

MEXICANIDADES DE LA DIÁSPORA ASIÁTICA: Considerations of Gender, Race, and Class in the Treatment of Japanese Mexicans During WWII

Selfa Chew

This article examines the Japanese Mexican relocation program during WWII, discussing notions of mestizaje, race, and gender that affected men and women of Japanese descent through the Japanese Mexican relocation program of 1942. During the period preceding World War II, children of Asian immigrants in Mexico, particularly those whose mothers were Mexican, created hybrid forms of cultural identification that challenged hegemonic ideas of nationality, citizenship, and mestizaje. Borderlanders of Japanese descent wove a social fabric across ethnic lines that helped them to soften the social and political limits dividing racialized communities in México. World War II, however, reconfigured gender and race boundaries destabilizing gender roles as well as national and racial identities. In line with Anzaldúa's view of the mestiza as an agent of social transformation who merges two seemingly opposite cultures in her body, this paper demonstrates the role of mestizaje in the civic engagement and mobilization during the Second Great War.

Key Words: gender, *hibridismo*, immigration, Japanese relocation program, mestizaje, Mexicanidad, national identity, racial relation, World War II

In December 1943, Julio Novoa, associate director of Banco General de Capitalización in México City, accused Flora Kikutake Yahiro, United States citizen of Japanese descent, of falsifying a series of documents to fraudulently cash checks worth approximately Mex\$3,000. Kikutake had extracted the money while employed as a clerk at the same institution. Like any other clerk taking care of customer's transactions, Kikutake had access to the bank's cash and records (Kikutake Yahiro, personal correspondence, 1 Dec. 1943). She had the opportunity and the motivation to obtain the amount she illegally extracted from the bank; nevertheless, her ethnicity and citizenship made this move particularly dangerous in view of the

Mexican declaration of war against Japan and the United States' mandate to force more than 100,000 persons of Japanese descent into internment camps. When examined in the context of World War II, Flora's motivation to commit a crime reflects not only an internal moral turmoil but the dimension of her need to put together a sum larger than her regular income. As an American citizen of Japanese origin living in Mexico during the Second Great War, her circumstances and choices can tell us a great deal about racial, class and gender relations, ultimately refuting the idea that Mexico's rebirth as a post-revolutionary nation inaugurated a racially democratic society.

Immediately after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941 and the entrance of the United States into World War II, Mexico became an ally of its northern neighbor. Against a previous history of popular anti-imperialist sentiment derived from the War against Mexico and subsequent invasions of Mexican territories by the United States, President Manuel Ávila Camacho committed his administration to manage the population of Japanese in the borderlands and coastal zones. The border regions included areas in proximity to the United States, the northern regions of Tamaulipas, Coahuila, Chihuahua, Sonora, and the then territory of Baja California. Heeding the United States Department of State's recommendations, the Mexican government ordered the strict surveillance of those regarded as internal enemies at local, state, and federal levels as early as December 1941 (Ota Mishima 1982, Niblo 1999, Masterson and Funada-Classen 2004). The transnational criminalization of Japanese and Japanese Mexicans resulted in their removal from their homes in the United States/Mexico borderlands and the coastal zones of Mexico. In spite of the prevailing suspicions of espionage or contraband that made Japanese Mexicans vulnerable to civil and state surveillance, Flora took the risk to make personal use of the funds she was entrusted with by her employer (Paz-Salinas 1997).

The subject of this paper is to examine the effects of the Japanese Mexican relocation program over the lives of Japanese immigrants and their children in terms of national identity and gender. To do so, it is necessary to have an understanding of the Japanese Mexican diaspora. Therefore, this paper includes a) a brief discussion of capitalist processes that lead to the migration of Japanese men and women to the American continent; b) an overview of racial and gender relations conditioning the quality of life and mobility of Asian Americans in the Mexico/United States borderlands before World War II; and c) an analysis of the various strategies Japanese Mexican and Mexican women implemented to resist racial oppression and form interracial alliances at the onset of the Second Great War.

To learn about the lives of Flora Kikutake and other Japanese Mexicans during World War II, I had to conduct extensive research at the Archivo General de la Nación in Mexico City. Records of female Japanese immigrants at the Departamento de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales (DIPS), a section of the Secretaría de Gobernación, or Ministry of the Interior, were almost nonexistent. In many cases, only their names were recorded within the files of their husbands, without further information. My historical research of the experience of Japanese and Japanese Mexican women during the Second Great War has required, thus, the deep excavation of relevant documents in the Archivo Nacional de México, occasionally relying on the examination of El Paso's newspapers, which reflected the dominant view of Asian immigrants, and new perspectives from which we can assess the importance of the Asian diaspora in the formation of gender, racial and national identities.

Positionality: At the Intersection of Multiple Diasporas

As a child in a multicultural family I learned from my elder Korean, Chinese, and Japanese Mexican relatives how to take care and be proud of

my community. In the face of discrimination, our extended family provided resources and moral support so we could survive and thrive. My parents gave and received from other members of our extended family advice, loans, food and clothes in times of scarcity. We called the adults *tías* and *tíos*, even if they were not blood relatives but just *paisanos*, and their children were deemed our cousins. They expressed their delight when describing our skin tone, shape of eyes, or hair color, making us feel better about ourselves in a world in which those same features were often caricatured. Cooking our meals when our *tías* visited implied lessons of Asian culture and history and the celebration of our family roots. I grew up listening to their stories, in which Asian and indigenous peoples appeared as dignified, resilient human beings, creators of millenary and sophisticated cultures. Such communal education could take place only within the interstitial spaces of hegemonic social structures that Emma Pérez and Chela Sandoval describe as providing opportunities to construct counterhegemonic cultural identities (Sandoval 1991, Pérez 1999).

The textbooks I received during my school years omitted the contributions of Asian immigrants to the economy and culture of Mexico. Furthermore, mass media stereotyped, humiliated or confused us children of Asian origin with denigrating or paternalistic images, stories, and jokes about the “chinitos” who resembled our parents or ancestors. First-generation adults were more confident about their intrinsic human value even when they endured discrimination, but their children had to imagine the contexts in which people who looked like them were considered “normal.” We attempted to recover from a fragmented or distorted identity through strategies Mexican American children tried also north of the Mexican border.

At my arrival in the United States, I met the bandit, the maid, the beaner, the wetback, the siesta and other images and joke plots in which the

dominant society frames the existence of persons of Mexican descent to justify discrimination and disfranchisement. In continual *déjà vu* moments, which white middle class men and women usually are spared in Mexico or when migrating, I easily recognized the struggles of Chicanas. Like them, my phenotype and culture were markers of difference and alleged inferiority; we were deemed permanent foreigners regardless of our place of birth; our histories had been obliterated or distorted in the attempt to make us feel we were disposable human beings; and we have had to fight the myth that we enjoy the same opportunities that anybody else when accumulative historical processes and unequal relations of power have disfranchised racialized women since birth.

I became a resident of the United States with thousands of other women who crossed the northern border of Mexico in the 1980s. Foreign investment created geographical and economic displacement in Mexico since the 1960s. The Border Industrialization Program, inaugurated in 1965, attracted women from the interior of Mexico to supply the labor force for maquiladoras in the Mexico-US borderlands (Fernández-Kelly 1983). Like many other families, mine migrated to Cd. Juárez in the 1970s where my mother worked at a maquiladora. The prospect of a better life away from unemployment and economic instability forced many women in the borderlands and other zones of Mexico to migrate further. Eventually, I joined the immigrant community north of the border.

As an immigrant in the United States I have continued the journey initiated by my grandparents in Asia three generations ago. After experiencing racism in Mexico and the United States, I have joined the scholars of color who enrich with their transnational vision the study of transnational communities.¹ The stories of displaced Japanese Mexican women that have been rendered almost invisible in mainstream narratives recover a personal meaning in my own academic work. Not only I am a woman whose *mestizaje*

and hybridity refute the official Spanish/indigenous notions of mexicanidad in both the United States and Mexico, but the history of the Japanese Mexican community is the history of my own extended family.

Displacement and Mestizaje

Starting in January 1942 and ending in October 1945, the displacement of Japanese Mexicans has a very short historiography. Research on the relocation of Japanese immigrants and their descendants during World War II starts with the pioneering work of Helena Ota Mishima in *Siete Migraciones Japonesas en México: 1890–1978*, containing a brief exploration of the relocation program (Ota Mishima 1982). Subsequent papers omit the study of the Japanese Mexican community during the Second Great War as a separate topic. Among them, Stephen Niblo's paper "Allied Policy toward Germans, Italians and Japanese in Mexico During World War II" in 1998 and his 1999 *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption* briefly mention the motivation of president Manuel Ávila Camacho to remove Japanese immigrants from the Mexican coast and borderlands (Niblo 1998, Niblo 1999). In *The Japanese in Latin America*, Daniel Masterson and Sayaka Funada-Classen describe some of the losses suffered by the targets of the relocation program and contextualize their removal as part of a continental effort to manage Latin Japanese (Masterson and Funada-Classen 2004). Francis Peddie provides one of the most complex views of the Japanese relocation in "Una presencia incómoda: La colonia japonesa durante la segunda guerra mundial." Published in 2006, this historical report collects first person accounts of Japanese Mexicans, analyzing the importance of community memory, and addressing the heterogeneity of the victims of the relocation (Peddie 2006). María Emilia Paz studies the relocation program in the context of diplomatic relations and binational security measures in *Strategy, Security and Spies. Mexico and the U.S. as Allies in World War II* (Paz-Salinas 1997). Jerry García argues, in *Looking Like the*

Enemy: Japanese Mexican, The Mexican State, and US Hegemony, 1897–1945, that Mexicans appreciated the alleged whiteness of Japanese immigrants for which Japanese Mexicans did not experience a “vitriolic” rejection in Mexico (García 2014). This paper establishes a direct dialogue with García’s argument, introducing mestizaje and gender as factors that complicated the treatment of Japanese Mexicans during WWII.

The notion of mestizaje, particularly from Gloria Anzaldúa’s perspective and seen both as a racial and cultural merging, merits a deep examination in view of the hybridism shaping the experiences of the Japanese Mexican community. Like any other social process, hybridism takes different characteristics according to space and time. The incorporation of Asian men and women into mestizaje was not evident in colonial Mexico, although Asian commodities were important elements of New Spain’s material culture. When mestizos were recognized as a social reality by 1530 in New Spain, their existence destabilized the colonial order that sought to separate indigenous peoples from Spanish and African peoples but Asians were not even registered in this mestizaje. Later, criollos articulated racial hybridism as the symbol of a distinct American identity that set them symbolically apart from the European colonial power (Kellogg 2000, Carrera 2003, Medina 2009). The notion of mexicanidad included, at least linguistically, the Nahuatl peoples, and meant to unite and homogenize all indigenous communities as well as Afro-mestizos under one Mexican identity with no Asian components (Lovell Banks 2006, Medina 2009).

Anzaldúa ponders the weight of sexual violence against indigenous women that originated mestizaje, symbolically embodied in Malinche, and identifies as cultural tyranny other expressions of patriarchal power implicit in the mestizo culture (Anzaldúa 1999, Medina 2009). Following Anzaldúa’s concept of cultural tyranny, I argue that internalized racism in Mexico is

masked by the celebration of idealized indigenous and Spanish *mestizaje* which has resulted in the rejection of other *mestizajes* and, consequently, the oppression of Mexicans of Asian descent. Such internalized oppression, as noted by Anzaldúa, is created through our perception of “the version of reality that (culture) communicates” and tend to accept dominant paradigms formulated by those in power (Anzaldúa 1999).

Although by 1942 Japanese immigrants had taken important productive positions within the labor sector, participating in the Mexican Revolution to improve the conditions of peasants and industrial workers, they were a constant target of state nationalist cultural projects that emphasized assumed essential negative racial differences (Daniels 1988, Kikumura-Yano 2002, Masterson and Funada-Classen 2004, Harris and Sadler 2007). As confirmed by letters submitted to officials and news reports, those citizens of Mexico who did not have a direct relation with Asian immigrants or their descendants saw Japanese and their children as superfluous elements of the Mexican society during World War II. Once the global conflict ended, the debate over considering Japanese Mexicans as a danger or as integral members of the Mexican society subsided. In any case, Kikutake’s experience and the stories of other Japanese Mexicans have been erased from national and transnational official histories in spite of their importance in the economy, identity, and culture of Mexico.

Globalization of the United States/Mexico Borderlands

The presence of Japanese immigrants in Mexico and the United States before World War II was the product of changes in the global economy and the expansion of capitalism. Japanese emigration was very limited from 1638 to 1865, when the Tokugawa dynasty considered it a capital crime. Not until 1865, when Japan had become engaged in the global economic marketplace, competing with European and American industries and their attendant

capitalist and colonial model, did the nation lift emigration restrictions. Japanese immigrants in the Mexico-US borderlands at the end of the nineteenth century arrived primarily to supply the labor American companies required on both sides of the international border (Espiritu 1997, Azuma 2005).

United States investors considered Asian immigrants easy to manage and a temporary, disposable labor force. North American companies with interests outside the United States imported most Japanese workers as contract laborers to their Hawaiian and Mexican plantations (Okihiro 1991). Married employees would need adequate housing, schools for their children, and medical care for their families, increasing the costs of labor. Consequently, at the beginning of the twentieth century companies operating in Mexico imported single men from China and Japan (Ichihashi 1915, Espiritu 1997). A total of 11,000 Japanese immigrants entered Mexico between 1901 and 1907. Most of them were contract laborers who agreed to work for a fixed salary and number of years before seeking employment anywhere else (Daniels 1988, Masterson and Funada-Classen 2004, Okihiro 2005).

Asian laborers found limits in all realms of social engagement in the borderlands. The sexual lives of Japanese immigrants were shaped by different factors and would eventually determine their degree of integration into Mexico. Japanese women immigrants were almost nonexistent during this period; nevertheless, Japanese men did not suffer significant legal restrictions on their decision to form interracial families. They could marry Mexican women or be their temporary or permanent sexual partners despite the racial prejudice that made such unions challenging.

Japanese immigrants faced economic and social disruption with the rest of the population during the Mexican Revolution, sharing losses and continuing to form families with Mexican women. All Asian Mexicans remained a racialized vulnerable population, however. In 1919, President Carranza modified Article

106 of the Labor Law to deny naturalized citizens the protection offered to Mexican laborers (Rénique 2003). The pressure from private and public sectors to marginalize “foreigners” in Mexico grew stronger as patriotism demanded that economic resources were in the hands of those regarded as Mexicans. Japanese Issei who owned property in Tijuana lost it in 1935 on the grounds that ownership of land within 100 kilometers of the territorial limits of Mexico was forbidden to foreigners (Velázquez-Morales 2006).² As the United States and Mexico strengthened their diplomatic and economic relations, the view of Japanese Mexicans as dangerous residents of the borderlands increased.

In 1943, the Mexican and United States presidents, Manuel Ávila Camacho and Franklin D. Roosevelt, dictated the arrest and displacement of hundreds of Mexican citizens of Japanese descent. Although no Japanese Mexican was ever tried for any crime, many lost their property and civil rights during World War II in a process Nicholas De Genova and Giorgio Agamben refer to as denationalization. Citizens by birth, naturalized citizens, or longtime residents of Mexico who had Mexican children were deportable racialized citizens, stripped of their nationality and rights through legal mechanisms similar to those targeting Jews and Gypsies during the same historical periods in Europe (Agamben 1998, De Genova 2002).

De apariencia decente: The Possibilities and Limits of Flora Kikutake

In December 1943, Flora Kikutake Yahiro had powerful reasons consciously to face the risk to go to prison. She was an educated woman, aware of the dire circumstances Japanese Mexicans were facing at the time. As a clerk, her salary was probably enough to pay for the most basic needs of her widowed mother, who seemed to depend economically on Flora and was the only relative living with the young woman. Kikutake’s was not an act of theft motivated by greed or the desire to acquire a higher standard of

life. According to her, she became a delinquent “impelida por la miseria.” Confronted by Julio Novoa, who had detected the deceit, Flora explained in detail her predicament (Kikutake Yahiro, 1 Dec. 1943):

[...] Por necesitar traer a mi pequeño hijo Kiyoshi Imahashi del Japón, procedí en una forma incorrecta, pues con toda pena confieso que cobré en la caja documentos falsificados, con un importe de tres mil pesos, cantidad toda que entregué a un señor que se marchó en el Grisholm y parte para ir pagando a las personas que me prestaron para acompletar con grandes intereses.³

Kikutake was immersed in the Mexican culture from the time she was very young, acquiring the social and technical skills that would ensure her a job when most Japanese Mexicans were struggling to regain financial stability in the face of War World II. But the war placed her in a vulnerable position. Kikutake was born in Seattle, Washington on January 22, 1914. The date of her arrival in Mexico is not registered, but Kikutake must have been a child when her parents decided to move south of the border, for she was a student enrolled in the elementary school Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez in Orizaba, Veracruz. Flora thus had the opportunity to learn Spanish early in her life, which increased her chances to find and hold a job. In a patriarchal world limiting educational opportunities for women, young Flora had academic aspirations that translated into a selection of educational institutions: she attended the secondary school that formed part of the Universidad Veracruzana, and later the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria, where she was enrolled in the premedical program. Kikutake also sought training as secretary at the Chamber of Commerce trade school in Orizaba, Veracruz. When she relocated to Mexico City, Kikutake was ready to take a clerical job (employment application, Banco General de Capitalización, S. A., unpublished, 1 Oct, 1941).⁴

Kikutake's employment application of October 1941 reflects the apprehension Japanese Mexicans may have felt in view of international hostilities that could affect their immigration status. Although Kikutake declared Seattle, Washington, as the city in which she was born, when she applied for employment at Banco General de Capitalización in Mexico City, she wrote "Japonesa" as her nationality, perhaps conflating "race" with citizenship. The attack on Pearl Harbor had not taken place at the time the bank's administrator interviewed Kikutake as a candidate for a clerical position at the financial institution; nonetheless, uncertainty as to the direction that Mexico would take in the global conflict made persons of Japanese origin cautious, as newspapers and politicians portrayed them as the enemy (*El Paso Herald Post*, Dec. 26 1941).

In addition to the inconsistency between birth place and nationality, Kikutake neglected to note in her application that she had a child living in Japan. Notions of respectability that rejected single mothers could have forced her to hide her motherhood. Through her message explaining the reasons for her criminal action, we can learn that her son carried a different last name, but the information available does not tell us if it was her decision not to follow the patriarchal tradition of adopting her husband's last name, or if she was divorced. Flora also noted in her application (1 Oct. 1941, unpublished) that she was Catholic.

Mexico's entrance into World War II changed Flora Kikutake's situation. Her job was jeopardized by restrictions on hiring nationals of the Axis countries (Riquelme, unpublished correspondence, 15 Mar. 1944). The new dispositions prompted the bank's associate director, Julio Novoa, to ask Kikutake to obtain a written authorization from the Ministry of the Interior to work at the bank. In November 1942, José Lelo de Larrea, Chief of the Departamento de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, wrote a letter to Banco General de

Capitalización stating that a search into Miss Flora Kikutake's records had produced no criminal "charges" against the "*expresada señorita*" (unpublished correspondence, 30 Nov. 1943).⁵ Lelo de Larrea did not object, consequently, to her employment at the bank. In a period of hardship and unemployment for many Mexicans, and particularly for Mexican Japanese persons, Flora Kikutake was fortunate enough to have a clerical job that seemed secure and comfortable. Yet the war would take its toll on Kikutake's life.

Kikutake's Spanish vocabulary and grammar reflected her formal education and her middle-class status, favorable factors in presenting her case. She conveyed in her letters to Julio Novoa her anguish as well as her remorse in a dignified manner, stating that she had no accomplices and that she would repay in small amounts the amount in question. The young woman promised to notify the bank of her new employment information to calculate a reasonable deduction from her future paycheck to cover her debt.

[...] Reconozco que el medio fue el menos indicado, pero mis deseos de traer a mi hijo a México antes de que la situación sea peor en Japón, fue lo que me obligó a proceder en esa forma (Kikutake Yahiro, 1 Dec. 1943).⁶

Kikutake acknowledged both her duty to her employer and her responsibility to take care of her child. The owners of the bank decided not to press charges against Flora Kikutake, but they notified the DIPS about the conditions of her dismissal (Kikutake Yahiro, 1 Dec. 1943). Both the bank and the DIPS officers elected to avoid harsh punishment for Kikutake's actions, anticipating that she would repay the amount improperly appropriated (Kikutake Yahiro, 1 Dec. 1943). Kikutake's technical training as a clerk made her reliable and the expectations to repay the amount were reasonable given her employability.

Furthermore, in view of the state of war and under the conditions of the relocation program, Kikutake could not leave the city or the country. To ensure that she would remain in sight, the DIPS officials were notified of the arrangements. No more correspondence was filed in Flora's chart until almost one year later when, in September 1944, the DIPS Chief ordered inspector Mercedes Ramírez Mendoza, the only female official registered in this institution's archives, to investigate her (Kikutake Yahiro, 1 Dec. 1943).

Inspector Ramírez visited Flora Kikutake's home and reported on the conditions and activities of the Japanese Mexican woman. She was a "humble" working woman who took care of her mother when at home:

[...] El mueblario es viejo, sin que se denote derroche de lujo, más bien humilde, vive en compañía de su madre, me informaron que trabajaba para la Empresa del Cine Metropolitan (Ramírez Mendoza, unpublished correspondence, 18 Sept. 1944).⁷

The research Inspector Ramírez undertook reflects the "in-between" state addressed by Gloria Anzaldúa when theorizing on *Nepantla*. Ramírez interrogated some neighbors of Kikutake, collecting details on the Japanese Mexican woman's routine. The DIPS officer obtained most of her information from a Mr. Gonzalo Novelo M., who lived in front of Kikutake's apartment and who provided an exhaustive report on Flora's daily life.

[...] Me informò el señor Novelo (...) que lleva una vida decente, no ha hecho amistad con los demás inquilinos, generalmente permanece despierta hasta muy noche, la visita su novio, entre doce y una de la mañana, tiene hermanos y actualmente están peleando del lado del Gobierno Japonés, pero que ella elude cualquier conversación que se relacione con la Guerra.⁸

Inspector Ramírez and Kikutake's neighbor, Novelo, did not find definitive proof of Kikutake's involvement in espionage or sabotage activities. However, Novelo insinuated that Kikutake was part of a pro-Axis group and he reported Kikutake's visits to a Japanese Mexican dentist who, according to Novelo, had "made [Axis] propaganda by giving free consultations" (Ramírez Mendoza, unpublished correspondence, 18 Sept. 1944). Ramírez wrote her own impression of Kikutake, whom the inspector deemed "de apariencia decente, culta" who mastered the Spanish language to perfection. Although Kikutake resided since her early childhood in Mexico "aun conserva (ba) su aspecto oriental" in her adulthood, according to Ramírez (18 Sept. 1944). Whatever Ramírez's idea of Oriental was, in her view, Kikutake could not be defined as a Westerner; therefore, in spite of her education and long residence in Mexico, Flora remained in the Nephantlian in-between space described by Anzaldúa.⁹

Ambiguity, as well as the threat of displacement, permeated Flora's relationships with other Mexicans. Kikutake's neighbor and Inspector Ramírez insisted on describing Flora as "decente" but not to be entirely trusted, a claim that could result in the internment or deportation of Flora. Novelo reported that he used to hear suspicious noises coming from her radio at about four o'clock and then he proceeded to state that such noises could have been the product of his imagination caused by the "desconfianza que estas personas le inspiran" (Ramírez Mendoza, unpublished correspondence, 18 Sept. 1944). To conclude her report, the female DIPS inspector wrote that Gonzalo Novelo gave her his business card and volunteered to keep close watch on Kikutake, taking note of her guests and the hours she received visitors at her apartment. Although under surveillance, and in spite of her neighbor's ill-founded insinuations of involvement in pro-Axis activities, Kikutake was able to continue her life employed at a theater in Mexico City to support her mother. (Ramírez Mendoza, unpublished correspondence, 18 Sept. 1944),

Flora Kikutake Yahiro's predicament reveals the complexity of interracial gender relations as well as aspects of the gendered criminalization of Japanese Mexicans during the global conflict generated by capitalist expansion. Flora occupied a highly ambiguous social place which represented a challenge for classification: even when she was a mother of a child, officials granted her the "honorable" title of *señorita*. Flora's ties to Japan were evident in the residence of her son in that country as well as the continuous visits to her Japanese acquaintances and friends. Nevertheless, her education and aspirations to become a professional in Mexico and to bring her son to her side tell us of her desire to live permanently in this country. We can even assume that her reported boyfriend was Mexican, because his racial classification was not cited by the police officer or Flora's neighbor. A member of a group considered "alien enemy" in Mexico, she was employed in clerical jobs that required the trust of her employers; Flora was the provider at her home, supporting her mother, a role reserved for men; while her economic situation was precarious and her fraud placed her in a socially disadvantageous position, her supervisor and the police officer treated her with the respect middle-class women command in Mexico. Yet, her neighbor and a police officer considered her a foreigner not to be entirely trusted. Unlike most Japanese Mexican women, and following the patriarchal procedures of gathering all information of women and children under the male head of each family, the DIPS officials opened a file for Kikutake because she was not officially associated with a man, unlike most Japanese Mexican women. Flora had no husband, brother, or son in Mexico.

Flora Kikutake's appearance was the only argument her neighbors and police had to reject her as a Mexican woman. In spite of her status as a racialized single woman in a patriarchal world, Kikutake countered orientalist notions through her economic class, profession, skills and demeanor which fitted the idea of a modern citizen, a desirable trait fostered by the government of

Mexico during this period affecting favorably Flora's situation. Her cultural *mestizaje* shaped the complex perception that Mexicans held of Flora. She was a foreigner but she was Mexicanized through her mastery of the Spanish language, her middle-class life style, and her habit of following the norms of the Mexican society that rendered her "decente."

Differential Gendered Treatment

The decision of the DIPS and bank officials not to prosecute Flora Kikutake stands in contrast with the harsh prosecution and incarceration suffered by Japanese Mexican men. Mexican officials punished Japanese Mexican men for crimes ranging from protesting their living conditions at the concentration camp to changing addresses without obtaining permission from the DIPS. Men suffered, in general, more violent forms of control than women during World War II (Ortega, 21 Aug. 1942, unpublished correspondence). Miguel L. Yshida, for example, was incarcerated in Perote in September 1942 after being arrested in the company of his father at Agua Caliente, in the state of Chihuahua. Yshida was Mexican by birth and his main crime, according to DIPS inspector R. Candiani, was to speak "perfectamente Japonés y por dominar perfectamente nuestro idioma" and could serve as a messenger between Mexican and Japanese Mexican communities (Candiani, 30 Sept. 1942, unpublished correspondence). State officials did not try Miguel Yshida in court to prove he was guilty of espionage, but ordered his incarceration based on his ability to speak Spanish in contrast with the official praise of Flora Kikutake's linguistic skills (Said 1979).¹⁰ Inspector Candiani, of Italian descent, thought that when Japanese Mexican men answered questions with "sagacidad" and demonstrated "cultura," the Mexican state had enough evidence of sabotage and espionage activities warranting the incarceration of such intelligent Japanese Mexican men (Hiromoto 1944). Like Flora Kikutake, Miguel Yshida was in the process of being "completely" Japanese, Mexican or

Japanese Mexican, depending on the view of those who appraised his cultural citizenship. Notably, Candiani's freedom and status as a government agent deciding Yshida's criminality attest to the racist character of the Japanese Mexican program. The Mexican government did not order the eviction in mass of Italian and German immigrants or their descendants from the borderland and coastal zones. Inspector Candiani, was, therefore, able to hold a position of power in the management of the Japanese Mexican community.

Since the Mexican police looked for signs of extraordinary skills to revile Japanese Mexican men, the victims of the displacement program sought to accentuate their normalcy and the ordinary but indispensable gendered function they had within their families. Jorge Sato (27 Aug. 1942, unpublished correspondence), for example, invoked his role as head of his family, declaring that he was forced to abandon his wife and three children when the Mexican government ordered him to leave his home in Mexicali, Baja California:

[...] Como hombre y como padre de familia que soy pido si ha bien lo tiene usted disponer se me permita ir a la Baja California a reunirme con mi familia pues como repito a usted mis hijos son menores de edad y no pueden trabajar todavía y yo aquí no puedo conseguir trabaja para poderlos sostener.

Japanese Mexican men insisted in their official letters that the economic sustenance of their household derived exclusively from their work, although many Japanese Mexican women performed unpaid labor at home and at their family's small businesses.¹¹ While the intent of Japanese Mexican men was to evoke the empathy of the Mexican officials who ordered their displacement, obliterating the equally important productive role of women in their families supported patriarchal values. In addition to emphasizing their role as providers,

Japanese Mexican men volunteered to guard Mexican sovereignty, arguing that the defense of their country fell to the men in their homes: “Yo y mis hijos, aunque ellos no están en la edad militar, estamos dispuestos a empuñar las armas a la hora que la Patria lo solicite” (Sato, 27 Aug. 1942). As Sato offered in his plea to remain at home, the men in his family were trained to be providers and protectors. By promising to take arms in the name of the nation, Sato was enforcing patriarchal notions endowing men with authority and power.¹²

Claiming national security reasons, the Mexican government denied gendered privileges to Japanese men during the Second Great War; however, the history of racism in this country included Orientalist contradictory views of Asian males and shows either a tendency to feminize them or a proclivity to make them appear as abnormal, dangerous sexual beings. Both notions limited their full enjoyment of rights attached to maleness in Mexico (Peña Delgado 2012, Schiavone Camacho 2012).

Un pueblo humilde, pero fuerte en unificación

If some aspects of the relocation program perpetuated a patriarchal system in Mexico, other elements of the same program opened the opportunity for some women to acquire a decisive role in the representation of their families and the administration of their possessions. Although Mexican culture dictated that the ideal space for women was home, many working-class women took up jobs, whether temporary and informal or permanent, to complement the salary of their husbands or to provide entirely for their dependents. However extensive the practice of working outside of their homes, Mexican women did not see their social status increase when they performed productive roles. Once married, a woman’s family and financial matters as well as property became the prerogative of her husband (Bortz 2008).¹³ Before World War II, such was the arrangement within Japanese Mexican families. In 1942, husbands, parents,

and sons obeyed orders to leave their homes in the borderlands finding difficult-to-obtain employment in the interior of Mexico. The women in the Japanese Mexican communities took then more assertive roles as head of households.¹⁴

The case of Margarita Fude Jorita de Kawano—who did not have a file of her own at the DIPS—illustrates other gender dynamics taking place during World War II. Mrs. Fude de Kawano saw her husband and oldest son leave for Mexico City in 1942, with lamentable consequences for her whole clan. In July 1942, authorities removed Margarita Fude de Kawano's husband, Manuel Kawano, and her son Manuel Guillermo Kawano Fude from Portugués de Gálvez, a municipality of Navojoa, Sonora. Both men were naturalized Mexican citizens.¹⁵ In her struggle to keep her family's residence in Sonora, Mrs. Fude de Kawano acknowledged with clarity in a letter addressed to the Minister of the Interior that the relocation program had been implemented “a raíz de que el Gobierno de este gran y noble país tuvo que satisfacer sus compromisos de índole internacional,” committing the country to uproot the Japanese Mexicans, but when ordered to leave her town along with her son and her husband, she would not follow presidential orders (de Kawano, 19 Nov. 1942). Manuel Kawano was gravely ill when ordered to abandon his home. On his arrival in Mexico City, Manuel Kawano's health condition worsened and he was admitted to the Huipilco Sanatorium. Not only was the fifty-nine-year old man's appeal to return to his family denied, but the DIPS officers insisted on expelling his wife, Margarita Fude de Kawano, from Sonora along with their children.¹⁶

Margarita Fude de Kawano's resistance to the relocation program was not limited to a passive act of civil disobedience. She actively opposed her relocation orders gathering the support of at least 175 Mexican residents of Portugués de Gálvez, “un pueblo humilde, pero fuerte en unificación” which assertively resisted the relocation program as many other Mexican

communities did. To obtain the sympathy of federal officials, the signatories used the official discourse that highlighted acceleration in production through the application of male labor (Loaiza, 18 Jul. 1942).¹⁷ They stated that by requesting Mr. Kawano's return to his original town, they were following the orders of Presidente "General Manuel Ávila Camacho quien recomienda MAYOR PRODUCCIÓN" (capital letters in the original) as the hallmark of masculinity and warfare.¹⁸

The message from the pueblo did not initially affect the stance of the officials in charge of the relocation program. Margarita was forced to continue fighting the Ministry of the Interior orders to leave Sonora immediately. She appealed, like other affected Japanese Mexicans, to the notion of family as the basic unit of the Patria. In a letter to President Ávila Camacho, she stated her circumstances:

[...] no precipitar a una familia a la ruina y a la miseria, tanto más cuanto que, siendo mis hijos y mis nietos hijos de este venturoso país, seguramente mañana, al conocer estas determinaciones de equidad de usted, que espero merecer, mayormente se preocuparan de ser útiles a un país en donde no sólo vieron la primera luz, sino cuyos funcionarios, modelos de responsabilidad humana, benévolamente y dentro de la Ley, fueron justos, de elevados principios de acendrada caridad."¹⁹

Either the DIPS officials realized that the Kawano family would live in Mexico under severe financial stress if forced to travel to or live in Mexico City or the bureaucrats were impressed by the support the family received from their community. The Ministry of the Interior granted an extension of 10 days for Margarita to leave town (Ortega Peregrina, 23 Nov. 1942; de Kawano, 19 Nov. 1942). After several extensions, the final decision arrived on December 30, 1942: Margarita Fude de Kawano could stay in Sonora

permanently, but her family continued to face serious difficulties. They did not get to see their father ever again: Manuel Kawano died in Mexico on March 3, 1943 from a kidney condition (Lelo de Larrea, 30 Dec. 1942).

In spite of the state's harassment, Margarita and her daughters were able to manage their business. DIPS agent Molina visited their town to verify that Margarita Kawano operations were legal and ethical. He stated that "esta familia, en su mayoría nativas de Navojoa, trabajan para su sustento y sus negocios no sé que exploten ni lucren a nadie" (Loaiza, 18 Jul. 1942).²⁰ Notwithstanding their capability to operate businesses and work in the agricultural fields, among other occupations, women were expected to dedicate themselves to being mothers and housekeepers. The view of women as naturally belonging to the domestic realm affected the official decision to allow Margarita Fude de Kawano and her daughters stay at home. DIPS Inspector Molina considered Mrs. Kawano inoffensive in the absence of a male head of household; thus, the Mexican state did not enforce the relocation orders in her case. In contrast, among complex popular ideas in Mexico of Asian men was the notion that they were a threat to national security and cultural values; therefore, the relocation and confinement of Japanese men was, in most instances, mandatory.²¹ Facing the prospect of losing a significant portion of their income, some Mexican women refused to divide their families. When efforts to cancel relocation orders failed, they left their homes to follow their Japanese Mexican husbands or sons (Guzmán Araujo, 2 Oct. 1945).

Mexican women married to men of Japanese origin were more willing than Japanese Mexican women to express their opinion about the injustice of the relocation program during World War II. They were Mexican nationals by birth and their indigenous/Spanish mestizaje made them feel entitled to the protection of a state, which claimed mestizos were the pillars of the

nation. One of the most provocative messages addressed to the Minister of the Interior came from the pen of Herlinda Cruz de Yanagui, a woman from Rosario, Sinaloa. Herlinda Cruz' letters submitted on behalf of her husband reflect Herlinda's political awareness:

[...] recuerdo que México pagó a España tres siglos de esclavitud dando hospitalidad a nuestros niños españoles (a través de Lázaro Cárdenas); a Inglaterra y Estados Unidos, todo un historial de graves errores, con una ayuda efectiva de nuestra riqueza y de nuestros hijos, así ha pagado mi patria todos los ultrajes a sus derechos (Cruz de Yanagui, 4 Aug. 1943).²²

Herlinda claimed her citizenship status and that of her children to assert her right to denounce the effects of Spanish, British, and United States imperialism over Mexico. She demanded a uniform policy of hospitality and forgiveness from her government and underlined the feminine quality of her nation, invoking family values and the need of a man in each household to support his wife and children:

[...] ¿Por qué hoy no nos permite que nuestros esposos continúen a nuestro lado, dando el cariño y sustento a nuestros hijos? Se lo pido a nombre de mi Patria, a nombre de mis hijos; creo que no todos estos hombres son culpables de esta situación, que muchos viven ajenos y alejados de los asuntos de la guerra.²³

Herlinda Cruz was not alone in her struggle to free her husband from the effects of the relocation program (López de Kihara et al., 31 Dec. 1942). Other women affected by the relocation program were also vigilant and kept themselves informed of all news concerning their situation, using it to write letters to the

authorities in hopes of freedom for their husbands, brothers, or sons. Trinidad Rodríguez demanded the return of her husband in 1944 when she heard the news that “the Citizen President of the Republic signed a decree stating that any foreign persons with more than five years of residence in the country must be considered a national” (López Padilla, 30 May 1944).²⁴ Rodríguez had proof that her husband fulfilled and exceeded the length of residency required to keep his Mexican citizenship and submitted such proof to the Minister of the Interior without any positive result (López Padilla, 30 May 1944).

Lack of effective political power and anti-Asian historical processes, not passiveness or ignorance, curtailed the efforts of women to demand the return of their husbands and sons during World War II and afterwards. The wives, sisters, mothers, and daughters of displaced Japanese Mexican men took public spaces that were not ordinarily theirs, and organized their resistance against the relocation program. As activists, women who were part of Japanese Mexican families mobilized other citizens to protest the relocation programs. This was no small deed in view of the state of war that demanded complete adherence to State projects. When challenging national policies or convincing other men and women to sign petitions to cancel government orders, Mexican wives of Japanese immigrants functioned as cultural brokers between their husbands and children and the communities who received them. Japanese Mexican cultural and interracial mestizas lived in at least two cultural places and, as borderlanders, understood the specific patriarchal social codes and expectations of the dominant society operating in Mexico: they skillfully deployed notions of *mestizaje* and *mexicanidad* to attempt to cancel social injustice.

Conclusions

During the period preceding World War II, children of Asian immigrants in Mexico, particularly those whose mothers were Mexican, represented another

kind of *mestizaje*. This hybridism demanded the reorganization of the notion of “otherness” and introduced new social tensions and possibilities in the dynamics of racial relations in the borderlands. Thus, Japanese Mexicans in this area created hybrid forms of cultural identification that challenged hegemonic ideas of nationality, citizenship, and *mestizaje*. Furthermore, the social fabric that borderlanders of Japanese descent wove across borders further helped them to soften the social and political limits dividing racialized communities in the United States/Mexico borderlands region.

The existence of multicultural, multiracial, and nonheterosexual persons in the borderland regions challenges the possibility of enforcing permanent racial, sexual, and cultural boundaries. Gloria Anzaldúa brings a feminist, queer perspective to the study of the borderlands that reflects on the constant disjunctives that a *mestiza* confronts and resolves on a daily basis, living in *Nepantla*, “this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space” with no defined boundaries (Keating 2009).

Despite the degree of agency that ethnic Mexican women have in the creation of their images and their sexual and cultural practices, those dichotomies imposed over the bodies of *mestizas* in terms of gender, race and sexuality are painful and costly. The border, concludes Anzaldúa, is a scar that *mestizas* heal through their creation and renovation of a multicultural world (Anzaldúa 1999). While Anzaldúa recovers some aspects of the celebration of the “*raza cósmica*,” and calls for the recognition of Spanish/indigenous *mestizaje* as a powerful force to transform racial relations in the borderlands, it is important to acknowledge and politicize other hybridisms which are forced by global economic projects. As the Mexican women and men who resisted the displacement of their Japanese friends and relatives have proved, the conscious acceptance of multiracial identities and *mexicanidades* opens the possibility

to form stronger community coalitions against racism, sexism, and economic exploitation. The divide-and-conquer strategy can be effectively countered through the understanding of our social and cultural history as inextricably mixed with that of the Asian diasporas. The constantly renewed Chicana cultural and political identity thus is inclusive of Asian and other mestizajes. While Chicanas are not Mexican or Japanese Mexican women, their issues and ancestries are inserted in the global displacements and histories of other racialized communities. Furthermore, the racial relations Chicanas deal with today are rooted in the history of Mexican women of all ethnicities and determined, in part, by the presence and struggles of the Asian Mexican and other “othered” communities in the two past centuries.

In their efforts to counter the effects of World War II, Japanese Mexican men and women altered normative gender roles to accommodate the state, family, and individual agendas. The experiences reflected in this article indicate how fluid and intricate notions of gender affected the status of Japanese Mexicans from 1942 to 1945. Sometimes the victim would pursue change to ameliorate conditions. At other times the state, as victimizer, pursued changes to promote its interests even when disrupting traditional notions of family, thus destroying patriarchal relations through the displacement of the heads of family. In either case, Japanese Mexican women and men endured systematic discrimination along gender, race, and class lines in spite of their adaptation to new gender roles. Nevertheless, the social impact their economic and cultural contributions as well as their displacement had on the history of Mexico had gone unregistered in the official narratives.

According to historian Yolanda Chávez Leyva, racial hierarchies and social exclusion has created historical trauma among ethnic Mexicans and Native Americans. The healing of victims of racial oppression requires the analysis of

historic events, which separated families and generations in the borderlands. Because silence prolongs the pain of members of marginalized communities, historians have the potential to reestablish a sense of continuity that validates and strengthens marginalized communities through the construction of their memories (Leyva 1996, Leyva 2003). Ultimately, this article recognizes the Japanese Mexican community's resilience and its ability to survive uprooting and oppression.

Notes

¹ Among the various examples of this type of scholarship are Deena Gonzalez, Vicky Ruiz, Antonia Castañeda, Emma Pérez, and Yolanda Leyva (Castañeda 1992, Gonzalez 1999, Pérez 1999, Ruiz 1999, Leyva 2003).

² Delfino Navarrate, in charge of the Immigration Service office in Tijuana, suggested President Lázaro Cárdenas to completely halt the immigration of Japanese persons in 1935.

³ The Gripsholm was the American/Swedish vessel, which transported civilians between Japan and the United States during World War II. My translation: [...] Because I needed to bring my little son Kiyoshi Imahashi from Japan, I acted in an incorrect manner; it is with pain that I confess having cashed falsified documents with a value of three thousand pesos to give such amount of money to a man who left in the Gripsholm, and then to pay the enormous interests charged by those persons who lent me money to complete [the amount required to bring Kiyoshi from Japan].

⁴ She had already worked at clerical jobs at two other companies, earning between \$200.00 and \$280.00 (pesos) a month. That amount seemed sufficient to pay the \$75.00 for the rent of an apartment she shared with her mother.

⁵ My translation: "(...) charges against the *expresada señorita*, for which th[e] Department ha[d] no objection against her continuing rendering her services at that institution."

⁶ From F. Kikutake Y. to Sr. D. Julio Novoa, dated December 1st, 1942. Archivo General de la Nación, México, D. F. Instituto de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales 21362.4(52)/1620 (hereafter abbreviated IPS). My translation: "I recognized that these were the least honorable means through which I [could obtain the money] but my desire to bring my son to México before the situation worsens in Japan was the reason that forced me to proceed in this way."

⁷ My translation: "The furniture is old, without luxuries, better described as humble. She lives in the company of her mother, I was informed that she works for the enterprise managing the Metropolitan Movie Theater."

⁸ My translation: "[Mr. Novelo] informed me that she carries a decent life, she has not made any friendship with other renters [in the building], generally stays awake until very late at night, her boyfriend visits her, between twelve and one in the morning she has brothers and currently they are

fighting on the side of the Japanese Government, but that she eludes any conversation about the War” (Ramírez Mendoza, unpublished correspondence, 18 Sept. 1944).

⁹ Edward Said argues that Western imperialists created non-temporal, fragmented or distorted views of Asians, which were useful “for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient’ (Said 1979).

¹⁰ For a discussion on language as a tool to limit or grant access to social resources along racial lines in the United States, see Lippi-Green (1977).

¹¹ Shizutuo Matzumoto Mouaque (Pedro Matzumoto) to C. Secretario de Gobernación, dated June 9, 1943. IPS 2/1/362.4(52)1315. For a discussion of unpaid domestic labor see: (Diana 1979, Beneria 1992).

¹² “I and my sons, even when they are not yet qualified to enter the military because of their age, are willing to take the arms at any time our motherland calls us” (Sato, 27 Aug. 1942).

¹³ From Francisca Montoya de Shinagawa to Lic. Lelo de Larrea, dated September 6, 1943; from Lic. Alberto de la Peña Borja to C. Secretario de Gobernación, dated May 14, 1943.

¹⁴ From Camilo Marín Talavera to Sr. J. Lelo de Larrea, dated July 26, 1943. IPS 2-1362.4(52)/1321.

¹⁵ Naturalization certificate signed by Jaime Torres Bodet in reference to Tosita Masato Kawano, dated October 21, 1941. IPS 2-1362.4(52)/883.

¹⁶ From 175 signatories to C. Coronel Rodolfo T. Loaiza, dated July 18, 1942. IPS 2-1362.4(52)/883.

¹⁷ Every post-revolution Mexican president, including leftist Lázaro Cárdenas, proposed industrialization of the nation as a solution to poverty. Manuel Ávila Camacho emphasized during his presidential period the link between production and war in every report to the nation requesting from the Mexican workers their application to increase production. The following are examples of his production discourse: “(...) Because the entire nation has demonstrated with its attitude that, when the time arrives, each Mexican knows how to be a soldier willing to defend the motherland, both in the armed struggle and at work, in the production or in the sacrifice.” (Ávila Camacho 1942) And “(...) when addressing my compatriots during these last months I have repeatedly exhorted them to work and to achieve harmony (applause). A nation with deficient or no production, or which superfluously spends on what does not manufacture, is a defeated nation from the start.” <http://cronica.diputados.gob.mx/DDEbates/38/3er/Ord/19420901.html>

¹⁸ Capitalization in the original.

¹⁹ Loaiza, 18 Jul. 1942. My translation: “to avoid forcing this family into ruin and misery, even more when my children and my grandchildren are children of this fortunate country, for which certainly tomorrow, when they learn this just determination you are taking, and that I hope to deserve, they will apply themselves with more strength to be useful to a country where they not only saw the first light, but in which its officials, models of human responsibility, were kindly and legitimately fair, of elevated principles and unblemished charity.”

²⁰ My translation: “this family is mostly composed by women born in Navojoa who work to support themselves and it is obvious that they do not abuse any [employee] or make improper profits.”

²¹ See file of Alfonso Ayshikawa. IPS 2-1362.4(52)/1582. In *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*, Lisa Lowe argues that damaging stereotypes of Asian men in the United States were also part of the Orientalist imaginary prevailing in México during World War II (Lowe 1996).

²² My translation: “I remember that México paid Spain three centuries of slavery by providing hospitality to many Spanish children [brought by President Cárdenas as refugees from the civil war]. To England and the United States, a whole history of grave mistakes [our country has paid] with the effective help [we provide to those countries] taking a toll on our wealth and that of our children. That is how my mother country has paid all the injuries suffered in her rights.”

²³ Cruz de Yanagui, 4 Aug. 1943. My translation: “Why today you do not allow our husbands to return to our side, to give their love and support to our children? I ask you in the name of my motherland, in the name of my children, I believe that not all these men are guilty of this situation, that many of them live apart, distant from any issues stemming from the war.”

²⁴ My translation: “The Citizen President of the Republic signed a decree stating that any foreign persons with more than five years of residence in the country must be considered a national.”

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