

When Women Migrate:
Children and Caring Labor in Puebla, Mexico

by

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Abstract

WHEN WOMEN MIGRATE:
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This investigation concerns children and caregivers in Santa Ursula, a town in Puebla, Mexico, from which many women have migrated to the United States in recent years. The expansion of female migration since the 1980s and children who remain behind in women's poorer nations of origin, where households, communities and governments assume their care, are salient features of global economic restructuring (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001). This study analyzes how children's circumstances change when mothers migrate, and how family, community and state representatives understand and deal with these changes. Social reproduction in a community like Santa Ursula supports not only a source of cheap immigrant labor in the global economy, but also helps produce and reproduce transnational social hierarchies among individuals, households, communities and nations.

Gendered, aged and intergenerational relations and obligations are central to care arrangements in Santa Ursula. Social reproduction is primarily women's responsibility. Although men migrate in greater numbers, female migration most greatly affects care arrangements. Expectations and possibilities for childhood, a gendered and aged household division of labor, early marriage and childbearing, residence rules and in-law relations shape

how family members understand and distribute carework when mothers migrate. Most often grandmothers are designated caregivers for children. However, the eldest, unmarried girl, typically aged twelve to eighteen years, usually shoulders the burden of caring and domestic labor. Children's reproductive responsibilities sometimes supplant educational and social activities, which is more common in poorer nations' migrant-sending communities, than in wealthier receiving nations. Female migration also affects old-age care. Providing companionship and help, grandchildren-charges are often critical to grandparents' well-being as kin networks shrink. Sometimes children cannot adequately or safely carry out domestic tasks. Nevertheless, children are usually well cared for, often with help from extended family. Rarely, children end up abandoned, in which case the state intervenes to "reintegrate" the family. Despite neoliberal restructuring, the Mexican state has expanded social spending since the mid-1990s and supports Santa Ursulan families through many programs and institutions. Given Mexico's slow economic and job growth, increased social spending inadvertently contributes to a healthier and better educated transnational workforce, including young adults who were raised by caregivers.

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Introduction

One early March morning three grandmothers were on their way back from the city market to their homes in Santa Ursula, a community in the state of Puebla in central Mexico. Santa Ursula is a township (*junta auxiliar*) in the brickmaking region of Cholula where many children today live with grandparents, or less commonly other family members, because their parents are away working in the United States. As we waited in the station for the *combi* (van) to fill with passengers, the grandmothers sat silently. One woman had with her two preschool-aged children, a boy and a girl. Soon after, another grandmother arrived with an eight-year-old girl who took a seat near the sliding door where passengers enter and exit the van. A fifth woman with a pronounced limp arrived from the market hauling a large sack fastened tightly with cord. Stepping up unsteadily into the *combi*, she struggled with her heavy bundle. The girl's legs blocked her way. "Move so the *señora* can get in," scolded the girl's grandmother. Then turning to the other women she added, "*Pinches chamacos*" (darned kids). Her complaint was light-hearted and laced with flicker of pride. The women's laughter filled the *combi* as the girl moved to another seat. "Is that your granddaughter?" one woman asked. "Yes," the girl's grandmother responded proudly, "they left me two." The woman with the bundle immediately replied, "I only have two now, but the boy finished primary school and they took him." As the *combi* wound through the narrow city streets towards the highway and on to Santa Ursula, all five women exchanged information about the grandchildren for whom they had cared while the children's parents were in the United States.

Conversations like this are common in Santa Ursula, where alternative childcare arrangements have become prevalent during the past decade, such that in any given social

situation, such as this *combi* trip, all children present might be living with or have lived with caregivers, and all adults might be or have been caregivers or parents who migrated and left children in Santa Ursula for a period. Indeed, nearly everyone in Santa Ursulan has a least one, and usually many more, immediate family members who have migrated to the United States. Although the women in the *combi* seemed not to know each other, at least not well, with few words and little explanation all the women understood that the question “Is that your granddaughter?” meant also “Are you her caregiver?” When the girl’s grandmother succinctly responded “Yes, they left me two,” she was explaining, “Yes. This is my granddaughter. She and her sibling live with me. And they—my child and his or her spouse—left them in my care, because they went to work in the United States.” The other woman’s quick and concise response “I only have two now” showed that she immediately understood the woman’s answer. Moreover, she also was caring for two grandchildren, and had previously cared for more. “The boy finished primary school and they took him” were words I repeatedly heard from Santa Ursulan grandparents. Parents “taking children” or “sending for them” when they completed primary school in Santa Ursula had become an increasingly common practice that grandparents usually accepted, albeit with sadness. For the majority of grandparents wanted their grandchildren to live with them, were proud to be their caregivers, but also understood that their charges would eventually reunite with their parents, either in Santa Ursula or in the US.

Since the early 1980s migration from Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe and Asia to wealthy nations has included an unprecedented number of women. As female migration has expanded, so has the number of children left in the care of other family members in women’s communities of origin. When mothers migrate without their children, households, communities and institutions in the poorer nations from which they come assume the responsibilities of caring

for their children. This study concerns children and caregivers in Santa Ursula (a pseudonym), a community from which numbers of men and women, many of whom are parents, have migrated to the United States since the late 1990s. Fathers almost always migrate from Santa Ursula prior to or along with mothers. Yet, because caring labor is principally women's work, the departure of women most greatly impacts care arrangements. Through an in-depth community study focusing on the socio-cultural, economic and institutional context of such families, my research investigates how caring labor is redistributed when mothers migrate. I analyze how the conditions of children change when mothers leave and how family, community members, and representatives of relevant state institutions understand and deal with these changes.

Mexico and the United States have a long history of interconnectedness, economically and politically, as well as through migration. Yet, over the past three decades, economic and political restructuring, deepening economic inequalities within and across these nations, and the maturation of migrant networks have led to a dramatic increase in both scale and scope of Mexican migration to the United States (Cornelius 1991; Durand, et al. 1999; Passel and Cohn 2009). Since 1970 the number of Mexican immigrants in the US has increased seventeen-fold (PEW 2009). Despite the neoliberal promise of economic prosperity, since the implementation of NAFTA in 1994 social inequality in Mexico has deepened (Audley et al. 2003). Mexico ranks among the nations with the highest number of billionaires in the world. Yet, it is an upper middle-income country that had a national poverty rate of 47.4 percent in 2008 (World Bank 2011).¹ Children account for about half of the nation's poor (OECD 2006). Although Mexicans are more likely to have lower incomes in the US than other immigrants or native-born workers,

¹ The World Bank classifies national economies as low income, middle income (subdivided into lower middle and upper middle), or high income, based on gross national income (GNI) per capita, previously referred to as gross national product (GNP).

the considerable difference in wages between the two nations makes migration, despite its perils and hardships, economically attractive for many parents trying to raise children in Mexican communities in which employment and earnings have declined in recent years. Today, approximately one-in-ten of all people born in Mexico lives in the United States, and Mexicans constitute a third of all foreign-born residents, the largest U.S. immigrant group by far (Passel and Cohn 2011). The state of Puebla, where 62.7 percent of the working population earned less than \$8 US dollars per day in 2003 (INEGI), has in recent years become a significant source of Mexican migration (Smith 2006; Weeks et. al 2009), and place where parents leave children in the care of other family members. Puebla is third in inequality—based on income, health and education—of Mexico’s thirty-one states and the federal district (Mexico City) (UNDP 2008). Moreover, San Pedro Cholula, the municipality where I conducted research, ranks fourth for income inequality out of Mexico’s 2,438 municipalities (UNDP 2008).²

Santa Ursula forms part of the Cholula brickmaking region in the state of Puebla and is one of thirteen townships (*juntas auxiliares*) that, in addition to the municipal capital city, make up the municipality of San Pedro Cholula. Since the late 1990s, US-bound migration from the Cholulas, particularly the outlying townships, has intensified dramatically. Until recently, most Santa Ursulan households had an active brick kiln in the large open patio adjacent to their house, where women, men and children would work together to make thousands of bricks each month. The decline in Mexico’s construction industry—spurred by economic crisis—and the increased preference for cheaper manufactured brick and cinderblock, resulted in a drop in demand for handmade brick in regional markets and thus rapid expansion of migration to the United States. Despite the arduousness of brickmaking, many Santa Ursulans remember wistfully a time when

² The municipality of San Andrés Cholula, which borders San Pedro, ranks number one in income inequality in Mexico (UNDP 2008).

the air was thick with smoke bellowing from active kilns and how the gentle hiss of baking bricks would lull them to sleep at night. Today, many abandoned, weed-covered kilns stand in the shadows of recently-built, ornate two-story houses, monuments to newly acquired migrant dollars, tastes for urban and US architecture and a desire to leave an inheritance for their children. As Santa Ursula's young women have increasingly joined what began as a predominantly male migration stream, the number of children left, at least for a period, in the care of other family members has grown. In 2006 approximately 30 percent of primary school students were in the care of grandparents, an aunt or an older sister, and 14 percent lived with their mothers while their fathers were in the US.

Caring Labor in the Global Economy

Globalization theory with its focus on flows, connections and “movement—of people, commodities, capital, technology, images, and ideas” (Rothstein 2007:7) has become a central analytical framework in anthropology (Edelman and Haugerud 2005). As such, much of contemporary anthropological work analyzes connections between local communities and global processes (Susser 2009, 1996). Analysts of the new economy describe the emergence of a system based on global financial markets, increasingly flexible labor processes, rapid technological development, the reorganization of manufacturing and the expansion of service industries (Castells 1996; Harvey 1989; Sassen 1991). Immigrant labor is central to these processes. Sassen (1991), for example, argues that the proliferation of high-paid white collar jobs in global cities, such as New York, has created a demand for low-wage service workers, met largely by immigrants, who cater to the needs of this high paid cohort.

Women's labor is also a significant component of social transformations of late capitalism. Young women make up a great portion of the flexible and low-paid industrial

workforce, particularly in the textile and electronic industries, of transnational corporations who have set up plants in Mexico and other developing nations (Eisenstein 2005; Fernandez Kelly 1983; Nash 2005). The expansion of the service sector has also resulted in rapid growth in women's employment. In the United States "From 1970 to 2000, of the 53 million new jobs created, 60% went to women. This shift reflected 'both the increase in women's labor force participation and the disproportionate increase in service industries in occupations where significant numbers of women [were] employed' (Kuhn and Bluestone, 1987,9)" (Eisenstein 2005:490). Immigrant women who work in factories, restaurants, and other service jobs, including domestic work, in the United States form a significant part of these trends.

More broadly, women's reproductive labor, both paid and unpaid, has important implications in global development processes (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; Nash 2005).

Nash argues

Women's everyday work in reproducing society was invisible until recent decades, when feminist scholars and activists began to explore women's contribution to society and the survival of the human species. Women's mediating positions linking families to communities, and communities to larger political, economic, and social circuits, become crucial to survival where global development processes have undermined social reproduction (Nash 2005:145).

Rothstein emphasizes the "diversity of unevenness" within the contemporary globalized world and argues that "Anthropology's attention to detail and insider views provides an important basis on which to look at global flows without assuming or projecting a single hegemonic pattern" (2007:12). Rothstein found that in San Cosme, a Mexican community where she conducted ethnographic research over three decades, "The flow of capital influences [San Cosmeros'] movements, but so too do social relations that derive from a different noncapitalist, subsistence imaginary. That noncapitalist imaginary sees family reproduction as more important than capitalist profit" (2007:11). Analyzing childhood and social reproduction in a migrant sending

community in Mexico, Magazine and Ramírez Sanchez argue that “The latest phase of globalization shapes and is shaped by local versions of social reproduction and intergenerational relations” (2005:70). The aim of my study is to analyze the local processes of social reproduction—in this case women and children’s everyday caring and reproductive work in a migrant sending community—that make possible the migration of mothers, who have become a significant part of contemporary transnational movement in the global economy. The migration of women has a substantial impact on the way that households and caring labor are organized in women’s communities of origin, and has broad implications for the how the costs of social reproduction are distributed in the global economy.

During the past fifteen years two interrelated bodies of literature have developed that analyze the reorganization of households and caring labor in the global economy: 1) the globalization of paid domestic work and 2) transnational families. Because many migrant women who work as domestics leave children in the care of family members in their communities of origin, several studies of domestic workers have also analyzed dynamics of mothering from afar (Colen 1995; Erel 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). Together, studies of paid domestic work and transnational families have offered a number of insights into the dynamics of carework, families, households, gender and social stratification in the global economy.

Because women of color, poor women and migrant women have long performed paid domestic work throughout the world, social stratification is central to analyses about paid household work (Bunster and Chaney 1985; Chaney and Castro 1989; Chang 2000; Gill 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2002; Mattingly 2001; Momsen 1999; Sanjek and Colen 1990). Analyzing issues such as working conditions, social status and relationships between employees and

employers, and the stigmatization and invisibility of domestic workers, these studies emphasize the dynamics of intersecting hierarchies of power. Intersectional paradigms, building on Marxist feminist and critical race theory, explain social stratification as a system of penalty and privilege based on factors such as race, gender, sexual orientation, class and place in the global economy (Collins 2000).

Domestic work differs from other low-wage service or manufacturing jobs that immigrant women hold. Most, if not all, societies regard paid domestic labor as low-status work, in part because many domestic tasks, including cleaning, cooking, caring for children or other dependents, are unremunerated and therefore not classified as “work.” Consequently, those who form the lowest rungs of the social hierarchy in a given society constitute the pool of laborers from which the majority of domestic workers are drawn. In turn, the association of such tasks with those of low social status, only serves to further diminish the value assigned to this kind of work (Sanjek and Colen 1990). In an industry in which workers are usually employed informally and isolated from each other while realizing a job that is not regarded as “real work,” household workers often lack basic rights and protections as workers. Sanjek and Colen (1990) argue that the organization of paid household work reinforces and produces inequalities in society. Households that rely on domestic workers tend to have more power, wealth and status than the households from which workers are recruited. Thus, paid domestic work reinforces relations of power and inequality as differences in class, race or ethnicity distinguish the employers’ household from that of the employees. This imbalance in power is compounded by the fact that the employer-employee relationship is itself unequal. In addition, the very labor of the household worker helps to set apart the two households allowing the employing household “to allocate their time and energies in other ways—to more remunerative or prestigious

productive work, leisure, or investment in social relations. The essential point is that the workers' labor is utilized to maintain and advance the position of members of the employer household" (Sanjek and Colen 1990:3).

Social stratification is also central to analyses of how individuals and groups experience reproduction (Baer, et. al. 2004; Colen 1995; Duffy 2005, 2007; Glenn et. al. 1994; Ginsburg and Rapp 1995; Laslett and Brenner 1989; Susser 1991). Analyses of the contrasting reproductive experiences of household workers and their employers have contributed significantly to these debates. The concept of stratified reproduction that Colen (1995) puts forth in her analysis of West Indian child care workers and their employers in New York has been influential to analyses of the reconfiguration of caring labor in the global economy. Colen explains stratified reproduction as the way in which "physical and social reproductive tasks are accomplished differentially according to inequalities that are based on hierarchies of class, race, ethnicity, gender, place in a global economy, and migration status and that are structured by social, economic, and political forces" (Colen 1995:78). She argues that although both paid child care workers and employers value parenthood, want the best for their children and face the challenge of securing childcare in a context of "continued privatized, female responsibility for reproduction," they experience it differently (Colen 1995:98). Employers are able to pay for private care, because of the availability of immigrant women who work for low-wages as nannies. In contrast, West Indian women have to migrate in order to find adequate work to pay for the cost of raising their own children and to do so are forced to live apart from their children who remain in their country of origin.

Other scholars refer to this phenomenon as an emerging international division of caring labor or social reproduction (Mattingly 2001; Parreñas 2000; Truong 1996). Building on

analyses of the two-tiered racialized division of reproductive labor, Parreñas (2000) argues that Filipina women who migrate abroad to work as domestics form part of a three-tiered international division of reproductive labor that includes paid domestic workers in the Philippines who take care of the children and homes of Filipinas who migrate. Because international migration requires capital, Filipina women who are too poor to migrate make up the third-tier of reproductive labor. In addition, domestics in the Philippines earn considerably lower wages than Filipina women who work abroad. Therefore, the poverty and low-wages of such women support the migration of Filipina women who support middle-class women and households in receiving nations.

Several scholars of paid domestic work have also theorized that globalization is creating new forms of inequalities by redirecting the reproductive labor of women not only from working-class households to middle and upper-class households, but also from poorer nations to wealthier nations. Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001), for example, points out that “Women who are performing other people’s private reproductive work are women who were themselves socially reproduced in other societies. The costs of their own social reproduction—everything that it took to raise them from infants to working adults—were shouldered by families, governments, and communities” in their home nations (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001:24). In addition, many migrant workers return to their nations of origin, where families, communities and governments often carry the costs associated with their eventual old age and retirement.

Similarly, Chang (2000) argues that domestic workers’ labor “makes possible the maintenance and reproduction of the American labor force at virtually no cost to the US government” (Chang 2000:13). But immigrant women have helped bolster the US economy not only through their contributions to the maintenance of the labor force, but also through their

engagement in other parts of the expanding service sector in jobs that form “part of the infrastructure needed to operate the global economic system—be it manufacturing, import-export trade, or international finance (Chang 2000:xi). The fact that many migrant women, as well as men, transfer the costs and labor to families, communities and government in home nations, results in what Erel in her study of Turkish women in Germany, calls the outsourcing of reproductive labor to Turkey (2002:130). Immigration and social policies that restrict the reproduction of the families of migrants in receiving nations, such as the US, play an important role in the dynamics of the “outsourcing of reproductive labor” (Chang 2000; Kearney 1991; Mattingly 1999, 2001; Wilson 2000). Moreover, the “bargain” of immigrant labor, which often relies on the outsourcing of social reproduction, acts as a subsidy to US consumers, workers and living standards.

While scholars of transnational families and paid domestic work recognize the crucial role of state policies and institutions in social and economic processes of globalization, there is little documentation of how social policies and institutions function in migrant sending communities. Despite restructuring of social policy towards decentralization and targeting and reductions in social spending following economic crises, the Mexican government has steadily increased social spending since the mid-1990s and has many institutions and programs that support the reproduction of Mexican families. This study examines the structure of the Mexican welfare state, and how it functions in Santa Ursula and in relation to municipal, state and federal entities. In addition, I consider state support for senior citizens in relation to shrinking kin networks, as well as the role of the DIF (*Desarrollo Integral de la Familia*), Mexico’s principal public institution that provides social assistance, in the lives of children who end up abandoned when their parents migrate. Scholars of transnational families, as well as anthropologists, have

given little attention to the issue of child abandonment for several reasons, including the fact that child maltreatment and abandonment are uncommon (Korbin 1987a).

Researchers of transnational families have examined the roles and relationships of family members as they live their lives across borders (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002; Hirsch 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Mummert 1997; Poggio and Woo 2000). Several studies examine experiences from the point of view of mothers living abroad in Europe and the United States. Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997), for example, explore the meanings of motherhood among Mexican and Central American women who work as domestics in Los Angeles, California. Similar to studies of domestic work mentioned above, the authors situate their argument within the framework of differential experiences of motherhood based on factors such as race, class and culture, pointing out how the structure of domestic work, particularly live-in positions, encourages the separation of mothers and children. They show how in this context women find new ways to conceive of mothering, which includes economic ties through remittances as well as emotional bonds through letter writing, gifts, and phone calls.

More recent studies include research on children and caregivers in migrants' nations of origin. Such studies have contributed to our understanding of the emotional worlds and relationships among members of transnational families. For example, Moran-Taylor (2008), based on research in a Guatemalan community, examines social relationships among caregivers in Guatemala with children's parents in the United States, as well as caregiver-children relationships. In addition, she considers the emotional and educational consequences of parental migration on children. Dreby (2010) examines relationships among parents and children in Mexican transnational families. She finds that while transnational family arrangements involve hardship and emotional strain, the parent-child bond in most cases endures. In addition,

caregivers, rather than supplanting parents, usually play a role in maintaining parent-child bonds. Schmalzbauer's (2004) work focuses on the economic role of transmigrants in the United States, and the reproductive role of women who care for children in Honduras. Schmalzbauer (2004) found that "motherwork" of transmigrants in the US includes sending remittances not only for children but also for other family members in need. In addition, "motherwork" of other-mothers often includes not only caring for charges, but also helping community members in need, such as providing food for poorer community members who have been "abandoned" by their family members in the US.

Gendered analyses are central to studies of transnational families. Migration of women can challenge gender roles and the household division of labor, particularly among family members who reside in receiving nations (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Malkin 1997; Mummert 1994, 1999). Yet, contradicting notions and practices of gender often exist within a given community (Smith 2006), and some scholars argue that gender norms persist more than they change when caring labor is reorganized due to migration of mothers (Dreby 2010; Parreñas 2005). Parreñas (2005) shows that the ways in which migrants and their family members adapt to transnational migration "enforce gender boundaries. Moreover, the integration of transnational families into the Philippine public sphere imposes a pressure to uphold gender norms via the public sphere's rejection and society's disapproval of this household structure (2005:6)." Likewise, Parreñas's framework of a three-tiered division of reproductive labor, draws attention to the way that "with the feminization of wage labor, global capitalism is forging the creation of links among distinct systems of gender inequality" and that "the migration of women connects systems of gender inequality in both sending and receiving nations to global capitalism" (2000:569). Indeed, a gendered and aged division of household labor and related norms, such as

post-marital residence rules, are central to how Santa Ursulan families care for their dependents in the context of transnational migration.

The departure of women, who are principally responsible for caring labor, affects not only forms of raising and caring for children, but also support systems for the aging generation in Santa Ursula. By examining how carework is redistributed when the middle generation is away from families and communities of origin, this study examines how care for aging and ill family members relates to care for children. The majority of studies of transnational families that consider the relationships among migrants and dependents who need care, have focused primarily on boundaries and connections between parents and their children (Dreby 2010; Erel 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Moran-Taylor 2008; Parreñas 2001a, 2005, 2008; Schmalzbauer 2004). Scholars have given less attention to the relationship of adult children and their spouses to aging and ill parents. Lamb's *Aging and the Indian Diaspora* (2009), which examines care arrangements for elderly urban, Hindu upper-caste, middle-class men and women of Kolkata (Calcutta), is a notable exception.

The adult children of most of the women and men in Lamb's study are highly trained professionals who have left Kolkata to work elsewhere, either abroad or in other cities in India. Lamb shows how older men and women in Kolkata have shifted their expectations and strategies for old age, which included care by a son and his wife who would remain in the parental house in Kolkata. In contrast to Santa Ursulans, the men and women in Lamb's study live principally in old-age homes for the middle class or in their own homes with paid domestic workers who aid them. In addition, some older men and women have joined the households of married adult children who live abroad. Lamb found that older men and women living with their adult children who had migrated to California also had to adjust their expectations to fit the lives of

their adult children who spend many hours out of the house working and cannot give them the attention they had expected. This adjustment has included accessing public social programs, such as Medicare.

Social scientists have tended to treat the issues of elder care and child care as separate domains of analysis. A notable exception to this trend is an edited volume by Cole and Durham (2007) that brings together seven case studies that examine how age and intergenerational relationships among children, youth, adults and elders are central to processes of social reproduction in the context of economic globalization and state restructuring in diverse regions of the world, including Botswana, Madagascar, Western Europe, China, India and Mexico. The editors argue that “Age mediates relationships in the family and household, social cohorts across space, and history and change. In the course of these mediations, age links world-historical economic and social change with the intimate spaces of caring and obligation within the family” (2007:2). In addition, they point out that age is relational. For example, one is a child in relation to parents, one is a youth in relation to educational expectations, and one is an adult or an elder in relation to labor and retirement expectations. My research shows how gendered and aged relationships shape the way caring labor is usually distributed among family and household members in Santa Ursula, and subsequently redistributed when women migrate. In addition, I consider intergenerational relations and expectations for childhood, youth and adulthood in order to examine the role of children and youth in domestic and caring labor.

Children, especially older girls, play an important role in carrying out domestic chores and carework in households. When mothers migrate, the burden of reproductive labor often increases considerably for older, unmarried daughters. Although anthropologists have a long history of including descriptions of childhood and child rearing practices in their ethnographic

accounts, ethnographers have conducted little systematic research on the role of children in caretaking or on children and childhood in general (Gottlieb 2000; Hecht 1998; Helleiner 1999; Hirschfield 2002; Stephens 1998). Nevertheless, cross-cultural data suggests that sibling caretaking is common throughout the world (Weiner and Gallimore 1977). Weiner and Gallimore (1977) reviewed ethnographies and other written texts, including biographies, in order to analyze the incidence of child or sibling caretaking. They conclude, “Though child caretaking is widespread cross-culturally, little is known of its ethnographic incidence. Relevant material is scattered through many ethnographic studies and is generally reported in a manner that makes comparative analysis difficult” (1977:170). For example, Margaret Mead (1961) described how sibling caretakers learned to use verbal commands to keep their charges quiet and still so that mothers would not need to discipline them. Since the publication of Weiner and Gallimore’s article in 1977 anthropologists have given little systematic attention to the topic of child caretaking.

Nevertheless, as in the ethnographic sources that Weiner and Gallimore analyze, references to sibling caretaking and children’s participation in domestic work are “scattered through” accounts of transnational families and paid domestic workers. Contemporary studies of children of domestic workers and transnational families suggest that children play a role, sometimes substantial, in caring and domestic labor in their homes while their mothers are working. For example, Le Roux (2000), whose research focuses on domestic workers in South Africa, describes that women who had children living on their own were particularly concerned about their children’s well-being. “They had to become independent at an early age and perform potentially dangerous tasks, such as housekeeping, cooking and laundry” (2000:189). Erel (2002), who conducted interviews with the daughters of Turkish women in Germany, also found

that some daughters discussed their increased role in domestic work or in caretaking for younger siblings. In one case, a five-year-old girl described being responsible for a great deal of housecleaning in her very strict grandmother's house. Likewise, Parreñas's research with the children of migrant parents revealed that many eldest daughters take on a great deal of domestic responsibilities when their mothers migrate. Some daughters resent the extra burden, while others, who have the help of paid domestic workers or other family members tend not to (2005).

Romero's work on the children of domestic workers in the United States offers an analysis of the way that workers' children fit into hierarchies of power that constitute relations of paid domestic work. By asking "Who Takes Care of the Maid's Children?" Romero(1997) explores the differential experiences of children in workers' and employers' families. She found that the children of domestic workers frequently performed household work. Not only did they carry out tasks at home, in part because their mothers were occupied with their paid jobs, but they sometimes helped their mothers with their jobs, for example by playing with the employer's children or ironing for the employer's family. Romero argues that because working-class mothers (domestic workers) replace the labor of mothers in middle- and upper-class families, the children in middle- and upper-class households had fewer domestic responsibilities and were therefore able to spend their time on educational and social activities. Even in cases in which middle-class households depend on children to help with household chores, they are not likely to assign children duties "*at the expense of school or other education and sports activities*" (166). Romero's theoretical framework is important for understanding the experiences of children in transnational families, whether or not their parents work as domestics, as the following Chapters demonstrate.

Research Setting

Santa Ursula is located in the Cholula brick-making region of the state of Puebla in central Mexico. Cholula consists of three municipalities: San Pedro Cholula, San Andrés Cholula and the smaller and more rural municipality of Santa Isabel Cholula.³ The urban areas of San Pedro and San Andrés make up the city of Cholula Rivadavia⁴ (usually referred to simply as Cholula), the oldest inhabited city in Mesoamerica (Kubler 1969; Olivera 1976). Cholula was an important pre-Columbian commercial and religious center, and the contemporary barrios and major avenues of Cholula follow the layout of the ancient city, which lies below the surface.⁵ Like many migrant-sending communities in Puebla and the neighboring state of Tlaxcala, Cholula, particularly its rural townships, was predominantly Nahuatl-speaking at the beginning of the twentieth century, and today is primarily Mestizo and Spanish-speaking.⁶ Today Cholula forms part of the Puebla City metropolitan area, and in recent years the open fields that once separated the two cities, have given way to commercial establishments and housing developments.

Bienvenidos a la Ciudad Sagrada (Welcome to the Sacred City) reads a large sign marking the city limits of San Pedro on the highway from Puebla. Visible from the highway is a pre-Columbian pyramid, one of the largest in volume in the world, located in San Andrés Cholula on the edge of San Pedro. Today, grass covers much of the pyramid's base, creating the appearance of a large hill, on which sits the Catholic church of Remedios. The partially excavated pyramid, its underground tunnels, and numerous Catholic churches built on top of pre-

³ Mexico is divided into thirty states and each state is divided into municipalities. Puebla has 217 municipalities.

⁴ The name Rivadavia is in honor of the Argentine Bernardino de Rivadavia as a political cultural exchange with the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina, which named one of its principal avenues after Benito Juárez. (Encyclopedia of the Municipalities of Mexico).

⁵ See Olivera, "The Barrios of San Andres Cholula" (1976).

⁶ According to the 2010 Population census, less than 1 percent of residents in the municipality of San Pedro Cholula, and 10.4 percent in the municipality of San Andrés Cholula reported understanding an indigenous language (INEGI 2010).

Columbian temples, draw tourists to Cholula.⁷ The archaeological site, protected by the *Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia* (INAH), extends beyond the visible pyramid to an extensive base which contains fields of cultivated flowers, a dirt running track, two soccer fields and a skateboarding area.⁸ Local *deportistas* (athletes) use the pyramid to workout, jogging up and down its steep steps, as do some soon-to-be migrants seeking to prepare themselves for the arduous journey across the US border. Despite its historic importance and prominence nationally and internationally, the pyramid is disconnected in many ways from Santa Ursula. Don Rigoberto, for example, a return-migrant and mayor of Santa Ursula (2005-2007), described to me his surprise when his boss in Indiana told him that the pyramid in a photograph hanging in his livingroom was from Cholula. With the exception of small number of students who have visited the archaeological site on class trips, most Santa Ursulans have never been to the pyramid, and only go to Cholula to run errands or shop in the market. Moreover, tourism-based employment from the archaeological site and colonial center does not benefit Santa Ursulans.

During the 1960s and 1970s Cholula was the subject of a series of INAH-sponsored studies known as “The Cholula Project.” The Cholula Project included historical, archaeological, ethnographic, ecological and geological research, and was far-reaching in its goals. One aim was to contribute to the development of tourism in the region, and to this end the INAH created a museum and illustrated guides of the archaeological site. A primary goal of the project’s ethnographic component was to generate socio-economic and cultural data that would be useful for government political-administrative projects (Marquina 1970). These studies

⁷ In late 2006 the municipal government initiated a project to improve Cholula’s profile as a tourist destination by restoring streets and storefronts in the colonial center. As part of this effort, new higher end bed and breakfasts and hotels emerged. Previously there were few hotels for tourists. In the process of repaving and improving the drainage system, workers uncovered Pre-Columbian temples and artifacts, which the federal government’s INAH assessed before covering over again to continue repaving. During the period of my fieldwork local newspapers reported several archaeological finds uncovered during other construction projects.

⁸ There is a private psychiatric home on the base of the pyramid that was constructed before INAH declared this land protected.

examined communications, transportation, economic activity (Castillo Rella 1970), religious practices (Olivera de V. 1970), “Indo-colonial structures” and socio-cultural processes of urbanization (Nolasco Armas 1970) in Cholula’s then-contemporary barrios and pueblos.⁹ Based on research from the Cholula Project, Bonfil Batalla’s *Cholula: La Ciudad Sagrada en la Era Industrial* (1973) examined how Cholulans maintained traditional ways of life while participating in the industrial, capitalist economy and modern, urban culture. The central themes of his work included traditional and agricultural organization in the barrios, industrial economy, commerce, religious festivals, education system and public administration. His principal objective was to show the persistence of a series of traditional institutions that support an active ceremonial life and that require a pattern of ritual spending in a local, non-indigenous society.

Catholicism and the fiesta-cargo system continue to play a principal role in religious, social and political life in contemporary Cholula, and the religious calendar and fiestas greatly dictate the activities of caregivers and children in Santa Ursula. Ninety-seven percent of Santa Ursulans are Catholic (INEGI 2000). Catholics also make up 88 percent of the population in the municipality of San Pedro Cholula and the state of Puebla (INEGI 2010). Because of its prevalence across Mesoamerica and the Andes, the cargo system, which has declined and disappeared in many communities (in part due to the spread of Protestantism), was a much debated subject of anthropological inquiry from the 1950s through 1980s (Carrasco 1961; Chance and Taylor 1985; Harris 1964; Nash 1958; Wolf 1955, 1957, 1986). While analysts differ in their theories about the system’s origins and function, most describe the system, despite local variations, as a hierarchy of offices that make up a community’s civil and religious administration. All men in the community are expected to participate in and ascend the

⁹ Mercedes Olivera conducted ethnographic research about religion and the fiesta-cargo system in several communities in Cholula, including Santa Ursula, during the late 1960s through the 1980s.

hierarchy of positions (Chance and Taylor 1985:1). Although holding such cargos is burdensome, economically and otherwise, men usually participate in the system out of a sense of duty to the community as well as the prestige which it brings. As we shall see, women, and therefore caregivers, are also important participants in the system (D'Aubeterre 2005; Mathews 1985; Stephen 2005), and the cargo systems relates to how social policy, through the DIF, is implemented.

Today Santa Ursula is well connected with the city of Cholula. Located approximately three miles from the municipal seat, Santa Ursula is a twenty-five minute *combi* ride to the city. Santa Ursula's *combi* service, the principal form of transportation, began in 2002. Travel to and from Santa Ursula further improved when the municipality paved the highway near Santa Ursula's main entrance in 2004. Previously, Santa Ursulans relied on privately-owned bus service from a neighboring community that passed through Santa Ursula every hour in the morning and every two hours until six in the evening. Today, fourteen *combis*, privately-owned and operated by Santa Ursulans, run punctually between Santa Ursula and Cholula every twenty to twenty-five minutes until nine at night. *Combis* provide more frequent service on Cholula's market-days, which are Wednesday and Sunday, and during special occasions, like Santa Ursula's patron saint's day festival. Older Santa Ursulans frequently spoke to me about transportation, the long walks of their day, and how trucks, roads and bus service had impacted, for the better, their productive and reproductive activities.

Leaving Cholula near the market, the *combi* drives along the highway, which is lined with businesses, churches and a few roads that lead into neighboring townships. *Ladrilleras* (brickmakers), visible from the highway, become more concentrated as the *combi* moves away from the city. Before reaching Santa Ursula, the *combi* winds through unpaved roads of the

neighboring, brickmaking-town of San Felipe. The trip is dusty, particularly during the dry season, when dirt makes its way in even through closed windows. Entering Santa Ursula is a recently paved road, flanked by large, privately-owned, recessed parcels of land from which Santa Ursulans removed soil for brickmaking. During the harvest season, corn crops, grown with fertilizers and pesticides, fill many of the trenches. The main road leads to Santa Ursula's town center, where the mayor's office, church and primary school are located. The *combi* then laces through unpaved streets dropping off passengers along the way. Children walking to or from school often fill the streets. Occasionally, religious processions pass through the town center, and older women on their way to a special mass, such as a saint's day or funeral, carry bundles of flowers. At any given moment, one is likely to see women and young children returning home from a fiesta with a plastic bucket full of *mole*, or else en route to help prepare a meal for a fiesta with a plastic woven basket in hand. There are some active *ladrilleras*, where men, women and children work together making bricks, and many inactive kilns. Occasionally, a large truck passes through the streets carrying bricks, clay or other raw materials needed for brick-production, and although unusual, every so often, a boy or man might ride by on a tractor or a horse. There are always dogs.

Until the recent spike in US-bound migration, almost all Santa Ursulans were born and raised in the community. Today social life continues to revolve largely around extended networks of kin and *compadrazgo*, and men, women and children primarily conduct their daily activities—working, going to school, taking care of family and home, participating in ritual activities—in town. A small number of students attend private junior high and high schools in Cholula, and a handful of young adults study at universities in the city of Puebla. With the exception of one primary school teacher who moved to Santa Ursula, teachers live elsewhere and

travel each day into Santa Ursula. In addition, women, sometimes with children, go weekly to Cholula to shop in the market. Cholulans tend to describe Santa Ursula as a closed community, distrustful of outsiders. Santa Ursulans tend to describe their community as tightly-knit, and more united than other Cholulan communities, on account of the fact that nearly all Santa Ursulans are Catholic. Even scholars have described Santa Ursula as the most traditional or conservative of Cholula's communities. However, Santa Ursula has the highest rates of US-bound migration in Cholula, and is in this way the community most involved in the global economy. In addition, despite some variation among townships, Santa Ursula shares with other migrant-sending communities in Cholula, features of social life, including forms of gender relations, inheritance, residence, a household division of labor and fiesta-cargo system, that shape the way families raise and care for children.

Migration and Children Left Behind in Santa Ursula

Although migration from Cholula, particularly the townships located furthest from Cholula's urban center, is widespread, there is little precise data on the incidence of migration from the region. According to an article in the local newspaper *Más Noticias de Cholula*, in 2006 at least 25 percent of the population in the rural townships had migrated to the US or cities in Mexico (Flores 2005). This figure is an estimate based on a survey conducted by the Municipal Councilor of Migration (*Regidor de Migración*). However, during an interview, the Councilor explained that the results of such surveys were not accurate, "The problem is that these censuses are not very good, people do not want to give information and afterwards, they do not tell us that they are going. They do not support the project." Santa Ursula's mayor, who spoke to me about the shortcomings of the migration census, estimated that during the years 2005-2006, when Santa Ursula had a population of approximately 3,000 (INEGI 2005), each

month a group of thirty men, women and children, some of whom were return migrants, left Santa Ursula for the United States with one of Santa Ursula's *polleros*.¹⁰ According to the mayor, each month five to ten and sometimes as many as fifteen Santa Ursulans migrated to the United States for the first time. The mayor based his estimate of first-time migrants on the number of people who came to his office each month to obtain an identification card indicating that they were from Santa Ursula.¹¹

With few exceptions, Santa Ursulans, like the majority of Mexican immigrants, lack work authorization or US residency and therefore cross the border by land. In fact, 80 to 85 percent of Mexicans who have resided in the US for less than a decade are undocumented immigrants (Passel and Cohn 2009:iii). Each month a group of Santa Ursulans leave the community with one of Santa Ursula's two *polleros*. As it has become increasingly common for parents to send for or bring children to the US, migrant groups also include children. Most children travel with a parent or another trusted family or community member. It is uncommon for Santa Ursulan children to migrate alone, an issue which has led to government-run shelters in border cities for migrant children. US-born children who reside in Santa Ursula, usually travel

¹⁰ Santa Ursula *polleros* worked taking migrants through Mexico to the US border. They also worked with groups of migrants from neighboring communities.

¹¹ The secretary described the identification card and its purpose this way: "It is a simple ID that indicates that the person is from this community. His address and a photograph with a seal, in which the president establishes that this person is from this community. They get an identification card, just in case the *migra* stops them." According to the secretary, very few people requested this identification card for reasons other than migration to the United States. "Generally we ask, 'What is the destination of the credential?', especially when it is a child, because generally it is the school that needs to give the credential to the child. In the preschool and primary school they do not issue identification cards, but in secondary school they do. So if the school doesn't give it to them, they request it through us. And we ask, 'Where are you going?' and they say 'Es que ya se van' (It's that they are going to leave). Adults also come to get their identification. We've had cases in which an entire family will come. Five family members will come, the father is already there, the wife comes, for three credentials for her children, and hers, because they are going." Although other national identification cards (the CURP or IFE) would serve this same purpose, the community identification card was easier and quicker to obtain. In 2011 the Calderón administration began issuing a national biometric identity card that includes a facial photograph, all ten fingerprints and an iris scan for children seventeen and younger. The government plans to require biometric cards and establish a biometric database for all Mexicans and foreigners residing in Mexico.

back to the US by airplane. Most Santa Ursulans returning from the US also travel by air. Since the US economic downturn and the tightening of border control, the number of new arrivals from Mexico has declined (Passel and Cohn 2009). However, it appears that heightened border enforcement has also resulted in an increase in Mexican migrants who stay in the US, rather than returning to Mexico for home visits. As we shall see, return migration to Santa Ursula, which has implications for care arrangements, was somewhat common during the period in which I conducted fieldwork. Although I do not have exact data on the impact of the US recession or heightened border enforcement on migration or childcare arrangements in Santa Ursula since 2007, census data suggests that migration from the community continued, albeit at somewhat slower rates, through the second half of the decade (INEGI 2000, 2010).

Santa Ursula's total population declined from 3,618 to 3,043 between 2000 and 2005, and by 2010 was at 2,637. This represents a loss of 27 percent of the total population over ten years, 16 percent (575) during the first half of the decade and 13 percent (406) of the remaining population during the second half (INEGI 2000, 2010). In addition, by 2010 Santa Ursula lost almost half (48 percent) of the approximately 2,800 community members who were five to forty-nine years of age in 2000. This number, which includes deaths (which are generally low for this age bracket) and internal migration (which is uncommon among Santa Ursulans), reflects the scope of US-bound migration from the community, and is generally consistent with the mayor's estimate that anywhere between sixty to one hundred or more Santa Ursulans were leaving the community per year between 2005-2006. The census numbers also reveal an increase in the numbers and percentage of Santa Ursulans aged sixty and older from 199 (5.5 percent of total population) in 2000 to 290 (11 percent of total population) in 2010. More dramatic perhaps is the fact that the percentage of the population under age twelve dropped from 46 percent in 2000

to 24 percent in 2010. These numbers have implications for old-age care in Santa Ursula, an issue that I analyze in Chapters Six and Seven, and for schools, considering that the population aged five to eleven declined from 1,051 to 418 between 2000 and 2010.

As the frequency of migration varies from town to town in Cholula, so does the frequency of children living with caregivers due to parental migration. The *juntas auxiliares* (townships) located furthest from the municipal seat have the highest rates of female migration, and thus the highest rates of children living with caregivers. According to Municipal Government officials, Santa Ursula is the township with the highest rate of US-bound migration, the greatest incidence of female migration and thus the greatest number of children who stay behind when mothers migrate. According to a survey of Santa Ursula's morning primary school teachers conducted in March 2006, about one-third (145) of the 436 students included in the survey were living with caregivers, because their parents were in the United States.¹² Only nine of the 145 children had single mothers, which reflects the fact that most Santa Ursulan mothers are married (or living in free-unions) and migrate with or after their husbands, and that separation and divorce rates were low in Santa Ursula. Another 16 percent (69) of children were living only with their mothers, because their fathers had migrated to the United States. Approximately half of the children surveyed (222) were at the time living with both parents in Santa Ursula. My conversations with the afternoon primary school director and teachers suggested similarly high numbers of children living with caregivers.

¹² Santa Ursula's mayor and the primary school director organized this survey in which teachers provided information based primarily on their own knowledge of the living situations of the students in their classrooms. With the exception of one fifth-grade teacher, all teachers participated in the survey, in which they indicated if a student's mother and/or father were in the US, and with whom the child was living. When the teachers conducted the survey, there were 470 students enrolled in the morning primary school. With the exception of one fifth-grade teacher, all teachers participated in the survey. Therefore, the survey contained information on all students except one fifth-grade class, for a total of 436 children. I consider the results of this survey fairly accurate, particularly in comparison to the Migration Councilor's census, because the information is based on teachers' long-term and day-to-day contact with children.

This survey reflects the living arrangements of children during one moment in time. Care arrangements, like household configurations, are fluid and ever changing, which I discuss in Chapter Four. As mothers, fathers and children migrate to the United States or return to Santa Ursula, the composition of the households in which they live are continually reconfigured. While such survey data is neither stable nor exact, it does reflect the fact that the incidence of parental migration from Santa Ursula is very high. The teachers' survey also revealed that the majority of parents leave children with grandparents. This finding was consistent with the findings of my research. In addition, because most Santa Ursulans have children in their mid-teens and through their late thirties or early forties, the age of grandparents who act as caregivers ranges from about forty to seventy, and older caregivers, who are many, often suffer from poor health, which has implications for caring labor as I show in Chapters Six and Seven. My research also revealed that Santa Ursulan parents tend to leave children with paternal kin, a practice that I analyze in relation to residence rules, gender relations and the role of mothers-in-law in Santa Ursula.

Background to the Research Project

The original formulation for this study grew out of theories of stratified reproduction and domestic work in the global economy, as well as related ethnographic research that I conducted in New York City in the late 1990s, which I describe below. While the research questions driving this study have remained the same, I found that the answer to the question "How do the conditions of children change when mothers leave and how do family, community members, and representatives of relevant state institutions understand and deal with these changes" lie not only in the bodies of literature mentioned above, but also in contemporary kinship studies in Mexico. When I chose to situate this study in Mexico, I did not set out to focus on the classic

anthropological topics of kinship or cargo systems in rural Mexico. Nevertheless, I ultimately chose to situate this study in a rural community, for reasons described below, and as my research progressed, I found that I had to give careful consideration to these aspects of social life, because they are central not only to how family members distribute and redistribute reproductive labor in Santa Ursula, but also to caregivers activities and the way in which the state, via the DIF, administers social assistance. This section describes the background to the research proposal on which this study is based and how I came to conduct research in Santa Ursula.

In the late 1990s, I conducted research on labor migration of Peruvian women in New York City for my Master's thesis. The women who participated in my study were principally middle-class, urban and high-school or college educated, as are many South American immigrants in New York. Most of the women had left children with other family members in Peru while working as nannies and housekeepers in New York City, a trend that scholars had begun to document during that period (Colen 1995; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1997; Parreñas 2000). My Master's thesis research as well as the related literature, which at the time was based primarily on research with mothers in host nations, led to my concern with processes of transnational childrearing from the perspective of families and communities in nations of origin. I chose to focus my research project on migrant-sending communities in Mexico, because Mexicans during that period had become the fastest growing immigrant group in New York City (Smith 2001). In addition, I had lived and worked in central Mexico and Chiapas in the early 1990s, and had been an ESL instructor and advocate for Mexican and Guatemalan agricultural workers in rural New York from 1988-1991, when rates of female migration from Mexico were much lower than they are today. I chose to situate my research in the state of Puebla, because it was a principal sending state of Mexicans migrants in New York.

I initially set out to conduct research in an urban setting, in part because I considered myself an urban anthropologist, but also because urban areas in recent years had become an increasingly significant yet understudied source of Mexican migration. I selected Cholula for a number of reasons. Despite the high rates of US-bound migration from the area, there was little systematic research on migration from Cholula. In addition, with a combined population of 118,174 (INEGI 2005), the urban areas of San Pedro and San Andrés Cholula constituted a small and manageable city for research, which was an important factor in the feasibility of my project. Although migration was widespread in the city, I knew that households of caregivers and children were less common, and locating families with whom to conduct not only interviews, but also ethnographic research would require traveling throughout the city. After beginning my research, I soon learned that not only was migration more concentrated in the rural townships, a pattern common throughout Mexico, but so were alternative care arrangements.

A few months into my fieldwork in Cholula a report appeared in the local newspapers about the DIF's intervention in a case of children abandoned by parents who had migrated to the US. I went to the DIF to speak with the coordinator and staff about their work and present my project. The DIF lawyer, who was head of the maltreatment program, brought me to Santa Ursula to meet with the town mayor, who then introduced me to his wife, the local DIF representative, and the principals of the primary and high schools, where we arranged that I would teach English classes. I soon decided to situate my study primarily in Santa Ursula. Not only would I be able to easily locate research participants in Santa Ursula, but the community was more typical of Cholulan communities where children live with caregivers. For example, while Santa Ursula, according to municipal officials, had the highest rates of children living with caregivers in Cholula, the neighboring community of Santa Lucía also had similarly high rates of

children left behind. Although the findings of my research are not generalizable to all Mexican communities where children remain with caregivers, the concentration of alternative childcare arrangements in rural townships reflects a continued urban-rural divide in Mexico, and the stratified nature of both reproduction and childhood regionally and nationally, such that parents in rural communities are more likely to migrate and leave children in order to care and provide for them.

Ethnographic Research in Santa Ursula

This study is based on eighteen continuous months of ethnographic research in Cholula, from September 2005- February 2007, as well as three months of research during the summers of 2003 and 2004. I also conducted three follow-up visits to Cholula and Santa Ursula in 2007. My research is based primarily on participant-observation in family and community activities and events in Santa Ursula, as well as activities of the auxiliary and municipal DIF. In addition, I conducted fifty-five interviews, some of which I recorded, with caregivers, teachers, high school students, representatives of relevant institutions, mothers, some of whom had left children with caregivers, as well as a small number of children who had lived with caregivers. I also spent time with families in two other communities: another township of brickmakers in San Pedro Cholula, and an urban neighborhood in San Andrés Cholula. While this study is primarily based on data from Santa Ursula, my contact with families in other parts of Cholula yielded relevant information about brickmaking, the religious cargo-system and migration, all important for understanding the socioeconomic and regional context of Santa Ursulans migrants, caregivers and children.

In order to learn about caregivers' perspectives and activities, I visited caregivers in their homes and attended child-centered social events, such as baptisms, birthday parties and school

celebrations where I spoke informally with and observed caretakers interact with their charges. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with caregivers eliciting information about their relationships with charges and responsibilities of meeting children's social, emotional and physical needs. Grandmothers often spoke about their health issues and their worries about ending up alone in old age, because many of their adult children and grandchildren had migrated to the United States.

I participated regularly in daily and ritual activities of one extended family network. Long-term contact and participant observation in their daily activities, allowed me to examine more closely how caring labor and related reproductive tasks were distributed among children and adults, and how stated norms differed from actual behavior, particularly in households with caregivers and charges. In order to learn about the conditions of such children's lives I also gathered information about household composition, as well as key aspects of children's lives, such as schooling, peer groups, nutrition, clothing, social activities and work. Participant-observation and conversations with children and teenagers generated data about gendered experiences of children, particularly older, unmarried sisters, who tend to take over a great part of the burden of reproductive labor when mothers migrate, as we shall see in Chapters Seven and Eight.

In order to investigate the productive activities and prospects of children and teenagers, as well as the socio-economic context in which parents migrate, I used a variety of methods. I accompanied men, women and children while they planted corn for household consumption and made bricks. In Santa Ursula, where low education levels limit most residents' possibilities in local and national labor markets, I gathered perspectives about migration, work and education from high school students who, for several reasons that I discuss in the following chapters, make

up a small minority in Santa Ursula. Because most men and women marry and have their first child between the ages fifteen and eighteen, interviews also focused on how dating and marriage impact teenagers' educational, productive and social lives. Interviews with return-migrants focused on parents' employment and migration histories as well as the reasons they wanted to take children to the United States or leave them in Santa Ursula.

In order to learn about the role of the DIF in the lives of children of migrant parents, their families and community, I was in regular contact with Santa Ursula's DIF representative—the mayor's wife. I regularly participated in DIF activities in Santa Ursula and in the municipal capital. Participant-observation in such events was crucial for understanding how the DIF functioned in Santa Ursula, as the details of events often differed from those reported in local newspapers or by municipal DIF representatives. Nevertheless, interviews with DIF representatives in the municipal capital, where the administrative office, clinics and centers are located, generated data about the history, philosophy and function of the DIF. These interviews focused particularly on services for children abandoned when parents migrate. In addition, local newspapers were an important source of information about DIF activities, programs and local politics in Cholula. I also interviewed Santa Ursula's mayor, his secretary and the doctor in the local clinic and attended political rallies in Cholula, both for state and presidential elections.

I investigated school-related responsibilities, costs, and how school activities intersect with caretakers' involvement in the civic-religious cargo system through participant-observation in events, such as school graduations and saint's day fiestas. I also attended *Educación Inicial* (Early Childhood Education) activities, aimed at enriching parents' childrearing practices, where I observed teenage girls, in their mother's absence, assume responsibilities for younger siblings' educational and psycho-social development. Interviews with teachers elicited their perspectives

on education in Santa Ursula and school performance of children living with caretakers. Most teachers believed that the community's religious and social activities conflicted with children's schooling.

Outline of Chapters

The following chapters constitute an ethnography of caring labor and social reproduction in a community with high rates of female migration and children who live with alternative caregivers. The international migration of women from Santa Ursula has impacted not only household and care arrangements, but many aspects of social life that shape and are shaped by traditional gender relations and social organization, common to many migrant-sending communities in rural Mexico (D'Aubeterre 2000; Maronni 1994; Mulhare 2005; Mummert 1997; Pauli 2009). Nevertheless, the resilience that most Santa Ursulan families demonstrate in the face of new and difficult circumstances of migration, hinges largely on an adherence to traditional, albeit somewhat modified, gender, age, generational, extended family and social network relations and obligations. For example, post-marital residence rules, a household division of labor, and the local fiesta-cargo system help create conditions of care and sociability for the majority of children and elderly family members who remain behind in Santa Ursula. Yet, migration and the redistribution of caring labor are not without their costs. Gender, age, wealth and other factors that differentiate individuals and groups constitute a system of intersecting hierarchies of penalty and privilege (Collins 2000) within a family, community, nation and the global economy. This system of privilege and penalty shapes dynamics of care and childhood, and helps determine who benefits from, carries the burden or pays the costs of the reorganization of social reproduction in the global economy.

Chapter Two analyzes the economic context of the rise in migration from Santa Ursula and how changes in how people make a living relate to the reorganization of caring labor. Chapter Three provides an overview of social policy and the welfare apparatus in Mexico, focusing on programs and institutions that support families in Santa Ursula and the municipality of Cholula. Since the 1980s, economic crises and neoliberal structuring have marked a significant transition in the philosophy and structure of Mexico's economic and social policies, which shape the conditions in which Santa Ursulans provide and care for their children.

Chapter Four analyzes how gender relations, residence rules and domestic lifecycles shape the way that family members typically distribute caring labor, and subsequently redistribute caring labor when a mother migrates. Chapter Five examines caregivers' responsibilities as they relate to local notions of womanhood, childhood and childrearing—that is, what constitutes proper or ideal care for children. This chapter is divided into four aspects of caring labor: physical care, emotional work, children's education and religion and rites of passage.

Chapter Six considers old-age care in Santa Ursula. The migration of women, who are principally responsible for caring labor, affects not only forms of raising and caring for children, but also support systems for the aging generation. In addition, aging and illness shape grandparents' perspectives and experiences as caregivers for their grandchildren, and children are impacted by their grandparents' health and advanced age. In Chapter Seven I discuss the relationship of grandchildren to older caregivers. Children often perform a great deal of domestic labor in the households in which they live, and play an important role as companions to grandparents. In some cases, grandparents' advanced age or poor health compromise their

ability to care for grandchildren, and sometimes grandchildren are crucial to the well-being and daily existence of older or infirm grandparents.

Underscoring the role of older girls in carework, Chapter Eight analyzes the experiences of “Marisol,” a teenage caregiver whose parents left her in charge of six younger siblings when she was sixteen years old. I consider Marisol’s experience as caregiver in the context of childhood, youth and adulthood in Santa Ursula, and how Marisol’s life compares and contrasts with other Santa Ursulan teenage girls, married and unmarried.

Chapter Nine analyzes the relationship of *niños abandonados* (abandoned children) to children of migrant parents. Incidents of child abandonment due to parental migration, while unusual, speak to the dynamics and importance extended family networks and older sisters in carework, as well as the role of the state in supporting “vulnerable” families.

Chapter Two

Houses, Kilns and Children: A Landscape of Change

One day in May 2005 Belarmino, in his early thirties, proudly showed me three maguey cactuses that he had planted in his garden. Reminiscing about the Santa Ursula of his childhood, he described a countryside replete with *nopal* and maguey cactuses. “We used to make *pulque* (fermented maguey cactus drink),” he recalled nostalgically, “but since they began opening up the ground to make bricks, to take the dirt for the bricks, there are no longer magueys in Santa Ursula.”¹³ Like Belarmino, Santa Ursulans aged thirty or older often spoke about how the expansion of the brickmaking industry changed their way of life from agriculture to brickmaking and how the landscape was transformed in the process. Similarly, since the mid-1990s brickmaking’s decline and the rise of migration has left its print on Santa Ursula’s landscape—most notably in the form of large, elaborate houses built with *migradollars* and the gradual disappearance of brick kilns.

The transformation of Santa Ursula’s landscape reflects not only changes in how Santa Ursulans make a living, but also how families have reorganized caring labor as their productive activities have changed. As the demand and price for handmade brick declined in regional markets, men began to seek work in the United States while women and children remained in Santa Ursula. Before long it became common for married women to join husbands in the United States and leave their children in the care of other family members in order to do so. The reduction in brickmaking activity and the expansion of migration from Santa Ursula has changed how women and children distribute their time among productive activities and domestic work, as

¹³ Bottled beverages also began to replace *pulque* in Mexico.

I analyze in Chapter Four. Furthermore, aged, gendered and intergenerational relations that form the basis of the division of labor in brickmaking families, relate to the way a mother's domestic and caring responsibilities are redistributed among female kin and children when she migrates. This chapter begins with an analysis of how changes in Santa Ursula's landscape and architecture reflect transitions in families' economic activity, reproductive strategies and perspectives and plans for the future. Specifically, the state of land, brick kiln and patio usage, and the architecture, construction, and remodeling of houses reflect, to some extent, whether household members are brickmakers, migrants or both. Whether houses are empty, occupied and by whom, undergoing construction or abandoned in the process, is indicative of people's perspectives and plans for the future—whether or not they intend to return to Santa Ursula and brickmaking or remain in (or return to) the United States to work in the service sector. Accordingly, the state of houses, land, patio and kiln usage, relate to how families organize and reorganize themselves in order to provide and care for their children, and the decisions they make about where and how to raise them. In order to situate this discussion, the following sections examine the expansion and contraction of the brickmaking industry in Cholula, and the subsequent rise in migration from the region. The final two sections discuss the major US destinations for Santa Ursulans, US work experiences, and how such experiences shape parents' decisions about whether to return to Santa Ursula or take children to the US.

A Changing Landscape and Family Life

Looking around Santa Ursula one immediately notices deep trenches and entire parcels of recessed land, vestiges of Cholula's brickmaking boom, when Santa Ursulans extracted dirt from their agricultural lands to manufacture bricks in their patios, or to sell to other brickmakers. Though less common today, one occasionally sees a truck piled high with dirt on its way out of

town to be sold to brickmakers in neighboring communities. Santa Ursulans use their recessed parcels of land to grow corn for household consumption. Because such soil is less fertile, owners depend on fertilizers. Less commonly, a landowner constructs a house on a deeply recessed lot.

A spectrum of house, kiln and patio configurations also form part of the landscape. These configurations reflect a combination of ways in which families make a living, their residential arrangements, as well as their future plans and intentions. When mothers and fathers set out from Santa Ursula they usually do so with the intention of returning. When asked why their parents went to the United States, children almost always respond, “To build my house.” Parents and caregivers usually offer the same explanation, often adding that a house is a means with which to leave an inheritance for children, an important aspect of intergenerational obligations. Parents typically leave the house to their youngest son and his wife, in exchange for care in old age, which I discuss in Chapter Six. Indeed, house construction, according to several studies, is a primary objective of many US-bound Mexican migrants (Cohen 2001; Fletcher 1999; Hirsch 2003; Pauli 2008). Accordingly, children expect their parents to return when construction on their house is complete. Parents also expect to return. Likewise, caregivers expect that children will only be in their care temporarily until their parents return. However, families use remittances for more than house construction. Remittances are usually a critical source of income for a household’s daily living expenses. Consequently, once fathers and mothers have migrated and settled into their new surroundings and jobs, plans can take a variety of directions, in part for economic reasons, but also due to changes in circumstances and perspectives of mothers and fathers, as I discuss in the final section of this Chapter. Often, house construction and the state of kilns reflect such plans.

Houses

The oldest houses, built during Santa Ursula's agricultural period, are small adobe structures. Some adobe homes are still inhabited while others are abandoned, weed-covered shells, often with a more modern house standing next door. Don Pedro, approximately eighty years old, explained how he built his house when he was recently married. Every day after returning home from his job as a musician in Puebla City, he worked *sacando adobe*—digging up earth to make adobe. He also dug his own well. Day after day he worked late into the night until the walls and well were complete. Many years later, his youngest son Belarmino leveled the adobe structure to construct a new house. “When they knocked down Belarmino's room, I even cried,” Don Pedro explained laughing. “How difficult it was for me to get the adobe and then to build the wall. And *pobres diablos* (poor devils), they knocked it down. I cried. What are they going to tell me? ‘That now we are going to make (a house) but out of brick. I was left [speechless], but that is how it ended up.’” Like Don Pedro's house, many old adobe homes in Santa Ursula have been leveled and replaced with more modern structures.

The next architectural phase includes larger cinder bloc and brick houses, many of which were constructed during the brickmaking boom. A typical brickmaker's home consists of a simple one-story house with a large open patio to allow trucks direct access for loading and unloading. Most patios contained one or two kilns during the height of Santa Ursula's brickmaking era. Families also use their patios to host large parties. Long folding tables and rows of chairs easily convert this workspace into the setting of a *mole fiesta*. Hosts also use this large open space to prepare great quantities of food for fiestas, which requires the help of many members of a woman's social network. A typical brickmaker's house might also contain a large all-purpose room, where families keep a small altar and also receive guests. The traditional kitchen, called the *cocina de humo* (the smoke kitchen), is located outside the house in a separate

room with air holes at the top of the walls to let out smoke from the hearth. In the *cocinas de humo* women and older girls make their daily tortillas on a *comal* (griddle) over a low wood-fueled hearth. Women also use gas-burning stovetops with two to four burners to prepare hot meals.

The newest houses, usually built with remittances, are the largest houses in Santa Ursula and often contain features of urban Mexican or US suburban houses. Lopez (2010), who analyzes the impact of migration on architecture in rural Mexico, calls these constructions “remittance houses.” In Santa Ursula remittance or migrant houses are often two-stories high with elaborate indoor staircases and brightly painted exteriors. Migrant houses vary in style and size. In recent years, increasingly larger houses have begun to appear in Santa Ursula, as some migrants compete with each other to build the most conspicuous or elaborately designed home. In early 2007 a return migrant began construction on a four-story house. When I first saw the construction, I thought it might be a building intended for public use. It did not look like a house, certainly not by Santa Ursulan standards, given its size and design. It had nearly one hundred windows. As it turned out, the house was that of a man who had worked in Chicago for many years, along with his two brothers, who had built large lavish two-story houses in Santa Ursula. The three brothers, then in their forties, had the largest homes in the community, and the recent four-story construction was an example of this brother competing with his two brothers who had built their homes before he had. Building large houses in order to conspicuously compete with neighbors or family members was a trend that had recently emerged among some Santa Ursulans, and Santa Ursula had the reputation of having the largest houses in Cholula.

Architectural changes in Santa Ursula also reflect changes in use of domestic space. Like brickmakers’ houses, many migrant houses contain a large all-purpose room to receive guests.

However, almost all migrant houses have smaller urban-style living rooms with couches and an entertainment area with television sets, stereo and DVD or VCR players. A typical brickmaker's home has a television set in a bedroom, where family members sit on the bed, floor or sometimes in chairs to watch programs. Recently-built migrant homes also have more bedrooms than the older style houses, and wooden or metal doors that separate bedrooms from common areas. The number of bedrooms in a home is reflective of sleeping patterns. In Santa Ursula several children usually sleep together in a bed or a room, and adults sleep with children—parents share a bed with young children and grandparents with grandchildren. The increase in number of bedrooms reflects the influence of urban Mexican and US sleeping patterns based on a philosophy that children should not sleep with adults and many children should not share a bedroom or a bed. Elena, in her mid-thirties, remembers school teachers visiting homes when she was a child, instructing Santa Ursulans not to sleep several children in one bed. Despite the fact that a migrant house may contain several bedrooms, many children and adults prefer not to sleep alone, and may not end up inhabiting all the bedrooms as planned.

Kitchens, which are primarily women's domain and central to activities of social reproduction, reflect the influence of migration and what Marroni de Velázquez calls "the complex relation between new and old, between modernization and tradition" (1994:219) in rural Mexico. Remittance houses have urban or suburban-style indoor kitchens, some with US-style finishing, like countertops or cabinets. Many also have stoves with ovens. However, women rarely use ovens for food preparation, because meals typically consist of one-pot stovetop foods, such as stew, soup and beans. Instead, ovens are used for storing bowls, plastic containers or other kitchen items. In addition to the indoor kitchen, most migrant houses also have *cocinas de humo* (outdoor smoke kitchen), which are essential for making tortillas and for preparing food

for *fiestas*. The construction of *cocinas de humo* in new houses, reflects not only the continued importance of ritual activity in Santa Ursula, but also the centrality of handmade tortilla-making to women's activities and identities.

Migrant houses in various stages of construction form part of Santa Ursula's landscape. Some are new constructions and others are expansion and renovation projects of brickmaking houses. Many home owners set out to build a two-story house and then end up leaving the second floor unfinished, because they do not have the funds to continue construction, at least for the moment, often because they have returned to Santa Ursula. The second floor of such homes usually lack not only inside finishing details, such as doors, paint, floor tiles and electricity, they also lack window panes and exterior paint. Other houses are completed and subsequently occupied by either a couple and their children or just a mother and her children, because the father is in the United States. New houses are never occupied by caregivers and their charges, although the house might be more elaborate and in better condition than the caregivers' home. Some houses are completed, but then left unfurnished and uninhabited. Such are the homes of migrants who end up staying in the United States longer than they had anticipated and are uncertain when or if they will return. In such cases, their children might live in Santa Ursula with caregivers, or might have joined their parents in the United States. Yet other houses are just empty shells, the beginnings of constructions that owners abandoned when they abandoned their plans to return to Mexico. In such cases a husband might have sent for his wife, or parents might have sent for their children. Such constructions with time begin to show wear from the elements and become overgrown with vegetation.

Kilns and Patios

Alongside the various types of houses are a variety of kilns and patio combinations. As described above, a typical brickmaker's home consists of a simple one-story house with a large open patio and either one or two kilns. Kilns are square brick structures. Partially underground, they extend approximately eight feet above ground level and hold between 10,000 and 40,000 bricks. Kilns in a variety of states dot Santa Ursula's landscape. Active kilns might be filled with bricks, bellowing with smoke during firing for twenty-four to thirty-six hours and then left to cool for two days. Brickmakers only fire once or twice month, such that an active kiln is often empty while rows of recently cut bricks dry nearby in the patio. An inactive kiln suggests that the owner or principal members of the household's workforce are in the US. Without regular maintenance, brick kilns begin to erode from rain and wind, and weeds and plants begin to grow inside the base. Some kilns are clearly abandoned. These often share the patio with a recently constructed or renovated migrant house.

Many households during Santa Ursula's brickmaking boom had two kilns. Today, it is common for brickmakers to use only one kiln, and either level their second kiln or leave it in disrepair. A household that once relied almost exclusively on brickmaking might show no sign of the kiln or kilns that once stood in its patio, and many new houses sit on land where a kiln never existed, because the owners never intended to make bricks on their property. Some of the newest houses also have large walls surrounding them, which is typical of urban Mexican homes. Walled-in properties reflect an intention not to make bricks on one's property, because the trucks that transport raw materials and bricks cannot access the patio. In addition, many brickmakers who had been successful enough to purchase flat-bed trucks to transport their own finished product, have since sold their trucks to purchase *camionetas* (pick-up trucks). A few migrant

homes even have suburban US-style manicured shrubs and trees. In such cases, their owners had worked as landscapers in the United States.

Leveling a kiln, selling a flat-bed truck to purchase a pick-up truck or constructing walls around a property are all signs of a reduction in a household's brickmaking activities, and usually signify that some of its members have migrated to the United States. However, having no kiln does not mean that a household depends entirely on family members in the United States. Some men and women continue to make bricks despite the fact that they no longer have a kiln. They might work on the property of a relative who has a kiln or make bricks in their own patio and sell them as *crudo* (unfired brick) to another brickmaker. In addition, it is not uncommon for a woman whose husband has migrated, to continue making bricks, often with the help of her children, in her own patio or the patio of another family member, in order to supplement remittances her husband sends.

From Agriculture to Brickmaking

Santa Ursula forms part of Cholula's brickmaking region, which consists of fifteen towns along the Cholula-Huejotzingo federal highway. Before the rise of the brick industry in Cholula, agriculture was the primary productive activity in Santa Ursula and other villages. As brickmaking was expanding throughout the Cholulas during the 1960s and 1970s, Santa Ursula's economy was still based approximately 80 percent on agriculture. Using oxen and mule-drawn plows, families grew corn, squash and onions. Approximately 75 percent of crops in the region were grown with the use of fertilizers and pesticides (Castillo Rella 1970). Although much of what families produced was for their own consumption, products were also sold directly to consumers, particularly on principal market days (Castillo Rella 1970). Like today, Santa Ursulans also kept animals, such as turkeys and pigs, for household consumption and fiestas.

The development of Cholula's brickmaking industry forms part of a period of industrial development throughout Mexico, when the state implemented economic development policies based on growth of internal markets and state-led industrialization from WWII through the 1970s.¹⁴ During this period, the population in Mexican cities, including the city of Puebla, grew considerably as people left their rural communities to work in the expanding industrial sector (Durand, et. al. 1999). During the beginning of WWII, Puebla's industrial and agricultural sectors both grew, initially due to shortages in countries at war, and later because of Mexico's import substitution strategy.¹⁵ In Puebla, growth of the textile industry was of particular significance. However, by the end of the war (1945), Puebla's position as an industrial center declined as other regions, such as Mexico City, Jalisco, Nuevo León, Coahuila and the state of Mexico began to diversify their industry and gain importance.¹⁶ In addition, Puebla experienced a crisis in its agricultural sector, due to a combination of factors (Lomelí Vanegas 2001:376).¹⁷

Between 1964 and 1973, Puebla's industrial production expanded and diversified, including the establishment of more than 120 new industrial companies (Lomelí Vanegas 2001:384). The federal government invested large sums in construction of industrial parks, as well as job training and technical education, including the creation of the *Instituto Tecnológico Regional* (Regional Technological Institute). Industries ranged from foodstuffs, such as meat and dairy products, distilled beverages, textiles and clothing, to industrial parts, lamps, light

¹⁴ Although the development of brickmaking is related to state-led modernization, the mechanism of expansion of brickmaking throughout Cholula, as Shadow and Rodríguez-Shadow (1992) explain, was informal and occurred without intervention of government institutions or representatives.

¹⁵ Cravey defines ISI as a "development strategy that uses a variety of techniques (e.g., import licenses, tariffs, subsidized energy inputs) to encourage domestic producers to manufacture goods that have been supplied previously by imports" (1997:4).

¹⁶ The decline in Puebla's manufacturing sector was related to the fact that many plants were still using old machinery from the *Porfiriato* period (1888-1910), which was based primarily on textiles. This hindered the diversification of Puebla's industrial sector (Lomelí Vanegas 2001:376).

¹⁷ According to Lomelí Vanegas, Puebla's agricultural crisis was caused by a combination of "economic, political, social, institutional and demographic factors" (2001:376), including the fragmentation of productive units due rapid population growth.

bulbs, pharmaceuticals, plastics and paper products (Castillo Rella 1970). The expansion of the automobile industry was of particular importance. In 1967 Volkswagen opened a plant in Puebla, and eventually became the largest enterprise in the state. Despite the plant's proximity to Cholula, Volkswagen never became a source of employment for Santa Ursulans.

Growth of the construction industry, which included the extraction and fabrication of materials such as cement, clay, marble, onyx, tiles, sand and granite was the principal way in which Cholulans participated in Puebla's industrial development. At the time of the Cholula project there were already a great number of brickmakers in the region fabricating different size bricks (*tabique and ladrillo*), roof and floor tiles, and lattice windows (*celosias*) (Castillo Rella 1970). The brickmaking industry expanded to become one of the principal sources of employment in the state.¹⁸ Guerrero (2004) estimates that by the mid-2000s, despite the decline of artisanal brickmaking in the Cholula region, there were more than 2,000 kilns and 10,000 people still directly involved brickmaking.¹⁹ As Guerrero points out, "When we take into account that Volkswagen, the largest enterprise in the state of Puebla, employs between 10,000 and 15,000 workers, we can appreciate the importance of the brickmaking industry as a source of work, and its contribution to the regional economy" (2004:175).

Santa Ursula was one of the last communities in the region to adopt brickmaking. Although brickmaking was a new activity in Cholula, scholars trace its roots to the ancient barrio of San Matías Cocoyotla, where they once produced ceramics and adobe (Bonfil Batalla 1973;

¹⁸ The development of brickmaking in Cholula relates to four interconnected factors. First, the rapid urbanization and population growth in cities in Central Mexico resulted in a spike in demand for bricks. Second, Cholula is located near Mexico City, Puebla and Cuernavaca, which were principal cities of demand, and highways had already been established connecting Cholula to these cities. Third, a rural labor force and local private lands (not *ejidos*) were available due to the decline in agriculture in the region. Finally, the soil on which Cholulans had farmed was deep and had the appropriate characteristics for the production of quality bricks (Shadow and Rodríguez-Shadow 1992:64).

¹⁹ This figure does not include intermediaries, such as truck drivers (Guerrero 2004).

Shadow and Rodríguez-Shadow 1992).²⁰ Following WWII (1939-1945) brickmaking expanded rapidly in San Matías, where four-fifths of Cholula's *ladrilleras* (brickmakers) were located in the late 1960s (Bonfil Batalla 1973).²¹ Initially, Santa Ursulan men worked as *peones* (unskilled laborers) in San Matías and other brickmaking towns, which were over an hour's walk from Santa Ursula. The work was arduous and uncomfortable under the sun, and their bosses often mistreated them. As such, as soon as they were able to, they built their own kilns in Santa Ursula so that they could work for themselves in the trade they had learned in the other communities.

In the process women's activities shifted. In the early days of brickmaking, women with small children in tow walked over an hour to bring their husbands their mid-day meal. When Santa Ursulans set up their own kilns, women and children's labor, which was important in agricultural production, became an important part of brick production. Today the majority of Santa Ursulan households, whether they rely principally on *migradollars* or are still heavily engaged in brickmaking, grow their own corn. Women are principally involved in corn production—from planting to processing and families hire workers, mostly from the Puebla's Sierra for the heavier harvesting work that husbands and older sons used to do.

Economic Crises and Restructuring

This period of industrial growth in Puebla, in which brickmaking developed in Santa Ursula and elsewhere in Cholula, was followed by a period of economic crisis and restructuring throughout Mexico. Accordingly, less than a decade after the publication of Bonfil Batalla's Cholula: *Ciudad Sagrada* (1973), which was concerned with how Cholultecos'

²⁰ Today Santa Matías Cocoyotla is classified as an independent *junta auxiliar* (township). It was a barrio in the Pre-Columbian period and in 1960 and 1970s during the Cholula Project when a handful of San Matías's artisans were still producing ceramic objects, such as *comales* (griddles), which they sold in weekly *tianguis* (outdoor markets) (Bonfil Batalla 1973).

²¹ As Shadow and Rodríguez-Shadow explain, "The villages closest to San Matías tended to be the first to adopt the activity, and served as points of transmission of the industry to further away villages" (1992:63) from which *peones* (unskilled laborers) came.

maintained traditional culture in the context of industrialization, the principal concern of most households throughout Mexico was how to survive *la crisis* (Benería 1992, García and de Oliveira 1990, González de la Rocha 1994).

Mexican industry began to decline in the 1970s (Cravey 1997; Hellman 1988; Moreno-Brid et. al 2009). In response, the federal government under the administrations of Luis Echeverría Alvarez (1970-1976) and José López Portillo y Pacheco (1976-1982), took over failing enterprises, which entailed expanding government spending as well as borrowing from foreign investment banks. Nevertheless, Mexican enterprises continued to lose money. Mexico's foreign debt grew more than eight-fold, from \$6.8 billion in 1972 to \$58 billion in 1982 (Harvey 2003). Inflation increased dramatically and the peso suffered significant devaluations—first in 1976 and then in 1980. In 1982 the government devalued the peso three times—exacerbating inflation and depressing real wages. In August 1982, no longer able to finance its debt, much of which was from private banks at variable interest rates, which spiked in the 1970s, Mexico suspended payments to its lenders. The following month, President López Portillo nationalized Mexico's private banking system.

High inflation and interest rates on Mexico's debt, substantial capital flight, an overvalued peso and the falling price of petroleum, which was a major Mexican industry,²² created the context for a new period in Mexico's political economy. The post-war model of industrial growth based on internal markets and state-led import substitution increasingly shifted to an export-led model based on foreign investment. Neoliberal restructuring also included significant cuts in public spending (Cravey 1997; Gordon 1995; Schteingart 1997). The De la Madrid administration (1982-1988) adopted broad neoliberal reforms proposed by the IMF, World Bank and the US Treasury in exchange for an aid package to help Mexico emerge from

²² In 1938 President Cardenas nationalized Mexico's petroleum industry..

the crisis and resume payments on its debt.²³ The shift towards export-led development that had begun in the 1970s with Mexico's industrialization programs in the northern border region, further expanded under the De La Madrid administration, as Mexico entered into the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) in 1986, a critical year in global trade negotiations with the beginning of the Uruguay Round. De la Madrid also began privatizing public enterprises and using the proceeds to pay down debt. This strategy intensified under the Salinas administration and the process of privatization further formalized. In addition to expanding the *maquila* program, Salinas entered into negotiations with the US and Canada in 1988 to create a free-trade zone, which resulted in the implementation of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) on January 1, 1994.

Economic crises and restructuring, including NAFTA, have had different effects on different regions and economic sectors in Mexico (Cordera Campos and González Tiburcio 1993; Durand, et al. 1999; Gledhill 1995; Gutmann 1998). In northern cities, for example, NAFTA brought economic expansion. Nevertheless, although productivity expanded, an insufficient number of jobs have been created to keep up with productivity or the demand for jobs. Instead, each worker produces more (Durand, et al. 1999). In addition, despite expansion in export manufacturing, domestic manufacturing declined and a number of foreign-owned Mexican factories have closed since 2000, as transnational firms have sought cheaper labor in China and elsewhere (Audley, et al. 2003; Harvey 2005). As in northern cities, throughout Mexico real wages have declined since the implementation of NAFTA (Gledhill 1995; Audley, et al. 2003). Audley, Papademetrious, Polaski and Vaughan conclude, "The overall reality during the NAFTA years has been one of strong growth in the volume of manufactured exports

²³ Mexico was the first of many countries that the World Bank and IMF obligated to adopt neoliberal reforms in order to receive aid.

but very disappointing growth in manufacturing employment” (2003:16). Although this divergence began since the mid-1980s, it appears to have widened since NAFTA (Audley et. al 2003).

Crisis and restructuring adversely affected Puebla’s manufacturing sector, the strongest of its economy. Textile industries in particular suffered greatly, in part because of lack of innovation, as they had been protected by Mexico’s ISI strategy from the 1940s through the 1960s. Pressure to change, which had already begun by the late-1960s and early 1970s, intensified during the 1980s (Fuchs 2001). Between 1982 and 1994, trade liberalization resulted in the closure of 80 percent of Mexico’s textile companies (Rothstein 2007:36). Subsequently, the 1994/1995 peso crisis impacted those workers still remaining in Puebla’s textile industry, as large factories closed or were forced to cut working hours (Fuchs 2001). Rothstein documented the impact of neoliberal reform in San Cosmo, a community ten miles from Puebla in the neighboring state of Tlaxcala, in which nearly 50 percent of economically active men before the crisis had been factory workers, the majority in Mexico City and Puebla’s textile plants. The textile industry’s decline resulted in substantial job and income loss for San Cosmeros, who in response employed multiple strategies to survive the economic crisis. Such strategies, similar to those reported elsewhere in Mexico (Benería 1992; García and de Oliveira 1990; Gonzalez de la Rocha 1994), included increasing the number of wage earners, particularly women and youth, in a household, reducing household expenditures on items such as food or fuel, and intensifying subsistence agricultural activities. By the late 1980s, some San Cosmeros had begun to produce and sell clothing in the domestic market, a strategy that intensified in the 1990s.

The 1994/1995 economic crisis also impacted Puebla’s Volkswagen plant, a major exporter, and their suppliers. As a result many workers faced a reduction in their hours.

Although, some of the effect was staved off by German management's decision to produce its new Beetle there, suppliers were adversely affected and had to reduce working hours, because of increased outsourcing of parts (Fuchs 2001). Similar to Rothstein's and González de la Rocha's descriptions of household survival strategies in Tlaxcala and Guadalajara (respectively), Fuchs found that in Puebla City, household members increased activities in the informal sector, while reducing expenditures. For example, some wives of Volkswagen and textile workers began to buy clothes or other items at cost, in order to resell them to friends and family, while cutting back on household expenses, particularly food and medicine. Fuchs found that parents were less willing to cut back on child-related expenses, particularly education, because children and their education represent hope for the future and the expectation that their children will be better off than parents were. Rothstein found that while increased education had represented an important strategy for San Cosmeros during the 1970s and 1980s, by the mid-1990s "a noticeable change took place, moving people away from education and professional career aspiration for the community's youth to a hope in mobility through economic success in garment manufacturing. (Rothstein 2007:39).²⁴ In Santa Ursula, young adults, as well as parents, hold divergent perspectives on whether education or migration represents the best way to financial well-being and mobility.

Neoliberal reform has also lead to decline in Mexico's rural sector. Small subsistence farmers in particular have struggled and many have been pushed deeper into poverty (Audley 2003). Some medium and large farms managed to adjust to NAFTA tariff reductions. However, many Mexican farmers could not compete with the low price of US-produced, government-

²⁴ This shift reflects the decline in professional jobs in Mexico since crisis and restructuring. Rothstein found that after the crisis, "many of the advantages gained by the middle class were lost. For the people of San Cosme, textile factory jobs and the professional jobs as teachers, nurses, and doctors that their children were beginning to get disappeared. Some women and men trained as teachers waited years for teaching positions or accepted placement very far away" (2007:30).

subsidized crops. The decline in agriculture added to new and intensified migration streams from various regions, including Puebla (Cornelius 1991; Gledhill 1995; Smith 2006). In Chiapas, where US migration is less extensive than regions like Puebla, peasants responded to neoliberal restructuring of the agricultural sector with armed protest (Collier 1995).

This new era in Mexico's political economy is not just one of deepening poverty, it is also one of unprecedented wealth—for a small sector. Although, socioeconomic stratification is not new in Mexico, the gap between Mexico's wealthiest and poorest citizens has widened over the past three decades. While millions of Mexicans have confronted job loss and economic hardship, a small minority of Mexicans, as well as foreigner investors, have greatly benefitted from neoliberal restructuring. The total net worth of Mexican billionaires appearing on the Forbes billionaire list, increased from \$24.9 billion in 2000, to \$43.5 billion in 2005, to \$90.1 billion in 2010 (Forbes 2000; Kroll and Goldman 2005; Miller and Kroll 2010).

Carlos Slim Helú, who Forbes magazine ranked as the wealthiest man in the world in 2010 (Miller and Kroll 2010), is the most conspicuous example of skewed economic growth in neoliberal Mexico. A Mexican engineer and businessman, Slim grew his fortune by investing heavily in Telemex when the Mexican state privatized telecommunications.²⁵ As many analysts point out, personal relationships among prominent politicians and businessmen played an important role in Mexico's process of privatization, in which Slim greatly benefitted (Winter 2007; Teichman 2002). Teichman argues, "The case of Telmex, which at sale provided for monopoly control of the country's telecommunications industry until 1997, to close presidential confidant Carlos Slim is the most well known example of cronyism in the Mexican privatisation

²⁵ Slim's holdings include telecommunications and other enterprises, such as retail, banking, insurance and auto parts manufacturing throughout Latin America, as well as the United States and elsewhere (Kroll and Goldman 2005). He the second the largest individual shareholder, after the Schulzburger family, in The New York Times Company (Dash 2009).

process” (Teichman 2002:501). Telmex’s almost complete monopoly, estimated as 92 percent of the nation’s fixed-line market in 2007, has kept the price of Telmex’s services high, while helping to concentrate Mexico’s wealth in the hands of a few (Winter 2007).

The expansion of telecommunications in Mexico has benefitted Mexico’s migrant communities by allowing family members separated through migration to communicate much more easily and regularly than they had during the early days of migration, when private lines in communities like Santa Ursula were non-existent. Accordingly, in 2005 most Santa Ursulan homes had telephone lines, for which Telmex was charging an installation fee of approximately \$US200.²⁶ In addition, internet service came to Santa Ursula in 2007, as part of Telmex’s plan to expand Prodigy internet service throughout the country (Fineren 2000). Of course, increased access to telephone lines and internet service is a small consolation for Mexicans who have migrated to the US because they cannot find adequate employment in the national job market, while Slim’s expanding empire, estimated at \$53.5 billion in 2010, has had little impact on job creation in Mexico.

From Brickmaking to Migration

Economic crisis and restructuring in Mexico, which followed the expansion of the brick industry in Cholula, resulted in increased poverty and migration throughout Mexico. (Cornelius 1991; Lustig 2000). Yet, in Cholula, and elsewhere in central Mexico, migration did not spike

²⁶ Telmex greatly improved accessibility not only by adding more lines throughout Mexico, but by making its services, such as installment and payment, much more efficient. Today, Telmex installs land lines within a few days, which in the past, might have taken up to two years while a customer waited for a line to become available. During my fieldwork in Cholula, Telmex installed my phone line and internet service within two days of my order. However, the process for cancelling the service was much more complicated and involved many visits and phone calls to Telmex over a three-month period. The increased efficiency in installing and making payments for telephone and internet service that goes along with expansion of telecommunications in Mexico and the expansion of Slim’s wealth, seems not to have caught up with the efficiency in cancelling such services. Anger towards Telmex’s monopoly and Carlos Slim was evident in customer interactions I observed during my far too many visits to the Telmex offices, as I tried to cancel my phone service. In March 2007, as I waited in one of Telemex’s offices in Mexico City, a frustrated and angry customer stormed out of the Telmex office pointedly telling the customer service representative “While Carlos Slim is getting richer, things are just getting worse for customers”.

until the mid-1990s. Nevertheless, neoliberal reforms leading up to the implementation of NAFTA and the 1994 crisis, set in motion changes in Mexico's political economy that resulted in migration from Santa Ursula. In a collection of essays that aims to explain the causes of accelerated migration from the states of Puebla and Veracruz, Binford (2004) argues that the causes of migration from this region differ from those of other migrant sending-regions of Mexico that have been the object of study. Binford's analysis that accelerated migration from Puebla is generally not a result of social networks originating from the Bracero Program holds true for Santa Ursula. Only three men left Santa Ursula to work in California as part of the Bracero Program. Two of the men soon returned to Mexico. The third stayed in the United States, where he eventually acquired citizenship, and upon retiring, returned to Santa Ursula to live off his US "*pensión*" (social security check).

Migration from Santa Ursula follows a pattern similar to that outlined by Lee (2008) who analyzes the emergence and acceleration of international migration in new sending areas of Puebla. Like migration from Zapotitlán, a community in the southeastern Pueblan Mixteca where Lee conducted research, the roots of Santa Ursulan migration can be traced back the mid-1980s, when some individuals "set out for New York City in order to *salir adelante* (to do well for themselves) in the hopes of improving their standard of living in Mexico" (Lee 2008: 49). By the mid-1990s, the contraction of the construction industry, driven by Mexico's deepening economic crisis, led to the steady decline in the demand for bricks. According to Guerrero, who conducted research on the impact of the decline in the brickmaking on migration from San Matías Cocoyotla, Cholula, the construction industry had its worst period in 1995 and then slowly regained ground over the following five years. By the year 2000 production was just above the level that it had been in 1994. Increased demand in regional markets for cheaper,

machine-made cinder blocks and *tabique hueco* (hollow brick) added to the decline in the demand for and price of Cholula's hand-made bricks (Guerrero 2004:181).²⁷

The expansion of migration also resulted in the contraction of the labor pool necessary for brickwork, which makes it difficult for brickmakers remaining in Santa Ursulan to manufacture enough bricks to generate adequate earnings. Because all household members of working age participate in brick production, fewer available family members, including women and children, means that a household will produce fewer bricks and therefore generate less income from brickmaking. As we shall see in Chapter Four unmarried children, married sons and daughters-in-law who are not yet mothers are an important source of labor in brickmaking families. Therefore, their migration has a significant impact on a brickmaking household's output. In addition, although a woman and her children might continue to make bricks while a husband works in the US, their production and income earned from brickmaking is considerably lower without the labor of a husband or older children who have also migrated.

Changes in consumption patterns and expectations due to Santa Ursulans' increased access to US wages and goods, has, as Lee points out, "reinforced individuals' decisions to migrate, particularly in the context of worsening economic and social conditions in Mexico" (Lee 2008:49). In Santa Ursula, the desire to build large and elaborate houses is the most conspicuous sign of such changes in consumption patterns.²⁸ The desire to purchase a car is another marker of changing consumption expectations, especially among single, childless young

²⁷ For brickmakers who have their own trucks, this means that when they drive to Mexico City or Cuernavaca to sell, they often have to wait as long as two to three days before they can find a buyer.

²⁸ In contrast to other migrant sending towns in the region, such as that studied by Lee (2008), migration from Santa Ursula to the city of Puebla or Mexico City was not common strategy of Santa Ursulans dealing with the decline of the brick industry. Rodríguez-Shadow et al. (1992) relate the low incidence of migration from the Cholulan community where they conducted research to brick production's high demand for labor: "Due to the enormous demands for labor in the production of bricks, few sons and daughters emigrated from the community to look for work" (Rodríguez-Shadow et. al. 1992:9). This might explain why there was little migration from Santa Ursulan to Mexican cities prior to the boom in US-bound migration.

(principally male) adults. However, the construction of houses is a much more common goal of married migrants, particularly parents who leave children in the care of other family members. In addition, access to US wages has resulted in increased spending on ritual events such as weddings, which, as I analyze in Chapter Four, has an impact on migration patterns and activities of women and caregivers who remain in Santa Ursula.

Some Santa Ursulans pointed to inflation as the primary reason that many community members had left brickmaking to look for work in the United States. For example, Manuel, a Santa Ursulan brickmaker who had never migrated, explained that the cost of food prices and other items needed for daily living, had increased in Mexico, such that earnings from brickmaking had become insufficient to cover the costs of most Santa Ursulan households. However, the rise in production costs, particularly raw materials, was the primary way that inflation had impacted the brickmaking industry.²⁹ The inflation of petroleum prices in particular was a crucial factor that had impacted the earnings of brickmakers, as petroleum, which is used to fuel brick kilns, is the most expensive material used in the process.³⁰ Indeed, more than one-third of a brickmaker's gross earnings goes to petroleum.³¹ A brickmaker must

²⁹ In addition to costs for materials, other expenses include upkeep of kilns, which begin to deteriorate with time and use. Some brickmakers also pay for additional labor, such as a worker to load the kiln or a *quemador*—a skilled worker who knows how to operate the furnace. The *quemador* must stay awake and next to the kiln during a continuous 24-36 hour period in order to regulate the firing process, such as kiln temperature and water and fuel levels of the furnace.

³⁰ In March 2007, a group of brickmakers in one of Cholula's townships (San Diego Cuachayotla) installed an electric kiln that would hold up to 400,000 bricks. This "ecological kiln" project, backed by the state government, aimed to place at least one ecological kiln in each of Cholula's townships in order to reduce contamination from petroleum fueled-kilns, and increase income of brickmakers who use the kiln. Brickmakers in Santa Ursula and San Matías with whom I spoke wondered if the new kiln would be successful, and if the bricks would have the red hue that buyers sought. During the 1990s Cholula's municipal government promoted a pilot project in San Matías to change to gas fuel for firing. However, the project failed, because the gas-fired bricks did not have the uniform red color that customers sought.

³¹ According to brickmakers in Cholula, 40,000 bricks sold for approximately 24,000-28,000 (US\$ 2,400-\$2,800) in 2006, while the fuel necessary to fire them cost about 10,000 pesos (US\$ 1,000). A *millar de ladrillo* (1,000 bricks) was selling for about 600-700 pesos, and *un millar crudo* (1,000 unfired bricks) for 250 pesos. The selling price usually rises and the supply drops due to weather conditions during the rainy season and during the month of Santa Ursula's patron saint day festival when people are busy preparing for and participating in the festivities.

pay fuel prior to receiving revenues from brick sales, and therefore always needs a significant amount of capital to continue producing bricks. During the 2005 presidential campaigns in Cholula, PRD (Partido de la Revolución Democrática) candidate López Obrador and EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional) delegate *Subcomandante* Marcos, both spoke about the impact of petroleum prices on the brickmaking industry and pledged their commitment to improving the local economy, such that families would not have to endure the hardships and separation that US migration had brought to many families in the region.³²

US Jobs and Destinations

The expansion of migration from Mexico to the United States stems not only from changes in Mexico's political economy and regional labor markets, but also from shifts in the US labor market. In "global cities" such as New York that receive large numbers of migrants the globalization of the economy resulted in the expansion of service industries and the reorganization of manufacturing particularly (Harvey 1989; Sassen 1991). Sassen (1991) argues that the proliferation of high-paid white collar jobs in global cities, created a demand for low-wage service workers, met largely by immigrants, who cater to the needs of this high paid cohort. Indeed, when Santa Ursulans first began to migrate to the United States in large numbers in the 1990s, the majority found employment in New York's service and manufacturing sectors. Santa Ursulans were among a great number of Poblanos who migrated to New York City during this period (Smith 2006). The majority of Santa Ursulans living in New York reside in Brooklyn, with the Brighton Beach section the major destination, followed by the Bronx and upper Manhattan.

³² *Subcomandante* Marcos traveled throughout Mexico during the 2006 presidential campaigns, as a delegate for the EZLN's *otra campaña* (other campaign), in which the EZLN sought not to run for presidency, but to meet with diverse groups and bring attention to their political program. In 2006, Marcos held his "other campaign" rally in San Matías, Cocoyotla, the heart of Cholula's brickmaking region.

Over time Santa Ursulans increasingly began to migrate to other parts of the United States, including New Jersey, California, Texas and the Chicago area. Although New York continued to be an important receiving area for Santa Ursulans, by 2005 the state of Indiana had become the principal destination and preferred place of many migrants from the community. The migration experience of Santa Ursula's mayor is typical of Santa Ursulans. When Don Rigoberto first migrated to the US in the late 1990s, he lived for several years in New York City, where he worked in restaurants. He later moved to the Chicago area. After returning to Santa Ursula for a short period, he migrated again to the United States, where he lived in a small town near Indianapolis and worked in a factory manufacturing wood pieces for furniture. Like many of his fellow community members, Don Rigoberto explained that he did not like New York, because it was "too big and too busy." He preferred the Chicago suburbs and small town near Indianapolis, which reminded him of Santa Ursula's rural setting. Santa Ursulans' preference for rural and suburban settings is similar to preferences of rural Central American migrants in New York, who in the 1980s became a significant population in suburban Long Island (Mahler 1995). In contrast to Central Americans in suburban New York who work primarily in landscaping and domestic work, Santa Ursulans in Indiana work primarily in restaurants and factories.

Many Santa Ursulans I knew described New York as a harsh place to live, and compared the quality of life in New York to that of Indiana. Perhaps because I am from New York, the topic came up frequently. Men and women often cited as undesirable New York's small, enclosed living spaces and lack of green spaces. They explained that because rent prices are significantly lower in Indiana, a family can afford to rent their own apartment, in contrast to New York, where Mexican migrants tend to share small living spaces among many people. Parents who had children in New York were greatly concerned about the safety of schools and the

neighborhoods in which they lived. In addition, many Santa Ursulans described poor working conditions, such as long hours or mistreatment from fellow employees, as more typical of New York than Indiana.

Juanita, for example, explained that she and husband had lived for a period in Brooklyn, where they worked in *una marqueta* (a Korean grocer) six days a week, from seven in the morning until eleven at night. They used their day off for laundry, shopping and other chores. Her husband said, “If we continue this way, it will be the end of us.” In 2000, they returned to Santa Ursula, knowing they would subsequently move to Indianapolis, where some of their extended family members lived. When I met Juanita in 2006 she was visiting Santa Ursula for a three-month period to care for her ill mother-in-law and was planning to return to Indiana where her husband and children were living. “Life is better for children in Indiana,” she explained. She considered local authorities in Indiana more effective at enforcing laws that protect children than in New York. In Indiana she had not enrolled her children in school when they first arrived, because she did not know she was permitted to do so in the middle of the academic year. As a result, someone reported her and her husband for not sending the children to school. In contrast, she explained, she had seen thirteen and fifteen-year olds working in the *marqueta* in New York where she was employed. Juanita believed that the enforcement of such laws resulted in better opportunities and quality of life for children and adults in Indiana than in New York City or Santa Ursula, where many adolescents drop out of school before they are legally permitted to do so. Views like that of Juanita on opportunities and quality of life in Indiana, figured among the reasons that some parents decided to stay in the US and send for their children instead of returning to Santa Ursula.

Returning Home or Sending for Children

Although most migrants say they go to the United States in order to “construir mi casa” (build my house), in reality, remittances go to more than just house construction, they also go to daily living expenses, such as utility bills, food, health care, clothing, children’s school expenses, parties and religious cargos. Therefore, many migrant parents find that once the construction on their house is complete, they still need a source of income to maintain their families, and earnings from brickmaking are insufficient. In some cases, newly acquired consumption expectations, increase a households’ budget, making earnings from brickmaking even less adequate. In addition, because families use remittances primarily for house construction and living expenses, most migrants do not invest in a business or economic activity that would provide an alternative to brickmaking when they return to Santa Ursula. Return migrants who do invest remittances in this way, tend to open small stores in Santa Ursula, which only produce small profits.³³

Mothers and fathers confront the difficulty of sustaining their families on incomes earned in Santa Ursula in a variety of ways. When parents have returned to Santa Ursula, a father is likely to migrate to the United States again. I knew many women who, after returning to Santa Ursula with their husbands, remained alone with their children in their new houses when husbands left again for the US. Some parents return to Santa Ursula in order to bring children back with them to the United States or “send for” their children from the US. Most parents intend to reunite with their children. Few parents leave their children indefinitely with caregivers. However, reuniting with children often takes longer than parents initially intend, and

³³ Scholars have debated the role of remittances in development of rural Mexico, and whether the investment of remittances in rural communities can effectively generate alternative income generating activities in local economies (Binford 2003; Cohen, et. al. 2005). Investing in a small store is a limited strategy, because such businesses not only generate small earnings, but the market for stores selling chips, candy and soda is limited in a community like Santa Ursula. Eventually if enough return migrants open stores the supply will far surpass the demand.

children often remain with caregivers for periods longer than parents, caregivers or children had expected.

When parents send for their children, it often reflects a broader plan and perspective in which they see little future for their children in Santa Ursula, or Mexico in general. In Santa Ursula children and teenagers are increasingly studying beyond primary school. The population of secondary students has risen substantially since the mid-1990s, and although smaller in numbers, there was for the first time in Santa Ursula a significant number of high school students as well in 2005-2006. Although many students who begin high school do not finish, a few high school graduates had also gone on to enroll in college. At the same time, the number of children and teenagers migrating to the US is steadily increasing. These contradicting trends, reflect a divergence in Santa Ursulans' perspectives on the future prospects for the next generation, and whether a high school (or college) education or migration will provide better opportunities. Most of Santa Ursula's high school students viewed a high school diploma as an alternative to migration. Yet a contrasting outlook of many parents who bring children to United States is that because children will eventually need to migrate in order find work, they are better off going when they are young so that they can learn English and receive their education in the US, which will provide them with better and less exploitative working conditions in the United States job market. Nevertheless, without US residency or work authorization, children will only have, at best, slightly better opportunities than their parents had.

Exploitative and poor working conditions of US immigrants, particularly those who lack work visas, are well documented (Chang 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Kwong 1996; Mahler 1995). Some Santa Ursulans had experienced mistreatment and hardship in the US labor market, typical of the low-paid, informal jobs Mexican migrants tend to find. In addition, most return

migrants I knew would have preferred to have stayed in Santa Ursula. Nevertheless, many men and women described their US employment experiences positively. They were proud of knowledge and skills they had gained on the job. Those who had worked in restaurants often described with great pride and detail the foods they had learned to prepare, such as peanut butter pies and fried chicken using Kentucky Fried Chicken's secret recipe

Many Santa Ursulans also took pride in their work ethic and how their bosses appreciated them as top workers. Such narratives often accompanied stories of lazy and unethical Americans who frequently called in sick, were not hard workers or even intentionally injured themselves to collect workers compensation. Rosalina, for example, explained how her determination to do well in the US job market, won her the admiration of not only her boss and co-workers, but that of her husband as well. She had quit her first job in Chicago as a dishwasher after only six months, due to low pay, long hours and mistreatment from coworkers. Subsequently she worked for several years in a bakery-café, where she earned pay raises and certificates for courtesy and good service. She explained that the job at the café was easy and because she was hardworking and liked to learn new things, she was able to learn enough English to ascend from clearing tables to serving food at the counter. Rosalina would have liked to have remained in Chicago. However, she returned to Santa Ursula in order to care for her ill mother-in-law, who was taking care of her children in Santa Ursula. This is a common practice among Santa Ursulans that I analyze in Chapter Six. Although Rosalina's mother-in-law's health improved, she decided to stay in Santa Ursula because she felt that she was better able than her mother-in-law to guide her daughter through her teenage years, an issue that I analyze in Chapter Five

Santa Ursulans' experience as brickmakers shapes their perspectives on US service and manufacturing jobs. On the one hand, brickmakers enjoy a great degree of autonomy. They can

set their own hours and vacation days. However, Santa Ursulans consistently described brickmaking as arduous and hard on the body. Many older men and women suffered from back problems due to years of heavy lifting. Santa Ursulans explained that compared to brickmaking agricultural work was much easier. Given the arduousness of brickwork and the long hours in the sun, many return migrants preferred US service jobs, particularly those in restaurants. In addition, they liked the “cleanliness” of such jobs, as brickmaking entails constant contact with dirt, clay and sand—stepping with bare feet on the wet mixture to prepare it and then muddying one’s hands while “cutting” and stacking bricks.

In addition to the desire to provide a better future for their children, some parents decide to remain in the United States, because they become accustomed to life there. Some Santa Ursulans come to prefer the lifestyle and the environment of US suburban and urban communities. For example, Enrique, a father of nine adult children, most of whom are in the United States, had migrated to Indiana twice during the mid-1990s. He explained that he liked Indiana and the jobs he held in restaurants bussing tables and washing dishes. “It was not hard, like working in the sun all day,” he explained, “and people were very nice.” In addition, “everything was clean and organized. There wasn’t dust around, like here.” Several Santa Ursulans told me that they had family members who no longer wanted to live in Santa Ursula, because of the “dust and the wind.” Inés explained, “what happens is they come back and they find that they don’t like it. They see that the streets are dusty, unpaved, and that there is garbage around and they don’t like it.” Some people do not even bother building their houses anymore for this reason, she explained, because they say that they will not come back.

Conclusion

Land use, houses and kilns reflect not only Santa Ursulans' productive activities, but also household configurations and future plans and intentions. A mother and father might be in the US while their house is under construction and their children are living with grandparents in Santa Ursula. In other cases, a mother or both parents might have returned to live with their children in their newly constructed house. A weed-covered, abandoned house, either completely or partially constructed, might represent a family in which parents have decided to remain long-term in the US. Perhaps their children have joined them in the US, or perhaps they have remained for many years in the care of their grandparents. This dissertation considers the children, mothers, fathers and caregivers who occupy Santa Ursula's houses and work in their patios. And those who do not—meaning those who live and work in the United States.

Although most parents migrate to the United States with the intention of returning to Santa Ursula to raise their children, such plans often change. Few migrants invest in businesses that allow them to make an adequate living in Santa Ursula upon their return. Rather, migrant remittances are used largely for household maintenance and consumption, such as building and remodeling houses or paying for a wedding. As a result many migrant parents find that without *migradollars* they are unable to sustain their household, which sometimes includes newly acquired consumption patterns. Therefore, it is common in Santa Ursula that after parents return home the father-husband of the family will migrate again to the United States while his wife and children remain in their newly constructed or remodeled house. Other parents return to Santa Ursula in order to bring their children back to the US or remain in the US and send for children. Parents who do so usually see little future for their children in Mexico, and believe that their children will have better opportunities if they are educated in the US.

Changes in labor markets as well as economic policies form the context in which parents began migrating from Santa Ursula in large numbers. The decline in the price and demand for handmade bricks in regional markets in Mexico, coupled with inflation in costs of daily living and raw materials for brick-production, particularly petroleum-based kiln fuel, has made brickmaking no longer an adequate means through which Santa Ursulan families can sustain themselves. At the same time, the expansion of service industries and the reorganization of manufacturing in New York, which was initially the principal destination of Santa Ursulans, created a demand for low-paid migrant workers. Santa Ursulan migration has since expanded to include other US destinations, most notably Indiana, where Santa Ursulans also work primarily in restaurants and factories.

In the following chapter we shall examine how the retooling of Mexico's social policies since the 1980s closely parallel neoliberal restructuring of its economic policies. Together, economic and social policies shape the conditions in which Mexican provide and care for their families. We will examine how Mexican governmental social programs and policies operate in Santa Ursula. This framework provides the context in which to understand subsequent chapters that deal with the role of the state in the lives of children left behind, their families and community.

Chapter Three

Social Policy and Programs in Mexico

Social policy and public programs shape the conditions in which families provide and care for their children and other dependents. Since the mid-1980s, economic crisis and restructuring have resulted in a shift from policies based on universal rights to targeting and decentralization. The reduction and elimination of general subsidies is perhaps the aspect of restructuring that has most affected Santa Ursulans. As discussed in the previous chapter, some Santa Ursulans explained the rise in migration as a combination of declining profits from brickmaking and inflation in basic living costs. Despite cuts in public spending following the 1982 economic crises, social spending in Mexico has increased since the mid-1990s (Moreno-Brid et. al 2009; UNDP 2011). During this period, a public high school and health center were established in Santa Ursula and many families in the community became beneficiaries of the expansion of Mexico's principal targeted anti-poverty program, Oportunidades. In addition, the municipal DIF (*Desarrollo Integral de la Familia*) launched new centers and programs in Cholula, and the municipal government created two new offices to assess and address the needs of migrants and their families. Following a brief overview of the history of the Mexican welfare apparatus, this chapter examines social programs and institutions, and how they operate in Santa Ursula in relation to the municipal, state and federal entities. How might we understand the expansion of state institutions and public assistance in a community like Santa Ursula where the incidence of transnational migration and children left with caregivers has spiked sharply during the same period?

Charity, Universal Rights, Crisis and Neoliberalism

The emergence of state social assistance in Mexico, as in Europe, has its origins in state formation and modernization. Until the mid-1800s the private sector and the church were in charge of programs and institutions to help the poor. In 1861, in an effort to separate the church and state, the Mexican government took over from the church hospitals, psychiatric homes, orphanages and hospices. During that same year, President Juárez (1858-1864) created the National Lottery, aimed at generating public funds for social programs. As Guadarrama (2001) points out, these developments reflect the governments' aim during this period to limit the power and privileges of the church and clergy more than a widely held belief in Mexican society that the state should be responsible for eradicating poverty. Although Mexican society largely viewed poverty as an individual's problem and responsibility, widespread poverty and hunger in Mexico helped legitimize the state's move to take control of social welfare institutions. Like the majority of Mexicans during this period, Santa Ursulans and other rural Cholulans, were primarily impoverished peasants with no schooling.

During the Porfiriato (1884-1911) social inequalities across the country deepened as the state forged ahead with its program of progress and modernity. Of great importance were projects aimed at economic development, such as railroad construction (Coatsworth 1981).³⁴ Modernization also included projects related to social assistance, such as the construction of the city of Puebla's Maternity House (1879-1885) and Poor Hospice (1894) (Contreras Cruz 1994:195). During this period the city underwent "an intense process of remodeling and urban change" (Contreras Cruz 1994: 191). Other major cities in the state of Puebla also benefitted from improvements in infrastructure, such as public lighting and metal plumbing, and the

³⁴ Central to Porfirian development in Puebla was railroad construction linking Puebla territory with principal points of commerce—Mexico City and the port of Veracruz, and the Railroad to Matamoros passed through Cholula, linking it with the neighboring state of Morelos. In addition, the Industrial Railroad, connecting Cholula to Puebla was built.

construction of schools and hospitals (Lomelí Vanegas 2001:283). Despite the state's increased investment in welfare during the Profiriato, public opinion continued to be divided on whether the state or the private sector ought to take responsibility for the well-being of its poorest and most underprivileged citizens. Philanthropists, who typically had a close relationship with the church, continued to organize private fundraising events, such as circuses and balls, for charity work. Although such efforts were related in part to philanthropists' criticism of the government's ability to meet the needs of the poor, charity work was also a source of prestige among the wealthy (Guadarrama 2001).

The Mexican revolution brought new ways of approaching poverty and the role of the state. The rhetoric and structure of social assistance shifted from the poor as subjects of charity to the poor as citizens with universal rights to well-being (Guadarrama 2001). The state's role was to guarantee its citizens' rights and protect the most vulnerable sectors of society. The Constitution of 1917 served as a road map for the development of Mexico's social policy, including the right to the protection of health, mandatory public primary school and labor rights, which defined the legal working age at fourteen. The implementation of the social reform following the Constitution passed through many stages between the administrations of Carranza (1917-1920) and Cárdenas (1934-1940). Cárdenas oversaw the most radical phase of reform, as his administration expanded land distribution for peasants, created new welfare programs for the poor, nationalized the railroad and petroleum industries and established "a program of socialist education in the public schools" (Weston 1983:383). During the 1940s the government took several important steps to meet some of the goals of the constitution (Schteingart 1997). The Mexican Institute of Social Security (IMSS), created in 1943 under the Camacho administration (1940-1946), offered benefits and protection to salaried workers in the formal sector (Pozas

Horcasitas 1992). Of course, workers outside the formal sector, who were the majority of the population including Santa Ursulans, did not benefit from these developments. However, during this period the government also developed a system of healthcare for the uninsured and universal education. The Aléman administration (1946-1952) saw to the construction of numerous schools. In 1948 Santa Ursula's federal primary school was established. Although literacy expanded throughout Mexico from 1910-1940, it was after 1940 that formal education for rural women became widespread (Vaughan 1994).³⁵ Moreover, rural women initially were not direct beneficiaries of the Revolution of 1910. As Vaughan argues, the Revolution "was a quintessentially patriarchal event for rural women, many of whom suffered physical violation during the prolonged struggle. Afterward, politics remained the dominion of men. Women were excluded from the post-revolutionary redistribution of land and water, except in their capacity as wives and daughters (Vaughan 1994:106). In addition, in regions with large indigenous populations, such as highland Chiapas, the National Indian Institute (INI) oversaw social development programs, such as education, road construction and public health, based on a model that focused on the indigenous themselves instead of "the economic and political systems that exploited them" (Lewis 2008:609). This approach created double standards, and often focused on "improving" or "modernizing" indigenous populations (Hewitt de Alcántara 1986; Lewis 2008).

Despite the many shortcomings and uneven application of social policy, the concept of social justice during the post-revolutionary period most resembled social democracy in which the state's role is to "compensate for the inequalities the market produces" (Gordon 1995:175).

Mexico's social policy corresponded with its economic policy and objectives of development.

³⁵ Between 1910 and 1940, female literacy in Puebla outside the capital city increased from 16 to 22 percent, while male literacy rose from 23 to 38 percent (Vaughan 1994:107).

“Social spending was seen as part of the project of development, since the aim was to promote consumption in order to expand the internal market, and at the same time promote social cohesion and the legitimacy of the State” (Gordon 1993:178-179). Social policy during this period was structured to reach the greatest number of people possible, through mechanisms of regulation and subsidization. The state controlled the price and supply of basic goods and services, such as electricity, transportation, drinking water, and basic foods (Schteingart 1997). Such subsidies helped make low salaries more manageable for workers and low salaries helped control costs of industry. At the same time, ISI policies helped protect Mexican industries and guarantee national markets (Gordon 1993).

Since the 1980s economic crises and neoliberal restructuring has resulted in significant changes in Mexico’s social policy. As economic crisis and international lenders pushed Mexico towards neoliberal restructuring of economic policy, so too did these factors help move Mexican social policy in the direction of neoliberal reform, including reductions in social spending (Gordon 1993; Moreno-Brid et al. 2009; Schteingart 1997). During this period of deepening poverty and socio-economic stratification, mechanisms to deal with poverty moved away from redistribution and subsidies. As social spending decreased, programs became increasingly focused on reaching smaller numbers of people—those the government deemed the “most vulnerable.” The official rhetoric and structure of social programs shifted towards poverty and extreme poverty rather than universal rights, entitlements and equality. As the role of the government decreased, the private sector gained ground, not only in the form of privatization of state services, such as telecommunications (as discussed in the Introductory Chapter), but also civil society, such as non-governmental organizations and philanthropists, took on an increasingly significant role in social assistance (Guadarrama 2001).

Gordon (1995) argues that the state employed a concept of social justice that was in line with neoliberal restructuring of its economic model. Just as the “state should not substitute the action nor the initiative of individuals in different camps of economic life (industry, services, investment, etc.)” (Gordon 1995:181), individual initiative and action should be at the center of social policy. According to Gordon,

The criteria of equity were no longer given by a tutelary initiative by the state to compensate for the results of the inequalities that the market produces, or by global objectives of well-being, but instead by an action (*tendente*) to even out the basic capacity to compete. The access to better standards of living will be a result of the productivity and creativity of each person, which will be qualified by the market (1995:181).

“Co-responsibility” is the term most frequently used by the Mexican government to emphasize this aspect of its social policy’s philosophy and structure. For example, the Fox administration (2000-2006)³⁶ named its federal social policy package *Contigo* (With You) precisely to underscore the idea that the government aimed to work *with* individuals, communities and the private sector, such as non-governmental organizations, to create improvements in individuals’ well-being.

Based on a philosophy of evening out individual’s capacity to compete, the *Oportunidades* (Opportunities) program, which I return to later in this chapter, was one of the principal social programs to develop in the context of Mexican neoliberalization. At the heart of this conditional cash transfer program are scholarships for school children, and obligatory

³⁶ The PRI governed Mexico from 1929 until 2000 when Vicente Fox of the PAN became president. Felipe Calderón (2000-2006), in a contested election, took the presidency following Fox. Despite the historic importance of PAN’s governance, Fox and Calderón’s policies are very much a continuation of the neoliberal policies implemented by the previous PRI administrations. Presidential elections were held during the period of my fieldwork. The principal candidates for the 2006 presidential elections were the PAN’s Felipe Calderón, and the PRD’s Andrés Manuel López Obrador. For the first time in recent Mexican history, a left-leaning candidate, López Obrador, was favored to win. Also, running was the PRI candidate Madrazo. Alongside the official campaigns, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation’s (EZLN) candidate *sub-comandante* Marcos, was running an unofficial campaign, which he called *la otra campaña* (the other campaign), to mark his opposition to the political and electoral system.

nutritional and health support, services and education. *Oportunidades* is a renamed and retooled version of the *Progresa* program, launched by the PRI's Zedillo administration (1994-2000). Following the Fox administration, Calderón, also of the PAN, continued the *Oportunidades* program under the same name. PRONASOL or Solidaridad (Solidarity), established in 1988, preceded *Progresa* and *Oportunidades* and was Mexico's first large-scale anti-poverty program. PRONASOL differed from *Progresa* in its model of poverty relief and had party political aims (Cornelius et. al 1994, Molyneux 2006). "It was designed by the Salinas administration to offset the political consequences of the adjustment years and revive the flagging political support of the PRI" (Molyneux 2006:433). Since its launch in 1997, *Progresa-Oportunidades* has expanded considerably throughout Mexico and is one of the largest CCT programs in Latin America (Veras Soares et. al 2010; Fernald et. al 2008).

Neoliberal restructuring also resulted in reforms to some of Mexico's longstanding social institutions, such as the social security and health care systems, the latter of which I analyze later in this chapter. Decentralization is a central component of health care reform, and the restructuring of other sectors of the Mexican state, including the DIF as I discuss in the following sections. In addition, despite budget cuts in the 1980s, public spending began to expand again after the mid-1990s (Moreno-Brid et. al 2009; UNDP 2011). As a result of decentralization and continued investment in the public sector, Santa Ursula and Cholula has experienced an expansion in services and programs. Nevertheless, inadequate tracking of spending and program results are continued problems in Mexico. For example, during the period 2008-2011, Mexico spent about 780,888 million pesos, 5.85% of the PIB (a percentage similar to social spending in other Latin American nations in recent years) on programs for children and adolescents

(UNICEF 2011). However, UNICEF reports that only 1.4 of every 10 pesos allocated to programs for children and adolescents are used in

programs subject to rules of operation with the highest standards of institutionalism, transparency, financial accountability, with positive results from external evaluations, while four of every ten pesos allocated to children under eighteen were distributed through state-administered funds...which according to evaluations and audits...need more attention in questions related to transparency, financial accountability and institutionalism (2011:25).

Indeed, the performance of several of the municipal programs and offices I had the opportunity to observe or interact with were deficient, and the way they functioned differed from how they appear on paper, such as reports in the local newspaper. Another serious problem is the impact of social spending vis-à-vis economic growth. As Moreno-Brid and his collaborators argue, given the economic slowdown and continued lack of job opportunities in Mexico, the nation's social policy seems "to be running up a down escalator, having to deploy additional resources just to keep pace and so avoid a massive deterioration of social conditions" (2009:156). I return to this issue later in the chapter.

Neoliberal restructuring of Mexican social policy comes in the context of changes in social policy and welfare states throughout the world—the US, Europe and throughout Latin America (Gledhill 2001; Morgen and Maskovsky 2003), although since 2000 there has been a widespread turn away from free-market approaches in Latin America (Sandbrook et al. 2006:77).³⁷ The rise in left governments in Latin America has also resulted in increased concern with philanthropy among Latin American magnates, who recognize the relationship between widespread poverty and the "success of radical populist leaders who are changing the political

³⁷ The rise in left governments in Latin America has also resulted in increased concern with philanthropy among Latin American magnates, who recognize the relationship between widespread poverty and the "success of radical populist leaders who are changing the political panorama of Latin America with a discourse based on vengeance against the rich, corrupt and white" (Reyes 2005: 114). Some of Latin America's wealthiest business men, including Carlos Slim, meet yearly to discuss poverty, philanthropy and social responsible business.

panorama of Latin America with a discourse based on vengeance against the rich, corrupt and white” (Reyes 2005: 114). Some of Latin America’s wealthiest businessmen, including Mexico’s multibillionaire Carlos Slim, meet yearly to discuss poverty, philanthropy and socially responsible business. Slim donated four billion dollars to his Carlos Slim Foundation between 2006 and 2010, making him, according to Forbes Magazine, “One of the world’s biggest philanthropists (Dolan 2011; Kroll 2011). Nevertheless, Slim is skeptical of charity and the Gates-Buffet Giving Pledge, which he did not sign (Epstein 2010), stating that “Trillions of dollars have been given to charity in the last 50 years, and they don’t solve anything” (Frank 2010). Rather, Slim has argued on several occasions that job creation is the “the only way to fight poverty” (Frank 2010). As of yet, he has been much more successful at growing his own wealth, than growing jobs that would significantly impact Mexico’s labor markets.

Political Structure and Social Provisioning

Santa Ursula is one of thirteen *juntas auxiliares* (townships) that, in addition to eight urban *barrios* (neighborhoods), make up the municipality of San Pedro Cholula.³⁸ A locally elected municipal president (mayor) along with a group of *regidores* (councilors) form the *ayuntamiento* (municipal council), which runs the municipal government. Santa Ursula, like other townships, has its own locally elected *presidente auxiliar* (auxiliary president), much like a small town mayor.³⁹ As Fox (2007) points out,

The conventional wisdom holds that the municipality is the most local level of government in Mexico’s official three-tier system. Yet much of rural Mexico is also governed by a ‘fourth level,’ which administers villages *within* municipalities. This layer

³⁸ The federal system delegates power to Mexico’s thirty one states, which regulate municipal governance. Two hundred seventeen municipalities make up the state of Puebla’s seven regions.

³⁹ Both elected and appointed sub-municipal regimes exist in Mexico. “Based on a review of state municipal laws as of 2006, thirteen states had elected systems, in thirteen states sub-municipal officials were named by the municipal authorities, and four states had mixed systems in which different layers of sub-municipal leader were chosen through different means [Fox, 2007]. Notably, during the 1996-2006 decade, only four states passed laws that involved changes in ‘sub-municipal regime.’” (Fox 2007:530).

of sub-municipal governance has been largely invisible to all but the occasional anthropologist—and the literally millions of citizens who live in villages (Fox 2007:529).

Sub-municipal localities such as Santa Ursula are dependent fiscally on the municipal government, which administers all public services, and sub-municipal leaders “usually lack much in the way of formal authority – except when government social investment funds are supposed to be invested outside the town center” (Fox 2007:530). In contrast to municipal mayors, state governors or the nation’s president, auxiliary presidents do not receive a salary for their work as government representatives.⁴⁰ Their participation as town mayor is considered a service to their community as part of the local cargo system, in which adult married men in town serve in a series of positions in the religious and civil hierarchy.⁴¹ Cargos, particularly the higher status positions, also often involve large personal expenditures, (Chance and Taylor 1985; Wolf 1986). The cargo of mayor is a burden, economically and otherwise, for a man and his family, a reality that Don Rigoberto and his wife Doña Celia, Santa Ursula’s *presidente* and *presidenta* (2004-2007), repeatedly discussed with me. Their service resulted in considerable strain on their family and their relationship. Upon completing his service, President Rigoberto, a former

⁴⁰Auxiliary presidents, like the municipal president, serve a three-year-term and are not eligible for reelection the following term. In contrast to other townships in Cholula and the municipal government, in Santa Ursula, mayoral candidates do not run with a political party. Nevertheless, President Rigoberto supported and had a close relationship with the PRI party, which ran the municipal and state government.

⁴¹ The way in which the auxiliary governments function varies among townships, and among administrations within a township. There is also variation in the positions that make up a local cargo system and the extent to which the men who fill such positions play an active or largely symbolic role in local governance. In Santa Ursula, the auxiliary government includes a vice president, several *regidores* (councilors), two judges, the chief of the local police (*comandante*), the *subcomandante* and several *comandantes* (police officers). All are unpaid positions. Although high cargo positions like mayor represent a burden to a man and his household, holding such positions are also a source of prestige and respect within the community. Although throughout his administration President Rigoberto and his wife Presidenta Celia generally considered the cargo a very large burden and described it to me on several occasions as a “bad experience,” they were also proud of the fact that they had held this position. Mathews (1985) argues that earlier literature on the cargo system in Mesoamerica focused on the prestige that men gained as they worked their way up the political and religious hierarchy and failed to recognize the fact that an entire household gains prestige and respect through the cargo system. As such, a male/female couple (typically a husband and wife) usually serve as *mayordomo* together. This is clearly the case with the cargo of mayor, in which President Rigoberto’s wife simultaneously held the cargo of Presidenta of Santa Ursula and the auxiliary DIF.

migrant, returned to the United States, in order to earn back money he had spent and borrowed for his household's expenses during his term, and to "forget about" his experience as mayor.

The demographics and socio-economic needs in the townships vary from those in the urban center and "the political subordination of sub-municipal rural communities to municipal centers directly mirrors underlying class and ethnic inequalities" (Fox 2007: 530). Residents in townships, such as Santa Ursula, generally have fewer years of education and lower incomes than their counterparts in the nearby urban center, where migration is less widespread.⁴²

Throughout Mexico out-migration rates appear to be higher for sub-municipal localities than for town centers (Fox 2008: 451). In addition, the infrastructure, such as paved roads and public lighting, and services, such as health care, telephone and postal delivery are less extensive in the rural townships than in the municipal city.

Historically the distribution of funding for social programs in Mexico has been "geographically uneven" (Cravey 1997:80; UNDP 2008). Likewise, the existence and operation of social institutions, programs and services differ throughout the country, in part according to a political entity's location, population size and needs. The decentralization of government, including institutions of social welfare, has had varied results. In some regions and localities, decentralization has resulted in increased funding and services. In other areas the opposite is true. In Cholula, decentralization has resulted in greater services and increased public spending. Yet, rural communities and other sub-municipal localities like Santa Ursula, are still subordinate to the municipal center. The political structure and relationship between the municipal seat and

⁴² For example, according to the 2000 INEGI census, the average level of schooling among adults 15 years and older was 4.17 years in Santa Ursula as compared to 8.39 in the city of Cholula. Of Santa Ursulans aged 15 and older, 44 percent had not completed primary school, as compared to only 14 percent of urban Cholulans. Of Santa Ursulans aged 18 and older, less than 2 percent had some high school, and less than 1 percent had studied beyond high school. Of urban Cholulan's 18 years and older, 17 percent had attended HS, and 17 percent had beyond high school. 50 percent of employed Santa Ursulans received no wages or less than one minimum salary and only 2 percent earned more than five minimum salaries. In Cholula 12 percent earned no wages or less than one minimum salary, and 12 percent of the population earned more than five minimum salaries.

townships (*juntas auxiliares*) shape the way that the government, through the DIF, provides social assistance in Cholula, as the wives of political leaders are in charge of their corresponding DIF.

The DIF

The National System for the Integrated Development of the Family (*El Sistema Nacional para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia*), called most commonly by its Spanish acronym the DIF, is the principal government institution responsible for creating, shaping and carrying out public policies that provide social assistance in Mexico. The DIF has its origins in the post-revolutionary period, with the establishment in 1929 of the *Gota de Leche* (Drop of Milk) Program, a milk distribution program for children in Mexico City. The aid and protection of children has been a primary area of concern of the DIF, as is reflected in its institutional foundations.⁴³ Historically, the DIF's principal areas of assistance have included nutrition, family and community development, child abuse and abandonment, and aid to vulnerable populations, such as the elderly and people with disabilities (Guadarrama 2001:142-143). The DIF is a key component not only of Mexico's social welfare apparatus, but also of its political structure and has a significant presence in many rural communities.

The DIF, located today under the Ministry of Health (*Secretaría de Salud*), is a decentralized institution, divided into federal, state, municipal and auxiliary (township) subsystems. Traditionally, the wife of the top official of a political entity, known as the *presidenta*, runs the corresponding DIF. In other words, the wife of Mexico's president heads

⁴³ According to the government website "Its first formal antecedent is the Gota de Leche Programa in 1929, which brought together a group of Mexican women, who took charge of distributing this food to girls and boys around Mexico City. This gave way to the creation of the National Association for the Protection of Children, which organized the National Lottery in order to support the Beneficia Pública (Public Welfare), which since this time has been in charge of supporting actions of this kind" A succession of institutions aimed to aid poor children and families followed. Finally, in 1977 the DIF is established via presidential decree under the administration of López Portillo by fusing together the Mexican Institute for Children and Families (IMPI) with the Mexican Institution for the Support of Children (IMAN) (<http://dif.sip.gob.mx/>).

the federal DIF, the wife of a governor heads her state's DIF, and so forth.⁴⁴ This practice became customary in the 1940s and was formalized with a decree in 1977 (Guadarrama 2001). In this way, the government is structured around the normative heterosexual family with gendered division of labor. Mexico's president is the leader of the nation, and his wife is in charge of the family—the Nation's family.⁴⁵ Having political wives in charge of the nation's principal institution for social assistance builds on a history of women of wealthy and political families in charge of charity work in Mexico (and elsewhere). According to Guadarrama (2001), by running the DIF, the president's wife serves as a bridge between civil society and the state, and the role of the government and private sector in social provisioning. The fact that the DIF is closely tied to the municipal government has implications for the ways politicians use the government structure to reinforce political control over townships, as I will discuss. Moreover, because politician's wives run the DIF, each term a new *presidenta* takes over and brings with her a new staff, which can result in a lack of accountability and continuity in services and programs.

The decentralization of the DIF during the 1980s served as a mechanism of austerity in the distribution of resources and contributed to the unequal distribution of resources (Guadarrama 2001). While in some of the most marginal regions in the country municipal DIF installations and services are limited or practically non-existent (Guadarrama 2001), in other

⁴⁴During the period of my fieldwork Marta Sahagún de Fox was head of the federal DIF (2000-2006), followed by Margarita de Zavala de Calderón (2006-2012). In the state of Puebla, PRI governor Mario Marín's wife, Margarita García was the *presidenta* of DIF Puebla. In the municipality of San Pedro Cholula, PRI municipal mayor Juan Pablo Jiménez's wife Margarita Blanca Jiménez was the *presidenta* of DIF Cholula). The federal, state and municipal DIF usually have directors that run their institutions, and in some cases the *presidenta* is primarily as a symbolic figures.

⁴⁵ This is not entirely unlike other political regimes, such as in the US, where the first lady is informally expected to take care of the first family, choose china patterns for their home in the White House, and also carry out projects that focus on the nation's children and family. For example, Michelle Obama downplayed her background as a Harvard-trained lawyer during the presidential campaigns and early in Obama's presidency, emphasizing instead her role as a wife and mother, often referring to herself as the "First Mama". Her main service focus has been military families.

municipalities, such as San Pedro Cholula, with its proximity to the city of Puebla and relatively large population, benefited from decentralization. Through this process of decentralization, came the establishment of DIF Cholula in 1990 and along with it the expansion of the budget, programs and services. According to the DIF social worker, during the 1980s the DIF Municipal Committee, consisting only of the *presidenta municipal*, a coordinator and a secretary, ran social programs in Cholula. The Municipal Committee had a small budget and shared its office with the *Casa de la Cultura*. The municipal *presidenta* ran both institutions, and as such had to distribute her time and resources between these two institutions. During this period services and resources were limited to preschools, nutrition, community workshops and economic aid for families living in extreme poverty to help with costs such medicine, shoes, clothing, hospitalization of a family member or the purchase of a coffin.⁴⁶

During the late 1980s, DIF assistance expanded to include more programs and the distribution of items such as glasses, crutches, prostheses and wheel chairs. During the 1990-1993 administration the DIF and the *Casa de la Cultura* became separate institutions⁴⁷ and DIF Cholula established the *Procuraduría de Asistencia del Menor y de la Familia*, which included a physician, psychologist, psychiatrist, social worker, secretary and a driver and van to transport people to DIF Puebla for specialized therapies. According to the DIF social worker, who began working at the DIF in 1987 and is the institution's longest-standing employee, San Pedro

⁴⁶ According to the social workers, "Economic aid during this time consisted of taking children to their therapies in Puebla, economic aid in terms of hospitalizations, the purchase of coffins for families who did not have money to purchase coffins. Preference was given to newborns, minors and senior citizens (personas adultas) of families living in extreme poverty. Aid to buy medicine, we gave clothing, shoes, nothing else."

⁴⁷ The social worker explained: "We began to see more cases. It was during this period that the areas of social work were opened, and I began working there. That's when we began seeing cases of children who were abused or abandoned. Here a lawyer from the *presidencia* or the coordinator's friend who was a lawyer began to inform us 'We have a case. Well, do this. Listen lawyer, do this, or no do that.' Because we didn't have a lawyer then, we did everything, because there was not the specialized staff. We leaned on the coordinator, who was a teacher, myself, the secretary and the president. In other words, we did everything so that people would not be unattended. That's when we began to see more cases."

Cholula was the first municipality in Puebla to establish a clinic for “Atención del Maltrato” (Services for Maltreatment). The expansion of DIF Cholula has continued in recent years. For example, in 2006, DIF Cholula established a clinic for persons with disabilities (Centro de Rehabilitación Integral-Center for Integral Rehabilitation) and the *Estancias del Día* for Cholula’s aging population.

Decentralization of the DIF resulted in the expansion of the role of governors’ and mayors’ wives. Today, the state and municipal *presidentas* control their own budgets and can make changes in programs as they see fit. Often a *presidenta* will rename and reorganize former programs. The role of auxiliary presidents, such as Presidenta Celia, has also expanded in recent years in Cholula. The social worker explained that as part of the expansion of DIF Cholula, they invited the *presidentas* in the thirteen *juntas auxiliares* (townships) to play a larger role in the diffusion of DIF programs in their communities.⁴⁸ “Before it wasn’t like that...we would say ‘*Señora*, just give us the facts and we will go’,” explained the social worker. In addition, she explained, the auxiliary *presidentas* and their fellow community members were reluctant to participate in DIF programs, “The people during that time didn’t really want to get very involved. Today, the mayors’ wives in the townships are sworn into office. Now they give more seriousness to the programs that they offer.” In addition, DIF Cholula trains the auxiliary presidents so that they know about the different DIF services and what sorts of cases they can request help with from the municipal DIF.

Nevertheless, the expansion of the role of the auxiliary *presidentas* differs from that of the municipal and state *presidentas*. The auxiliary *presidentas* do not have their own budget nor do they have control over the programs that serve their community. Much like services, such as

⁴⁸ This began with the administration of Rosa María Concha de Jiménez, but became more so with the next administration.

water, road construction and electricity, the auxiliary DIF subsystem is controlled by the municipal center. In this way, participatory budgeting and democratization of resource allocation central to decentralization of the DIF, and state governance in general, has not expanded to rural areas (Fox 2007:528). Santa Ursula's *presidenta* does not create programs or decide how they will be implemented. Instead, the auxiliary *presidenta* serves primarily as an intermediary between her township and the municipality, which usually means helping assure that people will attend events that the municipal DIF proposes and organizes. In addition, in contrast to the municipal and state *presidentas*, or the auxiliary mayors, the auxiliary *presidentas* in Cholula do not have their own office in their township. This contrast in allocation of space reflects the limited role of the auxiliary *presidentas*.

The mission, philosophy, aims and programs of the DIF have changed over time and with different administrations. Such changes reflect larger shifts in Mexican social policy and approaches to poverty. The DIF social worker explained that “Before the government used to give them everything” and that today, “we counsel people on how to overcome their problems.” She explained that a principal aim of the DIF today is to “raise consciousness” in people so that they understand their responsibilities and obligations, “so that they will be more responsible members of society. Because as authorities if we don’t teach them, not give them, but teach them, they are never going to be able to. They will only expect that we give and give to them.” This shift in the DIF’s philosophy and approach to social assistance corresponds with broader neoliberal changes in Mexican social policy, such the *Oportunidades* program, with their focus on co-responsibility and developing skills so that individuals can overcome their circumstances of poverty and vulnerability. The DIF’s approach to nutritional improvement, which has historically been a primary area of DIF attention, provides an example of how the structure of its

programs has changed. School breakfast programs are an important part of the history of social assistance in Mexico, and are integral to the development and founding of the DIF. Today the DIF school breakfast program still exists. However, the DIF has scaled back this program, while expanding nutrition talks that aim to improve nutrition among the poor and extremely poor by giving them “the tools” with which to make better nutritional choices (Guadarrama 2001).

DIF programs vary among municipalities and states. In part, this reflects the fact that the state and municipal *presidentas* have control over their own budgets and programs. They decide which programs to implement and how. In addition, some municipalities receive more funding than others. More heavily populated municipalities, such as Cholula, have larger budgets and more wide-ranging programs than smaller municipalities. Variation in programs also reflects different regional needs. For example, the DIF operates shelters in Mexican border cities for migrant children traveling alone who are apprehended by migration officials. Located on Mexico’s northern and southern borders, the twenty-two shelters serve primarily Mexican and Central American children who travel alone. Santa Ursulans generally do not send children alone or with strangers. I knew of no such cases and Santa Ursulans whom I asked, told me that when children migrate to the US, they usually do so with a parent or another family member.

In Cholula the principal way that the municipal DIF provides services in townships, such as Santa Ursula, is through the *Jornadas de Salud* (Health Day Program). Typically, DIF Cholula arranges with Santa Ursula’s mayor and *presidenta auxiliar* a specific date on which to bring a variety of services, including free legal counseling, dental, optical, psychological, medical and nutrition services, and sometimes free medicines and vaccinations to the community. The auxiliary president and the *presidenta* promote the event through a public sound system or signs in the *presidencia*, and sometimes the auxiliary *presidenta* personally

invites people to attend, in order to guarantee a sizeable turnout. Service providers include institutions and individuals from both the public and private sector. For example, on one occasion DIF Cholula invited a local nutritionist from the Japanese transnational enterprise Yakult to give nutrition talks in the schools and the *presidencia*.⁴⁹ The nutrition talks included a description of the Yakult lactobacillus product line, free samples and the advice that consumption of one Yakult product daily would improve intestinal health in children and adults.

The DIF social worker explained the *Jornadas de Salud* as a mechanism to reach populations that lack public health insurance. However, the *Jornadas* also function as a platform for the political party in power in the municipal and state government, particularly during election years. As Santa Ursula's secretary explained, "They promote the *Jornadas* more during electoral times, because that is how the candidates take advantage to become known and to some degree share ideas with the people. So the institution that brings the *Jornadas* will say in a sign, 'Sponsored by the state government, or the municipal government or such and such candidate.'" Similarly, municipal and state sponsored projects like paving a road or inaugurating a new DIF center are more frequent during election years.

Because politician's wives run the DIF, this institution is an important instrument through which local elites and politicians in municipal centers use "the machinery of local government" to create and perpetuate political domination in sub-municipal localities (Fox 2007: 530). I observed many instances of how municipal and state politicians used DIF events, programs and services to promote their party and candidate for the 2006 elections. For example, the municipal and state government organized a large breakfast in Cholula for the auxiliary *presidentas* in order

⁴⁹ Yakult opened up their first plant in Mexico since 1981. They produce products containing *Lactobacillus casei Shirota*, and market their product as aiding in digestive health. Today with plants in the states of Mexico and Jalisco, and agencies in Mexico City, Guadalajara, Monterey, Oaxaca, Puebla and Toluca, Mexico is one of the biggest markets for Yakult.

to introduce them to the PRI candidates in the state of Puebla. Two months prior to the elections, the municipal president and his wife organized a mother's day and children's day event in Santa Ursula and other rural localities in order to promote their party's candidates. The event included music, fair games, toys for the children and raffle prizes for the mothers, such as plastic pitchers affixed with the name of the candidate. Shortly before the elections, a representative of the municipal DIF asked the auxiliary presidents to "remind" the women in their communities who receive monthly DIF *despensas* to vote for the PRI candidate.

Education and Healthcare

Public education and health care are fundamental components of Mexico's social policy. With a community clinic, preschool, primary, junior high (*secundaria*) and high school, Santa Ursula is fairly well serviced, due to its relatively large population and location. Communities located far from a major city or with smaller populations, including townships in Cholula, often lack clinics and schools other than primary school. For this reason, many Santa Ursulans were proud that these schools existed in their community, despite the fact that many students do not study beyond junior high school. Santa Ursula also had an early childhood education class for parents and their children aged four and younger, as part of the federal *Educación Inicial* Program. The class, which educates parents and caregivers about nutrition, safety, health and child development, and engages them in educational activities with their young children, met irregularly and was poorly attended. Given low enrollment and Santa Ursula's quickly declining population, the directors of the high school and preschool were concerned that the Ministry of Public Education (SEP—*Secretaría de Educación Pública*) would close their schools. In Chapter Five I analyze education in Santa Ursula and the role caregivers play in this aspect of children's lives.

Mexico's health care system consists of three tiers (Vargas Bustamante: 2010). The first tier includes three social security institutes, financed by employers, employees and the federal government, which provide care for salaried employees and their families at federally-administered clinics. Like the majority of rural Mexicans and the urban poor who rely on informal economic activities, most Santa Ursulans do not qualify for social security because they work outside the formal labor market, as brickmakers or as transnational migrant workers in the US. Only thirteen of 3,618 Santa Ursulans reported in the 2000 census received insurance through the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS—*Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social*). Nevertheless, a separate, entirely federally funded and centralized entity, IMSS-Oportunidades, provides basic coverage and limited services in the nation's poorest rural areas for the otherwise uninsured (Vargas Bustamante 2010:927). Covering approximately half the population, Mexico's social security system, despite neoliberal reforms, is the largest provider in the country.

A network of government-owned clinics, administered by the Ministry of Health, makes up the second tier of Mexico's health system. DIF health services, described earlier, also form part of the Ministry of Health's safety net for the uninsured. The federal government partially decentralized the clinics during two periods—in the 1980s and then in the mid-1990s. Today fourteen of Mexico's states have entirely decentralized clinics, and in the remaining seventeen decentralized and centralized clinics co-exist (Vargas Bustamante 2010:927).⁵⁰ Santa Ursula's *Centro de Salud* (Health Center), which is part of the Ministry's network of clinics, opened in 2000. The staff of one physician, a resident (*médico pasante-servicio*) and two nurses provides consultations during the day and receives emergencies at night. The clinic operates seven days a

⁵⁰ Comparing decentralized and centralized clinics, Vargas Bustamante found that “centralized provision of basic health care in rural areas of Mexico is ...more effective...families from rural Mexico who receive benefits from centralized clinics pay less out-of-pocket for health care, and use preventive care more often than those who access decentralized clinics. A second relevant finding is that decentralization timing explains some differences in the outcome variables, which suggests an improved performance of decentralized providers over time” (2010:933)

week, twenty-four hours a day; clinics with smaller personnel open for fewer hours. Services are free or at low cost, and include family planning, prenatal care, childbirth, vaccinations and care for young children, who most commonly suffer from respiratory and diarrheal infections. There are also programs to detect and treat illnesses, such as hypertension, pulmonary tuberculosis and diabetes in its early stages. The attending physician refers advanced and complicated cases to units of “greater complexity” in Cholula or Puebla City, which has the most advanced infrastructure and medical specialties.

Santa Ursula’s Health Center also offers special services for migrants, as part of the national program *Vete Sano Regresa Sano* (Go Healthy and Return Healthy), called *Bienvenido Poblano* (Welcome Poblano) at the state level. According to the attending physician services include “education and health of migrants from the time they leave, during the trip and until they arrive in the US.” Services include prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, prenatal care for women who are pregnant when they migrate, and vaccinations and medical records for children who will enroll in school in the US. Diabetes, which is widespread in Santa Ursula, is of particular concern for migrants. The physician explained, “The uncontrolled diabetic urinates a lot and is very thirsty, and if he goes through the dessert, he will die. Many have died that way. So, if he must go, we say, ‘Take your medicine, and control your diabetes, so that if you go, you will be able to withstand (*aguantar*) crossing.’” A sign that read *Atención al Migrante* (Services for Migrants) hung on the clinic door to let people know about the program. However, according to the doctor, few Santa Ursulans sought care before departing for the United States.

Seguro Popular (Popular Health Insurance), a universal, voluntary public health insurance program, is the newest component in the second tier of Mexico’s health system. Formally introduced in 2003, the goal of Seguro Popular was to convert the Ministry of Health’s existing

health services for those not covered by social security into a health insurance system and create a “culture of prepayment” so that families could “insure themselves against catastrophic expenditures, which would reduce medical impoverishment” (Lakin 2010:318). Following the tripartite financing model of the IMSS, Seguro Popular was to be financed by the subscriber, state and federal government (Frenk et al. 2003). However, thus far few families and state governments have been willing to pay. The federal government has made up some of the difference, but overall the program has been underfunded. As a result, Seguro Popular has not been able to achieve the goals of offering a basic service package or separating purchasers from providers. In addition, politicians still have control over purchasers in many states and subscribers have little or no choice of providers (Lakin 2010).⁵¹ Nevertheless, the program has managed expand health coverage to some extent and increase government spending on health care, which were two objectives of the reform (Lakin 2010).

The private sector, which is the third tier of health care, comprises more than half of total health expenditures in Mexico (Frenk et al. 2003). “Mexicans of all socioeconomic backgrounds in both rural and urban areas often use private services, as an alternative to public care or to overcome the limitations of public clinics, such as drug supply or long waiting periods. Private health insurance coverage is restricted to only 3% of the population (Vargas Bustamante 2010:926). Quality and cost of private care varies greatly. Impoverishment due to health expenditures is most common among poor families who lack insurance. “85% of families that spend more than 30% of their disposable income (defined as total spending minus spending on food) on health are uninsured and more than half are in bottom quintiles of the income

⁵¹ See Lakin 2010 for a comprehensive analysis of the political process that led to Seguro Popular, and the obstacles reformers have faced in its implementation.

distribution (Frenk et al. 2003:1670).⁵² Many Santa Ursulans use private providers, both traditional and allopathic healers, in addition to the local clinic. During the period of my fieldwork, Santa Ursula had a midwife and three nurses who attended homebirths as well as one private general physician. Some community members also sought care from private providers outside of Santa Ursula.

Families with members in the US use a combination of public and private providers in Mexico. However, households with migrants spend somewhat more in the private sector than households without migrants, because remittances provide them with greater resources to spend on health care (Salgado de Snyder 2010). “It is estimated that 46% of those receiving remittances use some share of these funds for health care, which represents the single largest category of the intended use of remittances” (Vargas Bustamante, et al. 2008). Studies show that remittances have positive effects on children’s health, particularly in households and communities with well-established migration networks (Donato et al. 2003; Kanaiaupuni and Donato 1999). Kanaiaupuni and Donato (1999) argue that improvements in infrastructure and standards of living associated with U.S. migration relate to decreases in infant mortality and better health for all children in such communities.

Households with migrants also use public health services. Salgado de Snyder, et al. (2010) found that in three communities in the Mixteca with high incidence of migration, 55.4 percent of households with migrants, compared with 59.8 percent of households without migrants, used the community health center and another 5.6 used an IMSS or ISSSTE (*Instituto de Seguridad y Servicios Sociales de los Trabajadores del Estado*) clinic. In Santa Ursula, the community health center was the principal source of public health services for families of

⁵² “An estimated 55 percent of health expenditure in 2000 was out-of-pocket, and between 2 and 4 million Mexicans per year fell into poverty as a result of this spending (Secretaría de Salud 2004)” (Lakin 2010:318).

migrants and non-migrants, and many families also had health insurance through the Oportunidades programs, which I discuss in the following section. In addition, by 2010 543 Santa Ursulans were affiliated with Seguro Popular (INEGI 2010). However, I have no data on how the insurance program, given its reported shortcomings (Lakin 2010), actually functions in Cholula or its sub-municipal entities.

Mexico is also a site of health care for US workers. Studies have shown that some Mexicans in the United States also return to Mexico for health care, given the fact that many Mexican migrants lack health insurance in the US and the costs of health care in Mexico are substantially lower (Vargas Bustamante et al. 2008; Brown 2008). Subsequently, there is a demand among Mexican migrants in the US for cross-border health insurance. (Vargas Bustamante et al. 2008). Migrants may also prefer to return home, particularly in the case of acute or terminal illness, in order to seek help from their family support system. Although documented migrants and those from regions closer to the US are more likely to do so (Brown 2008), I knew of Santa Ursulans who had returned to the community in such circumstances. In addition, there is some, albeit low, incidence of US-born (non-Mexican-American) retirees who seek care from Mexico's public system (Amin 2008; Hawley 2009). In these ways, the Mexican government contributes to the maintenance and reproduction not only of the families of migrants, but of US workers themselves.

The Oportunidades Program

In Santa Ursula, many households with school children, some of whom were living with caregivers, received cash transfers, called *becas* (scholarships), via the *Oportunidades* program. To qualify for the program a household must, according to the government website in 2005, meet the requirement of having school children who live in “conditions of nutritional poverty in highly

marginal zones or those of concentrated poverty.” Oportunidades is one of the largest cash transfer programs of its kind, and its budget and coverage have expanded significantly during the past decade. Between 2004 and 2007 spending on the program grew from \$2.2 billion to \$3.7 billion, and coverage increased from four million families to more than five million families (Fernald et al. 2008:828). In Santa Ursula, the program, which operates through the local clinic, had a coverage of approximately two hundred families in 2006, according to the clinic’s physician.

Emblematic of neoliberal social policy that approaches poverty reduction by focusing on the development of individual capacities and “co-responsibility” of beneficiaries (Gordon 1995), the Fox administration described the Oportunidades Program this way:

It is a program based on the co-responsibility of its beneficiaries, with the aim of breaking the cycles of transmission of intergenerational poverty. In order to achieve this, this program has extended its coverage and improvement of quality of the services that were offered in Progresá in order to stimulate the development of capacities, that is, assistance in health, education and nutrition.

Oportunidades, like Contigo, stresses co-responsibility not only of recipients but also of poor communities as well. However, as Molyneux argues, the community “is perhaps better described as being devolved to mothers who are those designated as being primarily responsible for securing the Programme’s outcomes” (2006:434). Mothers receive cash transfers for each child enrolled in school, in exchange for their participation in workshops and activities related to education, health and nutrition.⁵³ Junior high and high school students are also required to attend talks, which in Santa Ursula take place at the clinic and maintain a certain grade point average.⁵⁴

⁵³ Oportunidades is modeled on the Brazilian Bolsa Família Program, although the two programs differ in features, such as qualification requirements, application process and the monitoring of conditionalities (Veras Soares et al. 2010).

⁵⁴ Molyneux (2006) notes that obligatory attendance and participation in activities and meetings can conflict with work schedules, making it difficult for women to both hold a job and receive Oportunidades. This conflict is particularly relevant for single mothers. In Santa Ursula, this problem was less noteworthy because women who worked generally did so in brickmaking, and therefore had some flexibility and control over their schedules.

Oportunidades, particularly the cash transfer component, has positively impacted health, growth, motor and cognitive development in young children (Fernald, et al. 2008). The program also appears to have had some success in meeting its goal of improving school enrollment and attendance, particularly at the junior high and high schools levels (Escobar Latapí and González de la Rocha 2004). Attrition rates after primary school are high in Santa Ursula. Although students terminate their formal education for a variety of reasons, school-related costs, such as tuition, uniforms and school supplies, play an important role for many children from low-income families. Santa Ursulan families often depend on their adolescent children to help with brickmaking and more recently some teenagers also contribute to their household by migrating, often with their parents. Families also rely on teenage girls to help care for younger siblings and do domestic chores. In addition, many teenagers, particularly girls, drop out of school upon marrying, as I discuss in the following chapter. The *Oportunidades* programs supports the retention of girls after primary school by providing progressively larger stipends for girls than boys through junior high and high school (Fernald, et al. 2008). Santa Ursulan high school students who received *Oportunidades* generally judged the program positively and said that the economic support had enabled them to continue their studies.

Despite improvements in education and health for children of *Oportunidades*, the program, like PRONASOL before it (Cornelius et al. 1994), cannot fully compensate for Mexico's slow job creation and economic growth (Molyneux 2006; Moreno-Brid 2009). According to the program's verification process, which every three years evaluates whether recipients still meet the targeting requirements, few families move out of poverty. Mexico's National Institute of Public Health's 2006 evaluation showed that 20,000 of the 5 million families covered by *Oportunidades* no longer met the poverty requirement (Moreno-Brid et al.

2009). What that means, argue Moreno-Brid et al., is that only about 0.4 percent of families had “stopped living in poverty and had incomes high enough to satisfy their food, health and education needs...Even if the percentage of ‘graduation’ were five times higher, i.e. 2 percent, it would imply that, *ceteris paribus*, this transfer scheme would take at least five decades to eradicate poverty” (Moreno-Brid et al. 2009:166). Nevertheless, the goal of Oportunidades is not only immediate poverty relief for families, but also “breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty,” meaning that in theory, children and teenagers of Oportunidades would move out of poverty as adults due to their enhanced abilities to access better standards of living and employment.

It is yet to be seen what superior health, education and “skills” gained through Oportunidades and the expansion of other social institutions and programs will mean for the future of Santa Ursula’s children and teenagers. Will improvements in social indicators translate into a significant number of young Santa Ursulans who secure employment in Mexico? That is, will better educated Santa Ursulans be able to find adequate jobs in Mexico, and will they consider the jobs available to them competitive with those they might find in the United States? Given the community’s ample migration experience and networks, and the relatively higher earnings in the US, jobs opportunities available to young Santa Ursulans would have to be competitive in their eyes with US jobs, even when accounting for the costs, hardship and risks of migration. Most Santa Ursulan high school students I knew saw migration and a high school education as opposing options to securing a future. However, as of 2007 the number of Santa Ursulan teenagers who migrated far surpassed the number of teenagers who were seeking a high school diploma. With more than a third of all households (approximately 200 or 566) in the community receiving support from Oportunidades in 2006, clearly the reach of the program is

wide. Perhaps migration from the community would have been greater without the *Oportunidades* program. However, the number of teenagers and young adults who left the community during the past decade is staggering. Of 1,466 children aged five to fourteen in the year 2000, only 602 were still in the community a decade later. That is, nearly 60 percent of Santa Ursulans who would have been fifteen to twenty four years of age in the year 2010 were no longer living in the community. Given the fact that internal migration from Santa Ursula is uncommon and the death rate for this age bracket is low, it is safe to assume that the majority of this absent population were in the United States. These numbers suggest that the long-term impact of the *Oportunidades* program on helping young adults leave poverty, presumably through adequate employment made possible by better skills, health and education, is as of yet small. As Moreno-Brid et al. argue, and I agree, “As long as strong economic growth and job creation are wanting, social policies, whether targeted or not, will be unable to bring about major improvement in poverty and inequality indicators (2009:172).

Programs for Migrants

Cholula’s municipal government, under the 2005-2008 administration, created two offices to assess the needs of and aid migrants and their families. The Municipal Office of Migrant Services (*Oficina Municipal de Atención al Migrante*) was created in November 2006 in order to provide migrants and their family members legal assistance with issues such as incarceration in the United States, missing persons, problems related to debts, illness or death.⁵⁵ During the period of my fieldwork the office dealt with several cases in which family members in Cholula received telephone threats or fraudulent petitions for money, supposedly for a family member in the US. The same municipal administration also created the office of the *Regidor de*

⁵⁵ Assistance often consists of expediting legal processes via the offices of *Protección Consular* (Consular Protection) or the *Atención al Migrante del Estado* (State Migrant Services).

Migración (Councilor of Migration) with the objective of assessing the numbers, demographics and needs of migrants and their families in Cholula. One of the principal goals of the office was to eventually work with state and federal programs, such as the Three-for-One program, which supports migrant community development projects through matching government funding.⁵⁶

The *regidor* commented that such programs had not benefitted communities in Cholula, because they lacked previously consolidated organizations of migrant workers in the United States, which the programs required. His office aimed to help organize networks for this purpose. However, a principal obstacle in meeting this goal, according to the *regidor*, was that people in Cholula's communities were reluctant to discuss migration, because they feared doing so might cause problems for themselves or family members in the United States.

People are very closed...they do not want to share information because they are scared that they will be deported. In Cholula programs have not been established because of the lack of information. They will not give us the information that we need...they are scared and we cannot contact people and organize. Also they are very traditional and their customs *impide que se trabaje...es por eso no jala* (impede the programs from working...that's why they don't work).

He noted that Santa Ursulans in particular were very distrustful, and "if you offer them something after they think that you are going to steal from them...it seems like they won't let themselves *avanzar* (move forward or develop)."⁵⁷ Although Mexican migrant hometown organizations have expanded in the past fifteen years, the majority of migrants do not participate in such organizations.⁵⁸ In addition, despite the dramatic increase in migrant remittances from

⁵⁶ The municipal office was also organizing a house construction project, for which they had already acquired construction permits and authorization to use the land. The office also planned to train women who remain in the communities to carry out productive projects developed with migrant remittances. The *regidor* added that they had not made much headway due to people's feelings of distrust.

⁵⁷ Santa Ursulans had a reputation among Cholulans for being particularly traditional as well as distrustful of outsiders. Several Santa Ursulans spoke to me about three particular incidents in which outsiders had come to Santa Ursula and stolen money or property. However, Santa Ursula's reputation stemmed largely from a 1987 incident in which a group of women lynched three men, killing one, who had come to Santa Ursula to sell sweet breads. The women suspected that the men had come to kidnap children.

⁵⁸ "An unusually large-scale survey of relatively recent Mexican migrants found that 14 per cent of respondents

US\$3.7 billion in 1995 to more than US\$23 billion in 2006, less than one percent of migrant remittances is invested in community development (Fox 2008:438).

In Santa Ursula hometown organizations had not been directly responsible for organizing or funding community development projects with the exception of the construction of a new church.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, migrant remittances are an indirect source of funding for local development. For example, during Don Rigoberto's administration, the municipality paved several of Santa Ursula's main streets and installed public lighting along the road that leads into Santa Ursula from the highway. These projects were initiated by President Rigoberto who petitioned the municipal government. Although the municipal government provides funding for such projects, they often require community members, many of whose households depend on remittances, to contribute funds. However, distrust of the municipal government or previously unfulfilled promises can hinder local fund-raising efforts on which such projects and the Three-for-One program depend.⁶⁰

belonged to some kinds of hometown association (Suro 2005). However, a much smaller national survey found that only 6 per cent of foreign-born Mexicans interviewed reported membership in an ethnic immigrant civic or social organization (Waldinger 2007)" (Fox 2008:444).

⁵⁹ The new church, located just behind the old Franciscan church, was built to accommodate Santa Ursula's contemporary population, which had grown substantially since the original church was constructed hundreds of years earlier. Although still unfinished, the church was inaugurated in 2006. Funds for the construction of the new church come from contributions of Santa Ursulans through the local cargo system and other *colectas* (collections). Many Santa Ursulans pointed out that their population was quickly on the decline due to the expansion of US-bound migration, and often joked that by the time the construction was complete, there would no longer be enough people in town to fill it. Early in his administration President Rigoberto was making plans to travel to the United States, particularly Chicago, Indiana, New York, Los Angeles, and Texas, in order to speak with Santa Ursulans living there and persuade them to *cooperar* (contribute) in order to start investing more in the town. He said he had already applied for a visa to travel to the US. His wife, Presidenta Celia, was doubtful his efforts would result in much, stating, "People will help for a while, and then they begin to forget about the town." When I asked President Rigoberto mid-way through his administration how his plans for the trip were going, he threw his hands up in frustration, stating "I'm just waiting for my term to be over." His experience as mayor had been burdensome and frustrating. President Rigoberto and his wife spent much of his term looking forward to the day in which he would pass the cargo of mayor to the next man.

⁶⁰ President Rigoberto also petitioned the municipal government to build an awning over the preschool courtyard. This project had an estimated cost of 70,000 pesos (US\$7,000), according the preschool parent committee. The municipal government offered to contribute half the funds, if the preschool would come up with the other half—35,000 pesos. The parents' committee doubted they would be able to collect that amount, as many parents were unwilling to contribute, in part, because it was expensive, but also some parents doubted the municipality would

During election years offers from the municipal or state government to develop a community's infrastructure are more frequent, and in special circumstances the government might propose a large project at no cost to the community. For example, in 2005 the governor, Mario Marín, offered to pave all of Santa Ursula if Santa Ursulans would sell their agricultural lands for the construction of a Polytechnic University in Cholula. Despite President Rigoberto's enthusiasm for the proposal, Santa Ursulans were uninterested and unwilling to sell their land, which provides most households with the main element of their diet, corn. The mayor's secretary suggested that perhaps Santa Ursulans felt that a university would not benefit their community, because "everyone is migrating." Nevertheless, as we have seen, Santa Ursulans' perspectives on education, migration and economic well-being are in fact varied, and, as I discuss in subsequent chapters, high rates of migration are only one of several factors that accounts for low numbers of high school and college students. At any rate, Santa Ursulans clearly viewed their land as a better resource with which to meet their material needs and economic security than a local university.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined Mexican social policy and programs, how they function in Santa Ursula, and in relation to municipal, state and federal entities. Townships like Santa Ursula are dependent fiscally and structurally on the municipal government, which administers public services and social assistance. The DIF, the principal government institution that provides social assistance in Mexico, closely follows the government's political structure, such that wives of mayors, governors and the nation's president run the corresponding DIF entity. At the

keep their word, or that they money would be used to build the awning. One member explained, "The problem of not receiving support is more of a problem in the preschool than in the other schools. Also, another problem is that if people have given money, and then they see that nothing happens, then they say, 'Where has the money gone?' and then they don't want to give money after that. So they won't send money, they would prefer to spend it elsewhere."

township level, this means that the mayor's wife serves as *presidenta auxiliar* for the DIF in her community as part of the unpaid local cargo system. As we shall see, the relationship of the *presidenta auxiliar* to the municipal DIF and the fact that her position is unpaid and burdensome, as are the highest positions of local cargo systems, shape the way in which DIF social assistance is carried out in the townships. In Chapters Six and Nine we shall consider more closely the role of the DIF in providing services for aging men and women, as well as children who are abandoned when their parents migrate.

Neoliberal restructuring of both economic and social policy shapes the conditions in which Mexican families provide and care for their children during this period of high rates of female migration from Santa Ursula. The reduction and elimination of general subsidies appears to be the aspect of social policy reform that most affected Santa Ursulans. At the same time, over the past fifteen years the community has benefitted from Mexico's continued investment in social programs—with the founding of a public clinic and high school, the expansion of the Oportunidades cash transfer program, which in 2006 included more than one-third of Santa Ursulan households, and the establishment of the public health insurance program Seguro Popular with approximately 20 percent of Santa Ursulans affiliated in 2010. The municipal government also benefitted from the process of decentralization with the expansion of the DIF budget, programs, institutes and staff since the mid-1980s and the founding of two offices to assess and address the needs of transnational migrants in the year 2006. Nevertheless, the results or efficiency with which programs or offices actually function are varied. For example, although Seguro Popular has increased coverage and public spending on health care, the program thus far has been underfunded and has not functioned as intended (Lakin 2010). In addition, as the 2011 UNICEF report on social spending on children and adolescents in Mexico indicates, inadequate

tracking of spending and results are continued problems in Mexico, particularly in programs run through state-administered funds. Indeed, several municipal programs and offices that I had contact with during fieldwork appeared fairly ineffectual.

While public programs and institutions in Santa Ursula and Mexico's social spending have expanded since the mid-1990s, so has migration. Because Mexico's economic development and job creation have not kept pace with demand for jobs, social programs in effect serve to mitigate the effects of inadequate employment and prevent massive decline in social conditions (Moreno-Brid et. al 2009). For example, although the Oportunidades program appears to have improved health and education indicators among children and adolescents, it is yet to be seen whether children's improved skills and well-being will result in significant decrease in poverty, which is dependent on beneficiaries eventually securing adequate employment. In Santa Ursula, despite the program's broad coverage, the number of teenagers and young adults who have left the community during the beginning of the twenty-first century is staggering. It could be argued that not only has social spending functioned to prevent deleterious effects of slow economic growth, but social investment has also inadvertently contributed to a healthier and better educated transnational workforce. That is, given the continued intensity of emigration from Santa Ursula, many children who have benefitted from improved state services, have or will eventually migrate and form part of US labor force. In this way, the Mexican government helps subsidize some of the costs of the maintenance and reproduction of a segment of the US workforce.

Chapter Four

Caring Labor, Gender, Residence and Mothers-in-Law

Chapter Four analyzes how gender, age, residence rules and domestic lifecycles shape the way that family members distribute caring labor, and subsequently redistribute caring labor when a mother migrates. In the first section, I examine how residence rules and domestic lifecycles relate to the fluid and dynamic nature of care arrangements. Although households in which children live with caregivers are common in Santa Ursula, such family, household and care arrangements are usually temporary. Next, I give an overview of traditional and contemporary practices of courtship and marriage in Santa Ursula. The majority of migrants from Santa Ursula are young adults in their late teens through their mid-thirties, precisely the age in which Santa Ursulans typically form free-unions, marry and have children. The third section looks at how individual and domestic lifecycles correspond with how reproductive labor is distributed within families. Traditionally, a woman's responsibilities in brickwork, caring labor and household work change throughout her life—from childhood through youth, adulthood and old-age. Although female migration and leaving children behind are new phenomena in Santa Ursula, the impact that these events have on older girls' and women's activities can also be understood in the context of a gendered and aged household division of labor. The final section examines the dynamics of marriage and mothers-in-law in the lives of young women. Virilocal post-marital residence rules and the quality of a woman's relationship with her mother-in-law relate to care arrangements for children left behind in Santa Ursula, where most people expect parents to leave children with paternal grandparents, and in the majority of cases they do.

Fluidity, Care and Lifecycles

One morning in January 2007 a group of women—all extended family members and *comadres*—were busy at Amalia’s house preparing a *mole* meal for a “small” fiesta of about fifty guests. Older girls were helping their mothers, aunts and grandmothers make stacks of tortillas on two large gas-burning *comales* (griddles). Meanwhile, younger children weaved in and out of the room, laughing, playing and chasing each other through the recently built cement rooms of Amalia’s two-story house. Because nearly all Santa Ursulans, if not all, have one and usually many more family members who have migrated to the United States, such social gatherings were always composed of women, men and children who had either migrated and returned to Santa Ursula, or had a parent, child, aunt, uncle, cousin, or sibling in the United States. As I looked around the room that day I noted that all the women and children had either previously lived in the United States, or had at least one immediate family member who was still there. Together their experiences represented a spectrum of movement and change in household and childcare configurations that typically occur within a family over the years.

Amalia’s mother, Doña Idalia, in her seventies, had cared for the children of two of her daughters and one of her sons. On that day, the grandchildren who were once in her care were now living with their parents. Amalia’s sister, Viviana, had left a son behind with Doña Idalia. She had recently returned to Santa Ursula with her husband and their three US-born children to baptize them. Her husband returned to New York shortly after, and Viviana stayed behind in their recently built house with their four children. She said it was difficult without her husband, because she had to be “both the mother and the father.” Amalia had also spent seven years in New York. Like Viviana, she returned to Santa Ursula with her husband, who subsequently returned to New York with their oldest daughter. Amalia and the youngest children stayed behind in their recently built two-story house. Dolores, Amalia’s sister-in-law, had never been to

the United States, but her husband had been in New York since the mid-1990s, and she had been raising her five children on her own for more than a decade. Inés, Amalia's cousin and *comadre*, spent three years in Indiana, while her four children stayed with their paternal grandparents. Prior to migrating, Inés lived with her children in her parents-in-law's house while her husband was in Indiana. In 2004, Inés and her husband returned to Santa Ursula and moved into their newly constructed home with their children. Four years later, her husband returned to the United States. Marisol, Inés's then seventeen-year-old niece, was caring for her six younger siblings and their home. Her mother, father and older brother had left for Indiana the previous year.

Childrearing arrangements that emerge when a father or mother leaves for the United States are hardly ever static. While "mother-away" family configurations have become increasingly common and visible in Santa Ursula, they are neither permanent nor fixed. Rather, they represent one stage in the lifecycle of an individual or domestic group. As fathers and mothers migrate or return, as children go to live with caregivers or leave them to reunite with their parents, families and households are continually reconfigured.

Like care arrangements, households and families are intrinsically fluid and dynamic, and "child circulation" is only one way in which households and families in Santa Ursula "are assembled, disassembled, and reassembled at different moments and in different ways" (Anderson 2009: 185). Marriage, for example, is an important event that changes the composition of households. In Santa Ursula, traditional residence rules that make up what Robichaux calls the "Mesoamerican developmental cycle of domestic groups" (1997) greatly dictate the way in which family members "assemble, disassemble and reassemble" households. The cycle Robichaux describes is based on virilocal residence rules. Typically a recently married woman leaves her natal home to live with her husband in his parents' house. Also

residing in the house are her husband's parents, his unmarried siblings, as well as his married brothers and their wives and children. Later, a married couple and their children form a separate household near the husband's parents' home. Ultimately, the youngest son inherits the parental house in what Robichaux calls the "replacement phase." As in all family or kinship systems, norms differ from actual behavior, and beliefs and practices vary among individuals.

In the introduction to a volume on fostering and adoption in Latin America, Leinaweaver and Seligman use the term "family-making" rather than "family" in order to underscore the "dynamic, processual and relational" (2009:1) quality of families and differentiate these contemporary studies from earlier anthropological work that treated kinship and family as "given, ahistorical and abstract" (2009:1). While Robichaux's categorization of Mesoamerican residence rules might appear similar to early anthropological treatments of kinship, Robichaux in fact aims to emphasize the dynamic quality of families and households by focusing on the concept of lifecycles. Robichaux found, based on his review of ethnographic accounts, that the Mesoamerican household formation system is prevalent throughout Mesoamerica and extends across "ethnic, linguistic, and ecological boundaries" (Robichaux 1997:150). Nevertheless, Robichaux argues, by focusing on the numbers of extended or nuclear families in a given community, the ethnographies on which he bases his analysis tend to give an inaccurate picture of the dynamics of the family. In contrast, Robichaux proposes, it is most useful or accurate to "view the extended family as one of several possible phases in the developmental cycle of domestic groups" (Robichaux 1997:149).

Along these lines, it is also most accurate to understand mother-away family arrangements in which children live with caregivers as one phase in the developmental cycle of a domestic group. Family members, such as spouses or parents and children, who experience

separation through migration, expect to eventually reunite. Of course, plans sometimes change. A marriage might dissolve or parents might not be able to reunite with children as soon they had planned to. Less commonly, a child might remain with a caregiver indefinitely. However, as Amalia's family network demonstrates, most families in Santa Ursula experience changes in household configurations that involve a series of separations and reunifications.

Courtship and Marriage

While Robichaux's "Mesoamerican developmental lifecycle of domestic groups" is useful for understanding the context in which mothers, fathers and children migrate, separate and reunite with each other, migratory processes also impact practices and ideals of family organization. Although "family-making" follows a discernable pattern in Santa Ursula, as in other communities in rural Mexico, practices are changing due to transnational migration and other socio-economic processes (D'Aubeterre 2000; Hirsch 2003; Robichaux 2003; González-López 2005; Lestage 1997). Young, middle-aged and older Santa Ursulans often spoke about generational differences in courtship and marriage ideologies and practices. Many grandparents were proud of their traditions, and criticized younger Santa Ursulans who had begun to adopt new customs. Many teenagers and young adults also spoke disapprovingly of certain contemporary trends, such as the increasing number of young couples who separate. Santa Ursulans usually blamed migration for what they viewed as negative changes. The following section is an overview of courtship, free-union and marriage customs and the primary ways that Santa Ursulans describe changes in such practices. Courtship, marriage and childbearing are central aspects of individual and domestic lifecycles, which form the context in which parents migrate and children separate and reunite with parents.⁶¹

⁶¹ Woo, who analyzes women's migration in relation to family structure and their positions as mothers, wives, daughters and sisters before they migrate, emphasizes the dynamic relationship between the individual, the family

Courtship in Santa Ursula typically begins after boys and girls complete primary school, which is approximately twelve to fifteen years, given that a significant number of students repeat one or sometimes two years of school. The culmination of primary school is an important marker in a person's life.⁶² Although studying beyond primary school has become much more common in recent years, Santa Ursulans generally view primary school as the end of obligatory education.⁶³ The completion of primary school marks a transition from childhood to youth, when adolescents and teenagers are ready to take on new or greater work and family responsibilities, and enter into romantic unions. Although less common, some children begin dating as young as ten or eleven years of age, which most Santa Ursulans consider too young.

Santa Ursulans expect courtship to culminate in a permanent and committed relationship. After courting for several months to a year, a young couple will usually *juntarse*, literally to join or come together, which means live together in free union. Santa Ursulans consider couples living in free union husband and wife, and call them by these labels. The majority of couples are close in age, and many begin living together between the ages of fifteen and seventeen. Many Santa Ursulans, adults and teenagers alike, believed that young people today begin courting and living together too young. Some teenagers believed that parental permission has a significant impact on the age in which a young person might begin courting, and suggested that some adolescents enter into free unions at a young age because parents do not have control over their

and the social context ("as proposed by Jelin and Feijo (1983)": "It is necessary to apply a dynamic model that connects the transitions and stages of the biographies of women with, on the one hand, the stages and characteristics of family-domestic organization of which they are members, and on the other hand, with the social economic and political transformations that condition and determine the field of possibilities for the elaboration of life projects/plans and strategies" (2000:50).

⁶² This is not the case of earlier generations. Many parents of contemporary primary students did not finish primary school and grandparents average between one to three years of schooling.

⁶³ Although secondary school is technically mandatory in Mexico, the state does not enforce this rule and most Santa Ursulans view secondary school as optional. Many families need children to work at this age, and if not, many parents view studying beyond primary school as an adolescent's choice. This speaks in part to the lack of employment opportunities available in Mexico for those with more schooling, as well as a history of low educational levels of parents and grandparents, who worked in brickmaking and agriculture, which did not require formal schooling.

children, particularly *jóvenes* who live with grandparents, as they had in the past.⁶⁴ Yet, most older women I knew had married and had their first child between the ages of fifteen and eighteen, suggesting that early marriage and childbearing are not a particularly recent phenomenon as most Santa Ursulans perceive. Perhaps, in part, what has changed are Santa Ursulans' expectations for adolescence, particularly because many children today stay in school beyond primary school. Nevertheless, contemporary practices, such as living in free union, contrast with customs of Santa Ursulan elders, who usually participated in a ritual engagement process, called the *pedimento* or *pedida*, and Catholic marriage ceremony, before initiating their domestic life together.⁶⁵

Although it is not uncommon for a couple to *juntarse* specifically because of a pregnancy, living together often means that a couple will initiate their sexual relationship. The clinic promotes contraception use for adolescents, particularly through the Oportunidades program. However, unplanned pregnancies are common, and therefore many couples have children shortly after entering into a free union. For this reason, many Santa Ursulans believed couples should *juntarse* when they are old enough for parenthood. Many Santa Ursulans described the case of a thirteen year-old primary school student who had recently moved in with her boyfriend and his parents because she was pregnant, in order to illustrate the point that *jóvenes* today were becoming parents too early in life. Had this young mother been fifteen years old, and no longer in primary school, Santa Ursulans would not have considered her situation particularly noteworthy. Although pregnancy at fifteen years of age is fairly common in Santa

⁶⁴ One high school student explained, "Young people don't stay together. They move in together when they are young, and they don't have the same customs as before....They dress differently than before. Like they wear big baggy pants, *pocho* style. Now at thirteen there are *jóvenes que se juntan*." She felt that adolescents had changed and that parents do not have as much influence over their adolescent children as they had in the past. She reasoned that one of the main reasons that young couples split up is because parents do not obligate their sons to pick up (*recoger*) their wives if they separate and she returns to her natal home.

⁶⁵ See D'Aubeterre (2000) for an in-depth analysis of the *pedimento* and its contemporary practice among transnational families in rural Mexico.

Ursula, many Santa Ursulans consider seventeen or eighteen years an ideal age for a girl to *juntarse*. After twenty years of age, a woman is deemed past her prime and may have difficulty finding a partner. Nevertheless, some high school students believed that early or mid-twenties was a better age for marriage, suggesting that level of education relates to individual views on ideal age for marriage and childbearing. Some teenagers also felt that young couples were less likely to stay together, which many Santa Ursulans spoke of as a growing and undesirable trend that was “damaging” to children, because they would then “not have their father.”⁶⁶ This point of view suggests that in circumstances of marital separation children are likely remain with mothers and have limited contact with or support from fathers and paternal kin, a pattern documented by Mulhare de la Torre (2005) in village near the city of Puebla. In addition, many teenage girls and their mothers or caregivers thought a young woman should enjoy her freedom instead of marrying young, because marriage involves increased restrictions on women, as I examine more closely in the following section.

Santa Ursulans expect that a couple living in free-union will eventually have a traditional wedding ceremony, which includes a Catholic Church marriage, a series of rituals and a large reception. Until recently, most couples only married in the church. Although it is becoming increasingly common for couples to also marry in a civil ceremony conducted by the town’s mayor, the religious wedding, which involves *compadrazgo*, rituals and a large party, is more important to most Santa Ursulans. It is typical for a couple to marry after they have children together and some couples live in free union for as many as ten years or more before marrying. Because weddings are elaborate and expensive, a couple’s ability to pay for the wedding

⁶⁶ A young woman who separates from her free-union husband is more likely to have difficulty finding another spouse, than a young man. One high school student explained that “boys do not want to *juntarse* with a girl who had already been *juntada*. It doesn’t matter that she doesn’t have children yet, the boys don’t want to because they are afraid she won’t stay with him.”

determines the timing of many marriages. Saving for a wedding is an important goal for many migrants. Marta, a senior in Santa Ursula's high school, explained a typical pattern for young couples this way:

They enter into a free union first, and then they go to the US to save money to get married. Well, many go because of this, but not all recently married couples go to the US. When they do go they stay about five years, they save money, and then they return to get married. And then they go again. It's that weddings cost a lot. It is very expensive. Sometimes I think they exaggerate [in the amount they spend]. Sometimes there are like seven pigs. And sometimes the food that's left over goes to waste. And what is never missing is alcoholic beverages. I think they waste money a little bit, when they should invest it in something that will help their future.

Wedding ceremonies, like house construction, have become more elaborate and expensive as a result of access to *migradollars*. Related expenditures on services and goods, such as musicians, photographers or chair rentals, have minor multiplier effects in the local economy. For example, Magazine and Ramírez (2007) found that some villagers in one Tlaxcalan migrant sending community had established themselves as musicians, cooks (paid positions), contractors, construction workers, plumbers, electricians and glass-cutters as a result of the expansion of expenditures on fiestas and house construction. The creation of short-term employment within Santa Ursula as of yet has been minimal. Hiring cooks for fiestas, for example, was still uncommon as of 2007, as most hosts relied on unpaid labor of female kin and *comadres*. However, Santa Ursulans do hire workers from other communities as musicians, photographers and construction workers. Nevertheless, increased spending on rituals, house construction or other forms of consumption do not represent a long-term solution to slow economic growth or expansion of employment in the region, which Magazine and Ramírez (2007) also argue.

Household Division of Labor

Individual and domestic and lifecycles shape how a household distributes reproductive and productive labor among its members. A woman's responsibilities in brickwork, caring labor

and household work change throughout her life as she moves from childhood to adolescence in her parents' home, as she marries and becomes a mother and as her children become adults and her sons' wives come to live in her house.

Women are primarily responsible for domestic work, including food preparation, washing dishes, keeping a clean house, washing, repairing and ironing clothes, as well as caring labor, not only for children, but also for sick and elderly family members, as we shall see in Chapter Six. Women also participate in certain aspects of agriculture, mainly planting, and are an important source of labor in brickmaking families. Women primarily work "cutting bricks" and helping to stack them for drying. Although brickmaking tasks are to a certain degree aged and gendered within families, there is variability in how tasks are divided among family members. Factors such as whether a household hires wage laborers for certain tasks, whether they produce only *crudo* (unfired bricks) or fire their own bricks, the number of household members who have migrated, whether adolescent children are still in secondary or high school determine how brickmaking work is distributed among family members. Brickmakers work in the morning hours beginning at about eight o'clock. Therefore women usually prepare the mid-day meal and take care of domestic chores, such as washing clothes or cleaning the house in the afternoon. Women also tend to wake early in order to prepare breakfast and sometimes tortillas for their family.

As we shall see throughout the following chapters, older boys and girls play an important role in domestic and productive labor in their families. Boys and girls usually begin working in brickmaking at eleven or twelve years of age, although I knew younger children who contributed a significant amount of labor to their family's brickmaking activities. Children help with the preparation of the clay, sand and water mixture by stepping on it. They also cut bricks and help

stack them for drying. Men and adolescent boys usually do heavier tasks, such as loading the kiln, but I also knew younger boys who participated in this activity as well. While boys are responsible for feeding animals, girls are predominantly responsible for helping their mothers with domestic chores, such as washing clothes and making tortillas. Both girls and boys watch over younger siblings. However, girls tend to do more caregiving.

A teenage girl's work load generally increases when she marries. Although older daughters usually help their mothers with domestic chores, married women are principally responsible for daily reproductive work for her new family unit—her husband, herself and their children. In addition, a recently married woman must follow her mother-in-law's orders, which might include cooking or cleaning for other household members as well. For example, Graciela, whose husband had been in the United States during most of their marriage, also prepared meals for her parents-in-law, brothers-in-law and their families during the many years that she lived in her parents-in-law's house. She explained that because her husband's family did not treat her as well as the other daughters and daughters-in-law who were living in the house, she had to win their respect with hard work. She worked very hard, she explained, *echando tabique* (making bricks), preparing food, making tortillas and keeping the house clean.

Daughters-in-law are an important source of labor. As Olivera (1976) points out, married sons who live in their parents' houses pay service to them by working. This means that their wives also pay service with their labor. Rodríguez-Shadow, Shadow and Goldsmith (1992) show that a woman's participation in brickmaking is greatest when she recently marries and joins her husband's family. When she becomes a mother her brickmaking activity decreases as her domestic burden increases. Later, when her daughters grow and are able to take over a significant amount of domestic work, the hours she spends in brickmaking again increase.

Subsequently, when her sons marry and bring their new wives into her home, her daughters-in-law replace much of her labor in brickmaking. A woman's participation in brick production significantly declines in her forties, and most women retire from brick work by the time they reach fifty years of age. Therefore, grandmothers who act as caregivers are usually no longer active in brickmaking.

The reduction in brickmaking activity and the expansion of migration from Santa Ursula has changed how women distribute their time among productive activities and carework.

Although women whose husbands send remittances might still work "cutting bricks" in Santa Ursula, usually their brickmaking activities are greatly reduced and they have more time to spend caring for small children. One mother explained it this way:

Well now that we don't make *tabique* (bricks) anymore women stay home to watch the small children. When the children are small...they get sick or you need to change them. When we used to make bricks, we didn't have a lot of time to really tend to them well. Sometimes they would end up crying. They would throw themselves on the ground, because we couldn't really tend to them well. But today [children] don't cry a lot.

Of course the increase in female migration has also greatly impacted the way that women distribute their time between productive and reproductive activities. Women who migrate with husbands and leave children in Santa Ursula spend many more hours in paid work, often working two jobs, and substantially fewer hours in reproductive activities than women in Santa Ursula.

The increase in numbers of teenage girls migrating to the US is also changing patterns of how families distribute labor. For example, some teenager girls migrate with their new husbands immediately upon entering into a free union. If her partner is living with his parents in the United States, a recently married woman will usually move in with her parents-in-law in the US. In contrast to women in Santa Ursula who almost always drop out of school when they move in with their partner and his family, some teenage girls who live in free unions in the US continue

to study. In addition, most women old enough to hold jobs do so. Some unmarried teenage girls migrate with their parents or father in order to work and contribute to their parents' efforts to earn and save for a house. However, some parents prefer that a son or mother migrate, because a teenage girl is likely to enter into a free union, in which case her labor and wages will no longer belong to her natal family.

Mothers-in-Law

While a small number of mothers who leave children in the care of other family members are single, the majority are married or living in free-union. The dynamics of married life relate to the dynamics of care arrangements for children left behind. As we have seen, when a couple in Santa Ursula enters into a free-union or marriage, a young woman leaves her natal home to live with her husband in his parents' house. A woman's relationship with her in-laws, particularly her mother-in-law, plays an important role in her life, and shapes decisions about migration and leaving children. In the following section I examine the role of the *suegra* (mother-in-law) in a recently married woman's life, and how the dynamics of a woman's relationship with her *suegra* relates to the ways in which households are assembled, disassembled and reassembled in the context of migration, as well as care arrangements for children left behind. I begin this section by looking at how a woman's life changes when she moves in with her husband's family. Next, I present Doña Rafaela's experience with her *suegra* as an example of how mothers-in-law in Santa Ursula are known for their controlling and abusive behavior. These two discussions form the basis of my analysis of the ways in which the role of the *suegra* shapes the dynamics of household configurations, migration and care arrangements for children left behind.

Social Restrictions of Marriage

Moving in with a partner and his parents signifies a loss of freedom for young women. A woman's husband, mother-in-law, and to a lesser degree other in-laws who live in the house, become central figures in her life, controlling her whereabouts and activities. Mothers-in-law are primary disciplinary agents of young women. Parents place fewer restrictions on their daughters than a husband or mother-in-law place on a recently married woman. Typically, a woman's husband and mother-in-law prohibit her from attending *bailes* (dances) or socializing with her male or female friends. As young women explain, a husband and his family expect her only to "stay in the house," where she is under their watchful eye. Because restrictions on her social life extend to the school setting, marriage or living in free union is almost always synonymous of dropping out of school for young women.⁶⁷ Social restrictions apply not only to a young woman's peers, but also to her natal family, as it is common for a young man to prevent his wife from going to visit her mother or her siblings. Young women explain the restriction on visiting one's natal family as the most difficult aspect of social restriction, but that some women continue to visit their mothers anyway. Nevertheless, most young women stop socializing with their friends or attending dances.

In contrast, recently married or *juntado* men continue to socialize as they please. Not only do they have continued contact with their natal family, with whom they live, but they also continue to see their friends and they might also still attend school. They also usually attend

⁶⁷ During the period of my fieldwork there were a few noteworthy exceptions of boyfriends or "husbands" who tolerated or encouraged the education of a girlfriend or "wife." While unusual, these cases may suggest that the attitudes of young men towards their partner's education are beginning to shift, probably due to experience of migration and broad shifts in education throughout Mexico. There were a few "married" teenage girls who still attended school, a fact that other teenage girls commented on as an extraordinary event. I also knew a young man who had been instrumental in his girlfriend's pursuit of a college education. According to this couple, after completing high school this young woman was "in her house" and not sure what to do with her time. Her boyfriend, a return migrant, taught her computer science and encouraged her to study English. He also encouraged her to apply to universities, supported her as she chose a major, and offered encouragement when she felt doubtful or insecure in the university setting.

dances, where, as several teenage girls explained, it is not uncommon that they approach other young women. One high school student explained that restrictions on married women's movement was a point of contention within some young couples, and sometimes cause for separation, because some young women expect to have more freedom than their mother or grandmothers had.

Such social restrictions appear to be not only about ensuring a woman's fidelity to her husband or seeing to it that she does not leave him for another man. Social restrictions also serve to diminish a woman's support network, in order to allow a husband and mother-in-law greater control over a recently married woman. Pauli (2008) points out that in early marriage not only do a husband and mother-in-law severely reduce a woman's social network, but they also play an important role in keeping her mute. They see to it that a woman has limited opportunities to talk to others or seek advice about misbehavior or abuse from her husband or in-laws. The women Pauli interviewed consistently described how they were "prohibited from complaining, demanding, and expressing themselves" (2008:176). Similarly, I heard Santa Ursulans suggest that a young woman's friends or family might give her advice. For example, a high school student explained that a boy might fear that his "wife's girlfriends might advise her to leave a boy." In another situation, I overheard a man angrily ask his wife, "Who is advising you, your mother?" when she complained to him about his behavior.

An Archetypical Mother-in-Law

Much as the dynamics and rituals of marriage in Santa Ursula are changing, so too is the *suegra's* potential to exert power over recently married women. Nevertheless, mothers-in-law continue to play an important role in young married women's lives and in the dynamics of migration and care arrangements for children left behind. There is a spectrum of *suegra*

experiences—nice, neutral, abusive. However, mothers-in-law in Santa Ursula and elsewhere in rural Mexico are typically known for their controlling and often abusive treatment of young daughters-in-law who reside in their houses (Hellman 2008; Hirsch 2003; Pauli 2008). Doña Rafaela’s experience, which I describe in this section, illustrates the abuse and vulnerability that women, particularly those of her generation often dealt with in early marriage. Stories like that of Doña Rafaela, form part of women’s collective knowledge about marriage and mothers-in-law, and in turn play a role in decisions young women make about marriage, residence, migration or leaving children behind.

When I asked Doña Rafaela how she met her husband, she laughed and responded sarcastically, “Es una bonita historia” (It’s a beautiful story). In contrast to most Santa Ursulans, Doña Rafaela was not originally from Santa Ursula and her natal family lived in another community several hours away from Cholula. Although a recently married woman’s in-laws typically limit her contact with her natal family, having no family members nearby increased Doña Rafaela’s vulnerability and powerlessness at the hands of her mother-in-law. When Doña Rafaela was a girl, her future husband, Don Francisco, who was a musician, occasionally came to her home town to play with his band for events, such as weddings or the town’s patron saint festival.⁶⁸ Because Doña Rafaela was very young at the time, they courted for five years before Don Francisco came with his *padrino* and parents for the *pedimento*—to ask her father’s permission to marry her. Doña Rafaela did not want to marry him because “He was a musician, a womanizer, and he liked to drink.” In addition, she and her mother were concerned that the arrangement might be disadvantageous for Doña Rafaela, because she had no family members in Santa Ursula. “But my father was there, and he was *muy pistolero* (very much a gun user) and

⁶⁸ There were a number of musicians in town, although Santa Ursula is not known as the *cuna de los músicos* (cradle of the musicians) as is the neighboring town of San Pablo.

he had a gun with him,” Doña Rafaela explained. “He said that I would not embarrass or cause shame to the family by not accepting, when they had come to *pedirme bien* (to properly ask for permission to marry me).” The incidence of forced marriages has declined since Doña Rafaela was young, and is another example of intergenerational differences in courtship, marriage and gender relations in rural Mexico (Hirsch 2003).

Doña Rafaela’s new life with her husband and in-laws in Santa Ursula was worse than she had anticipated. Her husband frequently became violent with her when he was inebriated, and her *suegra* was very abusive and cruel. She regularly yelled at her, called her “terrible names, like *puta* (whore),” and kicked her out of the house. “There were not many houses in those days like there are today,” she explained, and she had no family members with whom she could stay, so she would wrap herself in a blanket and sleep on the doorstep. Her *suegra*, like her husband, frequently hit her, and encouraged her son to do so as well. “She would say, ‘Hit her. Don’t let her wander around like that.’” When the abuse would escalate, Doña Rafaela would take her children and go stay at her parents’ house. Although her mother wanted to offer her shelter, because “she knew what it was like [being a married woman],” her father would send her back to her husband after a couple days. She said she would pretend that she was busy helping her mother with some sewing or other activity, but her father would say to her mother, “Why is your daughter here? She is supposed to be with her husband. If she has nothing to do here, then feed her and send her back.”

As Doña Rafaela told me her story, her thirty-five year-old *comadre*, Alejandra, explained that her *suegra* had also kicked her out of the house on several occasions when she was a teenager and recently married. Like Doña Rafaela who sought her mother’s support when her situation became particularly difficult, Alejandra had also gone to stay with her mother when

her daughter was sick. Her mother-in-law had been too inebriated to help her care for her, she explained, and when her aunt saw the situation she told her mother, who came to take Alejandra back to her house. Alejandra and Doña Rafaela's stories illustrate the level of vulnerability that young women face when they leave their natal homes to live with in-laws, and the fact that a woman's natal family, particularly her mother, might provide her with support and shelter in particularly difficult circumstances. Therefore, women generally believe that it is more desirable to marry a man from Santa Ursula, a practice which is changing as more teenage girls migrate to the United States and marry men from elsewhere, most commonly other parts of Mexico.

"I suffered a lot," Doña Rafaela explained, "We all did" she added referring to her children. "I don't want my children to suffer like I did, nor my *niños* (boys)," she said gesturing to the grandsons she had cared for while her son and his wife were in the US. In contrast to many women who abuse their daughters-in-law, despite the fact that their mothers-in-law had abused them (Pauli 2008), Doña Rafaela explained that she did not want to repeat the suffering that she experienced. For this reason, she explained, she treats her own daughters-in-law with respect, she does not hit, abuse or chastise them. She also explained that she does not put flowers on her *suegra's* grave.

Some people ask me why I don't put flowers on her grave. After all that abuse, I don't love her, and I don't want to put flowers on her grave. When I am gone, my daughters-in-law can put flowers on my grave or not, that is their choice. We have a good relationship. I don't mistreat them, but they can decide. And I won't know the difference anyway. But I won't put flowers on my *suegra's* grave. Not after all the suffering I went through.

Caring for the souls of one's deceased parents, parents-in-law or children, including tending to their graves, is an important part of intergenerational obligations and social reproduction, a point that I return to in Chapter Eight.

Although not all mother-in-law experiences are as difficult as Doña Rafaela's, mothers-in-law are known for their controlling and abusive treatment of young women in Santa Ursula and elsewhere in rural Mexico. A woman's trials in marriage and her parents-in-law's house, as well as knowledge of other women's experiences, such as Doña Rafaela's, shape women's perspectives on marriage, residence and migration. Pauli argues, women's traumatic experiences with mothers-in-law, "as well as the lessons women take away from them, for themselves, their sisters and their children, have crucial effects on other social processes" (2008:174). Pauli shows how women's experiences and desire to shorten their stay in their mothers-in-law's house relate to house construction boom in Mexican migrant sending communities. Such experiences, in conjunction with traditional family roles and residential patterns, also shape Santa Ursulan women's decisions about migration and with whom they leave their children.

The Suegra's House

Virilocal residence rules, social restrictions on married women, and the nature of a woman's relationship with her mother-in-law shape residential patterns and care arrangements for children left behind in transnational migration. In Santa Ursula, when a husband migrates, a woman and children who have been living with a husband's family, continue to do so. Likewise, a woman's in-laws continue to control her movement and activities while her husband is away. In fact, unless a couple has already built and moved into their own house, a woman who has migrated to the United States, will, if she returns to visit Santa Ursula for a period, stay with her parents-in-law instead of her parents or other consanguine relatives. Many Santa Ursulans explained the reason for this practice as a way to quell gossip among community members who might think "bad things" or that a woman "is doing whatever she wants to." Fears and gossip of infidelity are common in migrant sending communities (Mummert 1994).

Given a woman's subordinate position in her in-laws' house and potential abuse from her mother-in-law, women generally wish to build their own house so that they can have greater power of decision over their movement and activities. For example, Ana who married at nineteen and lived with her mother-in-law for six years explained, "When you live with your *suegra* it is different, because you have to do what your *suegra* says. She tells you what needs to be done. When you have your own house, you decide what you will do." In addition, when a recently married couple lives with a husband's family, they usually live in a small room together, and often must share common spaces with many other family members. Isa, for example, explained that when she was recently married, several of her husband's younger unmarried siblings also lived there. A husband's married brothers and their young families might also live in the family compound. Isa explained that she did not like living with her in-laws because she, her husband and their infant son shared only a small room and when she needed to make tortillas and cook for her family, she had to wait until her mother-in-law was done using the kitchen. In addition, given the number of people living there, she was not able to keep animals. For these reasons, she explained, she and her husband only stayed a couple of years with her in-laws. As soon as they had saved enough money from brickmaking, they purchased a parcel of land and built their own house. Only later, when brick prices dropped, her husband migrated to the US.

Pauli argues that women's desire to "reduce the length of their often very traumatic residence in their mothers-in-law's houses or try to avoid it altogether" (2008:171) is an important component of house construction boom in many Mexican migrant-sending communities. Indeed, Santa Ursulans access to US dollars has allowed couples to build their own houses more quickly therefore reducing the number of years they reside with a husband's

parents.⁶⁹ Scholars have noted similar trends other migrant sending communities in rural Mexico (D'Aubeterre 2000; Maroni 1994; Mummert 1994). However, the desire of a couple to reduce the amount of time in a husband's parents' house is not necessarily a recent phenomenon or exclusive to US migration. Olivera (1976) documented similar changes in residential patterns in San Andrés Cholula in the 1960s and 1970s, when industrialization allowed men greater access to income through wage labor, resulting in a reduction of time in parental house and couple's increased ability to purchase land instead of relying on inheritance.⁷⁰

Virilocal residence rules, a very controlling or abusive mother-in-law and a woman's desire to build a house might also contribute to a woman's desire to migrate. Women in Santa Ursula give three principal reasons for migrating with their husbands. First is a woman or her husband's wish for companionship. Often women explain that their husbands had sent for them, because they felt lonely in the United States. Some women also mentioned their motivation for migrating as wanting to quell their fear of or prevent potential unfaithfulness of a husband. The most common explanation women gave for migrating was to accumulate money more quickly for house construction. Some women believed that women are better than husbands at saving, and that their presence helped reduce their husband's spending in the US, particularly on entertainment and alcohol. If we consider that a woman's desire to reduce the time in her mother-in-law's house relates to house construction in Mexican migrant sending towns, then the

⁶⁹ Pauli also suggests that the decline in the practice of living near a husband's family might also relate in part to women's agency. Although limited land near in-laws house also plays a role, Pauli argues that "A growing number of daughter-in-laws prefer to build houses close to their natal family homes and far away from their affinal kin" (2008:182).

⁷⁰ Olivera analyzed the reduction in time at a husband's parents house as a desire for sons, not daughters-in-law, to reduce the number of years in which they are subordinate to their fathers. "Submission to the father's authority would impede, at least theoretically, the son's chance to raise his standard of living. Today, sons prefer to separate from their parents as soon as possible in order to manage their household budget independently" (1976:82). Olivera also explains that prior to the Revolution, families did not separate until the father's death, or when death was near, in which case father began dividing up his inheritance among his sons. She also notes that since the Revolution (1917-1920), the time that older married sons spent in father's house has gradually decreased.

migration of a married woman might also relate to her desire to build a house that will liberate her from her subordinate position in her mother-in-law's house. In addition, given that women in Santa Ursula usually stay with in-laws when a husband is away, migration would instantly free a woman from day to day control by her mother-in-law. As Pauli's argues, experiences and lessons learned about mothers-in-law "have crucial effects on other social processes" (2008:174). In Santa Ursula, such social processes include not only house construction, but also migration of married women and children who live with extended family members while their parents are in the United States.

Paternal Grandmothers as Caregivers

Parents who migrate to the United States predominantly leave their children in the care of grandparents in Santa Ursula. Of 426 students included in the primary schools survey, approximately four-fifths of children living with caregivers resided with their grandparents.⁷¹ Likewise, in thirty-one "mother-away" families with whom I had either regular contact or had knowledge of because I interviewed a caregiver or mother who had returned to Santa Ursula, approximately four-fifths of parents had left children with grandparents.⁷² Other researchers have also found that parents from other parts of Mexico, as well as Central America, most often leave children with grandparents (Dreby 2010; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Moran-Taylor 2009; Schmalzbauer 2004). Nevertheless, in contrast to studies that found that parents prefer or tend to leave children with maternal kin (Dreby 2010; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila

⁷¹ While these numbers reflect the named or designated caregiver, such as a grandmother or aunt, it is important to point out that other household or extended family members, particularly an aunt or older sister of the children, also participate and often carry the majority of burden of carework or related domestic chores for children left behind.

⁷² According to the teachers survey 12 percent of children left behind were living with an aunt and/or uncle, and approximately 5 percent were in the care of an older sister. This pattern was also consistent to care arrangements in these 31 families.

1997; Moran-Taylor 2009), the majority of children left behind in Santa Ursula reside with paternal kin.⁷³

Children in Santa Ursula most commonly reside with paternal grandparents when parents migrate, followed by maternal grandparents, and then a paternal aunt and uncle. Of the thirty-one alternative care arrangements mentioned above, approximately three-fourths of parents had left children with their paternal relatives. Paternal grandparents accounted for two-thirds of caregivers in these thirty-one families, while maternal grandmothers only accounted for one-fifth. Care arrangements that I knew about through casual contact with children, parents or caregivers in other social settings also suggested that paternal grandparents predominate as caregivers in Santa Ursula.

Dreby states that “Migrants believe maternal grandmothers to be the most logical caregivers for their children during their absences” (2010:149). In Santa Ursula the opposite is true. Santa Ursulans expect paternal grandparents to act as caregivers in a mother’s absence and in fact consider this role the paternal grandparents’ “right.” For example, Doña Concepción explained that although her son’s children were in her and her husband’s care, every day the children went to visit their maternal grandparents, where they would eat their afternoon meal. In explaining this, Doña Concepción assumed I knew that Santa Ursulans expect paternal grandparents to act as caregivers and that they have the right over the maternal grandparents to the grandchildren. She explained, “What I mean is, they (the maternal grandparents) did not want to be responsible also, because we were still alive. They knew we were responsible for them.” Doña Concepción’s *comadre*, clarified, “What she wants you to understand is that Doña Concepción and her husband are the parents of the son. And since the other grandparents knew

⁷³ Schmalzbauer does not specify whether children tend to live with paternal or maternal grandparents.

that they still existed (they are still living), they never took advantage of their trust. Instead, they respected the paternal grandparents.”

Wanting to ascertain in what circumstances parents might not hold to this norm, I asked, “Is it always like that?” “Yes,” Doña Concepción’s comadre responded, “Well, because they [the two sets of grandparents] got along well. And they [the maternal grandparents] knew perfectly well that they were capable [of taking care of the grandchildren]. I mean, they would say, ‘Stay there with your grandfather, because they are there.’” “So, only in special circumstances would children stay with their mother’s parents?” I asked for clarification. “*Andale*, exactly,” confirmed Doña Concepción’s comadre, “And in this case, they got along well, and they [the maternal grandparents] knew that they [the paternal grandparents] had—and they have—the *right*. They had them perfectly well taken care of. That is why they would say, ‘Go with your grandfather, because they have the right to look after you.’” Doña Concepción reiterated:

That is why they didn’t want them there. That is why they would tell them, “You can have your snack here,” but afterwards they would send them, “Go on.” And once *la finadita* (the now deceased maternal grandmother) told the children, “You better you go back to your grandparents’ house or I am going to hit you,” and then they came. She really did that with the children!

Doña Concepción and her *comadre*’s explanation of why Santa Ursulans consider paternal grandparents to be the ideal caregivers, also explains why, in more unusual circumstances, Santa Ursulan parents leave children with maternal grandparents instead. Doña Concepción and her *comadre* drew attention to three important reasons why parents might break from norms that dictate that children stay with paternal grandparents. First, they stated that Doña Concepción and her husband were still alive, suggesting that death of the paternal grandparents is a primary reason that parents might leave children with maternal grandparents. Second, they point out that the maternal grandparents knew that the children were well taken care of,

suggesting that parents would have the right to send children to live with maternal grandparents if they knew the paternal grandparents could not or were not taking proper care of the children. Third, they explained that the two sets of grandparents “got along well.” indicating that friction between maternal and paternal kin may be cause for “not respecting the right” of the paternal grandparents to act as caregivers.

Although Doña Concepción and her *comadre* point to the importance of good relations and respect among the two sets of grandparents, the quality of a woman’s relationship with her mother-in-law is an important factor that determines with which set of grandparents parents leave their children. For example, one woman who had left her children with her own mother explained her reason for doing so simply as “My mother-in-law is bad.” Given that difficult relationships between women and their mothers-in-law are common, many women might actually prefer to leave their children with their own mothers, despite the fact that they do not.

When children remain with maternal kin, the choice appears to be largely that of the mother. Marcelina, for example, who had lived with her parents-in-law while her husband was in the United States,⁷⁴ explained that she left her children with her own mother, because she had a greater relationship of trust (*confianza*) with her. “You don’t have the same *confianza* with your *suegra* to say, ‘Please, make sure they are well fed, bathe them, look after them.’ With a *suegra* you couldn’t really say that. So it is more comfortable as a mother to leave your children with you mother.” Indeed, Marcelina had regular telephone communication with her mother while she was in Indiana. She would call to check on the children, and see if her mother needed money for special expenses, such as school registration. If her son had disobeyed his grandmother, she would tell Marcelina, who would then talk on the phone to her son and say, “Listen to your grandmother, she is the one is looking after you, she is taking care of you.”

⁷⁴ She did not have her own house yet, in which case she would have gone to live in her own house.

Although a woman might prefer to leave her children with her own mother, often her husband and his parents have a great deal of control in the matter. For this reason, of the thirty-one care arrangements I refer to above, two of the six women who left children with maternal kin were single mothers whose children had no contact with their paternal kin. A woman's social and economic standing in the community might also play a role in why a husband and his parents might respect her desire to leave her children with her own family. For example, Brenda, who was a pharmacist and one of only three Santa Ursulans with a university degree in 2006, explained to me very nonchalantly that she had left her children with her own mother. When I pressed her on the reason why, she simply explained that her parents had a large house and yard. Her sister, Micaela, had also left her children in her parents' care. I knew Micaela's mother-in-law, and while her house was not any smaller than that of most Santa Ursulans of her generation, she was widowed and clearly had less power and social standing in the community than Micaela and Brenda's parents. Micaela's mother-in-law very much wanted to have the children live with her, particularly because she was in poor health and living alone. However, the wishes of Micaela and her parents outweighed those of her mother-in-law.

The tendency among Santa Ursulan parents to leave children with paternal kin and their belief that paternal grandparents have the "right" to the grandchildren, relates to Santa Ursulans tendency to adhere to virilocal residence rules. Dreby, who found that parents most often left children with maternal grandparents, notes that "The prevalence of [this] practice...is curious given that anthropologists have documented the predominance of patrilocal residential patterns in the region of Mesoamerica from which the majority of the Mexican parents I met migrate." (2010:149). Perhaps differences in how closely members of communities tend to follow residence rules plays a role in explaining the difference between Santa Ursula and the

community where Dreby conducted research. Although virilocal residence rules are common throughout rural Mexico (Robichaux 1997), the strictness with which communities, like individuals, adhere to norms such as residential rules, courtship and marital customs varies.⁷⁵ Differences in the degree to which people in a given community tend to adhere to traditional residence rules and gender roles, might therefore explain differences in why in a community such as Santa Ursula, most parents leave children with paternal kin, while in other communities, such the community in the Mexican Mixteca where Dreby conducted fieldwork, most parents leave children with maternal kin. Along these lines, Dreby posits that given the prevalence of tensions between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law, “wives might prefer to return to their own parents’ home” when a husband migrates” (2010:149). Nevertheless, she does not clearly state whether this is the case in the Mixteca community where she conducted research. In Santa Ursula, as we have seen, it is rare for a woman who does not have her own house to live with her parents when her husband migrates or even when she returns from the United States to visit, suggesting that Santa Ursulans follow residence rules fairly strictly, perhaps more so than the community to which Dreby refers. This tendency among Santa Ursulans may very well change as residential patterns and gender relations continue to change.

Conclusion

Child care arrangements, like families and households, are dynamic, fluid and processual. As mothers and fathers migrate or return to Santana Ursula, as children stay with their grandparents or reunite with their parents, care arrangements and household configurations change. As such, child care arrangements in which children live with caregivers, while common in Santa Ursula, are temporary and represent one stage in a family’s domestic lifecycle. In Santa

⁷⁵ Many scholars have analyzed how migration can alter family structure, marriage practices and gender relations (Barrera Bassols and Oehmichen Bazán 2000; D’Aubeterre 2000; Hirsch 2003; Mummert 1997; Woo 2000).

Ursula, traditional residence rules and gender relations shape the ways that households are configured and reconfigured through events such as marriage and migration. In addition, gendered and intergenerational relations, as well as individual and domestic lifecycles, correspond with how productive and reproductive labor is distributed within families. A woman's responsibilities in brickwork, caring labor and household work change throughout her lifetime, from childhood through old-age. Female migration and child care arrangements for children also form part of patterns in which older girls and women's responsibilities change. As we shall see throughout the following chapters, children play an important part in the household division of productive and reproductive labor, both prior to and during the migration of mothers.

The final section of this chapter considered the role of marriage and mothers-in-law in young women's lives in Santa Ursula, and how this relates to female migration, residence of women and children when fathers migrate, and care arrangements for children when mothers migrate. Santa Ursulans expect that when parents migrate they will leave children with paternal grandparents. Moreover, Santa Ursulans describe leaving children with paternal grandparents as the "right" of paternal grandparents. Most grandparents want their grandchildren to live with them for reasons I discuss in Chapter Seven. As we have seen, traditional residence patterns, in which women reside in their parents-in-law's house during the first years of marriage, relate to patterns in Santa Ursula of leaving children with paternal grandparents. In addition, the potentially conflictive relationship between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law also relates to care arrangements and is a principal reason why some couples break from the norm and leave children with maternal kin.

Chapter Five

Invisible Work of Caregivers

This chapter examines caregivers' activities and responsibilities. Caring and domestic labor, both paid and unpaid, are considered low-status work in most societies, and the members of a society who perform the majority of such work tend to have less status and power than those who perform less (Sanjek and Colen 1990). Moreover, scholars have shown how the activities of social reproduction and the people who perform them are often rendered invisible (Glenn 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Rivas 2003; Sanjek and Colen 1990), a point that I examine in the following sections. While several chapters of this dissertation analyze the invisible "who" of carework for children left behind, meaning who takes over a mother's caring and domestic responsibilities, this chapter looks at the invisible "what" of carework—the activities and responsibilities family members carry out in a mother's absence.

The chapter is divided into four aspects of caring labor. First I examine caregivers' responsibilities for children's physical needs, such as nutrition, hygiene, and health. Second, I look at emotional work. Although all caregivers engage in emotional labor, such as making children feel cared for and loved, primarily younger caregivers, particularly aunts and older sisters, emphasized this aspect of their role. In addition, several caregivers stressed that listening, giving advice and monitoring teenagers' social life were particularly important aspects of caring for *jóvenes* (young adults). The third section of this chapter is a discussion of the role caregivers play in children's education. Caregivers generally have fewer years of education than their charges. Nevertheless, many caregivers find ways to support children's educational pursuits. The final section examines caregivers' roles and responsibilities in religious life and

rites of passage for children. Caregivers generally felt that parents should be present for important rites of passage, such as first communion or primary school graduation. Therefore, caregivers who accompanied children and prepared a fiesta for such events often felt that they had excelled in their caregiving role.

Caring for Bodies

Although meeting children's physical needs, such as nutrition and hygiene, is a central part of caring labor, most caregivers had little to say about this aspect of their role. Activities related to their charges physical well-being, such as cooking, washing clothes or keeping a clean house, seemed to most caretakers, with the exception of unmarried older sisters, mundane tasks that did not merit discussion, because they were simply part of their everyday lives as women, even before they had become caregivers. Indeed, most caregivers were mothers, and already had experience caring for children and a home. In addition, a woman's domestic responsibilities begin long before she reaches adulthood, as girls are expected to begin helping their mothers with domestic tasks and looking after younger siblings once they are old enough to do so. Therefore, by the time a woman becomes a caregiver, reproductive labor is usually already a central part of her identity.

The close association of womanhood in Santa Ursula with care activities, such as making tortillas and washing clothes, relates to the way in which "womanhood and motherhood are treated as synonymous identities and categories of experience" (Arendell 2000:1192). Not all women are mothers, and caring labor is not exclusively women's domain, yet womanhood is closely associated with motherhood in Santa Ursula, as it is elsewhere (Glenn 1994). For example, during the Mother's Day celebration at the primary school, members of the parents' committee gave me, like the "other" mothers in attendance, a blue plastic bucket as a Mother's

Day gift. When I commented to the women with whom I attended the event, that I was not a mother, they responded, “but you are a woman,” implying that motherhood is embedded in every woman.

The work that caregivers do is invisible, in part, because caring labor, like mothering, is closely associated with womanhood and femininity (Glenn 1994, 2010). As Rivas shows in her research about care attendants and their disabled customers, “When care activities are naturalized and essentialized, the work they entail is effectively erased” (Rivas 2003:76). Indeed, almost all mothers and caregivers described their caregiving and domestic activities as “just what we do” and “not work,” in order to clarify that they did not consider their responsibilities “work,” which was the term I often used to ask about their reproductive responsibilities. The way in which caregivers themselves naturalize their caring labor, corresponds with the way that the physical care of children left behind is invisible in the context of the global economy.

Some caregivers, particularly those who were in charge of older children, explicitly stated that the presence of their charges was not extra work. In addition, most Santa Ursulans described primary school-aged children and older as being able to “fend for themselves.” Many caregivers do not consider their charges a great deal of extra work, because often a primary caretaker, particularly a grandmother, does not carry the sole burden of housework and cooking. Rather children, especially older girls, also participate in reproductive work, which I analyze in-depth in Chapters Seven and Eight.

Caretakers who described feeding and cooking for children, as well as cleaning and washing clothes, as burdensome were mainly women who were responsible for young children or many children at the same time. Regardless of cultural constructions of mothering (Glenn 1994) or the

level of “intensiveness” of child rearing practices in a given culture (Hays 1996),⁷⁶ small children by nature demand more attention than older children, as they are unable to feed, cloth or, in the case of babies, move themselves without help, and often need help falling asleep or settling back down after waking. Caring for babies also involves bottle feedings—warming milk and cleaning bottles, which some caregivers described as burdensome or problematic. In addition, babies who are abruptly weaned upon a mother’s departure may have difficulty adjusting to the sudden change. Doña Ofelia’s granddaughter, for example, was an infant when her mother—Doña Ofelia’s daughter-in-law—left. The baby had only had breast milk until her mother’s departure, and suffered from vomiting and diarrhea as a result of the milk that Doña Ofelia gave her.⁷⁷ Caring for babies and toddlers also involves more washing of surfaces and laundering of diapers, clothes and blankets, which become soiled with food and bodily fluids. In addition, babies and toddlers need to be held and monitored more than older children. They are more vulnerable to illnesses and accidents. Of course childrearing practices, such as breastfeeding, formula feeding, co-sleeping, crib sleeping or baby-wearing shape how physical needs for infants and toddlers are met, and the amount of time and labor they involve. Nevertheless, caregivers in Santa Ursula generally considered caring for infants and toddlers more burdensome than caring for older children.

Although parents are more likely to leave preschool-aged and older children with caregivers, I knew several families, in which babies and toddlers had stayed behind with caregivers. For example, Severiana, who has four sisters and four brothers, described how five of her siblings left Santa Ursula within a short period, leaving her in charge of many young children, including

⁷⁶ *The Cultural Contradiction of Motherhood* (Hays 1996) forms part of a body of literature on US ideologies of mothering that analyze the way in which mothering is not only women’s domain, but that it is “intensive,” dictating that childrearing be child-centered, emotionally involved and time-consuming.

⁷⁷ I did not know of any cases of wet nursing for babies who lived with caregivers.

her own daughter. Severiana was in her late twenties when her siblings left, and at one point, she had eleven children, between the ages of six months and five years, in her care. With the exception of her six-month-old niece, who stayed with Severiana for seven years, the children remained in her care between one and three years. Severiana, like most Santa Ursulans who tend to understate hardship, described taking care of the children's physical needs, particularly feeding them and washing their clothes, as "difficult."

My sister was the first to go. She left her two sons with me. Then six months later a brother went. A year later another brother left, and so on. They all left their children with me. I had my own preschool! It was a lot of work. Now there are washing machines, but imagine, before it was all by hand. And there was nobody to help me, nobody. I did it by myself. They were all small, like my daughter. When I had to feed them, sometimes it made me laugh, and other times it made me angry. They would fight sometimes over the plates, because my mother would buy plates with pictures on them. Sometimes they would fight over the plates, or the cups, or even a spoon. They would fight and try to grab it away from the other. Then one would say, "You don't have a mother," and the other would say, "You don't have a mother." That's how they would fight. So sometimes this would make us laugh, and sometimes it would make us angry.

Apart from the help of Severiana's own mother, with whom she lived because she was a single mother, Severiana cared for the children on her own. In addition, because Severiana's mother was in poor health, Severiana carried most of the burden of carework in the household. Had some of the children in Severiana's care been older, Severiana would have counted on them to help themselves and the younger children in the household.

A few caregivers I spoke with described cooking for children as an important part of what they did for their charges. Doña Rafaela, for example, highlighted cooking, which she carried out with much care, as one of the most important tasks involved in caring for her grandchildren. "I would cook for them, and make sure they ate well," she explained, "When I'd go to the market to buy chicken, I would need to buy chicken for each boy. Three chicken legs, a leg for each of them, or else they would fight over the chicken." She laughed recalling the

boys' demands for attention and equal treatment, pointing out that she not only strived to meet their physical needs, but that tried to respond equally to their need for affection. As Doña Rafaela's comment suggests, cooking for children not only fulfills their physical need for nutrition, but is often an expression of a mother's or caregiver's affection and love as well. Indeed, many mothers in Santa Ursula talked about preparing special or favorite foods for children as a form of affection and as the aspect of mothering that gave them the greatest satisfaction.

Protecting children from physical harm and accidents is an important aspect of caregivers' responsibilities for children. Doña Rafaela explained that in addition to watching over her grandchildren during the day, or having her daughter-in-law watch the boys when she was not available, she also called her son to request he send money to build a wall around their property so that the children could not easily wander into the street. Several caretakers I spoke with expressed concern about the possibility of a child being hit by a car. Indeed during the period I carried out my fieldwork there were two separate incidents of children who were victims of hit and run accidents. In one case, a two and a half year old child was killed. Some caretakers, including Doña Rafaela, stressed that they limited the amount of freedom they gave children to go out with friends unsupervised. Several caregivers explained that they were stricter than other caregivers, who they felt gave children too much freedom to *andar en la calle* (go around the streets), as they usually called it. Caregivers who described themselves as protective and strict with children, felt that they were more responsible than other caregivers.

Caring for children through illness is also an important part of caregivers' responsibilities. This aspect of carework is usually less challenging for older women with prior mothering experience, than it is for younger caretakers, such as older daughters who lack

experience and knowledge. Most caretakers I spoke with had dealt with childhood illness, but only a few had seen children through a serious, life-threatening health crisis. According to the clinic physician, respiratory infections, such as colds and influenza, and occasionally pneumonia, are the most common illnesses among young children in Santa Ursula. Diarrheal diseases are also present in the community, but occur less frequently.

The clinic doctor also explained that children commonly suffer from skin infections due to poor hygiene. Primary and pre-school teachers also expressed concern about children's poor hygiene, and how they could "raise consciousness" among parents to improve hygiene. A few caregivers mentioned keeping children clean as part of their responsibilities. One aunt, Brenda, for example, considered herself a responsible caregiver, because she had kept the children clean when they were in her care. She explained that when the children later went to live with their grandmother, their clothes were often dirty. "Their grandmother doesn't take care of them as well," she explained. "In general you see that around here, that the children who stay with their grandparents often are not as clean or well kempt as other children." When I asked her why she thought that might be so, she responded, "Maybe because they are old, maybe that is why. They are tired now, they raised their children and it is hard for them to stay on top of things."

Although several teachers and the clinic physician mentioned that some older grandparents had difficulty caring for grandchildren, they did not believe that parents were necessarily better caregivers than other family members. Rather, they explained that children who suffered from malnutrition, who had not received vaccinations (which was uncommon), or who had never gone to the clinic, might either be in the care of caregivers, or their own parents. The town physical explained that "family dysfunction—parents who have some sort of problem and don't give attention to their children" was a more likely source of child neglect or a threat to

a child's health, than care arrangements in which a child lived with a family member other than a parent. Although children living with caregivers are usually well cared for, my findings suggest that some older grandparents with health problems or physical limitations have difficulty caring for their grandchildren, as well as themselves. In Chapters Six and Seven, I analyze aging and illness as it relates to caregivers' lives, and the impact of grandparents' health on their grandchildren.

Emotional Work

Emotional work is an important part of caring labor, both paid and unpaid, and perhaps the most "invisible" aspect of what caregivers do. In part, what makes emotional work particularly invisible is that it is difficult to quantify and define, even more so than other aspects of caring labor (Daniels 1987). For example, cooking and laundering clothes produces the material result of a meal and a pile of clean, ironed and folded clothing. In contrast, making children feel cared for and loved, produces less visible results. In addition, many aspects of emotional labor, such as listening to children or offering advice or encouragement, are about more than just work, they are also about interpersonal relationships. If caregivers in Santa Ursula do not perceive washing dishes or making tortillas as work, they even less so define activities like listening to their charges or making them feel loved as "work." Even sociologists, who have produced a large body of literature on the topic, disagree about "what constitutes emotional labor, the relationship between physical and emotional labor, and more broadly how to understand the various kinds of emotion work that service workers perform on the job" (Lopez 2010:255).

Hochschild, who introduced the concept of emotional labor in *The Managed Heart* (1983), was referring to the ways in which US service workers manage their feelings and

emotional displays in relation to organizationally defined rules and guidelines. Since *The Managed Heart*, sociologists have continued to grapple with the meaning and parameters of emotional labor as well as its significance for workers (Levy 2010; Wharton 2009). Most analysts agree that emotion work is highly gendered and naturalized, as women perform most of it in US families and work settings outside the domestic sphere. In the following discussion of emotion work of caregivers in Santa Ursula I use Erickson's definition of emotion work as "activities that are concerned with the enhancement of others' emotional well-being and with the provision of emotional support" (Erickson 2005:383). As Erickson points out, such activities "require time, effort, and skill" (Erickson 2005:383). The meaning of emotion work and the intensity of emotional engagement of mothering or caregiving vary among societies, families and generations. In Santa Ursula younger caregivers emphasized the aspects of "emotional labor" I discuss here more commonly than older caregivers.

When a Mother Leaves

Helping children manage their feelings and adjust to their new circumstances when a mother leaves is an important component of emotional labor and one of the first challenges that a caregiver faces. Some caregivers I interviewed emphasized this aspect of their experience, and I also observed caregivers in public spaces in Santa Ursula as they tried to help children navigate the emotional experience of their mother's departure. For example, during Santa Ursula's Mother's Day celebration in 2006, I observed a grandmother and her four young grandchildren as they spent the day in the town center. Most onlookers came and went, staying only for an hour or so, and then returning to their houses. In contrast, the grandmother and her grandchildren sat for hours on the curb in front of the mayor's office, watching the festivities. The atmosphere was lively. *Norteño* music played over the loudspeakers. Children and adults

bought popcorn, potato chips, sodas and ice cream from vendors. Mothers participated in fair games, such as potato sack races, for prizes, and the church youth group entertained the crowd with traditional folk dances. Although the children looked sullen and uninterested, they remained quietly perched on the curb throughout the afternoon. Occasionally their grandmother commented on the competitions and performances, trying to distract the children's attention away from their sadness and worries. She also bought them a steady stream of treats, more than a grandmother or parent would usually give to children. When I asked Inés, with whom I had attended the event, if the woman was the children's caregiver, she replied, "Yes, their mother left for *el norte* last night."

Most parents speak with their children about their plans to go to the United States. I also knew some mothers and fathers who had left during the night without telling their children that they were going to migrate. In such circumstances children wake in the morning to find that their mother or parents have left. Their caregiver and other family members must then help them understand what has happened. Despite how children learn about their mother's departure, the initial separation is difficult for children as well as parents. Although many Santa Ursulans downplay the dangers of crossing the border, probably as a way of managing fear and stress, the children of migrants who travel overland without documents, most likely experience a great deal of fear related to the dangers of their parents' journeys. However, mothers and caregivers commonly explain that over time children get used to living apart from their parents. Stressing how they had continued to suffer and worry about their children long after their children had grown accustomed to their absence, several mothers I knew in Santa Ursula mentioned how their children would tease them over the phone "Mamá why are you so sad, if we've already gotten used to you being gone."

How caretakers meet children's needs as they adjust to their new conditions varies. For example, Elena, who along with her husband came to care for her younger sisters when she was sixteen years old, explained that the way she helped her younger sisters deal with their mother's departure was different with each sister. Elena's youngest sister Clara, who was only six when her mother left, had the most difficulty adjusting to her mother's absence. "She missed my mother the most," Elena explained, "so I tried to treat her as I would my own daughter and to show her a mother's love." Elena believed that her other sisters were able to adapt more easily to their mother's absence because they were older, attended school and had friends. Like the grandmother at the Mother's Day celebration described above, Elena tried to ease the transition for all her sisters by shifting their attention to activities that would distract them. She took them regularly to visit their grandmother in town, to the store to buy them ice cream and to Cholula to play in the park. The fact that they were able to stay in their own home and did not need to adjust to living with extended family members, made adjusting to their mother's departure somewhat easier. Although most caretakers explain the initial transition as largely an emotional adjustment, children who move into an aunt or grandparents' house must also adjust to new physical surroundings as well as different routines.

Bonding and Making Children Feel Loved

The concept of emotional work is also useful for understanding emotional bonds that form between caregivers and charges. Although emotional attachment between children and caregivers amounts to more than just "work," forming emotional bonds with children is a way of making children feel cared for and loved, which is another aspect of child care, both paid and unpaid (Uttal and Tuominen 1999). Researchers of paid private childcare have analyzed numerous issues and contradictions that surround emotional linkages or attachments that

resemble family relationships in the context of remunerated carework (Colen 1995; Uttal and Tuominen 1999; Wrigley 1995). Kin care relationships differ from paid care relationships in that children and caregivers have familial bonds and emotional attachments prior to and beyond the care arrangement. However, some family caregivers described being “like a mother” to children in order to underscore emotional closeness they shared with their charges or to explain the dedication with which they had carried out their responsibilities of caregiving. Likening their relationship to that one shared by mother and child shows that caregivers consider emotional attachment an important aspect of their caregiving role.

Aunts and grandmothers who had cared for children from the time they were small, or who had cared for children for many years were more likely to emphasize the emotional bond they shared with children when describing their caregiving experiences. Some caregivers who stated that their charges referred to them as mother or father, did so not only to describe emotional closeness with charges, but also to criticize parents who had been away from their children for many years, or had failed to maintain consistent contact with them. However, most caregivers who spoke of their charges as if they were their own children or underscored that their charges called them mother, did so with great pride in order to demonstrate the tremendous care and love they had show for the children.

Blanca, for example, described with pride the close bond and reciprocal relationship of affection that she established with her nieces, who she had cared for since they were four and five years old.

I feel the same with the children that are mine as with the girls who are my nieces...because I raised them since they were little. The older one now is fourteen years old. My daughter left when she was fourteen. My nieces feel good with me, and I also feel proud of them. No, they don't say “Well we are old now so it is embarrassing to go out with my aunt.” No, if they see that I am going to go somewhere, to the store, they will say, “I will come with you. Let's go.” I feel proud of them, because many *abuelitos*

as I said, the parents leave them the children so that they will not feel alone, just to keep them company. But as I said before, since they left me the girls when they were small, and now they are big, I feel proud of them because years ago they were very small, but now that they are grown. I walk around with them, and they are big now, and I raised them. Now if they want to take them, it wouldn't be bad, but it was difficult raising them also. They would get sick, even if it was only for a half a night, a small flu, a fever, all of that. But I took care of them, I looked after them. And so I say that I feel proud of them because you know how teenagers are "OK, goodbye." Well that would be OK also, but I feel happy with them.

Like Blanca, several caregivers expressed pride about having treated children "as if they were my own," and also that children in return showed them love and respect.

Other caregivers explicitly did not use mother-child terminology to describe their relationship with their charges, even in cases where they shared a close emotional bond. Many grandmothers and aunts regularly reminded children that they were not their mother, that their mother was in the United States, and that one day they would live together again.⁷⁸ Knowing that children would mostly likely leave them to reunite with their parents, grandmothers seemed to mark the boundaries of their relationship as a way of softening for themselves and their grandchildren the emotional strain of the impending separation. That many caretakers and charges do not call each other by mother, father, son or daughter does not appear to be a reflection of being less connected or close. For example, Lorenza, who was proud of the close relationship she had established with her niece, was clear to explain that her niece did not consider her "like a mother." Rather, she described their relationship as one of companionship and friendship. "My niece doesn't have a lot of friends in Santa Ursula, because she doesn't really go out much, but when she wants to go to a fiesta, or go out, she says to me, "Let's go *tía*,

⁷⁸ Dreby also found that despite bonds between caregivers and "young children's practices of calling grandmothers 'mama,' rarely do these women consider themselves their grandchildren's mothers." Moreover, "As intermediaries, caregivers suggest that the ultimate reunification of parents and children is not only a possibility but also a probability" (2010:176).

let's go to the *fiesta*.” Her niece also tried to return home every afternoon in time to share the main meal of the day with her aunt and grandparents.

Listening, Giving Advice and Monitoring Teenagers

Younger caregivers, particularly aunts and older sisters, were more likely to describe listening to charges or offering advice as an example of their attentiveness. Older caregivers were more likely to discuss attentiveness and affection towards children in terms of physical care, like preparing a grandchild's favorite food. One eighteen-year-old high school student explained that *jóvenes* (young people) who lived with their grandparents did not “talk as much” as those who lived with their parents, because *jóvenes* do not have the same level of *confianza* (trust) with grandparents as they would with their own parents. She explained generational differences in verbal expression this way: “Things were different in their time; things were more private back then. So with grandparents you can't talk, it's not the same. When you try to talk with them they say, ‘What do you care’ or ‘Run along and do this or that.’” In such cases, she explained, *jóvenes* primarily share their concerns and interests with friends.

Aunts and older sisters stressed talking and giving advice as particularly important for adolescents as they transitioned into adulthood. For example, Blanca who stated that she treated her nieces as she had her own children, explained that her emotional bond with her nieces had to do with the fact that she listened to them and gave them advice about sexuality and dating.

I talked to them [her daughters and nieces] about menstruation, when a woman has her menstruation. I talk to them, I tell them “Look, behave well, be careful, pay attention to this and that.” Or, “Just because a boy says something to you, doesn't mean that he is an angel that has fallen from the sky, and that life is over.” A girl might think that her life is over, because there are very young girls who go to live with boys. But I tell them, that's not OK either, “You have to wait and see. You are still studying, you are still in secondary school...think about it, pay attention, because you can talk with other boys also, paying attention to what you talk about, paying attention to what kind of person he is. Not just because you saw this one boy. And you have to see how the young man behaves also. Does he behave well or does he behave poorly?” Because they are still

young, it would be different if they were twenty or thirty years old, but I think they think that the world is going to end. “I like this one,” and they fall in love, and she is gone. He steals her. But I tell them, “That’s not how it is. Look first.” They can talk with whom they want to, but more than anything, they should enjoy their youth. They shouldn’t think that just because their parents are far away, that [noone is looking after them, or that they can do what they want to]. So, they grew to care about me, and I grew to care about them.

Like Blanca, most mothers and caregivers expressed more concern about the social life and sexuality of adolescent girls than adolescent boys. For example, Blanca had spoken with her son about the sex workers who worked in the field near Santa Ursula. She warned him that “they have illnesses” and if she found out “he was doing those things,” she would “lose respect for him.” Yet, she did not express concern about her son dating, being sexually active or becoming a parent during his teenage years, as she had with her teenage nieces and daughters.

Lorenza, who had cared for her niece Raquel since she was five years old, expressed similar concerns about her twenty-two-year-old niece’s social life, despite the fact that Raquel had grown into a very responsible young woman. She had completed high school, was a university student in the city of Puebla, she respected Lorenza’s opinion and authority and helped with chores around the house. However, Lorenza felt that it had been easier to be responsible for Raquel when she was a child. “Because she is not my daughter,” Lorenza explained, “imagine if something happens to her, I would feel terrible. So I rarely give her permission to go out. If there is a school activity that is obligatory then I will let her go. But if it is a social activity unrelated to school, then I almost always say no.”

Rosa, a mother who left her two sons at three and twelve years of age, and two daughters at six and ten years of age, with her mother-in-law for five years, said that her daughters were her greatest worry while she and her husband lived in Chicago. “Girls are more delicate,” she explained. “You have to worry more when they go out, you have to worry that they are going to

juntarse.” Although Rosa liked working in Chicago, she said she would not return to the US because she did not want to leave her children, particularly her fourteen-year-old daughter, who “she watched over very carefully” and did not allow to go out at night or to dances unchaperoned. Rosa felt that it was important to be in Santa Ursula in order to guide her daughter through adolescence and help ensure that she continued studying and not *juntarse* at a young age. She explained that her older daughter, who was ten when Rosa left for Chicago, moved in with her boyfriend and his parents when she was fifteen years old. Rosa believed that her older daughter had “married” young, because she was not there to look after her. “Her grandmother gave her too much freedom,” Rosa explained, “She would go out to dances.” When Rosa returned to Santa Ursula she did not realize that her daughter had a boyfriend. Six months her daughter moved in with her boyfriend and his parents, and two years later she had her first child. Rosa explained that she often tells her younger daughter, “You see, your older sister went out a lot and she was very young when she went to live with her boyfriend. I want you to enjoy your youth.” She says her daughter agrees, which is why she is working hard at her studies.

Several studies have shown that community members often perceive a breakdown in values among teenagers whose mothers are away or a rise in juvenile delinquency due to the impact of migration in a community (Cohen 2004; Moran-Taylor 2008), but such perceptions do not necessarily correlate with a reality of change (Cohen 2004; Parreñas 2005). Many community members I spoke with shared Rosa’s perspective that a parent’s absence might result in a young woman becoming a mother earlier than she would have had she lived with her parents. Several high school students commented that in Santa Ursula “*dejan a las muchachas solas* (they leave the girls alone).” They reasoned that girls have more freedom when they are

living with their grandparents, and go out at night more than other girls their age. As a result, they argued, such adolescent girls are more likely to become pregnant and *juntarse* when they are young. One high school student also related migration to an increase in single mothers. He explained, “Today, young women have a lot of freedom. They have a boyfriend and then they change him for another one.” He then gave the example of an eighteen-year-old woman who while living with her sister became pregnant. The baby’s father did not stay with her and as a result the young woman and her baby continued to live with her sister.

The DIF psychologist also perceived a rise in single adolescent mothers as a pattern and social problem in Cholulteca communities where children live with grandparents.

Those whose parents are not here have sexual contact younger than those who have their mother and father with them. Because their grandparents don’t talk to them about sexuality.... I think it is a consequence. Since the time the parents went and left them in the care of other authority figures, who obviously didn’t do their job—well it isn’t even a question of if they did their job, it wasn’t their responsibility to do. Parents go and they abandon their children, because in fact it is an abandonment, even though they go to improve their lives. It is abandonment, and I feel that it is a consequence, it is a consequence. Yes, this is why you see now a sharp rise in single adolescent mothers. There are a lot of them. That is why you see a lot of adolescent mothers who already have their baby, and this increases [migration] a lot. They have to go, they have to go [in order to provide for their child].

Despite Santa Ursulans’ and the DIF psychologist’s perception that adolescent girls were entering into sexual relationships and becoming mothers at a young age because of parental migration, from my observations, the average age in which young women became mothers in Santa Ursula had not drastically changed or declined since leaving children with caregivers had become common. Many women in their thirties, forties, fifties and sixties had married or had their first child at fifteen or sixteen years of age. In fact, Rosa, who felt that her daughter had entered into a free union too young, at fifteen years of age, because she had not been with her, had herself married at sixteen. Santa Ursulans’ perception that adolescent girls were becoming

pregnant at a young age because their parents were gone, perhaps had more to do with the fact that expectations today for teenage girls in Santa Ursula are changing. It is more common today for Santa Ursulans to expect girls to study beyond primary school. In addition, most mothers, like Rosa, wanted their daughters to have better opportunities than they had, and enjoy their youth before taking on the burden of marriage and motherhood.

Many community members also held the opinion that children living with caregivers lacked a strong authority figure. Most high school students with whom I spoke, believed that although young children might obey grandparents, as children move into adolescence they tend to disregard their grandparents' rules and authority. One student conjectured that one of her classmates' disregard for their teachers' authority had to do with the fact that he had grown up without his parents:

There is a boy here in the high school for example, Eduardo, and his parents are both gone so he lives with his grandparents. You can see that he doesn't respect the teachers as much. I suppose it is because he is growing up without his parents. They aren't there to set boundaries for him. What happens is that aunts and uncles have their own children to look after, so they can't be worrying about the *educación* (rearing) of the children left by their parents. And grandparents *ya no son de edad* (are too old). Children also need affection, who knows how old Eduardo was when they left him, but you can tell that he doesn't have a parental figure around.

Several teenagers explained grandparents' physical limitations and feebleness as the reason that some older children lacked respect for their grandparents. One student stated, "There is the issue that when the kids are older, they don't listen to their grandparents because a lot of grandchildren believe that their grandparents cannot hit them." Another student explained, "When grandparents are older, it is hard for them to take care of the children, it is hard for them to yell at them. And even some of the younger children push their grandparents, there have been cases. Yes, they've even hit them. *El pueblo es bien canijo* (People in this town can be very difficult)."

Community members often characterized the conduct of children left behind as rebellious or said that they were likely to get into trouble. For example, Santa Ursula's mayor explained, "We have a lot of children who become rebellious, even as young as eight or nine. And although we don't have problems with drug abuse here, we do have the problem of very young people drinking now, while they didn't before. And also smoking cigarettes." Many people also believed that teenagers whose parents were in the US spent time idly, hanging out and getting into trouble instead of working or studying. In addition to concerns about adolescent drinking and smoking, some Santa Ursulans blamed teenagers whose parents were away for breaking windows and painting graffiti on the exterior walls of some of the large uninhabited houses of migrants residing in the US. Most high school students I spoke with characterized adolescents whose parents were away as *vagos* (bums), saying, "They go out more, they are almost never home." Some students explained such idleness as a result not only of parental absence, but also easy access to money. For example, one student explained, "They spend their time in the street, they get into trouble. The majority don't study, they don't work, because they have their parents' money. They don't want to study. They just wait for their parents to send them money." The perception that the children of migrants are less industrious and ambitious than other teenagers in Santa Ursula, echoes what some scholars describe as the "leisure effect" in Central America, in which heavy reliance on remittances might encourage consumerism over labor or investment (Edelman 2008; Segovia 2004). Nevertheless, claims of lazy and irresponsible children of migrants in Santa Ursula are overstated. Most children of migrants contribute to the households in which they live with their unpaid labor in productive and reproductive activities, and may take on greater responsibilities in their parents absence.

While many caregivers shared this general view that children whose parents were away lacked discipline and respect for authority, not all caregivers characterized their particular experiences this way. Some caregivers lamented that grandchildren had become rebellious and less respectful of their authority in adolescence. Yet other caregivers explained that even into their teenage years, their charges respected their authority. Several caregivers, such as Blanca, characterized teenagers' respect for them as part of the emotional closeness and bond they had formed with each other. Blanca explained her role as an authority figure as part of the mutual respect she shared with her nieces, "Yes, they will say, 'Aunt, will you give me permission to go out?' 'Yes, where are you going?' 'To *tal parte*, give me some money.' 'But don't stay out late'. And they respect my decision. Even if they are going to the store, or if they are going to a friend's house to do homework, they have to ask me for permission."

Education

Caregivers play an important role in children's education. However, how a caregiver prioritizes and carries out school-related responsibilities of caregiving, depends on a variety of factors, such as the age of the children in her care. The average level of education in Santa Ursula, and Santa Ursulans' perspectives on the role of education in ensuring a child's future well-being has changed over the years. Most grandparents aged sixty or older have an average of one to three years of schooling and some lack formal education altogether. Most parents of school-aged children have more than three years of primary school, and many men and women born after 1960 have completed primary school. The number of primary school graduates continuing on to secondary school increased significantly through the 1990s and 2000s. In more recent years, as brickmaking has declined, the number of teenagers and their parents who believe

that completing secondary school or high school will result in better employment opportunities has increased.

Like younger Santa Ursulans, most grandparents today consider completing primary school necessary, obligatory and desirable for children. Many older men and women I knew regretted that they did not have the opportunity to complete primary school, and older Santa Ursulans who were able to read or write proficiently were proud of their educational achievement. However, while almost all Santa Ursulans share the view that children must attend and complete primary school, perspectives on the necessity of a preschool, secondary school or high school education are less uniform. As a result, the primary school student body is much greater than that of the other schools.

Student enrollment in preschool (levels one through three, for example, totaled 123 in 2006, compared with approximately 750 in the primary school (grades one through six), because many parents and caregivers in Santa Ursula consider preschool optional. Preschool consists of three levels, and in order to enroll children must be at least three years old when the academic year begins in late August. The state mandates that a child have attended and completed the third year of preschool (the US equivalent of kindergarten) in order to enroll in primary school. However, given the high numbers of children who never attend preschool, the primary school directors accept all children into first grade. The preschool parents committee, like teachers, criticized the primary school directors for accepting children without preschool and they believed preschool enrollment was low, because parents did not feel obligated to send children. On the other hand, they conjectured, if the directors turned the children away, some parents might choose not to send them to school at all.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, student enrollment in the third year of

⁷⁹ Because of the low enrollment at the preschool, the teachers went through the principal streets of Santa Ursula to invite the parents with small children to send them to school. The door-to-door strategy did not yield results.

preschool is at least three times that of enrollment for the first and second years, suggesting that many parents consider the final year of preschool important, or at least are willing to follow the state rule of mandatory kindergarten. In addition, although Santa Ursulans do not necessarily consider sending children to preschool a caregiver's responsibility, many grandparents do send children to preschool, as a significant number of preschool students lived with caregivers.

Members of the preschool committee also blamed the town president for adding to the problem by not sending his own preschool-aged son to school. "As the president of the community, he should set an example, and he should send his son to preschool. But he doesn't do it," one member complained. Like many parents, the president and his wife, explained to me that they were not going to send their son to preschool until the third year, because they found the school-related costs prohibitive. Although the tuition fee was low, at 150 pesos (US\$15) for the academic year, the *presidenta* explained that all parents were expected to contribute 500 pesos (US\$50) that year for a fund that would go to building an awning over the open patio where the children played. Nevertheless, many parents who sent their children to the preschool never contributed to the awning.

Like the president and his wife, many parents and caregivers cited school costs as an economic burden, not only at the preschool level, but also for children in primary school and beyond. Usually it is not the cost of tuition for one child that is difficult for parents, but rather the sum of school related costs, such as uniforms, supplies and *cooperaciones* (monetary contributions), for several school-aged children at the same time. Most caregivers received remittances from parents for children's education. However, in some cases, parents only sent money intermittently, or the quantity sent was insufficient for all school-related costs. Nevertheless, migrant parents are generally better able to pay for their children's education than

they had been before they had migrated. Although most migrant parents consider their children's education important and expect the money they send to cover school related costs, their children's education is not usually the primary reason that parents migrate from Santa Ursula. Parents are much more likely to cite house construction, rather than their children's education as the reason they migrate. This contrasts with Parreñas's findings that Filipina women usually migrate in order to pay for costs of higher education for their children.

More so than costs, the primary reason that mothers and caregivers cited for not sending children to preschool was the time involved in bringing children to school. The preschool director required that parents or another family member bring children to school, rather than sending children on their own. As a member of the preschool committee explained, "Some of them say that it is because they live far away. And they can't bring them, because it takes a lot of time, it's a waste of time." Some houses in Santa Ursula are a fifteen or twenty minute walk from the preschool. Therefore dropping a child off nine in the morning, returning home, picking him at noon, and returning home again, could cause considerable disruption to a woman's daily schedule of household chores and activities. In addition, getting children ready for preschool and out the door also takes time. Some mothers and teachers believed that children living with grandparents, who are "older and more tired," might be even less likely to send children to school for this reason. Yet, because many people live in extended family arrangements, or have other family members close by, many caretakers and even mothers send other (often primary school-aged) children, such as a sibling, cousin or young aunt or uncle, to walk their children to preschool.

Preschool teachers complained that lack of direct contact with children's caregivers or parents interfered with children's education. In some cases, teachers did not know who children

lived with, in other words, they did not know who was responsible for the child, because the teacher had only had contact with the child's siblings throughout the school year. For example, one teacher explained:

The truth is, it is the *primitas* (little girl cousins). The older girls. The girls. From the time the children are registered, you only know the girl, who is fourteen, thirteen, until the school graduation, which is when the mother, the aunt, the grandmother comes and you meet them. "And you? Who are you?" [we ask]. "That is my daughter." "*Señora a poco?*" (Ma'am, really, you're kidding?). She says, "Yes." They don't say anything. You meet her when it is the day of graduation, and she shows up looking very elegant, very *guapa* (attractive) the *señora*. It's the same thing whether it is a grandmother or a mother.

Primary school teachers also reported similar problems in which a parent or caregiver might never show up at the child's school throughout the entire academic year, until they had a certain need to do so. For example, the afternoon primary school director told me about a caregiver who only showed up at the school at the end of the year in order to request a copy of the child's school enrollment record, because the child's parents who were in the US needed it in order to prove that they had a certain number of dependent children.

Many caregivers, like parents, also sent older siblings or cousins to parent-teacher conferences, or to school *juntas* (meetings). A member of the preschool parent committee explained, "If there is a *junta*, there are a hundred children, but if thirty come then that is a lot. They don't come. They send a child, a sibling of the child. But they (the parents) feel like they have *cumplido* (done their part), because they send a child." The committee members felt that lack of parental participation affected not only an individual child's education, but also the school.⁸⁰ "That is also why we don't make progress, they don't want to collaborate," explained the same committee member, "How many years will it take for Santa Ursula to progress?"

⁸⁰ In the US, many studies have found that parent involvement, among other factors, has a positive impact on schools (Johnson et al. (2000). Slate and Jones (2007) found that parents and teachers in Juárez, Mexico hold similar views that parent involvement is a primary factor in effective elementary schools. In Santa Ursula, parents views on parent involvement, as well as their actual involvement, are varied.

Oooooo years from now it is going to be the same,” she laughed. Like the preschool committee, teachers also felt that the fact that parents send children in their place to school meetings negatively impacted children’s education. They explained that communicating with a child about school related matters, such as what supplies children needed to bring, often yielded poor results.⁸¹ At the same time, they recognized that such arrangements were more desirable than those in which caregivers or parents did not send children to preschool at all.

Most caregivers and parents feel that like preschool, junior high and high school are optional. For this reason, the local high school (grades ten through twelve) only had forty students in 2006. Nevertheless, during the same year, Santa Ursula’s junior high (grades seven through nine) had a population of approximately 210 students, which means that the majority of primary school graduates begin secondary school. However, a significant number of students who begin secondary school do not finish. Of the 110 students who began secondary school in 2004, only eighty graduated in 2006. Because sending for children when they complete primary school has become a somewhat common practice among parents living in the US, migration accounts for some of the primary school graduates who do not enroll in the junior high school. In addition, some families with higher incomes send their children to private junior high and high schools in Cholula. In contrast, teenagers from lower income families may drop out because their family needs them to work. Some students drop out or never enroll in junior high, because they do not feel that it will benefit them or they find school uninteresting or difficult. Indeed, primary school teachers indicated that many students, some of whom repeat one or two years of primary school, struggle academically. For example, in 2006, in the first through fourth grades of the morning primary school, each grade was composed of an average of seventy students.

⁸¹ Indeed, many teachers complained that parents and caregivers showed more interest in the school graduation than in the actual education of their children.

However, by the fifth and sixth grades, the number of students rose to seventy-seven and eighty-seven respectively, indicating that a number of students repeat the final two years of primary school. According to the teachers, such students are less likely to go on to secondary school.

According to most high school students, parental attitudes also play a significant role in shaping adolescents' attitudes towards education. Teenagers whose parents encouraged them to go to secondary or high school were more likely to stay in school. Nevertheless, most parents, caretakers and adolescents I spoke with considered enrolling in secondary school an adolescent's choice. Many community members stated that some parents discourage adolescent girls from studying beyond primary school saying, "What for, if they are only going to get married and have children afterwards?", meaning why waste resources on sending teenage girls to school when they will probably not use their education. As often as I heard community members express this opinion about other people's attitudes, I never met anyone who stated this as their own belief, and enrollment of girls in the local high school was as high, and in fact higher, than that of boys.

Although many teachers and high school students believed that migration had a negative effect on education, because many young people chose to migrate instead of study, some young people had chosen to study precisely because of the influence of other family members who had encouraged them to do so. Many parents, aunts, uncles or older siblings believed that if they had had higher levels of education they would have either had better employment opportunities in the US or they would not have had to migrate, because they would have been able to find adequate employment in Mexico. Thus with a desire that their children have better options than they had, they support and encourage younger siblings, nieces and nephews to continue with their studies.

A caregiver's level of involvement in children's education depends in part on the age of the child. As discussed above, supporting the schooling of preschool-aged children requires more time, because parents and caregivers must walk children to school. However, all young children require more help than older children, with school-related tasks, such as getting ready for school in the morning. Teachers expect caregivers, like mothers, to make sure children are well groomed and bathed for school, and that their uniforms are washed and ironed. Preschool and primary school teachers complained about parents and caregivers' lack of attention to children's hygiene, and that some adults send children to school in dirty uniforms. Secondary school and high school students usually take responsibility for their own cleanliness and grooming. However, some caretakers and mothers continue to tend to adolescent children, particularly boys, and help them get ready for school by washing and pressing their uniforms and preparing their breakfast.

Attending school meetings (*juntas*) and participating in activities, such as painting classrooms or preparing for a school celebration is another way that parents and caretakers spend time and money on children's education. Again, like parents, some caregivers participate more than others. Thus although such participation is in theory obligatory, in practice, not all caretakers spend a great deal of time doing so. Blanca, a caregiver for her two nieces, explained activities related to her nieces' education involved a significant amount of time, and impinged on the time she used for her domestic activities, such as cooking:

What I find most difficult [about my role as a caretaker] is in the morning preparing the children for school, because I need to rush. 'Is this one dressed? Has she/he eaten breakfast? Well like today, they told me that there is going to be a *junta* at the school, so I have to get up early to make breakfast, so if I have time I will make *tortillas*, and if not then I will go directly to the *junta*. When they go to school, then I will make food for them. So if the *junta* ends at twelve or eleven o'clock, it leaves me time to make lunch after the meeting. But since I know there is going to be a *junta*, then I have to hurry up with my chores, since I have to feed the turkeys.

In contrast to caregivers who do not participate in meetings, or help their teenage charges get ready for school, caregiving activities related to her nieces' education take up a significant amount of Blanca's time. Meetings, which convene about once a month and last one or two hours, usually take place in the morning, when many women are busy taking care of domestic chores. In addition, school meetings often take longer than attendees expect.⁸² A caregiver's responsibility, in theory, also involves meeting one-on-one with a teacher, to discuss her child's progress or difficulty in school. However, as Blanca indicated, not all caregivers, or parents, show up for such meetings either.

Some community members, such as high school students and teachers, suggested that grandparents' limited formal education, may impact their charges' education, because they are unable to help children with school assignments. Nevertheless, although caregivers generally have fewer years of education than their charges, caregivers find ways of remaining involved, or supporting their charges in their academic pursuits. For example, many grandparents felt that making sure that children did homework was part of their role. Despite their inability to help children with homework assignments, they made sure that children completed their homework, before allowing them to move on to other activities, such as watching television. In addition, like parents, who generally have no more than a primary school education, younger caretakers, such as aunts, explained that although they were able to help children with homework in primary school, by the time children reach secondary school the material is beyond their abilities.

⁸²“Sometimes we meet to talk about children that aren't doing well. Like if there is a child who doesn't want to wear the uniform, or he comes looking messy, or he doesn't wear the correct uniform for that day (meaning the gym uniform versus the regular uniform), so they call for a meeting...Everyone will listen, or they will present the parent of the child who is having the problem, and they say, so what should we do about this child, because sometimes too the parent doesn't show up. Also sometimes if they want to do something in school and there isn't money, then they call us. Are we going to *cooperar* (contribute), or what are we going to do, or that the *inscripcion ya se acabó* (there is no money left from the tuition).”

Nevertheless, caregivers for older children also reported supporting their charges' educational pursuits as an important aspect of their caregiving role. For example, Lorenza, who stressed the importance of supporting her niece's education, frequently drove with her parents to Cholula to pick up her niece when she would stay late after school in order to complete homework assignments.

Religion and Rites of Passage

Preparing for and participating in religious celebrations and rights of passage, such as baptisms, school graduations or weddings, is a central part of women's activities. Women often spend many hours each week helping prepare meals for fiestas. Men also participate in food preparation, but to a much smaller degree. Men are primarily responsible for activities related to preparing animals for cooking, such as slaughtering and butchering pigs or plucking turkeys. Cooking meat, making tortillas, rice and *mole* sauce is strictly women's domain and requires the labor of many women and older girls, because fiestas are large, between fifty and 300 persons, depending on the occasion and the budget. Because of the amount of labor needed, a woman who hosts the event depends on her "comadres" and kin to help her. This work is like an exchange system, a woman agrees to help because she wants to ensure the help of other women in her network when she needs to call on them (Carrasco Rivas and Robichaux 2005). As Inés explained, "If I don't go and help, then imagine, who will help me when my daughters marry?" Women always use the term *help* to describe this activity. For example, "I have to go over to Amalia's to help," means specifically to help with preparation for a fiesta or with post-fiesta clean-up.

Children are at the center of several ritual events that demand a great deal of women's time and labor. Baptism, first communion and primary school graduation are three of the most

important rites of passage in a child's life and many parents celebrate these with large parties.

What happens when parents are away for these events? Caregivers generally consider important rites of passage and the corresponding fiesta the responsibility of the child's parents. Caregivers who accompanied children through such events, especially those who arranged for large parties, spoke proudly of this aspect of their role as an example of their dedication to their charges.

Many caregivers believed that parents should be responsible for children's rites of passage, in part, because arranging such events involves a great deal of time and labor. One must attend meetings, take care of necessary paperwork, find godparents for the child, and arrange for the purchase and preparation of food, as well as decorations or special clothing. In addition, preparing the meal for the fiesta means that a woman must call on her social network for help. Blanca explained that she had been very responsible in carrying out all of the details for her nieces' important rites of passage:

I did their first communion, since they were little. I did everything. Then catechism. You saw it right in October? The three of them. They called them and they said (in the church) do you have their birth certificates?" "Here I have them." "Do you have their baptism papers?" "Yes, I have them." "And their godparents?" "I am going to find godparents for them," because the godparents buy them a good (dress), like for brides, otherwise I would have to get the dress for them. Then in the primary school, they call me and they tell me that the children are going to graduate, that I have to bring their papers. I have ALL of their papers. "And their certificate?" "Yes, here it is." "And her *padrinos*?" "Yes, I will get them." "And there will be a meeting to discuss a contribution (*cooperacion*)." Yes, I showed up for everything. Everything. Everything.

Blanca was proud of her effort and dedication to her nieces. In addition, her nieces and their parents respected her and appreciated what she did for them, which gave her a great sense of satisfaction.

When caregivers arrange for children's rites of passage and parties, they almost always do so in coordination with a child's parents. Blanca and her nieces, for example, spoke with the girls' parents in order to decide who to choose as godparents.

The girls spoke with their parents about who they wanted the godparents to be, but then also the parents spoke with me and they said “Well you see, because the girls are there with you, you think about it, you decide also.” So even though their parents live there (in the US), they take me into consideration. My opinion is very important to them. They say “Well you are the one who needs to decide, because you are the one who raised them.” And I have my husband too, but he didn’t help at all with them. Even though my husband is here, he doesn’t worry much about his children. And sometimes he shows up and he’s been drinking. With his children, well a little bit, but with the girls, well they are his nieces, so I have really been the one.

In addition, parents are always responsible for financing such events and the larger the party the more money needed to buy food and drink for guests. *Padrinos* help with some costs, such as purchasing a dress for first communion, or a gift, typically a bicycle, for the primary school graduation. In return, the *padrinos* are the guests of honor at the fiesta, and the hosts expect that they will bring with them as many as twenty or thirty family members. In addition, it is customary in Santa Ursula for a host, in this case the child’s caregiver, to give the *padrinos* special items, such as a turkey, either cooked or alive.

Because Santa Ursulans generally consider children’s rites of passage a parent’s responsibility, many parents postpone baptizing children or having them receive their first communion until they are able to return to Santa Ursula. Santa Ursulans often spoke of a parent’s return in terms of such events. For example, Marisol, a sibling caretaker explained that her parents were going to stay in Indiana until the construction on the house was complete, and then they would return to Santa Ursula and baptize their youngest daughter Sara. In addition, I knew parents who had postponed baptizing their US-born children until they could return with them and baptize them in Santa Ursula. For example, Viviana and her husband waited to baptize their three US-born children until they returned to Santa Ursula in 2006. When they baptized the children in September of that year, the girl was four years old and the two boys were two and six years old. At the time of the baptism their father had already returned to Indiana, and their

mother was planning to take the children back to the US with her.⁸³ Sometimes, when a parent cannot return for a special occasion, such as a school graduation, they plan to host a party in celebration of the event upon their return.

Parents often return, and caregivers expect them to return, for such events, not only because of the amount of work involved in preparing celebrations, but also because Santa Ursulans generally feel that it is important for parents to be with children for these rites of passage. Consequently, some caregivers who had “done” such events, such as a child’s school graduation, spoke about their participation as a way of criticizing parents, whom they had expected to be there for their children. For example, one grandmother criticized her son and daughter-in-law for having forgotten about their sons. “I am like their mother,” she explained, “I did their first communion; I did their primary school graduation. I told my son to come back. I told them come back for the communion. But they did not. I told them they are going to graduate from primary school, you should come back. But they did not. They’ve forgotten about them.” This grandmother emphasized that she was “like their mother,” not because of her day-to-day activities in caring for the boys, but because of her role in these rites of passage, which she considered her son’s and daughter-in-law’s responsibility and a very important day for the children.

When I asked caregivers and mothers why it was important to baptize children or for them to receive their first communion, they usually answered, “That is our custom.” For example, one mother responded, “That is our tradition. That is what they teach us. We are Catholic. I don’t know about you,” suggesting that if the reason was not obvious to me, than perhaps I was not raised Catholic. However, Doña Petronila, a caretaker in her sixties, explained

⁸³ Viviana, her three US-born children and oldest son, who was born in Santa Ursula, were still living in their new house in Santa Ursula when I left Cholula in February 2007.

that it was important to see that children are baptized and received their first communion and confirmation so that they would be able to marry. “I wasn’t able to do that for my own children, because I didn’t have enough money,” she explained, “That’s why I insisted that the boys [her charges] have their first communion.” Doña Petronila’s response reflects the fact that seeing that children go through important Catholic rites of passage is a fundamental aspect of socializing children in Santa Ursula and preparing them for adulthood, so that they can fully participate in community life.

Because social life in Santa Ursula revolves largely around the cargo-fiesta system, if one is not baptized, one cannot participate fully in this system. For example, in order to participate as a *padrino* for a child’s baptism, one must have been baptized Catholic and also attend meetings at the church. Therefore, not being baptized would exclude one from this experience, and by extension impact a woman’s or man’s possibilities for building his or her social network through *compadrazgo*. In addition, as Doña Petronila explained, men and women cannot marry in the church, if they have not passed through the required rituals. As we saw in the previous chapter, although many young couples live in free union for many years, ultimately couples expect to marry and Santa Ursulans consider a religious marriage more important than a civil marriage, despite the fact that the Mexican state does not recognize religious marriages.

Although earlier studies of the cargo system focused mainly on men’s participation as political and religious actors (Lewis 1960), subsequent studies have shown that women, as well as households, are also significant participants in the *mayordomo* system (D’Aubetterre Buznego 2005; Mathews 1985; Stephen 2005). D’Aubetterre (2005) argues that while cargos have always been a source of prestige for a couple, not just a husband, as men have increasingly migrated from San Miguel Acuexcomac, a migrant sending community in Puebla, women’s participation

as *mayordomos* has become more visible. When women carry out responsibilities of cargos in husband's absence, they gain not only prestige for their household, but they help men work their way up the civic-religious hierarchy. In Santa Ursula, caregivers generally do not fulfill the role of *mayordomo* for a child's parents. However, I knew one sibling caregiver, Marisol, who had taken the responsibility of *mayordomo* in her parents' absence. As I will analyze in Chapter 8, this responsibility consumed a great deal of Marisol's time, and sometimes conflicted with her other activities.

Conclusion

Caregivers' perspectives on their responsibilities vary in relation to the age of their charges, as well as the caregiver's age and prior experience. Caregivers for young children, particularly babies and toddlers, described the physical care of children as the most important or demanding aspect of their role. Most Santa Ursulans describe children six years of age and older as being able to fend for themselves, and therefore not a great deal of extra work. Older children often help with domestic tasks, such as cleaning the house or washing clothes. In addition, most caregivers are mothers, already have experience caring for children and a home, and therefore did not consider taking care of their charges' physical needs a burden. However, older sisters who care for their younger siblings, find their new responsibilities burdensome and difficult. For example, older sisters were less likely to know how to care for children when they became ill. In Chapters Seven and Eight I examine in greater detail how the burden of domestic labor increases for older, unmarried girls when mothers migrate.

Some caregivers felt that being responsible for teenagers was the greatest burden, because they needed to monitor their charges' social lives and behavior. Caregivers of teenage girls in particular emphasized their role in listening to their charges and giving them advice about

sexuality and dating. Younger caregivers, such as aunts, were more likely to describe listening and giving advice as an important aspect of their role. Several caregivers explained that they were diligent in their responsibilities because they limited their charges' freedom to spend time with their friends or go to dances. Many Santa Ursulans believed that young women had "too much freedom" when their parents were away and believed that young women were entering into free-unions or becoming pregnant at a young age due to lack of parental supervision. Nevertheless, many older women had also married and had their first child when they were fourteen, fifteen or sixteen years of age, long before Santa Ursulans began migrating to the United States.

Caregivers' involvement in their charges' education varies. Most grandparents have only one to three years of formal education, yet they consider finishing primary school important for children, and usually supported their charges by making sure they did their homework and attended school. On the other hand, most Santa Ursulans do not view preschool, secondary or high school as obligatory, and therefore the enrollment in these schools is much lower than in the primary school. Parents, caregivers and teenagers generally felt that teenagers could choose whether to attend secondary and high school, and there were very few high school students or graduates in Santa Ursula. In part, this relates to Santa Ursulans tendency to marry in their mid to late-teens, and the fact that teenagers are often an important source of labor in their households. In addition, today, many teenagers migrate, and Santa Ursulans are divided in their perspectives on whether or not a high school education will help them find better jobs in Mexico, where job opportunities are limited. Teachers often complained that Santa Ursulans did not sufficiently prioritize their children's education, and that the religious calendar and fiestas consistently interfered with school attendance. Nevertheless, they complained about parents'

lack of involvement in the school as much as they complained about grandparent-caregivers lack of involvement, explaining that like parents, some caregivers were very responsible while others were not.

Because religious life and the cargo system are central to social life in Santa Ursula, women spend a great deal of time preparing for and participating in fiestas. As such, some caregivers' responsibilities included accompanying children through important rites of passages, such as baptism, first communion and primary school graduation. Nevertheless, caregivers and parents generally considered such events a parent's responsibility. As such, many parents plan their return to Santa Ursula around these important dates. When parents are not able to or do not make it home as planned for such occasions, caregivers often take on a parent's role by accompanying children, which sometimes includes finding him godparents, planning and hosting his party. Caregivers who did so felt they had exceeded their obligations to a charge and his parents. Nevertheless, parents almost always provide funds for such events and are usually involved in planning the celebration.

Chapter Six

Grandparents and Old-Age Care

The rapid expansion of female migration from Santa Ursula has impacted not only forms of caring for children, but also care arrangements for the aging generation. All older caregivers I knew suffered from poor health and chronic illness, and worried a great deal about their health and who would take care of them in old age. Because women primarily care for dependent family members, when a woman migrates, she leaves behind not only children, but often aging parents or parents-in-law who might need care. In addition, most grandparent-caregivers have several adult children who have migrated, which means that their children's spouses and some of their children have or might eventually migrate also. The result is an overall decline in the size and density of older persons' family networks in Santa Ursula. Although the Mexican state offers some support to its elderly citizens, kin networks form the core of old-age care and economic support in Santa Ursula, as in most of Mexico and Latin America. Therefore, older Santa Ursulans' rapidly diminishing family networks represent a threat to their well-being.

I begin this Chapter by presenting three grandmother-caregivers. Their concerns are illustrative of the concerns of many Santa Ursulans of their generation, who face poor health and diminishing old-age care networks as the "middle-generation" increasingly leaves their community for the United States. The remainder of the Chapter analyzes the issues that emerge from their stories. First, I discuss the kind of illnesses that afflict older Santa Ursulans, as well as health care and other state services available to them. The following section analyzes how traditional residence rules, gender and intergenerational relations help ensure the care of elderly and sick family members, and how migration has impacted the family support networks that are

the foundation for old-age care. Many older caregivers' expectations for old age differed greatly from their actual circumstances, given the number of adult children and grandchildren that were living in the United States. The final section considers the case of an elderly man in Santa Ursula who was gravely ill and had no one to care for him, because he had no family members in Santa Ursula. Although President Celia tried to find him help through the DIF, she was not successful. His story speaks to the vulnerability that elderly persons who lack family support systems face, and further elucidates the reason that many older caregivers expressed fear about ending up alone in old age.

Three Grandmothers

Doña Dominga

Drying her hands on the blue checkered smock that protected her blouse and skirt from her daily chores, Doña Dominga came out of her house to greet me one morning in February 2006.⁸⁴ She had been washing clothes and was planning to go to Cholula later that afternoon to purchase candy, chips, and other snacks for the small store she ran out of her house. Her twelve-year-old grandson, Omar, and eleven-year-old granddaughter, Micaela, soon appeared by her side, listening as we exchanged greetings in the large open dirt patio of her one-story, L-shaped, mint green house. Referring to her grandchildren, Doña Ofelia immediately told me, "Oh, they are all gone now. I only have two. I used to have many, but they take them when they finish school. So now I only have two. And this one," she said pointing to her grandson Omar, "is going to go soon. He's about to graduate, and he's going to join his parents in Indiana. That's what parents do, they wait for the children to finish primary school and they take them. But who knows," she added hopefully, "maybe he will stay and go to secondary school and then high

⁸⁴ Interview, February 22, 2006.

school and then look for work here. But they (his parents and siblings) tell him he should go, and he isn't scared. He wants to go."

Although I had interrupted her activities, Doña Dominga received me graciously and quickly decided to postpone her trip to Cholula to speak with me about her family. I followed her into a recently tiled and painted room that served as both a small store and bedroom. Her husband was resting in the next room. Doña Dominga signaled for me to sit on the full-size bed next to two large wardrobes holding clothes and linens. Near the front door, two tall metal stands reached to the ceiling, their shelves filled with plastic jars of candies. On the lower shelves sat small bags of lemon-chili corn sticks, bright orange cheese puffs, popcorn, *chicharrines*,⁸⁵ potato chips, and a large bottle of hot pepper sauce to squeeze onto these salty snacks. Omar pulled a bag of cheese puffs from the metal stand, and Micaela chose a chili-tamarind lollipop. As we talked, the children listened closely and slowly made their way through their treats. Every so often their grandmother pushed herself up with some difficulty from her chair to answer the knock of neighborhood children who came looking to buy snacks.

Omar and Micaela were the last two of ten grandchildren that Doña Dominga, in her late sixties, and her husband Don Juan, aged seventy, had cared for in their home over the past ten years. With three daughters and seven sons, Don Juan and Doña Dominga had a large family. Yet as they aged, their family network of children and grandchildren in Santa Ursula had become progressively smaller. With the exception of one son who was living with his family in Matamoros, all of Doña Dominga and Don Juan's children were in the United States. When the first of their children, a son, left in 1991, they never imagined that within fifteen years almost all their children and grandchildren would be gone.

⁸⁵ *Chicharrines* are popular fried corn, soy or wheat flour-based snacks most commonly in the shape of puffed square sheets and pinwheels.

Like most men and women their age, Doña Dominga and Don Juan were retired brickmakers. In the 1960s and 1970s, before brickmaking was well established in Santa Ursula, Don Juan worked in neighboring towns as a *peon* (unskilled laborer). Doña Dominga, with a baby and small child in tow, would walk an hour to bring her husband freshly made tortillas and his mid-day meal. Later they built their own kiln and their children helped make bricks when they were old enough to do so. Long after they had retired from brickmaking and all their children had left Santa Ursula, Doña Dominga and her husband kept the kiln standing, hoping their children would return. Today there is no sign of the kiln that once occupied the large open patio next to their house. After many years, their sons and daughters convinced them to level the kiln, indicating that they had no plans to work as brickmakers if they were to return to Santa Ursula. Doña Dominga's grandchildren never learned to make bricks.

When I interviewed Doña Dominga, she and her husband were still engaged in activities that produced small earnings and food. In addition to Doña Dominga's small store, the couple grew corn for tortillas and two kinds of beans for their own consumption. Their son in Matamoros helped during planting and harvest seasons, and, like many Santa Ursulans, they also hired temporary migrant workers to perform the heaviest harvesting tasks. They also had a few animals—a sheep, a donkey, chickens and a dog—that their grandson Omar was in charge of feeding. Despite the fact that these resources only generated small earnings, Doña Dominga did not seem worried about her and her husband's financial situation, principally because they felt that they could rely on their children for help when necessary. Their children called regularly to check on them and usually sent money for their health care and living expenses when Doña Dominga and Don Juan asked for help.

When I asked Doña Dominga what she and her husband found most difficult about their role as caregivers for her grandchildren, she responded, “Well, what is most difficult are our health problems.” Don Juan suffered from chronic pain due to injured cervical disks from years of brickmaking. The physician at the local clinic was treating him with injections and pain killers. Doña Dominga and her husband hoped that a surgical procedure would offer him a more permanent solution to his pain, but surgery was expensive, Doña Dominga explained sullenly, and the doctor recommended against it due to related risks. Doña Dominga worried about her husband’s condition, his pain and how it interfered with his daily activities. Doña Dominga was also in poor health. She had diabetes, which she was controlling through medication and regular examinations at Santa Ursula’s clinic.

Doña Ofelia

Doña Ofelia, fifty-seven, sat on a wooden chair near a small altar across from her daughter and me in a sparsely furnished room of her house.⁸⁶ Her right lid hung heavy over her eye and the right corner of her mouth drooped, muffling her speech. A month earlier she had had a stroke, her second in three years. She explained to me that after unsuccessful treatments from four allopathic doctors, she sought care from a naturopath in the city of Puebla. He attributed her condition to *los nervios* (nerves) and prescribed pills that she said had helped. She was also going for weekly treatments on a thermal massage bed at a cost of forty pesos per session in the neighboring town of San José. Her facial paralysis was improving. However, she also suffered from chronic high blood pressure and diabetes.

Doña Ofelia worried about ending up alone as she aged. She had a smaller nuclear and extended family network than most Santa Ursulans and she was a widow. Her husband died

⁸⁶ Interview, June 15, 2006.

twenty-eight years earlier from a neurological condition related to a childhood head injury.⁸⁷ Although Doña Ofelia married young, at fourteen years of age, and became a mother soon after, with three sons and two daughters, she had fewer children than most women her age. Unlike other women, she did not have children into her thirties, because her husband died when she was only twenty-nine years old. In addition, Doña Ofelia had a smaller extended kin network than most women, because her husband Don Antonio was an only child. His mother died during childbirth and his maternal grandparents raised him. His biological father remarried and formed another family. As a result, Doña Ofelia had no brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law or parents-in-law.

When Doña Ofelia's husband died, she and her children—then aged twelve, nine, eight, seven and three years—went to live with her parents. Two years later, she and her children moved back to their own house, because she “missed her animals.” When I met Doña Ofelia, she still greatly valued her animals, and with horses, donkeys, four cows, several dogs and turkeys, she had more animals than most Santa Ursulans. In addition, she had a great deal of land that her husband had left her. “But what good is all that land if I don't have my husband,” she lamented. “There is no one to work all that land.” Despite her property, Doña Ofelia struggled economically as a young widow to raise her children. She worked making bricks and as her children grew they increasingly helped her. They had their own kiln, which she covered up in the mid-1990s.

Doña Ofelia worried that she might end up alone in old age, because the residence of her children, their spouses and her grandchildren had changed many times over the past fifteen years as they migrated between Santa Ursula and the United States. When I met Doña Ofelia in 2005, her three sons were in Indiana. Living with Doña Ofelia at the time were her youngest son

⁸⁷ Her husband suffered a serious head injury when he fell from a tree while gathering figs in his grandparents' small orchard as a boy. Although he was knocked unconscious at the time, he went years without any noticeable neurological problems until he was an adult.

Tomas's two daughters, aged eleven and nine years. In addition, Doña Ofelia's youngest daughter had recently returned with her husband to Santa Ursula, and her oldest daughter and her husband had never lived anywhere other than Santa Ursula.

Although Doña Ofelia had five children, four of whom had migrated, the changes in residence of her youngest son Tomás and his family were most significant for her. Tomás first migrated to the US in 1990, when he was seventeen years old. Subsequently, he returned several times to Santa Ursula for short periods. The first time he left his wife and newborn baby stayed behind with Doña Ofelia. With each return visit to Santa Ursula, the couple's family grew. Laughing with a tone of disapproval, Doña Ofelia explained, "He returns here and then again she (his wife) is pregnant and then he leaves again." In 1997 Tomás's wife went with him to Indiana, leaving their then seven-year-old son and three daughters, aged five, three and one year, with Doña Ofelia. Several years later, Tomás's wife came back to Santa Ursula with another daughter who was born in Indiana. Doña Ofelia explained that her daughter-in-law had returned because she was suffering from (what sounded to me like) severe depression related to the emotional strain of being apart from her children. "She was always sad and tired," she said, "Her body ached and she cried all the time." She often had difficulty getting out of bed in the morning, going to work and carrying out her usual activities. She had sought medical treatment in Indiana to no avail. The same naturopath who treated Doña Ofelia helped cure her using *producto* (herbal-based natural remedies). Subsequently she returned to Indiana, leaving her youngest daughter with Doña Ofelia and the other children. In November 2004 Tomás and his wife returned to Santa Ursula again, this time to plan their wedding, which took place three months later. In May 2005 they returned to Indiana again, taking with them their two oldest

children and their four-year-old US-born daughter. In 2006 Tomás's wife gave birth to another daughter in Indiana.

Although her grandchildren's departure signified a loss for Doña Ofelia, she was not alone. In addition to Tomás's nine- and eleven-year-old daughters who were in her care, the wife and four children of another one of her sons were at the time living in a room directly adjacent to her house. Both of Doña Ofelia's daughters, their husbands and children were also in Santa Ursula. In addition, according to Doña Ofelia, her youngest son Tomás planned to return to Santa Ursula with his family, although she was not sure when. Because Tomás, in addition to one of his brothers, had completed construction on their houses on a family lot across town, I imagined this would be a promising sign of their intention to return to Santa Ursula. Yet, when I asked Doña Ofelia if Tomás and his family would move into their new house when they returned, she responded sadly, "They will have to decide. That it is up to them. But as long as I am alive, I cannot say that they shouldn't live here." Tears rolled from Doña Ofelia's eyes. She buried her head in her hands and sobbed, "My children are all I have. My father died years ago, and my mother died just last year."

"Mothers count on their sons to be nearby, because a son would never leave his mother," her daughter quickly interjected, trying to explain her mother's sadness while giving her a moment to recover her composure. Doña Ofelia then explained that although her daughters were still in Santa Ursula, she did not see them often, because they spent most of their time with their in-laws. Her daughter clarified, "Yes, my husband always wants to be with his mother." "But imagine," Doña Ofelia said, beginning again to cry, "*La señora* has her husband. I have nobody. No *suegros* (parents-in-law), no parents. Nobody. Just my children." The loss of Doña Ofelia's sons to migration had significantly impacted her life, and as she aged she worried greatly that she

might eventually end up alone. For the moment, her two granddaughters were central to her daily life. Yet, she knew that they would also leave someday, because, as many caretakers explained, in the end they were not her children.

Doña Petronila

Doña Petronila was around sixty years old when I interviewed her in February 2007. Her thin gray braids, deep facial lines and sunken cheeks spoke of her difficult life. She was poorer than most Santa Ursulans and her story of loss, struggle and determination to *salir adelante* (forge ahead) was reflected not only in her face, but also in her house and the land on which it stood. As we spoke, we were seated near a row of recently cut bricks in the small open patio of her home. Her daughter, in her early twenties, was busy tossing the damp bricks, four or five at a time, to Doña Petronila's teenage grandson, who stacked them into a pile with perfectly spaced air openings for drying. They would later sell them as *crudo* (unfired bricks), because they did not have a kiln. Behind us, Doña Petronila's property sloped sharply down into a large open ditch. "Look at my poor house," she said pointing to the far corner of her property that sat well below ground level. "The roof is made of *cartón*," she stated bringing my attention to the sheets of tar paper held down by a few scattered bricks atop her unpainted, two-room adobe home. Then she succinctly explained, "I am poor because I am divorced."

Doña Petronila met her husband, who was from Matamoros, when he came in the late 1960s to work in Cholula's brick-making communities. Together they had nine children, as well as a child who died in infancy and two miscarriages. They divorced in the early 1980s, when their three sons and six daughters were young, ranging from infancy to eleven or twelve years of age. She subsequently reared and provided for them on her own. "With bricks I raised my children," Doña Petronila explained sharply, fixing her eyes firmly on mine. Her face tensed as

she directed my attention to the dug out earth around us, “Look around you, this is how I raised my family.” She explained how with the help of her older children, she took soil little by little from her property to make bricks. Over many years the ditch grew deeper and wider, and with these earnings she fed, clothed and sent her children to school.

Standing in the trench behind us was a roofless, abandoned shell of a house—bare brick walls, overgrown with weeds, bushes and small trees. “This is my oldest son’s house,” she explained. He began building it in 1993, two years before he left for the US. When he left, his wife and five sons stayed behind in the room he had built adjacent to Doña Petronila’s small house years earlier. In 1998, his wife left Santa Ursula to join him, leaving Doña Petronila with the five boys, aged two, five, eight, ten and thirteen years. Several years later the two oldest boys joined their parents in New York. Doña Petronila was angry when her son sent for the children. “Sure you forget about them when they are children, but now that they are older you take them away,” she recalled telling him during a phone conversation. “Yeah, I told him,” she said, “And the boys were sad to leave. But then they grew accustomed to their life there.”

In old age, Doña Petronila was not only poor, but she had no land on which to cultivate corn, because she had given a small parcel of her property to each of her sons to build their houses. As a result, unlike most Santa Ursulans, she needed to purchase corn, which added to her monthly living expenses. Hoping I could help convince Presidenta Celia to place her on the list to receive a DIF *despensa* (supplemental food package), she explained, “For six pesos it is worth it. And I really need it. I really am poor.” Presidenta Celia had told Doña Petronila that she was not eligible to receive a *despensa*, because she received *Oportunidades* through her grandson. “*Presidenta* Celia told me I cannot have both. But there are other women who have both, and they have two-story homes. I want to talk with the *presidenta* and see if I can get on

the list for the *despensa*.” In light of Doña Petronila’s need to purchase her own corn and her preoccupation with receiving a *despensa*, the abandoned shell of her son’s house, which rendered a section of her property useless, seemed like a cruel irony.

Like Doña Dominga and Doña Ofelia, Doña Petronila suffered from poor health and her family network in Santa Ursula was diminishing as her children and grandchildren migrated to the United States. Unlike the majority of Santa Ursulans during that period, she had public health insurance through her daughter’s job in a restaurant in the city of Puebla. In addition to *carosidad* (pterygium),⁸⁸ severe headaches, high blood pressure and a burning sensation in her feet, she had a serious pulmonary condition, which resulted in a four-day hospitalization in May 2006. Doña Petronila’s daughter helped her while she was hospitalized, and upon her release she stayed with another daughter who lived in Mexico City.

Doña Petronila was unable to watch over her three grandsons during the two-month period in which she was away from Santa Ursula recovering from illness. As a result, the boys’ father sent the oldest of his five sons back to Santa Ursula to take care of his three younger brothers. Doña Petronila seemed hurt and angry that her nineteen-year-old grandson, who had been sad and reluctant to go to the United States years earlier, had not returned to Santa Ursula instead of his twenty-two-year old brother. In addition, according to Doña Petronila, the oldest grandson ended up causing a great deal of trouble upon his return to Santa Ursula. Her grandsons no longer respected her authority. They began to misbehave and get into trouble. A neighbor informed her that her oldest grandson and his seventeen-year-old brother were going out drinking and returning inebriated in the middle of the night. What bothered Doña Petronila most, however, was that her eleven-year-old grandson stopped going to school. Doña Petronila

⁸⁸ Pterygium is a growth on the surface of the eye related to long-term exposure to contaminants, wind and sun. The growth, usually in a triangular shape, can obstruct vision if it grows over the center of the eye.

spoke with her son about the boys' behavior, but he told her to leave the boys alone and not interfere.

In early December, about six months after he had arrived, Doña Petronila's oldest grandson returned to the United States, taking with him his eleven-year-old brother. Doña Petronila explained to me that she was relieved that her youngest grandson had left, because he had turned into trouble for her and that she no longer wanted the responsibility. However, his departure represented a loss for her, and her resentment and sadness over the incident were palpable. To make matters worse, the arrival of her oldest grandson had also resulted in the departure of her other two grandsons from her house. Upon her oldest grandson's recommendation to his parents, her fourteen and seventeen-year-old grandsons went to live on their own in the one-room structure where they had lived before their parents migrated.

Their departure also represented a loss for Doña Petronila, despite the fact that they had moved right next door to her and that her fourteen-year-old grandson came by regularly to visit, because, as she explained, he was used to living with her. Nevertheless, living next door meant that she was alone at night. As a result, Doña Petronila's daughter in Santa Ursula began sending her five-year-old daughter to sleep at Doña Petronila's house, so she would not be alone. The boys' departure from her home also resulted in a loss of income for her, because her son stopped sending her money. Although she said that the one-hundred dollars that her son used to send every month or so had barely been enough to cover their expenses, the loss of this income was significant. In addition, she most likely lost the economic support of the *Oportunidades* program soon after we spoke, because her youngest grandson was no longer in Santa Ursula.

Older Caregivers and Illness

Like Doña Ofelia, Doña Petronila, Doña Dominga and her husband Don Juan, all older caregivers I knew in Santa Ursula suffered from poor health and chronic illness. Their health problems were typical of older men and women in Santa Ursula, where high blood pressure and diabetes are the two principal illnesses. According to INEGI (2004), 14.9 percent of Mexicans sixty years of age and older suffer from diabetes, which is the leading illness among older Mexicans, after heart disease.⁸⁹ According to the physician at Santa Ursula's clinic, the onset of these conditions show up in men and women as early as in their twenties, and diabetes accounts for the majority of visits to the clinic, either for an initial visit, or follow-up care.

Although most patients regularly take their prescribed medications, which the state subsidizes, the clinic physician pointed to “cultural factors” as the principal obstacle in controlling chronic diseases, such as diabetes.

Cultural factors...have a very, very negative impact. For example, someone who is diabetic, who can't have soda for example. But then there is the custom, that if the *compadrito* comes and they offer him a soda, he cannot say no, at the price of his health. If he has an appointment here at the clinic, but he has a fiesta, then he cannot come here. Because the *fiestecita* is more important. These religious factors—there was a fiesta for a virgin and he had to drink alcohol, at the price of his health.

Indeed, sharing soda, tequila and foods prepared with pork fat was a fundamental aspect of fiestas and thus forging and strengthening social networks in Santa Ursula. Therefore it was difficult for adults suffering from diabetes or high blood pressure to follow the doctor's dietary recommendations, and fiestas occurred with enough frequency to have an impact on healthcare.

⁸⁹ Diabetes is one of the principal causes of illness and death among elderly people throughout Latin America, particularly among the poor (Albala et al. 2005; Pelaez and Vega 2006; and INEGI 2004). Robles Silva (2007) argues that while family networks have long been central to old-age care in Mexico, the prevalence of chronic illness among older adults marks a major change in the nature of dependency of aging parents on younger generations. Previously, one cared for parents in their old-age, but death usually ensued with the onset of an infection. Today, argues Robles Silva, conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, Alzheimer, strokes and heart attacks, which appear during adulthood, become more acute during old-age. Therefore, old-age care requires support in controlling chronic health problems and is a major part of older adults' lives.

Although soda was an important ritual drink, Santa Ursulans were less likely to consume it on a regular basis at home. However, daily meals often included leftover mole and food that women brought home from fiestas. Included in bowls and buckets of ritual mole were often pieces of lard, which women used at home to prepare meals. Many older women had commented to me that Santa Ursulans' diet was very "natural," because they cooked with mostly unrefined ingredients, like pork fat, instead of processed foods, like the bottled oils included in the DIF *despensas*.

Conditions associated with productive and domestic activities were common among adults. For example, many older Santa Ursulans, such as Doña Dominga's husband Don Juan, suffered from back and shoulder pain related to years of the heavy lifting of brick production. Because brick kilns generate thick black smoke, I expected that respiratory problems would be widespread due to frequent exposure. However, the clinic physician associated the incidence of respiratory problems, particularly in women, such as Doña Petronila, with smoke inhalation from carbon-burning cooking stoves, rather than brick kilns. "Since everyone makes tortillas, the exposure to smoke, contamination, that is what causes chronic destructive respiratory problems, the inhalation of smoke from the *brasero*, from the *anafre* (carbon-burning portable stove). This smoke also has to do with the prevalence of pterygium, a growth that presents in the eye." In addition to daily tortilla-making at home, collective preparation of food for fiestas also accounted for women's long-term exposure to smoke. Women and children gathered regularly in smoke-filled *cocinas de humo* (smoke kitchens), where they prepared food for fiestas. I occasionally observed people adding toxins, such as scraps of plastic or Styrofoam, to the fire, which would create a thick, black, stinging smoke. Dust from the cornfields, according to the doctor, also added to the high incidence of *carnosidad* (pterygium), which was so common, that the DIF

sent an ophthalmologist monthly to Santa Ursula to perform pterygium surgery in the all-purpose room of the mayor's office.

Health Care and State Services

Health care was the primary source of state assistance that older Santa Ursulans received. Most older Santa Ursulans went to the local clinic for their health care needs and the attending physician referred patients to public clinics or hospitals in Cholula and Puebla for specialized care. Until the recent implementation of Seguro Popular, very few Santa Ursulans had health insurance, because they were not employed in the formal sector. Therefore Doña Petrolina's access to public health insurance via her daughter's employment was unusual. Older Santa Ursulans also had access to complementary health services, such as eye and dental exams, through the DIF's *Jornadas de Salud*, as described in Chapter Three.

Some men and women, such as Doña Ofelia, who could afford private care, sought help from private doctors and healers, including naturopaths or alternative practitioners. The use of thermal massage beds in Cholula, while not widespread, was not uncommon, particularly given the high incidence in Cholula of back pain due to brickmaking. While Doña Ofelia paid forty pesos (US\$4) for individual treatment in a nearby town, there were also free thermal massage bed services in the city of Puebla. Doña Francisca, a retired brickmaker from a neighboring community, invited me to go with her one day to the Korean-run CARAGEM massage beds in the city of Puebla. Although free of charge, the CARAGEM services entailed an all-day commitment, including an hour *combi* ride each way and a four-hour wait before receiving treatment on the heated massage beds. Although Doña Francisca had been going twice a week for back pain, there were many men and women there for debilitating conditions, such as stroke-related paralysis, who gave testimonials about how the massage beds had helped heal them. In

light of the time and effort involved for the free service, Doña Ofelia seemed understandably pleased that she was able to receive individual attention for 40 pesos.

Financial support and material well-being was of great concern to older Santa Ursulans, as they were no longer able to work and did not qualify for pensions because they had not been formal sector workers. Only one out of three Mexicans aged sixty and older receives a private or public pension (Parker and Wong 2001). Therefore, men and women continue to rely on family support systems in old-age throughout Mexico (De Vos et. al 2004). Many older Santa Ursulans, such as Doña Dominga and her husband, relied on adult children in the US to send money, and others relied on the support of adult children in Santa Ursula. However, many older men and women, such as Doña Petronila lived in poverty. Indeed, old-age poverty is high throughout Mexico and Latin America (Smith and Goldman 2007; Barrientos 2006). Approximately one third of older Mexicans live in poverty (Barrientos 2006; Parker and Wong 2001). Mexico is one of wealthiest nations in Latin America, yet has highest relative levels of old-age poverty (Barrientos 2006). Barrientos (2006) summarizes the findings of two studies (Popolo 2001 and Bourguignon et al. 2004) that provide comparable estimates of old-age poverty incidence in Latin America:

There are significant differences in old-age poverty incidence across countries in the region. Old-age poverty ranges from 7.9 per cent in Chile to 38.4 per cent in Ecuador. In four countries, Chile, Uruguay, Argentina and Brazil, roughly one in ten older people are poor. In the next four countries, Peru, Nicaragua, Venezuela and Panama, around one in five older people are poor. In Honduras and Paraguay, one in four older people are poor. For the remaining seven countries, roughly one in three older people are poor (2006:371).

Barrientos argues that differences in social policy, particularly cash transfers for seniors, is “the strongest explanation for the cross-country differences in old-age poverty” (2006: 373) in Latin

America.⁹⁰ Cash transfer programs are an issue of great interest to many older Mexicans. 2005 PRD presidential candidate López Obrador had implemented a cash transfer program for senior citizens in Mexico City during the period in which he served as the city's mayor. A universal pension of 500 pesos (US\$50) per month was created for seniors, single mothers and disabled. During the 2005 presidential campaigns, López Obrador promised to extend the universal pension program throughout the country. In Cholula, he enjoyed considerable support among the aging population who came to his rallies with signs demanding pensions for seniors.

The DIF occasionally offered material support to older Santa Ursulans in the form of blankets, canes or wheel chairs. The DIF also gave monthly nutritional support to those who qualified in the form of *despensas*, which included basic cooking supplies, such as cooking oil, rice, sugar, flour, and cornstarch. In addition, grandparents who had school children in their care and qualified for *Oportunidades* received a bi-monthly stipend. Nevertheless, grandparents lost this economic assistance once their grandchildren left Santa Ursula or dropped out of school. The Municipal DIF also opened a new center in the city of Cholula for its aging population called *Estancias de Día* (Day Home) in April 2006. I visited the center with President Celia and a group of twenty-two older Santa Ursulans in early May 2006. The DIF sent the institute's bus to bring the group to see the center and learn about its offerings, which included classes such as yoga, painting, cooking, "artistic gelatin," chocolate making and *cachibol* (catch ball). A staff member led a gentle stretching session, preceding a talk from a physician on hypertension and the importance of proper diet and exercise. In addition, the center had a jewelry making

⁹⁰ Barrientos argues that "ensuring old-age support for the poorest and most vulnerable groups in the population" "requires a strong focus on tax-financed public cash transfer programmes targeted on poor and vulnerable older people and their households. In Latin America only a handful of countries have programmes providing assistance to poor older groups, including Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Bolivia and Uruguay. There is growing recognition that these have a measurable impact on poverty reduction (Wilmore 2001; Bertranou et al. 2002; Barrientos and Lloyd Sherlock 2003) (Barrientos 2006:370).

workshop, which, in the spirit of “co-responsibility,” the DIF staff presented as a viable option through which older men and women could generate income. The men and women appeared uninterested in the jewelry workshop and unconvinced that this craft could be profitable. Indeed, the idea seemed somewhat absurd given the practicability of an older Santa Ursulan traveling to Cholula to sell handmade jewelry or the profits this activity could actually generate.

Old-Age and Kin Networks

Doña Dominga, Doña Ofelia and Doña Petronila’s stories illustrate the sense of vulnerability older Santa Ursulans experienced in the context of diminishing family networks. Their worries about ending up alone speak to the ways in which their expectations for old-age contrasted with recent and rapid changes to household composition and kin networks due to accelerated migration. Most older Santa Ursulans expected to grow old surrounded by kin and with the protection and support of younger family members. Yet, US-bound migration had greatly impacted these networks by creating enormous geographic distances between elders, their adult children and grandchildren.

Sons and Daughters-in-Law

As we have seen, young married couples and their children typically live with a husband’s parents until they can build their own house. Traditional residence rules also dictate that one son, usually the youngest, remain with his wife in his parents’ home, where they raise their children, and pay service to his parents by caring for them in old age. Subsequently, the youngest son inherits the house when his parents die. This pattern is typical of the Mesoamerican developmental cycle outlined by Robichaux (1997), and documented by scholars (Sokolovsky 1997; Nutini 1976; Olivera 1976). Doña Ofelia’s tearful response “As long as I am alive, I cannot say that they should not live here” when I asked if her youngest son would live in

his new house upon returning to Santa Ursula, suggests that she had expected that they would live with her as she aged. The fact that her youngest son had built his own house signified for Doña Ofelia the possibility that she might end up living alone in old-age.

Santa Ursulans expected not only to live with a son and his family as they aged, they also expected to live within dense family networks that included other sons and their families who lived in close proximity. Customarily, parents gave each married son a small plot on which to build his house. Consequently, sons and their families usually lived near parents, either right next door or very close by, often within the family compound. Older men and women could thereby count on regular social contact and assistance of several sons, daughters-in-law and their children. Such housing patterns still exist in Santa Ursula. However, transnational migration has reduced the size and density of many older men and women's family networks. Although setting up a new residence near a husband's parents' house on land bequeathed to a young couple is still customary in many families, this is no guarantee that a son and his family will continuously occupy their house. In some cases, houses might remain uninhabited for years if a son has sent for his wife, or, some sons, like that of Doña Petronila, abandon construction on houses before they are complete.

Not only had many older Santa Ursulans' adult sons and their families migrated to the United States, but it was becoming increasingly common for sons to build their houses in Santa Ursula further away from their parents' home, which added to older men's and women's perception of thinning family networks. There were several factors contributing to this trend. First, population growth in Santa Ursula had resulted in a decrease of available land in the town center. Second, with access to dollars earned in the United States, sons and their wives could more easily purchase land on which to build a house. An overall decrease in land use for

productive activities, particularly agriculture, might also have contributed to a greater availability of land further from the center of town. In addition, with the increasingly common aspiration to build large houses, many sons had bought large parcels of land, which were generally located further away from the town center and from parents' houses. Although sons' houses in such cases were located within town limits or sometimes even walking distance of a parents' home, Santa Ursulans considered such distances substantial, given that people were accustomed to living in very close proximity. I knew several older women who described themselves as "alone," despite the close proximity of family members, such as a son's wife and children who lived next door or across the patio in the family compound.

Daughters

Santa Ursulans generally considered daughters a less reliable source of support in old-age than sons and their wives. As we saw, Doña Ofelia was concerned about ending up alone in old-age, despite fact that her two daughters lived in Santa Ursula. Doña Ofelia explained that a mother could not count on daughters, because "una vez que levantan la cola, se van (once they lift their tails, they leave)." In other words, once a daughter becomes sexually active, she will leave her parents' house to live with her partner and his family. Subsequently, a daughter's labor will pertain to her husband's family and her obligation is to care for her parents-in-laws in old-age and not her parents. In this context, the loss of adult sons to migration has a potentially more significant impact on an individual's old-age support network than the loss of married daughters to migration.

Nevertheless, the departure of married daughters from Santa Ursula is also significant for older Santa Ursulans. Although married daughters traditionally leave their natal home to reside with their husbands' parents, because women usually married men from the community

daughters almost always remained in Santa Ursula upon marrying, and therefore had a greater possibility of contact with elderly or ill parents.⁹¹ In some cases, daughters provide care for their aging parents. For example, a daughter who never married often remains in her parents' house, helping care for them in old age, despite the fact that the youngest son and his family also remain in the house, and are most likely to inherit the house (Mulhare de la Torre 2005). If there are no sons or daughters-in-law in a family to care for parents, daughters often play an important role in old-age care. Writing about Cholula in the 1970s, Olivera found that "There are some cases of men going to live in the house of their parents-in-law, but this situation is severely criticized by all relatives and only occurs under unusual circumstances, such as when a young bride must care for sick parents" (Olivera 1976:75). In addition, even though a daughter might not live with her aging parents, she might still offer them support. Doña Petronila, for example, had health insurance through one of her daughters, who took care of her when she was hospitalized. In addition, another daughter, who lived in Mexico City, took care of her for two months after she was released from the hospital.

Migrants and their Aging Parents

Although many grandparents worried about ending up alone in old age, the departure of adult children, daughters-in-law and grandchildren does not signify complete social isolation. Older men and women usually remained active in community life and rooted in social networks through the fiesta system. Nevertheless, the physical absence of adult children is significant for older Santa Ursulans' well-being. Although *comadres*, *compadres* and family members such as sisters, brothers, nieces and nephews are an important source of social contact, old-age care is

⁹¹ Although the majority of young adults in Santa Ursula still marry within the community, there is some evidence of an increase in young women who migrate when they are single and then marry men from outside of community, often from other parts of Puebla and Mexico. If this trend increases, the number of married daughters who reside in Santa Ursula after marriage might decrease in the future.

considered the responsibility of one's adult children. Accordingly, many adult children who migrated maintained a sense of obligation to their aging parents.

Adult children living in the United States generally remained in contact with their parents in Santa Ursula and supported them in old-age despite vast geographic distances. Some studies show that migration can change traditional values and create new expectations of responsibility towards extended family members, particularly aging parents. Izuhara and Shibata (2002), who studied attitudes towards old-age care among Japanese women living in England, found that "The insertion of different cultural contexts and ways of raising children have generated inevitable cultural gaps between different generations. Traditional culture, norms and day-to-day practicalities clash with newly emerging family norms and practices" (Izuhara and Shibata 2002:159-60). Despite the impact of migration on household composition in Santa Ursula, grandchildren, adult children and grandparents generally shared similar ideas about intergenerational obligations and who should take care of elderly and ill family members (Magazine and Ramírez Sánchez 2007).

The principal form of help that migrant children offer aging parents is financial support. This type of old-age assistance is the easiest way that migrants can help their parents, because sending money does not require their physical presence in Santa Ursula. Moreover, given the economic difference between the United States and Mexico, providing financial support for aging parents is often easier for migrant children than for those who remain in Mexico. Therefore, like Doña Dominga and Don Juan, many older caregivers relied on their migrant children's economic support, particularly for help with costly expenses, such as medical care. Many migrants continued to send remittances to aging parents, even after grandchildren were no longer living with them. However, others, like Doña Petronila's son, did not.

Helping aging parents or in-laws with their physical needs, particularly in the case of debilitating illness, is more difficult for migrants. Because Santa Ursulans do not pay caregivers or companions to help their elderly parents, such support requires migrants to return to Santa Ursula. In some cases, ill parents only require short-term help to get through a difficult period. In other cases, parents require long-term assistance. In either case, returning to Mexico is complicated for most Santa Ursulans, because they lack immigration documents that facilitate travel back to the United States. Despite the fact that returning to Mexico is relatively easy and affordable, because migrants usually travel by airplane, returning to the US afterwards involves the expense and risk of crossing the border on foot.

Because of the difficulty of traveling back to the US, most migrants prefer to return to Mexico only after they have spent several years in the United States, and have already met some of their material goals, including paying off debts of migration or house construction. Therefore, most return migrants plan to stay in Santa Ursula for long periods—often several months or years—or to remain permanently. In some cases, migrants are able to arrange for a leave of absence of several months from their jobs in the United States. Nevertheless, returning to Santa Ursula usually means leaving behind one's job, family members and life in the United States, for a long period or indefinitely. As a result, a migrant's sense of duty and desire to care for his or her aging parents often conflicts with the reality of what returning to Santa Ursula entails.

Nancy, a single mother who two years after migrating returned to Santa Ursula when her mother became too sick to care for herself and Nancy's seven-year-old daughter Patricia, explained it this way:

It's sad that people go and they forget about their family. The United States gives us a lot, because it helps us economically. But it takes the family away from us, because people die here and neither their son nor their daughter comes. Why? Because it cost us a lot to go. We had to suffer, struggling without eating two or three days, without

drinking water. And so because of the way we go to the United States, to then leave scares us. That is why people don't come anymore for their family. They used to before, when it was easier to cross (the border), and there were few people there. And then when the mother would get sick, your mother dies, and children would come back. Why...because they want to come back and still find their mother alive. And after, the mother gets better, well let's go. Or if she died, well then that's it. But they come to see her; then they go.

As Nancy argues, tightening of border security has led to an increase in undocumented Mexican immigrants who remain in the United States, because subsequent migration to the US has become increasingly difficult (Passel and Cohn 2009). Nancy argued that the United States had changed her siblings' values and sense of responsibility towards their mother she criticized them for not returning to Santa Ursula from New Jersey to care of their sick mother or for her funeral when she eventually died. Nevertheless, Nancy understood very well the implications of returning to Mexico. Indeed, she ended up staying in Santa Ursula long after her mother had died, and had no plans to return to the United States.

Despite the difficulty of travel between Mexico and the United States, when a parent faces serious illness or death, often one adult child or sometimes more return home. The responsibility to care for ill parents in such circumstances usually falls on a daughter or daughter-in-law whose children had been in the care of the ill grandparent. It is more unusual for a son to leave his wife in the US in order to return to Santa Ursula to care for his mother or father. Santa Ursulans usually see women as the "natural choice" to return to care for ill parents, because they are "able" to do the kind of work involved in caring for the ill and elderly.

Juanita, for example, was living in Indiana with her husband and young children when her mother-in-law was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Their oldest son, who had been reluctant to leave his grandmother, was still in Santa Ursula with his grandparents. When Juanita's husband found out that his mother was gravely ill, he wanted to return to Santa Ursula.

However, because he was earning more than Juanita he calculated that Juanita would have to take a second job in Indiana in order cover the family's expenses, and thus their children would end up alone in the house much of the time. Subsequently, Juanita took a three-month leave from her restaurant job and returned to Santa Ursula to care for her ill mother-in-law. Although Juanita initially explained to me that this economic calculation was the principal reason that she returned to care for her mother-in-law instead of husband, she later explained that they also realized that the women in the family were better suited for the sort of work involved in her mother-in-law's care, such as laundering sheets, feeding her and helping administer medication. The family decided to deal with her long-term care by sharing the work among the sisters-in-law. They planned to send a different sister-in-law to Santa Ursula every few months to stay with the mother-in-law.

Less common are cases like that of Rosa's husband Javier, who returned home to care for his mother while Rosa stayed in Chicago. When Javier first went to Chicago in 1997, Rosa and their four children stayed behind with Javier's parents. Two years later Rosa joined him, leaving their two sons, aged three and twelve, and two daughters, aged six and ten in the care of Javier's seventy-two-year-old mother. When Javier's mother, who suffered from diabetes, became severely ill, he went to Santa Ursula with the intention of returning to Chicago a few months later. Rosa explained that because the trip back to the US is more dangerous for women than for men, Javier preferred that she stay in Chicago. Nevertheless, he decided to stay in Santa Ursula and open a store. He asked Rosa to stay in Chicago and work, to continue sending money so they could furnish and stock their store. Three months later, her oldest son joined her in Chicago and a year and half later she returned to Santa Ursula.

“Chain migration” in which grandparents eventually migrate to live with adult children and grandchildren in the US might offer an alternative care arrangement for elders in transnational families (Izuhara and Shibata 2002). Such is a common strategy, for example, among upper-caste, middle-class Indians from Kolkata (Calcutta) (Lamb 2009). Lamb found that older Indians not only joined the household of an adult child in the US, but also shifted their expectations for old age care to include accepting public social services and age-based benefits. For some elders, such material support led them to eventually decide to leave their children’s home and set up their own independent household. However, the relocation of aging parents to the United States is uncommon among Santa Ursulans, because most men and women lack legal migration status which would allow them to petition for US residency on behalf of their parents. Given the physical demands and dangers of crossing the border on foot, traveling to the US without documents is nearly impossible for the elderly, frail or infirm. In addition, this impossibility of reproducing the extended family in the United States is what makes the system of grandparent-caregivers in Mexico possible.

Ancianos Abandonados: “Abandoned Old People”

In late 2005 in Izúcar de Matamoros, a region in Puebla with very high rates of transnational migration, the DIF opened a center for elderly men and women who had been abandoned by adult children who migrated to the United States. The older men and women no longer had adult children nearby to care for them and their children had also ceased to send money. I learned about the center in a brief report on the local news. The two services the DIF highlighted were the provision of an afternoon snack and a workshop to teach the “abandoned old people” how to make handicrafts to sell in order to generate money. This approach to

dealing with old-age poverty is the same as that implemented in DIF Cholula in the Estancias del Día Center that I described earlier in this Chapter.

When I asked the staff at DIF Cholula about the *Ancianos Abandonados* Center in Izúcar de Matamoros, no one had heard of it. They also explained that they had no program like this, and that they were not aware of any cases of abandoned elderly men or women due to migration in Cholula. Perhaps because migration was still a fairly recent phenomenon in Santa Ursula and Cholula, women and men of different generations still shared traditional expectations for family roles and responsibilities, including obligations for old-age care. In Izúcar de Matamoros the history of US-bound migration reaches back further and is more intense than in Santa Ursula and the Cholula region. Nevertheless, in 2006 there was a case in Santa Ursula of an old man who was dying and had no one to care for him because his only child had migrated to the United States. This incident is indicative of the importance of kin networks for old-age care, as well as how the DIF functions.

In late September 2006, Presidenta Celia received a call from the neighbor of an elderly man in town who was very sick. The man was originally from the neighboring town of Flores and had come to live in Santa Ursula years ago when he married a woman from Santa Ursula. Because the man's wife was deceased, and their only child together was grown and residing in the United States, the sick man had been living alone for years. Concerned that he was dying, his neighbor called Presidenta Celia to explain that because he had no immediate relatives in town, there was no one to care for him. Presidenta Celia asked around town in an attempt to locate a family member. The man's late wife had a daughter from another union who was still living in Santa Ursula. However, she would not take care of him because he was not her father. Presidenta Celia then contacted the *presidenta* of Flores. Also unable to locate a family member,

she told Presidenta Celia, “There isn’t anyone related to him here, there isn’t anyone who will take care of him.”

Expecting that DIF Cholula would have a mechanism for handling these sorts of situations, Presidenta Celia reported the case to Doctor Sonia, the director of DIF Cholula. In response, Doctor Sonia explained that because the man had no family member to represent him, there was nothing DIF Cholula could do. Passing the responsibility back to Presidenta Celia and her husband President Rigoberto, Doctor Sonia presented Presidenta Celia with two options: “You’ll either have to declare that the dying man is your family member so that he can be put in a home for *ancianos* in Cholula, or else, you’ll have to take him into your own home and care for him yourself. There is nothing we can do.” Recounting the incident, Presidenta Celia commented to me with indignation, “Can you imagine! If my own mother isn’t even living here!” Although President Celia’s mother was in poor health, she lived only with her three young grandsons. Given Santa Ursulan norms for intergenerational obligations of *ayuda*, Presidenta Celia’s obligation to care for her mother would have taken precedence over caring for an individual of no relation, which was virtually unheard of in Santa Ursula. In addition, as discussed earlier, norms dictate that a married woman’s primary obligation for old-age care is to her parents-in-law, thus taking her mother into her home would have been unusual and quite possibly something that her husband would not have agreed to. “How are we supposed to take care of this man...and with what money?” she pointed out, referring to the fact that she had six school-aged children and no source of income for three years, because of the cargo of presidency.

This incident marked the end of Presidenta Celia’s active participation with the DIF, after what had been a largely frustrating and burdensome experience for her and her husband as

president and presidenta. Presidenta Celia explained to me that after DIF Cholula was not willing to help her (*no me querían apoyar*) with this case, she was “throwing in the towel.” She reduced her participation with the DIF to the bare minimum, such as handing out the *despensas* once a month. Presidenta Celia decided to prioritize her responsibilities as a mother, her domestic tasks and “helping” with fiestas.

This incident demonstrates the importance of extensive family networks for old-age care in Santa Ursula. This man was vulnerable because he had only one child, a daughter. Perhaps if she were living in Santa Ursula she would have helped care for him. He also had a step-daughter, the child of his deceased wife from a previous union. However, she would not care for him, she told Presidenta Celia, because he was not her father. In addition, the man had no brothers or sisters-in-law in Santa Ursula, because he was from another community. The DIF, as we saw, offered little help when Presidenta Celia tried to find him assistance through the municipal DIF. Although the DIF had an asylum, which would have been the principal way they would have assisted him, the director insisted a family member have him committed, which seems illogical, given that he was abandoned precisely because he had no family members. In addition, the DIF director’s suggestion that President Celia and her husband President Rigoberto either take him into their home and care for him, or else declare that he was their family member, went beyond the burden they were willing to carry as president and presidenta. In addition, this suggestion conflicted with traditional residence rules and gender roles that dictate that daughters-in-law care for their parents-in-law, which is why as President Celia pointed out in indignation, that she would not care for a stranger if she was not even caring for her own mother who was in poor health.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have looked at the impact of migration on family support networks and old-age care in Santa Ursula. As we saw in Chapter Four, age, gender and residential rules shape the way that family members redistribute caring labor for children when mothers migrate. Similarly, gender, intergenerational relations and residence rules shape old-age care, and the way that adult children support their aging parents in the context of transnational migration. In many cases, daughters-in-law are the primary source of day-to-day care for ill and feeble Santa Ursulans, and some Santa Ursulans, such as Doña Ofelia worry more about the migration of their sons than that of their daughters, because traditionally sons and their wives are expected to live with and care for aging parents. Nevertheless, daughters also play a role, albeit usually more limited, in care of elderly parents. Although many migrants provide economic support for their aging parents, and make sure that at least one family member cares for a parent in the case of illness, many older Santa Ursulans worry they will end up alone in old age, given the numbers of young adults who have migrated from the community.

Most Santa Ursulans are not completely alone or isolated. Yet, their expectations for dense kin networks in old age contrast significantly with their current living situations. Nevertheless, having no family members in the community is a very real threat to the well-being of older Santa Ursulans, as we saw in the case of the old man who had no one to care for him when he was sick and dying. Moreover, although the state is supposed to serve as a safety net in such cases, there is no guarantee that the state will take responsibility, and often the DIF, which is the primary institution that deals with cases of abandonment, handles cases, for better or for worse, in an ad hoc manner. Nevertheless, as we shall see in the final chapter, the Municipal DIF intervened consistently in cases in which children had been abandoned due parental migration. Nevertheless, the state offers some support for its older citizens, primarily in the form

of health care. In addition, the DIF provides monthly *despensas*, supplemental food packages, to those who qualify, as well as occasional material support in the form of items, such as blankets or eyeglasses. Some grandparents with school children in their care received cash transfers through the Oportunidades program. However, old-age poverty in Mexico is very high and state sources of economic or material support are limited. Therefore, most older Santa Ursulans relied primarily on their adult children, many of whom had migrated to the United States.

In the following chapter we shall examine the impact of caregivers' poor health and physical limitations on their caregivers' responsibilities, as well as the role grandchildren play in households in which their grandparent-caregivers are ill or elderly.

Chapter Seven

Grandchildren, Help and Companionship

Older Santa Ursulans who worried about ending up alone in old-age, were or had been caregivers for their grandchildren, because men and women who leave children behind are also adult children leaving behind aging parents. In addition, as described in the previous chapter, most older caretakers suffer from poor health and chronic illness. In this Chapter I analyze the relationship of grandchildren to their aging and ill grandparent-caregivers, focusing on grandchildren's participation in domestic work, as well as their role as companions to their grandparents. As we have seen, before US-bound migration became widespread among young adults in Santa Ursula, most aging men and women lived in extended-family households, which included at least one son and his wife and children who would help and care for them in old age. With much of the middle generation away in the US, some Santa Ursulan households today consist only of grandchildren and grandparents. Such arrangements are often mutually beneficial, as grandparents provide grandchildren with a home, care and affection, and grandchildren provide assistance and companionship to aging grandparents who might otherwise live alone. In this way, grandchildren who stay behind serve, in part, as a solution to the aging generation's growing dilemma of living alone due to diminishing old-age care networks. Yet, because children usually reunite with their parents, such a "solution" is often temporary, and sometimes children are too young to effectively care for grandparents or themselves.

Aches, Pains, Illness and Caregiving

Dealing with illness and physical discomfort is one of the principal difficulties that grandparents confront as caregivers. Many grandparents I interviewed, like Doña Ofelia, Doña

Petronila and Doña Dominga, discussed their health, ailments and medical care in detail, indicating that physical discomfort and illness due to aging are central to older caregivers' daily lives and uppermost in their minds. Of course not all grandparent-caregivers are elderly. In fact, many are in their forties or fifties, and while they might suffer from health problems, their illnesses or painful ailments are usually less acute than those of their older counterparts. However, if children's parents are away for many years, even a younger, healthy grandparent may develop a serious or debilitating condition.

According to the DIF psychologist, grandparents "cannot deal with their illnesses...foot pain, headaches, stomachaches, a surgical intervention. That is an extra weight that does not allow them to give of themselves for a second time in their lives as a mother or father...These worries, or social stress, cause them to be more preoccupied with their illnesses than with the adolescents." As we saw in the previous chapter, Doña Dominga's perspective corresponds with the psychologist's view that a grandparent's health problems can be significant to their role as caregivers. When I asked Doña Dominga what she found most difficult about caring for her grandchildren, she responded, "What is most difficult are our health problems," indicating that her and her husband's health was the principal worry in her life. Moreover, Doña Dominga's response reflects the perspective of many Santa Ursulan grandparents that caring for grandchildren is not a responsibility they consider difficult or burdensome. On the contrary, most grandparents want their grandchildren to live with them, which is why, as we saw in Chapter Four, Santa Ursulans often describe caregiving for grandchildren as a "right" that belongs to paternal grandparents.

A grandparent's health problems in some cases interfere with his or her ability to care for grandchildren. In such circumstances, grandchildren, even young grandchildren, might take over

responsibilities that the caregiver left in charge was expected to fulfill. However, in some cases grandchildren are too young to adequately carry out the everyday tasks that are transferred to them and, as a result, children might end up living in unfavorable conditions.

Patricia, for example, was only seven years old when her mother went to look for work in New Jersey, leaving her in the care of her ill grandmother. When her grandmother's condition became critical, Patricia at times was left to take care of herself and even her three younger cousins. Prior to her mother's departure, Patricia lived with her mother, who was single, in her maternal grandparents' house. Also living in the house were her alcoholic grandfather, who occasionally disappeared for days at a time, her aunt Maty, whose husband was in New Jersey, and their three children. Because, Patricia's aunt and grandfather were both unreliable, her grandmother was her primary caretaker, and the only adult on whom she could depend. Her grandmother tended to the house and the children when she was well. Patricia's aunt was supposed to care for the children when the grandmother was ill. When her grandmother's condition became acute, she was hospitalized. During that period, Patricia was often left alone in the house with her three younger cousins. Sometimes her aunt showed up to cook for the children, and sometimes she sent one of her sisters to do so. However, some days nobody arrived, in which case Patricia, who was the oldest of the four children, tried to cover her and her cousins' basic needs.

To obtain food, Patricia would search through the supplies left in the small store that her mother operated out of the house before she had migrated. This meant that the children usually filled their bellies with snacks, like *Maruchans*, instant Korean noodle soup that only required adding hot water. "I never liked *Maruchans*," Patricia explained to me, "but because there was nothing to eat, that is what I would eat. Sometimes we would have *chicharrines*, and a lot of

times we would eat candy.” The children never ate breakfast. When I asked Patricia if she felt hungry during school, she explained, “I was used to not eating, and when I would see how sick my grandmother was, I just didn’t feel like eating.” While her grandmother was hospitalized, Patricia also took care of getting herself ready for school in the morning, including ironing her school uniform. She said she was not afraid of burning herself, because she knew what she was doing.

Patricia’s story demonstrates the impact that a grandparent’s poor health can have on a caregiver’s ability to adequately care for charges. Despite Patricia’s stoic attitude, she and her younger cousins clearly were not well cared for when her grandmother’s condition declined. Not only were they poorly nourished, but they were left without adult supervision for long periods, during which Patricia was carrying out tasks, such as ironing and using the stove, that most Santa Ursulans consider dangerous for young children. Nevertheless, dangerous care arrangements like this are often temporary. When parents become aware that the care arrangements in which they left their children have broken down or deteriorated, they often take measures to remedy the situation. As we saw in the previous chapter, when Doña Petronila became seriously ill and was hospitalized, her son in the US sent his oldest son back to Santa Ursula to watch over his younger brothers. In Patricia’s case, her mother eventually returned to Santa Ursula, because her aunt had called her mother repeatedly to inform her that Patricia and her grandmother were both living in poor conditions since the grandmother’s condition had become critical. Patricia’s mother explained, “She said I should come, that my mother wasn’t doing well, that my daughter didn’t have anything to eat, that my daughter spent most of her time alone in the house. That’s why I came. She kept on calling me, saying that my mother wasn’t well, that no one was there to feed her, that no one was there to do the housework.”

When Grandchildren Care for Grandparents

A grandparent's physical condition might impact not only her ability to care for her charges, but also her ability to care for herself. In such circumstances, a grandchild's presence in the household might be indispensable for meeting a grandparent's daily needs and running the household. Severiana, for example, described the situation of her elderly aunt who depended on her grandchildren's help with basic domestic tasks. Her son had gone to the United States and had left his nine- and ten-year-old sons in her care. Severiana explained that her aunt suffered from a degenerative bone condition that caused severe pain and deformation in her fingers and legs. Because her sons and their wives were in the United States, Severiana's elderly aunt did not have a daughter-in-law to help her.

"Poor thing," Severiana said of her aunt, "Sometimes she even cries, because her son left and left her with two grandsons.....He doesn't send [money] anymore, not even for food, not even for school....but my poor aunt is not well...she also needs money for her medicine, and sometimes she loses hope (*se desespera*), and instead, she drinks out of desperation." Severiana explained that the grandchildren helped her elderly aunt, because she could no longer carry out even simple tasks.

The children help her. My aunt has another son there (in the US) and so she has that son's daughter, a girl. The girl is big now though...she is the one who does the housework. But she is in school still, primary school, she is about thirteen years old. She is the one who feeds her grandmother, she helps her, because my aunt cannot even turn on the stove.

As the experiences of Serviana's aunt and Patricia demonstrate, the oldest children living in a household usually take over the majority of the burden of domestic responsibilities in households in which grandparents are elderly or ill. Older girls in particular play a crucial role.

Community Perspectives on Older Caregivers

While family and community members do not view the separation of children and parents as ideal, they view it as fairly ordinary, given the rate of Santa Ursulan parents who have migrated. Subsequently, most grandparents have come to expect that their adult children might migrate and ask them to care for grandchildren. Although gossip and rumors are common among Santa Ursulans, and people often speak poorly about other community members, men and women generally do not criticize mothers or fathers for leaving children in the care of other family members, even in circumstances such as those described above in which a grandparent is unable to provide adequate care. Rather, Santa Ursulans understand migration and the separation of children from their parents as a result of economic necessity and parents' effort to provide for their children. Only in certain circumstances, such as when a mother or father has ceased to send money or call children, do caregivers or other family or community members tend to condemn a parent's actions.

Despite this pragmatic attitude towards leaving children in the care of other family members, several family and community members expressed concern about grandparents' ability to meet children's physical and psycho-social needs, due to old age or illness and the impact this might have on the children in their care. The most common phrase I heard to describe this perspective was that grandparents "ya no están para eso," meaning they are no longer suited for this. Elena, who along with her husband took over the care of her three younger sisters when she was sixteen years old, compared the inability of grandparents to adequately care their charges because of their advanced age with the inability of young, unmarried sisters to care for their younger siblings because of their immaturity and inexperience.

I have seen older sisters who have been in charge of taking care of their younger siblings, and because they are young themselves, they have not taken good care of their brothers and sisters. Even with grandmothers, it's like, they are not suited for this anymore.

Especially when the children are small. For example, the older sister will go out and not feed her siblings, or else she gives them whatever thing to eat. Same with the grandmother, she might give them whatever thing to eat, and not feed them well. A grandmother isn't competent any more, more so when the children are small. I have an aunt who left when her youngest was three years old and the oldest was about twelve or thirteen. So the oldest sister was responsible for much of the care of the little ones. The grandmother would make the tortillas and cook, with the help too of the children, but the older sister didn't bath them, or comb their hair. Also, the oldest daughter, didn't have time to do her homework anymore, and their grandmother didn't really give them proper nutrition. There was a big difference when my aunt returned. The house was clean again, she would feed them. In this case, the children really felt the absence of the mother, because everything had changed.

Many high school students with whom I spoke expressed similar opinions and believed that aunts were the most suitable caregivers, because they were younger than grandparents, yet more experienced than most older unmarried sisters. Many Santa Ursulans, even those who were caregivers or had left children with other family members, talked about a recent increase in delinquency among teenagers in Santa Ursula. They attributed a rise in alcohol use, graffiti and idleness among adolescents to the absence of parents and an inability of grandparents to control their grandchildren. Similarly, the DIF psychologist questioned grandparents' capacity to act as guardians, because the traditional role of the grandparent is not that of a disciplinarian.

Grandparents are tired after having raised their own children. Whether or not they raised their own children well is not the question. They are tired of *educándolos* (teaching/rearing them), but they are the ones who are left in charge of discipline. And that is where they lose completely their role. Because they have a role as grandparents. Socially, grandparents spoil grandchildren, give them affection and attention. But this is not a disciplinary role....And so the situation slips out of their hands. It is something that fails. The grandparents' weariness results in a loss of following rules among adolescents and children.

Although some Santa Ursulans, like the DIF psychologist, believed that grandparents' feebleness might affect their ability to care for grandchildren, caregivers' experiences and the impact of their health on their responsibilities of course are varied.

Help and Children's Activities

While a primary caregiver's poor health can increase the burden of domestic work for children, children who live with healthy, able adult caregivers are also expected to participate in domestic chores and a household's productive activities as they would if they lived with their mother or both parents. Indeed, helping parents is an essential part of childhood in Santa Ursula. Magazine and Ramírez (2001) argue in Tlalcuapan, a Tlaxcalan village where they conducted research, that childhood is conceived of as a time for *ayuda*—help—and that children are born into a state of interdependence and indebtedness to parents, rather than a state of dependence, nature (Strathern 1992), fragility or innocence (Aries 1987). The authors explain indebtedness as exchanges between parents and children that take place over a lifetime. Parents help unmarried sons and daughters (and newlywed sons) by caring for them, providing shelter, clothing, food, school expenses and spending money during certain periods of their lifetime. Eventually, these exchanges culminate in an inheritance. Children help in different capacities during their lifetime.

From early 1900s through the 1970s Tlalcuapense children aged eight to eighteen worked as domestic servants in nearby cities and most if not all of their earnings went to their parents. As transnational migration became increasingly prevalent, single youth started migrating to the US and sending earnings to parents as a form of *ayuda*. This allowed younger siblings to remain closer to home (instead of going to work as domestics) and in school for more years. Nevertheless, younger siblings continued to help and contribute to their households in different ways. The authors argue, the concept of children's relationship with parents as one of interdependence still remains in tact. Older sons and daughters migrate and send remittances to parents "in reaction to the nurture their parents have already given them and in anticipation of the inheritance they will one day receive. Thus," Magazine and Ramírez conclude, "while this recent phase of global capitalist expansion has clearly left its mark on sons' and daughters'

activities and on intergenerational relations, villagers have incorporated the changes into the broader framework of earlier practices of social reproduction” (Magazine and Ramírez 2007:53).

In Santa Ursula, children’s role in households, their relationship to grandparent-caregivers, and the activities they carry out in their parents’ absence, can be understood in this framework of *ayuda* and intergenerational exchanges and indebtedness. As we have seen, children’s labor is essential to Santa Ursulan families, and Santa Ursulans expect children to help with cleaning, cooking, caring for animals, laundering, watching younger siblings, brickmaking and agriculture. More recently, many parents expect older children to help by migrating to the US in order to contribute earnings to the household, or by staying behind to care for younger siblings and home in a mother’s absence. As Magazine and Ramírez point out, “Both the quality and quantity of children’s activities vary depending on a number of factors, including stage in the domestic group’s development cycle (sibling order) and the specific means of generating income” (2007:57). Gender is also a significant factor that shapes children’s activities, particularly domestic work, which is primarily the responsibility of girls.

Although older daughters typically participate in household work when a mother is present, when a mother migrates, the oldest, unmarried daughter usually takes over her mother’s domestic responsibilities, which often includes caring for younger siblings. This is true even when a girl and her younger siblings live with grandparents or an aunt. Taking over a mother’s social reproductive activities is not the responsibility of a married daughter, because in most cases she has already left her natal home to live with her husband, where her labor belongs to her husband and the household in which she resides, whether it is her parents-in-law’s house or her own. Therefore, older daughters who take over the burden of care and housework in their

mothers' absence are usually school-aged, between twelve and eighteen years old, although in many cases they have already ended their education.

Beatriz's experience illustrates how an older daughter's life and domestic responsibilities change significantly when her mother leaves. When I met her Beatriz was eighteen years old and in her first year of college in the city of Puebla. She was living in a recently-built, two-story house with her mother, father and three younger siblings. Her university education and standard of living were made possible by her parents' employment in Indiana several years earlier, as well as Beatriz's labor caring for her younger siblings and their home while her mother was gone. By her mother's account, she was able to go to Indiana, because Beatriz had agreed to take over her domestic and care responsibilities.

Prior to her mother's departure, Beatriz lived with her mother, younger sisters Margarita, Elena, and brother Víctor in a small room on her grandmother's property, right next to her aunt and uncle. Their father had already been in Indiana for two years. He returned to Santa Ursula briefly to take his wife to the United States with him. When their mother departed, Beatriz and her siblings remained in their one-room home on their grandparent's property. At the time, Beatriz was twelve-years-old and in her first year of junior high school and her youngest sibling, Víctor was six years old and in first grade. Margarita and Elena were nine and seven years old respectively.

For Beatriz, the departure of her mother meant learning to cook and do the housework, and her parents explained her mother's pending departure to her this way. "My father told me that my mother was going to go, but I thought it was a joke, because he told me, 'You have to learn how to prepare food because your mother and I are going to go.'" A week before her departure, Beatriz's mother reiterated to Beatriz that she would need to prepare herself by

learning to cook clean: “You have to learn this, because we are going to go.” As Beatriz and I spoke, she was making tortillas over a *comal* in their *cocina de humo*. Her mother was in the kitchen in the house preparing the family’s mid-day meal. As I asked Beatriz how she felt when she found out her mother was going to leave, her mother came into the *cocina de humo* to puree some green tomatoes in the blender. Beatriz laughed in response to my question and then stated concisely “sadness.” Then her mother stepped into the conversation:

But at the same time....excitement. Her father is there, her father calls, he says, “You have to teach Beatriz to cook because you are going to come.” “But how, if we’ve never left them alone? When you’ve gone I’ve always been here and we’ve never left them alone.” “Well you have to teach her. I’m going to come and bring you back with me so that we can work. Furthermore, we are going to build a house. You see how we live, all of us squished together in one small room, and they realize that.” So I said, “You know what Beatriz, your father is going to come for me and then we are going to go. He says we are going to build our house. “No, don’t go mamá.” “Wouldn’t you like to have your own room? Your own room with your own bed and TV?” “Yes, *mami*. Yes.” [Beatriz’s mother’s voice changed the pitch of her voice to illustrate Beatriz’s excitement]. “I am going to mop, I am going to sweep.” Well they got very excited thinking about it, and I think that is why she accepted to take on the responsibility of a mother.

Beatriz’s life changed significantly when her mother left. It was particularly difficult in the beginning, explained Beatriz, because she “went from not doing anything, to doing all of the housework.” Like most older girls in Santa Ursula, Beatriz had helped her mother with domestic chores. Yet, compared to the responsibility that she took on when her mother left, Beatriz characterized her contribution of domestic labor prior to her mother’s departure as “almost not at all, just the most basic.” She explained that her father had often discouraged her mother from asking Beatriz to help around the house. “My father wouldn’t let my mother ask me to do anything. ‘You are going to wash the dishes,’ he would say to her, ‘She [Beatriz] is not going to do that, you are going to do that, because she is a child.’” For this reason, Beatriz was surprised and thought her father was joking when he told her she would have to learn to do the housework, because they were going to leave.

Although Beatriz's parents tried to prepare her for the burden of domestic work that she would confront, Beatriz mainly learned by doing once her mother was gone. She found laundering clothes one of the most difficult of her new responsibilities. Although she already knew how to wash clothes, she did not know how to wash them "perfectly" and therefore needed to learn how to wash them well. Beatriz laundered the clothes for all of her siblings, "even Margarita," she explained, who was nine when their mother left. "I would do it every other day because we have two uniforms, the sports one and the other one. And iron it after we wash it." Similarly, Beatriz knew how to prepare basic foods, such as tortillas, and had sometimes helped her mother cook, but making sure she and her three younger siblings ate sufficiently every day was a responsibility that greatly increased her domestic load.

Before my mother left I didn't know how to cook, I had to learn, it was you either learn or you learn. So I learned, sometimes by experimenting, I would say, "I'm going to add this ingredient..." That is how I learned. I taught myself. When I wanted to prepare a recipe that had a lot of ingredients I would ask my grandmother or ask my aunt how to do it, and then I would do it.

In the morning Beatriz would send Elena to the mill to grind the corn, while she prepared breakfast. They would usually eat tortillas and food left over from the day before or sometimes only cereal or bread. After school, Beatriz would prepare the main meal and make fresh tortillas. They bought supplies, such as milk, eggs, vegetables, tomatoes and soap, from her aunt's store next door, which meant they did not need to go to Cholula to shop. Despite the burden of providing food for herself and her siblings, Beatriz enjoyed learning to cook and remembered this aspect of her role fondly. She often spoke to me about special foods that she liked to prepare and how she used to try to replicate recipes that she saw prepared on television programs.

Caring for her younger siblings, making sure they did what they were supposed to, and keeping her family functioning, were new responsibilities that greatly contrasted with the level of

responsibility she had before her mother left. For example, Beatriz tried to follow the routine that her mother had always followed. On Saturdays she would spend almost the entire day doing the housework and finishing any laundry that she had not gotten to during the week so that she could rest on Sunday. “My mother had taught us that Sunday is for rest,” she explained. On Sundays the children attended mass, ate breakfast together, washed the dishes and then spent time relaxing, which usually included watching TV together. It was also Beatriz’s responsibility to see to it that her siblings did their homework. She explained, “I would check to see if they had done their homework, but sometimes my uncle would help me. They were supposed to obey my orders, but sometimes they wouldn’t.” Her sisters helped her with some of her domestic responsibilities, but Beatriz carried the majority of the burden.

I would prepare the food, wash the clothes, the dishes, bathe my siblings, iron the clothes and clean our room. My sisters helped a little, but not too much, because of their age it was a little difficult for them. Elena helped me more, because Margarita [who is two years older than Elena] was very rebellious. When I would tell her to do something, like housework, she would escape, and she would go with my grandmother. Elena was who helped me more, but heavy work was hard for her, so she would wash the dishes or sweep the room. She couldn’t cook, it would be dangerous for her.

Like Beatriz and her siblings, some children who stay behind with grandparents, live independently in a room separate from the main house, and are responsible for the domestic chores of their own household. Beatriz and her siblings stayed in the room on their grandparents’ property where they had lived with their parents. Despite the small size of their dwelling, it was in Santa Ursulan terms a separate household and typical of the dwellings that young couples set up on a husband’s parents’ property before they are able to expand and remodel a home or build a new one. As a separate household, the dwelling had its own small kitchen with a stove, table, dishes and cooking utensils. Beatriz only used her grandmother’s kitchen, which had a hearth, to make tortillas. Usually the children ate separately from their

grandparents, aunt and uncle meals that Beatriz prepared. Once in a while, Beatriz's aunt prepared meals to share with the children. On weekends the children occasionally ate with their grandparents "Sometimes she [my grandmother] would prepare the food, and sometimes I would. We would take turns."

Like other older daughters I knew, Beatriz described the initial adjustment period following their mother's departure as difficult, but that with time she grew accustomed to her new routine and responsibilities. Keeping up with her school work was particularly challenging. "I needed to feel more responsible, and to organize my time for my homework, the housework and for my siblings," she described. However with time, she grew very accustomed to her new routine, so much so that she characterized herself as "almost like a housewife." "For almost two years I learned about what it is like to be a mother. And also I learned how to mature very quickly. That is what I liked. Now, if I want to do something, I think about the consequences. I know what is ok and what is not. Before I do something I think a lot." Although Beatriz eventually found a way to balance her responsibilities such that she was able to keep up with her schoolwork, other older girls in similar circumstances are unable to manage the responsibilities of a schoolgirl and a mother. The following chapter, which analyzes the experiences of Marisol, a sibling caregiver, considers more closely the relationship between older girls' education and their domestic burden in a mothers absence.

Grandchildren as Companions

As I have shown, most grandparents wanted their grandchildren to live with them upon their parents' departure. They generally considered grandchildren's presence in their home desirable, and usually expressed great pride in their grandchildren and the fact that they were the ones who were responsible, to varying degrees, for raising them. Although several grandmothers

acknowledged that caring for babies was often burdensome, given the amount of work involved, most men and women explained that once children reached primary school age, they were capable of “fending for themselves,” and therefore did not represent a great deal of extra work for caregivers. Because children usually participate in a household’s domestic and productive activities, charges tend to make up for any extra work they might represent for caregivers and in many cases are a source of help to grandparents who might otherwise live alone.

Although grandchildren might represent a source of help for grandparents, grandchildren’s labor is generally not the principal reason why grandparents want grandchildren to live with them. Likewise, while most grandparents receive remittances from the children’s parents, economic gain does not explain most grandparents’ desire to act as caregivers for their grandchildren. Remittances are an important source of income. However, many aging parents receive economic support from at least one of their adult children, particularly for medical expenses, regardless of whether or not they are looking after grandchildren, as we saw in the previous chapter. This appears to be the case throughout communities in Cholula. The DIF psychologist’s perspective on the matter confirms my observations in Santa Ursula that economic reasons do not seem to play a major role in grandparents’ willingness to take on the responsibility of caring for their grandchildren.

In the majority of cases that I have seen, it is not for economic reasons. Also, I think that most of the grandparents don’t see it as a burden, it is more like an extra responsibility, because they see it as part of their work. ‘My son or daughter needs me, I am going to support them’. It is about supporting or helping their son or daughter. So that this son has a future, that he has at least a house, or a business, something that he can come back to work in. It is not a burden.

This sense of responsibility that grandparents have towards their adult children, is part of the framework of *ayuda* and intergenerational exchanges and indebtedness described by Magazine and Ramírez (2007)

Not only do most grandparents not consider grandchildren a burden, they consider them an asset. Grandparents generally value their grandchildren as an important source of companionship, which is a crucial factor in their willingness and even eagerness to have grandchildren live with them. Parents also consider children a source of companionship and most Santa Ursulans, including single women, desire and expect to have children (Mulhare 2005). When I asked mothers why they thought it was important to have children, they usually explained that a mother or a couple would be lonely without children. Children also play a role in forging other social relationships (Colen 1995). Children are crucial to creating and strengthening social networks, as adults form bonds of *compadrazgo* through child-centered rituals, such as baptisms. Studies have also shown that children are a particularly important source of companionship for recently married women, whose social networks and movements are limited when they reside in their mother-in-law's house (Pauli 2008). The value of children as companions to mothers is similar to that of grandchildren to grandparents. As elsewhere in rural Mexico, in Santa Ursula elders and children spend a great deal of time together and "relations of the very old with their grandchildren are especially important" (Sokolovsky 1997). The companionship of grandchildren is particularly important for grandparents who no longer have adult children living with them.

Doña Rafaela's story illustrates the role that grandchildren play as companions for older caretakers whose children no longer live at home. Doña Rafaela's son and his wife migrated to Indiana, leaving their three sons with Doña Rafaela and her husband in the year 2000. The boys were young at the time, between one and a half and seven years of age. Doña Rafaela and "her boys," as she referred to them, grew very close during the three years that the children's parents were away. "The youngest in particular," she pointed out, "he always called me *mamá*. Then

when his mother would call on the phone we would say, ‘Your *mamá* is on the phone,’ and he would respond ‘Which *mamá*?’ We would say, ‘Your *mamá*’. ‘No, but you’re my only *mama*,’ he would tell me.”

During the period that the boys lived with Doña Rafaela, they also regularly visited their maternal grandparents, who lived nearby in Santa Ursula. Doña Rafaela explained that their maternal grandmother had also wanted to take care of the children, and occasionally would have them spend the night at her house. Laughing, Doña Rafaela recalled how she had grown very attached to her grandsons and missed them when they were not with her, even for short periods.

On one occasion she (their maternal grandmother) wanted them to stay for three nights. But by the first day I was already crying. I had gotten used to them being with me, and I felt lonely, so I called over there. Since I was crying they sent the boys back to me, and after that, they never asked again to have the boys stay. That’s why they no longer went there to stay the night. Their other grandmother must have said “Oh, she’s going to cry, it would be better if the boys sleep over there.”

After the boys’ parents returned to Santa Ursula in 2003, Doña Rafaela’s grandsons continued to form part of her daily life, and she remained a maternal figure for them. Doña Rafaela’s son and daughter-in-law moved back into Doña Rafaela’s house, where they intended to stay long-term. They had used the money they earned in the US to expand and remodel Doña Rafaela’s house, which they were to inherit. As a result, the boys’ parents’ return to Santa Ursula did not signify a separation for Doña Rafaela and her grandsons. To the contrary, she continued to have a close relationship with them. Doña Rafaela explained to me proudly that her youngest grandson still called her “*mamá*,” and continued to sleep in her bed with her. “He would say ‘*Hija*,’⁹² now tonight I am going to sleep with my brother Juan,’ and I would say, ‘Okay,’ And then he’d come back and sleep with me for a few nights. Then another night he would say, ‘Now I am going to sleep with my brother Jorge.’” The boys also continued to go to

⁹² *Hija* (daughter) is a term of affection that Doña Rafaela’s husband used with her. Imitating his grandfather, Doña Rafaela’s grandson began to use the term as a sign of affection for his grandmother.

their grandmother with their daily needs, such as when they were hungry. They always asked her for permission or informed her when they were going out, and would often do so without telling their mother, even when she was also at home.

Sleeping and Nighttime

Like Doña Rafaela and her grandson, grandparents and young grandchildren often sleep together in the same bed, and generally like doing so. Such sleeping arrangements are common not only in families in which parents are away, but also in three-generation households in which children's parents live in the household. Sokolovsky, who worked in a village in the central mountain region of Mexico, found that co-sleeping among young children and grandparents was common and "seldom seemed a matter of space, but rather a case of mutual need. The child helps to warm up old bones and the grandparent provides emotional security at night when various spirits and demons are thought to travel through the village" (1997:203).

Children serve a particularly important role as nighttime companions for widowed or divorced women who might otherwise live alone. Thus, when grandchildren reunite with their parents, their departure represents a great loss for caregivers when they were their only nighttime companions. Several older women, such as Doña Petronila, who remained alone after grandchildren had moved out, expressed that they were very uncomfortable and lonely at night, even when another family member lived just next door. I knew several cases in which a family member had sent one of her children to an older woman's house each night to sleep and keep her company. For example, Doña Petronila's daughter sent her youngest daughter to Doña Petronila's house to sleep with her, even though her grandsons lived in a one-room dwelling immediately adjacent to her house on her property.

Doña Concepción's experience was similar to that of Doña Petronila. Doña Concepción, who was sixty-two years old when I interviewed her, had been widowed for ten years and had ten grown children. With all four of her sons and four of her six daughters and their husbands in the United States, Doña Concepción felt lonely and neglected. She explained to me that her oldest son had "forgotten" about her. He no longer called, nor did he send money. As her eyes filled with tears, she buried her face in her hands, "Why does one have children," meaning why do we bother to have children if we are just going to end up alone. Yet, at one time Doña Concepción was surrounded by grandchildren, having taken care of seven of them over the years. "But they are gone now," she repeated several times. Three years earlier the last of her grandchildren, a boy who she raised from infancy until he was seven, left to live with his parents in the United States. Doña Concepción ended up alone in her house.

Doña Concepción suffered from diabetes and high blood pressure. Although her oldest son had "forgotten" about her, her youngest son continued to send her money and call her regularly. When Doña Concepción had a heart attack in April 2006, he, his wife and two small children returned to Santa Ursula to stay with her and take care of her. Her son returned to New York two months later, but her daughter-in-law and grandchildren stayed with her six months longer. In January 2006, Doña Concepción's daughter-in-law left to join her husband, and brought her children to her mother's house to live. Doña Concepción very much wanted the children to stay with her. She offered to keep them, and told me her son had agreed. However, in the end, the children went to live with their maternal grandparents, for reasons discussed in Chapter Four.

Doña Concepción explained that after their departure she did not mind being alone during the day, because her niece lived right next door, but that she found it very difficult to be alone at

night. Her sister offered to send her ten-year-old son to stay with Doña Concepción at night, an offer she gladly accepted. When I met Doña Concepción her nephew was still spending the nights with her. He would drop his backpack off after school and then head to his mother's house for his mid-day meal, before returning to Doña Concepción's house to do his homework, watch television and go to bed. He slept in Doña Concepción's living room, in a bed that her daughter-in-law had left behind. Doña Concepción was glad to have his company.

Grandfathers

Studies of aging in rural Mexico indicate that men may be more socially isolated in old-age than women, who are in regular contact with members of their social network (Sokolovsky 1997; Treviño et al. 2006). As we have seen, traditionally older men and women had several adult sons, their wives and children living in close proximity who would keep them company. While these networks have diminished, older women still spend a great deal of time with members of their social networks through regular, at least weekly, participation in food preparation for fiestas. As such, they tend to spend a greater amount of time outside the home than older men.

Grandchildren who live with grandparents in some cases play an important role in keeping their grandfather company. Beatriz and her siblings, for example, spent a great deal of time with their grandfather while their parents were away, because their grandmother was often busy with ritual activities. "We had gotten used to being with my grandfather. Since my grandmother would go off to make *cacao* (ritual chocolate beverage) and all of that. Well, she would go and my grandfather was often very neglected. So we would always call my grandfather to eat....And we liked it too, because he would tell us legends and stories about when he was younger."

As food is also a source of affection, Beatriz often invited her grandfather to eat with her and her siblings. Sometimes she prepared special foods for him. She liked cooking for him, and she liked that he appreciated the foods that she prepared.

Sometimes when I would make my experimental foods, he would say “What did you make today?” “Do you want a quesadilla? I’ll bring you a quesadilla?” He also liked my *tortitas de papa* (potato patties). He would eat with us, and everything. I had seen that recipe on TV, I thought, if I add tuna fish what would it taste like. So I was experimenting and they came out good. On one occasion like four or five days, my uncle, aunt, their daughters, my grandmother, they went to Chalma, and they wanted to take my grandfather, but he didn’t want to. He said, “But who is going to stay”...with us...”who is going to stay?” So they wanted to take my grandfather, but he didn’t want to go, because he didn’t want to leave us. So they went, four days they were gone, and we were there with my grandfather, eating together and everything. One day he said, ‘Hurry up, because I am hungry,’ because he hadn’t eaten. Sometimes on Saturday and Sunday he would eat breakfast with us. We would call him and we’d make *atole de calabaza*.⁹³ My grandmother taught me how to make it. What he liked the best was *atole de chocolate*, and I learned to make it. He had his preferences [she laughed].

When Beatriz’s parents returned from Indiana, she and her family moved out of her grandparents’ compound and into their own home on the other side of town. Beatriz said that although they were excited to move into their new house, it was difficult getting used to being apart from her grandfather. “We liked [spending time with him] a lot, so it was difficult when we had to go...So now when we go there to visit, he tells us, “Why don’t you come, why don’t you come.” He always wants us to come over, he misses us too.”

When Grandchildren Leave

As we saw in Chapter Four, most children eventually reunite with their parents, either when they leave to join parents in the US or when parents return to Santa Ursula. As such, household composition tends to change considerably within in a short period. Many grandparents, such as Doña Dominga and Doña Concepción, had over the years cared for many grandchildren, the sons and daughters of more than one of their children. Yet, what might have

⁹³A warm, sweetened squash drink, like a thin porridge, that Santa Ursulans typically have for breakfast.

been a very full household could quickly turn into an empty household. Often, as Doña Dominga explained, parents send for children when they complete primary school. The oldest children are usually the first to leave their grandparents, while the youngest children remain in Santa Ursula. Nevertheless, it was becoming increasingly common for younger children to join parents as well.

In the best of cases, parents return to live in the grandparents' house, and children and grandparents experience the least amount of change, such as the case of Doña Rafaela, in which she remained a significant maternal figure to her grandsons. In other cases, such as that of Beatriz and her siblings, when parents return, children move with their parents to their own, often recently constructed house. Although less common, I also knew a couple of families in which a child remained with a grandmother, even after his or her parents had returned and moved into their own house. Most difficult however, for both caretakers and charges, is when grandchildren leave Mexico to join their parents in the US, thus creating a vast geographic distance between them and major change in their relationship. The emotional strain of separation appears to be particularly great when a child has lived with his grandparents for many years or from the time he was an infant or young child.

While some children, such as Doña Dominga's grandson Omar, seem happy to leave and reunite with their parents and any siblings that may be in the US, in many cases grandchildren do not want to leave their grandparents. In such circumstances, a mother or both parents might return to Mexico. Patricia, for example, did not want to leave her grandmother. Her mother called her regularly, and wanted to convince her to join her in New Jersey. However, Patricia insisted on staying with her grandmother, even when her grandmother became too ill to care for

her. Patricia's mother eventually returned to Santa Ursula to take care of her daughter and her ailing mother.

Similarly, Doña Rafaela's son and daughter-in-law wanted to remain in the United States and have their sons join them there. They began making plans to purchase a home in Indiana and send for their sons about a year and a half after they arrived in the US. They called Doña Rafaela and the boys to discuss their plans, but the boys strongly opposed the idea of leaving without their grandmother. The family tried to persuade Doña Rafaela to go to Indiana with the boys. "They are your children," she recalled telling them, "and you can take them, but I won't go. I won't be able to get used to living there. I don't know anyone. I don't speak English. What will I do when I need something? I can't ask for anything." Because the boys did not want to leave their grandmother, their parents decided to return to Santa Ursula. They spent another year and a half in Indiana, working and sending money to construct a second story on Doña Rafaela and her husband's house, where they later returned to live with their boys. I knew several parents who had considered sending for the grandmother-caretaker along with their children, particularly because of children's reluctance to leave their grandparents. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, the relocation of aging parents to the United States was uncommon. Without documents, the trip is nearly impossible for the elderly, frail or infirm, given the physical demands and dangers of crossing the border on foot.

Despite children's reluctance, many parents manage to get children to join them. Some parents return to take children with them, and others "send for them, which requires the cooperation of other family members in Mexico, particularly the caregiver and a family member with whom a child can travel. As mentioned in Chapter Three, Santa Ursulan parents almost

always send children with a family member or a trusted community member, but never alone, as they might do in other parts of Mexico or Central America.

Occasionally parents resort to deception in order to coerce children who are reluctant to leave their grandparents. Doña Dominga's son and daughter-in-law, for example, left their daughter Rocío when she was six years old. As she neared completion of primary school, her parents and two older siblings in the US regularly called Rocio asking, "When are you going to come? It is nice here. You can go to school here." "But she did not want to go," Doña Dominga told me, "She considered me like her mother, and did not want to leave me." Her parents continued to press her to join them in the Indiana, but when they thought she could not be swayed, "They tricked her," Doña Dominga explained. "They told her that she could come to visit. Only for a visit and then she would go back to Mexico." When she completed primary school at thirteen years of age, Rocio, agreed to go, believing that she would shortly return to Mexico and her grandmother.

When Rocio first arrived in Indiana "she would always call and cry." She missed her grandmother and had difficulty adjusting to her new circumstances. She did not want to "obey her mother." Although Doña Dominga also missed her granddaughter a great deal, she would tell her on the phone, "You need to listen to her, to your mother." Rocio would reply, "You are my mother," recalled Doña Dominga, "But I would tell her 'No. I am your grandmother. You are with your mother and you have to listen to her.' I would also tell her, 'You decided to go, now you will have to stay. Now you will have to make it work, because it will be very difficult for you to come back now.'" At times when she was angry or sad, Rocio would tell her mother that she wanted to return to Mexico. Her mother would respond, "Well, if you want to go back, go. But how are you going to go back to Mexico. You don't know how to." Eventually, Rocio

adjusted to her new life, but she continued to call her grandmother regularly. Sometimes she would ask her grandmother to send her Mexican snacks, like cheese puffs and chili-lemon flavored corn sticks that they do not sell in Indianapolis. These are the snacks that Doña Dominga sold in her store and that formed part of Rocio's everyday life as her grandmother raised her.

Conclusion

Grandparents in Santa Ursula often expect that their adult children will migrate and ask them to care for grandchildren in their absence. Although children's parents send remittances to grandparents who act as caregivers, economic benefits are not the principal reason why Santa Ursulan grandparents wish to act as caregivers for grandchildren. Most grandparents take on this responsibility out of a sense of duty to their children, as part of a system of indebtedness and exchanges between parents and children over a lifetime (Magazine and Ramírez 2007). Parents offer children nurture, shelter, care and an eventual inheritance, and children in exchange offer parents help with both productive and reproductive activities, in varying forms and quantity over time. In addition, many grandparents accept the responsibility of their grandchildren, precisely because they want their grandchildren to live with them. For this reason, as discussed in Chapter Four, Santa Ursulans describe the custom of leaving children with paternal grandparents, as the "right" of the paternal grandparents. Thus, many grandparent-caregivers, considered having their grandchildren live with them as a benefit rather than a burden.

Grandparents, like mothers and even fathers, generally value grandchildren for companionship. Even before migration became widespread in Santa Ursula, older Santa Ursulans spent a great deal of time with grandchildren. However, in the context of shrinking kin networks in Santa Ursula and the absence of much of the middle generation, children who

remain behind when their parents migrant play an even more significant role in the lives of grandparents. For some older Santa Ursulans, grandchildren are the only family members with whom they share their home. Therefore, the departure of grandchildren who reunite with their parents has a significant impact on grandparents. Nighttime companionship is particularly important for older widows who might otherwise live alone. For this reason, I knew several families in which a mother had sent a child to sleep at the house of an older widow who was living alone after her grandchildren-charges had left her home. In addition, grandchildren may play a particularly important role as companions for grandfathers, who tend to be more socially isolated in old-age than grandmothers.

In addition to the companionship that children offer grandparents, some grandchildren also offer assistance to grandparents. As we saw in the previous chapter, the majority of older caregivers suffer from poor health. Many grandparents worried less about the responsibility of caring for grandchildren and more about their own health problems, their grandchildren's imminent departure from their home and the possibility of ending up alone in old age. Sometimes grandparents' physical condition interferes with their ability to care for their charges or themselves. In such cases, grandchildren might play an important role in helping grandparents, and often take on greater domestic responsibilities than they otherwise would have. In some circumstances, children are too young to adequately or safely carry out the domestic tasks that are transferred to them, such as cooking or ironing clothes. Nevertheless, children, especially older girls, usually play an important role in caring for younger siblings and their home, even when grandparents are not feeble or ill. Indeed, Santa Ursulans expect children to participate in both productive and reproductive activities, as part of a system of intergenerational exchanges of nurture and *ayuda*, whether they live with caregivers or parents. The burden of

reproductive labor tends to increase significantly for oldest unmarried daughters when mothers migrate. As we saw, when Beatriz's mother migrated, her parents explained to her that she was going to have to learn to cook, clean, and take care of the house, even though she and her siblings were going to live with their grandparents. In the following chapter we will examine more closely the role and responsibilities of older girls in caring labor by looking at the experiences of Marisol, a teenage caregiver.

Chapter Eight

Marisol: Older Sisters and Sibling Caretaking

This Chapter analyzes the experiences of Marisol, whose mother left for Indiana when she was sixteen years old. Although her parents sent Marisol and her six younger siblings to live with their grandparents, Marisol assumed the majority of the burden of care work when her mother left. Marisol soon dropped out of high school in order to care for her siblings full-time. Shortly thereafter, she and her siblings with their parents' permission returned to the family house to live on their own with Marisol as head of household. The circumstances of Marisol's life are unusual in that parents who migrate from Santa Ursula generally do not permit their children to remain in the family house without an alternative caregiver. Yet, children who live with grandparents or an aunt usually play an important role in caring for themselves and their home, as discussed in the previous chapter, and the literature on transnational families suggests that older girls' role in social reproduction has helped support female migration from communities throughout the globe (Parreñas 2005; Erel 2002).

If parents form part of the global economy as workers, what can we say about the role of children who help keep their households and families running in their communities and nations of origin? This chapter shows how children's daily life—particularly children's engagement in local processes of social reproduction—support what Erel (2002) calls the “outsourcing of reproductive labor” to poorer communities and nations in the global economy. Local norms and practices, such as intergenerational obligations of *ayuda*, ritual and social life, and the goal of house construction shape the activities that Marisol and her siblings realized in their daily lives. Marisol's responsibilities as caregiver also speak of and to expectations and experiences of childhood, youth and adulthood in Santa Ursula. The possibilities and expectations for

education, work, marriage and childbearing define these life stages, and help situate Marisol's experience as a teenage sibling caregiver in Santa Ursula and in the transnational context of Mexico and the United States.

This Chapter begins by introducing Marisol and the circumstances in which she dropped out of high school and became a full time caregiver. I then situate her experience as a caregiver and head of household in relation to married and unmarried teenage girls in Santa Ursula. Next, I consider the role of Marisol's extended family network, which reached from Santa Ursula to Indiana. Her father's kin in Santa Ursula helped the children, monitored their activities and were an important part of their social life. The fourth section analyzes Marisol's participation in ritual life for family life cycle celebrations, such as birthdays, and the local cargo system. The final section examines Marisol and her siblings' contribution to domestic and productive activities. Although Marisol carried the burden of responsibility when her mother left, her siblings cooperated with her and each other to take care of themselves and keep their household running. I analyze how the expansion and remodeling of the family house, which is central to transnational migration, added an extra dimension to Marisol's responsibilities, and how the children handled a near fatal incident involving the youngest sibling in the household.

From Student to Caregiver

I met Marisol in February 2006. We were at her aunt's house getting ready to walk to Santa Ursula's town center for Carnival. Thin and petite with straight shoulder-length hair, long bangs pushed to one side, she looked young—somewhere between thirteen and seventeen I speculated. She was wearing a pink short-sleeved T-shirt and faded jeans with rhinestone-studded pockets, typical of teenage girls in Santa Ursula. Marisol had arrived at her aunt's house with Miguel, a two-and-a-half-year old boy who stayed close by her side. She had dressed him

with care in a makeshift Carnival costume—a long, belted button-down shirt and a red bandana tied snugly on his head. I was uncertain if Miguel was her brother or her son. Although Marisol looked young, many women in Santa Ursula were wives and mothers by the age of sixteen. Miguel seemed to cling to Marisol's leg as if she were his mother, and she was attentive with him. Yet, Marisol was notably carefree and playful with Miguel, more so than most young mothers in Santa Ursula. We spent that day together, Marisol, Miguel, their thirteen-year-old cousin Natalia and I, following the Carnival dancers through the smoky streets and listening to gun powder explode from their muskets over the drone of the brass band. Throughout the day, Marisol tended to Miguel—leading him through the streets, occasionally readjusting his outfit, picking him up when he was tired, and distracting him with treats when he grew restless.

Not long after Carnival, I found out that Miguel was Marisol's brother, and that Marisol had taken over the responsibilities of caring for him and her other siblings when their mother joined their father and older brother in Indiana, in order to work and save money, according to Marisol, "to build the house." During the course of my fieldwork and follow-up visits to Santa Ursula I had regular contact with Marisol, often at family and community gatherings and sometimes in her home.⁹⁴ We also saw each other twice a week during the evening English class I taught in town, after which we would spend time talking in the town center for a while before returning to our homes. Marisol often talked about her family, but mostly she enjoyed chatting about her social life or favorite pastimes, like listening to music or making crafts. While she had the responsibility of an adult woman, her interests and perspectives were very much those of a teenage girl, still unburdened by marriage and motherhood.

⁹⁴ This narrative is based on my fieldnotes, as well as transcripts from two semi-structured tape-recorded interviews I conducted with Marisol at her home in June 2006.

Marisol was the second oldest of nine children. The day I met her, she was just about to turn seventeen years old. She was living with her siblings Gloria, Oscar, Rosario, Angel, Miguel, who were fifteen, thirteen, eleven, ten, two and a half years of age respectively, and her sister Sara, who was twenty months old. The children's oldest brother, nineteen-year-old Gustavo, was in Indiana with their father and mother, who were awaiting the birth of another son, Cristofer. Prior to their parents' departure, Marisol and her siblings lived with their mother and father in their simple three-room house.

Marisol's father, Gustavo Senior, was a musician. Before he migrated to Indiana, he made a living playing for parties and festivals with his band in Santa Ursula and nearby towns. He also worked in the patio of his home "cutting" bricks alongside his wife and older son, who was no longer in school. During vacations, weekends or after school, Marisol and the older children would also help. A tall, very new looking brick kiln was still standing next to the pig pens on their property during the period of my fieldwork. "My father built it and then only used it about eight times before he went to the other side (the US)," Marisol explained. Her father usually sold the brick he made as *crudo* (unfired) for a smaller profit to other local brick-makers who had kilns. He also earned money cutting bricks for other Santa Ursulans in their patios. Up until the time he left for the United States, the family had been able to cover their basic living expenses with his earnings as a musician, along with the money they brought in through brickmaking. In addition, they had managed to save enough money to build the modest house where they had lived since 1996.

Marisol's father and older brother Gustavo left for Indiana in December 2004. Marisol's mother was planning to travel with them to the United States, but she stayed behind with Marisol and the younger children in order to take care of baby Sara, who was only six months old at the

time. Marisol missed her father and brother. Yet, her daily life did not change significantly upon their departure for two principal reasons. First, Marisol, her siblings and her mother were still living in the house where Marisol had lived since she was seven years old. Her bed, her surroundings, her routine remained the same. In addition, because her mother was still with them, her mother was in charge of the household and the children. During the day Marisol and her siblings went to school while their mother stayed home with the youngest children. When not in school they were busy with their usual activities—homework, chores around the house, attending mass at the church, helping with fiestas and socializing with friends and family. In addition, they continued to help with brickmaking, as their mother continued to make bricks after her husband and oldest son had gone to the US.

Marisol's mother left for the US with a group of ten men and women from Santa Ursula on May 14, 2005, when Sara was eleven months old. In Indiana her husband helped her find a job in a factory and later in a restaurant. Like Marisol's father, she worked two jobs, despite the fact that she was pregnant. When I asked Marisol if her mother found this difficult, she replied "My mother told me that the factory job is not very difficult. She just folds blouses. Well, since she was pregnant, she only worked folding clothes." As discussed previously, many Santa Ursulans described US restaurant and factory jobs as easy and light, a testament to the arduousness of producing handmade bricks.

The day their mother departed, Marisol, her brothers and sisters packed their clothes, school books and a few other personal belongings and brought them to their new, but temporary home in their grandparents' family compound. They left behind their house, their garden, their pigs, their radio and television—things that were important to Marisol and her siblings. The seven siblings were to share one room off a small patio near the entrance of their grandparents'

walled-in family compound. “In the room there were two beds, one for us girls, and one for the boys. So one bed for my brother Oscar, Angel and Miguel also slept with them. And we were in one bed, Gloria, me, Rosario and Sara.” Next to their room, were two rooms that their aunt Eleuteria and uncle Belarmino shared with their two young daughters.

Marisol explained her parents’ decision to send the children to live with their grandparents this way:

When my mother left she wasn’t sure where to leave us. Since my father was already gone, my mother told us we didn’t have any one to stay with. We were going to stay with my aunt, my mother’s sister. She’s still single. She was going to stay with us. But then my mother said, “No, it would be better if you stay down there,” where my grandmother lives. That’s why we ended up moving to my grandmother’s.

Marisol did not explain why her mother changed her mind and sent the children to live with their grandparents, instead of having their maternal aunt come stay with them. Perhaps, when her mother said “It would be better if you stay down there,” she meant that it would be better if they followed the custom that children stay with their paternal grandparents. Perhaps Marisol’s situation might have been different had her single aunt gone to live with Marisol and her siblings as their primary caregiver.

With only six weeks remaining in the school year, Marisol was about to finish her first year of high school when her mother departed. Her aunt Asunción, who lived just behind her grandparent’s house, had agreed to watch Sara and Miguel, while Marisol and her siblings were at school. After school, Marisol did the housework, washed her and her siblings clothes, and helped her aunt Eleuteria cook. Marisol did not find washing clothes, cooking or cleaning burdensome, because these were responsibilities she had prior to her mother’s departure. In addition, Gloria also helped with these tasks. However, what made her mother’s absence burdensome were the responsibilities she assumed for her youngest siblings, particularly for

Sara, who was a baby when her mother left. “Well, the girl (Sara) would wake me up a lot during the night. Yeah, at night she woke me up a lot. Since she was little, I had to warm her milk, give her her milk, and I wasn’t used to waking up during the night yet.” As discussed in Chapter Five, most caregivers consider caring for infants and young children burdensome, because of the physical care they require, such as the bottle feedings that Marisol described.

Marisol’s father expected that she would be able to continue going to school while he and his wife were away. Marisol explained that this was a primary reason that she stayed behind and her mother migrated. “I was supposed to go with them,” Marisol explained, “My father said ‘Either you are going to come or your mother.’” He planned to stay in Indiana only until they finished the house, which they would be able to do more quickly with three family members working. “And he was saying, ‘I don’t know, I don’t know with whom...’ ‘It would be better for me to go,’ I said, but then he said, ‘No, you stay here, that would be better. Stay and continue your studies and your mother will come with me.’ And that is why my mother went.”

Marisol’s father thought that the help of his two brothers’ wives would off-set his wife’s absence and allow Marisol to attend classes and keep up with her schoolwork. Marisol explained, “So my aunt was looking after the three of them. She would say, “Go to school, it’s getting late’ ...I would just get them dressed and then (leave for school).” Nevertheless, soon after her mother left, Marisol began to see that staying in school was going to be difficult. “I told my father I wasn’t going to go to school anymore, because Miguel was little, and he would misbehave. And since my aunt also had her daughter who was also little, well she is still little, she’s going to turn three soon and Miguel will be four.” As Marisol and I spoke that day, her responsibilities were all around her, making evident why she had found it difficult to continue her studies while acting as caregiver and head of household. The oldest children came in and

out of the room to check in with Marisol, and Sara and Miguel came to her looking for attention and affection. In addition, Marisol received a phone call from a neighbor asking if she was on her way to the church for a meeting, because she was serving as *mayordomo* in place of her father, an activity which I analyze later in the chapter.

The day after the school year ended, Marisol and her siblings moved out of their grandparents' compound and back into their own house. Marisol explained that they left because they could not get used to living there:

Here we go about our business, if we drop something, we just pick it up. And the room was small there, where we would sleep, just one room for all of us. We all slept in one room, one room. Everyday I would go to my house, and at night I would return to my grandmother's house. Sometimes on Sunday we would all come. The house was alone. The radio was there, the telephone, and nobody was using them. That's why I said to my father "It would be better if we move back into the house, because every day, every day, I come to visit the house, to turn on the lights."

I asked Marisol if her brothers and sisters also came back frequently to the house. "No, mostly me," she laughed in response, "because I couldn't get used to living there." What Marisol found most difficult about living in her grandparents' compound was living with people other than her immediate family members. She explained, "Normally it was just my mother, us, and my father. But there, there were other people. My uncle Belarmino and my aunt Eleuteria, and I didn't want to live with more people. I just couldn't get used to it. That's why."

Marisol's perspective corresponded with that of the DIF psychologist who believed that what children, particularly teenagers, find most difficult about their parents' departure, is adjusting to living with members of their extended family. She explained that although children might have been used to spending time regularly with their extended family members, especially if they had lived within the grandparents' compound before their parents left, children confront the challenge of adapting to living with people they were not living with before their mother left:

If...my family goes and I stay with my grandparents, I am going to change house, and they have different habits, even if we live in the same place and we are of the same family, we have different habits. We have different ways of thinking, so it is a question of adapting to other conduct. Perhaps my aunt doesn't eat at three in the afternoon, perhaps she eats at six. So it is a question of adapting again to a new schedule. Or for some things she scolds us a lot, and for others she doesn't. So adapting to ways and styles of this family. ... And also what has a big impact is that they are going to miss their parents, but first off it would be this, "That I am going to have to adapt to other human beings. Even if I love them, even if I know them, but they are different."

Indeed, Marisol missed her parents when they left. However, like many children whose parents leave, she said she got used to them being gone. What she said could not get used to was living with other people.

When I asked her if she wished she had gone to the US instead of her mother, Marisol responded, "Yeah, I think so. Well, if I were there, I would be working the way my brother works, but my father said that I was going to go to school there also. And I would have gone to school." Marisol enjoyed school and often spoke to me about the crafts class where she learned to make jewelry and papier-mâché. Before her mother left, her life largely revolved around school. Of course, like most older children, she also helped with domestic chores, watching after younger siblings when her mother was out, brickmaking and corn planting and harvesting. However, she was usually able to spend her time after school as she wished, "Since my mother would stay home, all I had to do is come home from school and I would say, 'I'm going out....or I would just call her on the phone and tell her that I was going to stay in Cholula to do my homework on the computer.'" Marisol expected to be a student during this period of her life. Therefore, she was disappointed to drop out, and she said that adjusting to her new circumstances initially felt like a burden. "Uhhh, on the one hand yeah, yeah I wanted to go to school still. But on the other hand no, because my siblings weren't going to....well...who was going to take care of them?" Her voice grew quiet, "They were still small." Then laughing

Marisol explained, “Well, from then to now, I got used to it, I no longer feel like it is much of a burden.”

Marisol’s experience must be situated in the context of changing educational expectations in Santa Ursula. Perhaps if Marisol and her mother had both remained in Santa Ursula, Marisol would have stayed in school and earned her high school degree. However, Marisol was not necessarily at a disadvantage compared to her peers in Santa Ursula whose mothers had not migrated. The majority of Santa Ursulans her age did not attend high school, and only recently had it become more common to do so. As we have seen, the majority of adolescents end their education after primary or junior high school. In addition, many girls Marisol’s age were already wives and mothers, and therefore no longer in school. In fact, Marisol explained, that in addition to her father’s desire that she stay in Santa Ursula to continue her education, he also reasoned that if she migrated with him, instead of Marisol’s mother, she might, given her age, marry (*juntarse*) while in the US, in which case her earnings would no longer go to her parents.

Teenage Wives and Mothers

Expectations and restrictions that define the lives of young women in Santa Ursula shaped Marisol’s daily life and how family and community members perceived her circumstances. As the caregiver for her youngest siblings, Marisol had the responsibility of an adult woman. Yet, her civil status largely defined her social standing in her family and community and the parameters of her social life. Because she was an unmarried teenager, Marisol, her family and community perceived her as a “minor” and not an adult. As a single teenager, Marisol had the freedom to spend time with friends, and go to dances. In addition, unlike married teenage girls, Marisol could have continued to go to school, if the burden of

caring for her two youngest siblings had permitted. Although Marisol's parents expected her to check in with them and her aunt or uncle who lived next door, she was able to socialize with friends and family members as she pleased. In fact, living without an older adult in the house afforded her greater freedom than if her parents, an alternative caregiver or even her older brother had been living with her.

During an interview in June 2006, Marisol casually remarked, "My father called yesterday and he told me that my brother is coming back. He says he'll be back in September. Since he also has his wife." "Oh, have they been together a while?" I asked, somewhat surprised. This was the first time Marisol had mentioned her brother's wife. "Since December (six months at the time)," she responded, "They met there, she went with her parents and her brothers and sisters a few years ago, after she finished primary school. Now she is fifteen years old."

In an attempt to quickly sort through this succinct barrage of information and what it might mean to be a fifteen-year-old wife in the transnational context of Indiana and Santa Ursula, I asked Marisol if her sister-in-law was still in school. She was. "Are they going to live here in the house with you?" I asked. "Uh huh. We're going to have company," she laughed. Her tone of voice suggested she would prefer not to have their "company," but she added, "and she is going to help me also," indicating that although she preferred they not live with her, their presence would be of some utility because her brother's wife would help her with household work, and perhaps child care. Trying to gauge how much help, particularly with child care, Marisol might expect from her brother's wife, I asked if they had children yet. If her sister-in-law had a young child of her own, she would have less time to help Marisol. "Well not right now," Marisol responded. "He says they don't have any yet. But probably they will come here

and the baby will be born here. They say it's a girl." "Oh, so she's pregnant?" I asked for clarification. "Yes, she's pregnant. They said that the girl will be born in October. October or November. So they are coming back in September."

"Are you looking forward to your brother coming back?" I asked. "My sister says we're not going to go out any more," Marisol laughed in response. "Like now, my sister just went out, and he (my brother) will call later and he will say, 'Where were you?' 'I went to such and such a place.' 'Because you know that I am going to come back soon and I'm not going to let you all go out.' That's why my sister says it would be better if he doesn't come back. We've gotten used to it being just us."

Marisol's social life was very important to her. Like her sister Gloria and brother Oscar, she regularly attended dances and parties in Santa Ursula on the weekends, while Ángel and Rosario watched over Sara and Miguel. Marisol also spent time socializing with her siblings. Sometimes they would go to Cholula to stroll around the central plaza, buy ice cream or bring Sara and Miguel to play on the swings and chase the squirrels. Occasionally she visited her former high school classmates in Cholula, or went with them to Puebla to see a movie or just walk around and talk. Marisol often spoke to me about the local *bandas* (gangs), which were primarily groups of male or female friends who went to parties together. In contrast to *bandas* in other communities, Santa Ursula's *bandas* did not participate in violent confrontations. Marisol sometimes showed me graffiti around town and would explain which group had written it or ask the meaning of English words in the graffiti. I wondered if her interest in the *bandas* came from belonging to one. She denied that she did, although I was uncertain if this were true. At any rate, she was very interested in the *bandas*, which reflected her social position as an unmarried teenager.

Marisol also had a boyfriend. He was a student at Santa Ursula's high school and a year younger than her. They had been together since March 2006, when he came to her house with five of their friends to celebrate Marisol's seventeenth birthday. As we saw in Chapter Four, for a teenage girl having a boyfriend is very different from having a husband. Without the restrictions of marriage, Marisol was able to spend time socializing with her friends and family members, which a young woman's husband and mother-in-law usually prohibit. Nevertheless, she usually kept her parents abreast of her activities and asked them for permission to go out, which they usually granted.

The contrast between seventeen-year-old Marisol as caregiver and her fifteen-year-old sister-in-law as mother-to-be is revealing. Santa Ursulans generally perceived of Marisol's situation as a primary caregiver and head of household as unusual. Indeed, she was the only unmarried, sibling caretaker I knew of who was not living with grandparents or other extended family members. In contrast, many young women married and had children at around fifteen or sixteen years of age. Although Marisol had a greater level of domestic and care responsibilities than her sister-in-law, she also had a greater level of freedom. Although Marisol's brother's "wife" was pregnant, and would soon have the responsibility of caring for an infant, home, and her husband, she was still under the protection of her parents, and would soon be under the protection and control of her husband and mother-in-law. If she had lived in Santa Ursula, she most likely would have already moved in with her husband and his family. Nevertheless, the fact that she was pregnant and "married" gave her adult status in Santa Ursula. In contrast, Santa Ursulans considered Marisol, who was still single at the time, a minor, although she had the responsibilities of an adult.

Marisol's aunts often teased Marisol and her sister Gloria by calling them "mothers." For example, one day while Marisol and I were talking in her living room, her aunt Inés stopped by to make plans with me for the next day. Referring to Marisol, she joked, "How is the single mother doing?" I laughed in response, but Marisol sat silently and shifted uncomfortably in her chair. She did not laugh along at her aunt's joke. Throughout my visit that day, Marisol's youngest brother and sister came in and out of the room, asking Marisol for permission, asking Marisol for help, but mostly asking Marisol for attention. Twice Sara stood near us softly whimpering until Marisol turned her attention to her. Aunt Inés teased, "They've come looking for their mother." When Sara and Miguel began to swing from a rope that hung over three sacs of corn in the corner of the living room, Marisol tried to distract and dissuade them by pretending to get ready to take them for a walk, "Come. Hurry up. Let's go to the store." When this failed, she employed the common persuasive refrain of Santa Ursulan mothers, "Should I go get the belt?" Aunt Inés laughed, "She has had practice too, being a mother, she knows how to discipline them, right?"

"Does she call you mother?" I asked. "She calls me by my name," Marisol responded. "Marisol?" I asked. "Well, she can't pronounce it well, so she calls me "Ma." When Marisol stepped out of the room to get Miguel a snack, Aunt Inés, sensing Marisol's irritation, whispered to me, "She says she doesn't call her mama, but she just did." Marisol, like her sisters Gloria and Rosario, usually responded with silence and quiet irritation to the suggestion that Sara thought Marisol was her mother. In part, the teasing seemed to be their aunts' way of marking the peculiarity of their circumstances while reminding the two older sisters that they were still minors, despite the fact that their parents had allowed them to live alone. If Marisol had been married and a mother at fifteen, sixteen or seventeen, her aunts would not have teased her. They

would have considered her circumstances commonplace. Maybe what her aunts considered most unusual about her circumstances was not the level of responsibility Marisol had, but the degree of freedom she had. If she had been married her husband or mother-in-law would have controlled her movement and activities. Perhaps for this reason, their teasing was a way of reminding Marisol that they were looking over her and monitoring her activities.

Extended Family Networks

Marisol and her siblings were deeply embedded in family networks that reached from Santa Ursula to Indiana. Marisol's parents, like many transnational parents (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997), remained present in their children's lives via phone calls, remittances and gifts. In addition, their extended family network in Santa Ursula played a role in the children's lives through their physical and day-to-day presence that Marisol's parents could not. Together they monitored the children's activities, well-being and safety, and supported Marisol in her role as caregiver. Most involved with the children was Marisol's father Gustavo's immediate family, particularly his parents, his brothers and his brothers' wives. As we saw, when Marisol's parents left, they left the children with Gustavo Senior's parents—Marisol's paternal grandparents. While the children lived in their grandparents' compound, Gustavo Senior's sisters-in-law, Aunt Eleuteria and Aunt Asunción, helped and monitored the children. Marisol explained that when they wanted to go out or purchase something, they would ask their aunt Eleuteria for permission. Aunt Eleuteria also helped cook for the children and Aunt Asunción looked after Sara and Miguel while Marisol was at school. Both her aunts and Aunt Eleuteria's husband Belarmino always kept an eye on them.

When Marisol and her siblings moved back into their own house, their father's family continued to play an important role. Although Marisol's parents gave the children permission to

live alone in the family house, they did so knowing that Gustavo Senior's brother, Reginaldo, and his wife Inés, lived right next door, and would help the children and watch out for them.

My father called my aunt Inés and my uncle Reginaldo, and he said 'Marisol and her brothers and sisters are going to move back into the house.' 'OK, we'll look after them.' 'OK,' he said." 'And at night if you hear something...' since the fence wasn't up yet, there wasn't anything between the house and the street. 'So if you hear something in the night, call them on the phone.' And that was it. But nothing like that ever happened, and we were never scared.

Marisol's parents' concern about their children's safety probably stemmed primarily from the fact that they were living alone, rather than the lack of a protective wall around their property. Building walls around one's property was a relatively new trend in Santa Ursula, as discussed earlier, and most Santa Ursulans seemed to feel safe living on open properties.

Marisol's extended family network also supported Marisol in her role as caregiver. Her authority over her siblings depended in part on the trust her parents placed in her and their ability to support her in her role. Her younger brothers and sisters, including fifteen-year-old Gloria, generally recognized Marisol's authority and would ask her for permission or inform Marisol about their activities. However, if her siblings failed to obey her, Marisol told her parents, who then reminded the children on the phone that they were to do so. In addition, Marisol counted on her uncle Reginaldo's support to reinforce her authority. Marisol explained, "My mother told me 'If they don't obey you, then go tell your uncle.' So I go tell my uncle, and he says, 'You know what, do this', and then I give them orders again, and that's it. Then they obey me."

Marisol and her siblings also kept their parents abreast of their activities through regular phone contact. Because her parents each worked two jobs, they did not have time to call during the week. Nevertheless, they always made sure to call once a week, usually on Saturday or Sunday, when they had time off from their jobs. Marisol's mother and father spoke with each of the children when they called. However, Marisol explained that she and her siblings were closer

to their father and generally preferred to speak with him. Gloria in particular was very attached to her father and would usually give him detailed accounts of her activities. “When my father calls she tells him where she went. She ALWAYS tells him ‘Monday I went here, Tuesday I went there also,’ and then she says ‘Sunday I went to Cholula.’ But she always has to tell him.” Some studies have found that children may more readily accept the migration of a father than a mother, because of gendered expectations for mothers to nurture and fathers to provide (Dreby 2010; Parreñas 2005).

Marisol had the responsibility of administering the money for her household. She paid the bills and her siblings went to her when they needed money. However, her parents and uncle Reginaldo played an important role in monitoring the children’s spending.

When my parents send money my uncle Reginaldo goes to pick it up in Cholula. And he tells me how much he is going to give me. He gives me money for our expenses and then he puts the rest away for the house. We need money to pay the electricity bill, the telephone, food. And that’s it. Also for school, and for *cooperaciones* (ritual spending), like for the church. We sometimes use the money to buy clothes or shoes, but my parents also sometimes send clothes for us. Just a couple of months ago they sent clothes for all of us. If we don’t have enough money I tell my uncle, and he asks me how much I need. I tell him “Twenty or a hundred pesos.” And he gives me a hundred and I tell him that I’ll let my father know. “Uh huh,” and he says “Yes.” And then I tell my father “*Mándame ya!*” (‘Send me money!’) [she laughed] and that’s it.

Marisol and her siblings had daily contact with their extended family, particularly their aunt Inés, uncle Reginaldo and their children. They participated with them in formal activities, such as fiestas, and had contact with them around routine tasks. During the year I was in Santa Ursula, there was no running water at Marisol’s house. Although they had a well, the *bomba* (water pump) was broken, and they were waiting for their uncle Reginaldo to repair it. As result, the children saw their aunt Inés every day when they went to get water from her house. Before the wall was constructed around the children’s property, their yard and was connected to Inés and Reginaldo’s unwall property. Therefore, getting water initially meant running a long hose

from Aunt Inés's house to theirs. Later, when the wall was built, the children came to gather water in buckets to bring back to their house. The children bathed at their aunt's house. I often saw them leaving Aunt Inés's house with their hair wet after showering. They also bathed at their neighbor's house. In addition, until the roof on Marisol's *cocina de humo* (smoke kitchen) was built, Marisol went to her aunt's house every morning to make tortillas. She waited until her aunt was finished using the *comal* (griddle) and the fire pit for her own tortillas.

Aunt Inés also included Marisol and her siblings in some of their household activities. In May 2006 Marisol helped Aunt Inés and her daughters plant corn on Aunt Inés's land. I was struck by the way Marisol worked quickly up and down the rows, faster than everyone else, which was typical of her energetic and responsible character. Meanwhile, her brother Miguel and their cousin Natalia wandered through the rows, playing in the dirt. Later they rested under the shade of a tree while Marisol continued working. I asked Inés if Marisol had come to help, because she would receive some of the corn during harvest season. "No, she just came to help because she wanted to," she explained. I then asked if Marisol would plant her own corn on her family's plot. She would not, Aunt Inés explained. Marisol's father left his land to his mother while they were in the US, and she would plant corn, but only for her own use. Marisol and her siblings were using the corn that their father had left for them. He had migrated just after harvest season. Aunt Inés explained that after they finished the corn their father left them, they would have to buy corn for their tortillas, which only a few families in town did, because almost everyone grew their own corn. Nevertheless, later in the year when Marisol's corn ran out, Aunt Inés ended up giving her sacks of corn that she had left over from the previous harvest.

Fiestas and Ritual Activities

While her parents were gone Marisol and her siblings regularly participated in family and community celebrations and ritual events, which served several purposes for Marisol and her family. First, Marisol's participation in such events allowed her parents to fulfill their ritual responsibilities, which allowed them to maintain and strengthen their social network ties and status in the community. In addition, such activities were an important part of Marisol and her siblings' social life. They regularly spent time with extended family at ritual events, and were therefore never alone despite their parents' distance. Fiestas were also a way through which the children acquired food. Although Marisol carried out ritual responsibilities with a sense of duty and pride, such activities added to her burden of work and responsibility. The final part of this section considers the way that Marisol and her siblings handled life cycle celebrations, focusing on the youngest sibling's second birthday. As we saw in Chapter Five, caregivers consider such fiestas a parent's responsibility and a great deal of work to prepare. As such, Marisol and her siblings marked these important events with small celebrations.

Ayuda and Social Obligations

Marisol helped maintain her mother's presence within her kin network by contributing *ayuda* (help) for fiestas. As discussed in Chapter Five, helping prepare meals for ritual events is a frequent activity of Santa Ursulan women and central to a system of reciprocity and exchange in rural communities throughout the Mesoamerica (Carrasco Rivas and Robichaux 2005). As Carrasco Rivas and Robichaux argue, *ayuda* creates debts among women and households and these debts are eventually repaid. Someone who fails to repay a debt by declining to help prepare for a fiesta, weakens a relationship of reciprocity and trust. In the long-term, a woman who reneges on her responsibility to reciprocate will eventually have difficulty recruiting help when her household hosts a party for a religious festival or a life cycle event. As such, through

ayuda women participate in a series of exchanges over a lifetime. Marisol's frequent participation in *ayuda* for fiestas hosted by members of her mother's social network therefore served to repay her mother's prior debts or create debts that her mother could cash in on upon her return when she hosted a celebration.

When helping prepare meals, Marisol usually carried out the tasks assigned to older daughters or young married women, who generally lack the experience and *sazón* (sense of seasoning) required to properly cook large quantities of foods, such as rice, *mole* sauce, meat and tamales. Helping as an older daughter often meant helping make tortillas, a job that requires several women and older girls, because fiestas are typically very large. Usually Marisol worked alongside her aunts and other older women, who watched over her and instructed her. Helping as an older daughter also entailed prepping ingredients that older women use to cook the meal. For example, for the blessing of Marisol's uncle Belarmino's new house in January 2007, Marisol's aunt Eleuteria and many family members prepared fifty-six chickens for the *mole* meal. When I arrived at Uncle Belarmino's house to help, Marisol and her thirteen-year-old cousin Natalia were busy cleaning and splitting open chicken intestines, which they piled into a large bucket, next to a plastic basin filled with chopped green onions and mint leaves. As was customary, the older women would later cook these together in pork fat to serve with tortillas to the women, men and children who helped make the meal for the fiesta, which was to be held the following day.⁹⁵

Marisol, along with some or all of her siblings, often attended fiestas and ritual events in the capacity of guests. As mentioned above, such activities were an important part of the children's social life. However, the children's attendance as guests also contributed to the maintenance and strengthening their parents' ties to their social networks. As Carrasco and

⁹⁵ Blood sausage and pork head soup are also typically served to those who help make the ritual meal.

Robichaux argue, parties, such as *quinceañeras* in Tlaxcala that are the object of their study, are “possible thanks to the family and social networks that are activated and strengthened with each *compromiso* (obligation or commitment) in which guests participate, contributing *ayuda* or in the capacity of guests of a godparent” (Carrasco Rivas and Robichaux 2005:484). In other words, when Marisol and her siblings attended parties as guests of a godparent, such as their aunt Inés, they were helping their parents maintain and strengthen their social networks.

On one occasion, Marisol took the place of her mother as the *madrina de cruz* (the godmother of the cross) for a woman who had died seven years earlier. It was customary in Santa Ursula for family and ritual kin members to bring a cross to the cemetery seven years after the death of a family member. Marisol’s mother had been the deceased woman’s *madrina* (godmother) years earlier. Since she was not in Santa Ursula for the seven year mass, she asked Marisol to take her place, which entailed going to the cemetery with the woman’s family at nine o’clock in the night, praying for two hours, and then going back to the woman’s house for a meal. Marisol spoke with pride about her role as *madrina*. Usually only married women served as *madrinas de cruz*. This was the only occasion that I knew of in which Marisol served in the capacity of a godparent in place of her parents. This happened for two reasons. First, this particular godparent role did not require a great deal of work, as would serving as a godparent for a baptism, first communion or wedding. In addition, her mother was already the godmother, so Marisol’s participation as *madrina* did not involve forging new ties of *compadrazgo*.

Todos Santos: Caring for the Souls of the Deceased

Marisol’s role in maintaining kinship ties while her parents were away included visiting with and attending to the souls of deceased family members for *Todos Santos* (All Souls Day or The Day of the Dead). On All Souls Days families gather at their relatives’ tombstones and set

up *ofrendas* (offerings) in their homes, which include bright orange *zempasuchil* (marigold) flowers, candles, *hojaldras* (Day of the Dead bread), *saumerios* (incense burners), incense, photographs of the deceased person, *chiquihuites* (handless baskets) filled with fruit, the favorite food and drinks of the deceased.⁹⁶ On November 1st family members create a path of marigolds from the street, through the front door, to the altar, in order to lead their relative's soul inside to visit. On November 2nd a new path of marigolds guides the soul out of the house. Most women make tamales and *mole*, offering the first serving to the *ánimas* (souls) by placing it on the *ofrenda*.⁹⁷ Sharing a meal among living and deceased family and community members on this day, according Castañeda Salgado, “reproduces a model of fundamental sociability within local society” (2005:443) and forms part of numerous lifecycle social gatherings, in which kin, including the deceased, are central.

Because souls only come to visit on this day, Marisol played an important role in “remembering” her family's deceased members, who might otherwise have been “forgotten.” Since Marisol's mother usually purchased and arranged the items for the gravestone and altar, Marisol got advice from her aunt Inés about what to bring to the cemetery. She and Gloria went with Aunt Inés and her family to the cemetery for the mass, after which each family tended to their relatives' tombs—sprinkling them with water and adorning them with candles and flowers. Aunt Inés and her daughters freshened the flowers on her baby son's grave and sprinkled it with water and confetti.⁹⁸ Aunt Inés also placed flowers and confetti on a grave next to her baby's grave, explaining to me, “His parents forgot about him, because they are in the United States.”

⁹⁶ See Carrasco Rivas and Robichaux (2005) for the symbolic use of *chiquihuites* in family reciprocity and compadrazgo networks.

⁹⁷ In Cholula *Ofrendas* for the first *Todos Santos*---the first year of a family member's death---often fill an entire room, and neighbors and kin came to the house to visit and eat mole in honor of the recently deceased.

⁹⁸ Santa Ursulans only use confetti to decorate the gravestones of children. In addition, mothers usually place candy, snacks, toys or stuffed animals on *ofredas* of children and infants.

There were many small graves for children, reflecting the fact that child morbidity was fairly high in Santa Ursula.⁹⁹ Almost all women I knew in their thirties and older had lost at least one child. Marisol's mother had lost two children. Marisol tended to the graves of her two siblings, as well as that of her father's grandfather Ismael. Caring for the souls of children and parents who have died also form part of intergenerational obligations of *ayuda* (Magazine and Ramírez Sánchez 2007:60). Therefore, tending to the gravesites of her sibling and great grandfather can also be understood in terms of Marisol meeting her parents' obligation in the series of long-term intergenerational exchanges of *ayuda* that begin at birth and continue after death.

The Cargo System: Marisol as Mayordomo

The most time-consuming ritual responsibility that Marisol had during her parents' absence was as *mayordomo* for *La Preciosa Sangre de Cristo* (The Precious Blood of Christ). The cargo of *La Preciosa* rotated each year among the Santa Ursula's three barrios, so that each household held the cargo every three years. Since there were 112 households in Marisol's barrio, there were 112 *mayordomos* when she received the cargo in March 2006. Marisol explained, "Since it was my father's turn to be *mayordomo*, I am going in his place," and that she had asked for his permission to do so. Marisol's responsibilities as *mayordomo* included attending meetings at the church every Monday afternoon with the other *mayordomos* until the conclusion of the fiesta of *La Preciosa*. To do so she waited for her siblings to return from school in order to leave Miguel and Sara in their care. Each *mayordomo* contributed 1,500 pesos (US\$150), which went towards building the bell tower for the new church. The other *mayordomos* elected her to take notes and keep a list of names of those who contributed their part.

⁹⁹ More than 10 percent of children born to women aged fifteen to forty nine were deceased (INEGI 2000).

While Marisol retained a dutiful attitude throughout her time as *mayordomo*, I observed many times how the cargo was burdensome for her and sometimes disrupted her other activities. For example, she had not seen her friends from her high school in Cholula since receiving the cargo, because she had been too busy. Her activities as *mayordomo* also conflicted at times with her other ritual obligations. On one occasion in June 2006 she stopped by Amalia's house to apologize for not helping prepare the ritual meal or attend the fiesta the previous day, because she had been at the church for a Monday *mayordomo* meeting. When she arrived at Amalia's house, several women were helping clean up from party, and, as is customary, eating leftover *mole*, rice and tamales from the day before. One woman immediately disappeared into the *cocina de humo* (the smoke kitchen) and quickly returned with a large bowl of *mole* for Marisol. "Oh," Marisol said placing her hand on her belly, "I'm full, we have already eaten." Meeting her social obligation to accept the plate of food, she slowly nibbled on a tortilla dipping it in the soupy *mole* sauce and leaving the large pieces of pork and chicken untouched.

Marisol stayed only for a few minutes, listening to the women's conversations before placing her hand over her belly again and repeating, "Enough, I'm full." Amalia brought out a large plastic bucket filled to the top with *mole*, chicken and pork for her to bring back to her house. Marisol added the meat and sauce from her dish. "I just came by to apologize for not stopping by yesterday," Marisol explained politely. "It was late and I didn't want to just stop by for food, since I wasn't able to come and help earlier." "We heard you were at the church," Amalia said. "We heard you fell asleep in the church," the women chided. Marisol laughed, "I was so tired, I thought I would just lay down in the pew for a few minutes, and when I woke up I realized I had been sleeping for an hour." "Yes, we heard you were sleeping," they laughed again, reprimanding Marisol.

Despite the women teasing Marisol for having breached proper church etiquette by falling asleep in a pew, Marisol was in fact very diligent in carrying out her parents' ritual responsibilities. As this narrative shows, not only was she dutifully acting as *mayordomo* on the day that Amalia hosted a fiesta, but she was also conscientious about her responsibility to fulfill her mother's obligation to help Amalia cook for the fiesta. The fact that Marisol had fallen deeply asleep during the *mayordomo* meeting reflects that, in spite of her usually energetic and cheerful disposition, her responsibilities were time consuming and sometimes taxing. In addition this narrative demonstrates that Marisol was well versed in the local social protocol of reciprocity, which Castañeda Salgado explains includes a range of social interactions from greetings to the exchange of material goods (2005:449). Not only had Marisol stopped by to apologize to Amalia, but she knew that she should socialize for a few minutes and accept the mole offered to her if only by nibbling on a tortilla.

Mole and the Redistribution of Food

All guests brought to fiestas plastic buckets in which to take home *mole* and meat. Some scholars of the fiesta system have stressed how the cargo system functions to redistribute highly valued foods, such as meat (Dow 1977), among community members. For Marisol and her siblings, helping and attending these events contributed a significant amount of food to their diets, and alleviated some of the children's burden of buying and preparing food for themselves. In order to help the children, family members usually gave Marisol and her siblings more food than was customary. For example, Marisol and her sisters attended a large baptism party on September 23, 2006, for which their aunt Inés was the godmother. As the godmother, Aunt Inés was expected to bring many family members with her. Marisol and her sisters sat with their aunts and cousins among what must have been nearly three hundred guests. The food came out:

plates of flavored rice, followed by large dishes of *mole*. Because their aunt Inés was the godmother, the hostess brought her a large platter decorated with red flowers. In the middle of the platter sat an entire cooked turkey with a cigarette smoking from its beak. Marisol's aunt carved up the turkey, giving the largest pieces to Marisol and her sisters, who placed the pieces together with those they pulled from their dishes and poured the mole sauce into another large bucket.

Sometimes the children came to fiestas only to pick up food. For example, on October 28, 2006, Aunt Inés and Uncle Reginaldo hosted a party for their three-year-old son's baptism. Marisol helped serve food, while her brother Ángel sat in the *cocina de humo* eating a plate full of *carnitas* (braised pork pieces). Later that evening Gloria and Rosario came by for food. Their hair was wet and brushed straight down their backs. They apologized to their aunt for arriving late. They were at the neighbor's house bathing. Aunt Inés commented to me that she knew they were on their way over, because she had heard them knocking on the big metal doors of their house for their brother to let them in. "I knew it was them," she told me. Aunt Inés was always looking out for them. She told the children to sit down and eat. Gloria and Rosario sat down together on a small wooden chair and began to pick a little at their food. Soon they began playing and joking with each other, Gloria pretending to sit on Rosario, who then pushed Gloria off. They burst into laughter and repeated their game several times. Eventually they stood up to announce they were leaving. They had hardly eaten, but left with their buckets full of meat and rice for the next day's meal.

Lifecycle and Family Celebrations: Sara's Second Birthday

Marisol and her siblings celebrated important occasions in their lives with small gatherings that often involved only the seven siblings. Marisol's parents always called the

children on special occasions, such as birthdays and Christmas, and sent gifts and money. They were particularly concerned with birthdays for the two youngest children, and hoped to return to Santa Ursula before their next birthdays in order to celebrate with them. Despite their distance, the children's parents were involved in planning the celebrations that the children held for such occasions. For example, as we saw earlier, Marisol had asked her father's permission to invite her friends to her house to celebrate her seventeen birthday. While their parents were away, Oscar graduated from primary school. As mentioned earlier, this is an important event in a young person's life that parents usually celebrate with a large party, a *mole* meal and godparents, who often give the child a bicycle as a gift. Because preparing such a party would have entailed a great deal of work for Marisol, her parents decided that the children should have a small celebration. They sent Marisol money to prepare a small meal for Oscar and his godparents and said they would prepare him a large meal in celebration of his graduation when they returned to Santa Ursula

On June 18, 2006, Marisol invited me to come to the house the next evening at around six o'clock to celebrate Sara's birthday. Since she had told me in some detail a few weeks earlier that they were deciding between pizza or cake for Sara's birthday, I asked which they had chosen. There was a small pizzeria in Santa Ursula owned by a return migrant who had lived in Chicago. Going there for pizza was a special treat for the children. "Both," she responded, adding that she had forgotten about Sara's birthday until her father called to ask if Sara wanted pizza or cake. He said they could have both. Marisol planned to go the next day to Cholula to pick up the cake. When I arrived at Marisol's house the next day little Sara was playing alone in the patio. Oscar, Rosario and Ángel were watching television in the living room, and Miguel

was asleep in the next room. They did not know where Marisol was, but expected her home by six o'clock so they could to Cholula for the cake.

Sara was wearing a fancy birthday outfit—a silky dress covered in brightly colored flowers, a pink crocheted handbag, black cowboy boots and a lacey white hat under which she wore two pink sequined barrettes in her hair. The children's parents had sent this special birthday outfit a couple of days earlier, along with sun-hats for all the girls, video games for the three boys, and money so that the girls could purchase a new dresser. The shiny new white dresser—adorned with two swans whose pink necks formed a mirror frame—was prominently displayed in the living room. Tied to it were three pink McDonalds balloons that their parents had sent for Sara's birthday. They also included in the package photographs of themselves with their new baby Crístopher, which Marisol had tucked under the dresser's plastic protective covering. The gifts and the photographs were a visible reminder that their parents were thinking of the children, particularly on this special day. They had obviously chosen Sara's outfit with great care, and I imagined that they did not envision her all dressed up and playing alone in the patio that day.

I played with Sara in the patio until Rosario came out to ask if I wanted to eat, as it was customary for Santa Ursulans to serve their guests food immediately upon their arrival. I told her I would wait for Marisol and her other family members, who I assumed Marisol had invited, since she had invited me. She had not. In retrospect, doing so would have entailed a considerable amount of extra work for Marisol, because she would have had to have cooked a large meal. Rosario set up a small table with a table cloth and four chairs in the living room on which she placed warm tortillas, coca-cola and three bowls of chicken soup for Sara, herself and me. She explained that Marisol had gone to Cholula in the morning to shop while her siblings

were at school. With Sara and Miguel in tow she was unable to carry the cake, and so only bought a chicken for the soup. Sara, too small to reach the table, stood on her chair to eat. Her silky dress was soon covered in chicken soup.

Rosario pointed out to me photos on the wall from Miguel's second birthday. He was blowing out the candles on an enormous colorful cake, and his father stood proudly behind him. The contrast between Miguel's second birthday and Sara's, which was supposed to be a pizza and birthday cake celebration, was striking. By eight o'clock Marisol had not shown up, and Gloria was also elsewhere, although I did not know where. I soon left, saying goodbye to the children who were deeply engrossed in their Nintendo Game Boys. Only Sara looked up to say goodbye.

Several days later Aunt Inés told me that Gloria had brought Sara her cake later that night. "Marisol sent her parents some photographs of themselves and you're in them," she told me laughing, "She said she's going to tell them, 'Look, since you are not here, look who is taking care of us.'" That afternoon Marisol came to see me to apologize for not being at the house on Monday when I came for Sara's birthday. As always, she was very responsible and polite. I told her that I heard she was at a church meeting for *La Preciosa* cargo and asked if it felt like a lot of work to be *mayordomo* with all the other responsibilities that she had. "Yes," she answered concisely, but as usual did not say much more about the matter.

This narrative speaks to several issues. First, the gifts and special birthday outfit for Sara illustrate how the children's parents remained present in their children's lives, particularly for special occasions. Second, the way the children planned and celebrated Sara's birthday is indicative of the way that family members often reduce child-centered celebrations when parents are in the United States, because of the amount of work such *fiestas* entail. Third, as discussed n

the previous section, Marisol's experience of taking over the cargo responsibilities for her father consumed a great deal of Marisol's time, which in this case interfered with her plans for Sara's birthday. Third, eleven-year-old Rosario's role that day—she had dressed Sara, and took charge of receiving me and serving the food in Marisol's absence—demonstrates the way that all the children participated in caring and other household responsibilities, as I discuss in the following section.

Daily Life and Responsibilities

As we have seen, in their parents' absence children play an important role in social reproduction—caring for themselves, their home or sometimes an elderly grandparent. Although children's responsibilities, particularly those of eldest unmarried daughters, increase when a mother migrates, Santa Ursulans expect children to work and therefore generally consider the activities they carry out in the parents' absence acceptable, with the exception certain circumstances such as young children who carry out dangerous tasks like cooking. We have also analyzed Marisol's role in maintaining her parents' and household's place in kin and social networks by participating in activities of reciprocity and exchange that are central to the fabric of Santa Ursulan social life. The following sections address three additional points about the role of children's labor in transnational families. First, although an eldest unmarried daughter might become primary caregiver, other children in the household have responsibilities. Marisol and her siblings cooperated with each other to keep their household and family running. Second, the construction on the family house added to Marisol's responsibilities. The final section analyzes an incident in which Sara become gravely ill and considers older siblings' role and ability to affectively care for young children in the face of illness.

Cooperation among Siblings

Social reproduction in Santa Ursula is very labor intensive. When women and older girls are not busy in their homes with domestic chores, they are busy in labor intensive activities of ritual celebrations. Marisol, as the primary caregiver, was constantly occupied with her domestic and ritual responsibilities and her siblings' cooperation made it possible for her to carry out her activities. On a typical weekday, Gloria, Oscar, Rosario and Ángel got up early to be at school at eight o'clock. Oscar usually went to the store to buy bread for their breakfast. While they got dressed, ate breakfast and watched over Sara and Miguel, Marisol would walk or ride her bicycle to the *molino* (mill) to grind corn for their tortillas, which she made by hand every day. "I take advantage of them being home to go to the *molino*," she explained, "They watch *Dora la Exploradora* while I go *moler* (grind the corn)." Marisol's siblings usually left warm milk on the stove for Marisol, Miguel and Sara's breakfast, and then walked to school with their friends. Then Marisol, Miguel and Sara ate breakfast and began their day together.

During the day, Marisol spent much of the day watching over Sara and Miguel and getting the housework done. Since Marisol had her hands full with Miguel and Sara, her father decided not to send Miguel to preschool when he turned three. Instead, they planned to enroll him in preschool when they returned to Santa Ursula. Her father was afraid that it would be burdensome for Marisol to bring him to school, which was a fifteen to twenty minute walk from their house every morning at nine and then pick him up again at noon. As we saw in Chapter Four, many mothers and caregivers complained that bringing their children to preschool disrupted their morning routine of domestic chores and for this reason many parents chose not to enroll their children in preschool.

After school and on the weekends Marisol's siblings helped with the domestic chores. Gloria, the next oldest sibling after Marisol, helped the most. She made the tortillas on the

weekends, did a great deal of the cooking, washed clothes, swept and mopped the floors. However, the older children participated and helped each other. For example, they usually cooked their afternoon meal together, and although Marisol and Gloria usually did the shopping together, their other siblings took over this responsibility when Marisol or Gloria were not available. In addition, Gloria, Oscar, Ángel and Rosario often watched Sara and Miguel when Marisol was not home. “Usually if I have to go out somewhere then I will say to the older ones, ‘Rosario come put the television on,’ or they might draw and write, even if they only scribble, there they are.”

Each sibling also had her or his own activities and responsibilities. Rosario, for example, took care of the chickens, turkeys and a duck. Their ten-year-old brother, Ángel was in charge of feeding the pigs, because, as Marisol explained, their thirteen-year-old brother Oscar had an after-school job. He had been working as an apprentice in a mechanic shop in Santa Ursula since he was twelve years old. He usually came home from school to drop off his books, change into work clothes and eat before heading to the shop at about five o'clock. He returned home in the evening to do his homework, and would often ask Marisol for permission to go out with his friends. Although Oscar tended to be home less frequently than his siblings, and seemed more independent, because he had a job, earned his own money and spent much of his time socializing with his friends, he still went to Marisol for permission and informed her of his activities. He also asked her for money sometimes, because he was trying to saving his earning from his job.

The House

The expansion and remodeling of Marisol's house added another dimension to Marisol's responsibilities. In conjunction with her father's two brothers, Marisol helped oversee and manage the construction of the house. Her uncles Reginaldo and Belarmino hired the architect

and construction crew, and were responsible for paying for construction materials and workers with remittances Marisol's father sent them. However, because Marisol was the head of the household, she dealt with the workers and the day-to-day business of the construction. For example, one day when I was visiting Marisol the workers showed up, but the cement Marisol had ordered had not arrived. She sent the workers away, told them to come back the next day and called the cement distributor to arrange for the delivery. On another occasion, Marisol was busy preparing food to serve to the workers, because they were placing the roof on the house that day, which Santa Ursulans consider an important event. Her thirteen-year-old cousin Natalia came over to help Marisol. Normally, Marisol's mother would have made and served the workers for this special day.

Living in a construction zone generated other kinds of work. For example, Marisol and her siblings moved the furniture around the house several times during the construction in order to clear out the rooms for remodeling. At one point, the children moved all of the furniture from the two bedrooms and the kitchen into the living room, where they ate and slept for weeks while the construction crew worked on the rest of the house. Living in a construction zone also added an extra dimension to Marisol's caregiving responsibilities, particularly for her two youngest siblings. During the day she needed to watch over them carefully in order to keep them safe. Marisol explained that they always wanted to go out to play in the piles of construction material, and she had to find ways to keep them inside. When the second level of the house was finally constructed, Marisol had to make sure that Sara and Miguel did not climb up the spiral cement staircase, which had no guardrail. She had put a piece of plywood at the bottom of the stairs to block their way, but when I would visit, she was often shouting after them to stay away from the stairs.

Marisol frequently talked about the expansion and remodeling of her house, and showed me the construction as it progressed. For example, one day she brought me into the living room, where she and her siblings were temporarily housed, along with everything from the kitchen. She spread the floor plans out across her bed, and carefully showed me where the new bedrooms would be located. A couple of months later, when the second floor was built, she took me up the unfinished stairs, and instructed me which tiles to step on so that we could cross the recently tiled floor into the bedrooms—five in total. She showed me each room and explained which family member would sleep where. Her father told Marisol and her siblings to choose their rooms and move into them when they were finished, and he let Marisol decide on certain finishing details, such as the designs around the ceiling light fixtures throughout the house. As Marisol showed me the room she was to share with her sister Gloria on the second floor, her cousin Natalia joked, “You can throw a rope out the window so your boyfriend can climb up.” Indeed, it was a house fit for a princess.

“Sara almost Died on Sunday”

Marisol seemed uncharacteristically serious and sullen one day in late November 2006. I asked her about the house, which usually evoked a cheerful response. Marisol responded accordingly, explaining which room she had chosen for herself and her sister, which room would be the master bedroom for her parents, and that her oldest brother would share a room with his wife and baby. “That sounds nice,” I said, “Are you happy with the way the house is turning out?” “I am happy now,” she replied, pausing for a moment, “But I wasn’t happy before, because Sara almost died on Sunday.” Of course I was taken aback by Marisol’s answer, and given her flat tone, I was not sure if she was exaggerating. She was not.

On Sunday afternoon Marisol left Sara with Gloria and her other siblings for a couple of hours to go shopping in Cholula. She had noticed that morning that Sara had a fever; she had been sick for a couple of weeks with the flu. However, her condition had improved with medicine prescribed by the clinic doctor. When Marisol left Sara was asleep in a bedroom. The other children were in the living room watching videos that their parents had recently sent. When four-year-old Miguel went into the bedroom to get another video he noticed Sara shaking violently. He ran to tell Gloria, who immediately sent Ángel to get Aunt Inés.

Aunt Inés called their uncle Belarmino, who had a car, to take them to the doctor. While they waited for Belarmino, Aunt Inés *le pasó el huevo, porque le dió el aire* (passed the egg on her, because the air had gotten to her).¹⁰⁰ Santa Ursula's private doctor was not home, so they drove to Cholula. The trip was harrowing. The car stalled three times. Then Sara stopped breathing. Aunt Inés shook Sara and began "pushing on her stomach and blowing in her face" as she had seen demonstrated on television and on a poster at the clinic. Eventually, Sara reacted. The pediatrician in Cholula examined Sara and gave her medicine. When he found out that Sara's fifteen-year-old sister was watching her that day and that she normally was in the care of her seventeen-year-old sister, he told Aunt Inés that Sara should spend the night at her house. Marisol and her siblings stayed awake through the night at Aunt Inés's house crying and worrying. By morning, Sara seemed better. That night the children went back to their house, and all slept together in the warmest room—Marisol and Rosario in bed with Sara and the other children on a recently purchased mattress they placed on the floor. The problem, Marisol explained in retrospect, was that the temperature had dropped during those days, and that is why Sara had suffered a relapse.

¹⁰⁰ It is a widely-held belief in Mexico that colds and flu-like symptoms are caused, among other reasons, by exposure to drafts and winds (Baer et. al 2008). Passing a raw egg over the body of a person suffering from certain symptoms or afflictions, such as the evil eye, is a common folk remedy in Mexico and other parts of Latin America.

In light of this incident, Marisol explained that it “was better” that she stayed with Miguel and Sara, because her other siblings were not able to control them, because Miguel and Sara did not obey them. Marisol also said that she was trying to keep them inside the house all the time, but that they always wanted to go out and play in the pile of sand that was for the house construction. “I tell Sara, ‘Do you want to die?’ And then she says, ‘No’ and she stays inside.” Still understandably shaken by the incident, Marisol explained, “It will be my fault if Sara dies. It is my responsibility to care for her.” “It was not your fault,” I said, trying to comfort her. “That is what my mother said,” Marisol responded. “She told me that she had spoken to Sara on the phone that morning, and that she sounded fine. She said that everything happened very quickly.” Marisol also explained that her mother was going to return to Santa Ursula, but when she found out that Sara was better her parents decided to wait until the house was finished. “She’s going to try to come back for Sara’s third birthday, and if she cannot make it for that, then for Miguel’s birthday. Also, they are going to baptize Sara when they come.” For once, Marisol seemed eager for her parents to return.

Caring for children in illness is more challenging for younger caregivers, such as Marisol, who lack the experience of a grandmother or older aunt, as I discuss in Chapter Five. Women are typically in charge of caring for their family’s health and use a combination of and allopathic medicine, primarily through the local clinic and traditional methods, such as herbs. As we saw, Marisol used the services of the clinic—as she had already taken Sara to the doctor who prescribed her medicine. In addition, I had seen Marisol attend the DIF *Jornadas de Salud* where she had taken Sara to the dentist for a chipped front tooth. Prior to this incident, when Sara was ill Marisol also sought advice from Aunt Inés who told her what kind of tea to prepare for stomach problems or which medicine to take for a fever or flulike symptoms. Aunt Inés was

crucial to Sara's survival in this case. She quickly got Belarmino to bring her and Sara to a doctor—a private doctor. She treated her with traditional methods (by passing the egg on her), and when Sara stopped breathing, she performed CPR on her based on knowledge she had attained from television and the clinic. Indeed, her prior experience and knowledge as a mother allowed her to act quickly which ultimately saved Sara's life that day.

Conclusion

Marisol's story makes evident the level of responsibility for domestic and caring labor that older, unmarried daughters acquire when mothers migrate. Although Marisol and her siblings went to "live with their grandparents" when their parents migrated, the children actually lived in a room separate from their grandparents' house within their grandparents' compound, where Marisol acted as primary caregiver, with help from aunt. Therefore, although Marisol's responsibilities increased when she and her siblings moved back to their house, she already had the responsibility of primary caregiver. This Chapter analyzes how we might understand Marisol's circumstances in terms of childhood, youth and adulthood. Although Marisol had the responsibility of an adult woman, she and her family still regarded her as a minor, because she was not married or a mother.

Santa Ursulans generally regard the kind of work that Marisol performed as acceptable. Helping with domestic chores, caring for young children, helping with brickwork and corn cultivation are all typical activities for children in Santa Ursula, and throughout Cholula's townships. In addition, many unmarried teenage girls who lived with their mothers had dropped out of school to help their families with their labor, both productive and reproductive. Furthermore, many girls her age were already married, which meant that they had a great deal of reproductive and productive responsibilities, as recently married women contribute a large

amount of labor to their husband's parents' household in the early years of marriage. Many teenage girls are also mothers, and therefore have care responsibilities for infants and toddlers. Therefore, although the migration of Marisol's mother cut short her education, the fact that Marisol was in high school meant that she had more years of education than most teenagers in Santa Ursula. In addition, although the number of Santa Ursulan children studying beyond primary school has increased in recent years, many teenagers choose not to attend high school because opportunities in local and national labor markets in Mexico are limited.

The prominent role of older girls in domestic labor is not particular to Santa Ursula. Around the world older girls play an important role in domestic and caring labor, both paid and unpaid. In Mexico, and elsewhere in Latin America, there is a long history of contracting young women and girls as paid domestic workers (Churchill 2004; Goldsmith 1990; Howell 1999; Magazine and Ramírez 2007). These arrangements vary in their characteristics and level of exploitation. In poor families, parents might send their older daughters, some as young as thirteen or younger, to work for other families, in order to relieve the burden of supporting her and gain the benefit of her salary (Gill 1994; Magazine and Ramírez 2007; Mummert 1994). Despite Mexican labor laws that prohibit children younger than sixteen from working, the practice of employing under-age girls as domestics still occurs, particularly in poorer regions of Mexico. These jobs are among the most exploitative, as they are usually live-in positions, in which a girl is constantly on call for her employers and lacks the protection and support of her family network (Chaney and Castro 1989).

As Parreñas argues, "the migration of women connects systems of gender inequality in both sending and receiving nations to global capitalism," (2000:569) as women who migrate employ poorer women in their nation of origin to care for their dependents and homes. Such

systems of gender inequality rely not only on paid labor or poorer women, but also unpaid labor of female kin. Moreover, systems of gender inequality also include children and teenagers. The expectations and opportunities for adolescent girls in Santa Ursula, in terms of marriage, motherhood, work and education, shape their role as caregivers when mothers migrate. Older children, like Marisol, who take over the burden of reproductive labor when their mothers migrate form part of the “international division of reproductive labor” (Parreñas 2000). Mary Romero argues that the “purchasing power” of middle-class families, compared to working poor families, alters “the “quality of work that employed mothers’ children do (1997:166). What this means is that children’s work is more likely to supplant educational and social activities in working poor families rather than middle- or upper-class families. Within the “international division of reproductive labor” children’s work is more likely to supplant educational and social activities of children in migrant sending communities in poorer nations, than in wealthier receiving nations.

Chapter Nine

Niños Abandonados: Child Abandonment and the State

This chapter analyses the relationship of *niños abandonados* (abandoned children) to children of migrant parents. We have seen how children living with alternative caregivers are usually deeply embedded in extended family networks that reach from Santa Ursula to the United States, and the role that such networks play in children's daily lives and care needs. We shall now examine what happens when family networks on which alternative care arrangements depend break down and children end up in a situation of abandonment. I begin this chapter by considering why anthropologists have given little attention to the topic of child abuse and neglect and the difficulties that analyzing child abandonment in the context of parental migration poses. Next, I examine how the concept *abandonment* relates to how Santa Ursulans, officials and professionals perceive and define the conditions of children whose parents are in the United States. Focusing on the DIF social worker's narration of a 1991 child abandonment case in Santa Ursula, the remainder of this chapter considers how children may end up in a situation of abandonment when parents migrate and the role of the DIF in such cases.

Anthropology, Child Maltreatment and Abandonment

In Santa Ursula cases of child abuse or neglect are unusual. Moreover, the incidence of child maltreatment or abandonment related specifically to parental migration is very low. On the contrary, as discussed in previous chapters, most children of migrant parents live with alternative caregivers, who often accept the responsibility with pride, and children are deeply embedded in family networks that reach from Santa Ursula to the United States. Nevertheless, because my research closely considered the perspectives and roles of state institutions and representatives in

the lives of children of migrant parents, the issue of child abandonment emerged as an important theme in my findings. The topic of child abandonment appeared in two principal ways. First, professionals, such as teachers, DIF representatives and other state officials, tended to use the terms *abandonment* or *abandoned* children to describe the situation of all children whose mothers had migrated. I believe professionals often highlighted the negative effects of parental migration, such as abandonment, in part, because they assumed that I wanted to determine what social problems might arise when parents leave children with caregivers. Second, DIF involvement with children of migrant parents came largely through intervention in cases of abuse and abandonment.

Given the fact that cases of abandonment due to parental migration in Santa Ursula are rare, interpreting such cases poses difficulties. Medical anthropologist Jill E. Korbin, who has studied and written extensively on child abuse and neglect, argues that anthropologists have produced little cross-cultural data on child maltreatment, because of the discipline's tendency to focus on normative cultural patterns. "Since child maltreatment is a low base rate behavior, it may not be observed in smaller-scale societies during the traditional year-long period of anthropological fieldwork, or cases may be so few that they are difficult to interpret" (Korbin 1987a:4). Moreover, a community study would not detect children who escape abusive domestic situations by migrating to large cities (Magazine 2003). As a result, ethnographic descriptions tend to exclude such cases. Indeed, the issue of child abandonment due to migration came to my attention specifically because the DIF dealt with a case of six abandoned siblings in Santa Ursula during the period of my fieldwork. If I had conducted my fieldwork a year earlier, most likely the issue of abandonment would have been less prominent in my analysis. Nevertheless, as

Korbin points out, the absence of published anthropological data on maltreatment does not mean the problem does not exist in a community.

Korbin (1987) also points out that difficulty in interpreting child maltreatment or neglect relates not only to low incidence, but also to the fact that such behavior may seem to contradict dominant cultural patterns in a community, such as those of Inuit and Hawaiian-Polynesians, who tend to treat children with warmth and indulgence. Similarly, child abandonment seems to contradict the protectiveness and pride that Santa Ursulans usually display towards their children. As discussed in previous chapters, Santa Ursulans greatly value their children. All adult men and women I knew aspired to have children. Parents and caregivers generally perceived children as an asset rather than a burden. Many parents and caregivers described children primary school-aged and older as able to “fend for themselves” and thus not a great deal of extra work. In addition, older children typically help with productive activities, such as corn cultivation, brickwork and caring for animals, as well as household tasks and childcare. Parents, especially mothers, consider children a source of companionship, and children also help to build and strengthen social networks through *compadrazgo*. Parents count on their children to help them in old age, and grandchildren are an important source of companionship and help to many older Santa Ursulans. Consequently, cases of maltreatment or abandonment seem to contradict Santa Ursulans’ attitudes towards children.

Analyzing the issue of child abandonment in a study about children of migrant parents also poses a potential dilemma of contributing to what Parreñas calls the “dismal view of transnational households” (2005:40). Parreñas, in her study of Filipino transnational families, argues that media and academic reports, “provide a gloomy depiction of the lives of children of transnational families” by characterizing such children as abandoned and deviant (2005:40).

Parreñas maintains that academics tend to frame their analyses of children in terms of emotional and moral problems, implying that the ideal family is one in which both parents, and particularly the mother, is present. Moreover, media accounts reinforce this view with their propensity “to present negative reports on the welfare of children in transnational families” (2005:40). Reports on mother-away families in particular often claim “that children fare poorly and receive inadequate care” (2005:40). In Cholula, newspaper stories about migrants or their children were infrequent, yet, as Parreñas argues, the media reported on negative outcomes of parental migration for children.

Between September 2005 and February 2007, only one report about Cholula’s transnational families appeared in local newspapers. The front page headline read: “In Santa Ursula, child abandonment.” The article focused on children abandoned due to parental migration, and portrayed the incidence of abandonment as much higher than it actually is. The article began:

The township of Santa Ursula is where the most cases of abandonment of boys and girls by parents who go in search of the American dream are being registered. The Municipal DIF is intervening in order to provide them with protection...(the) legal coordinator and head of the Services and Prevention of Maltreatment Clinic, indicated that “The cases that we are most dealing with in this area are ones of nutrition and emancipation, because many minors are abandoned by their parents who go looking for the American dream.”¹⁰¹

The article described the then recent case of six siblings in Santa Ursula who were living alone in one room that had been “set up as housing.” The father was incarcerated and the mother had gone to the United States. The DIF intervened by locating the paternal grandmother who lived in another Cholulan town and placing the children in her custody. When I interviewed the DIF lawyer, she explained that “The mother had left them alone.” Their maternal grandmother had died of diabetes, and the mother did not leave the children with their paternal grandmother

¹⁰¹ I have not included the citation of this newspaper article in order to protect the identity of the community.

because she had a bad relationship with her. It is possible that the mother's intention, rather than abandoning her children, had been to leave the oldest of the siblings, a twelve-year-old girl, in charge of her younger siblings and the household, as the lawyer explained that the older sister did "everything for them." She would dress them, cook for them and bring them to school. At any rate, when I went to the DIF to find out more about services for families of emigrants, the DIF lawyer depicted child abandonment due to parental migration as much more frequent than seemed statistically possible. During the twelve-month period following the newspaper article, there were no reported cases of abandonment in Santa Ursula, nor did the local newspapers report on other cases in Cholula.

Conceptualizing Abandonment and Children Left Behind

Representatives of state institutions, such as teachers, DIF staff and the *Regidor de Migración* (Migration Councilor), often used the terms "abandonment" and "*niños abandonados* (abandoned children)" to refer to children whose parents were in the United States. In the following section, I examine more closely how the concept *abandonment* relates to how Santa Ursulans, teachers and DIF representatives perceive and define the conditions of children of migrant parents.

"Cross-cultural variability in child rearing beliefs and behaviors makes it evident that there is not a universal standard for good child care nor for child abuse and neglect" (Korbin 1987a:5). Visible bruising on children, spanking or having young children care for siblings are parenting behaviors and practices that are interpreted differently in different social or cultural settings (Korbin, et al. 2000). In Cholula, teachers and other professionals diverged from Santa Ursulans in their views on what constituted good childrearing practices. Moreover, professional definitions and perceptions were often imbued with a sense of superiority that implied that Santa

Ursulan practices, such adult-child co-sleeping, bed-sharing among many children, toddler breastfeeding and mid-wife attended births, were a sign of Santa Ursulans' ignorance or "lack of culture." Similarly, Santa Ursulans and teachers had different ways of understanding and defining the conditions of children of migrant parents.

Santa Ursulans

Caregivers in Santa Ursula most frequently use the phrase *me dejaron* (they left me), as in "they left me the girl" or "they left me three," when speaking about the children in their care. Other family and community members also use the term *dejar* (to leave), such as "they left him when he was two years old," to describe children of migrant parents. Santa Ursulans use of the term *dejar* (to leave) does not carry negative connotations or a moral judgment about migrant parents. Moreover, Santa Ursulans never used the term *abandonment* or *niños abandonados* (abandoned children) to describe the circumstances of children whose parents were in the United States. They do not conceive of children as abandoned for several reasons. First, children are almost never "alone" when mothers or fathers left. Parents almost always make alternative care arrangements for their children prior to departing. Thus, not describing children as abandoned reflects the fact that Santa Ursulans recognize the role, responsibilities and legitimacy of the children's caregivers, as well as parents' efforts to secure child care for them. Even in Marisol's situation, which family and community members perceived as unusual, people I spoke with never referred to or conceived of her or her siblings as abandoned. They acknowledged that Marisol was the caregiver in charge, despite the fact that she lacked full adult status, as she was not married. In addition, far from abandoned, the children of migrant parents usually have constant social contact with aunts, uncles, grandparents and cousins. Santa Ursulans understand that children form part of dense family networks, as we saw in the case of Marisol and her

siblings, and that extended family members often keep an eye on children and help them when necessary, even if they are living with their grandparents.

Santa Ursulans also recognize what scholars term “transnational” parenting, in which parents remain present in children’s lives by transcending borders through telephone communication, gifts and remittances (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997) . Moreover, as we have seen, parents and caregivers generally regard such childcare arrangements as temporary, as most parents intend to reunite with children. Caregivers and other family members accuse parents of having “forgotten” about their children, primarily when parents fail to send money, gifts or maintain communication with children. However, they almost always describe children in such circumstances as “forgotten,” but never “abandoned.”

Parreñas found that most representatives of community organizations in high-migration sending towns and cities characterized children of migrant mothers as neglected, abandoned and deviant, based on views similar to those expressed in print text, which suggest that “biological mothers are more suitable caretakers of children than are fathers or the female relatives left responsible for their care” (Parreñas 2005:40). Parreñas describes that she was initially surprised by participants’ negative characterizations of the effects of migration on families. However, she soon realized that such community organizations are comprised primarily of members of “father-away” households. In contrast to Filipino transnational families, Santa Ursulan migrant mothers do not leave children with fathers, because married mothers always migrate along with or after fathers, and single, separated or divorced mothers leave children with their own relatives, usually a sister or mother. In addition, Santa Ursulans’ perspectives on “mother-away” families, stem from either personal experience as a child, parent or caregiver in such families or from observing and interacting with relatives who live in households made up of children and caregivers.

Nevertheless, community members sometimes spoke in generalities about children living with grandparents, as I analyzed in Chapter Four, despite the fact that they usually had first hand knowledge of the variation of children's and caregivers' experiences.

Teachers, Officials and Other Professionals

In contrast to Santa Ursulans, professionals and representatives of state institutions in Cholula used the terms *abandonment* and *niños abandonados* (abandoned children) to describe children of migrant parents. Cholula's *Regidor de Migración* (Migration Councilor), for example, explained that the initial aim of his office, which was created in 2005, was to identify the highest emigration zones in Cholula and the problems migration had created. The *Regidor* described one of the two principal problems in migrant-sending communities as *desintegración familiar* (family disintegration), and he spoke of his intention to ascertain the number of "child abandonments" in Cholula and the difficulties parents faced in taking children to the United States.¹⁰² He also explained that "older people" had taken on the role of raising "abandoned children" and that municipal support for caregivers and "abandoned children" consisted primarily of medical attention via the DIF. Such characterizations of children of migrant parents as "abandoned" appear similar to those expressed in print text and by members of local migrant organizations in the Philippines (Parreñas 2005). However, teachers and DIF staff in fact have more nuanced views of migrant mothers' children than their initial expressions often suggest.

Like the *Regidor de Migración*, teachers in Santa Ursula frequently used the term "abandonment" to describe the situation of children whose parents were in the United States. Teachers' characterizations of "abandonment" most commonly signified what they perceived as a negative emotional impact of maternal migration, rather than a complete physical abandonment

¹⁰² The other problem the *Regidor* identified was what he called "economic problems" in which family members who stay behind do not know how to manage remittances. He explained that this was why one of the aims of the office was to create productive projects for the investment of remittances.

of children. When teachers employed the term “abandonment” in this way, they did so irrespective of the particular relationship that a child had with his or her parents, and whether or not parents maintained regular contact with children through phone calls, remittances or gifts, in other words whether or not they were doing the things that scholars describe as transnational parenting.

One preschool teacher described the emotional impact on children and potential feelings of abandonment this way:

If you ask the children why their mother or father left, they say “To build my house.” “Why did he go?” “To build my house.” In other words, they say “the house.” They don’t speak about the other part, the economic need, “We have to live.” In other words, they don’t talk with the children. They go, and the children are only left with the idea that it is for the house. So, the child says “House.” They are left empty inside. “Why did my mother leave me? For a house.” They trade their child for a house. “I am going for a house.” That is the only answer that the parents give. So the children get used to it, and they get the idea that the important thing is a house, not a family, not he or she—the one who is abandoned, the one that they left when he was four or five years old.

This comment suggests that children are “abandoned” and negatively impacted by their parents’ migration, because parents fail to adequately communicate with their children about the reasons for their departure. As a result, according to this teacher, children feel that their parents value them less than they value a house, and are even willing to trade them for this material object.

This sort of discourse was not uncommon among teachers and DIF representatives who sometimes questioned parents’ priorities and use of resources, particularly in reference to houses that were large or elaborate. Nevertheless, even such judgments were often accompanied, as reflected above, by the recognition of economic need beyond house construction, and labor migration as a way that parents try to cover their family’s daily living expenses.

Some teachers I interviewed stressed the emotional, social, educational or physical effects on children when mothers departed. Preschool teacher Carolina, for example, described changes in one of her four-year-old students:

Two years ago I had a student named Omar. This was a child who had some difficulty paying attention, but he always did his homework. He would come to school, very clean. He always had breakfast in the morning. He hardly ever missed school. The mother was very attentive and she would always come to drop him off and pick him up from school. Then all of a sudden the child began to change, and I didn't see the mother anymore. The child would come to school crying. He had a harder time paying attention. He wouldn't socialize with his classmates. He would come to school without food, without homework. He would miss school a lot. So there was a complete change in the child, the way he was (*su manera de ser*), the way he would socialize with others. He became more timid, quieter. He wanted to be alone, not with his classmates. He would cry.

Several teachers highlighted cases like this, describing visible changes in children, and suggesting that children not only suffered emotionally from a mother's departure, but also that caregivers were less diligent than parents. The above preschool teacher, for example, described the mother as "attentive" with Omar, suggesting that the alternate caregiver was not.

Teachers often made general statements about children and used the term abandonment irrespective of the care that children received from caregivers. Nevertheless, professionals often followed statements about children being abandoned with clarifications and specific details. For example, the social worker explained, "Yes, the children end up completely abandoned, they stay with relatives. Sometimes they love them, sometimes they pay attention to them, but in some cases no." The social worker's second statement makes clear her perspective that the level of care and affection that caregivers give their charges varies on a case-by-case basis. In addition, as I described in Chapter Five, teachers also criticized many parents for providing inadequate hygiene and nutrition for their children, and for their lack of involvement in their children's education. In other words, although teachers often considered children whose mothers had migrated as "emotionally abandoned," they generally did not view care given by parents as

superior to that of caregivers.¹⁰³ Like the social worker, they judged the conditions of children on a case-by-case basis. For example, preschool teacher Adriana explained that she did not see a significant difference between children who were living with their parents and those who were living with caregivers:

There are many grandparents that are with the children and they don't take care of them. But there are many children that are with their grandparents and they do take care of them. But there are times when you say, "This child is not taken care of, he is lacking many things. And the parents are here, both of them. So the parents are here, then why do the children come to school this way?" And then you understand the history of the father, drunk, he goes around with another woman. The mother, submissive, I know that in the house it is difficult, it is a very bad situation, in which there is no culture, there are no values. More than anything, there are no values.

Some teachers also argued that the migration of mothers has a greater impact on children than the migration of fathers. For example, preschool teacher Ariana said that when "the father leaves it does not have as big of an influence," but when the mother leaves "that is when the child is left alone. They get blocked, they don't participate. As if the child were dying. And that is when you see the change in that the child comes to school dirty, with *mocos* (mucus). The children adapt, but they carry with them that shadow of sadness." Such statements about the greater emotional impact of a mother's migration versus a father's migration seem to coincide with what Parreñas (2005) argues are the continuation of gender roles in transnational families and the tendency to characterize children of mother-away families as deviant or pathological. However, teachers' perspectives on the matter also considered other related factors. For example, teacher Ariana also clarified, that a mother's departure is usually more significant than that of a father, because her departure often implies for children greater changes, such as change of residence or daily routines. This observation is consistent with my findings. Moreover,

¹⁰³ Nevertheless, as discussed in Chapter Seven, many teachers, like the DIF social worker, and some Santa Ursulans felt that a caregiver's advanced age or youth and inexperience were important factors that impacted quality of care.

another teacher pointed out that the impact of a mother's departure in some cases might be particularly significant, if the child were the last member of his nuclear family to remain in Santa Ursula. For example, teacher Carolina described the situation of one student in her class:

He was a shy child, even before his mother left, and then after his mother was gone, he became even more timid. I believe he was the only child here. He had older siblings, but the parents had already taken them to the US. Imagine, breaking those kinds of connection within the family—that he sees the majority of the family gone and he remained alone. It is very important for a child that the siblings go away.

The *DIF*

As we have seen, state representatives and teachers' ideas about children whose parents migrate are often more nuanced than their statements about abandonment or abandoned children might suggest. Despite the fact that professionals often made general statements about the negative experiences of children who live with caregivers, most professionals who had close contact with such children recognized that the circumstances of children whose parents migrate vary on a case by case basis. In addition, I believe that professionals' tended to begin their discussions with me by focusing on negative effects of parental migration, because they assumed that I was looking for this sort of information. Teachers and state officials were generally helpful and willing to participate in my research. They generally felt that the topic of children who remain with caregivers when parents migrate was of great social importance in the region and often assumed that I was conducting research on this topic as a diagnostic or evaluation of social problems that might arise from transnational migration. As professionals who carry out social policy and programs, the *DIF* staff and Migration Councilor, in particular, were concerned with social problems and social policy.

Another reason why state officials, particularly *DIF* representatives, focused on the issue of abandonment when discussing the conditions of children of migrant parents, was that these were primarily the kinds of cases that the *DIF* handled. That is, in addition to *DIF* health and

nutrition programs that were available to the entire community, DIF contact with children whose parents had migrated was primarily through the Clinic for Maltreatment, which handles child maltreatment and neglect cases. Although teachers and DIF representatives used the term “abandonment” loosely to refer to an emotional abandonment by children’s parents, they did not consider children to be living a state of abandonment that required state intervention. Rather, they recognized that children were in the care of other family members. This recognition came despite the fact that there was no legal process to officially designate an alternative caregiver or temporary guardian in the parents’ absence. When parents leave children with other family members, they do so informally. Representatives of government institutions, such doctors, teachers and DIF staff, recognize the role and authority of the caregiver as guardian.

The professional definition of an *abandonment* that warrants DIF intervention involves the absence of a designated caregiver and conditions in which children’s basic needs and rights, such as adequate food, housing, health, safety and education are not being met. In such cases, DIF recognizes its role and responsibility to intervene. The DIF social worker explained the role of the DIF in child maltreatment and abandonment this way:

As I tell the people, the DIF is not here to mistreat, it not here to break up families. On the contrary, it is here to unite them. But in delicate cases, we need to act as we must, because what is at stake is the life, integrity, security of the children...So we must act as we should, because the life of a child is worth a lot. So as adults we understand the situation, but they [parents] cannot do what they want with them because they are their children. That is why there are rules, there are laws, there are institutions. Because before, if I wanted I could abuse, I could kill him. Why? Because this is my child. Not anymore. Because this is the law. Period. This is why there are institutions.

To a certain degree community members in the townships such as Santa Ursula also recognize the role of the DIF in such cases, for they are sometimes the ones to report cases of children living in precarious circumstances to the auxiliary president or *presidenta*, who then reports to DIF Cholula.

The DIF Cholula primarily provides services for children of migrant parents based on reports of child abuse and abandonment, after which it refers children to its psychology and social work departments.¹⁰⁴ This sequence has to do with the structure of the DIF and the focus of its programs. Abandonment and abuse have been a central concern of DIF for decades. In addition, one of the principal functions of the DIF today is to serve specific “vulnerable” populations—people whose circumstances of poverty coincide with other factors of vulnerability, such as advanced age, illness, maternity, disability, or in this case, abandonment or abuse. As such, abuse and abandonment are one of the principal areas of attention in DIF Cholula, particularly of its legal services department. In the contemporary context of widespread migration in Cholula, the DIF’s role in dealing with cases of abuse and abandonment takes on a new dimension. As we saw in Chapter Six, in addition to the issue of children who are abandoned when their parents migrate, the DIF in other regions of Puebla have recently begun to offer services to elderly men and women who are “abandoned” by their adult children who have migrated.

The DIF primarily assisted children of migrant parents in situations in which the children had “fallen through the cracks”—meaning there were fissures in the family network and support system that were supposed to take care of them. These cases primarily occurred because the person left in charge deserted the children or in situations of family dysfunction, such as alcoholism or domestic violence. For example, the social worker described the case of an adolescent boy whose mother had migrated to the US. The boy’s father had migrated to the US

¹⁰⁴ The psychologist explained: “Well there isn’t a kind of work (therapy) specifically for migrants. A lot of times, they report mistreatment or abandonment. And that is where the area of legal assistance comes in, and then channels the case to psychology. What psychology does, is an evaluation of the emotional state of the child, how he is emotionally, what his personality is like. And apart from that, we work with the child. We can offer individual sessions in which unfortunately we don’t have all of the resources that play therapy requires. But we try to improvise, but very professionally.”

prior to the mother. The boy's parents separated in the US, and his mother returned for a period to Cholula, before leaving again for the US and leaving the boy with his maternal grandfather, who was a widower. The boy's father had ceased to communicate or provide for him. In addition, the boy had dropped out of school in third or fourth grade and had serious conduct problems.

The grandfather was an old, tired *campesino* (peasant) and he kicked the boy out, because he had continual behavior problems. So he kicked him out and he came here with us, and we got in contact with the family. And the grandfather said that he didn't want to take care of this child because he was a thief, that he had stolen [money] from the grandfather during that period. When I spoke with him, he said, "You know what, I don't want him anymore, because he doesn't obey, the mother left and I haven't heard from her. The father also abandoned him. I am old now and I can't take care of him. I can't control him. I told him to leave the house." And for the same reason of his poor behavior, nobody wanted to take care of him.

The DIF staff placed the boy in a *casa de asistencia* (shelter), from which he escaped. "He had very serious behavior problems, and from that shelter he also took out two other children (*dejó sacado otros dos niños*). So that child was lost." He committed a crime and officials sent the boy to the *Escuela Agraria Hogar* [Agrarian Home School], where he spent a year. Again he broke the law (*se delinquirió*) and again he escaped from the home, after which he was incarcerated. His mother returned to Cholula, and began visiting her son regularly in prison.

"But the problem is," I told the mother, "You should have been with him when you were with him." Because she went [to the United States] two or three years with the idea of making money, during which time she was not able to make anything. She returned indebted, to go with her father who the boy had left a while ago and from whom he had stolen. He didn't continue studying, he dropped out in third or fourth grade. But the father drank a lot, the mother also, there were times where the mother was abused by the father. It was a total family disintegration. Terrible.

In late 2005 the DIF also handled a child abuse case in Santa Ursula that was related to parental migration. When Blanca was one year old her mother went to the US, leaving her in the care of her grandmother. Three years later her mother returned, but Blanca "did not know her,"

as one teacher explained to me. She had lived most of her life with her grandmother. Blanca's mother brought her to live in her own house, just down the block from her grandmother. The DIF lawyer and the teachers explained that her mother grew frustrated because her daughter would not listen to her and would misbehave. Blanca's mother began to abuse her. Usually, the abuse was in the form of hitting, but one day she pulled Blanca's ear with such force that it tore. In the words of the lawyer "the whole inside came out." The teachers reported the case to the DIF, and that is how it came to the lawyer's attention. The DIF lawyer intervened to give custody to the grandmother. The mother eventually left and returned to the United States. She was angry about what had happened, and after she left did not keep in contact with Blanca. To the knowledge of the DIF staff, neither she nor Blanca's father continued to send money. In addition, the living arrangement for Blanca was not ideal. As described by the lawyer, the grandfather was an alcoholic, and when he would drink, he would become violent and the grandmother and Blanca would hide to protect themselves. Although the lawyer was aware of this, the DIF did not intervene with these sorts of problems, as the DIF's primary goal was to place Blanca in a situation where she was not the direct victim of abuse, and in which she would have her basic needs met.

Niños Abandonados in Santa Ursula

Although migration of mothers from Cholula was fairly uncommon during the early 1990s, DIF Cholula had a significant case of child abandonment related to parental migration as far back as 1991 or 1992. When I interviewed the DIF social worker in 2006 she spoke at length about this case, despite the fact that the DIF had recently intervened in a similar case involving the six siblings who were the subject of the local newspaper report described earlier. The social worker spoke in depth about the 1991 abandonment case, largely because the DIF had played a

central role in caring for the children while working closely with family members to resolve the situation. In contrast, DIF involvement in the 2006 abandonment case was less extensive, because they were able to quickly locate a grandmother who took the children into her care. The following case of child abandonment in Santa Ursula, as described by the DIF social worker, speaks to possible causes of child abandonment in the context of Santa Ursulans' propensity to value and protect children, and care for family members in the context of dense extended family networks. In addition, the social worker's narration serves as a lens through which to understand the philosophy and function of the DIF.

In 1991 the DIF received a telephone call from Santa Ursula that there were six minors, four girls and two boys, living alone in a house. Their mother and father had migrated to the United States two years earlier. The children were young, between four and eleven or twelve years of age. "I went personally," explained the DIF social worker, "I went to see them. Indeed, they were alone. They were living with rodents, insects and spoiled food. In conditions of poor hygiene—in terms of their personal hygiene and in the food, the cleanliness of their house." The oldest child, a boy, explained to the DIF representatives that his father had left for the United States because he did not have money to support his family. Subsequently, their mother left them and they did not know where she was. Aiming to locate the mother or another family member who could take care of the children, the DIF carried out an investigation. According to the children's neighbors, their mother had left with another man and they had not seen her around town. They believed that she had gone to the United States. "It is very unusual in a pueblo—because of the customs and culture that they have—it is very unusual that a woman leaves her children for a man," commented the social worker. "But she left them, and her whereabouts were unknown."

The DIF located an older sister living in Santa Ursula. However, the older sister could not take care of her younger siblings. “For as much as I want to, I cannot look after them,” the social worker recalled the older sister’s words. The older sister herself was young, around thirteen years of age when the mother left. Because she was the oldest sibling left in the house, she took over the burden of domestic and caring labor, but only for a short period. Because she already had a boyfriend when her mother left, it was not long before she left her natal home and her siblings to live with her partner and his parents. Two years later, when the DIF became involved, she and her partner had a baby and were expecting their second child. The young couple’s economic needs and care responsibilities for their new family made it nearly impossible for the older sister to help her younger siblings with her reproductive labor or economically. The children had another older sister in Santa Ursula. She had also married young and was living with her in-laws, but the DIF was initially unable to locate her.

“Once the father, the mother and the sisters were gone,” explained the DIF social worker, “the children were left alone, completely unprotected.” The children stopped going to school, they struggled to feed themselves, and they were living in squalor and generally unhealthy conditions. The social worker described the situation in which they found the children this way:

They never washed their clothes. They would just put on the same dirty clothes again. No, you lifted up a rag, and like twenty rodents would come out. No, it was terrible. Dogs. Cats. Everything. Everything. That is why we said that they (the children) seemed like wild animals. Because they were living like wild animals....They lived in conditions, in which one says, “My god, how is this possible?”.....The two oldest children, a boy and a girl, were the ones who ended up with a lot of the responsibility. They took over the roles of mother and father. Eleven and ten (years of age). Or twelve and eleven. They would go look for food. They had twenty dogs. For the same reason that they [the dogs] were the ones who took care of them.

And like the dogs, the social worker explained, the children “would eat whatever people gave them.” Although neighbors helped them by giving them food, by the time the DIF intervened, the children were poorly nourished.

Unable to locate a relative who would take the children into their home and care for them, the DIF made arrangements to remove the children from the house and bring them to Cholula, where they set up a provisional dormitory in the DIF offices. “So I brought the six children, but first we had to let the authorities know. As the DIF we have the power to take them.” The day the DIF came for the children, the neighbors were suspicious of the DIF’s intentions and the children were terrified.

That day I picked them up it was sad. Very sad. They (the children) didn’t understand what had happened. I explained it to them. They said that their parents were going to come for them. We said that children needed to be comfortable, that they need to be in a clean and healthy place, and that is why we were there. And that we were going to continue to support them. They cried a lot, because they thought that we were going to steal them. Because in the *juntas* (townships) they sometimes have what they call “*quitaniños*” or “*robaniños*” (child stealers). We said “No, we are here to help you, to protect you.” The oldest daughter cried a lot. Because the neighbors said that we were going to give them away (*regalarlos*). That we were going to separate them and that each child would go with a different family. They didn’t know who they were going to end up with. Those are things that people said in their town. The smallest children didn’t want to get in the van. So I said to the oldest ones, “Tell them to come, they can’t live here anymore. A person could come in here, and they could do something, they could take one of your younger siblings, or they could get sick.” I said to them “Look, don’t doubt me, I am from the DIF. We are here to look after you. Nothing bad is going to happen to you.” And so when we talked with them, they felt better. But it was a very difficult situation. The neighbors came out and they said, “Why are you taking them?” They came close to us. But I told them, “This is my work, and I need to look out for them.” And then they saw that this was true, and that we were there to help them. Then they didn’t say anything. They were afraid that we were going to do something to the children, because they had the idea that the DIF mistreated and took away children. We said “No. Our function is to *integrarlos* (integrate them), to improve their living conditions.”

Once the DIF had temporary custody of the children, the social worker and lawyer continued their search for a relative who would assume responsibility for the children. Their

older sister said that their father was living with their uncle in the United States, and that he was working there. “‘Well give us a phone number and we will get in contact with him.’ And that is what we did. We spoke with the father.” The father was unaware that the children were living alone.

There was no phone in the house where the children had been living. Which is why there was no communication, and he didn’t know what the situation with his children was like. And in a pueblo nobody gets involved because they don’t want trouble. So when we talked to him and told him, “Your children are alone. They are abandoned,” he said “How is that possible if my daughters are there?” “Your daughters are not there. They are with their partners. They are mothers.”

The father explained that he could not return to Santa Ursula or send money for the children because he was still working off his debt to the *coyote* who had taken him to the United States. Once he cleared his debt, he would begin sending money for his children. The DIF contacted the older sister again. She reiterated that she could not help them: “What can I give them? I cannot help them.” Again the DIF contacted the father, explaining that the situation was very difficult and asking what he thought could be done. “He said that he did not want to desert his children. He wanted to provide for his children. He was interested in his children. But he didn’t have what he needed to help, without a partner (wife), without economic stability, he could not help his children. And he didn’t have anyone who could take care of them.”

The children therefore remained in the DIF offices and the staff members “shared the role of taking care of them.” “We would make breakfast, lunch and dinner among all of the DIF staff. For example, we divided it up, ‘You are going to make lunch twice a week. You the dinner and the breakfast.’” They also required the children to study. The DIF coordinator, who was a teacher, would give them assignments and chores. “We kept them active. She would leave them work. They participated in cleaning the house. ‘Make your bed. Pick up your dirty clothes. Help us make the food.’” The DIF also sought the support of other professionals. They

required the children to see the doctor and attend regular therapy sessions with a psychologist.

They attended individual and family therapy.

They had to understand the situation as a family. That there was no mother or father, but “someone is here to help us.” That even though their father was far away, he still existed. To help them see small things. But “We as children, we have value.” They as small people had value; that there were people who loved them. We started working with their self-esteem, because they didn’t talk. They hardly talked at all.

The DIF paid for the children’s expenses for approximately a month until their father began sending money for them. The DIF set up a bank account for the children. The father would regularly deposit money and the DIF coordinator would pick up the money in the presence of the children. “So when they saw that we began to buy them clothes, shoes, (they knew) these came from their father’s money.” Their father established regular communication with the DIF staff and his children through telephone calls to the DIF offices. “When the father would call, he would always talk to his children, for almost an hour, they had a lot of communication.”

When the DIF staff finally located the children’s other older sister in Santa Ursula, they hoped she would agree to take care of the children. However, she also explained that she could not help them, “because of her husband’s disposition—he did not allow her to see her siblings.” Referring to the common practice in the townships of husbands and mother-in-laws restricting recently married women’s contact with her natal family, the social worker commented, “It’s like you marry and then you need to forget about your family.” The DIF persisted and spoke again with the sister. “She said ‘I want to see them, but my husband won’t let me.’ So we spoke with her husband to help him see things.” She then began to visit her siblings at the DIF offices in Cholula. She wanted to help her siblings. Her husband also grew increasingly interested in the children when he began to see that their father was taking responsibility for them. “When they

saw the change in the children, and the support of the father-in-law, because during a period he (the children's father) drank a lot. That is why he said, "Why am I going to help them, if the man who is their father spends his time drinking (*se dedica a tomar*)? But then he saw the change in the children, and in the father, and everything."

In the meantime, the DIF prepared the family's house so that the children could later return to live there. They discarded everything and used the money sent by the father to modestly condition and stock the house with food and items that the children would use to keep the house, their clothes and themselves clean. When the DIF was ready to send the children back to Santa Ursula, the children did not want to leave. They had grown accustomed to their new routine and surroundings. They felt cared for and protected. "When they were separated from us, it was a very difficult situation for us, because they began to see us as their family. But we always had the idea of having them see that they would be with us only for a period, but then we were going to see how they could be with their father again." When the children returned to Santa Ursula their sister took on the responsibility of taking care of them until their father could return.

Two months later, the children's father returned to care and provide for them. The social worker explained the final resolution of the case this way:

We gave the children temporary shelter, but we tried to *integrar la familia* (to put the family back together). We turned the house over to him clean. And for the children to see their father, well it was something else. When the father came, and he saw in what conditions they were in, and in what condition the house was in, he didn't want to go back (to the US). And thank god they were integrated back with their father. We never knew anything else about the mother. We heard she had gone to the US with her new partner. We didn't know where. But we did manage to get the children and father back together again.

Fissures in Family Network and Norms

As we have seen throughout this dissertation, dense social networks are central to social life in Santa Ursula. These social networks, in conjunction with gendered and aged family roles and expectations, shape how children are cared for when mothers leave. As the social worker pointed out, “It is very unusual in a pueblo, because of the customs and culture that they have, it is very unusual that a woman leave her children for a man.” Indeed, it is very unusual for a mother to abandon her children for any reason. Likewise, it is unusual for extended family members not to play a role in children’s care when a mother migrates. As such, abandonment cases represent a clear rupture from the norms.

The children described in the above case clearly had extended family members living nearby. The social worker explained that no one wanted to “step forward to say they are family. There was no family. But when we came to get the children, then everyone came saying they were family.” What might account for the fact that extended family members did not intervene when they saw that the children were living in unfavorable conditions? It appears that family members helped the children to some degree, because according to the social worker “the neighbors,” some of whom I would expect, given typical residential patterns, were members of the children’s extended family, gave the children food. However, “when they began to see that it was all the time,” explained the social worker, suggesting that when the family realized the severity of the children’s situation, and the level of help they needed, they did not want to take on that responsibility. Certainly the responsibility of six children, aged four to eleven or twelve, without any economic support from the parents is a great burden.

In addition, the older sister’s husband’s stance is indicative of how responsibilities are typically distributed when parents migrate. His initial refusal to help the children was related in part to the fact that the father was not involved with the children. In other words, the sister’s

husband recognized that it was primarily parents' responsibility to care and provide for their children. Only when he saw the father become involved was he willing to help. Perhaps other extended family members shared this point of view. Indeed, parents almost always maintain responsibility for children when they migrate, and caregivers expect them to help economically and remain in contact with their children. This case also alludes to how other family issues, such as the dissolution of marriages or alcoholism, can exacerbate problems and strain networks on which care arrangements depend.

Given that parents usually leave children with grandparents, and that grandparents usually expect and are pleased to take on this role, where were the children's grandparents while the children were living alone and in inadequate conditions? In the 1991 case it is not clear why the children did not live with their grandparents. However, in the 2006 case, the maternal grandmother had died of diabetes, and according to the DIF lawyer, the children's mother did not leave the children with her mother-in-law, because she did not get along with her. Instead, she left the children alone, or perhaps from her perspective, she left them in the care of her oldest, unmarried daughter, who was twelve years old. It is much less common for parents to leave children in the exclusive care of aunts or uncles, perhaps because they already have the burden of care for their own young children.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, in the 2006 case, the mother, who had sole responsibility for the children because their father was incarcerated, was unable or unwilling to call on the surviving grandmother to care for her children. In addition, the paternal grandmother lived in another town, which indicates that the husband was not from Santa Ursula, and that his brothers and their wives lived elsewhere. This is significant because, as we have seen, the paternal family network usually plays an important role in watching over children when their parents migrate.

¹⁰⁵ Of the few aunt caregivers I knew, half were either single or childless.

Lack of communication between family members in the US and Santa Ursula was another issue that, in the 1991 abandonment case, led to the breakdown of the family networks that care for children. Telephone service in the early 1990s was limited in Santa Ursula. The expansion of technology—travel and communication technologies, is a crucial aspect of transnationalism. The DIF was able to inform the father about his children’s situation, precisely because they had telephone service. In contrast, the children did not have a telephone in their house, so the father was unable to maintain regular contact with them. In addition, once the DIF helped reestablish communication between the father and the children, the father spoke regularly to his children and their caregivers (in this case the DIF staff), because they were living at the DIF offices, where there was a telephone.

Today, it is less common for children, parents and caregivers to have such communication problems in Santa Ursula, because most homes have telephones. In addition, as mentioned in Chapter Two, in 2007 Telmex began providing internet service in Santa Ursula, which is likely to have further improved communications among family members. Nevertheless, regardless of telephone service, mothers and fathers may not always have an accurate perception of how their children are doing, or how family members are spending the remittances they send. Phone calls do not serve the same function as regular, in person contact with children. For this reason, extended family members play an important role in the lives of children left behind. As we saw in the previous chapter, Marisol’s extended family network in Santa Ursula, particularly her aunts and uncles, not only kept an eye on the children, but also had communication with the children’s parents, whom they informed about the children’s activities and circumstances.

The Role of Older Siblings

The 1991 case of child abandonment makes evident once again the role of older children in carework. First, when the mother left, the burden of care shifted primarily to the children's older adolescent sister. The father's response upon learning about his children's situation ("How could they be abandoned if my older daughters are there?") reflects his perception of his adolescent daughters as capable caregivers. The DIF also recognized the older sisters as potential caregivers, which is why they tried to involve them and have them take responsibility for caring for their younger siblings. Although the older sisters were only in the mid-teens, the DIF understood that Santa Ursulans considered them adults, particularly because they were married and mothers. The DIF therefore recognized the sisters as adults and potential caregivers.

When the older sister left her younger siblings to live with her partner and start her own family, the burden of care shifted to the next two oldest siblings, who were at that time either eight and nine or nine and ten years of age. Too young to adequately care for the home and younger siblings, their efforts primarily took the form of looking for food. The DIF considered these children, aged ten and eleven or eleven and twelve years old, too young to be responsible for themselves and their younger siblings. Yet, they were also aware of the fact that when the father returned the children would do much of the housework and cooking, which is why the DIF taught the children how to prepare food and keep themselves and their house clean. Although their father would be living with them, they would have to be responsible for a great deal of the household work. When the social worker described that the children were "living like wild animals," she explained that one of the DIF's principal goals was to help teach them better habits.

But after that, they began to develop good habits. We talked to them. They learned. They began to understand what was good, what was clean, what was bad, what was organized. They learned everything. The oldest ones mostly, but the little ones also

participated. They bathed themselves, they bathed daily, they changed their clothes daily, they washed their clothes. We taught them, and they learned. Yes, the oldest ones began to learn to wash their clothes. We told them “Look, you have to participate, we are all participating and you are going to have to learn and participate. We would say, “Look do this, help me with this.” When they boy and the girl saw that we were helping them, they wanted to participate. But there were days that they didn’t want to. They would get depressed. They would miss their mother and their father. But we always tried to lift them out of the emotional state they were in. But they did well.

In addition, the social worker pointed out that once the children returned to Santa Ursula “The daughter who was ten or eleven years old stayed in school, because that was one of the conditions. They have to go to school, they have to be well fed.” The social worker specifically pointed to the oldest girl, suggesting that her father would have been likely to keep her out of school to care for the house and family, including the youngest child, who was four years old at the time.

“Integrating” the Family

It was unusual for the DIF to take such a hands-on role with children in cases of abandonment. However, they did so only temporarily as a step towards family reunification. For this reason, although the DIF staff took on a caregiving role, they repeatedly reminded the children that they would eventually return to Santa Ursula, and they aimed to help them understand that their father had not abandoned them. In addition to preparing the children psychologically to reunite with their father, the DIF also helped create proper physical conditions for the children, by overhauling the house and getting it ready for their return. As part of this objective, they worked with the father so that he would begin sending money for his children and their home. Despite the very difficult circumstances of this case, the social worker was pleased with the role she and the other DIF staff members played, because they were able to meet their goal of “integrating” the father with the children. “How good that the father helped us with this. That he reacted. He had other ideas about his children, and we talked to him and we told him.

He cried. He felt powerless (*impotente*) that he couldn't help. And then when he remembers his wife, well (*pues ya*)... So we achieved a good integration.”

Family “integration” is one of the principal aims of DIF in abuse and abandonment cases, and as an institution, as its name “Integrated Development of the Family” suggests. The DIF philosophy and goal of “integration” suggests that the breakdown in the structure of the family is a primary factor that exacerbates an individual's vulnerability and that a strong family structure is one of the principal ways to improve the conditions of “the most vulnerable.” For this reason, the DIF deals with cases of abuse and abandonment anonymously, explained the social worker. In other words, because the 1991 case was dealt with anonymously, the father could not be legally accused of child abandonment, which would have created a legal obstacle in reuniting the children with the father.

Conclusion

Child abuse and abandonment, while uncommon, occasionally occur in Santa Ursula and in families in which parents have migrated. During the period of my fieldwork in Cholula, the municipal DIF dealt with two such cases. One case involved a girl whose mother, upon returning to Santa Ursula, physically abused her, because, according to school teachers and the DIF lawyer, she was frustrated with the girl's misbehavior and unwillingness to obey her. Her daughter had grown up with her grandmother, and did not recognize her mother's authority. The second case involved six children, aged twelve and younger who were living alone in dangerous and unhealthy conditions in Santa Ursula since their mother had migrated. Their father was in prison. In both cases the DIF intervened to give custody to the children's grandmother. Despite these recent cases, when I interviewed the DIF social worker, she spoke at length about the 1991 Santa Ursula child abandonment case, in which the DIF took over the role of caring for the

children while they worked to reunite the children with their father, who was in the United States. As these cases demonstrate, the principal objective of the DIF is to “integrate” the family, and in cases of abuse or abandonment, this means finding a family member with whom to place the children.

Anthropologists, as well as scholars of transnational migration, have given little attention to the issue of abuse and abandonment. Ethnographic accounts usually do not include description or analysis of child maltreatment, because of its low incidence and the fact that such behavior seems to contradict prevailing tendencies among adults in a given community to treat children with warmth and indulgence. At the same time, scholars of transnational families have tried to challenge conceptions of such family configurations as deviant. Parreñas (2005), in particular, argues that most scholarly and media accounts of Filipino transnational families focus on negative outcomes for children who live with caregivers when their mothers migrate. Characterizing children as abandoned is central to such portrayals, even though abandonment is uncommon. Despite the potential difficulties of analyzing child abandonment in the context of parental migration, the cases of abandonment I describe in this chapter, speak to the dynamics of care arrangements in Santa Ursula, age and gender relations in families and households, as well as the role of the state, particularly the DIF, in such cases.

Age and gender relations played an important role in the process through which the children ended up abandoned. In the 1991 case, when the mother left the children, she left them in the care of their adolescent sister, who soon left to live with her boyfriend and his parents. When the DIF contacted another older sister who was living in Santa Ursula, she said she could not help her younger siblings, because her husband expected her to “forget about” her natal family. As we have seen, a husband and mother-in-law typically restrict the movement and

activities of a recently married woman, which includes prohibiting her from spending time with members of her natal family. The dynamics of a woman's relationship with her mother-in-law were also an important factor which led to the abandonment of the children in the 2005 case. The maternal grandmother of the children had died of diabetes. Because the mother of the children did not get along with her mother-in-law, she left the children alone (or perhaps in the care of their twelve-year-old sister) rather than leaving them with their paternal grandmother. As such, although these cases are atypical, the family and community context, including traditional post-marital residence rules, in-law relations and the aged and gendered household division of labor, are central to understanding the dynamics of care arrangements for children left behind, even for those who end up abandoned. Moreover, these cases seem to suggest that other issues, such as alcoholism, can exacerbate problems and strain networks on which care arrangements depend.

Chapter Ten: Conclusion

Behind an immigrant woman clearing tables at a Chicago sandwich shop, preparing peanut butter pies in an Indiana restaurant, working the line of a New Jersey factory, or cleaning the apartment of a New York City family, are often the invisible hands of her family members caring for the home, children or aging parents she has left behind in her community of origin. The purpose of this study has been to investigate the dynamics of the global economy's "unpaid reproductive labor" that makes possible the transnational migration of women who work in the service and manufacturing sectors of wealthy nations, such as the United States. Set in the rural township of Santa Ursula in central Mexico, this study has examined who takes over the burden of care when a mother migrates, as well as the activities that constitute such care. This investigation has also considered how the community and Mexican state shape local processes of social reproduction. Social reproduction in a community like Santa Ursula supports not only a source of cheap immigrant labor, but also helps produce and reproduce transnational social hierarchies.

Santa Ursula has become a site of social reproduction in the global economy. It is a place where undocumented US workers' children grow up and their parents grow old. It is also a place where families' raise children who are likely to become transnational migrants. And it is a place where Mexican migrants are likely to return for retirement and old-age. As US-bound migration has increasingly replaced brickmaking as source of livelihood for Santa Ursulans, and remittances have yet to create long-term economic solutions, daily life in the community has come to revolve less around production and more around reproduction—the care of home, family and ritual life. A landscape of abandoned or leveled kilns and large, ornate "remittance" houses speaks to this separation of production and reproduction across national borders.

Of course, the separation of production and reproduction across borders is not absolute. Many Santa Ursulans, including women whose husbands are in the US, still produce handcrafted bricks in the open patios of their homes. However, brickmaking is an insufficient source of income for most households. As such, many parents, particularly fathers, who return to the community, migrate again in order to cover the family's daily living expenses, changing consumption expectations or complete another phase of house construction. The fact that approximately half of the community's primary school students had one or both parents in the US in 2006 demonstrates the extent to which migration has become a way of life for young Santa Ursulans. The United States is also a site of reproduction. Santa Ursulan immigrants take care of themselves, their homes and bring new babies into their families in the US communities in which they reside. Moreover, it has become increasingly common for parents to send for or bring their Mexican-born children to the US. However, these factors do not diminish the significance of Santa Ursula as a site of social reproduction. Many parents wait for children to finish primary school before sending for them, suggesting that young children are more likely to be raised in Mexico while older children who will soon enter the US labor market are more likely to migrate. In addition, because most Santa Ursulans are undocumented, their aging parents almost always remain in Mexico as it is nearly impossible for them to endure the dangerous and difficult trip across the border. This impossibility helps make the system of grandparents-caregivers in Santa Ursula possible.

If you ask a Santa Ursulan mother in Indiana or New York "Who is taking care of your children?" she is likely to say that she left them in the care of her mother or mother-in-law. However, underlying this simple truth is a complex web of gendered, aged and intergenerational relations and obligations. Carework and related domestic activities are primarily women's work

in Santa Ursula, as in much of the world. Nevertheless, several interrelated factors, including expectations and possibilities for childhood, a gendered and aged household division of labor, early marriage and childbearing, post-marital residence rules and in-law relations shape the way that family members understand and distribute the burden of care when a mother migrates. In most cases, children are well cared for while their mothers are away, and often several members of an extended family network monitor and help children. Rarely children end up in a situation of legal abandonment. In such cases, the state, through the DIF, steps in to “reintegrate” the family by finding a parent or other family member to take responsibility for children.

Santa Ursulans’ commitment and obligation to kin and members their social network create conditions of care and sociability, rather than neglect, isolation or abandonment, for most children and elderly family members who remain behind in Santa Ursula. Santa Ursulans take their obligations of *ayuda* (help) very seriously. Through exchanges over a lifetime, children and parents help each other with labor and material support (Magazine and Ramírez Sánchez 2007). For example, parents provide children with shelter and food, and children help parents with their productive and domestic labor in different ways throughout the course of individual and domestic lifecycles. A son and his wife typically care for parents in old-age and later inherit the house. In the context of transnational migration, *ayuda* also means helping one’s adult child migrate by caring for grandchildren, helping one’s mother migrate by caring for younger siblings, or helping one’s sick or dying parent by returning to Santa Ursula. This sense of duty and obligation has helped families deal with the strain of migration and family separation, and is a central component of Santa Ursulans’ resilience in the face of these new and challenging circumstances. *Ayuda* also means helping kin or a *comadre* prepare a fiesta, which is a central component of women’s (and therefore caregivers’) activities and the socialization of children.

Moreover, the fiesta system contributes to the care of children and elders left behind in concrete ways—by providing regular social contact and a supplementary source of food. Party-goers always return home with a bucket full of mole and meat, and Santa Ursulans often dole out larger amounts to those in need.

Santa Ursulan parents most often leave children with paternal grandparents. The reason for this is rooted in a Santa Ursulan's observance of virilocal post-marital residence rules. When a woman marries she lives with her husband and his parents. If her husband leaves for the US, she and her children usually remain behind with his parents, unless she already has her own house. If she also migrates, her parents-in-law expect the children to stay with them, and consider it their "right," in part because a woman, her children and their labor are considered the property of a husband and his family. Although many women would prefer to leave children with their own mothers, the majority do not. Those women who do, often cite a bad relationship with the mother-in-law as the principal reason for doing so. Young women's subordination and vulnerability in the mother-in-law's house might also play a role in why some women chose to migrate. Most couples eventually build their own homes, and aspire to do so as soon as possible. Access to remittances has made house construction easier and quicker to achieve, and when a woman joins her husband in the US, a couple is able to realize this goal all the more quickly.

To be sure, gender relations and expectations are changing in Santa Ursula, not only because of US migration, but also because of changes in Mexican society. However, the process of change is not uniform, and is filled with contradictions. While a married woman may free herself from a situation of subordination in her mother-in-law's house by migrating to help speed up construction of her own house, her ability to migrate is dependent on other women's reproductive labor. That is, her ability to migrate is dependent on a traditional gendered

household division of reproductive labor. Moreover, women's subordination to her husband and his family, plays a role in determining where she resides when her husband migrates, or where her children reside when she migrates. These practices may soon change, as many practices that shape women's lives appear to be changing. For example, women are having fewer children than their mothers and grandmothers had, and age of marriage and first pregnancy may be increasing. Although Santa Ursulans still marry young, the fact that community members consistently complained that young women married and had children too young is a sign of changing expectations, and practices may soon catch up. The trend towards more years of schooling and increased access to birth control may play a role. Similarly, although divorce is still uncommon in Santa Ursulan, the fact that community members, young and old, consistently lamented that young couples today *se juntan y se dejan* (they enter into a free-union and then they leave each other) may be a sign of changing gender relations in which young women today have more power to leave a relationship.

Although grandmothers in most cases are designated caregivers for children, a number of family members, including aunts and cousins, often help care for children left behind. Aunts and uncles tend to keep an eye on children, and help when needed, and older girls living in the household, including unmarried aunts and cousins may also pitch in. More importantly, older siblings, particularly sisters, are often critical to care arrangements. When a mother migrates, the eldest unmarried daughter usually takes over her mother's domestic responsibilities, including caring for younger siblings, even when she and her siblings live with grandparents or an aunt. Sometimes children left behind actually live in a separate household and dwelling—consisting of a room and cooking area—on their grandparents' property. A married daughter rarely takes over her mother's domestic or care responsibilities, because in most cases she has left her natal home

to reside with her husband and her labor belongs to the household in which she resides. Moreover, a husband and mother-in-law typically limit a married woman's contact with her natal family. Given the tendency to marry young, older daughters who shoulder the burden of care and housework in their mothers' absence are usually school-aged, between twelve and eighteen years old. In many cases they ended their education prior to their mother's departure. However, some older girls drop out of school, because of the burden of domestic and caring labor they carry while their mothers are in the US.

Grandchildren who stay behind are often critical to grandparents' well-being. Most grandparents value grandchildren for the companionship they provide. With much of the middle generation away, older men and women's kin networks in Santa Ursula have shrunk considerably. For some older Santa Ursulans grandchildren are the only family members with whom they share their home, and nighttime companionship is particularly important for older widows who might otherwise live alone. Sometimes grandparents' physical condition interferes with their ability to care not only for their charges but for themselves and their home. In such cases, grandchildren might play an important role in helping grandparents. However, some children are too young to adequately or safely carry out the domestic tasks that are transferred to them, such as cooking, washing and ironing clothes.

Despite the grandchildren's role in grandparents' well-being, Santa Ursulans consider old-age care the responsibility of adult children, particularly sons and their wives. In many cases sons and daughters who live in the United States provide economic support for their aging parents and will return to Santa Ursula to care for an ill parent. It is difficult to anticipate how this practice will change over time, as mass migration is a relatively new phenomenon in Santa Ursula. Experience of migration can change traditional values and create new expectations of

responsibility towards extended family members, particularly aging parents (Izuhara and Shibata 2002). There is evidence of such change in Izúcar de Matamoros, a municipality in Puebla where emigration is more extensive than in Cholula. In 2006 the DIF created a program in Izúcar de Matamoros for senior citizens abandoned by children who had emigrated. Moreover, the continuing tightening of border security has led to an increase in migrants who remain in the United States, which in the long run is likely to have a negative impact on elders who remain in the community.

How might we conceptualize the position of Santa Ursulan children within the “international division of reproductive labor” (Parreñas 2000) and transnational social hierarchies? I have shown that children left behind are often more than charges, they are central to keeping their households and families running in Santa Ursula. Comparing the experiences domestic workers’ children and employers’ children, Romero argues that children in middle-class and working poor families are both likely to have domestic responsibilities. However, the ability of middle-class families to hire paid household help means that children’s work is more likely to supplant educational and social activities in working poor families rather than middle- or upper-class families. Subsequently, middle-class children have a greater chance of growing into middle-class adults. Within the international division of reproductive labor children’s work is more likely to supplant educational and social activities of children in migrant sending communities in poorer nations, than in wealthier receiving nations.

Moreover, children’s caring and domestic labor in Santa Ursula contributes to the subsidy that cheap immigrant labor is for US standards of living. That is, their unpaid labor makes possible the low cost of undocumented immigrant workers’ labor that helps keep down costs of services, such as restaurants or housecleaning, in the US. Women who stay behind to care for

children, home or aging parents also contribute to the global economy in this way. Accordingly, children's and women's unpaid reproductive labor in Santa Ursula is at the bottom of intersecting hierarchies of productive and reproductive labor across borders.

But what makes the labor of children and teenagers different from the labor of aunts, grandmothers or even mothers who remain behind to care for children? In theory childhood and adolescence is a time for school, at the very least because the contemporary labor markets in which Santa Ursulans find themselves demand higher levels of education than do brickmaking or agricultural work. In fact, the Mexican government and its principal anti-poverty program *Oportunidades* purports that the key to overcoming poverty is the development of individual capacities—specifically the education, nutrition and health of children. Accordingly, communities in which poverty and extreme poverty are concentrated, would, in theory, move out of poverty as more and more children and teenagers achieve better health and education, thus breaking “intergenerational cycles of poverty.” *Oportunidades* has made gains in improving education and health of children. However, the goal of poverty reduction has been more elusive, and it is yet to be seen if there will be adequate employment in Mexico to meet the needs of this new cadre of educated and healthy young men and women.

Clearly this is a period of great transition in Santa Ursula, not only because of migration and family separation, but also because of shifts in education. This is also a period of contradicting realities and trends. Santa Ursulan children today are much more likely to complete primary school and junior high school than their parents were. And for the first time, Santa Ursulans, albeit a small minority, will obtain high school and even college degrees. The *Oportunidades* program has contributed to, but is by no means entirely responsible, for this shift. At the same time, a significant number of adolescents are left out of this formula for success

when they drop out of school to care for younger siblings or to migrate. Perhaps some younger siblings will reap the benefits of their older siblings' labor. In addition, numbers of teenagers drop out of school because they marry and have children, find school difficult or uninteresting, or because they are not convinced that higher levels of education will translate into better employment opportunities. Some Santa Ursulan parents share this skepticism about their children's future in Mexico. For this reason they bring children to the United States, in hope that knowledge of English and a US junior high or high school education will improve their conditions in the US labor market. Perhaps such children will have slightly better opportunities as adults in the underground labor market than their parents had. However, such children not only face the dangers and hardship of crossing, they also face a constant threat of deportation, and in the future will be denied many rights and protections as workers.

What is the greater cost to the community of these trends? As young Santa Ursulans and children leave the community, as parents give birth to US citizens, as overall birth rates decline, the number of children and young adults in Santa Ursula continues to plummet. At the same time, the number and percentage of seniors in the community has increased over the past decade. If this trend continues, Santa Ursula will become less a place of children and caregivers, and more a place for old-age. As such, issues of care for elders left behind may become increasingly urgent. In addition, the dramatic drop in total and school-aged population may reverse some of Santa Ursula's recent gains, such as the high school, preschool and clinic, which the government established based on population size. During the period of my fieldwork, all school directors were concerned that the quickly shrinking student body would result in eventual closures. The primary school had already let go several teachers. At the same time, the benefits of remittances as of yet are visible primarily in the construction of houses and the new church, which, as many

Santa Ursulans pointed out, may no longer be necessary if the population continues to decline. Many Santa Ursulans seemed nostalgic for the days of brickmaking—not because they missed the work—it was arduous and many return migrants therefore preferred the service and manufacturing jobs they held in the US. Rather men and women longed for a time when their trade allowed them to earn enough to remain in the community, where family members could remain together, where they could grow old surrounded by children and grandchildren. At the same time, many Santa Ursulans with migration experience hoped that US immigration policy would change such that at the very least they could travel safely to the US and return to Santa Ursula periodically to visit or care for their loved ones.

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