions—productive work. Remit-





tances are used in Mexico to provide food, better schooling, clothing, and to pay for sojourner's families' leisure activities:

Juan: How does your family use the money in Mexico?

Miguel: "Juanito, they save money, and they also spend money. I'm here for them, they deserve it. You know, Juanito, sometimes, my wife ask me for permission to use the money to buy something. I tell her, you don't have to ask for permission to spend the money any way you like. I tell her, I know you will use the money wisely."

Although for the majority of these workers being employed in the U.S. is synonymous with upward social mobility in Mexico, for others, working in the U.S. is a strategy for simply surviving in Mexico. Since sojourners work over forty hours a week, their wives back home attempt to maximize their money. For example, since three out of the seven families have over six children, these families experienced greater socioeconomic constraints:

Lázaro: "I hope my children don't want to study past middle school. I think I won't be able to afford it."

However, as Paco said: "I value education so much. I will do anything, within my power, to make sure that my six children receive an education."

Sojourners work very hard, but remittances are not always enough. This is especially true for workers who have come for four years and have earned \$8.50 an hour every year. Thus saving money becomes crucial, particularly when it comes to sending money and/or goods to Mexico.

Remittances follow a dual model: the first model is typically associated with money transfers. The second model is related to material goods such as the delivery of clothing, refrigerators, bicycles, etcetera.

Regarding money transfers, we found that sojourners preferred Western Union over other money-wiring options, including Money Gram or bank account transfers, the exception being Miguel, who favored a company called *Sigue*. Miguel likes to use *Sigue* because he sends his money in dollars, and the money is received in Mexico in dollars. Miguel is well





aware of currency exchange rates. Miguel thinks that keeping his money in dollars will offer him greater insurance for potential macro-economic instability. The sojourners do not trust bank transfers because of their hidden costs and fees. Miguel provides a case in point:

Juan: Don Miguel, how do you send your money?

Miguel: "I use a money transfer company called 'Sigue' located in Lansing."

Juan: So you go all the way to Lansing?

Miguel: "Yes, I trust this company, and I prefer to wire money in U.S. dollars, not Mexican pesos."

Juan: Why don't you use Western Union or U.S. banks?

Miguel: "Western Union doesn't send U.S. dollars; they convert the money to Mexican pesos. And, I don't trust banks; they have too many hidden fees."

Remittances are also delivered in a non-monetary model. Workers usually have two options. They may send goods through a middleman, or deliver these goods themselves. Since a middleman is an expensive option, workers prefer to wait almost until December to take these goods into Mexico in well-organized groups. Because our field notes were collected between September and November, we were able to observe how sojourners prepared themselves for their trips to Mexico. Within a circle of very close friends, one worker was able to save up extra money to buy a pickup truck. Purchasing a pickup truck enabled this worker to transport not only his goods, but also other goods from his circle of friends. In the house where they lived, we counted over 10 pickup trucks. Some of them were leaving early to Mexico. These trucks were all packed with bicycles, refrigerators, televisions, microwave ovens and clothing, among other goods. The trucks themselves also constituted a remittance. Workers had bought the pick-up with the aim of leaving it in Mexico for family use.

Leisure Time

Mexican workers experience relative isolation in the U.S. It is relative because although sojourners are separated from their families,





they are not quite alone. Many of these workers are able to develop close friendships. Even though these circles of friendship do not substitute families, they operate as support systems. These support systems help alleviate some of the more difficult aspects of being away from their families and are usually developed during leisure time or weekends.

Sojourners live on a campsite where the employers provide housing. There are two main houses surrounded by several trailer homes. The entire campsite is inhabited by male sojourners, who pay \$120 per month, including utilities and phone service, deducted from their paychecks on a weekly basis. The house is equipped with a kitchen, bathroom, and garage. There are two workers per room, and the kitchen, bathroom, and washing machine are shared by all the tenants. The houses are adequate, although the sofas and rocking chairs are second-hand. Although each house is clean, the carpet needs replacing, and the whole house would benefit from some paintwork. The kitchen is clean since it is the part of house that is most often cleaned because sojourners like to cook when they are at home.

Because sojourners come to the U.S. to work, it is difficult for them to dedicate much time to leisure. As winter approaches and the weather become colder and overtime work is reduced to a minimum, sojourners spend more time at the campsite on weekends. We found three behavioral patterns that describe how sojourners spend their leisure time: (1) watching television, (2) playing cards, and (3) drinking beer.

We observed that married sojourners watch more TV than non-married workers while single sojourners tended to drink more beer than their married counterparts. According to Brad, married workers behave in a more mature way than single workers because they are aware of the responsibility they have to the families they left behind.

Jose says, "We have to keep focused on what we want to do here. We want to work. Otherwise, what's the point of coming thousand of miles to work in Michigan? I did not come all the way up here just to have fun." Some married workers may have a couple of beers, but they do not like to lose their self-control. For instance, Paco argues, "What would happen if I got drunk and there was an emergency back home in Mexico? I wouldn't forgive myself if something were to happen in Mexico and I was not able to solve the problem. Besides my wife is





always keeping an eye on me—I mean she may call on Saturday just to check how I am.”

Sojourners use their leisure time to rest, watch television, or even play cards. We did not see any married workers getting drunk. Sojourners consider leisure time to be a part of their transnational fatherhood strategy of raising, disciplining and educating children back home. It is very important for them to act as role models, even though they are thousands of miles away from home. Furthermore, it provides respite from the intensive work they do.

Discussion and Conclusion

Guest worker systems benefit both the U.S. and Mexican governments. The U.S. economy enlists cheap labor during labor shortages without a long-term commitment to guest workers. The U.S. benefits because guest worker systems perpetuate seasonal migration, which in turn, reduces permanent settlement. U.S. guest worker policy, then, disrupts families and shifts the biological and social reproduction of sojourners' children to Mexico. The Mexican government benefits because the longer a sojourner maintains his circular migration, the longer he will be able to continue sending remittances. Sojourner's remittances help to empower local communities in rural and urban areas. Once a sojourner shifts to permanent settlement, there is a reduction in his economic-remittance contribution to the Mexican economy. Thus, it is in the interest of both governments to maintain the status quo. Orozco found that in the year 2000, remittances accounted for \$6.5 billion (2002:47). According to Hernández—citing data from Banco de Mexico, per capita remittances totaled \$364.96 (p. 26). Unfortunately, no information is available on the proportion of these remittances sent by H-2Bs workers.

Furthermore, immigration policy-makers suggest that re-implementing new migration programs for non-skilled migrants based on a “guest worker” (see Gamboa, 1990) model, will serve as an alternative approach to deter and redirect undocumented immigration. However, critics of the program, such as U.S. labor organizations contend that H-2s programs depress wages and discriminate against American workers (Escobar-Latapí, 1999).





Because sojourners tend to be young, in their prime-age, and married (Glenn, 1999), employers profit from their longer working hours and low wages (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ávila, 2000). Being married guarantees relatively long-term work-related stability. Since sojourners are voiceless and powerless, they do all kinds of jobs, that U.S.-born workers would not be prepared to do, in order to avoid being unemployed. Because sojourners' labor contracts are renewed on a yearly basis (BCIS, 2003c), only a submissive attitude assures their re-hiring the following year. Job security based on their marginality as sojourners translates into relative financial stability for the families left behind.

In order to attain financial stability for their families, one of the sojourners' primary goals is the accumulation of capital. Remittances become a crucial component (Glenn, 1999) of the transnational fatherhood strategy because these remittances help their families lead their everyday lives and experience social mobility in their countries of origin. Food, utilities, house payments or rent, clothing, and even school items are part of this continuous pattern of remittances. The exchange rate difference between the peso and the dollar maximizes its purchasing power. This relative financial security translates into better housing, food quality, clothing, and schooling (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ávila, 2000:288).

However, while transnational fatherhood practices compensate for the physical separation, sojourners nevertheless experience a "...loss of daily contact with family..." (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ávila, 2000:288). Work and family life are not only spatially fragmented, but they are also temporally distanced. Mothers have the burden of raising children on their own. Sojourners address the spatial-temporal separation by continuously re-shaping strategies to maintain their transnational fatherhood commitment. Although men do not typically take jobs that involve raising other people's children and thus transforming definitions of motherhood, they, too, have to cope with stigma, guilt, and criticism. The use of phone calls, letters, and photos becomes central in the reduction of the effects of physical separation, especially the emotional aspects. This strategy is important because since sojourners want to avoid the stigma of being "bad" fathers, they constantly look for different avenues to keep open channels of communication with their families (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ávila, 2000) even when this proves extremely expensive.





Transnational fatherhood re-arrangements as a socioeconomic response to the separation of the family are negotiated on a daily basis. Migration transforms assumed gendered interactions for both men and women, as they attempt to reshape their existence to maintain a transnational livelihood (Pribilsky, 2004). The main interaction between sojourners and families left behind in Mexico is carried out through phone conversations. Remittance spending and distribution, disciplining children, emotional support, and educational issues are all discussed over the phone. Some workers do so daily and others weekly. Fewer still mail letters to communicate with their families.

The social outcome of this type of family organization—split-household family—varies from one sojourner to the next. In general, this type of family organization produces “strong mother-child ties; weak father-child ties” (Ártico, 2003; Glenn, 1999). Sojourners are aware of this familial situation. As heads of their households, sojourners argue that they have the responsibility to prioritize their family needs. Often—if not always—economic needs supersede emotional needs.

It has been said that the guest workers in this study have had no previous experience of international migration except for Miguel. Switching permanent jobs in Mexico for temporary contracts in the U.S seems to be linked to the accumulation of capital; however, this paper suggests that a combination of social and economic factors drive these Mexican workers to sojourn. Whereas saving money is seen as the primary economic goal, in the social context, the sojourners’ main desire is to improve their families’ quality of life. However, during the sojourning process workers do not foresee the conflicts involved in rearranging familial life in the context of the split-household family organization.

A gap exists in the International Migration literature on guest workers and their families that have been fragmented by international migration; this paper has been an attempt to address that gap. We do not assume that the findings of this ethnography can be generalized to the general sojourner population. However, from a family studies perspective, we have found it worthwhile to study the socioeconomic and familial factors that trigger sojourner migration.

Guest Worker Systems have policy implications as well as ethical connotations. We found, in our review of the literature, that family members of sojourners are entitled to an H-4 visa. Although family





members are not allowed to work under this immigrant provision, they can at least live together. The sojourners in this study were not aware of this privilege. Although it is impossible to know whether the information was intentionally concealed, it does allow for speculation. The Split-Household model of family affects sojourners, wives and children emotionally. Although their economic security is relatively protected for seven months, the father's detachment from his family may have long-term consequences.

What is obvious is that this ethnography cannot be complete without covering the other side—the families left behind. Even though face-to-face conversations help to grasp the human side of scholarly research, the project is still incomplete if we do not cover both sides. What is the situation of the children and wives back in Mexico? Does sojourning migration alleviate some of the financial hardship of families left behind? Are children and wives included in the sojourner's decision to migrate? These are some of the questions that could be answered in an exploration of the other side. We anticipate that others may take up this endeavor. Having recognized our limitations, we hope to have provided an understanding of the structures that surround temporary migrants and their attempts at recreating their families across borders.

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